

FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

DHARMA WORLD

SEPT./OCT. 2003 Vol. 30

The Fascination
of Buddhism

A Pliant Heart
and Mind



*A stucco head of
the Buddha, unearthed
in Hadda, Afghanistan*

Buddhist Basics Explained for All

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The author of these readable, enlightening guides is the late KOGEN MIZUNO, Litt.D., a renowned authority on early Buddhism and Pali texts. He was president of Komazawa University, where he also taught Buddhology.

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2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo, 166-8535 Japan

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Cover photo: This beautiful stucco head of a Gandharan-style buddha was unearthed at Hadda in the Jalalabad district of Afghanistan, where the seventh-century Chinese monk Hsuan-tsang visited a stupa housing Buddhist relics. It is 25.7 cm tall, and dates from the third-fourth centuries. Tokyo National Museum.

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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"Peace Entails Perseverance"

We cannot under any circumstances afford to consider the situation in Japan today safe. We sit close to two countries, North Korea and China, that possess nuclear weapons, and just beyond them is Russia, with which Japan has never concluded a peace treaty. At the same time, the power of the United Nations is weakening. Thus, understandably, the Japanese are becoming very nervous about the prospect of war.

After Japan's defeat in the Second World War, there was such a desire for peace that there was a strong trend to frown upon those who even spoke about war as being militaristic. When the autobiography of the late Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, was published, because his personal history included his service as a battleship crewman in the Japanese Imperial Navy, there were some critics who denounced Founder Niwano, who had devoted his whole life to working for peace, as a false peace-worker. Although it is absolutely true that there are records showing that Rev. Niwano was conscripted to serve in the navy, that was long before the Second World War. Nevertheless, I was amazed at the superficiality of such criticism.

It is rather strange, but a great many of those in the Japanese mass media simplistically believe that just by not thinking about war, peace will come. Their thinking stops there.

If they would think seriously about peace, they could not help but also think about the important factors that prevent peace from coming about. In order to stop war, it is necessary to think about war. However, in Japan, no one conducts any deep discussions on war and peace, and the atmosphere is such that there is a strong tendency to see those who cry for peace as "good," and those who talk about war as "bad." Under this situation, there are hardly any university courses dealing with war. But this is exactly

the same as if one were to say, "Since I am afraid of disease, I will not study medicine."

We cannot easily define the matter of peace and war in terms of "good" or "bad"—there are various forms of peace, and various forms of war. We should not allow ourselves to be tossed about by the ideal, emotional, and simplistic dichotomy of war or peace.

When those who preach profound religious doctrine talk about war or peace, for some reason it becomes a naive and emotional discussion—and this can only be described as a sad state of affairs. Concerning this point, I am reminded that Founder Niwano did more than just sing the praises of peace—indeed, he strove with all his might to help establish the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP).

China is a great country with the largest population in the world. When religious leaders in America and Europe asked Rev. Niwano to try to persuade China to join the WCRP, saying that the WCRP would remain incomplete without China's participation, he accepted the challenge.

Rev. Niwano visited China, in which there were many who continued to regard Japan as an enemy, several times, speaking about what ought to be done and asking religious leaders for their cooperation. The basis for that was Founder Niwano's firm belief that "peace entails perseverance." Without a doubt, his serious attitude served as the motivating force to cause China's religious leaders to open a door that had been tightly closed. □



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:

DHARMA WORLD
Kosei Publishing Company
2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku
Tokyo 166-8535, Japan

E-mail: dharmaworld@kosei-shuppan.co.jp
Fax: +81-3-5385-2331

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- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Rissho Kosei-kai Geneva
c/o WCRP, 14 Chemin Auguste-Vilbert
1218 Grand-Saconnex
Geneva, Switzerland
Tel: 41-22-798-5162 Fax: 41-22-791-0034
E-mail: rkkgva@iprolink.ch</p> | <p>Rissho Kosei-kai of Oklahoma
2745 N.W. 40th St.
Oklahoma City, OK 73112
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| <p>Rissho Kosei-kai of Los Angeles
118 North Mott St.
Los Angeles, CA 90033
Tel: 1-323-269-4741 Fax: 1-323-269-4567</p> | <p>Thai Rissho Friendship Foundation
201 Soi 15/1, Praram 9 Road
Bangkapi, Huaykhwang
Bangkok 10310, Thailand
Tel: 66-2-716-8141 Fax: 66-2-716-8218</p> | <p>Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea
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Speaking the Dharma

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.

When we speak about Buddhist teachings, we tend to feel that unless we use special terms, what we are talking about is not really Buddhism. I think, though, that in teaching about Buddhism we must use simple words that anyone living in today's society can easily understand. To do this, we have to be able to grasp the Buddhist teachings firmly and make them truly our own. If we have only a vague understanding of the teachings, we will not be able to express them in a way that all can understand.

Here are some suggestions about how to use our own words to explain Buddhist terms. "Nonself" is not clinging to things, remaining always free of that which captures the mind. "Awakening" is total acceptance of the truth of the Buddha Dharma. "Being content with little" is the basis of moderation, or, to put it another way, the means by which the human race can survive. "Emancipation" is not being controlled by our internal defilements and passions.

Some people might understand more academic explanations, such as "'Emancipation' is an internal state of liberation or perfect freedom," but generally it is better to explain terms in a way that everyone can comprehend. Thus "nirvana" is a state of peace, "repentance" is the ability to be self-critical, and "buddha-nature" is our inherent humanity.

Sometimes even the pronunciation of Buddhist terms causes arguments, but such controversies can do nothing to bring people to salvation. In a new age, we need to teach Buddhism using new expressions and new strategies.

A university professor who came to lecture at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo was so impressed by the attitude of the woman at the reception desk that he came to a deep understanding of the nature of our organiza-

tion. He subsequently has expressed his thorough appreciation of Rissho Kosei-kai. It is not skillful words alone that invite people to respect us and want to join us. Each of our everyday actions forms our total makeup as believers.

Quite a long time ago, when I met the Venerable Etai Yamada, head priest of the Tendai Buddhist denomination, he mentioned that in the past it was thought that there was special merit in hearing a priest speak, whether or not the words were understood. When the person listening to the teaching did not understand much, it was meaningless to calculate what we call the "enormous merit" of the fiftieth person, as described in the Lotus Sutra, who hears the teaching with joy, via forty-nine people who have also heard it with joy and conveyed it in turn. "We need to teach Buddhism while thinking of the needs of the times," he said.

We should seek to make the person right in front of us understand the Buddhist teachings. The Buddha expressed the same idea at the end of chapter 16 in the Lotus Sutra, pondering, "How shall I cause all the living to enter the Way supreme and speedily accomplish their buddhahood?" This concern is the true reflection of his great compassion. It is also important that we present Buddhist teachings not only with words. We should not forget that a true sermon is the "unspoken words" that guide others even by our conduct. Though one's verbal preaching might be excellent, it is nothing if it is at odds with one's actions.

Seriously but Warmly Aiding Others and Ourselves

Some people have commented that what is important is the nobility of the Buddha Dharma itself, and it is not at issue whether or not those who preach it are noble. It is important that we "rely on the Law and not upon persons," but the attitude and manner of speaking of the person explaining the Dharma cannot be overlooked. The Chinese *Li-chi* (Book of Rites) says, "A teacher, having dignity, respects the Way. Because the teacher respects the Way, the people, too, know respect of the Way." Just

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 (left) chatting with the Venerable Etai Yamada at the temple Enryakuji on the occasion of a memorial service held at the temple by Japanese and Chinese Buddhist leaders in August 1987.

because we preach the Dharma, we don't have to intentionally act important or put on a solemn expression. When we speak of the problems that beset human life and people's hearts, it is natural that we should be serious, and this will reveal itself from our facial expressions even though they may be gentle. That is why the Buddhist teachings we preach become noble spontaneously, leading hearers to pay respect to the Buddha Way we follow. We must not forget to be resolute when we teach, neither should we neglect to bring warmth to our words despite our solemn expressions. Warmth is difficult to convey without humor. To lack humor is like being in a stifling, windowless room. If we take care to have joyful hoza counseling sessions, which attract people to join in readily, when the occasion demands, people will unite with one mind to work together.

I have long reiterated the importance of our members being personally responsible for guiding other individuals to the Buddha's teachings. We might very well say that the sum of our religious training lies in guiding each individual in the Buddhist Way. Nichiren wrote in his "Opening of the Eyes" (*Kaimokusho*), "One can know the flavor of the great ocean by tasting a single drop, and one can predict the coming of spring by finding a single flower in bloom." We can discover what the sea tastes like by tasting a drop of water on the tip of a finger. We do not have to drink the whole Pacific Ocean! Watching a flower burst from its bud, we know that spring will come soon. In the same way, by striving to bring happiness to another, we are able to truly understand what a human being is.

We may be shown the weakness and ugliness of human

nature, but we must persevere and bring each person to an understanding of the teachings. By listening to people's troubles, allowing them to vent their complaints, and trying to embrace their willfulness, we are able to reflect on ourselves, asking, "How has it come about that I am teaching others such wonderful things?"

People used to say that through examining others we are able to reexamine ourselves. This is an extremely accurate observation. Psychiatrists say that it is very difficult to psychoanalyze themselves, and that the quickest way to know yourself is to examine someone else. As they listen to the words of their patients, psychiatrists are able to learn what lies deepest in their own minds. To know yourself, there is no better partner than another person.

Nichiren also said that if we strive to bring awakening to even one person among all the beings in the nine realms of unawakened existence, that striving reveals the reason why all living beings can become buddhas. It is, he said, like being able to snap and split a length of bamboo if you can split its first joint, though the bamboo joints may be hard. It is for this reason that I have always stressed the importance of each person guiding another. Even if it is only one person, we must guide that person with compassion. We should also have the humility to seek to learn through those we guide, benefiting ourselves as we benefit others, learning gratitude toward the three treasures: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. In this way we can experience the meaning of the practical doctrine of the three thousand realms in one thought, that is, the working of the Dharma such that we can change others by changing ourselves. □

The Fascination of Buddhism

by Raimundo Panikkar

*The Buddha's Middle Path is neither mundane nor religious,
as "religion" was understood in his time. It is the path
of balance, of harmony, of impartiality, of serenity.*

This is the story of a young prince, who was not from the Kingdom of Asturias or the House of David. He was from a small clan located between the world's highest mountains and the plains of the Ganges, which for a thousand years had witnessed the intersection of civilizations. One fine morning—no later than the sixth century B.C.E.—after years of conflict and hesitation, the prince took his favorite white horse Kanthaka and his personal servant Channa and departed his father's kingdom through the castle doors. Leaving behind his son and wife, he went away to try to solve the problems that had been plaguing him since the age of six.

After passing the river bordering his father's kingdom, he dismissed his servant and his favorite white horse, changed his clothes, took a beggar's cup, and walked, not knowing where to.

At the prince's birth it had been foretold that he would become a great king who would revolutionize the world of northern India's small kingdoms. But when the prince was seven years old, his father realized that the prince did not truly yearn to use the power and means at his disposal. The king built him a spring palace, then an autumn one and a winter one. In the spring palace he put everything an adolescent could have wanted. In the winter palace he placed all the various teachings the pandits could give him; in the autumn palace he offered the prince the experience of the old men of his clan. But it seemed that nothing satisfied the boy. He could have used all the tools of an entire kingdom to change whatever he believed was wrong, but he seemed to disdain using power to accomplish good deeds. As his conduct would later confirm, he renounced the use of power. As another young man near the prince's age was to say, "Let the stones be stones; do not wish to turn them into bread"; that is, one should respect all things and not use them—not even to do good.

The prince's father, who held him in such high esteem, wished to spare him the pains of existence. But his 29-year-old son had apparently managed to see an old man, a sick man, and a bird holding in its beak a worm that couldn't

free itself, and later came across a dead man and a funeral. When he left the palace, he went without knowing where he was going, broke all bonds, and on a whim abandoned all things. In disdaining power, he overcame what he would later encounter under a tree: the temptation of means, that is, the temptation to use means and power to do good.

His first master introduced him to the Brahmanic monasticism of his time, and with a novice's enthusiasm, the prince followed him until he realized that this man was not his master. Leaving him, he went in search of a second master, and then of a third, and then realized that he

Raimundo Panikkar is professor emeritus of religious studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Born in Spain to Catholic and Hindu parents, he is an authority on the dialogue between Christianity and Asian religions. Dr. Panikkar's books include *The Cosmotheandric Experience* (Orbis, 1993) and *The Intra-religious Dialogue* (Paulist, 1978). He is also a consultant to UNESCO on interreligious dialogue. He has won Spain's Premio Espiritualidad, as well as Italy's prestigious Nonino Prize, which recognized his lifelong "academic and spiritual contributions."

would not be satisfied with any subsequent master. The young prince, who was hiding his royal origins, seemed a little too stubborn in his insistence on traveling a road he did not know. For six years he followed the teachings of the three masters. With the zeal of a convert, he reached extremes of practice, every day decreasing the grains of rice he ate until, so the legend goes, his sternum was visible from the back, his ribs were transparent, and he was reduced almost to nothing.

One day, while he was crossing a river, he encountered a beautiful young woman named Sujata—mentioned in all the scriptures—who fed him, probably because she was moved to compassion. The five disciples accompanying him were upset by the fact that he had accepted food from the hands of a young girl, and abandoned him. Left all alone (since Sujata, too, had gone away after feeding him), the prince continued on his own. He understood that extreme asceticism was counterproductive and that neither the king's palace nor the poor man's shack was what he was seeking. Yet he did not know what he *was* looking for; he knew only what he did not want. He didn't want to be king, he didn't want to be a monk, he didn't want power, he didn't want to be a renouncer. He thus stopped being a *sannyasi* [wandering ascetic] and continued his pilgrimage in the Ganges region. He passed one of the capitals of his time, Pataliputra, and settled down in a place that today bears part of his name, Bodh Gaya. There, under a *Ficus religiosa*, the holy tree of the Brahmanic tradition, he stopped, trying to connect the mystery of life, the mystery of death, the injustice of poverty, the reality of the divine, the past, and the present. When he was completely serene, he realized that he could overcome temporal order and look into the future.

According to tradition, he remained there motionless for a long time. He resisted two temptations presented to him by Mara. But he still had to conquer the third temptation: the temptation to do good, the temptation to become a preacher. Drawing close to him, Brahma said, "Since you have already achieved your fulfillment, pass it on to others." The prince answered no, saying that it would be useless to pass on something already accomplished and done and that his teaching would be only an idiosyncratic message, if people had not experienced enlightenment personally and had not journeyed through the places where he had been.

Wanting to save the world is the great temptation; wanting to save yourself is the great danger. To do nothing was impossible; to do small things didn't appeal to him. To do everything was what he yearned for.

This 35-year-old man remembered the past, saw the present, and still didn't know what to do. He went on wandering. After the rainy season he walked on a flat path above the Ganges for about 600 kilometers. He came to a place between the Asi and Varuna rivers, tributaries of the Ganges. Here the Ganges, which usually flows west, flows

Prince Siddhartha meditating beneath a tree. Ca. Second century. Unearthed at Gandhara. Peshawar Museum.

north toward its source in the Himalayas, in one of those freaks of nature that people interpret in different ways. This area had thus become a sacred place where, perhaps a thousand years before his birth, Varanasi, the holiest city of the Brahma tradition, was founded. He made sure to avoid the city. He no longer wanted to see holy men; he no longer wanted to see the capital of Brahmanism. So he withdrew northward, before arriving at the confluence of the Varuna and the Ganges, to a park populated with deer. And there, in Sarnath, fate decided that he was to

meet the five monks who had been his disciples and who, when he had last parted from them, had been so upset at the sight of a young woman feeding him.

Having overcome the temptation of the holy man, which is to do good; the temptation of the politician, which is to use means to do good; and the temptation of the monk, which is to renounce all things in order to feel good and justified, he summoned the five monks and told them:

“Two extremes must be avoided. What are these two extremes? One is to search and long for pleasure. It derives from attachment. It is vulgar, it is not noble, it carries no profit, and it leads to rebirth. The other extreme is the quest for asceticism, for the unpleasant, for suffering, for renunciation. It is equally painful and leads to no gain. These are the two extremes that must be avoided.”

“Hence,” he continued, “The Tathagata [we don’t know whether he gave himself this name or was given it by the tradition, but this is how the Pali text reports his words] avoids these two extremes and follows the Middle Path, which is bright, beautiful, and intelligible; a path full of serenity which leads to peace, to knowledge, to enlightenment, to nirvana.”

“Tell me, dear monks,” he said to the five who were listening to him, “what is the Middle Path leading to peace, knowledge, enlightenment, and nirvana? This is the Middle Path: it is the noble truth of suffering.”

The word he used, *dukkha*, which has been translated in a thousand different ways, may mean suffering, disquiet, unease, to be unhappy, to be poor, or to be miserable. Realizing that its antonym is *sukkhā*—which means well-being, tranquillity, or peace—we can assume that the prince had in mind *dukkha*’s original meaning. The farmers of his time knew that when the oxcart was well oiled and the roads were not too bumpy, then things went *sukkhā*: well. When the oxcart creaked because it hadn’t been oiled and the roads were bumpy, things were *dukkha*: not working conveniently or smoothly. He thus delivered this fundamental speech in Varanasi:

“This is the noble truth of *dukkha*, of disquiet, of pain, of suffering, of the human condition: birth is painful, getting old is painful, illness is suffering, death is suffering, to come into contact with all that is painful means suffering, not to have what you long for is suffering, and the *khandhas* [the five senses by which we come into contact with reality—like the five doors of knowledge] mean suffering.

“This, dear monks, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: thirst and desire, which induce the search for pleasure. They also kindle passion and seek satisfaction, causing the yearning to please, and the yearning to exist and not to exist.

“This is the noble truth of the cessation of pain: the total suppression of thirst, its annihilation, letting it go, relinquishing it, being freed of it, and remaining detached from it.

The dried-up bed of the Nairanjana River, where Sujata fed Shakyamuni, who had become emaciated because of extreme austerities.

The Deer Park at Sarnath, where Shakyamuni preached his first sermon after he attained enlightenment. The commemorative Dhamekh Stupa is said to have been built originally at the order of Emperor Ashoka.

"This, dear monks, is the path leading to the extinction of suffering: this is the Eightfold Path (*astanga-marga*), that is, the right vision. . . ."

I use the term "right" to translate *samma*, which could also be translated as serene, balanced, complete, perfect, or harmony—the harmonious vision. Let us therefore say: "The right *vision*, the right *intention*, the right *word*, the right *action* or conduct, the right *means* or lifestyle, the appropriate *effort*, adequate *attention*, and the necessary devotion or *concentration*."

Each of these words can be translated in various ways and should be explained in detail, but let's continue with the text:

"As long as my knowledge and insight into the reality of these Four Noble Truths in their three stages and twelve forms were not yet perfectly purified, I could not call myself one who had actually attained true and supreme enlightenment in this world, with its gods, with Mara, with Brahma, with its ascetics, Brahmins, spirits, men, animals, and all the rest."

These Four Noble Truths are the cornerstone shared by this entire tradition, which for twenty-five centuries has contributed to the world not only one, but many philosophies, many civilizations, and a whole Way of living.

