

FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

DHARMA WORLD

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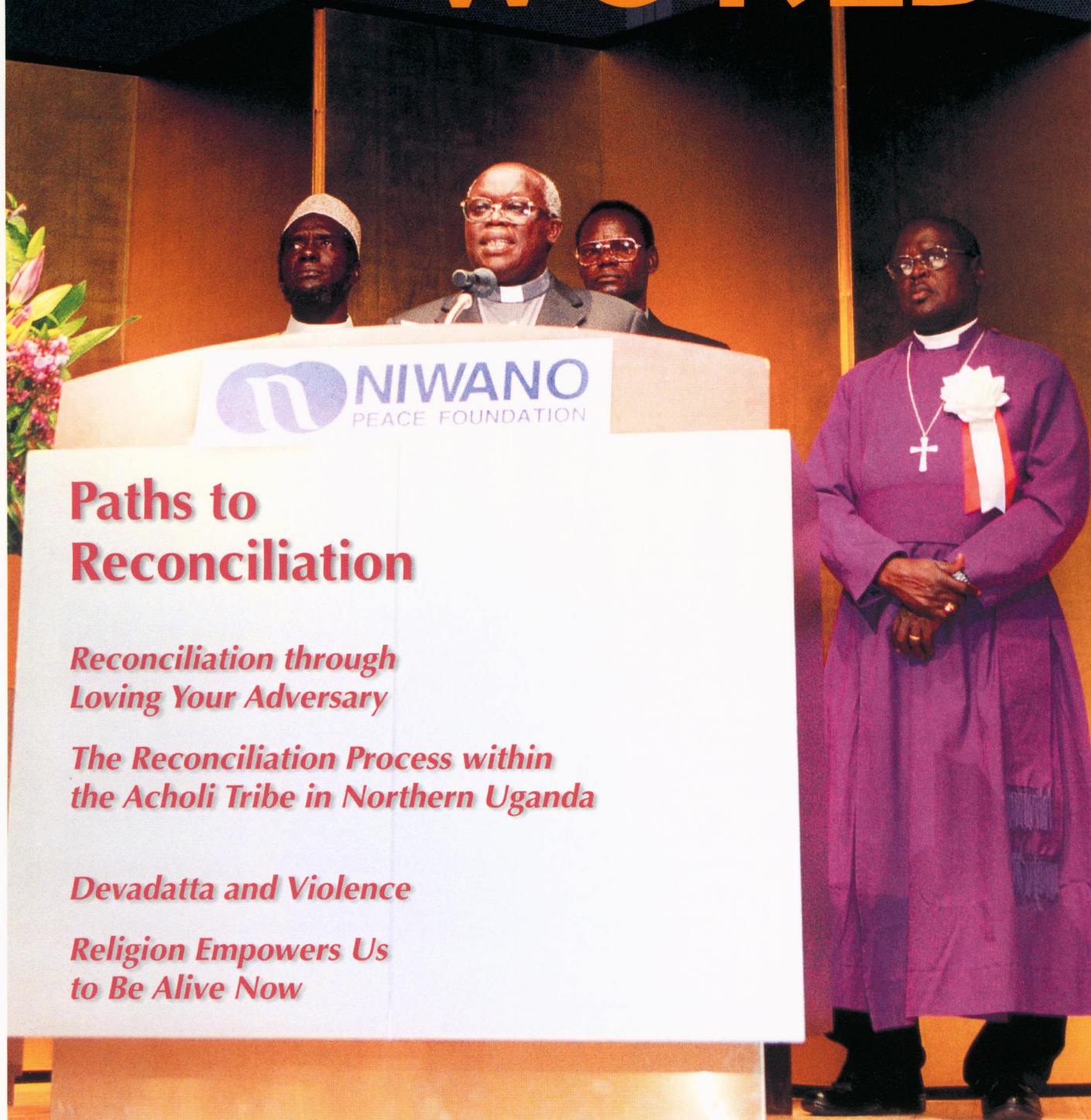
Paths to Reconciliation

*Reconciliation through
Loving Your Adversary*

*The Reconciliation Process within
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Cover photo: The 21st Niwano Peace Prize was presented to the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative (ARLPI), which works to end conflict and promote social justice, human rights, and peaceful coexistence among the peoples of the East African country of Uganda. The presentation ceremony took place in Tokyo on May 11, during which the chairman of the ARLPI, Archbishop John Baptist Odama, delivered an acceptance address. Photo by Yoshio Shinoda.

Photo: AP/WWP

DHARMA WORLD presents Buddhism as a practical living religion and promotes interreligious 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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For Living Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue

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How Can Paths to Reconciliation Become Possible?

by Noriyoshi Tamaru

The twentieth century from which we recently emerged is known as the century of war. In view of that century's record of global clashes—two world wars followed by a cold war—this opinion is not wide of the mark. But I cannot see any reason for optimism that the new century that has now begun holds any better prospects. Regional and ethnic conflicts are occurring with depressing frequency around the world, and it is clear that some of these, such as the conflicts in Israel/Palestine, in the Balkans, and in Sri Lanka, are strongly influenced by religious factors also. In these cases, religions, which are supposed to bring about peace and concord by transcending conflicting interests, have instead been incorporated into the identities that groups have of themselves, thereby worsening the conflicts and making them harder to resolve.

The Buddhist teaching of the Four Noble Truths demonstrates that if people wish to do away with suffering, they need first to understand its causes. This is also the basis of all successful medical treatment. What, then, are the sources of the social pathology of confrontation and conflict that is now afflicting humanity? Of course, the actual circumstances are highly diverse. Even so, I think we

can divide the causes broadly into two categories. One consists of specific situations—such as conflicting economic interests and social inequities—that directly or indirectly bring about friction and discord. If we look closely, however, we realize that often these causes are merely the triggers of conflict. More important are the causes of the other type, those that lie deep within people's minds, such as hostility, long-standing mistrust, and resentment built up between the conflicting parties over extended periods of history. All too often, what was at first minor discord swells over time and leads finally to catastrophe.

If this view is correct, it will require simultaneous and sustained efforts to achieve the two objectives of settling diverse conflicts and confrontations and bringing peace to the world. The first thing necessary is the elimination of the specific circumstances causing the problem, such as discrimination, oppression, and the poverty that accompanies them. Doing so calls for calm understanding and an analysis of the situation. In addition, to prevent a recurrence of the problem, it would be wise to devise some kind of institutional framework that will be effective over the long term, rather than to just settle for a short-term solution. No matter how carefully such a framework may be thought out and crafted, however, that alone is not enough. A fundamental resolution of the problem demands not just deterring or ending confrontation, but also doing away with the underlying mistrust and resentments. Only then will reconciliation in the true sense become possible.

This, however, involves extremely complex and often intractable problems. That is because the formulation of a fundamental resolution requires us to go beyond the principle of justice that is the basis of ordinary ethics. Social order, whether on a large or a small scale, cannot be achieved without a distinction between good and evil. But if we cling exclusively to this distinction, we will never be able to escape from the framework of dualism, and the mistrust that comes from the failure to accomplish this will not dissipate. Herein lies the meaning of the teaching, found in Buddhism and most other religions, of forgiveness transcending the dichotomy between right and wrong, good and evil. In the real world, however, this kind of forgiveness is extremely rare. Will we, ultimately, have no other recourse except to trust that the healing power of time will dissipate mistrust and resentment and bring about reconciliation? □

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Reconciliation through Loving Your Adversary

by Yoshiaki Sanada

If we do not strive to follow the way of God, how can we abandon vengeful hatred of our enemies and achieve forgiveness and reconciliation?

The twentieth century was a century of war during which humanity experienced nearly 250 wars, including two world wars—a total unprecedented in history. Not only were some 200 million lives lost, but the environment—both natural and social—was destroyed, precious treasures of cultural heritage and even some traditional cultures vanished, and huge amounts of resources were expended on armaments. War brought humanity slaughter and destruction, violence and looting, hatred and rage.

We greeted the twenty-first century with the prayerful wish that we would not make the mistake of repeating the previous century's folly of the havoc of war, but that the new century would shine with peace and hope. But then came the terrorist atrocity of September 11, 2001, in the United States. Pronouncing this a new war, the Americans attacked and destroyed the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

There were hopes that the end of that campaign would usher in peace, but before long the United States made clear its intention of toppling the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, which had been put at the top of the list of countries making up what was called an "axis of evil." On March 20, 2003, despite much international opposition, America launched a military attack on Iraq. On May 1, President George W. Bush declared, "Mission accomplished."

Far from arriving, however, peace has retreated as the situation has worsened, as if a hornets' nest had been stirred up. Contrary to the intended effect, the use of force by the United States and some of its allies has provoked armed resistance or terrorism, depending on one's point of view, not only from forces within Iraq, but also from their sup-

porters, and it has also touched off religious clashes and ethnic disputes that could even divide Iraq. Thus, Iraq remains a country at war as the slaughter and destruction continue.

Religion and the Justification for War

When humanity has faced war in the past, great emphasis has often been placed on such values as the "righteous-

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A graveyard in Sarajevo for the victims of the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, extending beside a stadium that was destroyed in the shelling.

ness” of a “holy” war in order to justify the conflict. It has been argued that the slaughter, destruction, violence, and looting of war are permissible if war is waged for the “holy” and “just” cause of repelling barbarism and protecting civilization. Moreover, the argument that the use of force in war is merely retaliation against an enemy attack and thus is acceptable under international law as the exercise of legitimate self-defense has often been used to justify war.

Now as in the past, it is far from unusual to invoke religion to justify war. Sometimes words like *freedom*, *equality*, *democracy*, *humanitarianism*, and *civilization* are used in a quasi-religious sense to express values considered sacred and inviolable. There is no need to hark back to the Crusades. Even today, politicians and military men alike often talk about God’s protection and ask for God’s blessing. And they speak loudly of “the war for civilization” and “the war of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.”

How much slaughter and destruction, though, have been perpetrated in the name of such causes? In both Afghanistan and Iraq, how many innocent people—men and women, young and old—have been killed and injured, and how many families have been shattered? The environment—both natural and social—has been destroyed,

towns and villages have been reduced to rubble, and the precious treasures of cultural heritage of all humanity and even some of the traditional cultures that define people’s identity have vanished. People have lost their livelihoods, fallen prey to starvation and disease, and been wounded both physically and spiritually. Communities have lost their former order, had their public safety severely compromised, and been reduced to a kind of anarchy.

Human history has certainly been a history of war. At the same time, however, it has been a history of anger, lamentation, and grief over war. To be sure, the idea of “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” has been brought to bear again and again. But, as demonstrated by the system of *diya*, or blood money, devised by Islam as a way of bringing an end to the vicious circle of vengeance, humanity also developed the idea that “the parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall, first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice” (United Nations Charter, Article 33, paragraph 1).

There are, of course, those who maintain that war is a

The sixth assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (now called the World Conference of Religions for Peace) held in Italy in 1994, in which world religious leaders and scholars discussed ways in which religions can cooperate to make a concerted effort for peace.

part of human nature. This stance, however, is tantamount to abandoning our efforts—indeed, our responsibility as human beings—to avoid and overcome war. It also reveals a cowardice devoid of compassion and courage, and of the wisdom to undergo sacrifice and danger for the sake of peace.

