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DHARMA WORLD

MAR./APR. 2003 Vol. 30



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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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Rissho Kosei-kai Overseas

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Note: Because of their scholarly nature, some essays use diacritical marks or alternative spellings for foreign names and terms; other essays do not, for easier reading.

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Money Games Should End

Last year in the United States, the Enron Corporation, one of the largest energy corporations in the country, collapsed. Soon after, suspicious accounting and cover-up attempts by WorldCom, a long-distance telecommunications provider, were exposed. Not only these, but many other scandals involving other companies came to light, and the prices of stocks on the American exchanged plummeted.

We used to place our absolute trust in the regulatory and monitoring systems that should never have allowed cover-ups and other wrongdoing to happen in the first place, but that trust is now being undermined as well. It goes without saying that we can only be astonished that Arthur Andersen and other large accounting firms are said to have been involved in these.

I have heard that the expression "cockroach theory" is now being used popularly in the United States. That is, if you see one cockroach, you can assume that there are a hundred cockroaches hidden in a nest somewhere nearby. In the same way, if you discover wrongdoing by Enron, or some other company, there are sure to be lots of other companies engaged in the same kind of wrongdoing. What the "cockroach theory" points to is the need to investigate this possibility thoroughly.

This problem, of course, is not limited to the United States. I am sure there is corporate wrongdoing in Japan, as well. It would have been a good thing if Japanese banks had sincerely pursued their rightful role as banks, but instead they got carried away in the real-estate speculation of the economic bubble years, and are now saddled with an immense burden of loans that the borrowers are unable to pay back.

This leads me to think that, in economics, we need to stop and remind ourselves that money is not everything—rather, the most important things in reality are goods and

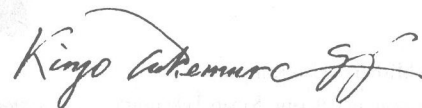
services. However, it seems that we have become very attached to money itself, and rather too exclusively involved in money games.

Money is only useful inasmuch as it empowers the exchange of goods and services. However, it seems to me that during the last decade or so, particularly in the United States, money has become almighty in economics—that is, finance capitalism has become supreme. Short-term exchanges and stock trading dependent mainly on hedge funds do not yield profits without shifts from one currency to another. This has given rise to various contrivances.

At first, in the early 1990s, international currency speculators threw the English pound, the Italian lira, and the French franc into confusion and in the process made immense profits. They aimed at profits from exchange-rate differences, made through "short selling" of stocks and commodities they did not even really possess. Europe learned its lesson from this experience, and dealt with it by fixing the rate of participating nations' currencies to the Euro.

Speculators next targeted Asia, where they again set their trap of financial contrivances. As a result, the value of the Thai baht was cut in half and the value of the Indonesian rupiah fell to one-sixth of its former level, causing disturbances that even led to a change in government.

However, we are now at the end of the age of money games that merely run after money for its own sake. This year, we need to think about what we can use as a true standard of value that is in essence fixed to a global standard. □



Kinzo Takemura

We would like to share readers' thoughts and experiences of faith and also welcome your comments on the contents of this magazine. We would also appreciate your reports on recent events of interreligious collaboration in which you took part. All letters are subject to editing. Letters can be forwarded to us by regular mail, fax, or e-mail. Our mailing address, fax number, and e-mail address are:

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How You Act Reveals Your Past, Present, and Future

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.

In an early Buddhist text, Shakyamuni spoke the following words: "Who was it who has erected the house of ignorance and defilements? When I seek that architect, I cannot find any person, only rebirth in countless forms of transmigration." However hard one seeks the architect, finally one must identify him as none other than one's self. We find here the expression "transmigration," and are reminded of the saying that the process of transmigration is long for a stupid person. Shakyamuni in fact often speaks of this.

People in ancient India were apprehensive about not being able to evade eons of transmigration throughout the six realms of asuras, animals, hungry spirits, hells, humans, and heavenly beings. Buddhism, in linking the evil aspect of karma with transmigration, seems to many to be equally dark and frightening. This idea of karmic retribution is why we hear people say things like "Your bad luck is the result of what you did in a past life," or "The spirit of someone many generations ago who died an unnatural death is not at rest." If drowning people who are clutching at straws to escape their suffering are told this, they will probably accept it, and this will lead to the misunderstanding that Buddhism is a teaching that avoids responsibility by making all ill-fortune in the present life the fault of spirits or the karma from past lives.

We have no knowledge of, and no means of knowing, what the circumstances of our past lives were or who our ancestors many generations ago may have been. But people who taught this could not actually see the past in this way; however, most people probably think that it is far easier to believe that misfortune, having its origin in spirits, can

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 Niwano addresses Rissho Kosei-kai members at the Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo in 1988.

be escaped through exorcism rather than to admit that we can correct ourselves through religious training.

It is said that if you want to know what you were in a past life, look at what you are now, at how you live your present life and what you are doing with it. If you want to know about your future life, again you must look at your present life and your actions. If people, hearing this, accept it and realize the importance of the present, then all is well and good, but to speak of the karma of past lives to those who are skeptical about it only increases their doubts. It is far better to explain how we should all feel gratitude for our lives at the present time.

Karma Is What We Do

"Karma" tends to create a gloomy image in our minds. This may be explained as the influence on Buddhism of the ideas behind the caste system of ancient India, where birth, rather than individual effort, determined status and occupation. Shakyamuni himself said clearly that human dignity is not a result of birth but of what a person actually does. Still, the caste system gave rise to fatalism and karma, which became transformed in people's minds to something like the power of fate, against which it was difficult to resist.

Karman (pl. *karma*) literally means "deed." What we do becomes engraved upon our minds, our spirits. People who think of this as the residue of their past acts shudder at the idea, but what Shakyamuni always taught was that it is what we do right now that is of the greatest importance.

As Buddhists, we should stand firm to work for the good of the world, for the good of others—that is, within the everyday actions of our present lives. We should endeavor to establish within our karma, within our daily actions, and put into practice for the good of others, the precepts contained in the Verse of the Seven Buddhas of the Past:

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

We Are the Source of Our Troubles

To consider that good actions lead to good results, and evil actions lead to evil results involves an extremely strict moral code. This is because it is essential that we should be able to look carefully at ourselves in order to seek out our deficiencies and to reflect on them. Therefore we must be careful not to push others to reflect upon themselves by saying that it is the bad karma they have created in previous lives that is responsible for the misfortune they are now experiencing, for this could cause them great harm, since there is a likelihood that they might fall into the danger of fatalism.

The theory of karma should not be forced upon others; rather, we should think of it as a means to question and reflect upon ourselves when we have attained a deep faith. When we must confront some kind of suffering directly, we will be able to confront our deficiencies with good grace if we tell ourselves that we must have caused others trouble in a past life. There is no meaning in merely shuddering at the idea of the karma of past lives. Through reflection we can make the theory of karma meaningful by actively allying it with our personal spiritual effort.

Discourses on karma were expounded in ancient Buddhist sutras to encourage us to reflect upon our own karma, which persistently clings to us and hinders our progress along the Buddha Way. If we confront those who are suffering misfortune with the doctrine with karma, far from making them understand it, we might worsen their condition, resulting in their being hurt even more. To repeat, the teaching of karma is something that contributes to our understanding of ourselves, not something that should be pushed on people who do not deeply understand the causes and effects of the past, present, and future.

The ritual of spirit pacification (*chinkon*) resulting from the fear of a supernatural curse has been performed in Japan since ancient times. Buddhism was transmitted to Japan nearly 1,500 years ago, when King Syongmyong of the state of Paekche on the Korean Peninsula sent Buddhist sutras and statues to this country in 538. When Emperor Kinmei (r. 531–71) notified his advisers of this, the head of the Soga clan recommended a positive response, saying that Japan should follow the example of other countries and adopt the worship of the Buddha. However, the head of the Mononobe clan wanted to reject it, seeing it as the cause of an epidemic raging at the time and attributing the numerous deaths caused by the epidemic to a curse by the Japanese deities on the worship of a foreign divinity. The Soga clan countered by saying that the epidemics and the high death toll were the result rather of a curse laid upon the people for not worshipping the Buddha. Thus history tells us that both sides employed the idea of a curse in their debate.

Japanese religion up to that time had been based on the veneration of nature. It was a simple belief that deities (*kami*) inhabited stones and trees and rivers and mountains. The Chinese ideograph for the word "curse" (*tatari*) is made up of two elements, "to appear" and "to show." This means basically that the deities expressed their form through such things as rocks and trees.

Shinobu Orikuchi (1887–1953), a scholar of Japanese literature and folklore, explained the etymology of "curse" as deriving from the word *tachi-ari*, meaning "standing forth," which signifies the display of spiritual power of a deity. Down through the centuries the belief grew that catastrophes were the result of curses brought upon people by the wandering spirits of both the living and the

dead (*mononoke*), especially those who had died an unnatural death. Thus, a word that had originally applied to the power of the deity came to have terrifying connotations, together with prayer rituals and ancestor veneration to subdue these spirits, both of which came to play a central role within Buddhist belief.

Ancestor veneration within Rissho Kosei-kai, however, is completely different from this. True veneration of our forebears is an expression of love and respect, as well as of gratitude, for all those without whom we ourselves would not have been born. Rissho Kosei-kai is a lay Buddhist organization in which the veneration of ancestors is a symbol of household religion. It is something that I hope will continue indefinitely. Some people point out that ancestor veneration does not occur in India or China, but I think in fact that we should introduce this good custom widely to the people of the world.

The Buddhist scholar Tetsuo Yamatori wrote *Bukkyo to wa Nanika* ("What Is Buddhism?") and introduced the concepts of curse and spirit pacification that run deep beneath the tradition of Japanese religions. Whereas human relations between the living tend to become rigid, the communication and dialogue between the living and the dead—that is, ancestor veneration—give a depth to human relations in actual daily life.

It is in this sense that I think we should think once again about the meaning of ancestor veneration.

People often talk about curses by ancestral spirits. I wonder, though, how it is possible for such spirits to curse their beloved descendants and cause them to suffer. When we think of the love a parent feels for a child, this must be very obvious. Even if these spirits regretted the path their lives had taken, they would not want their descendants to walk the same path, but would wish them every happiness. There is no way that they would desire unhappiness for their descendants.

The problem lies within ourselves. Since human beings are weak creatures, even a small setback is likely to get them thinking that misfortunes "come not single spies, but in battalions." The equivalent Japanese expression literally means that curses come to the weak, and when bad luck keeps recurring, people may begin to think that they have actually been cursed.

It often happens in baseball that a pitcher falters at the final inning just as he is about to have pitched a perfect game. This is mostly the result of desire and delusion, being too conscious of a perfect game. However, some are blind to their own faults and do not wish to admit fault.

When similar things keep on happening, they put it down to a curse. But just as the proverb says, "One misfortune rides upon another's back." You yourself call down your own misfortune, and to blame it on your ancestors makes no sense at all.

Recurring misfortune is what your present state of mind reflects. Shakyamuni taught that life is suffering, which in other words means that weakness is the normal condition of life. When bad things keep happening and you feel vulnerable, what is most important is to reflect upon the reasons for your weakness and to regulate your mind according to the Buddhist teachings. The feeling of being cursed will then evaporate of its own accord.

Avoiding the Arrows of Misfortune

Once Shakyamuni said to his followers, "Both those who have already heard the teachings and those who have yet to do so share the experience of ease and suffering. What then is the difference between the two groups?"

There must have been some among the followers who thought, "What is the use of striving hard at religious training if we cannot escape the suffering of old age, illness, and death, no different from those who have had no training at all?" Shakyamuni said to these people, "Those who have heard the teachings as well as those who have not yet done so are similarly hit by the first arrow of suffering. However, those who have heard the teachings are not hit by the second and the third."

We all experience illness, whether we have faith or not. Those who have faith, though, look upon illness as a good friend who teaches them to look more deeply into their own lives. Illness also teaches us to be truly grateful for the gift of life. Those who are not supported by faith, however, might demand to know why they have been singled out to suffer, and they might curse fate, hate others, and cause much pain to their families through their selfishness. These are the people who are hit by the second and third arrows.

It is when we are most vulnerable that it is essential for those of us with faith to be correct in how we see ourselves, so that we can avoid being hit by those other arrows caused by our own feelings of being cursed. We often hear how, when one spouse has a problem at work, the rest of the family, formerly concerned with the individual concerns of its members, comes together as one, and the bonds between husband and wife, parents and children, strengthen. This is an excellent example of how to avoid being hit by the second and third arrows. □

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Life Is Larger Than Globalization

An Interview with IARF President Eimert van Herwijnen

Eimert van Herwijnen, president of the International Association for Religious Freedom, one of the oldest international interreligious organizations in the world, visited Japan in October 2002 to deliver a lecture on globalization and corporate responsibility at Nagoya University of Commerce and Business. DHARMA WORLD spoke with him in Tokyo about the confrontation between modernization and traditional values.

You worked for the Royal Dutch/Shell Group for 27 years as a chemical engineer, until you took early retirement in 1985 at the age of 52. What were your jobs at Shell?

I joined Shell in 1957 as a chemical engineer after graduating from the Technical University of Delft. I worked first in the head office in The Hague and then became a chemical manager in the Tokyo office. Shell was selling its technologies to Japanese companies under license, and I did licensing work. I returned to the head office in 1967; after one year there, I moved to a refinery near Rotterdam, managing one of the chemical plants at the installation. In 1971 I moved to London and worked there for two years, coordinating production levels for several Shell chemical plants in Europe. In 1973 I returned to the Netherlands. Until 1985 I was involved mainly in economic appraisal negotiations at the Hague and Rotterdam offices.

Why did you take early retirement?

In my free time I have always been interested in matters related to my church, the Dutch Remonstrant Church. I was also involved in interchurch aid to developing countries. Through those activities I learned that some large corporations did not always compensate people fairly for their work. Let me give you an example. There are many cows in the Netherlands. We import feed, such as tapioca from Thailand or soybean residue from other countries, to feed the cattle. World market prices for these commodities are kept very low because of competition. Farmers, although they have to do all the work to raise the crops, earn very little for their labor, while the profits are made by others: producers of seeds, pesticides, and fertilizers; brokers; trading companies, etc. While working for Shell, I began to feel a moral conflict. Shell produced fertilizers, and also made pesticides, and then they decided to go into the seed business. They intended to offer a complete package—seeds, pesticides, and fertilizers—to farmers

Eimert van Herwijnen is an active member of the Remonstrant Church, a small, nondogmatic Christian denomination founded in 1619, and served on its board for interchurch aid. After retiring from the Royal Dutch/Shell Group in 1985, he joined the board of the Dutch Industrial Mission. In 1989 he was elected to the board of the Remonstrant Church and served as its chairman from 1993 to 1997. He has been a member of the IARF's Dutch chapter since 1993 and helped organize and lead IARF conferences in Germany, in 1994, 1995, and 1998, and in the Netherlands in 1997. He was elected to the International Council of IARF and has been its president since 1999.

so that the company could control the entire agricultural chain. Shell obtained the seeds or other genetic materials for farming almost free from poor countries, mainly tropical or subtropical countries in Asia and Africa. As a large seed producer, Shell took the genetic materials from these areas, improved them somewhat, and sold them back to farmers in those same regions at high prices. I had difficulty with that kind of business, because I thought that an energy company like Shell should not make profits on food, which is a basic necessity. That was one thing. I also disagreed with Shell's policy in South Africa under apartheid. Partly because the country used to be a Dutch colonial state, there was strong Dutch involvement there. How could we justify our business in South Africa in the face of apartheid? Of course, we were not breaking laws. But the point was that a company like Shell should not be part of the military-industrial complex. We were helping the South African government continue a policy that was ethically unacceptable.

Was there any specific event that prompted you to retire?

At that time, my wife and I were interested in trying a totally different lifestyle, having to do with the Asian Rural Institute in Nishi Nasuno, a mountain village north of Tokyo. This institute, an international organization supported by Christian churches and other groups, was training leaders for rural development in Asia and Africa. I came to know the institute because my wife visited its predecessor in Tokyo during some Christian social activities while we lived in Yokohama in the 1960s. My wife and I visited the institute in Nishi Nasuno in 1983, staying there for six weeks. Joining the program, we met participants from many different countries. This experience caused me directly to confront the problem within myself: I was meeting and working with people who were suffering from corporate injustices.

The Asian Rural Institute's work was exactly in line with my wife's and my thinking. The institute asked people from poor villages who had leadership ability to join programs there from April to December. The programs do provide agricultural training, but focus on leadership education, through which Asian and African rural leaders learn how to organize a cooperative or how to promote cooperation among villagers. In India, for example, farmers could not get certain things done because villages did not cooperate with their neighboring villages due to the fact that they belonged to different castes. At the Asian Rural Institute I learned how to explain to a trainee from an Indian village the need for collaboration between villages across caste divisions: by building dikes or irrigation systems together, they would all benefit equally from the harvest. Such thinking very much impressed my wife and me. This experience, together with the conflict I felt about

Shell's activities, made me decide to leave the company.

After we returned from the Asian Rural Institute, inspired by its work, my wife and I started a small community in Brummen, Holland. We had five to six people staying in our community, sometimes more. We accepted people who needed some time out, people who were suffering mental stress from divorce, unemployment, or many other factors. People who were really depressed stayed there for months. Our community was a place where they could recover. We asked them to work in our organic garden and promoted a meditation program to help their rehabilitation. We continued the community until 1989.

Globalization brings huge opportunities for those who are able to seize them, but it reduces the poor to helpless victims of the global economy. Can you elaborate on the issue of globalization and social justice?

First of all, let me give you two definitions of globalization as I understand the term.

From an economic perspective, globalization means the development of worldwide markets for commercial products, global finance, and the huge consumption of commercial products. And from a sociological perspective, it can be described as the development of worldwide patterns of lifestyle, consumer behavior, and entertainment. Obviously there are interactions among the various factors.

In the field of international economy and business transactions, transnational enterprises can control their activities across national borders without the interference of national governments or international regulating bodies. These enterprises look for cheap labor and raw materials, the most lenient environmental regulations, and the most attractive investment conditions, including the right to repatriate profits. National governments, on the other hand, are powerless when companies are closing down plants, causing loss of jobs and tax income. They are also powerless when the speculation affects the exchange rates of their currencies. The volume of "flash capital" (speculative capital transferred electronically) is supposedly three times the value of total world trade. The sociological effects of globalization make it more and more difficult to uphold traditional norms and values. One might say that national governments are losing some of their sovereignty; in effect, democracy is under attack.