The Buddha, as he was called by his disciples (meaning one who has achieved the fullness of the *buddhi*, of knowledge or enlightenment), was this prince, who was perhaps 38 or 39 years old when he had more than 100 disciples. But he didn't want to found a religion; he didn't even want to found a monastic order. He hadn't left his father's house to save the world; he didn't want disciples to follow him because he had something to tell them. He wanted to live, and he discovered one thing: he discovered that there

is suffering in the world. He discovered the origin of this suffering, he discovered that this suffering can end, and he found the way to end it. It is the complex Eightfold Path that extinguishes pain and suffering and appeases what has often been translated as desire—although in both Pali and Sanskrit it means simply thirst: the thirst to exist, the thirst not to exist, the thirst of wanting to be perfect, the thirst of wanting to get somewhere, the disquiet of wanting to remain in one's place, the yearning of wanting anything whatsoever. To transcend the will—this is what Nietzsche did not understand—is not *to have the will* to have no will.

For almost forty years this man continued living in the Ganges plains of northern India; gradually people began to gather and settle down around him. At that time, those who followed a spiritual leader or master were called *bhikkhu* (monk), *sannyasi* (wandering ascetic), or *sadhu* (renouncer). Gautama spoke while he walked; his disciples absorbed everything he said. "Just as the wind blows above and below and makes the cotton leaves move, thus the true and inexhaustible joy is moving me. This is how I do all things." What does it mean to be a human being? According to one of his disciples, to be a human being means to participate in the joyful celebration of our entire existence.

"The perfume of a flower does not travel against the direction of the wind, but the balm of a good man can spread even against the direction of the wind; a good man penetrates the four directions." The prince feels deeply what later tradition will interpret: "The holy man leaves no trace; he is like the flight of a bird which leaves no track."

This is why it's so hard to follow him.

This man arouses enthusiasm. His disciples follow him

everywhere. Even women want to follow him; he, having made an exception for Sujata, says no. Ananda, the monk he most esteems, tells the master to accept women, so he does. But he does not pretend to found a religion, to set up a sect, to reform Brahmanism, or to create anything. He wants to live his own life; he doesn't expect anything; he doesn't even want to give a name to his community, which is constantly developing. When he dies, at eighty, his disciples realize that they don't have a place, that they don't know anything, that no regulations governing their way of life have been established. What happened? Three months after his death, five hundred elders called the first Buddhist council to see what had happened. They were surprised to discover that many things had indeed happened: Hinduism and Brahmanism had been severely criticized; people had formed groups living the life of the *sangha* (community) and had spontaneously taken as their master a man who said only that he had seen the ultimate truth of things as well as the diverse aspects they manifest in the real world.

This was the origin of what would later be called the religion of Buddhism; like all other -isms, it has a high degree of abstraction. This man didn't pretend to be a prophet; he didn't claim any special authority or maintain that he had been sent by someone. He systematically avoided mentioning the name of God; when the monk Radha once asked him to say something about God, he replied, "Oh Radha! You don't know what you're asking; you don't know the limits of your question. How do you expect me to answer?!"

Thus was born what today, with our flair for labeling things, we call Buddhism—or rather Buddhist traditions, as there certainly are more than a dozen, each with its own philosophy. But this is not what the Buddha wanted. His Middle Path is neither mundane nor religious, as "religion" was understood at the time. It is the path of balance, of harmony, of impartiality, of serenity. One day a mourning mother, Kisa Gautami, went to see him, desperate over the death of her daughter. She wanted a miracle, or hoped at least to be consoled. The Buddha received her, looked at her, and said, "I content myself with few things." "Ask me for anything you want!" said Kisa Gautami. "Bring me three grains of rice (or a handful of mustard seeds). But go and fetch them from a house that has never suffered a loss such as yours, where pain has never been felt." The desperate young woman, believing that the task was relatively easy, went in search of the three grains of rice and found no house that had never been visited by premature death. She returned to the Buddha and said, "How could I want to be so special, disregarding the human condition? Why didn't I realize that the same thing I was suffering existed also in those homes where I asked for a grain of rice? I previously thought there had been no pain, but I have now discovered that it is present in all homes. Thank you!"

She later entered the order and became an *arhant*.

Common sense! He doesn't speak of God; he doesn't speak of religion. He doesn't want to give emotional consolation; he doesn't give explanations.

His disciples of the second generation were more intellectual. They wanted doctrine and theoretical solutions. To them the Buddha said, "What I preach is like the case of a man at whom an arrow has been fired, and you want me to continue discussing: Why has the arrow been fired? Who were his neighbors? Who saw the culprit? Where did he go? All theoretical discussions, and in the meantime the wounded man has died, because the only important thing was to extract the arrow from his body, without wasting time looking into the causes, asking for reasons, chasing the culprit, seeking justice, being a philosopher, seeking solutions. Praxis, immediate action, spontaneity: to extract the arrow from the wounded man, from the body of deeply wounded humanity."

The Buddha talks of sacred silence, employing the same term he used in the garden near Varanasi, when he spoke of the Four Noble Truths and of noble silence. But noble silence is not the same as holding back everything one wants to say, or like keeping secret the philosopher's stone we have found. Noble silence is silent because it has nothing to say; since it has nothing to say, it doesn't hide anything, it doesn't say anything. Moreover, it does not keep silent but rather soothes the anxieties that may roil within us. If we ask why, it's because we're looking for an answer, but this answer only leads to another question. Until we destroy the very cause that leads us to ask why, we won't find an adequate answer. Every answer is secondhand information; it's the answer to a problem we have brought up. It answers a question—it doesn't resolve it, it doesn't dissolve it, and it doesn't ensure that the question won't come up again.

The Buddha's world is the world of spontaneity, of freedom, of extracting the arrow without asking the reason why, not because the reason doesn't exist, but because any question is like an act of violence against existence. It's like asking what lies behind things; it's like doing what children do when they tear a doll apart just to see what's inside—and the worst result is that they will no longer play with the broken doll. When we seek causes we don't allow the effects to enrich our lives.

This is the spirit of Buddhism. All the rest has arisen from this man who wanted nothing, who didn't even want to reform Brahmanism. I remember that in the fifties, in Sarnath, the same place where this large movement was born, I was speaking with an Indian monk, a Theravada Buddhist. He was a close friend of mine and the chief editor of the *Tripitaka* in Hindi, and later became the rector of the University of Nalanda. I asked him why there were no Buddhists in India—why, in all of India, the Buddha's birthplace, Buddhism as a religion did not exist. The *bhikkhu* looked at me and said, "Really? There are no Buddhists?" I retracted my question. We can say that there

are no Buddhists in India because no one has registered for the Buddhist party, because no one claims to be a Buddhist, because Buddhism as a religion does not exist in India. We have lost the spirit of true Buddhism. According to our surveys and statistics there are no Buddhists in India. The only Buddhist monk left in India was surprised at my foolishness in asking him this question. Either we take seriously what human traditions tell us from the deepest and most truthful perspective, or else we turn these traditions into ideologies, political parties, or even religions. All the Buddhists accounted for in statistical categories certainly live outside India, except perhaps Dr. Ambedkar's three million neo-Buddhists who—in order to overcome modern caste slavery, free themselves of the infamous mark of the outcast, and take on an identity—are “converting” to Buddhism. This is why mass conversions to Buddhism are taking place, to a social and political form of Buddhism that would make the Buddha smile. It is “taking shelter” in the Buddha as one of the three jewels (the *sangha* and the *dhamma* are the other two) that makes one a true Buddhist.

But taking shelter in the Buddha, as I did, does not mean abjuring Christianity, Hinduism, or any other religion. Why do we always have to act according to *our* categories? Although Hinduism does not have a founder, Buddhism does have one, despite the fact that the Buddha did not found anything. He is therefore rather a symbol. When the Buddha went to northern India, he saw a monk who had contracted a repulsive disease and who was rejected by his companions. The Buddha went to where the monk was lying, cared for him, and cured him. He then admonished the other monks, “Would you have cured me? Do to any other man what you would do to me.” This event happened more than four centuries before a young rabbi of another tradition would pronounce similar words!

Thus, speaking about Buddhism implies a certain degree of devotion. Buddhism cannot be turned into a mere ideology; it cannot be reduced to only some of its philosophical or logical doctrines. An entire Buddhist ideology undoubtedly exists, but its spirit—including that of Nagarjuna, perhaps the most acute of all Buddhist logicians—is always guided by what the Buddha himself defines as the very essence of Buddhism. According to the Mahayana tradition, this essence can be summed up in one word, which is hard to translate and even more difficult to practice:

mahākaruṇā, boundless compassion for all existing things, without discrimination. It means discovering the pathos in something and sharing this feeling with others. *Sunt lacrimae rerum*—There are tears for things—said Virgil. *Mahākaruṇā*—great *karuṇā*, boundless compassion—is found in the essential tenets of the Mahayana tradition, for one reason only: not to leave me suffering, but because I acknowledged the four fundamental truths and am aware of suffering, that this suffering has an origin, and that it can cease. The Buddha defines this cessation with the same classical term used by yoga: *nirodha*, which implies that the extinction of pain corresponds to the extinction of the stream of thought, of our internal tele-

vision which distracts us and does not allow us to enjoy the truths of life. *Yogas-citta-vrtti-nirodhah*, says the second sutra of the Yoga Sutra: Yoga is the cessation of the mental process.

Any approximate interpretation of Buddhism that does not reach into these fibers of universal compassion—of renouncing (as the bodhisattvas say) one's personal salvation for the benefit of all living beings who might still need one's help—understands nothing of what Buddhism truly means. A great *arhant* (and here we probe the irony of the two great Buddhist traditions), having completed his life on earth, rises to nirvana, the deserved heaven. His great desire is to see his master and know where his master lives. He rises up to all the skies of nirvana, finding *apsara* (nymphs) and precious things, until he reaches the seventh heaven. Here the doors are open; he shouts and looks for Gautama, the Buddha.

Not finding him, he cries out. An

apsara appears—a young girl who looks at him in surprise. He tells her, “I am looking for Shakyamuni, the Buddha.” She replies, “You don't know what you're looking for. Shakyamuni, the true one, the Buddha, has never come here. He has always been with mankind and he will remain there until the last sentient being attains nirvana.” The Buddha's place is among those who suffer, among human beings. The great compassion that allows someone to be a bodhisattva also makes that person renounce his or her own salvation to collaborate with other human beings for the liberation of the universe. The vow of the bodhisattva taken by monks in the Mahayana tradition, after a minimum of five years' preparation, is to renounce all personal benefits and advantages, to ignore them until the last living being attains fulfillment. □

In Search of Our Common Truth

by Jehangir Sarosh

The author describes his passionate belief that it is the major responsibility of religions to be the means of bringing forth peace, reconciliation, and harmony.

We wish for the perfect life. We wish for a happy life. We want the joy of life, and in a subconscious way we seek the “ultimate happiness”—a conclusion, or that beyond which there is no more to desire.

Yet desire is continuous and hope is everlasting, unless we obtain nirvana, where satisfaction is complete and desire is no more. For most of us, however, that state, if indeed it is a state, is elusive. We have to be content with how things are, or how they seem to be.

At the personal level, we are generally lacking something.

We seek this “something,” for we know it exists. We try to find it in many different ways; one way is to seek security in an identity. The identity may take the form of belonging to a community, which may be a religious, national, or racial community. This belonging gives us the security we seek, yet at the same time it separates us from those who do not carry the same label (identification)—a Christian, a Buddhist, a Zoroastrian, an Englishman, a Japanese, an American, and a myriad of other labels. These labels divide us and fragment the human community.

This method of trying to attain the “conclusion,” the final aim of our life, continually splits us off from the whole of humanity. This is similar to the way in which we try to reach and understand the beginning of the universe, the source of creation, by separating molecules (splitting the atom and then the electron), manipulating DNA, and so on, instead of looking at the whole and realizing its oneness.

Thus I question our search for the “conclusion.” The nature of conclusion is an arrival at an end, yet life is eternal. It is not natural to seek the end of that which is eternal.

What Is Natural?

So the question arises—how can we return to our own true nature, hear the Supreme Being, and enjoy a good, progressive life?

As a Zoroastrian (Zarathushti), I consider life to be a gift of the good Ahura Mazda—the Wise Lord, our name for the Supreme Being. To glorify Ahura Mazda and his creation one ought to enjoy it, for happiness is our nature. To be happy and bring forth happiness is good and natural.

How can we recognize what is natural for us?

We can do this by noticing what makes us and others happy. Our conscience tells us when we go against the natural way. We feel guilty; we know we have done wrong; we are uncomfortable, uneasy, frightened. If the environment is not natural, we are stressed. Is there not more

Jehangir Sarosh is moderator of the World Conference on Religion and Peace–Europe (WCRP/Europe) and a member of the Executive Committee of the World Congress of Faiths (WCF). He also serves as vice chair of the Week of Prayer for World Peace and is an Executive Committee member of the Interfaith Network of Great Britain. He has been nominated as interfaith representative of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (the principal body of the Zoroastrian community in Europe).

stress in the “developed” world, even with its abundant material wealth?

To be just is also part of our nature; to love is part of our nature; to be peaceful is part of our nature. These and other virtues, exercised responsibly, make us naturally happy. To be natural means not to be compelled, not to act from fear or by regulation, but through free choice. Therefore we should choose that which is good. As the Qur’an states, “There is no compulsion in religion.”

No virtue can be legislated. For example, the nature of peace and the nature of love have so much in common. Neither can be compelled; neither can be legislated; neither can be taken. Both have to be given and received. In the presence of one, there is the other: where there is love, there is peace; where there is peace, there is love.

Actually, we do not even choose good, for good is natural to us. Goodness is our nature when there is clarity and purity of mind. One has no choice; one simply does what is good, and proceeds with life in the right direction.

Allow me very briefly to touch on what a Zarathushti is and on the aspect of responsibility in our religion. Zarathushtis are the followers of the prophet Zarathushtra. Many believe that Zarathushtra lived about 3,500 years before Christ. He preached the first monotheistic religion. He spoke in abstract terms of the Supreme Wise Being, which could not be seen but could be felt in the heart, the Supreme Wise Being that is a friend of mankind and not to be feared, the Supreme Wise Being who infused the divine spark in each of us.

Zarathushtra offered not a belief system, but an inquiring, reasoning system, teaching that “with our good mind, we should discriminate that which is good from that which is not good.”

In his dialogues (the Gathas—the songs of Zarathushtra), Zarathushtra speaks of a Supreme Wise Being, the Creator who is all good and the source of all that is good, and suggests that evil is a mentality—something that exists only in the mind.

The choice is ours! Zarathushtra says that only goodness, through free will, can overcome evil. Therefore, he means that mankind has been given a choice. “Listen with your ears to the best things. / Consider with a clear mind— / each man for himself—between the paths before deciding. . . .” (Yasna 30.2). Note that this quotation suggests that the responsibility is completely up to the individual; one cannot abdicate this responsibility to another, not even to the revealed word of Zarathushtra.

All one has to do is choose good. When a person chooses

good, evil ceases to be. When there is light, there is no darkness.

With this free will comes responsibility.

Because evil can be annihilated only by goodness, it is the responsibility of every individual to behave and follow Zarathushtra’s ethical principle of *Humta, Hukta, and Huverashata*—good thoughts, good words, and good deeds.

This responsibility is complete and cannot be abdicated, discarded, or written off by prayer or by asking for forgiveness. In Zoroastrianism one cannot ask for forgiveness, but one has the responsibility of doing good and making good what one has done wrong. These scales of justice are the means by which one is judged; the good deeds are weighed against the bad deeds.

It is easy to have good thoughts, say good words, and do good deeds, but what is good? In our scriptures there is a beautiful sentence, *Ushta ahmai yahmai ushta kahmaichit*: “May happiness be unto anyone through whom happiness (may reach) others.” It is important to note that the word *others* here refers to anything whatsoever that has been created.

This idea of universality, which is so forcefully expressed by positioning *ushta* and *kahmaichit* (“anyone” and “whatsoever”) side by side reminds us that the term “anyone” is all-inclusive.

If a course of conduct is good, it must be good for one and for all. Note that this “all” includes oneself; Zoroastrianism does not demand sacrifice for giving and receiving, since both are one act. As the Bible declares, “To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice” (Prov. 21:3). Or as Henry Van Dyke puts it in “The Story of the Other Wise Man”:

Who seeks for heaven alone to save his soul,
May keep the path, but not reach the goal,
While he who walks in love may wander far,
Yet God will bring him where the blessed are.

Perhaps it is this aspect of responsibility that keeps me going in my work with the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), for I passionately believe that it is the major responsibility of religions, which have allowed themselves to be used by divisive forces and have sometimes committed violent and aggressive acts themselves, to be the means of bringing forth peace, reconciliation, and harmony for us all.

All religious scriptures tell us to love one another and to be compassionate to one another; very often, we have indeed loved and been compassionate to one another, but

Regardless of how we
identify ourselves as
members of personal,
national, or religious
communities, we are
all searching for
answers to the same
questions and striving
toward the same
goal—peace and
happiness for all.

only within our own community. Can we not be compassionate to all instead of only to those who carry the same label as we do, whether that label is Christian or Buddhist, Muslim or Zoroastrian, Jew or Hindu?

The world has various laws and charters for human rights. Attempts are being made to institute an international "Charter of Responsibility." Laws are being passed to enforce some responsibilities.

Human rights are important, but without human responsibilities those rights have no meaning. As I said earlier, one cannot legislate goodness. Notwithstanding that fact, we need laws to safeguard human rights. After all, human rights are nothing other than how we ought to be behaving naturally, and arise from observing our duties.

If individuals—you and I—carried out our responsibilities, our duties, our Dharma, there would be no need for human rights legislation.

Here lies the responsibility of religion and religious institutions: to promote, educate, and inform us about our responsibilities. However, the religious institutions (not the religions) have failed us so far. Too often the institutions have been more concerned about keeping themselves in power. Worse still, believing that they have the responsibility to protect and propagate only their "own flock," they have divided the human community. The religious institutions have taken the universal teachings of their "prophets," "messiahs," and "teachers" and lessened them by turning them into their exclusive domains. The teachings have been twisted and abused for their own ends, fragmenting the wholeness of creation and the human race.

The current need and responsibility of religions is to work together for the common good, for the family of communities. Just as in any family, each person is different. Each has different wants, needs, and characteristics, and each excels in different aspects of goodness. So it is with the human family. The importance of the family has been often stressed. But in other ages, every family might have a different identity and every valley might be a different country. Now our age of globalization and high-speed worldwide communication affords us an opportunity, never before available to us, to recognize the oneness of our planet and its inhabitants. But we should stress that what we have before us is no more than the *opportunity* for *cooperation*—because technology is neutral. It can be used for good or for evil, for better or for worse. The Internet can serve for positive communication as well as for pornography. Technology can be used to promote war or peace. So technology and all its implications need to be consciously considered, directed, and managed. The moral and political will to act and to take responsibility, the source of religion as well as of ethics, has become *more* essential than ever in an age in which popular interest in formal organized religion has waned in many parts of the world. So the spiritual dimension is not merely relevant to our highly technical modern way of life—it is also perhaps the very

condition of our survival, not a luxury but a necessity. This is because it is becoming increasingly clear that to survive we need to cooperate, and technology certainly can promote cooperation—but in the last resort *we also have to will it and to accept that at least part of our identity is global.*

As the Buddhist tradition suggests, we need to realize and actualize our interconnectedness and interdependence. Or, as Saint Francis of Assisi wrote, "He only will earn the divine Kingdom who will have first realized it on earth."