The Divine Blessing of Human Diversity

It is written in the Qur'an: "Mankind! We created you from a single [pair] of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other [not that ye may despise each other]" (49.13). God divided humanity into various nations and tribes not to pit them against one another, but so that they might understand and live in peace with one another. It was a divine blessing.

Human beings, however, strayed from the way of God. The Qur'an states: "Mankind was but one nation, but differed [later]. Had it not been for a Word that went forth before from thy Lord, their differences would have been

settled between them" (10.19). Originally, human beings were created as one nation, one *umma* (community). But conceit and egoism caused them to stray from the right path, and discord arose between nations, which then led to strife. Thereupon God in his infinite mercy sent prophets as messengers, vouchsafing revelations suited to the mentality of the people of the time. By indicating that it is precisely people's differences that help foster good deeds and enhance piety, God pointed the way to the realization of the ultimate unity of existence.

Through their pride, however, people not only fail to understand the divine will, but even turn away from God's commandments. Others, even enemies, do not exist solely as others. In view of the fact that all people are God's creatures, others of any kind exist so that we may understand ourselves as equivalent to, as well as different from, them. And since people are different as well as equivalent, we all exist to fulfill our own roles, complementing and cooperating with one another.

If we cannot understand this divine will as God's blessing, how can we aspire to achieving reconciliation with our neighbors? If we cannot establish peace with God in our own hearts, how can we establish reconciliation with our neighbors? If we do not strive to follow the way of God, how can we abandon the vengeful hatred we harbor against our enemies and achieve forgiveness and reconciliation?

It is often said that peoples and nations are selfish by nature and that the only thing that can overcome this is religion. But is religion tolerant or intolerant? It is interesting that the word *fanaticism* derives from the Latin *fānum* (temple). *Fānāticus*, the adjectival form of *fānum*, includes the connotations of "frenzied," "enraged," "insane."

To be sure, when religion is confined deep within the temple in a narrow spirit, people become filled with pride and self-righteousness, leading to the exclusion of outsiders and sometimes exploding in the kind of frenzy that condones violence and murder. But if religion goes forth from the temple, engages with outsiders, talks with them through the power of reason created by God, and comes to know their souls through that dialogue, we should be able to understand the true meaning of the divine blessing expressed in the Qur'anic verse "Mankind! We created you . . . that ye may know each other [not that ye may despise each other]."

There is no person, and no religion, that does not wish for the salvation of the self and others, happiness of the self and others, and peace for society and the world. This is because, basically, we are beings that live through having been given life as well as through giving life. The challenge for both people and religions is to venture out of their own narrow worlds, engage with others, and talk, walk, and act together as they face a common concern for the happiness and salvation of humanity and for world peace, and to do their very best, in their own realms, to serve this common goal. Whether the seeds of interfaith dialogue and cooperation planted by the great pioneers of the last century will flower and bear fruit in the twenty-first century rests upon our shoulders, for it is we who have inherited the achievements of those who have gone before. It is no exaggeration to say that the fate of the present, the future happiness of all mankind, and even the very possibility of achieving world peace hang precariously in the balance.

Love Your Adversary

In November 1994 the sixth assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace was held in Italy. Among the delegates was Ljiljana Matkovic-Vlasic of Croatia, one of the countries of the former Yugoslavia that was then still embroiled in war—its people killing one another and the populace forced to live in miserable conditions. The poem

she read to the assembly remains vivid in my mind. It was titled "Love Your Adversary." She prefaced her reading with the following words: "I did not want to say 'my enemy,' because I have eliminated the word *enemy* from my vocabulary. I believe that *man cannot be enemy to man*. He may be a competitor, he may be an opponent, but never an enemy—because we are all travelers in the same vehicle that is called the planet Earth."

I will end my article with this poem, for I believe it reveals the path to reconciliation.

Pray for that bastard?

No! God can't expect me to do a thing like that!

I love my friends, I love meadows, the woods, the sea . . .

I'll pray for plants and animals,

For when they die, our planet dies.

But to pray for that bastard and other trash?

Isn't that too much to ask?

No, it's too little.

How do you expect to change the world

If your love extends only to those who belong to you,

If your love creates camps—

We on one side, they on the other,

Friends on one side, enemies on the other?

You have no faith if that's how you divide the world.

You have no faith, though you are baptized,

Though you go to mass on Sunday,

Though you give your old clothes to charity.

You have no faith, as long as you love only your friends.

The world does not change through you,

Everything remains the way it was,

And the Earth will die slowly from your love.

Yes, the adversary hinders your growth—

He has robbed you of your heritage,

He has settled on your land.

You can hear him laughing in your home, from which
you have been driven away.

Yes, all this is true.

But you have no faith if you do not pray for him,

If you do not befriend him.

Only love such as this can change the world,

Build cities out of rubble,

Allow water to well up in deserts,

Make life come out of death.

And you will no longer see any enemies on your horizon.

Now you are like a phoenix arising from the ashes of
your home,

And all will be made new, new, new. □

The Reconciliation Process within the Acholi Tribe in Northern Uganda

by John Baptist Odama

The 21st Niwano Peace Prize was awarded to the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative (ARLPI), which works to end conflict and promote social justice, human rights, and peaceful coexistence among the peoples of the East African country of Uganda. The ARLPI is an organization in northern Uganda in which adherents of various religions and sects, including Islam and Christianity (Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican), work together. Since its establishment in 1998, it has followed the path of nonviolence to end armed conflict, nurture human resources for the task of creating peace, and provide assistance to war victims through the work of over 400 volunteers, including its core membership of religious leaders, as well as individual staff members, peace committees in various districts, and peace supporters. The prize was presented in Tokyo on May 11. The following is the acceptance address by His Grace John Baptist Odama, archbishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Gulu and the current chairman of the ARLPI.

Perceptions of, and attitudes toward, the intractable conflict in northern Uganda are very much colored by the north-south divide. For it is in the Luwero district that the Acholi tribe was construed as backward, violent like all northerners, and responsible for all atrocities committed by the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) in the Luwero Triangle. Though there were a significant number of Acholi in the UNLA, by no means did they make up the majority. But subsequent reports by Luwero peasants interviewed about atrocities committed during the Obote II regime always attributed the worst offenses to the Acholi, as if they were synonymous with the UNLA soldiers. This is clearly shown in the records of the Uganda Human Rights Commission set up by the National Resistance Army (NRA) government.

Then some victorious NRA soldiers motivated by revenge reached Acholiland in 1986. Later the same year, revenge killings and arbitrary arrests of able-bodied young Acholi men started. This provoked a reflex reaction from many of the former UNLA soldiers who had laid down their arms and settled down in peace. They took to the bush in self-defense, grouped under the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA). In 1988 they signed a peace agreement with the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government in Gulu called the Pece Agreement. But a splinter

group refused to sign and was absorbed into a new spiritualist movement called the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) of Alice Auma Lakwena, which was defeated by the NRM government in the Iganga district. Its offshoot was the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) of Joseph Kony, Alice Lakwena's cousin, which has caused untold destruction in northern Uganda to date.

A regional factor is the military and logistical support given to the LRA by the government of Sudan in retaliation for the support Uganda gave to the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA)—which has further complicated the conflict. The U.S. government's support of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) has added another complicated dimension to the conflict. The proliferation of small arms in the hands of the wrong elements in African "liberation" armies has also worsened conflicts in Africa. Small arms are the major cause of death, injury, massive displacement and dislocation of civil populations, refugees, and violations of human rights.

Reconciliation in Acholi Society

The Lwo ancestral myth of the separation of the brothers Labongo and Gipir is the foundation of the narrative that informs Acholi understanding of the pain of broken relationships and hence the need for reconciliation. What took

The ARLPI sponsors prayer gatherings and marches for peace that attract a great many citizens. Gatherings are held at sites where massacres have taken place, in which participants express their clear intent to reject violence.

place between Labongo and Gipir is retold as the defining myth of the Acholi (Lwo) community. It is hoped that it will help to enable them to avoid the folly of brotherly separation and, by implication, to be open to reconciliation, because a deep split in a fundamental relationship, such as that between brothers, is fatal.

The separation of Labongo and Gipir resulted from a dispute over an ancestral spear and a bead. Despite their separation, the brothers and their families were united by their common access to the waters of the River Nile, from which both families continued to drink on the east and west banks of the river. The Acholi saying *Waribo ma I kulu* refers to this bond of the River Nile.

The ancestral myth of Labongo and Gipir is central to value formation in most Lwo societies, including the Acholi. It has given rise to the five guiding principles of community living among the Acholi:

- Do not commit the first offense.
- Have respect for all, regardless of human differences.
- Speak the truth at all times.
- Never tell lies under any circumstances, even if your head is being cut off. It is better for you to die for the truth than to tell lies.
- Do not steal.

Thieving was unexpected and unheard of among the Acholi. No children were expected to grow up into thieves in Acholi culture. It was like a curse on a family if they became known as a thief. No one would marry anyone who belonged to such a family. Thus traditional Acholi houses had a simple door called a *kika*, which could slide sideways and could even be pushed open by a child. The *kika* was not meant to be a burglar-proof door, since burglary was unknown in traditional Acholi community living. The *kika* therefore reflected the communal security guarded by traditional norms and values.

Criminal offenses among the Acholi did not merit the death sentence. Traditionally, the Acholi community did not pass the death sentence on anyone accused of a criminal act. Instead, provision was made for forgiveness. Forgiveness therefore was a reflection of a nonviolent community. This is illustrated by the precedence of the rule of hospitality over any criminal intentions. For example, whoever ate my food, drank water from my house, or sought refuge in my house instantly became part of my family. I had a moral obligation to protect such a person. Even if he or she were an enemy, he or she would no longer be regarded as one. This was the humane Acholi way of responding to some difficult human relationships regarding so-called enemies.

Archbishop Odama receiving the citation of the 21st Niwano Peace Prize from Rev. Nichiko Niwano, president of the Niwano Peace Foundation, during the official presentation ceremony of the prize held in Tokyo on May 11.

Acceptance of Responsibility and Repentance

In the event that a member of a family committed the crime of murder, the person's whole clan or tribe took on the guilt as a community. No member of the offender's clan or community had any social intercourse with the victim's clan or community. However, the quest for peace and reconciliation compelled the offender's community to accept collective responsibility. This was followed by collective repentance and remorse for the murder committed. At this stage, the offender's community was vulnerable and bore the guilt of the murder, which weighed heavily on every community member. Thus fellowship and communion were not possible until the process of reconciliation was completed.

Forgiveness

Once genuine repentance was received from the offender's community, the victim's community had no option but to forgive in good faith. Forgiveness was an essential element of reconciliation. Forgiveness, in essence, was mercy that was graciously extended to the offender's community, which otherwise should have been condemned to death. The assurance of forgiveness was a great relief and gave hope for peace to the offender's community. It was an assurance that the victim's community was on the course of reconciliation despite its bereavement.