In the personal sphere, many people work under conditions of stress and job insecurity, as performance and competitiveness drive the economy. In such circumstances labor is a cost item, not an asset. As one economist remarked, "We want hands and brains, not people."

The thing that worries me is that with globalization, secular countries like the United States have gained enormous trading advantages by exploiting the freedoms guaranteed by their legal systems. One can think of examples

Young trainees from Asian and African countries join a class at the Asian Rural Institute to learn the importance of equal participation through role playing. Photo: Courtesy of the Asian Rural Institute.

like export subsidies, import restrictions, product standards, and patents. It is clear to me that these policies are pushing down the underdeveloped countries even further.

This conjuncture of problems doesn't make me feel very positive about globalization. There are, of course, positive things about globalization. But it is too easy to say that everything will be so much nicer, that everybody will have a mobile phone, that everybody can travel twice a year on holidays. Such things benefit only a very limited number of people; the vast majority of the world population is not even connected to a telephone line. But we tend to talk to each other as if the whole world is the same as we are and the whole world sees what we see. But that is simply not true. What is true is that the gap between rich and poor is widening.

There must be many people who oppose the kind of globalization that benefits only a few.

Modernization may be tempting to some, but people with more traditional values can easily be shocked and provoked. Globalization thus leads to contradictory reactions. Such reactions have been around for some time, but

the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States brought certain issues into sharp focus. The economic and military power of the West and the arrogance that comes with it certainly evoke protest. Not only do the successful states have greater wealth; images of this wealth, including the luxury and the excesses, can also be witnessed all over the world. But the uneven distribution of wealth cannot by itself explain the hatred and the fierce attacks. For many there is a religious dimension in play. Globalization and its lifestyles are an abhorrence to those who want their lives to be governed by their religious convictions, which are diametrically opposed to those lifestyles.

Many modern secular states have legal systems in which religion and moral values have been pushed to the periphery and are considered to belong to the private sphere. Alternatively there are people who believe that law, social identity, and loyalty all stem from a religious source, which they place in the center.

Globalization has to do with the loss of identity and growing uniformity that occur under the influence of mass consumption. Another side of globalization is the growth in terrorism, which presently is simplified as a conflict between Islam and Western civilization under the leadership

of the United States. But I think that terrorism has much more to do with the confrontation of traditional values and modernization.

What do you think about recent violent reactions by people who put stronger faith in traditional values as opposed to globalization and its lifestyles?

We can never justify the car bomb attacks [last October] at a nightclub in Bali, or any other form of terrorism—absolutely not. But maybe we underestimate the forces involved in these incidents. There have always been extremists; there have always been terrorists who thought they could force an issue by using violence. Such people were convinced that the world was deteriorating; they wanted to change it, not necessarily back to the way it was, but nobody ever listened to them. I think that, if we had been listening to those people, many precious lives would not have been lost to terrorism.

At the moment, people who have very traditional values must think that the world's moral values are really deteriorating. Globalization has allowed a tremendous world income gap to develop. For some people, luxury means taking a cruise on the Mediterranean; for many others it means one simple meal a day. Under such circumstances, the extremists may have felt that they did not know where to turn—they cannot reach the corporate executives of Mitsubishi Group or Shell to express their demands. Since they were not being heard, they started mobilizing people to draw attention to their cause.

Is confrontation between modernization and traditional values inevitable?

I think that modernization is not automatically identical with Westernization. Of course, the Western part of the world was the first to develop modern technologies and establish multinational corporations, so people now think that anything modern is Western. Some advocates of Islam repudiate the basic premises of Western modernity, not least the idea of inevitable progress and individual emancipation. However, in some countries the rise of an active civil society, the growth of higher education, easier travel, and the spread of the media and communication raise the possibility of a distinctive Muslim modernity. The fact that Confucian East Asia has provided an alternative model of modernization for Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia signifies that Buddhist and Islamic modernity are not only possible but also highly probable.

Are corporations making any efforts to prevent globalization from exploiting the helpless even further?

Let's go back for a moment to 1995. Every three years Shell builds a set of global scenarios, which are strategic plan-

ning tools with a horizon of twenty years. They help managers understand the dynamics of the business environment, recognize new possibilities, assess strategic options, and make long-term decisions. In 1995 it was believed that the forces of globalization, liberalization, and technology were irresistible. In that year Shell developed global scenarios based on that premise—not to understand whether the world would embrace or resist globalization, but rather to determine what form of embrace would be most successful. In 1998 one of the scenarios recognized that the forces of globalization might be contested by the three Rs: regulations, restraints, and rules—regulations to curb market liberalization; restraints on implementation of new technology, such as genetically modified food; and rules for engaging with products of globalization. In Zambia, for example, which has a lot of difficulty feeding its population, the authorities officially refused to buy genetically modified corn from the United States. The impersonal forces of globalization may be resisted by real people, who are worried about losing control of their own destinies.

Some developments are irreversible, in particular the advances in information technology, which has caused the world to shrink—though of course most people are not connected even to telephones. The future will not be shaped only by markets and technology, but also by the dynamics of how people connect to each other.

Do you see large corporations such as Shell becoming more aware of their social responsibilities?

Shell has made major advances in its awareness of corporate responsibility, of which I am quite proud. I think other corporations are beginning to change as well. More companies are looking at sustainable development, examining their energy and investment policies. Shell now issues "social reports" in addition to financial reports. Corporations have to issue financial reports about their business performance, but for years Shell has also published reports of how they have tried to carry out their social responsibilities; these reports are even examined by auditing firms.

Could you share with us your ideas about the future of religion in the face of globalization?

One of the things we aim to do in the IARF is to educate people about other faith traditions. The media, for example, are not trying to provide people with correct knowledge about such religions as Islam. They say only that Islam is breeding terrorism. Then everybody begins to say, "I can see that from the incidents in New York and Bali; I can see that there are Muslims and that they are terrorists." Such people do not really know anything about Islam. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, I was very unhappy to see the way the media were treating issues

of Islam. They seem to be interested only in continually reproducing the same picture of what is going on. What we need most is simple good information. It is important for people to have correct knowledge of Islam before they say something about the faith, rather than taking a position based on information processed by the media. So education is important. Interfaith dialogue, of course, is another thing that we can do. At the moment, we are training young people to enter into dialogue. If you are living in a Hindu village in India, and if an argument with Muslim villagers takes place, how do you start a dialogue to solve the problem? You need some help; you need some training. So we can do something in that field.

In the IARF, there is now an interesting discussion taking place about a code of conduct, or declaration of responsibility, of religious and spiritual organizations. We believe strongly that these groups must have some sort of criteria for religious activity and for conduct, because reli-

gious freedom does not mean an unlimited license to do whatever you like. Freedom without responsibility will give you chaos. And if you say that there should be freedom of religion, that does not mean that a majority group can suppress a minority. There should be limits on freedom. You have to define what the limits are if you demand that people respect each other's freedom.

I believe that religions can play a role, because in our age of globalization there is a tendency to define everything in terms of money, profits, or power. But life is greater than money or any other material value. If you are not careful, however, globalization will capture you so firmly that you begin to think of the whole of life in terms of how much money you have or what car you own, or whether you can wear top-brand suits. But I strongly believe that life is much larger than globalization. And I think that religions can help people develop values that are more powerful than globalization. □

Rows of computer terminals symbolizing the growing uniformity brought by globalization are displayed on the opening day of the 21st International Trade Fair for Information Technology, Telecommunications, and New Media "SYSTEMS 2002" in Munich. Photo: AP/WWP

How God Is Present in Other Cultures

An Interview with Catholic Bishop Samuel Ruiz García

The Most Rev. Samuel Ruiz García, emeritus bishop of San Cristóbal de Las Casas in Chiapas, Mexico, 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. Last year he received the 19th Niwano Peace Prize for his distinguished contribution based on religious spirit. DHARMA WORLD interviewed him in May last year, when he visited Japan to receive the award.

Why did you choose to become a Catholic clergyman when you were still young? Was there any specific event that motivated you to enroll in a theological seminary after you had finished your secondary education?

To answer this question, I have to mention a very strange thing that happened to me. The reason it is strange may be incomprehensible to people from outside. In the beginning of my life, there were several Catholic priests living near my house. I used to go to them weekly to have lessons or lectures on catechismal work. I had an image that one day I, too, would become a priest. The strangeness of pleasure was working inside of me. I felt that it was the grace of God. Something was working inside of me that pushed me to say that I wanted to become a Catholic priest.

Were your parents happy with your decision to become a Catholic priest?

When I had already been ordained bishop in Chiapas, I asked my mother why she gave me the name I have. She said that, after their marriage, she and my father were praying, begging God for child, and they promised him that if the first child were a boy, they would dedicate him to the service of God. But I never had any feeling that my parents were pushing me in that direction.

When you were ordained as bishop in the state of Chiapas in 1959, what was the situation of the indigenous Mexicans in general?

Before my nomination to the bishopric in Chiapas, I had little knowledge of Chiapas, except that I realized that it was near the “bottom” of Mexico, located in the southernmost part near the Guatemalan border. So I wrote a letter to one of my friends who had been one of my fellow students in Rome, at the Gregorian University. I asked him, “Please tell me what is the situation there in Chiapas?” He made very valuable presentations—good summaries, so that I held more or less a good picture of what to expect. Before that, I had been in contact with

only one family in Chiapas, but the summaries helped me to grip what must be done.

First of all, after arriving in Chiapas, I was very astonished, looking at the heavy percentage of the indigenous people living there. Actually, the population is 1.5 million in Chiapas, among which 78 percent are Indians in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. So the population is mostly Indians, I mean, the indigenous people descending from those who lived there before the arrival of the Spanish.

My first impression was shock that people were living in a world where little Spanish is understood. Almost nobody, especially women, can speak Spanish. So they are divided into four or five different language groups. The second

Bishop Ruiz at a deacon ordination in a community of Chamula County in Chiapas, Mexico, in 1995.

impression was one of cultural difference—not only a linguistic difference, but also a cultural difference. At the beginning, I had very heavy culture shock. For instance, when I visited one place—a community of 25,000 who were all Catholic, I started to try to shake hands with everybody. But nobody was offering their hands. So I was shocked. Some priests accompanying me said, “Oh, Bishop. We forgot to tell you that the style of greeting somebody here is not shaking hands.” “You place the back side of your hand on everybody.” So, in some way, that was the easiest way to greet somebody.

For the first time in my life, though having arrived in Chiapas in pleasure, I was denied by a different world. It was another type of culture, and another type of “living” that I had to learn.

Then, walking around the country, I was able to discover the poverty of the population. The social conditions of the Indian population was at the bottom, in the basement of Mexican society—not only the last part of the society, but the basement of the society—even below that. People were dying from hunger, not from illness. Indeed, the con-

ditions may be getting better in some way, but still there are people in Latin American countries—Chiapas in particular—that are dying of illness, of hunger, because they have no food. There are very few resources for survival.

The isolation of each community is one of the serious problems. For instance, in the parish of Ocosingo in the southern part of the state of Chiapas, one villager came from the extreme part of this parish to the part where he could attend Mass. This person had to spend three days in walking to Mass and another three days walking home.

You participated in all the sessions of the Second Vatican Council. What were the points focused upon by the Council?

The Council discussed the content of what the missionary activity of the Catholic church should be in the world. I learned at the Council what it means to evangelize, what it means to preach the Gospel, to construct, to build, and to become a church. So the decisions made during the sessions of Vatican II changed all the questions on pastoral

matters in the Latin American countries. During the sessions, I came up with thousands of questions. Especially, the critiques of the pastoral works of the Catholic church with the indigenous peoples were coming from the “happy intervention” of the bishops from African countries to the Council.

What did the African bishops demand?

They said in the beginning of the discussion in the Council that they would not hear the traditional answer to the missionary work of the church. They wanted the Council to discuss not only traditional missionary activities, but also discuss a new orientation to help find answers to the important questions that anthropology and the social sciences were asking the church regarding its missionary activities with indigenous peoples.

So, were you affected by this questioning of the missionary work and the new orientation for the evangelization of the Catholic church?

We must refine our attitude. That was the first problem the Catholic church was facing in the world. Early Christianity was incarnated within the body of the Roman Empire, and even helped to create Western civilization. So the missionaries were not just announcing the Gospel in Western culture. The important thing is how the missionary activity should be transformed from a mere announcement of a message coming from outside to an incarnation of the Gospel within cultures. So what happened in the Latin American countries after the Vatican Council was that we discovered the faith inside the history of the indigenous people in order to offer the Christian experience that is incarnated within all cultures.

Immediately after the Council, we had to investigate to see what God is doing inside of those indigenous communities in order to continue the Gospel work. The idea of the Council was that in every group in the world, we can discover what God is doing, how blessed all are with God's presence in other cultures, and moving in such a way, we began offering the Gospel to the indigenous communities. Therefore we needed to learn in what way God is present in their history, how God is present among them now, and what the seeds of the Word that Vatican II mentioned are.

How did you respond to the idea?

Immediately after the Council, we were asking Mexican anthropologists what they were seeking concerning the perpetuity of continuation of the revival of Indian cultures in Mexico. We needed to know first whether these cultures were still alive or whether they were already dead or dying. First, the anthropologists of Mexico totally re-

Bishop Ruiz bestows blessings upon the Catholic faithful at a church in Tokyo in May 2002.

fused to work with us, but finally they agreed to hold dialogues with us, but with one condition—we must sit down before the bench to be judged. So we accepted that. We were judged by Christian peoples from different communities that had come together as the Indigenous National Institute (INI), founded in Mexico City. In that way, we were expressing our way of thinking according to the Vatican Council. As a result of these dialogues, the anthropologists were impressed with our sincere attitude. Immediately after these dialogues we were able to send more than thirty persons—both clergy and laity—from our dioceses to study anthropology courses in INI, which were offered by some anthropologists present in the dialogues [e.g., Dr. Arturo Bartman]. So we started to review the indigenous cultures and their background, and we discovered the richness of Indian culture in order to help them embody the Gospel within themselves.

Did you have some sort of perception that the new pastoral plan had to be based on the specific needs of the indigenous peoples?

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Buddhists Engaged in Social Development

by Phra Paisal Visalo

A small number of Theravada Buddhist monks in Thailand actively concern themselves with social and human development in their country. The author of this article, a socially engaged monk from northeastern Thailand, addressed Japanese Buddhists during a symposium entitled "Buddhism, NGOs, and Civil Society" in Tokyo in July 2002. This article is adapted from the translation of his speech.

Recently in Thailand, the view that Buddhism has nothing to do with society is becoming widespread. Most people think of it as having ritualistic ceremonies or as a method of dealing with personal problems. But during the past twenty years, there have appeared among the Buddhist monks a small number of men who try to confront the problems of society head-on, which is causing the Thai people to change their attitudes toward Buddhism. Such monks are called "development monks," and they are mainly active in the agricultural regions of Thailand.

The economic development that has taken place in Thailand over the past few decades has widened the difference in the level of living between cities and rural villages, bringing to the villages poverty and environmental destruction. The development monks, while integrating themselves in the village society, have begun to confront the problems of villages suffering from poverty and environmental destruction. The economic development that has taken place in Thailand is not that different from that which occurred in the other Third World countries. More attention is placed on industry than on agriculture, and, in order to reduce the spending of those involved in the industrial sector, the prices of agricultural produce were pushed way down. Thus the life of farmers is fraught with troubles. Further, economic development was promoted in order to supply great amounts of natural resources on the market at cheap prices, with the result that once beautiful mountains and rivers have been destroyed. That is why a number of villagers have begun to question the merits of economic development.

Development monks can be divided into three groups. The first group is devoted to benevolent activities, such as building facilities for orphans or hospitals for people suffering from AIDS/HIV, and other charitable works. The second group is mainly active in an economic manner—organizing cooperative societies with cooperative shops in the villages, and even establishing the Water Buffalo Bank

and also creating a savings cooperative (credit union) so that people will not have to take out loans at high interest rates, and encouraging the production of traditional folk crafts. The third group is involved in environmental problems—working mainly to save and protect the forests and the rivers.

These activities of the development monks did not, at first, attract the attention of people living in the cities. Yet through the steady continuation of these activities, connections were made with NGOs both in Thailand and abroad, and their activities gradually became more widely known in the villages and cities. The activities of the Thai development monks were intimately related to those of

Ven. Phra Paisal Visalo is the abbot of Wat Pasukato in Chaiyaphum Province, Thailand. He was involved in student activism and human-rights protection before entering the monkhood in 1983. He is the cofounder of Sekiyadhamma, a network of socially engaged monks all over the country. In addition to writing and editing books on the environment and Buddhism, he holds training courses on nonviolence and meditation.

the NGOs from the beginning. The NGOs offered support to the activities of the development monks in various ways, such as supporting the creation of networks among the development monks, and even dispatching volunteers to help support their activities.

But I feel that, among the contributions of the NGOs, what was of the utmost importance was that they provided the development monks with various analytical points of view. Whether they were involved with problems of environmental protection or ameliorating poverty, the staff of the NGOs supplied the development monks with various ways of looking at how these problems were related to the structure of society or the economy, or the development of Thailand itself.

Formerly, development monks and other Buddhist groups who became involved with social problems took part in the kind of activity that deals with the problems right before their eyes. For example, if there were children suffering from starvation, they fed them; if there were people suffering from disease, they brought them to the hospital. But if anything is going to be done at the source of environmental problems or poverty, it is necessary to understand the social structure that forms a background to individual problems. Up to that point, the activities of development monks seem to be no different than giving an aspirin to someone suffering from a headache. Through that, the pain might be reduced, but concerning the fundamental cause of the headache, it is not a sufficient approach. The staff of the NGOs taught them that just giving someone an aspirin is not enough.