Let us seize this opportunity and cooperate to make life "on earth as it is in heaven" as per the Christian tradition; or as Jews say, to "repair the world"; or as Zoroastrians say, to "refresh the world."

To refresh the world, we need to ask ourselves:

- Is it possible to be religious and not spiritual?
- Is it possible to be spiritual and not work for the good of all creation?
- Is it possible to be spiritual and allow millions of dollars to be spent on weapons of destruction, also hurting Mother Earth in that process?
- Is it possible to be spiritual and allow pollution to increase in the name of economic growth?
- Is it possible to be spiritual and not share the fruits of creation equitably?
- Must economic prosperity mean economic disparity?
- Can spiritual needs be subservient to economic needs?

These are some of the questions we all need to reconcile as concerned individuals and communities.

We need to review the current systems that govern our lives. The things we put into systems are based on our beliefs; therefore we need to question both our individual beliefs and our communal beliefs. We also need to ask whether our beliefs are good for the whole or just for our community, just for our nation, or just for ourselves.

This requires us all, whatever our faith, beliefs, tradition, or mission, to turn our minds toward the common truth.

Education is the key to bringing about this change. Religious institutions are the instruments that can deliver education, for religions and their institutions permeate every aspect of life, whether in the national parliament or the local council, in big European cities or small African villages.

Religion permeates every walk of life: education, economics, commerce, and industry. Wherever there are people, there are religious people. Because religions are the instruments that strengthen and reinforce the inherent goodness of men and women, religious institutions and religious people have the responsibility to educate themselves for peace and harmonious living.

Until now, religions have focused merely on saving souls. Now we have the opportunity to bring solace to Mother Earth and all her inhabitants, and we shall do it only by working together. □

Dialogue and Cooperation among Religions

Essential Elements for Righteousness and Peace in the World

by Gianfranco Rossi

All types of differences among us should be seen as sources of humanity's wealth. Those who disagree with us are not our enemies—they are actually our co-workers in the search for peace.

The Bible declares that “the work of righteousness shall be peace” (Is. 32:17). In order to establish peace, it is necessary to work for righteousness, that is, for respect for the rights of all members of the human family.

It is necessary to work unceasingly in order to build a society that always places its anxieties about man, his rights, his liberty, his well-being, and his total enlightenment more in the center. And moreover, it is necessary to build a society that can be ruled with a true love for man, for others, and for those who are different.

The Role of Religions

Religions, which have a global vision of the human family and which preach righteousness, peace, and love among all, must play an important role in the building of a just society that is respectful of human rights.

Better than politicians, lawyers, or philosophers, religions should be able to educate the people to love one another and to respect their rights, for they can touch and stimulate the conscience in a great number of people.

It is not possible to imagine the building of a just and peaceful society without the support of religions. No one is ignoring the importance of the role they have played in the preceding societies, just as in our own. We must remember that in all times, the great religious systems have been modeled much more like dynasties, empires, and political systems, and in a more constant and stronger manner have served as the cultural home of the planet.

But it is necessary for religions and religious organizations to be faithful interpreters of the divine revelation of which they declare themselves to be the recipients and dispensers. For, if instead of scrupulously teaching the message received from on High, the religion degenerates; if it becomes an instrument that allows the exercise of a coercive power over conscience; or if it aims to apply its particular rules through the laws of the state—then it will become a curse on society. We cannot ignore the somber

periods of history that were dominated by intolerance and religious dogmatism.

Religious Extremism

It behooves us to verify, in our era, the troublesome manifestation of religious extremism, which is opposed to the building of a just, pluralistic, and peaceful society.

In effect, we assist, at their ascent, the most menacing of the movements stamped with religious totalitarianism. In many countries, these movements attempt to impose, through the devices of the state, the laws of a single religion. All of society sees itself thus ruled by the precepts of that religion. Those who do refuse to conform to the new

Gianfranco Rossi has been an activist for religious freedom since 1954. Since 1981, he has cooperated with the United Nations in Geneva, by intervening in favor of religious freedom at the UN Commission on Human Rights. Dr. Rossi has also discussed problems concerning this fundamental freedom with government representatives in Geneva and in many countries, adding contributions to some important solutions.

"No peace among religions without dialogue among religions." Religionists discussed problems under the basic theme, "Religion in the Struggle for World Community" at the 3rd assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, held in Princeton, New Jersey, in 1979.

order are considered infidels or unbelievers, and no one hesitates to use force against them.

Religious totalitarianism has reached the maximum of perversion in arriving at the spreading of terror in the name of a just and merciful God and in spite of the right to life of millions of innocents.

It is absolutely necessary to react against religious extremism. But, for that purpose, the responsible men of religion, who have not yet done it, must proceed toward a critical reflection of their own traditions—which, very often, are more the product of history than of divine revelation—in order to harmonize them with respect to all the rights of man universally recognized and to the exigencies of our time.

It is necessary to arrive at an understanding and an acceptance that each state should guarantee to all individuals the freedom to follow the spiritual path dictated by their conscience, in conformity with the teachings that they believe were given by God, the Supreme Authority.

It is not within the competence of the state to interfere in religious matters, and even less to impose upon its citizens a determined vision of the world, whether it be religious or not.

The State: The Common House

The state must be a common house for all of its citizens. That means that in each country, ideological pluralism should not only be accepted as a given, but should also be recognized through legislation. The different visions of the world—religious or not—must have the right to exist, to express themselves, and to value one another's worth in an atmosphere of mutual respect. None of them should serve the power of the state in order to suppress others or

prevent them from expressing themselves or acting freely.

To achieve such a peaceful coexistence, it is necessary to establish a climate of dialogue among religions on all levels. All religions should contribute to the establishment of a universal ethic that is acceptable to all.

Someone has said: "No survival for humanity without a planetary ethic agreed to by religions; no world peace without peace among religions; no peace among religions without dialogue among religions."

But so that it will be a real and constructive dialogue among religions, it is necessary to establish an atmosphere of respect for differences. There are many religions in the world, which is to say that there are many different ways of thinking about, or conceiving of, the relationship with God. Respecting one another's differences is fundamental.

The Importance of Differences

Not only can the society of the new millennium be pluralistic, it must be a society that respects equally not only the similarities but also the differences among human beings.

Professor Jean Dausset of the University of Paris and 1980 Nobel Laureate for Medicine, has declared: "One of the most important tasks of our time is the abolishment of contempt, and the teaching of the vital importance of the differences among men. There are not and there will never be two identical individuals. Each man is unique. The future of the species, its capacity for adaptation, and biological evolution, occur through the jealous preservation of diversity. Uniformity will lead to a decline, then to degeneration and to death. By analogy, the cultural evolution of humanity occurs through the jealous protection of the intellectual diversity of individuals and ethnic groups. Freedom of thought or opinion and the free practice of worship

are not only the free expression of intellectual diversity. *The differences among beings must not be simply tolerated*; they must be *admitted, encouraged, and cultivated* in full awareness of the inestimable riches that they contain.”

In effect, ethnic, cultural, religious, and other types of differences should not be thought of as bad or hostile elements, but, on the contrary, as a source of riches for all humanity. Those whose thoughts are different from our own are not necessarily enemies.

Each individual possesses within himself something unique that he can offer to others. Variety reinforces and enriches the human family. On the other hand, the refusal to accept diversity, together with prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination, divide and weaken people, and deprive them of the possibility to develop their talents and their personalities.

It is necessary to live with others as with partners having the same dignity and the same rights, although in certain circumstances, there will be some inevitable differences.

We must recognize that others have their own vision of the world, that they have the same rights as us—to believe and to practice that which they regard to be religious or philosophical truth.

Cooperation within Diversity

It is necessary to endeavor to highlight the common points—and they are numerous—and to discover the forms

of collaboration for the good of all. It is not necessary to eliminate the differences in order to cooperate for a common good.

Nature furnishes us with marvelous examples of cooperation, the most beautiful and most sublime of which is the family, the fundamental cell of society. In the family, the miracle of the birth of a baby is the product of the loving cooperation of two different beings. Without cooperation between different beings, humanity cannot survive.

Religions ought to be like the different instruments of a grand orchestra, all directed by the love of God, in order to play the universal symphony of righteousness, of peace, and of the happiness of humanity.

Conclusion

In closing, I would like to say that the responsible men of religion have a great role to play in the attainment of the survival of, and peace for, humanity in the new millennium. They should be the champions who promote dialogue and cooperation among religions.

These two activities, dialogue and cooperation, will have, without a doubt, great positive effects upon humanity, if they are conducted in the same spirit as that which, over two thousand years ago, inspired the Indian emperor Ashoka (r. 273–232 B.C.E.), who said: “Agreement can only reign if each respects the beliefs of others and tries with pleasure the risk of listening to them.” □

The Power of Prayer Is Greater Than We Can Imagine

An Interview with Oxford Research Group Director Priscilla Elworthy

In May this year, the 20th Niwano Peace Prize was awarded to Dr. Priscilla Elworthy, founder and director of the Oxford Research Group (ORG). The ORG is a nongovernmental organization in the United Kingdom that studies nuclear issues and is a well-known authority on nuclear disarmament and peace strategies. One of the particular characteristics of the ORG is the adherence of Dr. Elworthy and many of its members to the pacifist beliefs of the Religious Society of Friends. DHARMA WORLD interviewed her on May 6, when she visited Japan with her colleague, Rosie Houldsworth, to receive the award.

Please describe for us how your religious faith has provided a spiritual basis for your founding of, and activities with, the Oxford Research Group.

When I founded the Oxford Research Group with Rosie Houldsworth back in 1982, religious faith was not very important to me. My spiritual practice has grown steadily during the period that we have been working on disarmament issues. Also, I would not really call myself a Christian; I am a Quaker. But the basis of Quakerism, as you know, is to see something of God in every person. And Quakers do not insist on a particular definition of God. It is more like divine intelligence. So Quakers are not adamant that you must believe in a certain creed or certain way of worshiping. And I have had the privilege to spend a lot of time with various Buddhist teachers—in particular, Thich Nhat Hanh, who is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, who was very active in the Paris talks for peace in Vietnam. And he is my hero, if you like, a living hero, because I think he combines spiritual practice with political engagement. And that is really what I believe is most important—the combination of spirituality with politics, what we call engaged Buddhism or engaged spirituality. And that is the most important thing for peace.

Could you share with us your ideas on the role of religion in the resolution of conflicts? What do you think about the power of prayer?

Well, to be honest, I believe that religion has not only played a role in the resolution of conflicts, but has also sometimes caused conflicts. In the Middle Ages, the Catholic religion was very militant and sometimes responsible for terrible campaigns to force people to believe in a certain way, including torture and so on. And so, my own per-

Dr. Elworthy during the interview in May in Tokyo.

sonal belief is that it is more the practice of spirituality that is useful in the resolution of conflicts, more than a specific religious belief. This is because religious belief tends to say you must believe this way and if you don't, you are my enemy; whereas spiritual practice is more inclusive than exclusive.

The power of prayer is bigger and greater than we can imagine. I think it's almost impossible to estimate how powerful that is. For me, it is not so much that I think there is a God and I must ask him to do this and then he will do it. No, that is not the case for me. For me it is more

to find an inner sense of calmness, which allows a greater wisdom than I possess to enter my heart and be transmitted through me. So I believe human beings are intended to be vehicles to enable a much greater essence to manifest on the earth, just as are also animals, plants, trees, and even rocks. So prayer is about interconnection between all living beings and being able to be present enough and conscious enough to enable that to happen, and then amazing things happen—a transformation takes place.

How do you think divine intelligence responds to human prayer?

I have a mental image. I believe that when one being on Earth becomes quiet inside, it's like a little light goes on and the divine intelligence can see—Oh, this one, this one, this one—it's like lights go on all over the world whenever somebody is quiet. And that divine intelligence then, in its wisdom, knows that it can work through these beings. So the more we can become calm and quiet and receptive, the more we can each be a vehicle, like a transmitter—even if not a very good one, the best we can manage.

You took part in the World Conference on Religion and Peace, Commission of Disarmament for Peace in 1998. What is your opinion of the possibility of interreligious cooperation and dialogue for peace?

I believe it is in its infancy now compared to what it can become. At the moment I believe there is more division between religions than cooperation, because of centuries of competition between religions and insistence on "I am right and you are wrong. My religion is correct and yours is not correct." And this has reached a very dangerous stage now, particularly among fundamentalist people in Islam and in particular American Christian sects. And they are locked in conflict. Now each believes the other is dangerous; each is fundamentalist in the sense of believing that they are correct and the other is not correct. And so there is much greater need now than ever before for a promotion of understanding between people of different faiths. I believe that the World Conference on Religion and Peace has a huge role to play, and that it should become even more active than it is at the moment. I think that particularly since September 11 there is a huge risk that the people of the United States will see themselves as victims of Islam, and vice versa, and therefore this could lead to religious wars of a type that we haven't had yet. We have to work very hard not just to avoid that, but to transform that situation into a completely different potential. Possibly, the universe in its wisdom is offering us this not only as a challenge, but also as an opportunity, and we need to be very, very present in order to take that opportunity. I believe that becoming present—in other words letting go of the past and of the future and being present in the mo-

ment—is exactly what Buddhism teaches and also what Quakers try to practice. This will help us to let go of our attachments, attachments to history, attachments to what happened in the past—what you did to me, or I did to you—and to be present in the moment and do our very best to represent the highest intelligence as best we can. That is my hope.

You have participated in Buddhist discipline in the past and you also undertook a pilgrimage to Ladakh several years ago. Could you give some message to Buddhists, to make a common bridge to work together?

I have learned so much from Buddhism, and I am completely a beginner. I know very little. But my journey to Ladakh, which consisted in walking across the Himalayan mountains for 24 days—staying in Buddhist monasteries on the way—was a journey of transformation for me personally. There is something about people practicing Buddhism in remote communities that is very pure, so much so that you can almost feel it in the atmosphere, especially in Ladakh. And it was a great privilege to meet and talk with the monks in the monasteries and the nuns in nunneries, as we walked. So the whole journey was like a pilgrimage and a great teaching for me. And I suppose what I learned at that time and what I would like to pass on to share with others is the experience of being a "being of light," that we all carry within us the spark of enlightenment. We all carry it. We just don't realize it most of the time. We are so busy being attached, being worried, being involved in satisfying our needs—hunger, thirst, love, all of these things—that we don't spare much time to realize how much we are already inhabited by divine presence. It's quite hard to say this, to put it into words, certainly in the English tradition, because if you say, "I am a being of light," people think that she gives herself big ideas. But that is not the case. We are all here to represent the very greatest and biggest ideas of perfection as best we can. And if we could live like that every day, we would be able to bring about peace without any effort. But, as Rosie knows, when we work together in our offices in England, it's very easy to just be very busy, so busy trying to get things done, complete tasks, write the next report, and organize the next meeting, that it's very easy to get overwhelmed with details, and also with a sense of our own importance. We need to remember that it has nothing to do with us. All we really have to do is to get ourselves out of the way, clean everything up, and become like a clear window for the light to pass through. The transformation of the self is the beginning of peace. It's what we call "*sine qua non*"—without which nothing. And I believe that until we undertake *self*-transformation, what we can do in the world is quite limited. Acting from our own motivation is, of course, powerful, yet acting from the strength of divine presence is infinitely powerful. □

What Can People Do to Stop War?

by Priscilla Elworthy

This is the text of the keynote address, by the recipient of the 20th Niwano Peace Prize, delivered at the Kyoto Symposium of the Niwano Peace Foundation, held on the theme "Citizens Working for Global Security" on May 10.

In the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks, and even more during the build-up to the attack on Iraq, ordinary people felt a sense of helplessness. People kept coming to me, saying, "I want to help. I want to do more than sign a petition. What can I do that will really stop war?"

In the context of this symposium I want to try to answer these questions. I will offer four practical courses of action that anyone can undertake and that I know from my experience will help to change the perilous international situation we are in.

The first concerns alternatives to violence. Currently, politicians and officials think in terms of diplomacy, and if diplomacy fails, military force is the next step. We need to introduce them to the most effective powerful alternative—nonviolence, or "life-force." War prevention and conflict resolution using nonviolent methods is effective and is powerful. But it is not well recognized. We need to put it on the political agenda in order to convince our leaders that it is not only effective, but cost-effective, too.

Three years ago, the Oxford Research Group examined some 280 nonviolent interventions in conflict in different parts of the world. We published details of fifty of the most effective of those initiatives¹ and we funded them. One of the more expensive, at US\$240,000, was the setting up of a task force to help forge effective and united democratic opposition to Milosevic in Serbia in 1999, which was overwhelmingly successful. Another concerned a businessman in El Salvador, who tired of his trucks being held up at gunpoint after a twelve-year civil war and organized a gun return scheme that cost altogether \$1,300,000 and collected more weapons than NATO did in Macedonia. On a more local level, a high school in Lucknow in India managed to unite religious leaders to prevent violence in their city amid nationwide rioting after the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque in the sacred city of Ayodhya. This entire initiative cost only \$5,000, but it saved countless lives.

At the moment, war prevention and conflict resolution through the active use of nonviolence inhabit a lowly place in the strata of government allocation of funds. The United Kingdom, for example, spends a total of about £550 million on conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and enforcement, compared to nearly £30 billion on the military. In the United States the contrast is even greater. In 2001 the U.S. spent approximately \$50 million on conflict mitigation, excluding peacekeeping, while the most recent U.S. military budget was \$400 billion.

My second course of action concerns the media. Currently there are few program producers who give serious space to nonviolent alternatives, to conflict resolution and war prevention techniques. Our job is to educate them. It is simple to do and it works. Radio and television programs are sensitive to listeners and viewers phoning with specific criticisms and requests. Serious newspapers, in addition to the letters that they print, channel all comments they receive to the editors of the relevant sections or pages, and they are obliged to take these comments on board. We can therefore phone and insist that their next program feature one of a list of commentators we can recommend who will explain the power and capacity of a nonviolent approach. A preliminary list is given in the notes to this paper;² you can add names to it and e-mail it to friends, so that they might send it to the media.

We need a working set of nonviolent principles, based on current examples; we need to present them to politicians whenever military action is contemplated, and we need to do this in a public way. A first draft for such a set of non-violent principles might include the following:

- Provide for the physical security of those in conflict zones through introducing peacekeepers, civilian protection, and trained civilian violence monitors; by controlling the flow of arms; by offering food vouchers for weapons collection.
- Provide for the political security of those in conflict

zones by supporting measures for security sector reform and control of militias; by providing alternatives to controlled media; by introducing civil rights and human rights inspectors.