Compensation (Restitution)

The genuineness of repentance was tested by the readiness and willingness of the offender's community to pay compensation, as required in traditional Acholi culture. Compensation depended on the circumstances and nature of the crime committed. Traditionally, the offender's community was required to pay ten head of cattle if the murder was not committed deliberately. If it was proven to have been a deliberate murder, however, the offender's community was required to give one of its young daughters to the victim's community. The girl, given at the age of six to ten years, would become, by adoption, a daughter of the victim's community. Compensation was not a punitive imposition—it was deemed a process of healing, an affirmation of personhood, and an enhancement of life within the community. Compensation therefore opened the gateway of reconciliation so that both sides could walk through and approach each other and be reconciled.

The Ceremony of Reconciliation

After compensation, a third party invited both the offending and the offended parties to take part in the important ceremony of *mato oput*. The major feature of reconciliation was drinking juice made from the bitter roots of the *oput* tree from the same calabash. The bitter roots symbolized the bitterness of conflicts that end in bloodshed. The

red *oput* juice symbolized the sacred blood of a human being. The very process of drinking the *oput* juice from the same calabash was highly symbolic. Two people, one each from the offending and the offended communities, hands behind their backs, would sip the bitter juice simultaneously, with their heads touching in the process. This went on in pairs until every member of each community had drunk of the *oput* juice.

Another major feature of reconciliation was the sharing of meals in the presence of the ancestral living-dead and the Creator as witnesses to the covenant of peace. Sharing meals in Acholi culture was always a profound ritual of fellowship that made someone a part of the family. Communion and fellowship were a celebration of life on a daily basis among the Acholi people.

Implications

Looked at positively, the role of a young girl in compensation, especially for premeditated murder, was understood as “girl salvation” as a means of conflict resolution among the Acholi. The readiness and willingness of the offender’s community to sacrifice one of its daughters to the victim’s community affirmed the genuineness of its commitment to peace and coexistence through the whole process of reconciliation.

The presence of the girl as a new member of the victim’s community became a “bridge of communication” between the two communities, which had been aggrieved and cut off from each other. Her physical presence and life guaranteed life to all in both communities. It was as if her presence and life were a re-creation of both communities. She was therefore a guarantee of life and peace to re-created people and transformed the communities on both sides.

Looked at negatively, however, from an individual-rights and gender-based approach, the role of a girl used in compensation is gender oppressive and a violation of the rights of the child who was sacrificed on behalf of the offender’s entire community. She had to bear the pain of separation from her own family and taste the bitterness of violent conflict on behalf of the entire community.

At any rate, this ancient practice among the Acholi symbolized the collective responsibility, guilt, and suffering for any kind of crime committed by a member of the community. It acted as a deterrent to every community against being the first criminal offender.

General Beliefs of the Acholi

Primarily, there was no court of law among the Acholi. Everything depended on the truth and ready acceptance of

responsibility for one’s actions. Thus every individual was expected to abide by the five guiding principles of life. Though this was not possible because of human nature, if any crime was committed, the offender became the primary witness. The offender had to make a declaration at the entrance of the fenced village that he or she had committed murder. He or she immediately became ritually unclean and was cut off from all social interaction with the immediate family unit, the whole clan, and the tribal community. The offender had to undergo a ritual cleansing ceremony in order to be allowed to go through the entrance of the village. The offender remained in solitary confinement until the process of ritual cleansing was complete. A young girl was set apart and allowed to give the offender food and drinking water throughout the solitary confinement.

Lwo (Acholi) values are people centered and based on relationship as the essence of life. Thus an individual exists in a community. Nobody is alone, but all together are a community, whether a family unit, clan, or tribe.

Conclusion

Our identity as African people is defined by the recognition that we are part of humanity, entitled to enjoy all the universal privileges of the human community on earth. In Africa the universality of the human community is fully recognized and accepted as a gift from the Creator to all races and languages of the world. There is no individual without community. *Dano dano* means “a human being is a human being,” regardless of color, creed, gender, or social status. Thus the community and individuals enjoy the fullness of life through daily communion and fellowship of love with God, the ancestral living-dead, and one another. The restoration of broken relationships is a way of transformation of people and re-creation of communities through reconciliation.

Nevertheless, the legacy of barbaric wars inspired by economic interest and political power, the crime against humanity of the slave trade, and colonial domination of Africa’s peoples will continue to haunt Africa’s international relations for years to come. Thus there is need for international reconciliation between Africa’s colonial exploiters and masters and the peoples of Africa.

Out of the colonial legacy has come genocide in Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Chad, Ivory Coast, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and Uganda. Failed leadership, corruption, lack of democracy, violations of human rights, and so on, which are marks of Africa’s internal weaknesses, have not fared well under the troublesome colonial legacy. □

Building a World of True Peaceful Coexistence

by Masao Higa

What the world needs now is a kind of ethnocultural symbiosis in which peoples of different cultures can coexist peacefully, recognizing and respecting the differences, and pursuing a better understanding of one another.

Thirty-five years ago, in the autumn of 1969, I was in a village of the Yao people, an ethnic minority dwelling in the highlands of Chiang Rai Province in northern Thailand. At the time I was still a graduate student. I was there as part of a group surveying northwestern Thai history and culture, led by Professor Yoshiro Shiratori of Sophia University and funded by a research grant from Japan's Ministry of Education (now the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology). The Yao village that was our base camp comprised fewer than fifty households. In the surrounding mountains were communities of other ethnic minorities, including the Akha, Lahu, Karen, and Meo, separated from one another by a valley or a ridge. I felt as though I was seeing a veritable mosaic of ethnic cultures.

These ethnic minorities had migrated from Burma (now Myanmar), Xi Shuang Ban Na in southwestern China, and elsewhere at different times and by different routes. Each group tenaciously safeguards its own lifestyle, with its distinctive language system, siting of villages, and style of houses, and trades baskets, pots, and other items of daily life with neighboring peoples.

We were able to come into contact with, and live in the villages of, a variety of these highland peoples. They welcomed us as "visitors from afar." I still remember their warm hospitality: the old woman in an Akha village who happily served us precious water that she had carried up from the

deep valley, saying, "You must be thirsty"; the elder who with his own hands kneaded rice grown in the mountain

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A Lahu family sitting by the hearth in their house.

fields to soften it for us, saying, "You'll probably find it hard."

The mountain roads linking the villages truly represent a crossroads of peoples. As passers-by exchange greetings, they check out one another's ethnic affiliation. Ethnic identity is expressed through clothing. The women's colorful and varied costumes in particular are like badges of ethnic identity. The cloths covering the hair of Yao women differ subtly in style from one area to another, as do the patterns and colors worn by the White Meo and Blue Meo subgroups. I was able to see this strong expression of ethnic identity in women's hairstyles and in the designs and colors of their clothing not only in the Thai highlands, but also in Laos and the provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou, and Hunan in southwestern China.

The diversity of ethnic minorities in the Thai highlands and the tenacity with which they adhere to their own cultures—the strength of their identity—is visible not only in clothing but also in lifestyle. For example, even though living side by side, each ethnic group maintains its own relationship between the location of the village and of its water source and its own system of securing water. A Yao village is situated partway up a mountain, and the source of water is a spring at the upper edge of the village. A system of cleverly linked bamboo flues conveys water to each house's water jar. The Meo, who have the same lineage as the Yao, do not convey water to each house but collect it in two or three communal reservoirs in the village, whence

people carry it to their own houses. To our eyes the Yao method is more convenient, but the Meo cling to their own method.

The Akha build their villages on mountaintops, and women shouldering baskets containing two or three bamboo pipes descend to the valley below to fetch water for each household. The custom of building villages on mountaintops is tied in with various cultural elements, I suspect, and cannot be changed simply for the sake of convenience.

Living among these highland ethnic minorities, which interact with one another while safeguarding their own cultures, I felt that I was able to glimpse the rich spiritual world of protecting what is one's own while recognizing others' differences that underlies what appears to be a meager way of life in a harsh environment. This form of cultural change marked by adaptation to an environment in which many peoples mingle showed me a magnificent example of what anthropologists call ethnocultural symbiosis—a number of ethnic communities whose cultures differ and which do not interfere with one another coexisting peacefully by exchanging and trading the necessities of life that they produce in accordance with traditional controls.

I believe that what the world now needs is this ability to live together, recognizing and respecting the differences between oneself and others while pursuing understanding of one another's histories and cultures. □

Knowing How to Be Content: The Way of Life of Kanzawa Toko

by Shoji Tatsukawa

Around the middle of the Edo period (1603–1868), there lived in Kyoto, then the capital, a man of letters named Kanzawa Toko (1710–95).¹ He was a close friend of the poet and painter Yosa Buson (1716–84), who also lived in Kyoto. Unlike Buson, however, Toko spent the first half of his adult life as a law officer (*yoriki*) in the Kyoto magistrate's office. His annual stipend was two hundred *koku* of rice,² roughly equivalent to an income of ten million yen today.

After working as a bureaucrat for twenty years, Toko resigned at the age of forty or so because of poor health and made his son-in-law his heir. For the remaining forty-plus years of his life he continued to live in Kyoto, using part of his stipend for living expenses in lieu of a pension. In addition to writing haiku, he produced a voluminous prose oeuvre, including the two-hundred-volume *Okina-gusa*. The great early-modern novelist Mori Ogai (1862–1922) based his masterly stories “Takasebune” (The Takase Boat) and “Okitsu Yagoemon no isho” (The Last Testament of Okitsu Yagoemon) on material from *Okina-gusa*.

Toko was forty-four when his wife died and he never remarried. But instead of moving in with his daughter's family, he chose to live alone—an unusual way of life in the Edo period. He never settled in one place, but moved around. By the end of his life he had changed his residence eighteen times. It is highly unlikely that he ever owned a home. Instead he lived in a succession of rented lodgings. He did this so as not to forget that this world is one of

transience. His life was true to his motto: “Know how to be content.”

For the greater part of his life, then, Toko lived simply,

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apart from his family and on his own. But this was not the traditional way of life of the Buddhist monk or the pilgrim. While Toko aspired to a modest and carefree life, he had a keen curiosity about people and society, avidly following the goings-on of the day and recording them. His was not a world-weary, retiring way of life, but one of optimism and active engagement. That is why he chose to live in the city rather than retire to the country.

At the age of seventy, Toko related his view of life in *Okina-gusa* under the heading "Knowing How to Be Content." The philosophy of knowing how to be content can be found in the writings of Lao-tzu. However, what Toko meant by it was rooted not in Taoism but in the affirmative, optimistic view of life that many scholars think has been characteristic of the Japanese since ancient times. It was also a credo informed by Toko's own life experience. At the end of the final volume of *Okina-gusa* he wrote: "One who knows how to be content lives with lack and, being satisfied, does not know the lack that comes from wanting more." The way of life of knowing how to be content is not to be found by seeking satisfaction; seeking satisfaction can never lead to contentment, since one always wants more. We can even say that knowing how to be content means being satisfied with lack.