However, the relationship between the NGOs and the development monks is not just a one-way type of providing them with something. Rather, the development monks also had a positive influence upon the NGOs. One of the things they imparted was the importance of being aware of the significance of the spiritual aspect when engaged in their activities. It was one weakness of the NGOs, who could be said to have focused too much upon political and economic problems. It might even be said that they undertook their activities upon the premise that the villagers would become happy if they could live their lives in the midst of material wealth. Now, economic development is certainly important, but through bringing the new sense of values of what might be called "consumerism" into the village society, the villagers' peace of mind was disturbed. Yet, concerning this problem, I feel that the staff members of the NGOs were not sufficiently aware of this matter. Furthermore, among the NGO workers there were many who were indifferent toward spiritual matters, for which reason, because they were so busy with their activities that they did not have the leisure to pursue spiritual matters, they themselves ceased to be able to feel happiness, and there are even cases in which confrontations broke out among the NGO workers. When that happened, the development monks were able to teach the

NGO staff about the significance of attaching great importance to peace of mind while carrying out their activities. In my own experience, I believe that it is necessary for Buddhist monks and Buddhist groups and the staff of NGOs to share their knowledge with each other.

In Thailand, as in other Buddhist countries, cooperation between the Buddhist groups and the NGO staff is essential in promoting development. And what they must cooperate on is the creation of a sound civic society, which requires a comprehensive or holistic development in order to create. What I mean by "comprehensive or holistic development" is not just economic development—social development must take place, as well as development concerning environmental issues, and it is even necessary that spiritual development be part of the overall process. In order for such comprehensive or holistic development to take place, it is necessary for both sides—Buddhist monks and groups and the staff of the NGOs—to meet in cooperation in order that they might supply each other with what the other side lacks. In terms of activities, it is necessary to make political and economic reforms in relation to the issues of poverty, human rights, and the environment. At the same time, what might be termed "spiritual development," or "development in a spiritual sense," must also take place.

The problem at present is the importance of resisting the rapidly proliferating consumerism, which can be said to be the common enemy of both the Buddhist groups and the NGOs. This is because at its basis, consumerism creates a structure in which the poor are exploited, the environment is destroyed, and the spiritual peace of the people is thrown into confusion. Especially in the recent spread of globalization, consumerism has increasingly become more and more intense. Not only in Thailand, in many countries the number of poor is increasing, widening further the gap between the rich and the poor. And while the gap between the rich and the poor widens in a single country, the gap between rich and poor countries also grows ever greater. Within that context, it seems as though consumerism is just like a dominating religion. Within globalization, what is receiving special attention is the concept of free trade. The three slogans of globalization are often given as "liberalization of the market," "the privatization of public enterprises," and "deregulation," but while these aspects are being emphasized, the budgets for social welfare and various types of subsidies and funds to support the sick and the aged are being cut. The situation is such that the poor are now suffering more than in the past. And in the midst of that ever worsening suffering, it is important that the NGOs and Buddhist groups cooperate more fully than ever before to try to stop the situation from getting even worse. In order to do that, I feel that it is necessary for them to learn from each other, to create a new way of life and new sense of values that encompasses both the material and spiritual aspects of life.

Through the cooperation between NGOs and Buddhists, four categories of activities can be carried out. The first is the protection of human rights and engaging in humanitarian activities in support of those who suffer. It is crucial to lend assistance to the poor, the elderly, orphans, and other needy people. That is not enough, however. What needs to be done is to restructure society in order to reduce structural violence, that is, exploitation and lack of social justice, which is the root cause of poverty and suffering. This is the second category. As I mentioned earlier, although there has already been quite a lot of cooperation between NGOs and the development monks, still the situation is becoming ever worse. The third category is the creation of a new sense of values or spirituality as a countermeasure against consumerism. In particular, speaking as a Buddhist, I believe that there is a need to make it clear that Buddhism is not something that simply con-

sists of performing rituals; rather, it is an active religion that teaches us how we can achieve peace of mind and happiness. Finally, the fourth category is the effort to achieve peace. Today, there are many wars and conflicts going on around the world. Up until now, Buddhists have taken various opportunities to articulate the importance of peace, but in fact there are very few cases in which peacemaking and preventing wars were tackled in earnest by Buddhists. I have heard that during the past few years, many Japanese have visited Palestine and worked there as peace workers, and, at times, even served as human shields, and took part in various activities. When I heard that news, I could not help but think "How many of them are Buddhists?" or "How deeply involved in such problems have Buddhists become?" From now on, I believe that Buddhists must become involved in the problem of peace much more seriously than ever before. □

How God Is Present in Other Cultures

Continued from page 14

Indeed, we are equal in our relationship with God: we are brothers and sisters and work together. But we must then expect differences in our jobs, and in our works in the world. In that way, we will work until they can imagine the autochthonous churches, that is, the church within the bodies of their own cultures, with their own authorities, with their own hierarchy incarnated in the body in their own cultures, not according to ours. So that is a big change. However, we did not realize that the Gospel could offer some answers to the indigenous peoples' real problems and have a meaningful impact upon their daily lives. So how to go out to do pastoral work also posed many problems, and we had to review our way of thinking, our way of working in support of the emergence of the autochthonous churches in the dioceses.

Listening to your acceptance speech of the 19th Niwano Peace Prize, we were impressed and intrigued by your words, "The poor are the historical mediators of our salvation," and "The poor give in-depth meaning and significance to time and to life for all of humanity." Please elaborate more on the ideas that lie behind these words.

Yes, it may seem paradoxical. The central point of the teachings of the Catholic church is that the only person in human history who was said to choose the time of living, to give the place of living, the language to speak, and the culture to belong to, was Jesus Christ, according to our faith. He had chosen to be poor. He started his life in a lowly manger—outside of all possibilities. That was a personal decision, because as the Son of God, he chose

that way. So we must always understand that his later mission to teach the Gospel was paradoxical. In many ways, Jesus Christ was approaching the poor people of the time. He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

Do you have any specific vision of an ideal state for the indigenous communities in Mexico and Latin America to achieve? How will it be related to the salvific scheme of God?

Through the Indian situation of poverty and also by the attitude we had before, we were forced to change to accept that we must discover the richness of Indian culture in order to embody the Gospel inside of us. But this effort is still under way not only in Chiapas in Mexico, but in all the Latin American countries. This effort of the Catholic church to embody the Indian cultures in order to have value for the new autochthonous churches in Latin America is on the way. As for conditions in Chiapas, we have between 15,000 to 18,000 Indian catechists. In this way, Indians are entering in their own history. They go to a seminary. So some kind of a machine to push ahead the transformation is appearing, so that the Catholic church will be incarnated in its own way. We must say that the church will be embodied inside the cultures. If we are helping the Indian population, they will become the subject of their own history. As Saint Paul wisely said, "to save God is to reign"; thus, for the indigenous people, to become the subject of their own history is to embody God's plan. □

The Vatican Promotes Knowledge of Islam

by Eva Ruth Palmieri

Fr. Justo Lacunzabalda, chairman of the Vatican's Pontifical Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, speaks eloquently on the need to improve and foster dialogue between Christianity and Islam based upon mutual understanding and respect.

Not even the strong winds of prejudice still blowing have been able to shatter one of the pillars of Roman Catholic-Muslim dialogue, which has been standing for 52 years. The Pontifical Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies (PISAI) was founded in 1950 in Tunisia by the Society of African Catholic Missionaries (the White Fathers) with the aim of supplying academic information on Islamic culture and language, as well as religion, to those Catholic priests who were starting a new life in a Muslim context. For this reason, from the very start, it availed itself of the collaboration of local Tunisian academic staff. The independence of Tunisia (1956) and later, the opening of the Second Vatican Council, which issued the document *Nostra Aetate* on the Catholic church's relations with non-Catholic religions, brought a shared yearning for mutual understanding among different religions. It thus happened, through the will of Pope Paul VI, that the institute was moved to Rome in 1964.

Today, PISAI is Europe's sole academic promoter of Islamic and Arabic studies and language within the Catholic world. It is chaired by a renowned professor, Fr. Justo Lacunzabalda, whom we met in Rome on December 18.

"Emerging from the work of the Second Vatican Council," Fr. Lacunzabalda said, "the Catholic church opened new avenues of understanding with Jewish communities throughout the world. At the same time, the

Catholic church explored new ways and means to enhance and underline the importance of Muslim-Christian dialogue."

In terms of collaboration with academic institutions abroad, he said, "At the moment, PISAI has an agreement with the Comboni center in Cairo, Egypt, which is under the direction of the Comboni Missionaries. The students do their first year of Islamic studies there, and then they come here to do their second year, at the end of which they obtain a bachelor's or master's degree, according to the number of courses taken, or in Catholic terms, what we call a licentiate. The program is very intensive and demanding since there is a tutorship and lessons are compulsory. The students are from all over the world: Africa, Sudan, Senegal, Ethiopia, South Africa, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Indonesia, Pakistan, Great Britain, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Austria, Belgium, Spain, the U.S.A., Canada, and Peru."

Fr. Lacunzabalda emphasized that the institute's main thrust is to improve and foster dialogue between Christianity and Islam, which is achieved "first of all, with the study of the language of Islam, which is Arabic, because it is in this language that we find the sources of the documents and of the literature we are studying and also because it is the language of Islam's holy book, the Qur'an. Through knowledge of the language, we reach out to Islamic and Muslim societies throughout the world, which allows

us to better understand the local perspectives of Islam, such as Islam in Asia and Africa. We see and study Islam beyond the boundaries of the Arab region, which is important if we want to have a global knowledge of Islam. Our courses include the study of the religious and historic perspective of Muslim-Christian dialogue, to which we devote great emphasis. The approach is free of apologetics and polemics: the question is never who is 'right' or 'wrong.' This is important in forming the approach of the student, which must be based on understanding and respect in order to be conducive to dialogue and to solving problems that are not exclusively problems of Muslim communities or of Catholic communities, but of communities or society in general. There may be problems concerning religious liberties or violence—which are having a terrible impact on international relations, on the quality of those relations, and on the way people see one another. So all these issues are indeed very present in our minds. Nonetheless, we do not allow any kind of sterile polemics to interfere and negatively affect and hinder the spirit of our teaching. A university training such as ours must be based on the training of the mind and the formation of the soul, which comes only after an unprejudiced approach to subject matter."

Fr. Lacunzabalda told us he does not use the word "fundamentalism" to define situations of extreme violence. There is a widespread misuse

Fr. Justo Lacunzabalda at PISAI in Rome.

of this word, he said. "This is the danger today; the use of vocabulary is not all that clear. Sometimes we mix all the various extremisms without spelling out what they actually amount to, which is itself a form of violence that leads to a mixing up of issues. Religion has been used to persecute people; this is not a secret. And each religious community in the world has to come to terms with the tragedies committed in the name of religion. It is not a matter of condemning anybody, but simply to look at history and learn from its lessons so the mistakes of the past may never be committed again, and this is also achieved through knowledge. We have to start somewhere to prevent more of these acts of violence."

This spirit of reaching out is disseminated throughout the various publications of the institute, which also offer a platform wherein a fruitful exchange of ideas on topical and scholarly issues related to the institute's studies can take place. The articles published are written by Muslim and

Christian scholars alike; thus, at an academic level, contact with Muslim scholars from the Arab world is constantly maintained.

Such publications include *Islam-Christianity*, a 28-volume documentation of Muslim-Christian relations, as well as articles by Muslim and Christian scholars. There is also a publication in English called *Encounter*. "These are all tools of knowledge and understanding. If articles are not conducive to dialogue, we discard them, because there must be freedom as well as respect," Fr. Lacunzabalda said.

The institute is geared mainly toward the education of Catholic students, although occasionally there have been some Muslim students, too, and there are increasing requests for admission from Muslims. The institute is provided with an extremely comprehensive library—28,000 volumes—on Islamic culture, as well as on Christian-Muslim dialogue. Such a vast array of books includes sources in French, English, German, Spanish,

Italian, and Arabic—thus international students, even from other universities, as well as visiting scholars, often come to the institute to consult its master library.

Fr. Lacunzabalda told us that there was no aggressive or prejudiced attitude on the part of the students nor from the outside after the dramatic events of September 11. "On the contrary, Muslims came to encourage us in our work, we received positive letters and many came to visit us directly. This was truly encouraging. This I believe is because there is no polemical attitude in our study of Islam. I strongly believe that one of the main aspects of contemporary academic training is the awareness that we are living in a pluralistic world, and from the point of view of culture, civilizations, and religions this means that we are fostering a way of thinking that will guide us and illuminate society, and this is very important for us. The task ahead of us all is not easy, but there is a tremendous need for understanding, which is the only way to prevent conflicts."

The institute also hosts a regular series of meetings with Muslim speakers from Arab countries, such as the one that was held in January by Professor Akif Emre Oktem from the University of Galatasaray in Turkey, who spoke on "Secularism in Turkey." In February there was a roundtable discussion with various Catholic bishops from North African countries, who spoke about their experiences. "These conferences are open to the public and are often informal meetings. Often I realize that the friendly presence of various participants and the addition of a few words of solidarity with the speakers when introducing them is greatly appreciated and contributes to creating better bridges in the achievement of mutual understanding." □

Eva Ruth Palmieri worked for the Embassy of Israel to the Vatican for several years and has a deep personal interest in inter-religious dialogue.

One Great Cloud and Many Kinds of Plants

by Gene Reeves

Just as a cloud drops rain upon all plants, and the sun and moon shed light upon all things, so is the One Vehicle for all beings. We are all nourished by it and in turn can nourish others—and thus become like buddhas ourselves.

Chapter 5 of the Lotus Sutra is entitled “The Parable of Medicinal Plants,” but in the version translated by Kumarajiva and used in East Asia, and upon which almost all European versions are based, no such parable can be found. While medicinal plants or herbs are mentioned in the central story, which is a simile, they play only a minor role. In Sanskrit versions of the Lotus Sutra, however, there is a parable about medicinal herbs. As is true with some other parables, in this case too there are both prose and verse versions. Here is a telling of the parable that makes use of both.

A Parable of Medicinal Plants

Once upon a time there was a man who was born blind and could see nothing at all. He supposed, therefore, that there was no such thing as a beautiful or an ugly shape and no such thing as living beings who could see beautiful or ugly things—no sun, moon, stars, or planets, and no one to see such things. Even when people told him there were such things, he did not believe them.

When a certain physician saw this blind man, he realized right away that the man’s condition was due to something that had happened in a previous life. He knew too that this illness could not be treated effectively with currently available medicines, but that on the snowy King of Mountains there were four medicinal herbs that would work. One contained all flavors, colors, and tastes; another cured all ailments; another destroyed all poisons; and there was one that brought happiness to all who stood in the right place. Out of compassion for the blind man, and by using some sort of magical device, the physician went to that mountain, climbed it, and searched all over it to find the four herbs. After returning with them, he gave these herbs to the blind man in a variety of ways—chewed, pounded, raw in a mixture with other things, boiled in a mixture with other things, by piercing the man’s body, after burning them, and so forth.

The blind man soon regained his sight and was able to see such things as the light of the sun and the moon, the stars and planets, and a great variety of shapes. He realized that he had been a fool for not believing those who had told him about such things when he was still blind. And he began to think that since he was no longer blind he could see everything and as well as anyone.

There were also in that place some seers, men who were endowed with the five divine powers: the powers to go anywhere and to transform oneself or other things as you like; to see anything at any distance; to hear anything at any distance; to know the thoughts in the minds of others; and to know one’s own former lives and those of others. They said to the man who had been blind: “Now you can

Photo: IBC

Gene Reeves, former dean of the Meadville/Lombard Theological School, University of Chicago, recently retired from teaching at the University of Tsukuba, where he taught Buddhism and American studies. He holds a Ph.D. in philosophy of religion from Emory University. He is currently doing research, teaching, and writing on the Lotus Sutra at Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo.

One side of a sutra box decorated with a painting depicting the one cloud and many plants (ca. 11th century). Fujita Museum of Art in Osaka. National Treasure.

see, but you still do not know anything. Why are you so arrogant? When you are in your house you cannot see what is outside. You don't know who likes or dislikes you. And you can't hear or understand the voice of someone only five kilometers away, or hear a drum or the sound of a conch off in the distance. You can't go anywhere without lifting your feet and following a path. You can't even remember being in your mother's womb. How can you say you see everything? What makes you think you are so wise? Do you want to take darkness for light?"

Then the man asked the seers how they had obtained such powers. And they told him, "If you want such powers you should live in a forest, or sit in a mountain cave, and think only of the Dharma. You must get rid of all your faults."

So the man went off into a forest, concentrated on a single thing, got rid of his worldly desires, and obtained the five divine powers. Then he thought to himself, "In the past, no matter what I did, nothing good ever came of it. I was blind and not wise. Now I can go wherever I want."

The text goes on to tell us that a variety of herbs is needed because there is a variety of entrances into the Dharma. The blind man, we are told, just like ordinary people, is blinded by desire, while the man who thinks he

can see is like the shravakas. Then the man is encouraged to further his awakening.

An interesting aspect of this story is that, within the same story, the Buddha is likened to both the physician and the seers. Perhaps this is a way of telling us that the Buddha appears in many guises. An extremely important aspect of Buddhist practice for followers of the Lotus Sutra is the practice of recognizing the buddha-nature in others. This "buddha-nature" is nothing but the Buddha himself—we need to develop the ability to see the Buddha in others. And what the Lotus Sutra insists on is that we should learn to see the Buddha in all others. Thus, for those of sufficient skill, the Buddha can indeed be found in many guises, as both a physician and a seer.

I am reminded of the many stories in Chinese of how the bodhisattva Manjushri appears in many different disguises—as a beggar or a cripple, for example—in order to lead people to the sacred mountain, Wu-tai, which is like the home of Manjushri. Chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra tells us of the many forms in which the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Jpn., Kannon; Ch., Guan-yin) appears to people in need. Such bodhisattvas, of course, embody the Buddha, enabling the Buddha to live in the world. Thus, when we encounter someone who might be regarded as a

rival or even an enemy, we should pause and consider how this person might be a special disguise of the Buddha—at least for us.

The Simile of the Cloud and Rain

So, there is no parable of medicinal plants in the chapter by that title. What we do have there, however, is a very important simile for understanding the Lotus Sutra.

Parables and similes are both forms of metaphorical language. In a parable, of which there are several in the Lotus Sutra, characters in a story represent someone else. Thus, in the two parables we have already discussed in this series, there is a father figure who represents the Buddha. In a simile, on the other hand, one kind of thing is said to be like another. Strictly speaking, there is no story in a simile.

Here the Buddha is said to be like a great cloud that covers the entire world and dispenses a universal rain, a rain that falls everywhere. The rain, like the Dharma, is the same everywhere. But the living beings nourished by the rain are like an enormous variety of plants—some large, some small, some red, some blue, some growing on hills, some in valleys, some growing in sand, others in clay or water, and so forth. The rain nourishes all the plants equally, the big, the medium-sized, and the small, penetrating everywhere, from the tops of tall trees to the deepest roots.