- In terms of mediation, work from the “bottom up” at the same time as from the “top down”; in other words, make sure that grass-roots peace-building initiatives are funded and in place at the same time as top-level negotiations.
- Listen to all interested parties in a conflict. If they refuse to meet, communicate their views honestly.
- Set up a safe “container” for a meeting of representatives of interested parties, and move the discussion toward “interests” and away from “positions.”
- Provide for the psychological security of those in conflict zones by providing counseling for the traumatized and eventually some form of truth and reconciliation process.³

The third course of action enables nonviolence to become a household word, to become the natural alternative. This has to begin at the beginning, in schools. In Israel, for example, news from grass-roots sources and the classroom is a lot more positive than news from political and military leaders. The School for Peace at Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, a Jewish-Arab community in Israel, has organized “encounter” workshops and summer camps for over sixteen thousand Arab and Jewish children. Nonviolent communication training, the brainchild of Marshall Rosenberg, is also being used to great effect in Israeli primary schools, where children learn “giraffe language.” The giraffe, which has the biggest heart of any animal, is used to teach children as young as six that they have a powerful role in resolving conflicts. Giraffe language is contrasted with jackal language, and this is how Israeli children learn to practice nonviolence.

In the United States, more than fifty thousand schools use a program on “teaching tolerance.” Children in Boston’s public schools learn perspective-taking and empathy by writing their personal stories and reading them aloud in class. If peace proves elusive for today’s generation of adults, these programs inspire hope for the next one.

Professor Michael Nagler, founder of the University of California Peace and Conflict Studies Program, reports that teachers and administrators have been thrilled to find that not only do the programs “chill” a lot of the violence in schoolyards and classrooms, but a peculiar pattern emerges all across the country: the biggest troublemakers turn out to be the best mediators. How odd.

The fourth course of action concerns a nonviolent peace-force. Nonviolence starts from a positive statement: “How can I make a creative, constructive, long-term impact on the situation I’m in and, ultimately, on the world I’m in?”

Nonviolence is quite distinct from passive resistance. Passive resistance can even have a provocative effect if the

people doing it are angry or fearful. Thus the inner quality of the people who practice nonviolence is what gives it power. They are moving toward being free of hatred and free of fear.

Did you hear what I said there, so matter of factly?—“free of hatred and free of fear.”

“What? How on earth do you do *that*?” Well, the answer is, you train. You train as if you were preparing for the Olympics. You train your mind, you train your emotions, you train your body, you open up your spirit.

Well, how do you do *that*? I will offer here a few suggestions, from my own experience, and what I know of others’. You will have many more.

1. *Mental Fitness*

One aspect of training one’s mind for nonviolence lies in learning to distinguish information from propaganda or disinformation. Here’s a current example. If you watched television during the mounting crisis over Iraq, you may recall that we (in the U.K. at least) saw very little coverage of the Iraqi people. We heard so much about Saddam Hussein and his cruelty and deceit that it was easy to forget the humanity of ordinary Iraqis, and to assume that they all deserved the same treatment as their leader.

An important aspect of mental training is to understand the concept of projection, and then to notice it happening. What is projection? Human minds make a split between what we can tolerate about ourselves and what is so intolerable that it has to be repressed into an unconscious area, which some people call the shadow. We hide all sorts of unacceptable tendencies there—the inclination to lie, to steal, to be dirty, to torture; they are buried away from our conscious sight where we think we can disown them. But because these tendencies are repressed, they accumulate energy; they become very significant to us. Since we cannot admit them in ourselves, we begin to notice them outside ourselves, in other people. If another person infuriates or disgusts us, or if we hate them, then it’s very likely that that person has some trait or characteristic that is actually, secretly, ours. This is projection.

Here’s an example.

George W. Bush: “America must not ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof, the smoking gun that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.”

Saddam Hussein aims to “expose all the schemes that they hide in the darkness of their minds and chests; . . . our enemy has the darkness of the present and the darkness of distant horizons.”

George W. Bush: “This same tyrant has tried to dominate the Middle East, has . . . struck other nations without warning and holds an unrelenting hostility toward the United States.”

Saddam Hussein: “The enemy will pay dearly later, on

top of what it is paying at present, for its reckless policies of greed and expansionism.”

It is mental exercise to wake up daily, even hourly, to the fact that what we criticize or hate *out there* is in fact what we criticize or hate *in here*. What we have to learn to do is to unravel our own angry accusations against others and examine them to see whether in fact we are furious with that person because they are doing something that we, secretly, want to do, or because they have a characteristic that, buried deep down, is our own shadowy stuff. It's a painful business, full of awful discoveries. But discovering and uncovering these areas of our minds is a liberation. It liberates our energy for change.

Members of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, have developed a Peace Testimony over several hundred years. It includes the daily habit of seeing something of God in every person.

2. Emotional Fitness

Everyone feels fear. Everyone feels anger. What's interesting is what we do with those emotions. At one period in my life, I went through months of waking up in the middle of the night pinned to my pillow by fear. It was like a monster, and there were hundreds of others behind it, and it loomed over me and terrorized me, breathing fire. The fire was all the awful things I had done, and what would happen to me. And night after night I lay there paralyzed—until one night I lost my temper. I sat up and shouted at the monster. At first my shouting felt rather puny and silly, but as I shouted I gained confidence, and as I gained confidence, the monster began to shrink. It literally deflated like a balloon.

Only when we stop criticizing and disabling ourselves, and realize how deeply we are loved, can we begin to love our neighbors—let alone love those who hate us.

3. Spiritual Fitness

All the great spiritual leaders tell us that peace starts within, that we cannot be effective peacemakers in the world until we find our own peace. And *that's* the big challenge, finding our own peace. Peace begins by quieting the mind, learning that the mind is a good servant, but a terrible master. Quieting the mind has to be practiced, just like learning to play the violin, or throwing the javelin.

My own path has been bumpy, to say the least. I'm not a very serene person. I don't sit still easily. I have a strong drive to get up and get going and get things done. It was very hard for me to accept that it's not what you do, but how you do it that matters. That quality of being is more important than the quality of doing. Especially when there's a war brewing, when the juggernaut of slaughter begins to grind its ugly tracks toward the innocent. That's when the hard questions of nonviolence arise. It's always more fruitful to deal with actual examples than with the-

ory, so let's take the case of Iraq once again. The hard questions arose for Denis Halliday, when he was UN Assistant Secretary General and Director of the Oil-for-Food Program in Iraq in 1998. He concluded that the program he was in charge of, combined with the UN sanctions regime, was not helping the Iraqi people depose their leader; that in fact it was giving Saddam Hussein more power over the population, many of whom were suffering severe malnutrition. So he resigned his job. He didn't just ask to be moved to another position, he resigned, and did so publicly, describing the effects of economic sanctions as “the process of destroying an entire society.” In his words, he had been “instructed to implement a policy that satisfies the definition of genocide: a deliberate policy that has effectively killed well over a million individuals, children and adults.”

All through this time, what I had to learn again and again was to surrender to a power and presence infinitely greater than any I could imagine. “Thy will be done, not mine.” The second big lesson was to let go of any attachment to outcomes. I had to learn that I must forget about what follows from what I do, must accept that *nothing* might follow from what I do, and must do what I do without an expectation of outcome.

The acid test of nonviolence is that there is no rancor left behind afterward.

4. Physical Fitness

This is the easy one, but the one peace activists so often forget. We sit at our desks as if nailed to the keyboard. We drink too much coffee, thinking it gives us energy. Lunch? We grab a sandwich in the office. And all the while what we need is not in here under the fluorescent lights and the air conditioner. It's out there, under the trees, in the grass, under the stars. I know this because when I do take an hour to go for a walk in the woods near my office, I come back with a clear head, with more energy than caffeine could possibly provide, I come back having remembered what it is I'm really trying to do.

To be effective peace workers, we need well cared-for bodies. Bodies that are loved and listened to won't let us down when the stakes are high. And our bodies always tell us what they need, if we will only listen.

What Would Nonviolence Look Like Now?

What if there were not just hundreds or thousands of people trained like that (as there are now), but hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions?

What if they were being trained and training others, ready for crisis situations all over the world?

What if the military respected them and learned from them and cooperated with them?

What if their techniques were introduced into schools?

What if awards were given for this kind of courage, the

courage to risk your life for strangers, possibly the most extreme form of courage in the world?

Well, it's not so far away as you might think. An actual Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) is being formed to create a 2,000-member professional paid corps, along with 4,000

reservists, 5,000 volunteers, and a research division, ready to respond wherever there is conflict around the globe. In three years, the project, operating from offices in St. Paul and San Francisco, has guaranteed endorsements from seven Nobel Peace laureates, established bases in Europe and Asia, and built up a network of participants and potential volunteers from around the world, emphasizing the global South. This new project, if it succeeds, will result in a worldwide peace service capable of intervening in a conflict or incipient conflict more quickly than the UN peacekeeping division and—more importantly—with a different kind of power from that of national militaries.

“While the U.S. government insists there is no alternative to endless war, the Nonviolent Peaceforce is quietly attempting to institutionalize a proven alternative. If it succeeds, the world will have two kinds of standing army to choose from.”⁴

I take myths seriously, and I take modern myths as seriously as ancient ones. If we look at Philip Pullman's prize-winning *Dark Materials Trilogy*, or *The Lord of the Rings*, or even Harry Potter, what we find is young people, people with powerful values, saving the world from darkness. These unarmed heroes have the qualities we have been talking about: they have a vision of how things could be, they believe in themselves, they keep going when things are very bad, and they draw their strength and power from interior rather than exterior sources.

In short, they bring light into this dark world, just as every person in this room can do. It's about replacing the climate of fear, the climate that currently overshadows all international relations, with a climate of trust. And that particular climate change begins at home. □

1. *War Prevention Works: 50 Stories of People Resolving Conflict*, Oxford Research Group, 2001

2. Professor Paul Rogers, Professor of Peace Studies, Bradford University, U.K., Tel: +44 (0)1274 234 185 / Dr. Kevin Clements, Director, International Alert, U.K., Tel: +44 (0) 20 7793 8383 / Dr. Kate Dewes, New Zealand Peace Foundation, Aotearoa, New Zealand, Tel: +64 3 348 1353 / Professor Mitsuo Okamoto, Faculty of Law, Hiroshima Shudo University, Tel: +81 (0)82-848-2121 / Dr. Patricia Lewis, Director, UN Institute for Disarmament Research, Geneva, Tel: +41 22 917 31 86 / Simon Fisher, Responding to Conflict, U.K., Tel: +44 121 415 5641

3. For further details, see *The 'War on Terrorism': 12-Month Audit and Future Strategy Options*, Professor Paul Rogers and Dr. Priscilla Elworthy, Oxford Research Group, September 2002, pp. 15–22.

4. Russell Schoch, *A Conversation with Michael Nagler*, pp. 8–10; also accessible at <www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org>.

Dr. Elworthy meditating at the temple Enryakuji, the head temple of the Tendai Buddhist denomination, on the day before the Kyoto symposium. Her involvement in peace activities starts within.

Buddhism in Europe

As Numbers Grow, Catholics Seek Dialogue

Today, over three million Europeans embrace the Buddhist faith.

The largest number can be found in Germany, France, and Great Britain. In Italy alone, there are about eighty thousand faithful. Buddhist communities can also be found in Eastern Europe—in Hungary, where the Buddhist University of Budapest is subsidized by the regional government, as well as in the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Croatia, and Russia.

The number of Europeans who visit Buddhist centers regularly, a group that includes Catholics, has risen so significantly in recent years that the Roman Catholic Church has made efforts to create a dialogue between the two religions. The president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, (PCID) Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, sent a missive in May of this year, on the occasion of Vesak (the celebration of the historic Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and entrance into nirvana), to the world's Buddhist communities, extending cordial wishes and inviting them to unite with Christians in prayers for peace. "We Christians and Buddhists," he wrote, "have in common the conviction that peace should reside in the hearts of men before it can become a social reality. I am convinced that, persevering in prayer, we will contribute to the progress of peace throughout the world, both now and in the future."

Referring to the pope's proclamation of the year of the rosary, Archbishop Fitzgerald said he found it "a marvelous coincidence" that Buddhists have "a long tradition of using the *mala* for prayer"—the *mala* being prayer beads not unlike the rosary that enable Buddhists to overcome the 108 sinful desires and achieve nirvana.

Dialogue between Christians and Buddhists was a subject of discussion at the conference of the PCID and the Council of the European Bishops' Con-

ferences in Strasbourg held September 19–22, 2002. According to participants, there was general agreement that the pastoral work of the Catholic church needed to develop on two levels: "The first outreach should be to Buddhists that previously were Christians; the second should be to non-European Buddhists that often aren't familiar with the tradition of the church. In this regard, the church is concerned with responding to the expectations of Buddhists, but also with respecting the sensibilities of Christian communities, which sometimes aren't prepared for initiatives to dialogue."

But, above all, participants made it clear that the Christian community, when faced with a Christian's conversion to Buddhism, "even suffering from the decision, must respect the person under all circumstances. At the same time, it must ask itself about the reasons for the decision and recognize the liabilities, in order to draw from them ideas that can be implanted in pastoral work."

With the number of Buddhists in Europe growing so rapidly, the Christian community has thus altered its approach to the religion. The Strasbourg meeting followed a gathering in Rome in 1998, during which the Council of European Episcopal Conferences (CCEE) for the first time considered the matter of Catholic pastoral work on a continent increasingly looking to Buddhism.

Interreligious dialogue between Buddhists and Christians had important moments of growth and unity during similar meetings on the Asian continent. Scholars, members of the clergy, and lay people—about twenty in all—gathered to share the fundamental principles of their doctrine, the aim being to engage in dialogue based on reciprocal familiarity and respect for points of divergence. A meeting in Taiwan in

1994, which took place in a Buddhist monastery, was organized on the theme "Convergence and Divergence in Buddhism and Christianity"; a meeting in India in 1998, held in a Catholic monastery, the theme of which was "Word and Silence in Buddhist and Christian Traditions"; and a meeting in Japan in 2002, at the headquarters of Rishso Kosei-kai, on the Sangha in Buddhism and the church in Christianity.

European Buddhism is changing as well, according to Maria-Angela Falà, president of the Italian Buddhist Union (UBI), who also serves as co-president of the European Buddhist Union (EBU). "There is a need to re-launch the dynamic and the generational suitability in order to find new stimuli and new points of reference," she said.

Falà explained that, in search of common themes on which new projects could be based, a meeting was held in Paris this March "with the representatives of the national unions of the biggest international centers for Buddhism. The prevailing theme was that of education, discussed on two levels: internal education in the Buddhist world, in order to foster familiarity of the various traditions, and thereby find points of convergence for the realization of projects; and external education to promote a familiarity with general Buddhism, that is, a Buddhism that is accepted by all, without making a distinction about the various traditions."

These levels, she said, will be explored in a series of meetings organized by the EBU with representatives of the various traditions. In September of this year, for example, there was to be a meeting in Strasbourg with a Western Buddhist teacher, during which "some strategies for increasing familiarity with the traditions, but on the basis of themes, rather than the history of the different groups, will be sought. All of it will later

be supported by projects on the Internet, being developed in the university environment, and connected with the world Buddhist fellowship."

The integration of Buddhist traditions into the West is also progressing—always on an educational level—in the delegations at UNESCO and in projects of the European Union. As concerns the European constitution, Falà indicated that "we sent notes about the article regarding religions, which has always seemed to us too connected to the idea of the [Catholic] church, and therefore religion in a Christian monotheistic sense. Our notes aim instead to underline the necessity of not always speaking of the church, and of guaranteeing, instead, plurality."

Falà noted that precise figures on the number of European Buddhists were difficult to arrive at because, "unlike in the Christian religion, in Buddhism a register for the number of baptized doesn't exist. Furthermore," she added, "the true and practicing Buddhist, who has been making visits to a Buddhist center assiduously for three or four years, must be distinguished from people who go to the centers every once in a while for a little meditation."

Modern awareness and knowledge of Buddhism may have come to Europe through the first Christian missionaries returning from Asia, but it was psychoanalysts like Erich Fromm and Emile Durkheim, using Zen meditation in

their work, who introduced Buddhism into the culture on a broad, practicable basis. Subsequently, together with serious students of the religion, it was young dropouts from the mainstream journeying to Nepal and India in search of an alternative spirituality who helped spread Buddhism on a popular level throughout the continent.

In the twentieth century, up until World War I, there was a first phase of Buddhism in the West, during which Italian scholars like Giuseppe Tucci took up the study of Buddhism. A period of greater contact and familiarity—with Theravada Buddhism, which was known in the British Empire—then followed. After World War II, through contacts in the Pacific between Japan and the United States, Zen—and beat Zen—became one of the bases of New Age thinking. The most recent stage of Buddhism in the West has been marked by the Tibetan diaspora, the presence of lama missionaries, the rise in prominence of the Dalai Lama, and the emergence of Zen meditation centers.

"Now we should enter into a third generation, but it is still far off," declared Riccardo Venturini, professor of psychophysiology at the University of Rome and himself a practicing Buddhist. Venturini sees Buddhism as having "great potential, but it is not yet able to introduce itself as a cultural force. Any interest in Buddhism is still tainted by pretensions of a psychological or psychotherapeutic type, whereas it would be necessary to make a leap if there is to be a religion of the future."

"In one way or another," Venturini observed, "New Age thinking made attempts at this, but ended up orienting itself to aspects that were too individualistic or commercial, and left aside the search for answers to what we think is wrong with the world. Talking about peace is not enough to comprehend evil."

What is missing "is the awareness of a discipline and of a process of perfection. Instead, everything seems very easy, and free. In New Age thinking, for example, there is the succession of happy ages and unhappy ages that does

Participants in a meeting of European Buddhist teachers held at a Tibetan Buddhist institute in Germany in 1996. They discussed Western approaches to the study of Buddhism.

not appear to depend on our commitment," Venturini said. "It is an expectation that is a little naive. New Age thinking was an interesting experiment that emphasized the cosmic need to unite the natural and the spiritual, but otherwise its answers are a little weak."

Interreligious dialogue could in this sense be "a fertile ground for comparison and growth, given the fact that it involves more mature interlocutors. But here the concept of religious pluralism enters into the game that, on the part of Catholics, is not yet accepted. Dialogue with the Catholic church is not a dialogue between equals, because the church continues to focus on the figure of Jesus as the only savior. Buddhism, instead, could make a big and important contribution, insofar as it knows how to go beyond the concept of religion to arrive at a level in which these various penultimate truths can be unified under a higher truth.

"Buddhism has used the religious vehicle in order to be able to communicate to all, but could be in the mode to reveal something more profound, that goes beyond the very concept of religion," Venturini said. "Religions are ways of access that sometimes get in

Followers of various Buddhist traditions gathering at the temple Zenshinji in Scaramuccia, Italy, to celebrate Vesak.

the way of the road itself: there is the middle but not the process."

In any case, Buddhist communities in Italy continue to develop. On May 25, 2003, in Orvieto, a province situated be-

tween Rome and Florence, 150 people gathered at the temple Zenshinji in Scaramuccia to celebrate Vesak. Among them were followers of the Zen, Theravada, Vajrayana, and Ch'an Buddhist traditions. Many were young people who

had learned about Buddhism through meditation.

"It's the first time that we are participating in Vesak," said Pierluigi, one of the participants. "We have been visiting the center for several months. What brought us to Buddhism was the fact that its approach was pretty much atheist. Buddhism in fact doesn't even ask whether God exists. The problem is much more interior: it is happiness here and now, not from others or to please a god that, if he exists, must judge you. You judge yourself on your own, let's say."