The Confucian scholar Kaibara Ekiken (1630–1714), best known for his *Yojokun* (Precepts for Health), wrote in *Rakukun* (Precepts for Pleasure): "Think well on the reason for knowing how to be content and never forget it. If you know how to be content, you will enjoy life even if you are poor. If you do not know how to be content, you will remain dissatisfied even if you have great riches." The obsessive search for satisfaction leads to the perception of lack. The obsessive search for convenience leads to the perception of inconvenience. In terms of life, this means that rather than grasp at life, one knows how to be content with the life received from Heaven. It is the idea of the acceptance of Heaven's will, of fate.

To use the parlance of the people of Edo, Toko's way of life was *iki*. The concept of *iki*, perfected in the Edo period, has almost completely fallen out of use today as an aesthetic of life. During the postwar period of rapid economic growth, the Japanese embarked on an endless quest to satisfy material desires. They forgot the ideal of knowing how

to be content and, in their attachment to material things, lost the *iki* way of life.

In his 1930 work "*Iki no kozo* (The Structure of *Iki*), the philosopher Kuki Shuzo (1888–1941) defined *iki* as "sophisticated and urbane (acceptance), spirited (pride), seductiveness (coquetry)." An *iki* person is frank and open-hearted, strong-willed, and sophisticated. According to Kuki, the opposite of *iki* is boorishness. A person bursting with rude good health is not *iki*. A sickly person who lives bravely is *iki*. Such a person is *iki* precisely because he or she contends with deprivation and weakness. *Iki* exalts maturity over growth, weakness over strength.

As applied to Toko, *iki* means knowing how to be content, breaking bonds, always being bighearted, and enjoying each day as it comes. Without acceptance and pride, one can neither know how to be content nor break one's bonds. And in being bighearted and unattached to things lies charm (seductiveness).

Surely what Japan and the world, now in a slow-growth phase, most need today is not a sense of values that seeks to satisfy the desire for growth and development but the philosophy of knowing how to be content, of seeking stability and harmony in lack and an *iki* way of life.

In his old age Toko gave himself the pen name Kicho, which means "living for the day," to indicate his intention of savoring his remaining time on earth one day at a time. Writing blithely that "I have lived my life cheerfully, with nothing to hide" and "I live with enjoyment, exploring old age day by day," he described the supreme bliss of old age as "a sunny heart and an untroubled spirit."

Toko died peacefully at the age of eighty-six, as if slipping into a final sleep. The modest tomb of Toko and his wife is in the grounds of Jigenji temple, on Demizu-dori street in Kyoto. □

*"One who knows
how to be content
lives with lack and,
being satisfied, does
not know the lack
that comes from
wanting more."*

Notes

1. In this article all personal names are given in the traditional Japanese style, family name first.

2. A *koku* is a measure of volume. In the Edo period, one *koku* was equivalent to 0.18 cubic meters, 180.39 liters, or 5.12 U.S. bushels.

“Vengeful Spirits” That Created Peace: A Message for Today

by Kazuhiko Komatsu

*Belief in vengeful spirits has weakened and is unlikely to revive.
But people's imaginative power is still confined within the
narrow limits of their society, indifferent to those outside.*

Onryō (vengeful spirits) are, as the term suggests, spirits hostile to the living. Belief in such spirits and their malign influence is believed to date back to ancient times in Japan. Here I would like to explore the historical context of this belief and what it has to say to modern society.

The Historical Context

It used to be thought that everything that exists—indeed, everything with a name—had a spirit, and that these spirits sometimes turned vengeful. Needless to say, the Japanese were most deeply concerned with human spirits of this kind. The spirit residing within a living person was called *ikiryo* (literally, “living spirit”), and that of a deceased person, *shiryō* (literally, “dead spirit”). Since ancient times, the Japanese have most feared the vengeful spirits of the dead.

Not everyone could become a vengeful spirit upon death. People who gloried in life and died natural deaths did not turn vengeful. Only those who died under extraordinary circumstances—those who died nursing a resentment against society—were qualified to become vengeful spirits.

Who decided which people had died nursing such resentment? It was people who had been involved with them in life. Say, for example, that a man of high station was deprived of his position through a plot and later was murdered. When the ringleader of the plot and the co-conspirators

believed that the murdered man nursed a grudge against them, and only then, the necessary conditions were in place for the generation of a vengeful spirit. And it was when various calamities occurred around these people and

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were blamed on the vengeful spirit that it manifested itself. In short, it was the imaginative power of the living that produced vengeful spirits. Disasters would continue unabated unless these spirits were appeased. That meant building shrines for them and enshrining, or confining, them inside.

The Ancient Pursuit of Peace

Vengeful spirits were rampant in ancient times. Of course, the fluctuating fortunes of the nation could be explained by political and economic factors, but in religious terms, simplistically stated, the nation was seen to be ruled by vengeful spirits. For example, the construction of the ancient capital Heiankyo (today's Kyoto) in the late eighth century was spurred by vengeful spirits, who also preserved its peace (*heian*).

Heiankyo was built by the emperor Kanmu (r. 781–806). He became emperor by prevailing in a murky political struggle in Heijokyo (today's Nara City), the capital during the Nara period (710–94). He is said to have gained the throne through a plot to dispose of the previous emperor's consort and their son, the crown prince. Because of this, the new emperor lived in constant fear of the vengeful spirits of the empress and crown prince, who were widely believed to have been poisoned. To escape their predations he abandoned Heijokyo and built a new capital, Nagaokakyo, nearby in 784.

This capital did not last long, however, as the curse of the vengeful spirits persisted. In fact, the number of vengeful spirits increased. While Nagaokakyo was under construction, one of the emperor's most trusted retainers was assassinated. Kanmu accused his younger brother, who had been designated the heir to the throne, of the crime in order to make his own son the crown prince. The younger brother, who had protested his innocence, committed suicide while being transported to his place of exile, the island of Awaji in the Inland Sea. Kanmu, who was now being tormented by yet another vengeful spirit, abandoned Nagaokakyo and moved the capital to Heiankyo in 794. Kanmu is said to have ordered those around him to continue to propitiate these vengeful spirits until his death. He named the new capital Heiankyo, "peaceful capital," from his wish to lift the curse and live in peace.

Interestingly, the Heian period (794–1185) actually was blessed with peace for almost 400 years, until warriors who had been mercenaries of the emperor and the aristocracy seized power. This was the longest period of peace in Japanese history, surpassing even the Tokugawa shogunate during the Edo period (1603–1868), with its seclusionist policy. Peace prevailed because the rulers of the time con-

tinued to fear vengeful spirits. To be sure, emperors and aristocrats in the "peaceful capital" continued to engage in political struggles, but they knew that Kanmu had been persecuted by vengeful spirits, so those who triumphed bent over backward to avoid turning those they defeated into such spirits. Various arrangements were devised to ensure this. One was the practice of never putting high-ranking nobles to death for their crimes, no matter how serious, in an attempt to prevent them from becoming vengeful spirits.

Insiders and Outsiders

Even so, vengeful spirits continued to appear. If people feared these spirits and disasters occurred, the trouble was inevitably blamed on the spirits. This was the mechanism of the belief in vengeful spirits. In the mid-Heian period one of the most notable vengeful spirits in all of Japanese history appeared: the spirit of the court scholar, poet, and political figure Sugawara no Michizane (845–903). Michizane, minister of the right, was defeated in a political struggle led by Fujiwara no Tokihira (871–909), minister of the left. Michizane was demoted and transferred to Dazaifu, on the southern island of Kyushu (officially, this was not exile), where he died. Whether he resented his fate while alive is not known, nor is there any evidence that he expressed a deathbed wish for vengeance. Nevertheless, soon after his demise, Tokihira's clique was beset by a series of calamities, while the capital suffered flood and pestilence. All this was believed to be the result of Michizane's curse. To pacify his spirit a shrine to him was built in the Kitano district of Heiankyo, known today as Kitano Tenmangu.

Belief in vengeful spirits created them whenever the opportunity presented itself. Meanwhile, living persons made every effort to prevent the emergence of the spirits by preventing bitterness and ill will from arising. These efforts led to peace. I would note, however, that the peace brought about by vengeful spirits was limited to the circle of the Heiankyo nobility. People outside this circle were put to death for crimes. A classic case is that of the warrior Taira no Masakado (d. 940), who was killed because, having subjugated the Kanto region of eastern Japan, he was seen as having set his sights on the capital. He was beheaded and his head taken to the capital, where it was displayed to the emperor and nobles. Although the timing coincided with the period that generated the vengeful spirit of Michizane, the nobility showed no fear of this occurring in Masakado's case. That was because he was outside the circle of the emperor and Heiankyo nobility. The death of such an outsider did not exercise the imagination.

The Kitano Tenjin Emaki (Picture Scroll of Kitano Shrine), which depicts the vengeful spirit of Sugawara no Michizane, now in the form of the God of Thunder, taking revenge on the political rivals who demoted him.

In other words, fundamentally, Masakado had no connection with them, so killing him had no unfortunate consequences.

The Task of Religions Today

When we view modern society in the light of what we might call the vengeful-spirit view of history, what do we see? If everyone everywhere believed in vengeful spirits, would the world become peaceful? No. Belief in vengeful spirits weakened, and it is unlikely to strengthen again. Does not this all rather suggest to us that the scope of the imaginative power that was directed toward the dead and that characterized the belief in vengeful spirits is also seen in conflicts today? In our age, too, people who are members of society, as it is envisaged by those in authority, direct their imagination toward the dead. But people's imaginative power is still confined within the narrow limits of that society. They are indifferent to the great mass

of people who are outside. In that sense, the same pattern of making a separation between those inside and those outside the society to which one belongs can be discerned in the Japan of today as in ancient times.

The philosophy of vengeful spirits was generated by the power of a person's imagination directed at the dead, based on the observation of resentment and ill will while alive. Considering the many conflicts going on around the world, in what way do the Japanese of today imagine the dead? The nation's media frequently report the number of deaths of the American soldiers who have been fighting in Iraq following the invasion of that country, but they seem to me to be far too indifferent to the vastly greater number of Iraqis who have died. Imagining their deaths means imagining the sorrow and resentment of those prematurely and unfairly deprived of life. Is not one task of the world's religions to recognize that we are all part of the same human family? □

Devadatta and Violence

by Gene Reeves

There are many different versions of a wide variety of stories about Devadatta, but it is said that his evil led him to become the greatest enemy of the Buddha.

In Indian versions of the Lotus Sutra, the stories of Devadatta and the Naga (Dragon) Princess are at the end of chapter 11, while in Chinese and Japanese versions, these two stories are given separately, in chapter 12. This gives a stronger impression of the chapter being an interruption of the longer story that begins in chapter 11 with the emergence from the ground of the stupa of Abundant Treasures Buddha. Probably these two stories origi-

nally circulated independently of the Lotus Sutra as one or two separate texts. Putting them in a separate chapter in this way gives special emphasis and importance to them.