The passage itself is so succinct, it is worth quoting here: “Kashyapa,” says the Buddha, “suppose that in the three-thousand-great-thousandfold world, growing on mountains, along the rivers and streams, in valleys and in different soils, are plants, trees, thickets, forests, and medicinal herbs of various and numerous kinds, with different names and colors. A dense cloud spreads over all of them, covering the whole three-thousand-great-thousandfold world, and pours rain down on all at the same time. The moisture reaches all the plants, trees, thickets, forests, and medicinal herbs, with their little roots, little stems, little branches, little leaves, their medium-sized roots, medium-sized stems, medium-sized branches, medium-sized leaves, their big roots, big stems, big branches, and big leaves. Every tree, large or small, according to whether it is superior, middling, or inferior, receives its share. The rain from the same cloud, goes to each according to the nature of its requirements, causing it to grow, bloom, and bear fruit. Though all grow in the same soil and are moistened by the same rain, these plants and trees are all different.”

Lotus Sutra Universalism

Here the focus of the sutra has shifted somewhat—from a focus on skillful means in chapters 2 through 4 to an emphasis on the universality of the Dharma and the equality of living beings.

In the missing half of the chapter, there are two additional similes: a simile of light and a simile of clay and pottery. According to the first, just as the light of the sun

and the moon illuminates the whole world—those living beings who do good and those who do ill, the tall and the short, things that smell good and things that smell foul—so too the light of the Buddha’s wisdom shines equally on all the living according to their capacities. Though it is received by each according to what it deserves, the light itself has no deficiency or excess. It is the same everywhere. According to the simile of the clay and pottery, just as a potter makes different kinds of pots from the same clay—pots for sugar, for butter, for milk, and even for some filthy things—they are all made of the same clay, just as there is only one Buddha-vehicle.

It is worth noting in passing that in both of these similes there is a deliberate inclusion of bad or unpleasant things. This is one of the ways in which the Lotus Sutra expresses universality, the idea that there are no exceptions, no one is left out of the Dharma. Everything is affected by the



Detail from a standing screen, “Summer and Autumn Grasses,” by Sakai Hoitsu, 19th century. Tokyo National Museum.

Buddha-dharma. The One Vehicle is for all living beings.

It is also important to recognize that the kind of universality that the Lotus Sutra affirms does not in any way diminish the reality and importance of particular things. The fact that the pots are made of one clay does not make the pots any less real. Similarly, the many beings of various kinds that are illuminated by one light affirm both the oneness of the light and the many-ness of the living beings. Thus the universalism of the Lotus Sutra is at the same time a pluralism, an affirmation of the reality and importance both of unity and of variety.

The central message of the simile of the cloud and rain is that the Buddha’s teachings, the Dharma, is equally available to everyone. It can be found anywhere, ready to nourish each and every one of us. All living beings participate in a process in which they are nourished by the same living energy as everyone else, a living energy that Buddhists call “Buddha-dharma.” But we are not all alike. We live in different cultures, have different histo-

ries, use different languages, are born in different generations, have different abilities to hear and understand, and so on. That is why the one Dharma has to be embodied in many different teachings and practices.

The variety of teachings is often categorized in the Lotus Sutra as the three vehicles—the way of the shravakas, which involves seeking awakening for oneself in a monastic community; the pratyekabuddha way, which involves a solitary pursuit of awakening; and the bodhisattva way, which involves finding one's own awakening in the midst of the world, and then helping others. But we can see that in these similes, there are not just three ways—there are a great many, just as there are many different kinds of plants.

If plants, at least the vast majority of plants, receive no rain, they soon wither and die. The same is true of us: without the nourishment of the Dharma we would dry up and die. But this Dharma that nourishes all is not some-

to function and survive through growth and modification.

Today, many believe that minimal harmony is being destroyed by Earth's dominant group of living beings—human beings. Whole habitats—rain forests, wetlands, uncultivated plains, natural rivers and streams—have been destroyed and are still being destroyed, probably at an increasing rate. Increased economic activity virtually everywhere also means increasing pollution of the air and water and the very soil upon which we depend for much of our food. In addition to such environmental destruction, humankind has developed weapons of enormous destructive power that could hardly have been imagined a century ago.

In this sense, human beings have made themselves more important, that is, more powerful, than other living beings in this ecosystem. They threaten to destroy even the minimal harmony that makes life on Earth possible today.

This is a situation well beyond what the ancient Indian compilers of the Lotus Sutra could have imagined. It would be foolish to claim that the sutra provides a recipe for solving the kind of current problems that threaten the planet. But, in principle, the sutra is hardly silent about such matters. It calls upon us to recognize that—in important respects—all living beings are equal. All are nourished by the same processes, symbolized in the simile as the rain of the Dharma.

The Lotus Sutra calls upon us, not only to transform individuals, but also “to purify Buddha-lands.” From the point of view of the Lotus Sutra, of course, this Earth is the Buddha-land of Shakyamuni Buddha. This world, and especially this world, is Shakyamuni Buddha's world. But the Buddha is not some sort of all-powerful God ruling the universe. The Buddha is embodied, made real, in the Buddha-deeds of ordinary living beings. The Buddha invites us to be partners with him in transforming this world into a pure Buddha-land, where there is a kind of harmony of beauty enabling living beings to flourish together in many different healthy ways, all equally depending upon the Dharma and upon one another.

This chapter of the Lotus Sutra encourages us to think of the large picture and to be grateful that we are nourished by the rain of the Dharma. But it is also important to recognize that the Dharma can be rained by us. In *Zen and Western Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, p. xxiv) the famous Zen scholar Masao Abe wrote that “the greatest debt without doubt is to my three teachers. . . . Without the Dharma rain they poured upon me, a rain which nourished me for many years, even this humble bunch of flowers could not have been gathered.”

In other words, to follow the Buddha Way, the Dharma, is not only to be nourished by the Dharma, but also to nourish others—many kinds of others. In still other words, to follow the Buddha Way of transforming living beings and purifying Buddha-lands is to become a buddha oneself, at least in small part.

To be continued

thing to be found only in the Buddhist religion. It is universal. It is everywhere. The Dharma can be found even in the ordinary food that we eat and the water we drink, making it possible for us to live.

Ecological Harmony

According to the simile of the great cloud and rain, every living being is, in one sense, equally valuable. Each has its own function within the large whole. Each has its own integrity, its own value for itself, its own goodness, its own purposes, its own beauty. The rain nourishes according to the needs of the various plants. A big tree requires more water than a small shoot of grass. But this does not necessarily mean that the big tree is superior to the small blade of grass; it's just bigger. Different living beings play different roles in the ecology of the planet. We depend on a vast network of living beings, dependent on each other. Thus, a certain harmony or peace is required—not necessarily a perfect harmony, but enough to enable the system

How Being Grateful Changed My Life

by Yukiko Hicks

A Japanese member of Rissho Kosei-kai now living in the United States addressed the twentieth anniversary meeting of the New York Branch on October 27, 2002. This is a slightly edited version of her talk, in which she described the strength her faith has given her.

My name is Yukiko Hicks and I live in West Virginia. I am very happy to attend this important twentieth anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai of New York. I am further grateful that today I am able to attend this event with my husband, Mike, and his sister, Annie. This is the first time for me to give a speech in front of a large audience, so please forgive my nervousness.

I was born and raised in Yokohama, Japan, which is a large port city located about twenty minutes by train from Tokyo. I was working in the Public Transportation Division of the city of Yokohama, where I met my first husband, who was stationed at the nearby U.S. naval base in Yokosuka. We were married in Yokohama and shortly after, in November 1969, we moved to West Virginia. My Japanese mother told me that going to America would be like climbing a rough and rocky road instead of traveling a beautiful highway. Even with that, I promised her that I would achieve happiness and headed for the United States. Finally my mother said, "Even though we will be far apart, if you are happy, I am happy." My mother was a member of the Yokohama Branch of Rissho Kosei-kai, and through her leader's help I became a member of the Chicago chapter and received monthly magazines and booklets. Although I knew the magazines and booklets had many good words and guidance, I really did not put them into practice.

A year after we moved to West Virginia, my son was born, in April 1970. In the third year of our marriage, my husband had an affair and we were separated for about a year and finally got a divorce. Knowing nothing about the local land and ways, and having to care for my four-year-old son, I was lost but needed to work. After a few different jobs, I settled on a glass-cutter design job at a local hand-blown glass factory. When my son was six years old, I met and married my present husband, Mike. He was a bachelor and seven years my junior.

My son and my new husband had a good relationship when my son was small. But things got rough when my son was in his teens. He excelled in and loved sports. Even

during the snowy winter season, ignoring my husband's concern, I devoted myself to my son's tennis training. He is now an adult, independent, married, and is a pro tennis instructor and high-school teacher.

Mike's father passed away from Alzheimer's disease in 1984. I helped take care of his mother, who passed away

Mrs. Hicks at her home in West Virginia.

from skin cancer in 1989. After her passing, Mike wanted to take care of the family farm. Mike's seven brothers and sisters also agreed that Mike should take care of the farm. So in 1989 we moved into a 100-year-old home on a 350-acre farm. There is "natural gas" coming out of the land in three areas, along with forty cows roaming the meadows. There is an interstate highway running through the farm with an underpass to move the cows from one side of the interstate to the other. It reminds me of the Lone Ranger and cowboy days as my husband drives the tractor to move the cows beneath the underpass.

Then a year later, my husband became unemployed. He had been working as an oil-field worker. He couldn't find work and most of our savings were used up. We bought a cow, raised calves, and tried our hand at breeding cattle. My husband liked farming and farm work. But we couldn't get a stable income, and it was getting hard to make ends meet. Mike tried to get a job while doing farming but was unsuccessful, and about two years passed. A friend had informed me about his starting an ice-cream stand and said he needed help. Since my son was grown and in college, it was timely for me to work and bring in additional income. After working for a couple of years, my friend asked me if I wanted to buy out his ice-cream stand. I thought it was a good chance and possibly the only opportunity to bring in a stable income.

I got in touch with a local bank and applied for a ten-year loan. Since we had no money for a down payment or deposit, we needed to borrow the total amount to purchase the ice-cream business. Because this was an important turning point in our life, and because I was aware of my own selfishness, I asked Mrs. Kayo Murakami for advice. Mrs. Murakami, head of the Chicago chapter, asked Rev. Katsuji Suzuki (former head of the New York Branch) for guidance. He said that the timing was favorable to buy a business. However, he suggested that I go to Japan on the next pilgrimage to Risho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo. We were down almost to our last cent and in near desperation to survive. My husband knew that if the ice-cream business started it would be difficult to take any trips and agreed that it would be good for me to go to Japan. I headed for Japan, not knowing if the loan was going to come through or not. Upon arrival at my sister's home in Yokohama, I received a postcard from my husband informing me that the loan had been approved.

I was most grateful for the kindness and compassion that the Chicago members, along with members in Japan, extended to me on this important trip. And on top of that, while I was in Tokyo, I came up with a name for our ice-cream business—"Coke and Float." During my stay in Tokyo, I was impressed by the hardworking attitude and the devotion of the Japanese people, and I promised myself that I would work just as hard when I returned to the States. I was especially impressed by Mrs. Sato, a member from the Chicago chapter. Mrs. Sato's Japanese-housewife

Mrs. Hicks with her husband, Mike, at a local restaurant.

manner and her feminine quality were so different from my Americanized style. The Japanese people's hardworking manner gave me the motivation and strength needed to strive hard in my new business. Upon returning from Japan, I felt some inner power of faith and knew that following the Buddha's teaching would bring happiness. And so, only two months after I returned from Japan I succeeded in purchasing the ice-cream business.

The first year was very rough, with the heavy load of loan payments, my lack of knowledge of business techniques, and many sleepless nights. The business season lasted about seven months of the year, but I spent long eighty-ninety-hour weeks trying to make the monthly loan payments on time, and we somehow managed to survive the first year. It was my first experience to really see how difficult it was to work and survive at a job. Up till then, my husband had worked hard and I had remained a housewife and had had an easy life. Now I realized how much I appreciated the dedication and hardship my husband had gone through trying to keep the family safe and secure.

The second year, the business picked up some, and we became busier and needed more help. Then my husband started to help with the business. Since all or most of the business was done in cash transactions, I felt secure and stronger with my husband's presence. On top of that, he worked beyond the call of duty and was an excellent

like to practice and spread the precious teachings of the Buddha to the people in West Virginia. If it wasn't for the teachings, I know the business and my life would be a lot different and I would not be this close to happiness.

I decided to list the happinesses I had achieved through the precious teachings of the Buddha:

The happiness in realizing that Mike, my husband, had the ability and know-how to do almost anything.

The happiness in realizing that we were healthy and could work each day.

The happiness in realizing that many customers came to our store.

The happiness in realizing that, because of our store, we were surviving.

The happiness in realizing the satisfaction that we had successfully accomplished another season.

The happiness in realizing that I enjoyed and loved the wonderful farm.

Nine years ago, I was just a housewife not knowing anything about business. So how did I succeed in my business? The answer can be related to the wonderful power that swelled within me when I realized how to show gratitude and be grateful to the many people around me. Even with this feeling of power, there were many times when I was overcome by lots of problems, and a couple of times I almost gave up. But when those hard times hit me, I recalled the words of Rev. Suzuki: "Don't forget the feeling of gratitude and thankfulness, and work hard constantly; then your business will grow." Even now these words are the guiding light of my life.

Last summer my mother passed away at the age of ninety-three. She had reminded me that no matter how far apart we were, she wanted me to keep close ties with Rissho Kosei-kai. I wanted to attend this wonderful occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai of New York to say a heartfelt thank you to the heads, to Mrs. Murakami, and to the membership who supported me during my trying times. And most of all, I wish to thank the founder and the president for spreading the teachings of the Buddha and the Lotus Sutra, which kept my hopes and motivation up during the tough times. My experience in faith through the ice-cream business gave me the opportunity to truly understand the meaning of gratitude and compassion. Through Rissho Kosei-kai, I was able to change my selfish attitude and show compassion and understanding toward others. I strongly feel that without the teachings I would neither have successfully managed, nor worked well in, my business. And finally, I want to take this chance to express a heartfelt thank you to my dear husband, Mike, for supporting me.

And thank you, everyone, for giving me the opportunity to share with you my experience of the teachings of the Buddha. □

Mrs. Hicks delivering her testimonial speech during the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai of New York on October 27, 2002.

handyman and fixer-upper. Up to that time, I didn't even notice or care about his goodness and constantly complained to him, but when we started working together, helping each other, we were able to pay off our loan in our sixth year. And each year we were getting better at business management. When I was able to show honest and true gratitude toward my husband, the relationship between him and my son improved. And through the years, I realized how gratitude and compassion make a difference. The bond between them is now deeper than that between a real father and his son.

Throughout the years, I continued my devoted prayers through the rough business days. I tried to put into practice the guidance I read from Founder Nikkyo Niwano and President Nichiko Niwano in the monthly issues of the Rissho Kosei-kai magazines. While interfacing with my employees and other people nearby, I tried to show kindness, compassion, and the joy of living as suggested many times by the founder and the president. As the years passed, I started to practice more and more of what I read.

Next year will be our tenth year in the ice-cream business, and I am thinking about maybe retiring. I am most grateful to be with my husband in a wonderful natural environment and to be able to talk lovingly and communicate deeply with him. For the rest of my life, I would

The Virtue of Humility

by Nichiko Niwano

When we realize what a blessing our life is and the impulse to thanksgiving arises within us, we become able to accept everything that occurs around us as a blessing.

When we gaze within, we see that we contain both good and evil. It is important to sincerely acknowledge this. We are guilty of robbing other living things of life in order to sustain our own lives. But we are also capable of sustaining the lives of other beings. Moreover, within ourselves we find both self-centered greed and the altruistic impulse to improve society. All this indicates our contradictory nature. When we realize this we feel distress and sorrow, but we also become aware of the mystery of humanity. If we bear all this in mind, we will avoid both self-denigration and arrogance.

When we are in conflict with someone, if we honestly examine ourselves we can never say flatly that we are absolutely right. Recognizing our flaws gives us humility—one of the most important virtues. A humble person always lives in accordance with the Truth and the Dharma. The Lotus Sutra and many other sutras begin with the words

“Thus have I heard.” Following the Buddha’s teaching begins with listening to it with an open mind.

Hearing is said to be the most inner-directed of the senses. Sometimes when we hear another’s views, we refuse to accept those that do not agree with us. But the kind of hearing I am talking about here is very different from merely listening to the opinions of seniors and so on. The true meaning of hearing is to efface oneself and fully take in what one hears even if one cannot agree with it. This kind of hearing means setting aside, if only momentarily, the idea that one is right and looking within oneself in the light of another’s teaching.

Speaking to the brahman Kasibharadvaja, the Buddha said, “Modesty is the pole.” These days “modesty,” in the sense of shame, seems to be a dying word, but traditionally modesty, or shame, has been a highly valued virtue in Japan. Seen in Buddhist terms, shame is the gateway to repentance. When one gazes at oneself and becomes aware of the Truth and the Dharma, one realizes how insignificant one is in the face of the infinite. This gives rise to shame, and to repentance. Conceit is severed, and one has no choice but to become humble. One sees the arrogance of one’s way of living and is ashamed. One is compelled to bow down before the absolute.

The Japanese expression *ome-ome to ikiru* means to live (*ikiru*) in a shameless or brazen manner (*ome ome to*). It implies a sense of blame for being oblivious to that which we should be ashamed of. Reflection on episodes of daily life can trigger a sense of shame, but that is a superficial kind of shame. The essence of shame—that which we should be most ashamed of—is a lack of awe and thanksgiving toward the absolute. True awareness of what we should feel ashamed of springs from self-examination.

Constant Mindfulness

Through mindfulness we gaze at our own relative self and the absolute force that transcends it. Even if we gaze within and clearly know our inner landscape through mindfulness, however, there is nothing we can do about it. We

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Rev. Niwano (left) attends the enshrinement of the statue of Shakyamuni Buddha as the focus of devotion in a local Rissho Koseikai branch.

cannot improve it, however much we may wish to. Mindfulness only lets us know ourselves as we are, only shows us the true form of life of finite human beings. We can observe, know, and realize this, but we cannot change it. Nor can we do anything about the working of the absolute force. It is the working of nature, the working of a force transcending humanity.