For Emmanuel, another participant, Buddhism offered "a more coherent vision of reality, through which you understand what are the essential things for your life, and you learn to not have an attachment to the futile things. I arrived at Buddhism by chance," he explained. "I found in my hand a book, and I noticed that I had a tendency to see things in the same light as what it was saying. I had found a confirmation."

Nadia, on the other hand, practiced Zen meditation, which she had first learned about from her attendance at a martial arts center. "Our teacher taught us meditation," she said, "and when I quit aikido a year and half ago, I still wanted to practice Zen. I didn't think to myself, 'I want to become Buddhist,' but 'I want to practice Zen.' And after that, things happened on their own."

To a question regarding what she found in Buddhism that she did not find in Catholicism, Nadia responded: "I don't want to say that I have renounced Catholicism. The difference between the religions is much more in the form than in the content; Buddhism and Catholicism have many things in common. Instinctively, I follow Buddhism, but I continue to be deeply connected to the idea of God. I have also talked about it with my master, according to whom Buddhism and Catholicism are compatible. I don't feel the obligation to abandon my religion. For me the important thing is to practice Zen, but I don't feel like I am in a contradictory position because of it." □

Lucia Conti

Religious Freedom in the World

Despite the countless efforts of movements, organizations, and individuals to spread the seeds of interreligious dialogue, many still continue to suffer the tragic consequences of religious persecution all over the world.

Because of their faith, almost nine hundred Catholics were killed and one hundred thousand put in jail during the course of 2002. These are only some of the figures given during the presentation of the Report on Religious Freedom in the World produced by the Italian section of the Roman Catholic pontifical international organization Aid to the Church in Need (ACN).

During the presentation of the report to the foreign media in Rome, on June 26, the organizers explained that the criterion adopted in writing the report was that of providing for each country a broad outline of current facts and any legal changes that may have occurred during 2002. The sources of information were direct witnesses (where possible), official documents, articles from news agencies, newspapers, and magazines, and documentation provided by various organizations involved in human rights. "The uniqueness of this analysis," declared Attilio Tamburrini, director of ACN Italy, "consists in the fact that a Catholic institution is reporting on the respect of the freedom of worship that affects believers also from other religious denominations, because the right to religious freedom is one of mankind's natural rights."

The report consists of 450 pages examining the state of religious freedom in 190 countries throughout the world, with a map dividing the world into six main areas. The socialist-communist countries are marked in red, the Islamic areas in green, the Buddhist or Hindu areas in yellow, and the areas of the world with restrictive legislation or local forms of pressure in gray. An additional

area cross-hatched with brown lines refers to those countries with ongoing local conflicts.

There are, for example, countries such as Sudan, in the Islamic area, where, in addition to the persecution of all non-Muslims, devastating religious and ethnic strife, which has already caused two million deaths and four million refugees, has been underway for the past twenty years. According to the July 11 report of the World Evangelical Alliance, "The extremist interpretation of Islam and the imposition of the *shari'a*—Islamic law—upon the entire population, including the Animists and Christians in the south, is one of the key factors in the ongoing war."

In fact, in 1983 the Islamic government of North Sudan established the *shari'a* as the law of the state. This led to violent clashes with the southern part of the country, which has a Christian and Animist majority population, and which refused this provision. The non-Muslim population of the south continues to be attacked, bombed, raped, arrested, and murdered or left to die of hunger. "The church tried to establish a dialogue," said Father Justo Lacunzabaldá, African missionary and rector of the Pontifical Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, "but it is in a situation of persecution, in which *shari'a* is the dominant law. This led to the persecution of thousands of Christians. As long as religion is manipulated and imposed upon others, there will be conflicts and war." According to the report, during the course of 2002 some steps in the direction of peace were made. But this did not stop the bombing, the violence, the ransacking, and the destruction of entire villages in the south, not to mention the slavery of children, which continues despite the many appeals of the international community. According to the report, many kidnapped

children are forced to convert to Islam. "Slavery is still a daily practice in my country," said Monsignor Macram Maw Cassis, bishop of El Obeid, to the local offices of ACN. "These are tools used by the government in Khartoum to erase the identity of the African population in the country and to gradually Islamize the entire Sudan. The fundamentalist regime uses all means to achieve this goal. . . . We don't want to discredit Islam. The church is open to dialogue with its Muslim brothers and sisters. But Muslim fundamentalism is not a religion, but rather a political and economic ideology."

The situation of religious freedom, according to the report, is not much better in other African countries. In Nigeria, for example, the law of the state guarantees freedom of religion, and this right is respected by the government. Problems arise locally, however, since *shari'a* was introduced in twelve states of the Nigerian Confederation and this exacerbated the local conflicts between the two main religious groups of the country, Christians and Muslims. In less than three years, ethnic and religious strife reportedly caused ten thousand deaths. In particular, according to the report, the year 2002 was marked by an increase in episodes of religious intolerance, such as the threat to destroy fourteen churches pronounced by the government of the State of Zamfara, which first introduced *shari'a* in November 1999. Government officials argue that in that state there are too many Christian places of worship. Other African countries in which serious religious persecution or acts of religious intolerance were reported include Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Egypt. In other countries in the Mediterranean area, there is an increased threat of Islamic terrorism, which was responsible for the violent attacks in Tunisia and Morocco.

The Asian continent remains a part of the world in which there are frequent episodes of religious intolerance, especially toward the Christian minority. On the one hand, it counts countries with an Islamic majority and with a number of meaningful apertures, of

which Qatar is a happy example, but there are also countries where Qur'anic law and Muslim fundamentalism also physically threaten the very existence of the "infidels," such as Pakistan and the Philippines. In Saudi Arabia, thirteen Christians were arrested in 2001 because of their faith and are still in prison, and the Shi'ite minority—one million faithful—are the object of religious discrimination on the part of the government that banned all Shi'ite religious texts from the country. In Indonesia, there is a strong thrust toward an increasingly intolerant "Islamization" of the country. The apparent stability of the government led by President Megawati Sukarnoputri left room for destabilizing forces—the army and radical Islamic groups. The October 12 terrorist attack that caused the death of 188 civilians was in some ways a consequence of this attitude, although we must recall that several efforts are being undertaken by the international community to curb this trend. Such is the case of the interreligious forum held on the island of Flores in April and attended by Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, which launched a campaign in support of interreligious understanding.

On the other hand, there are also socialist and communist states in Asia, where minority religious groups are subjected to acts of violence allegedly perpetrated by the authorities and religious extremists.

In Northeast Asia, over one hundred thousand Christian prisoners reportedly are held in North Korean concentration camps, with the addition of at least two hundred in Chinese jails. "The People's Republic of China," said Father Bernardo Cervellera, director of Asia News, "issued new rules for bishops and communities, approved with the consent of the office for religious affairs, that subject the life and the very heart of the church to political decisions and to a 'democratic' methodology that may destroy the apostolic and sacramental dimension of the church. . . . It is possible that alongside these new regulations—unacceptable for Catho-

lics—there will be a surge of new persecutions."

Since the apparent increasing imposition throughout the country of Hindu fundamentalist culture by the Bharatiya Janata Party, India has registered mounting intolerance of other religious groups in the country. A process of "communalism" is underway, as described by Monsignor Vincent Michael Concessao, archbishop of Delhi and first vice-president of the Indian Episcopal Conference. In August 2002 the bishop of Mumbai, Ivan Cardinal Dias, reported on various forms of religious discrimination against Catholic schools in the State of Maharashtra. Violent clashes between Muslims and Hindus were registered in the Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh regions, where, in February and March 2002, over one thousand Muslims were killed. Also, the Kashmir clashes between Muslim guerrillas and Indian security forces often cause the deaths of many civilians, as reported by the Vatican daily *L'Osservatore Romano* of June 17–18.

In Europe, religious freedom experiences serious restrictions, especially in former communist countries such as Byelorussia—where President Alexander Lukashenko decreed a law on religious freedom defined by many as "the most repressive in Europe," which recognizes the Orthodox church as the official state religion—and Ukraine. In these countries, the Catholic church and other denominations reportedly continue to suffer violence and discrimination.

In the Americas, the situation is particularly serious in Cuba, due to the presence of Fidel Castro's totalitarian regime, as well as in Venezuela and in Colombia, where revolutionary armed forces are active.

The ACN was founded in 1947 by Father Werenfried van Straaten to help refugees and exiles expelled from communist countries. It stands out as one of the leading defenders of religious freedom, with about six thousand projects implemented each year, some of which are also ecumenical. □

Eva Ruth Palmieri

A Fantastic Castle

by Gene Reeves

The goal of the Buddha Dharma is not a static achievement, a place where one can rest permanently. It is a way of life and a never-ending challenge.

While most of chapter 7 of the Lotus Sutra tells the story of the Buddha Excellent in Great Penetrating Wisdom, discussed in the previous issue of DHARMA WORLD, the chapter gets its title from a parable told by Shakyamuni Buddha late in the story—the parable of the magical, fantastic castle.

The Parable

Once upon a time there was a very bad road that was many, many miles long; steep, wild, and difficult; deserted and far from where anyone lived—a truly frightening place. A large group of people wanted to go along that road to a

place where there were unusual treasures. This group was led by a guide who was knowing and wise and who knew the difficult road well—where it was open and where it was closed, for example—and who had considerable experience leading groups that wanted to go across that terrible road.

Along the way, the group became tired and weary and said to the guide, “We are utterly exhausted, and afraid, too, and cannot go any farther. Since the road before us goes on and on, we want to turn back.”

The guide, a man of many skillful means, thought to himself, “What a shame that these people want to give up on the great and unusual treasures and turn back.” Having thought about it in this way, he used his skill in appropriate means to conjure up a beautiful and wonderful castle that appeared about twelve miles down the difficult road. Then he said to the group, “Do not be afraid! You must not turn back! Here is a great castle in which you can stop and rest and do what you want. If you enter this castle, you will soon be completely relaxed. Later, when you are able to go on, you should leave this castle.”

The hearts of the exhausted group were filled with joy and they exclaimed, “Now at last we can escape from this awful road and find some rest and comfort.” Then the group went into the fantastic castle and, thinking they had been rescued from their difficulties, soon became calm and comfortable.

Later, seeing that the group was rested and no longer afraid or weary, the guide had the fantastic castle disappear. And he said to the group, “We have to go now, the place of the treasures is not so far. A little while ago I created this large fantastic castle just so that you could have a temporary place to rest.”

Nirvana

While there are several important things we might learn from this story, its central message is quite clear: while we may think that nirvana, a condition of complete rest and

Gene Reeves is currently studying, teaching, and writing on Buddhism in Tokyo. A consultant and teacher at Rissho Kosei-kai, he was recently a research fellow at Rikkyo University and prior to that retired from the University of Tsukuba. Before coming to Japan in 1989, Dr. Reeves was the head of Meadville/Lombard Theological School and professorial lecturer in the Divinity School of the University of Chicago.

quiet, is our final goal; it is not. While we may think that final nirvana is salvation, that is only a useful illusion from which we need to move on. According to the Lotus Sutra, it is always an illusion to think that we have arrived and have no more to do, to think that if we reach some kind of experience of nirvana, we have reached our final goal.

Similarly, while we may think that the Buddha entered final nirvana, becoming extinct, that too is only a useful illusion, as the Buddha is working still, enabling us to live and work with him to save the living. In chapter 16 we can read:

In order to liberate the living,
As a skillful means I appear to enter nirvana.
Yet truly I am not extinct.
I am always here teaching the Dharma.

The Buddha has appropriately used teachings, including the teaching of his own final nirvana, to help people along their roads.

In part, the message of this story is the same message as that of other parables—it's about the importance of skillful means used appropriately. But here the focus is not on skillful means in general, as it is, for example, in the parable of the burning house and the three vehicles or the parable of the poor son and rich father. Here the focus is on the particular teaching of nirvana, one of the most important concepts of classical Buddhism.

Literally, "nirvana" means "extinction." It was often thought to be the state of awakening achieved by Shakyamuni Buddha, a state in which all illusions and all karma that leads to rebirth are extinguished. While it was interpreted in various ways by various Buddhist philosophers and schools, nirvana is often said to be the goal of Buddhists or of the Buddhist path. In this story, however, we are to see that nirvana, or at least that one understanding of nirvana, is not to be taken as a final goal at all. Quite the opposite—to take the magically created castle as the goal would be to remain in a permanent state of delusion, thinking one had arrived at one's destination when one had not.

Yet this does not mean that the teaching of nirvana is unimportant, a "mere" skillful means. To the contrary, here we are to understand that if the guide had not been able to conjure up a castle in which the travelers could rest, they would not have been able to continue toward their goal. The magical castle was vitally useful. In other words, it was not merely useful in the sense that it happened to be convenient but not really necessary; it, or something like it, was necessary in order for the travelers to be able to move ahead.

The Lotus Sutra is sometimes said to disparage the shravaka way and its emphasis on nirvana. Some passages

in the sutra can be cited to support this view. For example, in chapter 2 we can read:

For those with dull minds who want lesser teachings
Who greedily cling to existence,
Who, after encountering countless buddhas,
Still do not follow the profound and wonderful way,
And are tormented by numerous sufferings—
For them I teach nirvana.

But such references are rare and, while they are one way of looking at the matter, they do not represent the overall view of the Lotus Sutra, which is basically that shravaka teachings are an important step along the Buddha Way. Already in chapter 1 we can find:

By various causal explanations
And innumerable parables,
[The buddhas] illuminate the Buddha Dharma
And open understanding of it to all.

If any are suffering
Or weary from age, disease, or death,
For them they teach nirvana
To bring all suffering to an end.

If any are happy,
Having made offerings to buddhas,
And are devoted to seeking the superior Dharma,
For them they teach the pratyekabuddha way.

If any children of the Buddha
Have carried out various practices,
And seek supreme wisdom,
For them they teach the pure way.

To be sure, there is here the traditional ranking in which the bodhisattva way is higher than the pratyekabuddha or shravaka ways, but the shravaka way certainly is not belittled or disparaged—it brings suffering to an end. Expressed in different ways in different places within the sutra, this idea that the shravaka vehicle is one of the important teachings of the Buddha is very common.

For those who sought to be shravakas he taught the Dharma of the four truths for overcoming birth, old age, disease, and death, and attaining nirvana. For those who sought to be pratyekabuddhas he taught the teaching of the twelve causes and conditions. And for the bodhisattvas he taught the six practices (often called "perfections") to lead them to attain supreme awakening and all-inclusive wisdom.

Thus it is also quite common to find references to this shravaka nirvana as "incomplete nirvana," or as what shravakas "think is nirvana." Not surprisingly, we find contrast-

ing terms as well, such as “ultimate nirvana.” At one point in chapter 7, the Buddha says, “the nirvana that you have attained is not the real one!” This implies, of course, that there is a greater “nirvana” of some kind. This greater nirvana is often characterized in the Lotus Sutra as “Buddha-wisdom.” The shravaka nirvana, the Buddha says, is “only close to Buddha-wisdom.” Sometimes, the text goes further, declaring that real nirvana is a matter of being a buddha. Thus, at the end of chapter 7 we find:

When I know they have reached nirvana
And have all become arhats,
Then I gather everyone together
And preach the real Dharma.

Through their powers of skillful means,
Buddhas make distinctions and teach three vehicles.
But there is really only one Buddha-vehicle.
It is for a resting place that the other two are taught.

Now I teach the truth for you:
What you have reached is not extinction.
To gain a buddha’s comprehensive wisdom,
You have to make a great and vigorous effort.

When you have gained comprehensive wisdom,
And the ten powers of the Buddha Dharma,
And acquired the thirty-two features,
Then that is real extinction.

The buddhas, as guides,
Teach nirvana to provide rest.
But seeing that you are rested,
They lead you on to Buddha-wisdom.

Thus, what is taught in the Lotus Sutra, and in this parable of the fantastic castle, is that some experience of nirvana that leads you to think you have accomplished all that you need to accomplish is always an illusion. Yet, while it is an illusion, it is not necessarily a bad illusion, since, by providing a resting place along the way, it can enable people to pursue the greater goal of becoming a buddha.

Not Clinging to Teachings

As we said, the idea of nirvana is a centrally important one for many Buddhists. That it is treated in this parable not as something ultimately important, but as an aid to continuing on the path, can also be said of any Buddhist teaching whatsoever. That is, the fact that the Lotus Sutra encourages us to not take this idea too seriously can be applied to any teaching. All Buddhist teachings are for the purpose of saving living beings, but if we cling to them as though they themselves are the goal, they can become more of a hindrance than a help to our continuing on the path. We should welcome the Buddha’s teachings with joy

and make use of them in our lives, but we should not cling to them as though they were the goal.

The Way Is Long and Difficult

The Lotus Sutra provides assurance of our buddha-nature. It teaches that all will follow the bodhisattva way to some degree, however minimal. But it does not say that this way will be easy, or that it will make our lives easy. It promises a happy life, but not a life of comfort and ease. Especially when compared with remaining in a fantastic castle, continuing on the long, steep, and arduous road is difficult, and even fraught with danger.

Both patient endurance of hardship and perseverance are required, two of the six practices of bodhisattvas. In Buddhism this world is known as the “*saha* world,” that is, the world in which suffering has to be endured. Nichiren understood this all too well. And because the Lotus Sutra taught him to anticipate persecution and suffering, he was able to endure much suffering and cope with the problems that confronted him.

Leaving a resting place or giving up some comfort does not, of course, mean that we should all the time be feeling miserable. The point is that by resting you gain both strength and joy for pursuing the difficult way.

Resting Places

Resting places can be illusions and escapes, but they may be necessary. Without them many people, perhaps ourselves among them, might not be able to continue on the way. We should not, then, be too critical of resting places, especially of the resting places of others.

What is problematic, this parable teaches, is not the mere use of resting places. Holidays and vacations, “coffee breaks” and “breathers,” “time-outs” and “half-times,” “afternoon teas,” and “weekends” can all play a very important role both in sports and in human living. Without them we might become exhausted, or, at the very least, perform poorly.

A rest stop along the highway, like an inn beside the road in earlier times, can be a welcome sight, even a near necessity for weary travelers. But, just as we would think it highly inappropriate for anyone to seek to occupy a highway rest stop or a roadside inn permanently, so it is with the bodhisattva way. No matter how much we accomplish, the road always lies ahead as well as behind.

Believing or feeling that one is saved, believing that one has reached a resting place—some personal nirvana—is always in part an illusion. When the people in this parable enter the fantastic castle, they think they have been saved, they think their journey is over. But such endings are always also beginnings. When the weary travelers in this parable return to the road refreshed and renewed, in a sense they are making a new beginning, a fresh start.

The founder and first president of Rissho Kosei-kai

was Nikkyo Niwano. The title of the English translation of his autobiography is *Lifetime Beginner*, a title that well expresses this aspect of the bodhisattva way.

The goal of the Buddha Dharma is not a static achievement, a place where one can rest permanently. It is a way of life and a never-ending challenge. Awakening—following the Buddha Way—is not merely an end; it is a way that is an end; not merely a destination, but a path that is also a destination; it is a commencement, as well as a con-

clusion—a responsibility as much as, or more than, it is an achievement.