Superficially there is not much reason for these two stories to be together. In terms of characters, they have nothing in common. What makes sense—both in terms of their being together in one chapter and of the chapter being inserted at this point in the sutra—is the teaching of universal salvation found throughout the Lotus Sutra. The chapter reinforces the idea that there can be no exception to the teaching that everyone is to some degree on the bodhisattva path to becoming a buddha—including those regarded as evil, and even women, who too often in India were regarded as inherently evil. The creation of chapter 12 drives home the point that there are no exceptions. This is made explicit in the story of the Dragon Princess, while it is only implicit in the Devadatta story. Putting the two together helps us to better understand the function of both, and putting them together in a separate chapter serves to underline one of the main teachings of the sutra as a whole.

Devadatta in Legend

Some scholars believe that stories of Devadatta's evil deeds were invented later to discredit the leader of a group that was a rival to the main Buddhist organization, a Buddhist saint whose rival organization lasted for several centuries and probably only died with the death of Buddhism in India, long after the time of the Buddha.¹ Nevertheless, it is clear from the function of this story in the Lotus Sutra that the compilers of this chapter supposed that the evil doings

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of Devadatta are something that everyone already knows and does not need to be told about.

There are many different versions of a wide variety of Devadatta stories in Buddhist texts, some of them quite early. A kind of composite of these stories, generally accepted and often retold, undoubtedly includes both some historical and some fabricated material.

According to many stories, Devadatta was the son of King Suppabuddha and his wife, Pamita, who was an aunt of the Buddha. His sister, Yasodhara, was the Buddha's wife, making him both a cousin and a brother-in-law of Shakyamuni Buddha. Together with Ananda and others, he became a monk early in the Buddha's ministry. It is said that he was a good monk at first, known for his grace and psychic or magical powers, and that only later did he become greedy for power and start making trouble for the Buddha. As his ill will and jealousy toward the Buddha increased, he is said to have become the greatest enemy of the Buddha.

One day in a large assembly, Devadatta approached the Buddha and asked to be made the leader of the Sangha, the community of monks, a request promptly rejected by the Buddha. Devadatta became very angry and vowed to take revenge on the Buddha. Devadatta had followers, one of whom was Ajatasattu. Together they planned to kill both Ajatasattu's father, King Bimbisara, and Devadatta's enemy, the Buddha. Ajatasattu succeeded in killing his father, thereby becoming king, but Devadatta failed in several attempts to kill the Buddha.

The first attempt to kill the Buddha involved a complicated plot to hire a man to kill the Buddha, who would in turn be killed by two other men, who would in turn be killed by four other men, who would be killed by eight other men. But when the first man came close to the Buddha, he became frightened. Putting down his weapons, he became a follower of the Buddha. Eventually, all the men hired to kill one another became disciples of the Buddha.

Another attempt to kill the Buddha is said to have happened on Sacred Eagle Peak, where the Lotus Sutra was preached by the Buddha. From above this Eagle Peak, which is a platform about one-third of the way down the mountain, Devadatta pushed a huge stone down at the Buddha. On its way, the stone struck another, from which a smaller piece flew down and hurt the Buddha's foot, causing it to bleed, but not doing serious damage.

A third attempt to kill the Buddha involved getting a fierce killer elephant drunk. When the elephant saw the Buddha coming at a distance, it raised its ears and trunk and charged at him, but when the elephant came close, the Buddha radiated his compassion toward the elephant,

causing it to stop and become quiet. The Buddha then stroked its trunk and spoke to it softly. The elephant took some dust at the Buddha's feet with its trunk and scattered it over its own head. Then it went away and remained completely tame from that time on.

There are also several stories, which do not agree on details, about Devadatta wanting to split the community of monks into two factions. He asked the Buddha to require all the monks to follow five additional strict ascetic practices: (i) living always in forests; (ii) living only on alms obtained by begging; (iii) wearing only robes made from rags collected from trash piles and cemeteries; (iv) sleeping only outdoors at the foot of trees; and (v) not eating fish or meat for the rest of their lives. Apparently, Devadatta was able in this way to win some five hundred converts, especially among younger monks, to his way of thinking, welcoming them within the emerging group of forest monks who made up his followers. By some accounts, all of these followers of Devadatta were subsequently persuaded to go back to the Buddha.

Stories of the end of Devadatta's life vary a great deal from one another. It is said that he was so evil that he fell into a burning hell while still alive. In other accounts, though, it is said that toward the end of his life he came to deeply regret what he had done, decided to follow the Buddha again, and set out to join him, but before reaching his destination fell desperately ill and died. Most legends leave Devadatta burning in hell, but according to one, in a future age he would become a *pratyekabuddha*, someone who would be able to become fully awakened through his own efforts.

Devadatta in the Lotus Sutra Story

There is nothing at all in the Lotus Sutra about the evil deeds of Devadatta, not even a hint of the personification of evil he would become in Buddhist legends.

In the first part of the chapter, the Buddha relates that in a previous life he himself had been a king who deeply wanted to become fully awakened, abdicated his throne in order to pursue the Dharma, and sought far and wide for someone who could teach the Lotus Sutra to him. Asita, a kind of seer or wise man, told the king that if he would promise to obey him, he would teach the Lotus Sutra to him. So the king became a servant of Asita. Obedient to him for over a thousand years, he learned much from him and eventually received the Dharma from him. This Asita was none other than Devadatta.

Having told them this story of the past lives of Devadatta and himself, the Buddha then tells the congregation that the Buddha's enlightenment and powers are entirely

due to Devadatta, his great friend. After a long time, he says, Devadatta will become a buddha named Devaraja, the Heavenly King Buddha, and that he would be the buddha of a world called Heavenly Way.

Universal Buddha-nature

Nowhere within the Lotus Sutra is the term “buddha-nature” ever used; but basic to the teachings of this sutra is a kind of promise, an assurance, that each and every living being has the potential to become a buddha. This tells us something about ourselves, of course, but here the light is shining in the other direction, encouraging us to see the buddha in others—regardless of their moral or other qualities.

In an important sense, this story is not so much about Devadatta as it is about Shakyamuni Buddha. It does not teach us that Devadatta was able to become a buddha because his inner intentions were really good, or because he changed his ways and became a good man, or because of anything else he did or did not do. What this story teaches is that the Buddha is one who can see the buddha in others. And that is what we are encouraged to do—to look for and see the buddha in all those we encounter.

Devadatta and “9/11”

This is a story that can be seen as being about how the Buddha responded to the violence of Devadatta.

How we respond to violence depends heavily on the kind of violence to which we are responding. How I responded to the violence of September 11, 2001, is quite different, both emotionally and practically, from how I am responding today to the violence of President George W. Bush. How I respond to the violence of a child in my care is very different from how I respond to the violence of a boxing match. There are many kinds of violence. If we were to approach the theme of violence with the Buddhist idea of skillful means, a basic conclusion might very well be that the most important thing to be aware of when thinking about the Buddhist response to violence is, “It all depends.” So it would probably be foolish to think that there is one kind of response that one should make to all forms of violence.

Without, then, trying to suggest that it is the only Buddhist way to respond to violence or even that it was the best in this situation, I want to share how I did, in fact, respond to the events of “9/11,” September 11, 2001.

I am responsible for Dharma talks at a small, English-speaking, Buddhist congregation in Tokyo called the IBC (International Buddhist Congregation). September 11 was a Tuesday. On September 16, I was expected to give a

Dharma talk at the IBC. As the 16th approached, I felt I had to think and speak about the events of 9/11. As you know, Rishsho Kosei-kai takes the Lotus Sutra as its foundational text. So I was predisposed to think and talk about the events of 9/11 in the light of the Lotus Sutra. The title I chose for that talk was “Tuesday’s Devadatta.” Here I will share much of what I had to say on September 16.

The magnitude of what happened in the United States on 9/11 seemed, at the time at least, to be beyond imagination. Several thousand people were dead or missing; more than ten thousand injured; and hundreds of thousands directly affected. Children returned home to find no parents; parents went to bed knowing their children were probably dead; wives and husbands returned home to no spouse; friends dead; friends missing; friends in grief. The dead were not only Americans but people of more than thirty countries. Almost all of us are related to some of these people in a variety of ways.

Our response was predictable—disbelief, shock, grief, fear, sadness, anger, even hatred. All are forms of suffering.

Most Americans, and many people in other countries as well, felt more vulnerable as a result of that attack, no longer safe; felt as though their homes and homelands were no longer refuges of safety. Although Pearl Harbor had been attacked by the Japanese in 1941, it was in Hawaii, felt to be a long way from the U.S. mainland. The mainland United States had not been attacked for nearly two centuries.

Deep in human, or at least Western, nature there seems to be a need for revenge, retaliation, striking back, and inflicting pain and punishment on those who have offended or wronged us. Usually this is called “justice.” In America, the “criminal justice system” is for the purpose of punishing criminals. It is a way of “getting even,” though this “getting even” is often a matter of “getting back” in such a way as to be more than even.

It is likely, I said, that the 9/11 terrorists believed deeply that they were working for justice, giving their own lives for what they believed to be just and right. One of the saddest things to see on television news that week was some people in Palestine cheering the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. What was in their experience that led them to such a reaction to the killing of thousands of innocent people?

In the days following 9/11, and still today, some want to punish Arabs, or even Muslims, everywhere, seeing them as potential “terrorists.” Others wanted to bomb the extremely poor country and people of Afghanistan into oblivion. And now we are in the midst of an invasion of Iraq to rid it of weapons of mass destruction, which apparently

never existed, and to bring an end to connections to terrorism, which also apparently never existed. Too often this is the nature of “justice.” An eye for an eye, says the Bible. Justice looks back to correct wrongs or to get even by inflicting punishments. These days, religious people all over the world are being encouraged to subscribe to Western notions of “justice.”

This is not, however, the Buddhist way. Buddhists are asked, even in the midst of enormous suffering, to look back and behind events in order to better understand causes and conditions giving rise to suffering. Buddhists have to ask not only who did it, but why?

Buddhists are also asked to try to look forward—asking for, seeking for, a way ahead, a better world, a world of peace. We are not asked to look for ways to right a wrong, but to seek ways to create the good; not asked to get back at someone, but how to prevent such things from happening again.

This creates both a challenge and a problem for Buddhists. The problem is, how can there be peace in a world in which so many seek justice through punishment and retaliation, and in which so many people have no interest in causes or reasons but only in striking back? It is clear that Buddhists have an enormous healing ministry to perform if they are to be part of a movement toward world peace.

Being Thankful, Even for Violence

Shakyamuni Buddha’s response to the violence of Devadatta was to be thankful and to see in Devadatta the potential to become a buddha. “Thanks a lot,” he says in essence, “I learned a lot from you, and you, too, will become a buddha!”

Perhaps it is impossible now for us to be thankful for the devastation of September 11 and its aftermath in Afghanistan and Iraq, for the tragedy and loss is too great and continues still. But even if we cannot be grateful for 9/11, we can learn from it.

We might, for example, learn that violence produces more violence. Retaliation does not cut the chain of violent retribution. Too often, as we can see today, violence leads to more violence in long, perhaps endless, cycles of retaliation.