We do not change through self-examination. We can only look into ourselves. All we can do through mindfulness is gaze deep within and touch the true form of life. Mindfulness makes clear our complexity and mystery, giving rise to contradiction, confusion, and anguish. It reveals the inevitability of contradiction, confusion, and anguish and makes us realize that this is the human condition.

I imagine that some will wonder whether “only self-examination” can serve as a vigorous power for life. But I believe that mindfulness is the most important source of power. Shakyamuni is the greatest exemplar of a person who has come face-to-face with human contradiction and touched the absolute through mindfulness. It was through mindfulness that he awakened to the Truth and the Dharma. Knowing this is enough to stop us from dismissing mindfulness as having no power and generating no power.

As I have already noted, if we gaze deep within through mindfulness we become aware of our contradictory nature, made up as it is of both good and evil, both self-centered greed and the impulse to altruism, and we feel confused and anguished. This process is important; if we try to avoid looking frankly at our contradictory nature and shrink from

confusion and anguish, we cannot achieve mindfulness. It is when we confront our contradictions, taste the depths of anguish, and then surmount them that we are reborn.

Human beings are interesting, so it is said. When we experience anguish over our contradictions, we are moved by the complexity of humanity. Being moved in this way is the essence of what makes human beings interesting, and is the springboard for a new phase of life.

Surmounting our contradictions makes us aware of the rich potential of humanity, that amalgam of good and evil, self-centeredness and altruism. We realize the boundless potential of humanity, we are infused with the courage to live, and life’s boundless potential unfolds before us. This is the power generated by mindfulness.

Mindfulness dissipates anger and confrontation, gives rise to gentleness, and leads to harmony. Mindfulness makes us aware of the mystery and value of life and makes us thankful for everything. Mindfulness frees us from ricocheting back and forth between joy and sorrow and lets us remain calm and collected at all times. We can lead lives that are truly worthwhile, laughing and crying with others, feeling compassion for them, and dedicating ourselves to their well-being. Finally, mindfulness leads to firm belief in the Truth and the Dharma. This is how we encounter the Buddha.

None of this can be achieved by our own power. It is a realm that opens up naturally through what we might call the gift of nature or the gift of the Buddha—the working of the great life force. □

Democracy and Monasticism

by George A. Sioris

Buddhist and Western monastic communities were governed by a set of rules that were both democratic and authoritarian at the same time. Here the delicate balance between these two seemingly opposing ideas is examined in the light of how well the system worked for the monastic orders East and West.

The issue of how much—or how little—democratic characteristics permeate the philosophy and functioning of monastic communities of both East and West is large enough to provide material and thought for a long, independent study. There may be a great variety of arguments and an interesting discussion, but I believe that it might be best to minimize the angle of our lenses and consider the issue in a comparative light—in other words, how does this basic idea interrelate with the two monastic systems under review? Are there common approaches and characteristics? Are there differences and nuances?

I may be wrong, but after pondering the topic for a long time, I am led to avoid very strict categorizations of the type that might be labeled “convergences” or “divergences.” In this case, I would rather borrow from Vinaya terminology itself: *aniyata* is what I feel reflects as closely as possible the reality of how the issue of democracy obtains in the two monastic systems.

Aniyata, explains the Vinayamukha (VM, I, p. 78), means “uncertain.” It is a term for training rules, the breaking of which implies “uncertain *apatti*.” In Bhikkhu Thanissaro’s wording (Thanissaro, p. 157), the term means “undetermined or uncertain. The rules in this section do not determine fixed penalties, but instead give procedures by which the Community may pass judgment when a *bhikkhu* in uncertain circumstances is accused of having committed an offence.”

Why have I opted for this classification? It is certainly not because of any interlinkage with offenses, but for the notion of “uncertainty,” “difficult to determine,” and “procedures,” through which readers, students, and researchers may get a better understanding of the inner connection of democracy and the two monastic systems.

Indeed, while examining the latter, I have found at times significant similarities and then, suddenly, substantial differences. So I hesitated concerning how to proceed and how to present my conclusions without placing them either in the “folder” of convergences or that of divergences. In

the final analysis, it appeared that directly transposing notions and terms of the realm of political sciences into the religious domain may be erroneous and misleading, as the latter incorporates this terminology at a higher level that is different from that of the state. Therefore I came upon the choice of *aniyata* in the sense referred to just above.

Buddhist Monastic Communities

The West, in general, tends to see Buddhism in a democratic light, as it took a radically different position on the system of caste from that of Hinduism. The Buddha ignored these social distinctions. Examples abound, but let me choose just one to illustrate the point. In the first chapter of the Cullavagga (I, 13), there is talk about some

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depraved monks who misbehaved by presenting garlands and ornaments to “the wives of reputable families, to daughters of reputable families, to girls of reputable families, to daughters-in-law of reputable families, to *female slaves of reputable families*” [my emphasis]. So, even *slaves* were covered by Buddhist compassion. One could, of course, counter-argue that it is “depraved monks” that are being spoken of here, but still the mention of “female slaves” appears to me as noteworthy. But while it is true that the Master presented his doctrine to *anyone*, without social and other distinctions, it is equally true that he did not “antagonize” the prevailing caste structures. “When civil society is discussed,” writes Hubert Durt (*Colloque de Strash.*, p. 5), “its organization, like the hierarchy of castes, is not disputed.” The Buddha’s concern was to introduce a way of deliverance, without coercion and without polemics, to the existing order (cf. Henri Arvon, p. 51). There is one more example of eloquent testimony of democratic thought, if we consider some passages from the Mulasarvastivada-vinaya, dealing with death and the division of property (see Gregory Schopen, pp. 473ff): in rule number 5, concerning monastic funerals and the problem of inheritance, we note that “the body of one person was burnt up . . . in the burning ground *by a low-caste man* [my emphasis].” This is, of course, a detail, but a detail full of meaning, as it portrays adherence to the norms current at the time regarding cremation. The new religion is open to anyone, but this does not entail the abolishment of existing social structures.

Some scholars tend to stress the democratic character of Buddhist communities. I shall mention some of them, but with certain follow-up remarks.

Kenneth Ch’en (p. 92) very clearly states: “The main feature of these early Buddhist communities was the democratic nature of their internal polity, and in this respect, they differed from the existing mendicant orders of the time, which usually acknowledged one leader as the head of the Sangha and empowered to establish the line of succession. . . . The Buddha—himself without a teacher—steadfastly refused to initiate a line of succession when pressed by his disciples to name his successor.” Ch’en then goes on to discuss the issues of voting, quorum, consent by silence, etc., during the meetings of the Sangha. All this is true, but we should also bear in mind that the key word here is “early,” the “early” communities, as there is no doubt that things evolved in the course of time, with various manifestations of democratic preoccupations in different periods.

Walpola Rahula (p. 155) also mentions the administration of the Sangha as “a real democratic system.” Though the Buddha “was in command,” he writes, “he did not appear to have ever exercised that power.” He further elaborates, quoting from another scholar, Nalinaksha Dutt: “Probably as a member of the clan which favoured democratic constitutions, the Buddha became imbued with de-

mocratic ideas. He wanted to see his Sangha grow on democratic lines and formed the rules accordingly.”

W. Pachow, while rightly characterizing the Patimokkha as “unsurpassed by any Law book in ancient India” (p. 68), stresses the democratic aspect of early Buddhism in a Sangha where all bhikkhus were equal (p. 65). But he also underlines the last instruction of the Master, a little before gaining parinirvana, that his disciples should take refuge in the Dhamma and Vinaya. Obviously, this testamentary advice points to a kind of spiritual “High Court,” to a diachronic compass, over and above nuances of divergent opinions. In other words, entrance to the Sangha was free, bhikkhus were equal, unanimity was the ideal, but differing views were tolerated only within the basic perimeters of Dhamma and Vinaya.

A.C. Banerjee (p. 21) concurs: The Buddha “moulded his life and work on democratic principles. He became thus imbued with democratic ideas. From the very inception of the Sangha, he wanted to see it develop more and more on democratic lines and framed rules accordingly.” And Banerjee continues: “Every member had a vote and all decisions were taken by a vote of the majority. But when sharp differences of opinion arose among the monks of the Sangha to settle a dispute, the matter was decided by votes taken by means of *salaka* (marked sticks) and the view of the majority always prevailed. . . . In short, no act of the Sangha was valid unless it was decided by the decision of the majority.”

Here, we are far from agreement—careful reading of the Vinaya does not point so easily to this total glorification of the majority rule, to this absolute linkage of validity to majority. The main aim of the code of discipline was to achieve unanimity. There were several methods of settling disputes—to which I have already alluded—by agreement of the parties, by arbitration, and by the power of the Sangha. Resolving cases *by majority vote* is just *one* of

Young monks during a study of a Buddhist scripture at a Thai monastery. Photo by Isamu Maruyama.

Theravadin monks listen to instructions from a senior monk during an interval between meditation sessions, at the Sasana Meditation Center in Yangon, Myanmar. Photo by Isamu Maruyama.

the possible methods. The corresponding term is *yebhuyyasika*—a very elaborate system with a very concrete functional framework. But extreme caution is demanded: “Voting is to be used in small matters which do not have far-reaching effects, those that are likely to be easily concluded without much consideration,” states the *Vinaya-mukha* (V.M. III, p. 148). “To use it to support an idea which is not Dhamma, or to divide the Sangha into groups, is not proper.” Indeed, the Sangha had to preserve its paramount ideals, unity, and the Dhamma, which were at a much higher level than exigencies of majority.

In order to get a still clearer understanding of this method of *yebhuyyasika*, it is useful to go deeper into explanatory texts—in the procedure for resolving disputes, the role of the *Salakagahapaka*, a kind of “polling officer,” is very important. He has the power, writes Sukumar Dutt, (*Early Bud. Mon.*, p. 160), “to reject the whole voting if in his view the opinion of the majority was contrary to the Dhamma.” The voting may be secret, by whisper, or open; but in all cases, “the point to be specially noted . . . is the large discretionary power left to the polling officer, which was probably intended as a safeguard against possible abuses.” Here the commentary of a towering figure, Buddhaghosa, is more than eloquent, proving beyond doubt

how much “democracy” was curtailed if the Dhamma was in danger: “When [the vote] is improperly taken, it should be taken till a third time, [the polling officer] declaring, ‘This improperly taken ballot should be taken again.’ If even at the third time those against the Dhamma are in the majority, [the polling officer] should rise [saying], ‘Today is inauspicious; I shall announce it tomorrow.’” The conclusion of S. Dutt is quite ironical: “This naive commentary of Buddhaghosa unpleasantly reminds us of modern electioneering tactics, but perhaps even in an American state the polling officer does not stoop to wire-pulling and canvassing in the manner that Buddhaghosa innocently recommends.” Although I fully appreciate the exposé of S. Dutt, I cannot follow him in his last remark, as it shows that even he has succumbed to the error of equating political with religious procedures, so different both in substance and time. For the Buddhist way of thinking, the first priority was the Sasana (teaching), second, unanimity—if possible—and only thirdly came the preoccupation with majority views.

Writing along the same lines, Bhikkhu Thanissaro (p. 522) concludes: “In all of these steps for settling disputes, the important point to remember is that in no way is a group of bhikkhus to rewrite the Dhamma or Vinaya in

line with their views. Even if they attempt it, following the procedures to the letter, the fact that their decision goes against the Buddha's teachings invalidates their efforts and the issue may be reopened at any time without penalty."

A Japanese scholar of religions, Fumio Masutani (p. 30), writing from a more general perspective, in an attempt to compare Buddhism and Christianity as a whole, offers some very pertinent remarks regarding this delicate issue that I am trying to explore. After stressing the "openness" of the Buddhist "gate" to all and the Master's aversion to castes, he nevertheless draws attention to the rather limited number of those who could actually go through that gate. Those were the few with "the eye to perceive and the ear to hear." "Evidently the religion belonged to the 'wise and not to the fool.' Therefore those who actually constituted the realm of early Buddhism were chiefly young, intelligent men of noble birth. This shows that his religion was solely for the reasoning men." This insistence of Masutani upon the factor of "reason" is based on his reading of the "Middle Path," the golden rule equally distant from passions and self-torture. In the same way, he writes (p. 25): "The Bhikkhus had neither been blindly convinced by the simple, authoritative words, nor been made to perceive impulsively under the influence of simple parables." This is an interesting and rather rare transposition of the notion of the "Middle Way" in the sphere of early monastic recruitments.

But it is in the writings of another renowned Japanese scholar, Hajime Nakamura, that we find the most convincing vindication of our intuitive exploration of this most delicate chapter. For the Buddha, he writes, (*Buddhism in Comparative Light*, p. 93f), the ideal form of government was a republic. But such a government "did not prevail in India." Some of the kings were "very despotic and oppressive." "Among the many kinds of disasters, the Buddhists enumerated fire, earthquakes, thunder, floods, and robbers and kings [my emphasis]." But Buddhists, Nakamura continues, "sought to avoid all conflicts with kings. . . . The Buddhist attitude was rather *a-political* [my emphasis]." And Nakamura concludes: "Not merely did the Buddha discourage members of the order to participate in political life; he went further and banned discussion of politics. He made a distinction similar to that of Christ between the things of God and the things of Caesar."

These passages, in conjunction with what has already been mentioned, epitomize the whole Buddhist attitude—emphasis on the equality of human beings, open gates for anyone to enter the order, and expression of views, but only within the perimeter of safeguarding the Dhamma and the Sangha, seeking unanimity, separation from the affairs and the policies of the world. Democratic norms, yes, but only in relation to a higher "religious vocabulary" and within its specific confines.

There is no doubt in anyone's mind, after going through

the incredible and lengthy pages of chapter 4 of the Cullavagga, dealing with disputes, that it is "labyrinthine" beyond imagination, of a unique complexity and depth. But if we were to single out just one point, corroborating all our previous way of thinking, it would be the following reminder, which we consider of special importance: the majority-vote procedure is only an *allowance* of the Master, an *anujanami*, something that is "tolerated" for the sake of realism, but that is not of paramount significance: "I allow you, monks, to settle a legal question like this by the decision of the majority" These are the very words of the Cullavagga (IV, 24, p. 131). In our view, they contain all the essence of the right mixing of a democratic principle with the loftier necessities of the Sasana.

We have just promised to single out "one" point but the temptation is too intense not to elaborate still further. Let us take as example the whole first chapter of the Cullavagga. (There are analogies elsewhere, too, but I would limit our examination to the first one.) This chapter deals with a variety of cases of "fallen" monks, their misbehavior, their punishment, and their rehabilitation. If we read carefully between the lines and behind the colorful stories, we can discover a very clear mechanism for presenting motions to the Sangha and for the latter's pronouncement on each case. This "structure" is repeatedly witnessed and it remains unchanged, consisting of the following elements:

- An "experienced competent monk" leads the deliberations.
- He presents the motion to the assembly, (for punishment or for rehabilitation), always making sure that this assembly is complete.
- He requests all those in agreement to remain silent.
- He authorizes those "to whom [the motion] is not pleasing . . . to speak."
- This call is repeated thrice.
- The motion is *always* then accepted with the formulation: "It is pleasing to the Order; therefore, it is silent. Thus, do I understand this."

The same pattern appears in many instances in the Mahavagga also, for example, regarding the choice of a preceptor (MV I, p. 72), the granting of four months of probation to a former member of another sect (MV, I, p. 86), the agreeing upon a boundary (MV I, p. 138), etc.

What, then, is the meaning of this mechanism? In our view, it calls for the presence of everyone, it accepts the expression of opposite views, it makes an allowance of "a triple occasion" for them to be aired, but in the very end there is never any evidence of incorporating the differences; the motion is always carried as submitted in the first place by the "experienced and competent monk," obviously and convincingly for the benefit of the "accused" and the progress of the Sangha in general. This is a "democratic" method, but it has a very distinct "religious"

coloring, which shows the limitations for dissenting voices and the main concern for a “higher” order.

Scrutinizing not only the Vinaya texts but also numerous other related monographs, papers, and books, I have managed to find only one more explicit reference to monks “voicing an objection.” It is contained in Bhikkhu Khantipalo’s study “Banner of the Arahants” (p. 9) and it reads: “If there is an objection—and *this is very uncommon* [my emphasis]—then the legal act is broken and must be performed again to become valid.” This means first, that such instances are very rare indeed, and second, that eventual objections do not lead to changing the motion but to a formal invalidation of the act that has to be reintroduced according to the same procedures. Consequently, substantial disagreement and “democratic debate” in a “worldly” sense are, in our view, incompatible with the Buddhist way of thinking in these matters. It was therefore gratifying to me when my analysis met the full endorsement of the great Thai Pali scholar Ajahn Siri Petchai in a long, related discussion. He even informed me that at ordination ceremonies, the objection of a single person is enough to reverse the approval of all the others. This shows that the majority cannot prevail over Vinaya. (Incidentally, a very similar trend is in force in Orthodoxy also; for example, at ceremonies elevating a clergyman to the rank of bishop, the word *axios*—worthy—has to be unanimously pronounced by all those attending, both clergy and laity.)

Moreover, if we leave Vinaya aside for the moment, and if we refer to a different passage contained in Samyutta-Nikaya, we shall come across a statement that illustrates in a superb, almost epigrammatic way, the overall Buddhist position on this point.

While the Venerable Master was preaching in Koshala, he was once more approached by Mara, the Evil One, who addressed the Buddha in the following verses:

“Not suitable are you
To teach others.
Should you dare to do so
Take care not to cling to support or opposition.”

In his reply, Gotama said:

“The perfected person is liberated from both support and opposition.” (See Nakamura, pp. 287–88.)

Here, the context is of course quite different. But the conclusion, in the Buddha’s reply, may apply to all circumstances, including our examination of Vinaya: support *and* opposition [my emphasis] are notions not applicable to the perfected person and—one might add—to those aspiring to follow him. “Opposition” is not compatible with Dhamma and Vinaya, the ultimate compass of the Buddhist fraternity. This is the motto we should always bear in mind, the fine line separating the terminologies of this world from monastic notions of a higher level.