The Lotus Sutra teaches us that we should never become complacent and satisfied with any level of awakening, such as some great experience of nirvana, but always pursue the Buddha Way, by seeking to deepen and broaden our wisdom, strengthen and broaden our compassion, and improve our practice.

To be continued



The opening part of chapter 7 of the Lotus Sutra, from one of the eight scrolls of the sutra copied in the twelfth century. Important Cultural Property. Nara National Museum.

A Pliant Heart and Mind

by Nichiko Niwano

*Patience is a quality that helps us make our way
through this world in which we live.*

Put simply, cultivating the heart and mind means developing a pliant heart and mind—what we might call mental freedom. This kind of flexibility allows us to stop being preoccupied with differences between ourselves and others and to come to understand our interdependence.

Attachment to things is the cause of suffering. When we understand that everything is impermanent and devoid of self, our hearts and minds become flexible and we can become free as attachment falls away. This is the state described in the phrase “nirvana is eternally tranquil.” Buddhism calls the state in which defilements have disappeared “nirvana.” In today’s parlance, this is mental freedom. Since the Buddha’s wisdom is infinite, we finite beings can never plumb it. All we can do is approach the infinite by knowing our shortcomings and being humble and pliant.

In a verse in one of the sutras Shakyamuni says, in effect, “Gentleness lifts the yoke from the ox.” Pliancy leads to gentleness. Lifting the yoke from the tired ox symbolizes releasing the yoke of suffering from human beings. This verse also conveys compassion for the ox. The ox has worked hard all day and must be tired. In the compassion for the ox that leads to removing its yoke we sense the depth of Shakyamuni’s thoughtfulness. The phrase “Gentleness lifts the yoke from the ox” conveys empathy with the life of the ox—the life of which we all partake.

Without gentleness we cannot feel compassion for the ox. This warm consideration is important, reminding us that we must not be rigid. We often say, “So-and-so is always smiling; what a gentle person.” Surely what makes us say this is not just the fact that he or she wears a gentle expression, but that we sense the person’s compassion for others and empathy with diverse forms of life. This is true pliancy, true gentleness.

Enjoyment through Patience

Patience is an important quality that helps us make our way through this world we live in. Patience leads to a gentle heart and mind. Patience means striving to bear up under persecution and humiliation, suffering and disappointment, not succumbing to anger but remaining mild

and gentle. It also means striving not to give way to arrogance or euphoria when praised by others or when brimming over with happiness.

When we talk about patience we conjure up an image of gritting our teeth and grimly enduring, but essentially patience is enjoyable. The religious and moral philosopher Ishida Baigan (1685–1744), founder of Sekimon Shingaku (a Japanese movement that syncretized the Confucian philosophy of Wang Yang-ming [1472–1529] with native Shinto and Buddhist thought), said that ideally, patience means ceasing to be conscious of “enduring” or “putting up with” things, accepting this rather as an entirely natural part of life. Enduring is not meant to evoke a sense of pathos or tragedy; it is meant to be done with good cheer and enjoyment. When we awaken to the absolute Truth and Dharma of the Buddha, there is no more grimly enduring with gritted teeth.

Chapter 14 of the Lotus Sutra is titled “A Happy Life.”

Nichiko Niwano is president of Rissho Kosei-kai and the Niwano Peace Foundation, a president of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), and vice-chairman of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan).

“Happy” connotes not just serenity, but also the forbearance that accepts all things. Enduring with good cheer and enjoyment means perceiving all difficulties as trials bestowed by the Buddha. It means seeing difficulties as vehicles through which the Buddha is trying to teach us something, and dealing with difficulties in the realization that it is precisely these difficulties that enable us to savor the spice of life.

In “A Happy Life” we read: “If a bodhisattva-mahasattva abides in a state of patience, is gentle and agreeable, is neither hasty nor overbearing, and his mind [is] imperturbed; if, moreover, he has no laws by which to act, but sees all things in their reality, nor proceeds along the undivided way—this is termed a bodhisattva-mahasattva’s sphere of

can adopt the approach advised by Ishida Baigan, we will no longer need to think in terms of “patience,” “forbearance,” or “endurance.” If we attain that state of mind, this world becomes the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light, a place of true *joie de vivre*.

“Wisdom Is My Yoke and Plow”

The Buddha said, “Wisdom is my yoke and plow.” Wisdom is the working of knowledge of the Truth and the Dharma, the opening of the eye of buddha-knowledge, the realization of the law of transience. To say “Wisdom is my yoke and plow” is to say “Realization of the law of transience is my yoke and plow.” Wisdom means seeing—and accepting—things just as they are (“things in their reality”).

When we look with the eye of wisdom, we see that everything around us is in ceaseless flux, and that all things are linked and interdependent. In short, we perceive the working of the laws of impermanence and lack of an abiding self. This is “things in their reality.”

If we are preoccupied with the phenomena that directly impinge on us, we lose sight of their essential nature. Conversely, if we are preoccupied with seeing the essential nature of things we tend to belittle phenomena. It is important to strike a balance, neither belittling phenomena nor losing sight of the essence of things.

Seeing only the surface of things, we alternate between emotional highs and lows. “My kids don’t listen to a thing I say.” “My husband thinks of nothing but having a good time.” “She is totally selfish.”

Such complaints arise because we

are preoccupied with the surface of things. What we need to do is guard against self-centeredness, sensing and considering the other person’s feelings. Instead of making up our minds after seeing only one side of things, we need to view things in a multifaceted, overall, fundamental way. Looking at the big picture is the first step toward acquiring wisdom.

If we can see and accept all things just as they are, we realize that we are all given life, and this totally turns our lives around. Instead of constantly complaining, we find ourselves able to give thanks for everything. Seeing things just as they are is extremely difficult. It is important, though, to liberate ourselves from attachment and to develop gentle, pliant, mild hearts and minds. This leads naturally to wisdom. □

Rev. Niwano attending the memorial service of the 750th anniversary of the death of Zen master Dogen at the temple Eihei-ji in Fukui Prefecture in September 2002.

action.” When we are able to give thanks for hardship, we have overcome it; and when that happens, a gentler, richer humanity is cultivated.

As chapter 10 of the Lotus Sutra, “A Teacher of the Law,” says, “The robe of the Tathagata is the gentle and forbearing heart.” This “gentle and forbearing heart,” I believe, constitutes the backbone of a Buddhist.

The world never conforms to our wishes. Nevertheless, we struggle to make things go our way, trying to bend others to our will and acquire everything we want. This is the source of the greater part of suffering. If we accept that the world is intrinsically contrary, we will be able to endure inconvenience as something completely natural rather than growing angry.

Caught up in reality, we tend to forget patience. If we

Meeting Adversity with a Calm Heart

by Kim Tae Hee

On May 26, 2002, a Rissho Kosei-kai member in South Korea spoke to the organization's Busan chapter about the personal difficulties that at last led her to gratefully accept the Buddha's teachings.

First, let me express my deep appreciation for the opportunity given to me, thanks to the grace of the Buddha, to address you all despite my backwardness in religious training, on this happy day of the enshrinement of the statue of the Buddha at the Busan chapter.

I joined Rissho Kosei-kai eight years ago, thanks to the guidance of Shin Hyun Jeong, who at the time had just turned over the management of her beauty parlor to me. At that time, my life was very hard and I was exhausted. My heart had withered inside me to the point where I felt it was a chore just to go on living. I was adrift in a hellish life when Ms. Shin invited me to try coming along to Rissho Kosei-kai. I felt I had no need of faith, and rebuffed her curtly.

She did not give up trying, however, and thanks to her efforts to induce me to lead myself to a religious life, I finally managed to cross the threshold of Rissho Kosei-kai. At first I felt that there were too many differences between

Korean customs and the organization's ceremonies and routines, and I determined never to come back. But Ms. Shin invited me one more time, saying that a really wonderful teacher was coming over from Japan, and so I took part in a two-day lecture course. Thanks to the training I received, the misunderstandings and diffidence I had experienced regarding Rissho Kosei-kai vanished naturally. After that, I became able to perform the installation ceremony for the focus of ancestor veneration, and to take part together with the chapter leader in a week-long intensive sutra recitation at the Busan chapter. At that time, my thoughts and prayers were only, "Why do I have to go on living in pain every day? What awful sins did I amass in my former lives to deserve this? I am completely exhausted in mind and body, and I just wish the Buddha would take pity on me and let me die."

In 1974, I was working as a nurse in the Busan Army Hospital and married one of the patients who had been under my care for wounds in both legs that he had received during the Vietnam War. One day he started asking me to marry him, and in the beginning I refused repeatedly, but I could see that he was so intent on marrying me that it was having negative consequences for his health. Feeling that this could only be a manifestation of his love for me, and also because at that time I was hoping to become independent of my parents and could only imagine that this was possible by marrying, I said yes and we were married.

In my family I have one sister and one brother, and I am the elder sister. Thanks to my father, who worked as a public official, we never had to suffer financially, but my father was exceedingly strict, and under his iron hand I had no free choices and no leeway. Everything we did had to be in accordance with his wishes. When I reached puberty, my feelings of rebellion and my clashes with my father became worse. Looking back now, it seems to me that my feelings of rebellion against my father and desire to make my own decisions, together with feelings of pity rather than of affection toward my husband-to-be, were

Kim Tae Hee is a member of the Busan chapter of Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea.

the strongest emotions fueling my decision to marry. In any event, as our married life began things did not progress as I had hoped. My husband suffered from physical handicaps, and he took his stress out on me in the form of insults and violence. At the time I assumed that looking after my husband's parents was normal filial behavior, so I persuaded him to let us live with his parents. However, because my father-in-law drank to excess every day and was addicted to gambling, our main concern was how to scrape together enough money to live on from day to day and support his habits. I could not consult with my own family because I had ignored their opposition to my marriage, telling them that I would be happy, so I had to bear my troubles alone. By the tenth year of my marriage, however, I decided to divorce my husband, even though it meant leaving behind our three children. Thus started a life that for me was completely centered on amassing enough money so that I could be independent and live together with my children again.

I tried running an unlicensed food stall, which was forcibly removed by the authorities. I managed a street kiosk, and even took a temporary job overseas in Saipan. At that time, I held a grudge against my husband and father-in-law for ruining my life. I felt pessimistic about my luck, and while blaming the world for my troubles, I became more and more unpleasant myself. Just as I had run through my hard-won savings and thus had to give up my dream of being reunited with my children, I came into contact with Rishso Kosei-kai.

Little by little, I began to give heed to the teaching of the Buddha, started learning something about the Lotus Sutra and the doctrines of Buddhism, and in my own way tried to make the words of Truth my own. Among the teachings was the one that said, "All phenomena proceed from your self," but this was something I could not accept at all. I made acceptance of this idea my goal, however, and devoted myself to it every day. In time I realized that the reason things did not go well for me was to be found in myself, and I endeavored to entrust myself to the Buddha. Fortunately, my son, with whom I had not had any contact for ten years, came to find me and called me "Mother." After that, I was able to meet with my daughters, as well. Even though I did not have any money, the Buddha enabled me to gradually come back into contact with my children. At about this time, the location of the Busan chapter changed, and as a result I was no longer able to engage in training at the chapter, but I was able to faithfully continue my devotional exercises at home. Also, at about this time my former husband's father passed away, and thanks to the teaching I had received, I was able to engage sincerely in devotional services for repentance.

The Buddha teaches that "life is a sea of sorrow." Whenever my life became a series of continual troubles and sufferings, I would receive guidance from the chapter leader in the light of the Buddha's teaching at hoza group coun-

seling sessions, but when the chapter moved, I had no place to go and engage in devotional training, so I felt very lonely. However, when I heard that work on the interior furnishings of the new chapter had begun, I was filled with truly happy emotions.

On February 1, 2001, Rev. Hasegawa, head of education affairs of Rishso Kosei-kai in Tokyo, visited Busan and the new chapter was opened. Starting in October 2001, Mrs. Lee, chapter leader of Rishso Kosei-kai of Korea, started visiting Busan, together with others from the main office in Seoul, and took part in devotional training with us in Busan. It felt to me as if I were passing through a dark tunnel and coming out into a bright light. I learned how it felt to have the Dharma fall like rain into my parched spirit, and how to recognize the truth of the teachings. I became filled with the joy of having been truly saved.

I was very impressed to see how Mrs. Lee, who had come all the way to Busan from faraway Seoul in order to assist in the dissemination work of the Busan chapter, gave her all to help bring even just one more person into contact with the Buddha's teaching, and felt that I would also like to try my best to help with dissemination work. I had also come to feel that coming into contact with Rishso Kosei-kai had been a really good thing for me.

Koreans do not have the custom of installing a family Buddhist altar as a focus of ancestor veneration, and my family was opposed to the idea, so at first I temporarily did my devotional practice at the chapter. However, I thought it was now time to make arrangements to worship at home, so I set out on my own, leaving the home of my parents, who had taken me in. On December 2, 2001, the Buddha's will allowed me to hold an invocation for the focus of faith and devotion in my own home. However, as a result of weakened health my father suddenly was hospitalized. When I asked Mrs. Lee for guidance, she said, "This is an opportunity to perform a little filial duty, don't you think?" In keeping with her advice, once again I headed home, bringing my focus for ancestor veneration and faithful devotion with me. I was worried that my family would not like me engaging in this kind of worship, but when I explained to them about the Buddha and our ancestors, they did not object. Up until then, most of my conversations with my father had ended in clashes of opinion, but I had finally become able to actually listen to his ideas. I made an effort to reach out to my father with love in my heart, and as a result he also changed. I cared for him while he was in the hospital, and for the very first time in his life he said the words "thank you" to me.

Last year I took part in a special training session at Rishso Kosei-kai of Korea in Seoul, and in order to put into practice what I learned there, I visited Tokyo, where my former husband was living. He had always done his best to try and have my parents approve of our marriage, but he was not able to fulfill his wish. On meeting him again, I was able to sincerely repent of the fact that I had not really been

Ms. Kim making a testimonial speech at the Busan chapter of Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea on May 26, 2002.

able to give him enough love while we were together. He accepted my apology with a calm expression, and this gave me so much inner relief that I felt like a different person.

Suddenly one day, my younger daughter's attitude toward me turned cold and she stopped speaking to me. I was quite worried, but tried to consider the past with a cool head to see what might be causing this. I had become pregnant with my younger daughter just when I was suffering the worst troubles of my life, and I thought many times that I should have an abortion, but I could not screw up enough courage to go to the hospital to do so. Soon enough my mother-in-law realized that I was pregnant, and so I went ahead and had the baby. I had to go right back to work after she was born, so the task of raising her fell mostly to my mother-in-law. When I thought about it, we were not very affectionate toward my daughter, and when she was little had caused her various kinds of difficulties. Thanks to the teaching I received from Rissho Kosei-kai, however, I was able to reflect on how I had been relating to my children in each situation, and so through the agency of my children I was able to review and reform my own attitudes and actions relating to being a mother. Now my younger daughter and I are good friends, and our lives are brimful of love and affection.

In 2002, I was to hold a memorial service for all my ancestors at my family home, with the participation of many of my friends and colleagues. I was a little uneasy about how my father would take this, but when I honestly explained my feelings to him, he even decided to take part

in the service, which he attended with good grace until the end. To me it seemed a real miracle that my father, who had always opposed me and called me a bad-luck child, would take part together with me in venerating our ancestors. Strong feelings of gratitude welled up inside me, and the bad feelings I had harbored toward my father flew away. A deep sense of the parent-child bond filled me with joy, and I am now able to feel that I want to continue to do the very best I can for my father.

My life has thus changed in many ways. Through the agency of Rissho Kosei-kai, by serving in the training hall or attending hoza sessions, I have looked into my heart and also encountered the feelings of others. This was thanks to the opportunity I was given to learn the lesson, "All phenomena are the Buddha's teaching aimed at enhancing oneself." Having become aware of the law of transience and that "All things are interrelated and interdependent," as well as that "If you change your heart, other people also will change," I have become someone who is not swayed by the events happening around me. Although I still have a mountain of problems to deal with in life, I am now able to meet them with a calm heart, secure in the feeling that the Buddha and my ancestors are watching over me.

I hope to be able to continue with my devotional training and, with an awareness of the Dharma, to be able to lead many others to true salvation through the Buddha's teachings. I pledge not to waver from bodhisattva practice, and thank you for letting me speak to you, although I am far from adequate as a speaker. □

Shakyamuni Holding a Lotus Flower

by Takeshi Kuno

At a small temple in southwestern Tokyo are found exquisite statues of Shakyamuni, Maha-Kashyapa, and Ananda carved by the sculptor Genkei, together with statues of over five hundred arhats.

The main image of Rakanji, Tathagata Shakyamuni, and the statues of his two major disciples, Ananda (left) and Maha-Kashyapa (right). In front of the two disciples are statues of the bodhisattvas Monju (left) and Fugen (right). Photos courtesy of Gohyaku Rakanji.

The statue of seated Shaka Nyorai (Tathagata Shakyamuni) is the main image of Tennenzan Gohyaku Rakanji (Temple of the Five Hundred Arhats), also known as Rakanji, in the Meguro district of Tokyo. The image, portrayed in the full-lotus position, is 280-cm high, has its right elbow bent, and lightly holds a lotus flower in its right hand, while the left arm falls in front of the body and the left hand is held palm-upward on the lap. The facial features are firm with a hint of a smile playing across the lips, while the body is appropriately well-fleshed. On its left stands Maha-Kashyapa, and on its right, Ananda with his palms joined in the respect position. The form of Shakyamuni depicted here is known as "the Buddha holding a flower and smiling faintly."

On one occasion, Shakyamuni was preaching the Dharma before his followers on Vulture Peak. Silently he took up a lotus flower and twirled it gently in front of him. None of his disciples comprehended what he meant except Maha-Kashyapa, who signaled his understanding with a smile. The depiction of this moment is shown in this representation of the Buddha. Zen Buddhism prizes so-called "mind-to-mind transmission," and many images were made to represent this. Examples date from the latter part of the Kamakura period (1185–1392), but they were particularly popular in the Edo period (1603–1868), when many images were created. In addition to the statue under discussion here, stone carvings of this type made at that time can be found at Kaifukuji and Daienji in Tokyo. The main image of Rakanji, as well as the numerous arhat (*rakan*) statues, was made by the Zen master Shoun Genkei in the years 1691–95.

Genkei (1648–1710) was originally a sculptor of Buddhist statues from Kyoto, whose secular name was Kyubei. In 1669, when he was twenty-one, he entered Zuiryuji in Settsu to study under the Zen master Tetsugen. It was at

Buzen during his subsequent religious wanderings around the country that he made a vow to carve statues of the arhats. He later visited Edo (present-day Tokyo) in order to ask a favor of the monk Tetsugyu at the temple Gufukuji there. While in Edo, he resided temporarily at Shoto'in, within the precincts of Sensoji in Asakusa. In 1688, he began making statues with the backing of Iseya Kaemon, a merchant of the district of Kuramae. Then, in 1694, he received the patronage of Keisho'in, mother of the fifth shogun, Tsunayoshi, and one of the most powerful figures of her day. From the following year he completed statues of Shaka Nyorai, Fugen (Samantabhadra), Monju (Manjushri), Maha-Kashyapa, Ananda, Hotei (Ch., Pu-tai), Bishamonten (Vaishnavana), Zochoten (Virudhaka), Idaten (Skanda), the Byakue Kannon (Panduravasini Avalokiteshvara), and 561 arhat figures, all different.