We might learn that we should look into the causes and conditions creating the attitudes that enable someone to kill thousands of innocent people, along with oneself. The terrorists obviously were not pursuing their own selfish interests or desires. They apparently thought they were doing justice. If we are to work to create a better future, we need to better understand their motivation and the motivations of a great many like them.

We might learn that being disrespectful to others, by labeling them as “terrorists” or condemning them as “evil,” for example, does not lead to improved relationships or to better understanding or to peace. It leads to resentment and hatred.

We might learn that ignorance of others, especially of the cultural and religious customs of people with whom we are in conflict, does not lead to mutual understanding or trust. It leads to stupid mistakes, abuse of power, and tragedy.

Americans might learn that great profits from arms sales to Israel and others may not be so profitable after all. Selling weapons has been a big business for the United States. I suppose it still is.

However optimistic we may be, we should have learned that the way to peace is a long and difficult one. Maybe the bodhisattva Wonderful Voice in chapter 24 of the Lotus Sutra was correct when he asked Shakyamuni Buddha about his work in this world: “Are your ailments and troubles few? Are your daily life and practice going smoothly? . . . Are the affairs of the world tolerable? Are the living beings easy to save? Are they not excessively greedy, angry, foolish, jealous, and arrogant? . . . Don’t they have wrong views and inadequate goodness? Are they not unrestrained in their five emotions?”

By not even mentioning what Devadatta had done or tried to do to the Buddha, does the Lotus Sutra teach that we should ignore evil, that we should, in this case, ignore terrorism? Of course not. We are, rather, urged to do two things: to find the causes or reasons behind current events in order to try to understand them, and to try to see the good in others and to cultivate that to the best of our ability.

What Can We Do Now?

First of all, we can express sympathy—sympathy for the victims, their friends, and loved ones; sympathy for those who have worked so hard to rescue or treat or comfort victims; and sympathy, too, for those who continue to suffer from acts of vengeful retaliation. Sympathy both for the soldiers of several countries sent to risk their lives in Afghanistan or Iraq and for those who suffer the consequences of those wars, especially the poor and defenseless.

Second, we can reflect on what contributed to the tragedy of 9/11. Those of us in Japan might ask ourselves, for example, whether or not Japan contributes to the ongoing tragedy in the Middle East by blindly supporting American policies on the Middle East. And those of us in America might support those who seek to bring to light the facts about 9/11 and the many strange things surrounding it that remain unexplained.²

Third, we need to work to spread the Dharma. Too few

The frontispiece and opening part of chapter 12, "Devadatta," from a Lotus Sutra scroll presently owned by the Nara National Museum. Inscribed in gold and silver ink on colored paper in 1163. Important Cultural Property.

Buddhist voices are being heard in America today. It is said that Buddhism is becoming more and more popular in the West, but in the weeks following 9/11, I did not hear a single Buddhist voice on American television or radio.

Finally, we might cooperate with those who seek peace. Many Christians, Muslims, and Jews are, in a sense, practicing Buddha-dharma without knowing it. Through a variety of international agencies we can try to support and encourage them. The same Bible that demands "an eye for an eye" also says "turn the other cheek." We need to join the peacemakers of every religious tradition, promoting interfaith cooperation and encouraging them to work together to build a more peaceful world.

Once when Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, found himself under severe and unwarranted attack from a newspaper, he took the very unpopular stance of turning that very unpleasant situation into a learning situation, and began referring to the newspaper as "our bodhisattva." Bodhisattvas, even evil ones, can be our teachers, if we are wise enough to learn from them.

A central teaching of Rissho Kosei-kai's form of Buddhism is that every situation, no matter how difficult or tragic or violent, can be received as an opportunity to learn and benefit in some way. This does not mean, I hasten to

add, that every situation is simply to be accepted and lived with. Far from it. Rissho Kosei-kai is very involved in a variety of what have been called "world-mending" activities and projects. But the teaching does mean that within every situation there is something valuable, something redeemable; something from which we can learn if we follow the example of the Buddha in the story of Devadatta.

"Bodhisattva" means one who seeks to be awakened by working for others, one who is on the way to becoming a buddha. But another meaning of "bodhisattva" is one from whom we can learn, just as Shakyamuni learned from Devadatta. May the 9/11 tragedy be like Devadatta for all of us. □

Notes

1. For a very full account of this matter, see Reginald A. Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 162–78.

2. For a fuller account of questions surrounding 9/11, see David Ray Griffin, *The New Pearl Harbor: Disturbing Questions about the Bush Administration and 9/11* (Interlink Pub Group, 2004).

Creating a World of Harmony

by Nichiko Niwano

We are acutely aware of the importance of promoting harmony—not only in interactions with others, but also in world situations. What exactly is harmony when seen from the perspective of religion? What should we bear in mind in our daily lives to help us achieve a world in which it exists? The following is a translation of a recent interview with Rev. Nichiko Niwano that originally appeared in Rissho Kosei-kai's Japanese periodical Yakushin.

It is said that people are ignoring some important values in their personal relationships, that there is a strong tendency to avoid difficult situations in which we have to speak honestly but severely to someone, and to maintain the appearance of getting along with others. If this is only a superficial kind of “harmony,” then what should we do to build human relationships possessing a true harmony that allows people to trust one another while going forward in life together?

Frank talk that broaches a difficult topic and admonitions that remonstrate are both important in human relations. Precisely because we do trust one another, we can scold one another. We can argue and then make up with one another, and similarly, trust is built through frank talk and admonitions that arise from our concern for those we care about.

However, it is natural, too, that with advancing age we come to have, in a manner of speaking, some indications that are appropriate to certain conditions.

We live by various benchmarks and standards. So when we come to see, through the enrichment of our experience, that there are various measures and standards for making decisions, we become almost unable to come to a firm, definite conclusion about any subject, whatever it may be. We become incapable of proclaiming one-sidedly about others' words or actions: “That is wrong.”

For example, even a man who once was known as a free-

spoken individual in his youth may face such a situation: while he has achieved a degree of wisdom in his life, he may use some ambiguous terms to settle an argument on the spot. That does not mean, however, that we should superficially make things seem harmonious to others.

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

Reflecting on ourselves as to whether we are the only ones who are correct arises from a desire to enter into better relationships with others.

I think that therein lies the difference between ethics and religion.

Some people check the words and actions of others against a certain moral standard and directly point it out in those cases when they deviate from it. I think this would be called correct in terms of morality. And it can be extremely important in human relationships. The realm of religion, however, is one in which self-reflection and repentance are central and everything begins by first reflecting on oneself.

Even in cases when others are in the wrong or when we have done nothing wrong ourselves to become involved in trouble, in the religious realm we are required to reflect on ourselves, turn matters to ourselves, and have such thoughts as, "Am I not equally to blame?" and "Did I do all that I could have?" By seeing only one aspect of the connections of a phenomenon, we find it impossible to make determinations of good and evil. The realm of religion is one in which we should see things from many angles and examine them in their totality.

From the standpoint of common sense, of course, such an attitude may appear to be indulgent. When something needs to be said, it should be stated directly—that is what we learn through common sense. Suppose we follow common sense and are very frank in demonstrating friendship to others in admonishing them—they cannot help but be amazed and reflect on themselves. Or we may try to be such skillful communicators that we can make a point without hurting others. Then we can still say that frank talk and admonition are important to achieving harmony with others and for the personal growth of oneself and others.

Nonetheless, if I may say so, religion does not consider other people to be the root of a problem. What is central to religion is the act of reflecting on the self. The real significance of religion is that by rooting ourselves in the Truth we remove delusions and attachments from our minds and also break through all restraints, the "shell of the self." We can find the true meaning of religion in this. When we show consideration for each other and encourage each other, then for the first time admonitions and frank talk become spiritual provisions for each of us.

Assuming that reflecting on the self is the principal purpose of religion, how should we relate to others? If we ask what positive wisdom helps us to build trusting relationships with the people around us, then before we answer "admonition and frankness" we should say that it is complete trust in others. Just as Prince Shotoku said, "We are all

merely ordinary people." By being aware that each of us, as well as others, has an unlimited potential for good or evil and that we are interconnected, as explained by the teaching of the interpenetration of the ten realms, we can completely trust others and accept them without restrictions. This is an attitude that builds relationships of unshakable trust and forms the foundation for human ties that create true harmony.

A Harmonious World Can Only Be Created through Taking Refuge

To always reflect on oneself and to trust in others—you have taught us that this is the foundation for human relationships as seen from a religious perspective. However, even if we have faith in others, sometimes they betray us or treat us with suspicion. Transcending such a situation requires patience, doesn't it? Please talk to us about this and tell us what constitutes true harmony.

Being betrayed or being regarded with suspicion—I think that in such situations self-reflection is the only course for us to follow.

After all, why is it that we are not trusted by others? The doctrine of dependent origination teaches that if we trust others, they almost certainly will trust us. If we are viewed with suspicion or have been betrayed, it may be because suspicion of others lies within ourselves. Others act as a mirror, reflecting our own suspicions.

That is why, when we reflect upon ourselves and ask, "Am I not the one who is incapable of completely trusting others?" our dissatisfaction with others turns to gratitude for their having taught us about our true attitude. By turning to ourselves (in self-reflection), we can attain a world of harmony.

When we look at things from this standpoint, what matters most is not methods of endurance or conditions for meeting the demands of others, but having absolute trust in others and maintaining a spirit of putting our hands together in reverence.

In Japanese, the character used for "peace" can also signify "comfort" and "softness" and in that sense, if we accept whatever we experience with a flexible and unprotesting mind with no restrictions, that state can be called true harmony. Then, no matter who the other person may be, we can be in harmony with him or her. Conversely, if we are conscious of making efforts to get along with others and try to maintain a good relationship by demonstrating patience or offering flattery just to suit a particular occasion, what we will achieve is merely superficial harmony at best. True harmony is only achieved by the religious attitude of accepting whatever may occur.

Of course, we can surely say that what applies to relations among human beings also applies to problems in the relations between nations and between peoples. When we consider the variety of existing circumstances—from the state of international affairs and the problems in which each of us is involved, to say nothing of making world peace a reality—wholeheartedly trusting people can seem difficult. Yet, where the great subject of world peace is concerned, Founder Niwano promised: “Peace will come soon.”

I think what the founder really meant can be grasped through the words of Nichiren: “The one heaven and the four seas, all can be attributed to the Wonderful Dharma.” The Wonderful Dharma permeates the entire cosmos, and all things, each and every one, take refuge in the Wonderful Dharma—when we become aware of this and one by one prostrate ourselves before (“take refuge in”) the true teaching of the Buddha (the Wonderful Dharma), then we are already in a world of harmony. In other words, Founder Niwano told us that when everyone has an awareness that “the one heaven and the four seas, all can be attributed to the Wonderful Dharma,” a world of peace will arise before us.

With our eyes open to the fact that the Wonderful Dharma permeates us and that we have received the gift of life through the Buddha, the people around us, all of them, are equally worthy of our respect and gratitude. When everyone, with their minds and hearts united as one, takes refuge in the Wonderful Dharma, trusts one another, and puts their hands together reverently before each other, then there will be a genuine world of peace.