A few words should be added here regarding “protesting” monks and monks who are “speakers of what is right.” I should mention at the outset that the characterization of “protest” in the midst of an order is a very rare phenomenon, appearing—to my knowledge—only once, in the ninth chapter of the Mahavagga. Displeasure even at the notion of “protest” is amply obvious. The Master, answering a question concerning the validity of “protest,” at first dismissed such an action by nuns, probationers, novices, those suspended, madmen, etc. He then said: “Monks, a protest of a regular monk in the midst of an Order is valid if he belongs to the same communion, if he is staying within the same boundary, even if he only informs the monk next [to him]. Monks, his protest in the midst of an Order is valid” (MV, IX, p. 460).

In the same ninth chapter of the Mahavagga, we have a clue as to the limits of such a “protest” in connection with “speakers of what is right.” The text does not establish verbatim such a link, but we can easily see the bond: “Those monks who speak thus: ‘A [formal] act not by rule, in an incomplete assembly’ and those monks who speak thus: ‘The [formal] act is not carried out, the [formal] act should be carried out again,’ these monks are here speakers of what is right.” In other words, “protest” is tolerated only in relationship to “formality,” in order to facilitate taking a decision according to a regular procedure. Therefore, we should perhaps view under this specific light all above-mentioned cases of “those to whom the motion is not pleasing”—not so much as a disagreement in substance as a caution against potential procedural lapses. After all, the whole disciplinary system is firmly anchored on precise procedural regulations; any deviation from the latter leads to invalid decisions. Therefore “protest” of such a nature is considered constructive and desirable for safeguarding the main procedural structures.

The importance attached to “unanimity” appears on many occasions. Thus in connection with the major issue of observance day, the Buddha said: “Observance should not be carried out on a non-Observance day unless the Order be unanimous” (MV, II, p. 180). Regarding decisions on such an important issue, at the very core of Patimokkha, unanimity is definitely required. Also, in the crucial chapter on schisms (MV, X, p. 510), the Master requires unanimity in the case of restoring a fallen monk previously involved in strife and contention. After this unanimity was secured, “dissension in the Order is put down, schism in the Order is put down.” In other words, in some of the most basic issues affecting the order, solutions have to be reached “unanimously,” and not by majority vote.

Finally, I would propose a combined reading of all clauses regarding majority decisions with the beautiful chapter dealing with “covering up with grass.” In cases of striving, quarreling, disputing monks, the Buddha detected a potential for a road leading to harshness, to trouble, or to schism. If such is the case, the Master said, “I allow,

monks, a legal question such as this to be settled by the covering up with grass" (Tinavattharaka). I have discussed this elsewhere, so that my main concern here is not the allowance itself, but the cases where it *cannot* be applied. These, according to the Cullavagga IV, 13, are:

- a heavy sin;
- what is connected with the laity;
- absent monks;
- monks who have made *an open statement of their views* [my emphasis].

The last case has to be read in conjunction with Horner's relative footnote (CV, p. 116), explaining the "open statement" case as "those who say 'it is not pleasing to me.'" In other words, and if our reasoning is correct, if voicing disagreement is leading to an annulment of the disposition "covering up with grass," it is even more unacceptable in all other above-mentioned cases of the first chapter of the Cullavagga. Again, this indicates that monks enjoyed the freedom to express some differing views—but never to the point of disruption of the order of the Sangha.

Western Monastic Communities

Now is perhaps the time to focus upon the world of Orthodox Christianity and see if similar—or different—preoccupations exist there.

First of all, it should be borne in mind that monastic fraternities are something distinct from worldly institutions. According to the definition given by Maximus the Con-

fessor, "A monk is someone who has separated his mind from worldly things and is dedicated to God with chastity, love, chanting, and prayer." (Quoted by Cristodoulos, p. 35.) At least during the first centuries of its existence, Orthodox monasticism "had nothing to do with administrative procedures, as an institution outside the world, as an angelic regime. In other words, it was administratively self-existent, independent and self-governed" (Christodoulos, p. 19). It was natural, therefore, that direct transplantations from civilian concepts, notions, and rules were rejected.

Elections in Orthodox monastic communities are not uncommon, for the designation of competent people for the various tasks, *diakonimata*, or deacons. Also, in cases where the *proestos*, the head of the monastery, had at times to be absent from his seat, another brother, "elected" by the former and "other qualified brothers," served as deputy head in order to advise the fraternity. This is, says Saint Basil (8, p. 377), "so that the fraternity does not acquire a democratic form during the absence of the *proestos*, trampling in this way propriety and order." It is obvious that in Saint Basil's mind, "democratic form" was equal to disorder. He further continues: "If everybody rushes to talk, this creates noise and constitutes disorder; the Apostle did not allow even to those graced with the power to teach to talk several at the same time." (This is a reference to Saint Paul's epistle to the Corinthians [1 Cor. 14:23]: "So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?")

Of course, these passages can also be construed in the framework of just propriety and order, without meaning that Saint Basil was an opponent of democracy. But on closer scrutiny, they show a certain aversion to the rule of numbers, at least when the superior is away. Besides, he is undoubtedly abiding by the principle of seniority, which is not "anti-democratic" per se, but which always points toward established authority: "Do not dare to sit when anyone senior is present," he explicitly says in his first ascetic homily (8, p. 117). "Every soul has to obey superior authority" and all those resisting "will be damned" (8, p. 147). Here the legislator apparently draws from the epistle to the Romans: (Rom. 13: 1–2): "Everyone must submit to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right but for those who do wrong." In another instance, Saint Basil, while accepting up to a point disagreement with the actions of the Superior, shows no mercy for those persistently antagonizing him with secret accusations. He asserts that they have to be "evicted from the fraternity" because they spread disobedience. As for questioning or advising the Superior, this is not a task for everybody, but only for those closer to him "in rank and wisdom" (8, p. 385). This clause may be criti-

Monk artists at an Orthodox monastery on Mount Athos, Greece, painting traditional icons in their workshop. Photo: Greek National Tourist Organization.

cized perhaps as too elitist, but we should not forget the criteria of the times, where there was more respect for authority and seniority, always with an accompanying preoccupation to place in positions of higher responsibility the seniors, not doing this blindly but by promoting the ablest and most experienced, who often happened to be those who were older.

In spite of all the above nuances, Saint Basil's aim was not to "impose" his rule on all monasteries; he simply started by answering the questions of the monks in his own monastery and giving them general guidance, based essentially upon the words of the Bible. So we should not see his whole system as "authoritarian" or "undemocratic." These terms themselves have different connotations, depending upon whether we are talking about worldly or extra-worldly affairs. Monkhood pertains to a different level, as we have repeatedly seen, and so it must be with a certain care and reservation that we use this terminology. In addition, we should be always conscious of the time frame upon which we are focusing—because monastic institutions, both in East and West, show different characteristics in different periods of time.

At this point a brief parenthesis may be opened, related not to Orthodoxy but to Roman Catholicism. Although the latter is not included within the parameters of the present study, the digression may be relevant. One of the highest personalities of the Vatican, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, is repeatedly and vehemently accused by two very gifted Western scholars, writing on the Inquisition, of supporting the following points: "Standards of conduct appropriate to civil society or the workings of democracy cannot be purely and simply applied to the Church." "Authority is not based on the majority of votes." "Truth cannot be created through ballots. The Church makes no pretense to democracy." "On matters of faith and morals, no one can be bound by majority decisions." Obviously, there would be many to disagree with the above positions and side with the two researchers of the Inquisition in their strong rejection of the cardinal's arguments. For me, without entering into the substance of the debate, it is worth pondering on the similarities of this so-called "authoritarianism" across the whole spectrum of the religious traditions that we are trying to approach and understand (see Baigent and Leigh, pp. 245, 250).

As for Mount Athos, we have already seen the general lines of its administration. It seems that the authority of the *protos* (abbot) was almost unlimited, at least until around 1550, that is, until about a hundred years after the fall of Constantinople. The *protos*, in the wording of the *Typikon* of Manuel Paleologos—to give just one example—had to be obeyed and respected "as the heavenly Father." After 1584, writes Abbot Smyrnakis (p. 320), the Holy Mount was administered "in an aristocratic way," by three or four wise fathers. Things evolved in the course of time, but the aura of old traditions, monastic institutions, and

various rules has always been felt. In the case of a disagreement during deliberations in the Holy Community, views differing from the majority can be, and have to be, recorded and duly signed. This was decided in the year 1879. Paisios, a respected elder, advised the monks: "During a meeting, you will voice your opinion. When it differs, regarding important matters, ask that it be included in the records; in this way, when future generations blame present monks for their deeds, you may be exempted. Also you have to understand that a different opinion does not mean disobedience" (Brother Michael, *Obed.*, p. 37). As for disputes, after a first hearing before the Holy Community, they can be judged at a second or third degree by the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate in Constantinople. Elections for abbots' appointments in various monasteries take

A monk at a monastery on Mount Athos striking a wooden board to inform fellow monks of the time. Photo by Naomichi Horiike.

place every one to three years, depending on the practices of each fraternity. All these provisions seem quite different from the Buddhist framework, perhaps closer to worldly practices. But it is the same author, Abbot Smyrnakis, who voices some concerns about electioneering, while maintaining that an administration by one abbot, seconded by four to five able and wise fathers, is the best for cenobitical monasteries. This, he writes, (p. 343), “is in a position to contain mob-rule, which, always seeking power, has been a terrible curse for the holy monasteries.” These words were written in 1903, a mere century ago, but they still reflect the spirit of Saint Basil’s admonition in his answer No. 45, in his extensive Rule: *kata platos* (“loosely”)!

Democracy as *Aniyata*

Given the above analysis, I should perhaps be forgiven if I classify the issue of democracy in both Buddhist and Orthodox monasticism under the heading *aniyata*. Not that the prevailing ideas were necessarily and thoroughly authoritarian. On the contrary, in both cases, there is care for autonomy in the fraternities, for unanimity, at best, and majority as one of the options for resolving contentions, but, again, keeping as a paramount ideal the safeguarding of the basic doctrines, propriety, and discipline. *Aniyata*, therefore, is used in order to avoid the types of contradictions as those mentioned by established Buddhist scholar Michael Carrithers in an article about Buddhism in Sri Lanka (Bechert-Gombrich, p. 141). Explaining the voting procedures already mentioned earlier in this analysis, Carrithers qualifies the system as “authoritarian” but allowing “for individual judgement and dissent.” He also stresses the point of seeking “total consensus” and “continually maintained” consensus. While it is true that consensus was the ideal, I feel that it is wrong to proceed to a characterization of the system as “authoritarian,” as this term is a sort of “intercalary definition,” borrowed from worldly procedures not applicable on the Buddhist level. Moreover, I have reservations as to the meaning of “dissent,” in the sense put forward earlier.

This is why I finally chose the word *aniyata* as so special, since the issue of “democracy” transplanted in the monastic sphere transcends the initial dichotomy between “convergences” and “divergences,” as well as the conventional vocabulary of “this world.” The Buddhist approach provides us with one more characteristic illustration of this point—the whole Vinaya structure aims, apart from regulating the relations of monks with the laity, “to enhance the uniformity in all patterns of behavior and to make the monks conscious that they belonged to an integrated body *different from all customs, traditions and manners followed in lay society*” [my emphasis] (*The Place of Social Norms*, p. 9). Consequently, the term “democratic” may be borrowed from lay society, but we should always be careful of its particular connotations when we transpose it to the Buddhist world. □

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The Great Earthquake

by Hajime Nakamura

As he neared the end of his existence, Sakyamuni Buddha sat beneath a tree in Cāpāla and renounced the rest of his life, resolving to enter nirvana. When he did so, the earth trembled, shook, and quaked mightily; at the same time, his very renunciation lengthened his life span a little more.

The episode of the great earthquake, occurring while the Buddha was resting under the sacred tree of Cāpāla, was given considerable importance.

“(10) Then the Venerable Master, under the sacred tree of Cāpāla, renounced, mindfully and in full awareness, the factors of life [latent power]. And at the moment the Venerable Master renounced the factors of life, a great earthquake occurred. It was fearful and hair-raising, and the drum of the gods burst forth [thunder roared]. Then the Venerable Master, realizing its significance, uttered at that time words of exultation:

“The Sage [the Buddha] has renounced the factors of becoming that, immeasurable or not, are at the root of the body’s formation. With inner joy, and his mind concentrated, he has destroyed the shell-like base of the self’s becoming.” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, III, 10)

The compiler of the sutra is here attempting to say that the Buddha, being sunk deep in a state of *samādhi*, was undisturbed mentally by the shaking of the earth or the roaring of the thunder. The question remains, of course, whether an earthquake actually occurred at that time. The plains stretching from northern Bihar to northeastern Uttar Pradesh show no signs of volcanic activity and so it is very unlikely that earthquakes would happen there. Therefore it is probable that an actual earthquake did not occur, but the sutra’s compiler wanted to make mention here of some kind of convulsion of nature. In ancient India, earthquakes were supposed to signal the coming of some outstanding event, which might be auspicious or ominous. Thus the rare occurrence of an earthquake was full of portent.

“(11) Then the young Ānanda thought, ‘How marvelous, how mysterious is this great earthquake, so terrible, so fearful, so hair-raising, and with the drum of the gods bursting forth. What could have caused the great earthquake? What were the conditions [that led to it]?’

“(12) Then the young Ānanda went to where the Venerable Master was. Arriving, he greeted him and sat down to one side. Having sat down to one side, the young Ānanda

said to the Venerable Master, ‘Revered One, how marvelous, how mysterious is this great earthquake, so terrible, so fearful, so hair-raising, and with the drum of the gods bursting forth. What could have caused the great earthquake? What were the conditions [that led to it]?’” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, III, 11–12)

Here the sutra has the Buddha explain the various causes of earthquakes in terms of eight reasons.

“(13) ‘Ānanda, there are eight causes, eight conditions leading to the occurrence of a great earthquake. What are the eight? Ānanda, this great earth rests on water, the water on wind, the wind on space. Ānanda, therefore, when a particularly great wind blows, it stirs up the water, and the movement of the water causes the earth to tremble. This is the first cause, the first condition for the occurrence of a great earthquake.

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“(14) ‘Furthermore, Ānanda, there is an ascetic [*samaṇa*] or Brahmin who has supernatural powers, who has the strength to direct the minds of others, or *devas* who have great powers, great supernatural powers, who practice but little thoughts of the earth, but practice without limit thoughts of water. These beings cause the great earth to tremble, to shake, to quake mightily. This is the second cause, the second condition for the occurrence of a great earthquake.

“(15) ‘Furthermore, Ānanda, when a bodhisatta [a buddha before enlightenment] descends from the Tusita heaven, mindfully and in full awareness, into his mother’s womb, at that time the great earth trembles, shakes, and quakes mightily. This is the third cause, the third condition for the occurrence of a great earthquake.

“(16) ‘Furthermore, Ānanda, when a bodhisatta emerges from his mother’s [*Māyā*’s] womb, mindfully and in full awareness, the great earth trembles, shakes, and quakes mightily. This is the fourth cause, the fourth condition for the occurrence of a great earthquake.

“(17) ‘Furthermore, Ānanda, when one who has perfected his training [a Tathāgata, a Buddha] attains supreme, correct, and perfect enlightenment, the great earth trembles, shakes, and quakes mightily. This is the fifth cause, the fifth condition for the occurrence of a great earthquake.

“(18) ‘Furthermore, Ānanda, when one who has perfected his training [a Tathāgata, a Buddha] sets in motion the wheel of the unsurpassed Dhamma [begins to teach], the great earth trembles, shakes, and quakes mightily. This is the sixth cause, the sixth condition for the occurrence of a great earthquake.

“(19) ‘Furthermore, Ānanda, when one who has perfected his training [a Tathāgata, a Buddha], mindfully and in full awareness, renounces the factors of life, the great earth trembles, shakes, and quakes mightily. This is the seventh cause, the seventh condition for the occurrence of a great earthquake.

“(20) ‘Furthermore, Ānanda, when one who has perfected his training [a Tathāgata, a Buddha], enters perfect *nibbāna*, the *nibbāna* where the residue of the defilements no longer exists, the great earth trembles, shakes, and quakes mightily. This is the eighth cause, the eighth condition for the occurrence of a great earthquake.

“Ānanda, these are the eight causes, the eight conditions leading to the occurrence of a great earthquake.” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, III, 13–20)

The earthquake conveys impressionistically the extremely important significance of the Buddha’s decision to enter nirvana. Since the various recensions are in agreement on the episode, the legend must have been in place at a relatively early period. Still, the explanation of an earthquake in terms of eight causes and conditions points to the episode being added by scholars at some point after the Saṅgha had developed considerably. The prose section

would have been compiled at some date after the verse had come into being.

The Pāli text and Fa-hsien’s Ta-pan-nieh-p’an-ching add, after the eight causes of earthquakes, explanations connected with other groups of eight, such as the eight kinds of assemblies, and the eight stages of mastery of the senses. The Yu-hsing-ching also treats the eight kinds of assemblies, though not with the same verbosity. The insertion of the discussion about the eight assemblies shows how digression leads to verbosity. The urge to categorize clearly also governed the compilation of the Aṅguttara-nikāya and the Tseng-i a-han-ching. It represents a weakening in the descriptive power of the last journey.

While the Pāli text contains the explanation about earthquakes, it lacks the verse that appears in the Yu-hsing-ching. This verse may therefore be considered a later addition.

The Eight Kinds of Assemblies

Discussion of the eight kinds of assemblies is not found at this place in either the Sanskrit or the Tibetan version. It appears in the Sanskrit version elsewhere at XXIII, 6–7. I will refer also to the Yu-hsing-ching to elucidate both it and the Pāli text. Here the translation from the Pāli text is listed.

“(21) ‘Ānanda, there are eight kinds of assemblies. What are the eight? They are the assembly of Khattiyas, the assembly of Brahmins, the assembly of householders, the assembly of ascetics, the assembly of the host in the realm of the four heavenly kings, the assembly of the thirty-three deities, the assembly of *māras*, and the assembly of Brāhmas.

“(22) ‘I well remember, Ānanda, attending many hundreds of assemblies of Khattiyas, where I sat in them, spoke to them, and joined in their debates. Whenever I did so, my [skin] color was like their [skin] color, and my voice was like their voices. I taught them, instructed them, encouraged them, and delighted them with a discourse on the Dhamma. When I spoke to them, though, they did not know me and asked, “Who is that person speaking? Is he a god or a man?” And having instructed them, encouraged them, and delighted them with a discourse on the Dhamma, I disappeared. However, they did not know me, who had now disappeared, and asked, “Who was that person speaking who has now disappeared? Was he a god or a man?”