Genkei was given land in the district of Honjo, where he built Rakanji. However, he died at the age of sixty-three on the eleventh day of the seventh month in 1710 before it was completed. In 1908 the temple was moved to its present location in Meguro. The statue of Shaka Nyorai is enshrined in the middle of the altar in the Main Hall, with those of Maha-Kashyapa and Ananda on either side, like attendant statues. In front of them are the statues of Fugen and Monju, and on the platforms like tiered rows placed both to the right and left are several hundred arhat (*rakan*) statues, each with its own unique expression. To have been able to complete so many statues in such a comparatively short time, Genkei must have been concentrating enormous energy on carving them, inspired by a burning faith. □

Takeshi Kuno, formerly a director of the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, is now director-general of the Institute of Buddhist Art Research in Tokyo.

Some of the over five hundred statues of arhats.

The Buddha Suffers from Food Poisoning

by Hajime Nakamura

The blacksmith Cunda served Sakyamuni a dish that made him extremely ill and eventually would lead to his death. But whether the sūkara-maddava he ate was “tender pork” or “poisonous mushrooms” remains unclear.

Soon after he had eaten, the Buddha fell gravely ill. The mushrooms that Cunda had given him were poisonous and caused him to suffer a serious attack of diarrhea. The Pāli record is very descriptive.

“(20) When the Venerable Master had eaten the meal provided by Cunda, son of the blacksmith, he was attacked by a severe illness, with bloody diarrhea, and the pain was so great that it was as if he were about to die. The Venerable Master endured that pain, mindfully, well aware, and without distress. Then the Venerable Master said to the young Ānanda, ‘Come, Ānanda, let us go to Kusināra.’ ‘Yes, Master,’ replied the young Ānanda” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, IV, 20).

We should note here the express statement that Gotama Buddha bore stoically the pain caused by the food poisoning, which gives us to understand that even a sage like Sakyamuni suffered from illness, though he remained tranquil in his mind despite the suffering. For Buddhists of later times, however, the graphic description of the Buddha’s illness, down to the information that he experienced bloody diarrhea, was not thought to be in keeping with his image as the “Buddha,” one whose powers transcended those of the deities themselves. Therefore this passage, though it had been retained through one line of transmission as historical fact, was erased from the majority of the sutras, so that it is not found in any other version except the Māhāparinibbāna-suttanta.

What did historical Gotama Buddha eat that caused his death? This is an important question, for it relates to the wider issue of diet. Since ancient times various explanations have existed. The text itself only says that he fell ill after eating *sūkara-maddava*. Scholars ever since have been at odds over the interpretation of this word. The Sinhalese translation of the Dīgha-nikāya simply repeats the Pāli word. Buddhaghosa’s Pāli commentary, by contrast, says: “Raw meat of a wild pig which is neither very young nor very old. It is tender and smooth with a good deal of fat. It is prepared and then cooked well. In [this meat] the spirits of the four great continents surrounded by two thousand islands infused their energy.”

An additional explanation is given in two other different manuscripts of this commentary. “According to some people, *sūkara-maddava* means ‘soft rice’ [‘Reisbrei’ in Waldschmidt’s translation]. It is made with a stock of five ingredients derived from the cow. It is like milk-rice, and is the general name given to such dishes. Other people say that *sūkara-maddava* is the way of making the elixir of immortality [*rasāyana*]. This appears in treatises concerning this subject. Cunda prepared this elixir for the Venerable Master so that he would not pass into *nibbāna*.”

A similar explanation is given in a commentary on the Udāna by Dhammapāla (fifth–sixth centuries). “*Sūkara-maddava*’ is the tender, soft, raw flesh of a wild pig, says a commentary on Udāna, *Mahā-aṭṭhakathā* (Great Commentary). However, some people say it is not the meat of the wild pig, but the bamboo shoots that wild pigs favor.

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

Others say it is the mushroom that grows in the ground where wild pigs tread, while still others say that *sūkara-maddava* is a kind of medicinal herb (*ekarasāyatana*). Cunda, son of a blacksmith, said that he 'heard that [the Venerable Master] was expected to enter *nibbāna* today,' and so gave the dish to him in the hope that his life would be a little more prolonged." (The same story of Cunda's offering the meal as in the *Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta* is found in the *Udāna*. The explanation above is given in a commentary on the *Udāna*.)

A sutra in Chinese translation gives *sūkara-maddava* as *chan-t'an-erh* ("sandalwood ear"). Most, however, do not specify and merely translate it as "food." In both the Sanskrit and the Tibetan texts, there is no word corresponding to *sūkara-maddava*. This implies that in later times the meaning of the word had been lost and that the compilers of the various versions of the text probably deleted it.

Sūkara is considered to be "wild pig" (with the same etymology as the Latin *sus* and the English *swine*). *Maddava* means "tender." Thus the most popularly accepted meaning is "tender pork," and it has remained current to the present. For example, Franke translates it as "ein grosses Stück saftiges Schweinefleisch," and Arthur Waley also followed this interpretation. Waldschmidt gives a number of possible interpretations, and though he found difficulty in favoring one over the rest he was unable to reject the meaning of "pork" positively. Western scholars have tended to follow one or another of Buddhaghosa's hypotheses.

The Sri Lankan scholar-monk Somransi says that the Pāli *sūkara-maddava* is *uru mas* in Sinhalese, an obvious corruption of the Pāli. Both expressions refer to pork. *Maddava* in particular is used for fatty meat. Thus Sri Lankan scholars interpret *sūkara-maddava* as it appears in the *Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta* as the fattest cut of pork. This interpretation is not, however, generally accepted. A powerful piece of evidence against it is the appearance in Chinese texts of the word "mushroom." Professor Hakuju Ui, after a careful examination of the relevant Chinese texts, concluded that it was "a poisonous mushroom." Rhys Davids also interpreted it and translated it in this way ("made ready in his dwelling-place sweet rice and cakes, and a quantity of truffles"). The Chinese compound *chan-t'an-erh* means "a mushroom that grows on a sandalwood tree." This interpretation also exists among Southern Buddhist scholars. It is very likely, therefore, that the original meaning of *sūkara-maddava* was "mushroom." We are familiar with French truffles, rare and piquant mushrooms that grow beneath the ground and are sniffed out by pigs and that from ancient times have been considered great delicacies. It is very likely that the *sūkara-maddava* was something similar. According to Dr. Hoey, who has undertaken research in these districts, local farmers are still fond of a bulbous root, a sort of truffle, found in the jungle, and that they call *sūkara-kanda*. K. E. Neumann gives several similar instances of truffle-like roots, or edible plants, having such

names. At the time of the Buddha, *sūkara-maddava* was in all likelihood such a delicacy, having a distinctive flavor.

R. Gordon Wasson created considerable reaction through his contention that the *soma* that is mentioned in the *R̥g Veda*s refers to a mushroom. In a discussion of the Buddha's death, he mentions the view that its cause was eating mushrooms; however, he does not express any preference for one theory over another. We should note that, although the Law of Manu (V, 5 and VI, 14) forbade members of the three upper castes, as well as ascetics, to eat mushrooms (*kavaka*) according to Wasson's reference, the Buddhist legend explicitly ignores this prohibition. Does it come to an insistence that the Buddha died because he had gone against the Law? It would perhaps be most accurate to say that the Buddha disregarded the precepts of Brahmanism: for example, the Law of Manu (II, 215) states that Brahmins must not accept food from members of low castes, such as blacksmiths (metal workers, *karmāra*). We have seen how Gotama Buddha publicly trampled on such dictates.

Southern Buddhists did not oppose the suggestion that the Buddha ate "tender pork." After all, it was considered appropriate to eat whatever was offered as alms, even if that included meat, and the Buddha never agreed to banning the eating of meat, as can be seen from Devadatta's attempt to impose stricter austerities on the Order. Given, however, that the *Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta* (IV, 20) refers to the meal as *bhatta*, a word that is not usually used in connection with meat-eating, there is a strong likelihood that *sūkara-maddava* meant something that was not meat. It is clear from the above discussion that by Buddhaghosa's time (around 430) the meaning of *sūkara-maddava* had been forgotten, leaving the term wide open to a variety of interpretations, none of which was more convincing than other hypotheses.

The question remains whether Indians eat pork or not. The Hindu word for "pork" is *suar*, which is probably related to the ancient *sūkara*. Though specially bred, fattened pigs are not seen in India, animals with a leaner aspect, like wild boar and domestic pigs raised in pasture, are to be found. Since they are raised, then they are doubtless intended for food. An animal called *varāha* (boar) appears repeatedly in the classics. All the same, no one who has traveled to India has ever mentioned being served pork on festive occasions, and it is open to question whether there was the custom of serving it on such occasions even in ancient times. The school of thought that holds that Gotama Buddha suffered food poisoning after being given pork as a special delicacy reflects modern conceptions of pork that do not necessarily parallel culinary tastes of ancient times.

On the other hand, there is no doubt about the existence of mushrooms in India. Mushrooms are variously called *chatrak*, *gaganadhūli*, and *kukurmuttā* in Hindu. When I was in India I was told that a mushroom, written in English

as “chhata,” grows in the region of Kushinagar. This word almost certainly derives from the Hindu *chhat* (roof) and the Sanskrit *chatra* (parasol). The mushroom grows around straw and the like, and is said by locals to be a favorite of pigs. Nevertheless, the mushroom does not seem to be much used in Indian cooking, and there is no evidence that it was regarded as a delicacy in ancient times.

There is no mention outside the Pāli text of the type of food that was served to Gotama Buddha by Cunda. Since later commentators were unable to solve the problem of what *sūkara-maddava* was, the descriptive and realistic elements of the passage had largely been shorn from the text as it was transmitted. This is because later generations were principally interested in emphasizing Gotama as a deified being.

Stella Kramrisch has suggested, based on the results of Heim’s studies and Wasson’s investigations in eastern India, that *sūkara-maddava* refers to a plant called *pūtika* (*Guilandina Bonduc*). This is one of the plants mixed with the clay used to make the utensil called *mahāvira* that is placed over the fire during the Pravargya festival. The plant is mentioned in Brahmanical writings and in literature after the time of the Vedas, sometimes being used as a substitute for *soma*. Since it is called *pūtika*, most Indians think that it has an offensive smell. In view of Dr. Kramrisch’s vast erudition, her theory should be carefully considered.

According to Wasson’s report, the name *putka* given to a particular type of mushroom by the Santal people (several million of whom live in Bihar, West Bengal, and Orissa) is a corruption of the Sanskrit *pūtika*. It is considered to have divine power, and is dug out by pigs. This agrees closely with one of the explanations given in the Pāli commentary on the Udāna. Wasson therefore concludes that the *sūkara-maddava* was a special type of mushroom served on festive occasions. (If it could be shown that such a custom was prevalent among the Santal, then it would be possible to consider that mushrooms may have once been served as delicacies, even if this is no longer the case.)

Despite the many obscurities about the term *sūkara-maddava*, I favor the interpretation that it was a special type of mushroom. My reasons are as follows: (1) special mushrooms dug out by pigs are found among the Santal people, and were known in the Kushinagar region around the time the Buddha died; (2) one interpretation of the term in the Pāli commentary is “mushroom”; and (3) the translation *chan-t’an-erh* (“sandalwood ear [mushroom]”) is found in Chinese versions.

The Verse Description

The Pāli narrative then includes a short verse:

Thus I have heard, that after eating the meal of Cunda the blacksmith,

The firm and constant one (*dhīra*) suffered an illness, severe, deathly.

Having eaten a mushroom, the Master was attacked by a severe illness.

Suffering from diarrhea the Venerable Master said,
“Now will I go to the town of Kushinārā.”

(Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, IV, 20)

The verse makes it clear that the Buddha’s illness was caused by the mushrooms Cunda had offered him. It does not appear in the Sanskrit or Tibetan versions, nor in the P’i-nai-yeh tsa-shih. One of the variant Pāli manuscripts states that it was recited by a member of the first council, when the sutras were collected. A footnote on it says that the verse is not found in the Ceylonese version. In form the verse does not appear ancient, and even Buddhaghosa judged it and others in the text to have been added by later compilers. “It should be realized that these verses were placed here by the elders who compiled the sutras,” he wrote, concerning the above-mentioned verse and the verses in IV, 38 and IV, 41. They are therefore much newer than the prose and may originally have been circulated separately and absorbed into the Pāli text only at a later period.

The comparative lateness of the verse is borne out by the fact that it does not appear in the Sanskrit text, the Tibetan translation, the Pan-ni-yüan-ching, the Yu-hsing-ching, or the P’i-nai-yeh tsa-shih, and this proves that their compilers saw no need to quote it (verse in the sutras is not necessarily ancient).

The prose section makes a bald statement, which is followed by the verse section vividly describing various subjects of the prose section. This is a descriptive form often seen in later Buddhist scriptures. Such a form is already seen in the Pāli text above, as we see the introductory statement, “Thus I have heard.” The verse quoted in IV, 20 above is in fact a combination of two separate poems.

Continuing with the Journey

According to the Pāli version, Sakyamuni continued to walk toward his final destination, Kusinārā (= Kushinagara, Skt., Kuśinagari), which is on the edge of the present town of Kasia, some fifty-six kilometers east of Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh. It was a difficult journey for the old ascetic, wracked with illness. Of all the texts, the Pāli version best portrays Sakyamuni as a man in pain. Though by the time the Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta was compiled his deification was much advanced, old traditions still retained glimpses of his humanity, since after all he was a historical figure, and it was impossible to erase all reference to his suffering as a human being.

Sakyamuni set off in the direction of the Hiranyavati River, but was soon forced to rest.

“(21) Then, leaving the road, the Venerable Master went to the foot of a tree. Reaching there, he said to the young Ānanda: ‘Fold an outer robe in four for me, Ānanda, and

place it down for me, for I am tired and want to sit.’ ‘Yes, Master,’ Ānanda replied, and folded an outer robe into four and spread it out.

“(22) The Venerable Master sat at the place prepared for him and, having sat, said to the young Ānanda: ‘Bring me water, Ānanda, for I am thirsty. Ānanda, I would like to drink’” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, IV, 21–22).

The description in the Pāli version is far more realistic than that in the Sanskrit text or the Chinese translations. The one wish of a dying person is for water. We meet Sakyamuni the man in his words “Bring me water, Ānanda, for I am thirsty. Ānanda, I would like to drink.” The Sanskrit text by comparison plays down the human suffering, saying: “Then the World-honored One [Bhagavant] said to the young Ānanda: ‘Go, Ānanda, and fill a bowl with the water of the Krakūṣṭha River, for I would drink its water and pour it over my body.’” The Chinese translations have even less of the human element. There is, however, no diminution of a sage’s greatness in his desire for water. A legend in the Rg Veda (I, 85, 11) tells how the Maruts (storm gods) poured out the water from a fountain for the thirsty sage [vipra] Gotama.

The sutra relates that when Ānanda drew water for Sakyamuni to drink, a kind of miracle occurred.

“(22 *continued*) The young Ānanda replied to the Venerable Master: ‘Revered One, five hundred carts have just passed by. The [river] water here, churned up by their wheels, is scanty, disturbed, and muddy, but the River Kakutthā over there is not far and its water is clear, pleasant, cool, pure, easy to approach, and delightful to look upon. Let the Venerable Master drink and cool his body there.’

“(23) A second time the Venerable Master said to the young Ānanda: ‘Bring me water, Ānanda, for I am thirsty.

Ānanda, I would like to drink.’ And a second time the young Ānanda replied to the Venerable Master: ‘Revered One, five hundred carts have just passed by. The [river] water here, churned up by their wheels, is scanty, disturbed, and muddy, but the Kakutthā River over there is not far and its water is clear, pleasant, cool, pure, easy to approach, and delightful to look upon. Let the Venerable Master drink and cool his body there.’

“(24) A third time the Venerable Master said to the young Ānanda: ‘Bring me water, Ānanda, for I am thirsty. Ānanda, I would like to drink.’ ‘Yes, Master,’ replied the young Ānanda, and taking his bowl he went to the river. And that river, whose water had been churned up by the wheels of the carts, was scanty and flowed disturbed and muddy, but as Ānanda approached it, it flowed clear, bright, and clean.

“(25) Then the young Ānanda thought: ‘Ah, how mysterious and wonderful are the great suprahuman powers of one who has perfected his practice. This stream had been churned up by the wheels of the carts, and was flowing scanty, disturbed, and muddy, but when I approached it, it flowed clear, bright, and clean!’ He drew water into his bowl and went to where the Venerable Master was. Drawing near, he said to the Venerable Master, ‘Revered One, how mysterious and wonderful are the great suprahuman powers of one who has perfected his practice. This stream had been churned up by the wheels of the carts, and was flowing scanty, disturbed, and muddy, but when I approached it, it flowed clear, bright, and clean! May the Venerable Master drink this water, may the Blessed One drink this water.’ And then the Venerable Master drank the water” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, IV, 22–25).

To be continued

A Kamakura-period mirror, on one side of which a statuette of the eleven-headed Kannon (Avalokiteshvara) is mounted. The reverse side bears a design of blossoming Japanese apricots (ume) and birds. Kyoto National Museum.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 7

The Parable of the Magic City (3)

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

TEXT The Buddha [then] said to the bhikshus: “When the Buddha Universal Surpassing Wisdom attained Perfect Enlightenment, the five hundred myriad kotis of buddha worlds in all directions were each shaken in six [different] ways; [even] the dark places between those realms, where the august light of the sun and moon could not shine, all became brilliant. All the living beings in their midst could see each other and unitedly exclaimed: ‘From where have all these living beings suddenly come?’

COMMENTARY *In all directions.* This phrase refers to the “ten directions” (north, south, east, west, northeast, southwest, northwest, southeast, above, and below), that is, every single place.

- *Were each shaken in six [different] ways.* Legend has it that the earth shakes in six ways at the birth, enlightenment, discourses, and death of a buddha. The expression symbolizes how even heaven and earth are moved by a buddha’s actions.

- *The dark places.* These are the realms of a mind stricken with suffering, where no ray of hope penetrates. Even such realms were made bright by the radiance of the buddha’s enlightenment.

- *All the living beings in their midst could see each other.* Previously they thought they were alone, but now that the world was brightening they found that there were many others there with them. For the first time they recognized one another’s existence. When people are concerned only with escaping from their own suffering, in a place where the Buddha’s teaching has not penetrated, they have no time to pay attention to the troubles of others. Preoccupied with the self, they are unable to open their minds to others. In appearance they may be living with parents or siblings, but in the depths of their hearts they are alone. In the end, all they have to depend on is themselves. What a desolate life they lead!

Once the Buddha’s teaching reaches them, however, they come to realize they are all brothers and sisters, each pos-

sessing the same buddha-nature, living in a mutually advantageous relationship according to the teaching that all things are devoid of self. They then recognize for the first time the value of others, experiencing a deep fellow feeling with those around them. In this way, those who had been isolated and alone find themselves transformed into happy people surrounded by many good friends. In other words, they are released from the hell of loneliness.