As the Zen master Dogen said in his *Shobogenzo* (Eye Treasury of the Right Dharma), “Everything in this world as it is, is in the form of the Buddha and also is an expression of the buddha-nature.” All things in the world are the working of the life of the Buddha; in other words, the entire world itself is one life. When we become aware of this, we are liberated from the conflicts and distinctions between self and others. This is also a sign of a world of harmony.

A world of harmony and peace will be achieved when we ardently embrace the Buddhist spirit of the teachers of the past, and that will be a place where peace resides. In that sense, the mission of those of us who live in the chaotic present is to strive to create a truly harmonious world, a world in which all people take refuge in the Wonderful Dharma. Let us advance in disseminating the Buddha’s teaching by always remembering the humility of self-reflection in all things and the spirit of doing for others first. □

Bodhisattva Samantabhadra depicted as mounted on a sacred six-tusked elephant, described in the Lotus Sutra as appearing before the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra to protect them. Heian period. Important Cultural Property. Nara National Museum.

Religion Empowers Us to Be Alive Now

Interview with Catholic theologian Dr. Juan Masiá

Dr. Juan Masiá came to Japan from his native Spain in 1966 and was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in Tokyo in 1973. Since 1979, he has taught ethical theology and the history of philosophical thought in the faculty of theology of Sophia University. For ten years, starting in 1988, he taught life ethics at the faculty of theology of the Pontifical University of Comillas in Madrid. During the 1970s, he was the first to introduce the concept of "liberation theology" to Japan, and has played a leading role in the field of life ethics, having published a number of books and articles on the subject. While energetically engaging in dialogue with members of Japan's religions, he has pursued Buddhist research, and in 2003 published a translation into Spanish of The Awakening of Faith, attributed to the Indian poet and Mahayana philosopher Ashvaghosha, and is presently taking part in an effort to publish a Spanish-language version of the Lotus Sutra. In February 2004 he returned to the Pontifical University of Comillas to head its Institute of Life Ethics. Before he left Japan, he granted us an interview on the social and religious issues of our time for DHARMA WORLD.

Please give us some of your impressions of teaching at a Japanese university.

Life and peace—both of these things are being threatened in our present age as never before. It is a matter of urgency to think about this and act. Developments in science and technology have brought expanded possibilities into our lives, but have also given rise to new problems of war, destruction of the natural environment, life ethics, and human dignity. We have a new responsibility to take on these problems, but to do this we need a solid education. The important thing with respect to any problem is to ask the question—"Is this as it should be?" Real education occurs only when it produces people who can conceive of this kind of question.

However, in Japan today, education that does not require thought is the norm. It accustoms students to a format that demands only the approved answer to any question. It is necessary to drill students in this format if they are to pass university entrance examinations. In this way, stu-

dents become accustomed to not thinking. In my view, this produces a certain type of human clone, though not, of course, a biological one. It is frightening to think that somewhere human clones might be being produced. However, it is even more frightening to think that we are all becoming clones as a result of losing our ability to think.

How are children affected by this type of education that does not require thought?

The most difficult thing in teaching ethics at a university is to get the students to understand that ethics is not like mathematics. Numerical formulas yield a single answer, but in ethics, it is possible for two completely different answers to both be correct. However, students who have been conditioned to answering true-or-false type questions seem to be quite unable to free themselves from confrontational, black-or-white thought patterns. To nurture people who can think, it is too late to start with university students; the system for entrance examinations has already

begun at the kindergarten level, and those involved in the university system have, in actuality, complied with the present mainstream methods. In this regard I have also been greatly disappointed with the way Japanese universities are run.

Do you think this also applies to Japanese society in general?

I think that the trend toward uniformity, the trend toward not thinking, and the related dangerous trends in education are global ones. In this sense, human society is now facing a situation of grave peril, but the most dangerous thing about it is that people do not feel any sense of danger.

It is often said that Western society bases its value system on logic, while Japan has an illogical value system. However, a strong trend is now apparent among Japanese people toward a “black or white,” “yes or no” approach that puts Westerners in the shade. This is because Japanese people are now imbued with a “true or false” lifestyle from their early youth. However, it is not correct to say that the Aristotelian Golden Mean between 10 and 1 is 5. In the same way that a large person and a small one will not require the same amount of food, how people deal with things will differ depending upon the person. To communicate this in my classes, I use the method of introducing a new theme to my students every day, and require them to write a reaction paper. They read their reaction papers in class, and for the next class they write their reactions to that, and then react to these reactions, and this is how the course progresses. By doing it this way, with no fixed textbook to study beforehand, something original is created through the interaction between the professor and students. This is also a process in which, through a revolution in the self, an important mutual revolution can be achieved between the professor and students, or between students.

What precisely do you mean by a revolution in the self?

A revolution also means a shift in the position of one's viewpoint. Let us take as our example an elementary-school class in which the children are reading a children's story or fairy tale. In this case, the children are asked not just to read the story, but to also do a certain unusual exercise, which we could call an exercise in turning the story around. That is, they switch the roles played by the characters in the story, or change the background situation.

For example, in the well-known story of “Little Red Riding Hood,” the wolf is the villain. But in this exercise you ask the children to read the story with everything reversed, with the grandmother as the real villain, and the

Dr. Masiá during the interview at the Jesuit Theologate in Tokyo.

wolf trying to protect Little Red Riding Hood from her evil grandmother. When you do this, from ten different children you get ten different versions of “Little Red Riding Hood.” I think that this is actually the real way to read a book. That is, by shifting your viewpoint you get a clearer idea of the point of the original story.

Similarly, when you read the Lotus Sutra or the Christian Bible, if you shift your reading of the stories' content, you can gain a deeper understanding than you had before of what those stories are trying to say. The true way to read a book is to reread it several times, taking different points of view and trying different ways of reading it.

Turning around our “reading” applies not only to books. When we deal with questions of life in our ethics classes, and also when we deal with the Bible in religion classes, again and again we attempt to shift the position of our viewpoint. To achieve a revolution in the self is to change our “reading.” This is the meaning of the concept of hermeneutics given prominence by contemporary French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913–).

Not only is mutual revolution important in the context of interpersonal relations, but it is also an important issue for the global society as well.

It has been said that we cannot avoid the “clash of civilizations” written about by Samuel Huntington. However, do we not mutually influence one another when different civilizations come into contact? This applies also to dialogue among the different religions. While throwing doubts upon

one another, when we are different we can learn from one another and experience a revolution in thought precisely because we are different. It is possible for both to experience a change for the better as a result of coming into mutual contact.

I expect that America's President Bush believes he is a Christian, but by attacking Iraq in the name of the war on terrorism he shows that his reading of the Bible is completely different from our reading of the Bible. In much the same way, ordinary Muslims do not in any way countenance the reading of the Qur'an on which terrorist acts are supposedly based. However, the fact is that there are people who base their acts of terrorism on the Qur'an. The conflict is not between Christianity and Islam. The conflict is between two different readings of the Bible within Christianity, and two different readings of the Qur'an within Islam.

This is why the holy scriptures of all religions require the application of hermeneutics. It is vital to realize what one's own reading is, to embrace a healthy skepticism about that reading, and to remain aware of the possibility of other points of view.

However, we think that revising one's reading of holy scripture is an overwhelmingly difficult matter for those who embrace a doctrinal faith.

I think that all religions face this kind of problem. There are also fundamentalist-type people in the Roman Catholic Church. In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941) addresses this problem using the terms “dynamic religion” and “static religion,” saying that in all religions and systems of morality there are people who are open and dynamic, and people who are closed and static. That is, in every religion, there are fundamentalist-type people who interpret holy scripture literally, and who try to force that interpretation in an absolutist way on other people, while there are also people who do not insist that they are a hundred percent correct, and who seek dialogue with people belonging to other religions. Whether we are Buddhist, Muslim, or Christian, we all need to reflect on what are the good points of our own religion, and what are its excesses. It is important to accept that there are religions that differ from our own, and to be more accepting of diversity.

What are your thoughts about religious plurality?

With respect to the plurality of religions, for a long time the metaphor of climbing a mountain has been commonly used. That is, there are several paths leading up a single

mountain, and even though the paths for climbing the mountain are different, in the end, they all lead to the same summit. However, lately I have come to think that this metaphor may be a bit too optimistic. Is there really only one summit to be reached? Perhaps it might be better to think in terms of diversity and use flowers and rice wine for our metaphor. There are various species of flowering plants, and their blooming is affected by various factors—the soil in which they are growing, the water, air, temperature, and so on. There are many flowers that are indigenous to a particular area as well. Different types of wine are also produced depending on the soil, climate, and so forth. As can be seen by the great number of local varieties of Japanese rice wine, each brew has its own particularities depending upon where it is made. Even using identical methods in the brewing will not guarantee an identical product. There are infinite varieties of wine and flowers, the variety depending on the relevant local factors.

At the same time, all flowers absorb water and nutrients through their roots, and all varieties of local rice wine need a source of pure water. In the case of both flowers and rice wine, water is the fundamental key, and what water supports is “life.” If we think about it in this way, we can understand the existence of diversity. Rather than push myself to believe that all religions are aiming for the same mountain summit, I would rather think that, even though various religions are different, at the same time, in the deepest and most fundamental way, they are all connected through “life.”

You mentioned earlier that hermeneutics is needed for all holy scriptures. Doesn't this also have a great deal to do with understanding the words used in holy scriptures?

In Christianity there is the doctrine of the Trinity, and in Mahayana Buddhism, there is the tripartite doctrine of the law-body (*dharmakaya*), the reward-body (*sambhogakaya*), and the manifest-body (*nirmanakaya*) of the Buddha. If we try to forcibly make connections between these two, because of the differences in history and doctrinal context, we are likely to end up with a mixed-up mess that is neither here nor there.

However, just for the sake of argument, let us propose a fictional past in which Christianity traced a different historical path than it actually did. What if neither the Council of Chalcedon nor the Council of Nicea had ever occurred? What if Christianity had spread not in the direction of Europe, but toward Pakistan and China? Of course, it is true that Nestorian Christians did spread Christianity into Asia, especially China, and then disappear, but if Christianity's main development had been along that route, its

doctrine might not have been expressed as “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” but rather as something closer to the Mahayana Buddhist doctrine. By the same token, what if Mahayana Buddhism had not spread in the direction of China, Tibet, Korea, and Japan, but had spread through Greece and Rome and the area of present-day Germany at about the same time that Christianity was spreading throughout Europe? Most probably, it would have come to be expressed in a form very different from its present one.

If Shakyamuni and Jesus had each been born in the other’s homeland, I think that both would have boldly reinterpreted existing doctrines. I think this because what Jesus originally undertook was clearly a reinterpretation of Judaism. Therefore, Jesus was killed for his religious beliefs. In the case of Shakyamuni, as well, he interpreted Indian religious traditions in such a way that he was thought an atheist. Much the same can be said of Socrates and Confucius. Thus if Shakyamuni or Jesus were here now, they might say to those who are fanatically rigid about doctrine, “You do not understand the proper means.” Dialogue is impossible as long as we espouse an absolutist view of holy scripture that refuses to give way no matter what. I think that both Shakyamuni and Jesus would oppose taking such a view.