“(23) ‘I well remember, Ānanda, attending many hundreds of assemblies of Brahmins, . . . assemblies of householders, . . . assemblies of ascetics, . . . assemblies of the host in the realm of the four heavenly kings, . . . assemblies of the thirty-three deities, . . . assemblies of *māras*, . . . assemblies of Brāhmas, where I sat in them, spoke to them, and joined in their debates. Whenever I did so, my [skin] color was like their [skin] color, and my voice was like their voices. I taught them, instructed them, encour-

aged them, and delighted them with a discourse on the Dhamma. When I spoke to them, though, they did not recognize me speaking and asked, "Who is that person speaking? Is he a god or a man?" And having instructed them, encouraged them, and delighted them with a discourse on the Dhamma, I disappeared. However, they did not know me, now disappeared, and asked, "Who was that person who has now disappeared? Was he a god or a man?" These, Ānanda, are the eight assemblies." (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, III, 21–23)

The Pāli text then speaks of the eight stages of mastery of the senses, but since this section does not appear in the Pan-ni-yūan-ching, the Yu-hsing-ching, the Sanskrit version, or the Tibetan translation, it is probably a later accretion. Here is another instance where the Pāli text does not display the oldest form.

The text mentions the Khatṭiya assembly first, before the Brahmin assembly. Later, with the revival of Brahmanism, the order of precedence changed, and Brahmins came to take priority. The original of the Yu-hsing-ching, therefore, must have been compiled before the Gupta period.

The listing of the eight assemblies is a digression spurred by the mention of the figure eight in the eight causes of earthquakes. The Yu-hsing-ching digresses even further. Despite the fact that the main point of the episode is Ānanda's attempt to dissuade the Buddha from entering nirvana, the Yu-hsing-ching inserts the eight causes of earthquakes, the eight assemblies, and the assembly and discourse in the lecture hall beside the Perfumed Tower, which weakens the realism of the main subject considerably.

The Fate of Being Parted by Death

According to the Yu-hsing-ching, the Buddha next went to the "perfumed tower" (*kūṭāgāra*). *Kūṭāgāra* can be translated as "multistoried tower," and was said to have been located on the bank of the "Monkey Pond" in Vesālī, within the Great Forest. The sutra goes on to say that the Buddha taught the thirty-seven practices conducive to enlightenment at this place. The Sanskrit text, the Sarvāstivādin text, and the Tibetan translation, however, say that the Buddha then went to the sacred tree of Cāpāla (the Pāli text omits this reference), and gathered his followers in a lecture hall where he spoke to them about the law of impermanence and told them not to grieve as a result of being parted from him. This paragraph is clearly a later insertion. All texts preserve the central theme of the Buddha announcing his decision to give up life and Ānanda endeavoring to dissuade him; it is onto this trunk that other episodes have been grafted. They also preserve what might be called Gotama Buddha's last testament, the exhortation to honor the Dhamma. The Yu-hsing-ching at this point interprets "Dhamma" to be the thirty-seven practices conducive to enlightenment. This represents the extreme emphasis religious practice was given in terms of

the Dhamma by the compilers of the Yu-hsing-ching and the Pāli text, that the Dhamma could be manifested through training.

As sutras continued to be compiled, they were categorized in terms of the twelve divisions of scripture and said to be the direct words of the Buddha. The Yu-hsing-ching in fact talks about these twelve divisions of the sutras, a point of divergence with the southern Pāli text. The original of the Yu-hsing-ching was a Sanskrit text from northern India.

There are thus numerous disparities between the Pāli text and the Yu-hsing-ching, though in places they are identical. In all texts the decision of the Buddha to enter nirvana is pivotal; this is even treated as an independent tale in the Udāna (VIII, 1). This shows the extent to which the episode was prized.

It was inconceivable that a great man like the Buddha should be limited to the same boundaries of life as ordinary people. Therefore, after his death, his followers decided that the decision to die was taken on his own initiative, that is, that he renounced life voluntarily. This can be seen as an early stage of his deification, the starting point for the idea that the Buddha had an eternal existence, going beyond the historical figure of Gautama Siddhārtha. Here we find the seeds of later Mahāyāna thought.

Later Pure Land belief also held to the idea that the Tathāgata could have prolonged his life had he wished to do so. The Larger Sukhāvatī Sutra says: "If the Tathāgata wished, Ānanda, he could live for a whole *kalpa* on the gift of a single meal, or for a hundred *kalpas*, or for a thousand *kalpas*, or for a hundred thousand *kalpas*, to a hundred thousand *nayutas* of *koṭis* of *kalpas*, or live beyond that, yet the organs of the Tathāgata would not decay, nor the color of his face alter, nor the color of his skin perish." In this sense the Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta can be said to predict the idea of Amitāyus, the Buddha of everlasting life. Similarly, a central motif of the Lotus Sutra is the idea of the eternal, original Buddha. The substance of Mahāyāna Buddhism was already being formed at this point.

To Bhaṇḍagāma

Next Gotama Buddha traveled to Bhaṇḍagāma, where he gave a discourse and spoke about his own life.

"(1) Then the Venerable Master, in the early morning, put on his inner robe, took up his outer robe and bowl, and entered Vesālī to seek alms. He walked about Vesālī seeking alms, and when he had returned from his alms round, and had eaten his food, he looked back on Vesālī with his 'elephant's gaze' and said to the young Ānanda, 'Ānanda, this is the last time the Tathāgata [I] will look upon Vesālī. Now, Ānanda, let us go to Bhaṇḍagāma.' 'Yes, Master,' replied the young Ānanda. Then the Venerable Master went to Bhaṇḍagāma, together with a large company of *bhikkhus*. The Venerable Master stayed at Bhaṇḍagāma.

Vimasena khā Pallā, northwest of modern Vaiśālī, where the Buddha was said to turn himself around and “look back on Vesālī with his ‘elephant’s gaze’” before he traveled to Bhaṇḍagāma. Photo by Isamu Maruyama.

“(2) Then the Venerable Master addressed the *bhikkhus*, ‘It is because, *bhikkhus*, we did not understand or penetrate the four principles [*dhammā*] that we, you and I together, have long traveled on the round of birth and death. What are the four? [1] It is because, *bhikkhus*, we do not understand or penetrate the noble precepts that we, you and I together, have long traveled on the round of birth and death. [2] It is because, *bhikkhus*, we do not understand or penetrate the noble concentration that we, you and I together, have long traveled on the round of birth and death. [3] It is because, *bhikkhus*, we do not understand or penetrate the noble wisdom that we, you and I together, have long traveled on the round of birth and death. [4] It is because, *bhikkhus*, we do not understand or penetrate the noble emancipation that we, you and I together, have long traveled on the round of birth and death. Now, *bhikkhus*, we have understood and penetrated the noble precepts, understood and penetrated the noble concentration, understood and penetrated the noble wisdom, and understood and penetrated the noble emancipation. All craving for existence has been cut off, [all craving] leading to existence has been destroyed, and there will be no more rebirth in the deluded [realm].’

“(3) Thus the Venerable Master spoke. Having spoken, the Blessed One, the Master, said: ‘The precepts, concentration, wisdom, and supreme emancipation—these four principles the glorious Gotama realized. Understanding them well, the Buddha taught the Dhamma to the *bhikkhus*. He who has destroyed all suffering, the Master with vision has already broken all the fetters.’

“(4) While staying in Bhaṇḍagāma, the Venerable Master gave for the sake of the *bhikkhus* a large number of lectures concerning the Dhamma, ‘Such and such are the precepts and regulations. Such and such is concentration. Such and such is wisdom. Concentration nurtured with the precepts brings a great result, great merit. Wisdom nurtured with concentration brings a great result, great merit. A mind nurtured with wisdom is completely emancipated from all stain—the stain of the desires, the stain of becoming, the stain of false views, and the stain of ignorance.’” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, IV, 1–4)

The Pāli description stops here, in a very simple fashion. The Chinese texts, however, have many additional points added. The Pan-ni-yüan-ching comments on all of the thirty-seven practices conducive to enlightenment, in answer to the question, “What are the four fields of mindfulness to remove impurity?” In this sense, this sutra, more than any of the other versions, has the character of a commentary. The version was doubtless finally edited by *bhikkhus* living in a monastic environment to whom religious practice was the essence of Buddhism. The Yü-hsing-ching adds a description of the “four *dhyānas*” to the discussion of the thirty-seven practices conducive to enlightenment, and the Pan-ni-yüan-ching adds the “four *dhyāna* practices,” bringing the total to forty-one. Fa-hsien’s Ta-pa-nieh-p’an-ching mentions the thirty-seven practices conducive to enlightenment quite clearly as such, yet adds the four *dhyānas*, ignoring the original numerical structure. It is obvious that the compilers of these texts must have valued the four *dhyānas* greatly. It is also clear

that in the early period the contents of numbered categories were not fixed but were composed of various elements. The Sanskrit text says that the Buddha went to the village of Kuśita, where he regretted that he would pass from this world.

As the Buddha was leaving Vesālī, he “looked back on Vesālī with his ‘elephant’s gaze’ and said to the young Ānanda, ‘Ānanda, this is the last time the Tathāgata will look upon Vesālī.’” His words show a deep sense of regret at his coming death. (And how Indian is the expression “elephant’s gaze”!) The legend of the Buddha’s memories of Vesālī grew as time passed, and later Buddhists thought that a vast crowd must have gathered in sorrow at this time. Finally, a version of the legend in bas-relief tells how the Buddha used his supernatural powers to make a great river appear to the people who would not leave him in their grief, and departed, leaving behind his bowl as a memorial.

We have no way of knowing where it was that the Buddha looked back at Vesālī and commented how beautiful it was. Thinking that it might have been something like a mountain pass, I searched for the place, but the land around the site is completely flat with paddy fields and there are no elevated locations. Even near Aśoka’s stone column, or along the road to Patna, nothing like a hillock is to be found anywhere. Since, though, the verb “looked back” translates the Sanskrit *nāgāvalokitenāvalokayati* (Pāli, *nāgāpalokitaṃ vesālīm apaloketvā*), which employs the prefix *ava*, he must have looked down from some relatively high spot. The Tibetan translation has simply “looked with his elephant’s gaze” (*bal-glañ lta-ba ltar gzigs-pa*), which gives little help in interpreting the prefix *ava*. However, the context is of help. “Then the Bhagavat, from a forest near the city of Vaiśālī, turned his body to the right and looked around in every direction with his elephant’s gaze” (*de-nas bcom-ldan-’adas groñ-khyer yañs-pa-can-gyi tshal-nas gyas-phyogs-su sku thams-cad-kyis phyogs-te / bal-glañ lta-ba ltar gzigs-pa dan*). This sentence suggests that the Buddha turned himself around and looked from a forest near Vesālī. From this we gather that (1) it was an elevated place, (2) it was a forest, and (3) it was north of Vesālī. This corresponds to a place northwest of modern Vaiśālī identified by local people as Vīmasena khā Pallā. I have further verified what the local people said through documentary evidence.

In later times, Vaiśālī was one of the eight great pilgrimage sites. The Pai-ta-ling-t’a ming-hao-ching says: “The seventh [sacred site] is Vaiśālī, where [people] considered the life span of the Tathāgata.” The Tibetan translation of the Aṣṭamahāsthānacaityastotra says for the seventh site: “The caitya is worshiped where [the Buddha] showed his supernatural powers at Vaiśālī. [They were acts of] emancipation that further increased [*adhiṣṭhāna*] his life span by renouncing his remaining life span [*āyukṣaṃskāra*].” It is clear that Vaiśālī had come to be associated

with, and honored for, the Buddha’s decision to enter nirvana.

To detect regret in the Buddha is to see his human side. On the other hand, stories of his decision to die represent later Buddhist ideals about his subsequent deification. The wish to die at home is a familiar human trait. Sadly, the Buddha died before he reached his destination. Later Buddhists in their deep faith explained this by saying that he himself made the decision to die. Legends of Ānanda’s fault are consistent with this.

From the standpoint of fact, the tradition that Gotama decided upon his own death is a fabrication. If he had known he was close to death, he would hardly have set out on his journey, but would have remained to die at Vulture Peak. Here we find an example of strained interpretation in the sutra.

According to the Pāli text, Gotama went on to the villages of Bhaṇḍa, Hatthi, Amba, and Jambu, and a city named Bhoganagara, on the way to Pāvā. The names of these places he passed through differ greatly from text to text. They agree only in the fact that he went to Pāvā.

To be continued

A first-century relief unearthed at Amarāvati in Andhra Pradesh state, India, depicting people at Vesālī who were loath to part with the Buddha. The Buddha made a river appear between them and himself by supernatural powers and left a bowl as a keepsake. First century, C.E. Photo by Isamu Maruyama.

The Cosmic Buddha Seated in a Three-Dimensional Mandala

by Takeshi Kuno, Photo by Kozo Ogawa

In 823, Kukai, founder of the Shingon sect, was granted the temple Toji, where he established in the lecture hall a three-dimensional mandala by arranging twenty-one Buddhist sculptures. The central image is a fifteenth-century carving of the Cosmic Buddha, Vairocana.

The statue of the Cosmic Buddha Dainichi Nyorai (Maha-Vairocana) of the Diamond Realm (Skt., Vajradhatu) is the principal image of the Kodo (lecture hall) of Kyō Gokokuji in Kyoto. This temple, also known as Toji (East Temple) was founded in 794, together with Saiji (West Temple), on the occasion of the transfer of the capital to Kyoto by order of Emperor Kanmu (r. 781–806), for the protection of the city. Its construction foundered for a considerable time and it was not until Kukai (774–835; founder of the Shingon sect of esoteric Japanese Buddhism) was appointed its head in 823 by Emperor Saga (r. 809–23) that the temple took its present form.

Kukai placed in the Kodo a group of esoteric statues that he had brought back from China, arranging them in a way that suggests a mandala. The central position is occupied by the Five Tathagatas: Dainichi in the middle, surrounded by Hosho (Ratnasambhava), Muryōju (Amitayus), Fukujoju (Amoghasiddhi), and Ashuku (Akshobhya). To the east of this central group are the Five Bodhisattvas: Kongoharamitsu (Vajraparamita) in the middle, surrounded by Kongōho (Vajraratna), Kongōho (Vajradharma), Kongōgo (Vajrakarma), and Kongosatta (Vajrasattva). On the western side of the central group stand the Five Great Wisdom Kings (angry-visaged kings of mystic knowledge, the Myōō, or Vidyarajas): Fudo (Acalanatha) in the center, surrounded by Gozanze (Trailokyavijaya), Gundari-yasha (Kundali-yaksha), Daiitoku (Yamantaka), and Kongo-yasha (Vajra-yaksha). On either side of the altar are Bonten (Brahma) and Taishakuten (Indra), and the Four Heavenly Kings (Shitenno) stand guard in the corners.

The Tathagatas of the central group are known as the Five Wisdom Buddhas, who are complete in their enlightenment. The Five Bodhisattvas on the eastern side have the role of ensuring salvation for all good people through the true Dharma. The Five Great Wisdom Kings lead

those of evil character to goodness by force. In this way the images of the Kodo form an esoteric, three-dimensional mandala focusing on the functions of the divinities. This is very clearly a change from the way images were grouped in previous times, in either the Asuka period (593–710) or the Nara period (710–94).

The “eye-opening” ceremony was held for these images in 839. All of the Tathagatas and the Kongoharamitsu statue were lost in a fire during an uprising in 1486. Reconstruction of the lost statues was begun several years later; records tell us that the central image of Dainichi Nyorai was begun in 1493 and finished four years later. Recent conservation and restoration work has revealed from an inscription inside the statue that it was carved by the great Buddhist sculptor Kochin (?–1505), who was awarded the honorific title of *hogen* (Dharma-eye). He was a descendant of Unkei (d. 1223), the well-known Buddhist sculptor of the Kamakura period (1185–1333), in the eleventh generation. It is an imposing work and one representative of the Muromachi period (1333–1568), made according to the joint-block method (*yosegi-zukuri*) and with eyes of inset crystal. It follows the masculine style of Kamakura-period sculpture in the line of Unkei, with the body full and voluminous and the back of the head rounded to the full.

The head was made by hollowing the standard four blocks (here with an additional two blocks) of wood, and then assembling them. The head section was joined to the body by the tenon-and-mortise method. The body consists of nine blocks of wood that were separately carved and then joined together. This was the characteristic form of joint-block sculpture in that period. The surface was then covered with gold leaf. Kochin’s technique is greatly to be admired, considering the large size of the statue (285.2 cm), and the fact that there is no sense of disproportion.

The lotus pedestal and the halo-nimbus, which were made at the same time, are excellent pieces of work. The halo-nimbus design incorporates thirty-seven incarnated buddhas (*kebutsu*) in the outer decorative section. One of these is thought to date from when the temple was originally built in 794 and so is particularly precious. □

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The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 6 Prediction (2)

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

TEXT Thereupon Maha-Maudgalyayana, Subhuti, Maha-Katyayana, and others all tremblingly folded their hands with one mind, and gazing up into the World-honored One's face, not for an instant lowering their eyes, with united voice spoke thus in verse:

"Great Hero, World-honored One, / Law king of the Shakyas! / Out of compassion for us / Grant us the Buddha announcement! / If thou dost know the depths of our minds / And predict our future destinies, / It will be like pouring sweet dew / To change the heat to coolness,

COMMENTARY *Great Hero.* This epithet indicates the heroic strength that expels all delusion and evil from the world.

• *Law king of the Shakyas.* "Shakyas" refers to the Shakya clan, to which Shakyamuni Buddha belonged. The phrase literally means "master of the teachings who came from the Shakya clan."

TEXT Like one from a famine land / Suddenly finding a royal repast, / Yet cherishing doubt and fear, / Not daring at once to eat, / But when instructed by the king, / Then daring to eat. / Thus it is with us; / While minding Hinayana error, / We know not how to obtain / The supreme wisdom of the Buddha. / Though we hear the voice of the Buddha, / Who says we shall become buddhas, / Our hearts are still anxious and afraid, / Like him who dare not eat. / But if we receive the Buddha's prediction, / Then shall we be happy and at ease. / Great Hero, World-honored One! / Thou dost ever desire to pacify the world; / Be pleased to bestow our prediction, / Like bidding the famished to feast!"