TEXT Moreover, the palaces of the gods in all those regions, even Brahma palaces, shook in six [different] ways and a great light universally shone, filling all the worlds, surpassing the light of heaven.

“Then eastward, all the palaces of the Brahma heavens in five hundred myriad kotis of domains were brilliantly illuminated with double their normal brightness. And each of those Brahma heavenly kings reflected thus: ‘For what reason does this sign appear, that our palaces are now illuminated as never of yore?’ Then those Brahma heavenly kings all visited each other to discuss this affair. Meanwhile, amongst those assembled there was a great Brahma heavenly king named Savior of All, who addressed the host of Brahmas in verse:

‘In all our palaces / Never has there been such shining; / What can be its cause? / Let us together investigate it. / Is it that a great virtuous god is born, / Is it that a buddha appears in the world, / That this great shining / Everywhere illuminates the universe?’

“Thereupon the Brahma heavenly kings in five hundred myriad kotis of domains, with all their palace train, each taking a sack filled with celestial flowers, went together to visit the western quarter to investigate this sign. [There] they saw the Tathagata Universal Surpassing Wisdom on the wisdom terrace under the Bodhi tree, seated on the lion throne, surrounded and revered by gods, dragon kings, gandharvas, kinmaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings, and others. And they saw his sixteen royal sons entreating the buddha to roll along the Law wheel.

COMMENTARY A *sack*. This may actually be a plate or a basket to hold flowers to be offered to a buddha.

- *The lion throne*. This signifies a seat for a distinguished person, and also refers to the platform used when a buddha enters meditation or gives discourses.

- *Gods, dragon kings, gandharvas, kimnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings*. (See the November/December 1991 and May/June 1996 issues of DHARMA WORLD.)

TEXT Then all the Brahma heavenly kings bowed to the ground before the buddha, made procession around him hundreds and thousands of times, and then strewed the celestial flowers upon him. The flowers they strewed [rose] like Mount Sumeru and were offered also to the buddha's Bodhi tree. That Bodhi tree was ten yojanas in height. When they had offered the flowers, each of them presented his palace to the buddha and spoke thus: 'Out of compassion for us and for our good, condescend to accept the palaces we offer!'

COMMENTARY The Brahma heavenly kings, seeing the holy appearance of the Buddha Universal Surpassing Wisdom seated on the lion throne, intuitively realized why their palaces were shining so brilliantly.

- *Offered also to the buddha's Bodhi tree*. The Bodhi tree was a natural "place of enlightenment," for it sheltered the buddha from the heat of the sun, giving shade like a parasol, when he entered meditation or gave discourses. Therefore people with a deep reverence for and commitment to the Buddha Law made offerings not only to the buddha himself but also to his place of enlightenment.

- *Condescend to accept the palaces we offer!* The Brahma heavenly kings' donation of their palaces to the buddha symbolizes the abandonment of their rank, way of life, and preconceived ideas and also indicates their ability to hear the buddha's teaching with an open mind. Such an intention or attitude is vitally important to those who would hear the Buddha Law.

TEXT "Thereupon all the Brahma heavenly kings, before the buddha, with one mind and voice praised him in verse, saying:

'Rare is a world-honored one, / Hard it is to meet him, / Perfect in infinite merit, / Able to save all. / Great teacher of gods and men, / He has compassion for the world. / All the living in the universe / Everywhere receive his aid. / The [distance] we have come / Is five hundred myriad kotis of domains, / Leaving deep meditative joys / For the sake of serving the buddha. / As rewards for our former lives / Our palaces are magnificently adorned; / Now we offer them to the world-honored one / And beg him in mercy to accept.'

COMMENTARY Why did the Brahma heavenly kings, who had always been in a state of meditation in the heavenly realm, spending their days in calm and comfort, take the trouble to give this up and descend to the human realm?

Why would they want to donate their magnificent palaces, their reward for good deeds accumulated through countless former lives, and enter religious practice as novices? Since the reasons have to do with the very heart of the Lotus Sutra, let us examine them in some detail.

A person's aim in life is not limited to living in peace and quiet; rather, it is marked by the incessant urge to create. By *create* I do not mean merely to produce visible things. By undertaking religious practice to improve ourselves, we create virtue, and by doing good for the benefit of others, we create good. Similarly, artistic endeavor creates beauty, and striving in all legitimate and honest occupations creates energy, which vitalizes society.

Creation invariably entails effort; hard work is essential. Since creative effort and hard work are positive actions, however, much joy arises from them. This is entirely different from negative toil. The negative toil involved in trying to escape the suffering inherent in poverty, illness, and troubled personal relationships is hard to bear. Positive effort, on the other hand, is a pleasure. For instance, mountain climbers plod step by step up tall peaks carrying packs weighing up to fifty kilograms and, their eyes fixed on their next step, cannot afford to look at the scenery around them. Others may wonder where the climbers find pleasure in this exercise, but as far as the climbers themselves are concerned, the very effort is their pleasure.

Just as only a mountain climber appreciates the joys of mountain climbing, so the creative delights inherent in human life can be understood only by the person striving to create something. The joy of human life can be felt deeply in the positive endeavor to improve one's character, to enhance the value of one's job, to do one's best for people and society no matter how humble one's efforts may be. All people seek to live in ease and comfort. What would happen to us, however, if we enjoyed a life of absolute comfort, a life that demanded no effort? Such a life would be unbearably suffocating.

Human life is made meaningful through creative effort and the joy born of creativity, for this is the nature of life. Therefore the heavenly beings, despite dwelling in a state where physically and mentally they were at peace, took the trouble to descend to this world and try to improve themselves still more by listening to the buddha's teaching. However peaceful our state may be, having rid ourselves of all delusions, we can never rise to the highest Buddha realm unless we exert ourselves in a positive fashion to save other suffering people and aid the Buddha in saving living beings. True religious practice, the road to the Buddha's enlightenment, is nothing other than the endeavor to work for others, to make people happy, to rescue them from suffering, and to lead them to the correct path, that is, to live a life replete with the creation and action of compassion.

Nichiren declares in his "Treatise on Repaying Indebtedness" (*Hoon-sho* in Japanese) that a hundred years of religious practice in paradise is not worth more than one day's

merit in this defiled realm. Unless those dwelling in the heavenly realm constantly descend to the human world to work for the salvation of living beings, they will never attain buddhahood. This is why the Brahma heavenly kings came down from the ease and comfort of their heavenly realm, giving up their palaces, and aspired to take refuge in the Buddha's teaching.

Thinking of this in terms of our everyday lives, it can surely be said that we are in the heavenly realm when we are reciting sutras, chanting the title of the Lotus Sutra, or entering *samadhi*. At these times we can attain oneness with the Buddha, if only briefly. Still, it is not possible for us to undertake these religious practices twenty-four hours a day, and indeed, we must not, for where there is no action there is no creation, and without creation life cannot be lived to the full. Thus, if we can attain a spiritual state of briefly being one with the Buddha through religious practices, we must return to our daily round while maintaining that state of mind, work hard in our occupation, and devote ourselves to the good of others and of society as a whole (that is, to action to remove people's suffering and lead them to the correct teaching). This, and this alone, is the true path to the attainment of buddhahood.

TEXT "Then, when the Brahma heavenly kings had extolled the buddha in verse, each spoke thus: 'Be pleased, World-honored One, to roll the Law wheel, deliver all the living, and open the nirvana way!'

"Then the Brahma heavenly kings with one mind and voice spoke in verse, saying:

'Hero of the world! Honored of men! / Be pleased to proclaim the Law! / By the power of thy great compassion, / Save wretched living beings!'

"Then the Tathagata Universal Surpassing Wisdom silently gave assent.

"Again, bhikshus! The great Brahma kings in the south-eastern quarter of five hundred myriad kotis of domains, each seeing his own palace radiant with light as never before, were ecstatic with joy and amazed. And instantly all visited each other to discuss together this affair. Meanwhile amongst those assembled there was a great Brahma heavenly king whose name was Most Merciful, who addressed the host of Brahmas in verse:

'What is the cause of this affair, / That such a sign should appear? / In all our palaces / Never has there been such shining. / Is it that a great virtuous god is born? / Is it that a buddha appears in the world? / We have never yet seen such a sign. / Let us with one mind investigate it. / Let us pass through a thousand myriad kotis of lands / In search of the light and together explain it. / It must be that a buddha has appeared / In the world to save suffering beings.'

"Thereupon the five hundred myriad kotis of Brahma heavenly kings, with all their palace train, each taking a sack filled with celestial flowers, went together to visit the north-western quarter to investigate this sign. There they saw the Tathagata Universal Surpassing Wisdom on the wisdom terrace under the Bodhi tree, seated on the lion throne, surrounded and revered by gods, dragon kings, gandharvas, kinnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings, and others. And they saw the sixteen royal sons entreating the

buddha to roll along the Law wheel. Then all the Brahma heavenly kings bowed to the ground before the buddha, made procession around him hundreds and thousands of times, and then strewed the celestial flowers upon him. The flowers they strewed [rose] like Mount Sumeru and were offered also to the buddha's Bodhi tree. When they had offered the flowers, each of them presented his palace to the buddha and spoke thus: 'Out of compassion to us and for our good, condescend to accept the palaces we offer!' Thereupon all the Brahma heavenly kings, before the buddha, with one mind and voice praised him in verse, saying:

'Holy lord, king among gods, / With voice [sweet as] the kalavinka's, / Who has compassion for all living beings! / We now respectfully salute thee. / Rarely does a world-honored one appear, / But once in long ages; / One hundred and eighty kalpas / Have passed away empty, with never a buddha, / The three evil regions becoming replete, / While heavenly beings decreased.

COMMENTARY *Holy lord.* This honorific title indicates the leader of all the saints.

- *King among gods.* "Gods" refers to heavenly beings. In India, they are called *devas*. "King among gods" indicates the greatest of all the gods.

- *Kalavinka.* This is a sparrowlike bird with a beautiful voice. Here it is used as a simile to praise the buddha's beautiful voice. The superlative beauty of a buddha's teaching is also occasionally likened to the *kalavinka's* voice.

- *Rarely does a world-honored one appear, but once in long ages.* The buddha referred to here is the manifest-body (*nirmana-kaya*), like Shakyamuni. Though the Eternal Original Buddha always exists in this world, a buddha who manifests himself in human form, like Shakyamuni, and leads living beings is rare indeed.

- *Three evil regions.* These are the realms of hell, hungry spirits, and animals. (For more on their significance, see the January/February 1993 issue.)

- *Heavenly beings.* These are all those who dwell in the heavenly realm, that is, people who ascend to the heavenly realm as a reward for good deeds accumulated in this life.

TEXT Now the buddha has appeared in the world / To become the eye of all living beings, / The resort of all the world, / Savior of all, / Father of all the living, / Who has compassion for and does good [to all]. / Happy through our former destinies, / We now meet the world-honored one.'

COMMENTARY *To become the eye of all living beings.* This is a beautiful phrase. The greatest purpose of the teaching of a manifest-body buddha is to help living beings realize the true way of looking at things, to open their eyes to the truth. This is the very foundation of salvation. For us too, to study the Buddha's teaching is to open our eyes to the

truth and acquire the ability to perceive what is true and correct. Unless we make this our first principle, we go against the thinking of the Buddha.

- *Resort.* This word has virtually the same meaning as "refuge," as in the expression "take refuge in the Buddha." This implies that we leave all to him, depending entirely on him.

- *Happy through our former destinies.* Because of the merits accumulated in former lives, a happy event occurred, say the Brahma heavenly kings. That they have been able to meet the buddha is due to the merits that they have accumulated through good deeds. We too are the same. That we have been able to read and study the Lotus Sutra, described by Shakyamuni himself as containing the very body of the Buddha, is proof of the merits we ourselves have accumulated. We should thus have great confidence in ourselves. As we go on to increase those merits through this teaching, we will undoubtedly become "happy through our former destinies."

TEXT "Then, when the Brahma heavenly kings had extolled the buddha in verse, each spoke thus: 'Be pleased, World-honored One, to have compassion for all [beings], roll the Law wheel, and deliver the living!'

"Then the Brahma heavenly kings with one mind and voice spoke in verse, saying:

'Most holy! Roll on the Law wheel; / Reveal the nature of all laws; / Deliver suffering beings, / That they may obtain great joy. / All the living, hearing this Law, / Obtain the Way as if born in heaven; / Evil processes [of karma] decrease, / While endurers of goodness increase.'

COMMENTARY *Most holy.* This title refers to the great saint, that is, the buddha.

- *The nature of all laws.* This phrase indicates the real aspect of all things.

- *Obtain the Way.* This means to gain the Buddha Way, that is, to attain the Buddha's enlightenment.

- *Evil processes [of karma].* As often mentioned, this term refers to the circumstances of hell, hungry spirits, animals, and asuras.

- *Endurers of goodness.* Here the Chinese character translated as "endure" in "endurers" means "retain a firm hold." Anybody is capable of good thoughts and deeds once in a while. It is important that such thoughts and deeds are not sporadic but are constantly a part of our being.

TEXT Then the Tathagata Universal Surpassing Wisdom silently gave assent.

"Again, bhikshus! The great Brahma kings in the southern quarter of five hundred myriad kotis of domains, each seeing his own palace radiant with light such as never was before, were ecstatic with joy and amazed. And instantly all visited each other to discuss together this affair, [asking]: 'What is the cause of this radiant light in our palaces?' In

that assembly there was a great Brahma heavenly king whose name was Wonderful Law, who addressed the host of Brahmas in verse:

“That all our palaces / Scintillate with brilliant rays / Cannot be without reason. / Let us investigate this sign! / Through hundreds of thousands of kalpas, / Never has such a sign been seen. / Is it that a great virtuous god is born? / Is it that a buddha appears in the world?”

“Thereupon the five hundred myriad kotis of Brahma heavenly kings, with all their palace train, each taking a sack filled with celestial flowers, went together to visit the northern quarter to investigate this sign. [There] they saw the Tathagata Universal Surpassing Wisdom on the wisdom terrace under the Bodhi tree, seated on the lion throne, surrounded and revered by gods, dragon kings, gandharvas, kimnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings, and others. And they saw [his] sixteen royal sons entreating the buddha to roll along the Law wheel. Then all the Brahma heavenly kings bowed to the ground before the buddha, made procession around him hundreds and thousands of times, and then strewed the celestial flowers upon him. The flowers they strewed [rose] like Mount Sumeru and were offered also to the buddha’s Bodhi tree. When they had offered the flowers, each of them presented his palace to the buddha and spoke thus: ‘Out of compassion to us and for our good, condescend to accept the palaces we offer!’

“Thereupon all the Brahma heavenly kings, before the buddha, with one mind and voice praised [him] in verse, saying:

‘How hard it is to get sight of a world-honored one, / Who destroys all earthly cares! / After a hundred and thirty kalpas, / Now at length we have obtained the sight. / To hungry and thirsty beings / He pours forth the rain of the Law. / He whom we have never seen before, / The possessor of infinite wisdom, / Rare as the *udumbara* flower, / Today has been met by us. / All our palaces are / Made beautiful by [thy] light, / World-honored One! In thy great mercy, / We pray thou wilt condescend to accept [them].’

COMMENTARY *Hungry and thirsty beings.* This refers to hunger and thirst of the spirit rather than of the body: hunger for the truth, thirst for lost humanity. The buddha relieves hunger and thirst through the rain of his teaching.

• *Udumbara.* The *udumbara* is a kind of Indian fig tree. A cryptogam, its blossoms are rarely seen by human eyes. People in ancient India believed that it flowered only once in three thousand years and that when it did this signaled some great event, such as the rare appearance in the world of a tathagata or a holy wheel-rolling king.

In the Buddhist scriptures, as in this passage, the *udumbara* is often used metaphorically to stress how rare it is to meet a buddha in the world. What is of particular interest about the *udumbara* is that actually it always blooms at harvest time, although, being a cryptogam, its flowers are

hidden. Therefore the *udumbara* is an apt metaphor for the relationship between a buddha and ordinary people.

Though the Eternal Original Buddha abides perpetually in this world, living beings are not easily aware of the fact and do not seek to discover it. This is extremely regrettable; they are just like the poor son who came to the gate of his father’s house but did not know that the rich elder living within was his father. Even when his father attempted to bring the son to him, the son was afraid and ran away. Many people are exactly the same: though the world is filled with the Buddha’s teaching, they do not take the slightest interest in it. Some even flee from it, not knowing that the Buddha’s teaching is their “true father.” If only people knew this, they would joyfully listen to and heed the Buddha Law, and they would be able to take firm hold of true happiness.

We, who already know this, are happy indeed. Yet this happiness does not belong to ourselves alone but must be shared with as many other people as possible. Sharing happiness means preaching the Buddha Law for the sake of others. We must tell everyone that just as the *udumbara* in fact blooms in the harvest season, not just once every three thousand years, the Law-body Buddha remains in the world today, not limited to the manifest-body Shakyamuni, who passed away more than twenty-five hundred years ago in India. This is the vital role that those who have already learned the Buddha Law must assume.

• *In thy great mercy, we pray thou wilt condescend to accept [them].* Some may think it strange that the donation of magnificent palaces should be accompanied by such a plea. But that reflects a way of thinking characterized by attachment to material things. Even today, when we give a present to someone we love deeply, we pray in our hearts that the person will accept it with pleasure. This is a feeling unadulterated by any other emotion. We do not consider we are buying the person’s goodwill by the gift; our joy is merely in his or her acceptance of it. How much greater then is our joy when the Buddha accepts our offerings (our devotion and gratitude). Nothing can take the place of such joy, because our sincerity is communicated to the Buddha: there is nothing more wonderful than the feeling we have when our sincerity is transmitted to another. As if the “small self” had totally disappeared we feel the exhilaration and warmth of becoming completely one with that person. The Brahma heavenly kings too offered their sincerity to the Buddha and earnestly begged him to accept it. The possession of this kind of pure feeling is one of the precious qualities or favors of religious faith.

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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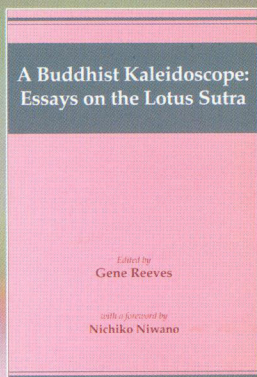
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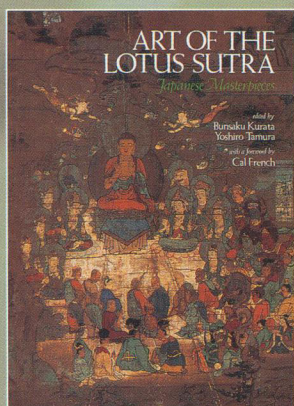
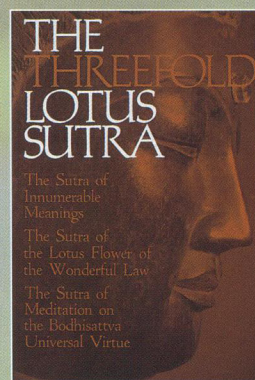
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