COMMENTARY The allegory of the royal repast is famous as a skilled parable ranking next to the seven parables of the Lotus Sutra. It is permeated with the psychology of a genuine disciple of the Buddha. I hope you will read it carefully and savor it.

Shakyamuni's discourses help us to understand clearly that all human beings can attain buddhahood. It is one thing to understand this fact logically; it is quite another to know it for ourselves, since this knowledge may give rise to some anxiety. We may be shown in a science class that two chemicals react in a certain way and understand this in principle, but when we do the experiment ourselves we may not be able to escape a certain anxiety about whether things will indeed go as explained and whether there might be an explosion.

It is only natural that we feel anxiety when we contemplate the fact that even we, having thought ourselves to be of no value, can become buddhas, the highest existence as human beings. What gives us confidence is the reassurance given to each and every one of us by Shakyamuni, our guide in whom we are able to place absolute trust. "You are sure to attain buddhahood," he says, and a new determination is born within us. As I have mentioned before, the power of words is very great.

• *While minding Hinayana error.* The Hinayana teaching is of course to be received with gratitude. Because we can depart from delusion by ridding ourselves of the defilements and lead a pure life, we can become truly excellent individuals. This alone, however, does not represent perfection, as the Mahayana teaching tells us. Unless we become happy together with all others, by saving people and the world, we cannot be said to have truly accomplished our practice of the Buddha Way. When we listen to the Mahayana teaching, we cannot help reflecting on the fact that we are still short of the final goal. This is the meaning of the phrase "while minding Hinayana error."

• *supreme wisdom.* Since wisdom is that which discerns the equal nature of all things, this phrase refers to the Buddha's wisdom, which leads all people equally to ultimate salvation.

• *Though we hear the voice of the Buddha, who says we shall become buddhas.* Here "we" indicates the two vehicles. Ever since the "Tactfulness" chapter, the Buddha has em-

phasized that even the followers of the two vehicles can attain buddhahood. This doctrine is based on the real aspect of all things. Nevertheless, though the disciples understand it in theory, they are still uneasy about applying it to themselves.

TEXT Thereupon the World-honored One, knowing the thoughts in the minds of those senior disciples, addressed all the bhikshus: "This Subhuti, in the world to come, shall do homage to three hundred myriad kotis of nayutas of buddhas, serving, revering, honoring, and extolling them, practicing the brahma life, and perfecting the bodhisattva way. In his final bodily state he will become a buddha whose title will be Name Form Tathagata, Worshipful, All Wise, Perfectly Enlightened in Conduct, Well Departed, Understander of the World, Peerless Leader, Controller, Teacher of Gods and Men, Buddha, World-honored One,

COMMENTARY *Perfecting the bodhisattva way.* "Perfecting" means to be completely endowed with, or to perfectly practice.

TEXT whose kalpa is named Possessing Jewels, and whose domain is named Jewel Producing. His land will be level and straight, with crystal for ground, adorned with jewel trees, devoid of mounds and pits, gravel, thorns, and unclean ordure, the earth covered with precious flowers, and purity [reigning] everywhere.

COMMENTARY We should note here that the Jewel Producing domain of the Tathagata Name Form is described in similar terms to the ideal land of Radiant Virtue, mentioned when the Buddha was making his prediction to Maha-Kashyapa. We will see later that much the same things are described repeatedly. There is great significance in this repetition. Such repetitions occur throughout the sutras. We tend to read those parts in a cursory way, knowing we have come across them before. We should not do so. Repetition has a very important meaning in religious practice.

Take the Japanese fairy tale "Momotaro." When reading it to children, the reader does not leave out repeated passages. For example, "Momotaro headed off bravely to Demon's Island. On the way he met a dog. The dog looked at Momotaro and asked him, 'Momotaro, Momotaro, what is it you have in that bag at your waist?' Momotaro replied, 'Here I have the best rice cakes in all Japan.' The dog begged him, 'Woof, woof, can I have one of those rice cakes?' Then Momotaro replied, 'I am on the way to Demon's Island and I'm going to defeat the demons there. This is my food and I can't give you any. But if you come along with me to help me fight, I will give you one.' The dog bowed low. 'I'll go with you, I'll go with you. Wherever you go, I'll go with you.' Then Momotaro gave him a rice cake and he munched it with relish." Next a monkey appears, and the same thing happens. "The monkey looked

at Momotaro and asked him, 'Momotaro, Momotaro, what is it you have in that bag at your waist?' Momotaro replied, 'Here I have the best rice cakes in all Japan.' The monkey begged him, 'Chee, chee, can I have one of those rice cakes?'" And so on. Without repetition of exactly the same words, children will not find the story interesting. It would be a very dull tale indeed that merely said, "The monkey received a rice cake just as the dog had done, and the pheasant too received a rice cake in the same way." Children who had been leaning forward eagerly listening to the story would lose interest and stop paying attention.

Repetition deepens the impression made by what is being said. If this repetition is done wholeheartedly, the impression it makes will be all the more profound. Try reciting this "Prediction" chapter wholeheartedly. You will feel the descriptions of the ideal form of a human being, symbolized by the ten epithets of the Buddha, and of the ideal form of human society, symbolized by the beauty of the Buddha lands, permeate your mind as you repeat them over and over again.

Business documents and government reports abbreviate repeated information. If they did not, no one in our busy society would bother to read them. This kind of shortcut has no place in endeavors that demand practice, however. Musicians and athletes practice the same thing tens or even hundreds of times, with the full force of their concentration, for otherwise they could not improve. When we chant the *daimoku*, "Namu-myoho-enge-kyo," it sounds all right in theory that chanting it once with sincerity is enough, but in fact without several repetitions a feeling of true faith does not permeate the heart.

To summarize, practice or training involves three elements: (1) repeating (2) what is good (3) with all one's heart. Without all three, there can be no good result. I hope you will always bear this in mind.

TEXT All the people in that land will dwell on jeweled terraces and in pearly palaces. Shravaka disciples will be innumerable and limitless, they can be made known neither by figures nor by metaphors, and the bodhisattva host will be numberless thousand myriad kotis of nayutas.

COMMENTARY *Will dwell on jeweled terraces and in pearly palaces.* "Terraces" refers to raised squares of earth, from the top of which people have a fine view in every direction. "Palaces" connotes tall buildings. Thus the people in that land will lead a wonderful life, all dwelling in homes like palaces.

- *They can be made known neither by figures nor by metaphors.* Their numbers cannot be calculated by means of mathematics or described in reference to anything else.

- *Nayutas.* "Nayuta" is a numerical unit in ancient India. Some say that it represents ten million, though there are different views. "Numberless thousand myriad kotis of nayutas" merely means "beyond count."

TEXT The lifetime of [that] buddha will be twelve minor kalpas, his Righteous Law will abide in the world for twenty minor kalpas, and the Counterfeit Law will also abide for twenty minor kalpas. That buddha will always dwell in the empyrean, preaching the Law to living beings and delivering innumerable bodhisattvas and shravakas.”

COMMENTARY *Dwell in the empyrean.* The Law-body buddha always fills space completely, sustaining and guiding all life. We should not forget that the buddha does not just “dwell in the empyrean” but fills it absolutely.

• *Delivering.* This means to cause to cross to the “other shore” of enlightenment and to bring liberation.

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

“All you host of bhikshus! / I have something to tell

you. / All with one mind / Listen to what I say! / My senior disciple / Subhuti / Will become a buddha / Whose title will be Name Form. / He will serve numberless / Myriad kotis of buddhas, / And following the practice of the buddhas, / Will become perfect in the Great Way. / In his final bodily state / He will obtain the thirty-two signs, / And be erect and beautiful / As a mountain of jewels.

COMMENTARY *Following the practice of the buddhas.* This phrase means emulating the actions of the buddhas.

• *The thirty-two signs.* These are the thirty-two beautiful primary marks on the face and body of the buddha (see the September/October 1992 issue of DHARMA WORLD).

TEXT The domain of that buddha / Will be peerless in pure splendor, / So that all who behold [it] / Will love and delight in it. / The buddha in its midst / Will save in-

Detail from a scroll of the Lotus Sutra mandala. Colors on silk. Muromachi period (14th century). Nara National Museum.

numerable beings; / In his Buddha Law / Many will be the bodhisattvas, / All of keen faculties, / Who roll the never-receding wheel. / His domain is ever / Ornate with bodhisattvas; / His shravaka host is / Beyond expression and count, / Who all attain the three clear [views], / Perfect the six transcendent [faculties], / Abide in the eight emancipations, / And are greatly awe-inspiring.

COMMENTARY *Roll the never-receding wheel.* The bodhisattvas never stop spreading the teaching, just like rolling a wheel. “Wheel” is short for “Law wheel.”

- *Ornate with bodhisattvas.* As mentioned before, this is an excellent expression. Fine people are the treasure of their land and serve to ornament it.

- *The three clear [views] . . . the six transcendent [faculties]* (see the September/October 2002 issue).

- *The eight emancipations.* The eight emancipations (*ashta-vimoksha*) are eight kinds of meditation that rid one of delusion and attachment and thereby enable one to attain the arhat’s enlightenment.

TEXT That buddha preaches the Law, / Revealing himself in infinite / Supernatural transformations / Beyond conception. / Gods and people / As the sands of the Ganges in number, / All with folded hands / Harken to that buddha’s words. / That buddha’s lifetime will be / Twelve minor kalpas, / His Righteous Law will abide in the world / For twenty minor kalpas, / And the Counterfeit Law will also abide / For twenty minor kalpas.”

COMMENTARY *Supernatural transformations.* This phrase refers to various inexplicable occurrences that are manifested through supernatural power.

TEXT At that time the World-honored One again addressed all the assembly of bhikshus, [saying]: “Now I announce to you that this Maha-Katyayana, in the world to come, will worship and serve eight thousand kotis of buddhas with many kinds of offerings, revering and honoring them. After those buddhas are extinct he for each [of them] will erect stupas a thousand yojanas in height, of equal length and breadth, five hundred yojanas, composed of the precious seven—gold, silver, lapis lazuli, moonstone, agate, pearl, and carnelian—and will serve those stupas with flowers, necklaces, perfume, sandal powder, burning incense, silk canopies, flags, and banners.

COMMENTARY *Offerings.* Specifically, “offerings” indicates the items and goods used for making offerings, but more generally it means “methods.”

- *Perfume, sandal powder, burning incense.* In ancient India people would, prior to making offerings to the Buddha, rub scented oils on their hands to eliminate bodily odors and to purify themselves. This has been translated here as “perfume.” They also sprinkled Buddhist statues with powdered incense (“sandal powder”). Burning incense

is well known to everybody. Incense and perfume purified body, mind, and surroundings, and signified devotion to refuge in the Buddha. Even today incense is an indispensable part of Buddhist rituals and ceremonies. Stupas were built to enable people to recall the virtues of the Buddha as well as to manifest and celebrate those virtues.

TEXT After this he will again similarly serve two myriad kotis of buddhas; and, having served these buddhas, he will complete his bodhisattva way and become a buddha whose title will be Jambunada Golden Light Tathagata, Worshipful, All Wise, Perfectly Enlightened in Conduct, Well Departed, Understander of the World, Peerless Leader, Controller, Teacher of Gods and Men, Buddha, World-honored One. His land will be level and straight, with crystal for ground, adorned with jewel trees, with golden cords to bound the ways, its ground covered with wonderful flowers, and purity [reigning] everywhere, so that beholders rejoice. The four evil paths will not be there—hells, hungry spirits, animals, and asuras—[but] gods and men will be many, and infinite myriad kotis of shravakas and bodhisattvas will adorn his domain. The lifetime of that buddha will be twelve minor kalpas, his Righteous Law will abide in the world for twenty minor kalpas, and the Counterfeit Law will also abide for twenty minor kalpas.”

COMMENTARY *The four evil paths will not be there—hells, hungry spirits, animals, and asuras.* The six realms of existence (see the January/February 1993 issue) indicate both the realms of rebirth according to the degree of good and evil karma ordinary people have accumulated and the state of an individual’s mind. Here we should interpret the passage in terms of the second definition, that is, that domain is a happy and joyful realm where none will be motivated by the four evils of anger, greed, ignorance, and self-interest. All hearts will be without discrimination and will follow the right path.

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

“All of you host of bhikshus! / Listen to me with one mind! / The words that I speak / Are true and infallible. / This Katyayana / Will, with various kinds / Of excellent offerings, / Pay homage to buddhas. / After the buddhas are extinct / He will erect stupas of the precious seven / And also, with flowers and perfumes, / Pay homage to their relics; / In his final bodily state / He will obtain the Buddha wisdom / And accomplish Perfect Enlightenment. / His land will be pure / And he will save innumerable / Myriad kotis of the living, / Being worshipped by all / In every direction. / His buddha luster / None can surpass, / And his buddha title will be / Jambunada Golden Light. / Bodhisattvas and shravakas / Free from all existence, / Numberless, uncountable, / Will adorn his domain.”

COMMENTARY *Perfect Enlightenment.* This refers to the Buddha's enlightenment, wherein all phenomena are correctly, universally understood. Since all buddhas realize the same truth, their enlightenment is identical. Thus it is termed "perfect enlightenment."

TEXT Thereupon the World-honored One again addressed the great assembly, [saying]: "Now I announce to you that Maha-Maudgalyayana will, with various kinds of offerings, serve eight thousand buddhas, revering and honoring them. After the extinction of these buddhas he for each [of them] will erect stupas a thousand yojanas in height, of equal length and breadth, five hundred yojanas, composed of the precious seven—gold, silver, lapis lazuli, moonstone, agate, pearl, and carnelian—and will serve them with flowers, necklaces, perfume, sandal powder, burning incense, silk canopies, flags, and banners. After this he will again similarly serve two hundred myriad kotis of buddhas, and then become a buddha, whose title will be Tamalapattra Sandal Fragrance Tathagata, Worshipful, All Wise, Perfectly Enlightened in Conduct, Well Departed, Understander of the World, Peerless Leader, Controller, Teacher of Gods and Men, Buddha, World-honored One. His kalpa will be named Joyful and his domain named Glad Mind. Its land will be level and straight, with crystal for ground, adorned with jewel trees, strewn with pearly flowers, and purity [reigning] everywhere, so that beholders rejoice. There will be gods, men, bodhisattvas, and shravakas, countless in number. The lifetime of that buddha will be twenty-four minor kalpas, his Righteous Law will abide in the world for forty minor kalpas, and the Counterfeit Law will also abide for forty minor kalpas."

Thereupon the World-honored One, desiring to proclaim the meaning over again, spoke thus in verse:

"This my disciple / Maha-Maudgalyayana, / After casting aside this body, / Will see eight thousand / Two hundred myriads of kotis / Of world-honored buddhas, / And, for the sake of the Buddha Way, / Will serve and revere them. / Among these buddhas, / Ever practicing the brahma life / For innumerable kalpas, / He will keep the Buddha Law. / After these buddhas are extinct, / He will erect stupas of the precious seven, / Displaying afar their golden spires, / And, with flowers, perfumes, and music / Pay homage to / The stupas of the buddhas. / Having gradually accomplished / The bodhisattva way, / In the domain Glad Mind / He will become a buddha, / Styled Tamalapattra / Sandal Fragrance. / The lifetime of that buddha / Will be twenty-four kalpas. / Constantly to gods and men / He will preach the Buddha Way. / Shravakas will be innumerable / As the sands of the Ganges, / Having the three clear [views], the six transcendent [faculties], / And awe-inspiring powers. / Bodhisattvas will be numberless, / Firm in their will, and zealous / In the Buddha wisdom, / Who never backslide. / After this buddha is extinct, / His Righteous Law will

abide / For forty minor kalpas / And the Counterfeit Law the same.

COMMENTARY *Displaying afar their golden spires.* Stupas are topped by golden poles ("spires") supporting nine rings. The spires glint in the sunshine and can be seen from a great distance, creating a deep impression among those who catch sight of them. Here the phrase has the meaning of throwing light on the Buddha's virtues like the brilliance of the golden spires.

• *Twenty-four kalpas.* This phrase has been abbreviated in the verse passage; it refers to the "twenty-four minor kalpas" mentioned in the prose section.

TEXT [You] my disciples / Of perfect powers, / Five hundred in number, / All will receive their prediction / To become buddhas / In the world to come. / Of my and your / Development in former lives / I will now make declaration. / Do you all listen well!"

COMMENTARY Besides the four great shravakas who have received predictions of buddhahood, the assembly includes five hundred outstanding disciples. The Buddha promises that they too will receive predictions concerning their future buddhahood. This will occur in chapter 8, "The Five Hundred Disciples Receive the Prediction of Their Destiny." Here "five hundred" should be understood as meaning "a very large number"; by extension it can refer equally to us today who study and have faith in the Lotus Sutra.

Behind his words "of my and your development in former lives" is Shakyamuni's assurance: "You think that our relationship as teacher and disciples has been forged in this world alone, but that is not so; we have been teacher and disciples from the distant past. The fact that you have undertaken religious practice for such a long period in former lives is the 'cause' enabling you to come in contact with the 'condition' of hearing my teaching in this world. Your practice in this world will in turn serve as the cause enabling you to hear my teaching in a future life, as well. As you persevere in your practice in this manner, you will eventually be able to reach the same state as the Buddha."

The Buddha then goes on to tell the disciples about the relationship ("development") between him and them since their former lives in order to encourage the disciples' religious practice in this life and enable them to confirm their future attainment of buddhahood. This is the discourse of chapter 7, "The Parable of the Magic City."

To be continued

In this series, passages in the TEXT sections are quoted from *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Company, 1975, with slight revisions. The diacritical marks originally used for several Sanskrit terms in the TEXT sections are omitted here for easier reading.

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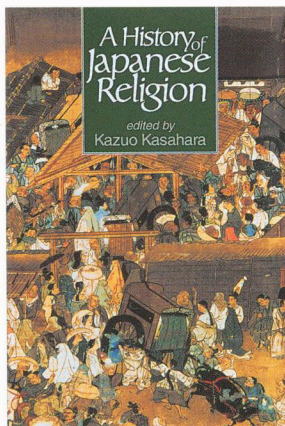
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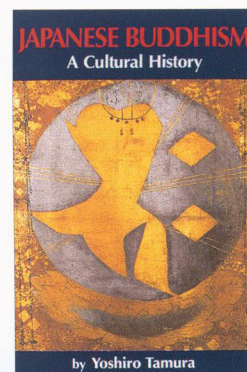
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