What you are saying is that we should take a dynamic approach to holy scripture as a matter of course.

With respect to the Christian Bible, what Jesus attempted to do is more important than what he attempted to say. This is something I have felt strongly in the course of my involvement in the Spanish translations of *The Awakening of Faith* and the Lotus Sutra. The Bible shakes us up when we read the words of Jesus. The Bible is by no means a static book. The parables as well are all dynamic. Those stories are meant to move you and me right now. Philologists delve into the past to verify the derivation of the words used in the Bible in order to understand the original meaning of the parables.

However, for the faithful, the power of those parables must be something that works on us in the present moment. In the same way, the “buddha-nature” expounded in Buddhism exists here, now, in ourselves and in everyone else. If that power is present now and will continue to work on us into the future, then it is possible that it may in the future be expressed in some other way than in the words “buddha-nature.”

At present in the Catholic Church, an increasing number of children do not feel like going to church. Even if they do come to church, they are bored. That is, I think we need to look at what is behind this trend of staying away

from church. Religion is not something that is contained in what was written in the past; rather, it is the power that gives us life right now. That is why religion needs to become dynamic as a matter of course. The reason people stay away from church may be because somewhere along the line we have come to a halt.

Lastly, would you give us your thoughts on how to pursue interreligious dialogue?

When we speak, not just of religion, but, for example, of comparing Spain and Japan, because I am Spanish, I cannot stand on neutral ground when comparing Spain and Japan. No matter how much I try to forget that I am Spanish, because I was born and raised there, this is not quite possible. In the same way, I was raised in a Christian society and became a believer in the Christian faith. So, there is also a limit to the merits of the Christian religion—this is something we must recognize. And you, as a believer in the Buddhist faith, must be aware that there is a limit to the merits of the Buddhist religion. So if I try to assume that I am neither a Christian nor a Buddhist, and can take an absolutist viewpoint rooted in absolute reality, this would be mere arrogance.

However, we need to be able to admit that our own viewpoint has its limitations—for example, when a Christian is having a dialogue with a Buddhist, although it may not be possible to take a completely Buddhist point of view, we can try to do so as far as possible. And the same thing goes for a Buddhist who is having a dialogue with a Christian: it is not possible to become a Christian in the context of that dialogue, but he or she can try to see things from a Christian point of view. When this happens, Christians become both more and less Christian than before. Because they have had a dialogue with Buddhists and gained an understanding of the Buddhist point of view, they have become more Buddhist and less Christian, but, paradoxically, at the same time, they have also become more Christian. Buddhists also become both more and less Buddhist. Because they have had a dialogue with Christians and gained an understanding of the Christian point of view, they have become more Christian and less Buddhist, but, at the same time, they have become more Buddhist as well. One might think that it is terrible for Christians to become less Christian. However, dialogue brings with it the realization that what we thought was Christianity was in reality a narrow image of Christianity, and thus as a result of this self-revolution we become Christians in a deeper sense. I expect that we can say the same thing with respect to Buddhists. That is, through dialogue Buddhists become better Buddhists and Christians become better Christians. □

Flower Festival Celebrated at Pure Land Temple

On April 11 a special service in observance of the Flower Festival (Hana Matsuri) celebrating the birthday of Shakyamuni Buddha was held at the Pure Land temple Denzuin in central Tokyo. Some 210 people—including foreign residents of the Tokyo metropolitan area as well as Japanese Buddhists—took part.

The event was sponsored by the Pure Land Sect of Japanese Buddhism and the International Buddhist Congregation (IBC) of Rissho Kosei-kai. They had organized an International Hana Matsuri Committee to give foreign residents the opportunity to learn about the teachings of Buddhism at the Flower Festival. The IBC has celebrated the festival since 2001 at Rissho Kosei-kai's former headquarters, and this year it decided to hold the event in cooperation with the Pure Land Sect.

The ceremony took place in the main hall of Denzuin according to Pure Land ritual. It began with the rite of purifying the hall with water and ended with recitation of the *nenbutsu*, or homage to Amida Buddha. A small shrine housing a statue of the infant Shakyamuni stood before the altar. At the beginning of the ceremony, the officiating priest poured sweet hydrangea tea over the statue, a ritual originating in the legend that just after Shakyamuni was born, a dragon descended from heaven and reverently anointed him with fragrant water. Then, led by two women members of Rissho Kosei-kai wearing saris, ten special guests—including H.E. Mr. Karunatilaka Amunugama, Sri Lanka's ambassador to Japan, and H.E. Mr. J. John Chikago, Malawi's ambassador to Japan—performed the ritual of pouring sweet tea over the statue. The Cherokee singer Rattlesnake Annie

sang "Prayer in the Early Morning" and "Comanche Tears."

Dr. Gene Reeves, IBC's international advisor and a former dean of the Meadville/Lombard Theological School in Chicago, spoke of the significance of the Buddha's birth. He said the Buddha, born as a human being in India 2,500 years ago, became awakened to the causes of human suffering and so made it his mission to save humanity by teaching others how to transcend suffering. Dr. Reeves said that all people share the buddha-nature and can help others find happiness at the same time they pursue it for themselves.

One of the participants, a British member of the IBC, said he was impressed by the wonderful unity of the traditional Buddhist ritual and songs. "I felt very close to Buddhism," he said. A Japanese participant expressed his joy at celebrating the Buddha's birthday with so many people of different countries and religions. □

Kyoto Chosen as Venue for WCRP VIII

The World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) has decided to convene its eighth general assembly in 2006 in Kyoto, the site of the historic first assembly in 1970. The WCRP's International Governing Board and the Japanese Committee announced the decision on March 27. The return to Kyoto is expected to strongly affirm the founding spirit of the conference, which has inspired many religionists' concerted efforts for peace. After the seventh assembly in Amman, Jordan, in 1999, the WCRP, guided by its International Governing Board, began deliberating the venue of the eighth assembly. Two years later, in 2001, the September 11 terrorist attacks took place, followed by the invasion of Afghanistan by U.S. and

U.K. forces, the terrorist bombing of a nightclub in Bali, and the U.S. preemptive war against Iraq. Violent retaliation against violence, which has made the world cruelly unsafe, is often blamed on religious animosities, and many people have condemned religion for fueling violence. Under such circumstances, the WCRP has demonstrated its determination to work harder for peace, to regain people's trust in religion. The choice of the Kyoto venue was also made after careful consideration of security at various sites in the aftermath of September 11. □

Buddhist-Christian Symposium Discusses Compassion and Love

The Focolare Movement, a worldwide Catholic lay movement based in Italy, held a symposium April 23–28 at its Mariapoli Center in Castel Gandolfo in a suburb of Rome, under the theme "The Dharma and Buddhist Compassion—Christian Agape." Some 120 people took part, including Buddhists of the Theravada and Mahayana traditions, and Catholic representatives, including the leaders of the Focolare Movement all over the world. The symposium provided an opportunity for both Buddhists and Christians to reconfirm the shared values of both religious traditions: compassion and love. The participants also sought ways to apply these values to contemporary lifestyles at home and in the community, as well as in such fields as science, politics, and economics.

On behalf of Rissho Kosei-kai, President Nichiko Niwano gave a keynote address titled "Compassion and Modern Lifestyle." The symposium was also addressed by Ms. Chiara Lubich, founder and president of the Focolare Movement; Archbishop Michael

Fitzgerald, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the Vatican; Great Master Ajahn Thong Sirimangalo, abbot of Wat Phratat Si Chom Tong Voravihan in Thailand; H.E. Ms. Prateep Ungsongtham Hata, a Thai senator and a pioneer in education for the poor; and Rev. Ryoko Nishioka, secretary-general of the Tendai Buddhist denomination. □

Niwano Peace Foundation Holds Inaugural Meeting of South Asia Program

On March 29 the Niwano Peace Foundation convened an inaugural meeting of its South Asia Program at the India International Center in New Delhi. The program aims to help nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in South Asia, regarded as one of the world's poorest regions, and to improve living conditions there. The fifty people attending the meeting included representatives of three partner organizations in the

program: Mr. Mohamad N. Amin, president of ADHIKAR; Mr. Khirod Chandra Malick, chairman of the Bharat Integrated Social Welfare Agency (BISWA); and Mr. Sharmanand Gardia, director of Jan Jagriti Kendra (JJK). Also present were invited guests—H.E. Mr. Yasukuni Enoki, Japan's ambassador to India; and Dr. K. D. Gangrade, vice-chairman of Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti. On behalf of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Michio Matsubara, a member of the executive committee of the organization's Peace Fund, took part.

The inaugural meeting began with an opening address by Rev. Kinjiro Niwano, the foundation's chairman. He introduced three partner organizations that the foundation would support in the program. He also reported that the Rissho Kosei-kai Peace Fund had made grants to the foundation this year to enhance its program. He explained that the program's main theme, "Poverty Alleviation," is based on the spirit of the Donate-a-Meal Campaign, one of Rissho Kosei-kai's peace activities, and that donations from members and nonmembers had sustained the organization's Peace Fund.

After an exchange of contracts with each partner organization, congratulatory addresses were delivered by Amb. Enoki and Dr. Gangrade. Amb. Enoki described the relationship between India and Japan as based on the historical and cultural influence of Buddhism, saying India is a second motherland for the Japanese. He hoped that through the South Asia Program, mutual understanding on a grass-roots level would help develop a more concrete relationship between both countries. Dr. Gangrade praised three partner NGOs that had helped poor people in the region to become self-reliant, as well as the South Asia Program, for providing support services. He expressed the hope that the program would enhance various activities meeting the needs of local people.

The South Asia Program was begun in July 2000 to help people in the region become self-reliant. The Niwano Peace Foundation organized a consultative committee meeting for the program in the summer of 2003 and invited many people, including scholars, social activists, and representatives of NGOs, to plan the program in detail.

After a full discussion, it was decided that the program's main theme would be "Poverty Alleviation," and that there would be an annual subtheme based on advice from the consultative committee. This year's subtheme is "Food Security." Each year the committee will select a subtheme based on the immediate issues of the region, such as women and gender, environmental protection, globalization, and so on.

The program covers Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and India. In India, the target area is limited to the seven states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Orissa, and West Bengal.

The first three partner organizations in the program selected by the committee are as follows:

ADHIKAR, which has helped the

Participants in the Inaugural Meeting of the South Asia Program held in New Delhi.

needy in Jagatsinghpur, Khurda, Naya-garh, and Cuttack and Nawaranghpur in Orissa through such programs as the establishment of farmers' organizations and the development of a grain bank;

BISWA, which has been assisting

rural people, tribes, and urban slum dwellers living in Western Orissa through its programs to form a Village Water-Management Committee and a workshop on local government for community leaders; and

JJK, which had been working with tribes in the process of shifting their lifestyles from forest-dwelling to farming through its programs of income generation and livelihood security for the landless poor. □

An Interreligious Workshop on the Value of Difference

A group of about twenty people representing the Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, and Baha'i faiths, as well as nonbelievers, and reflecting the constituents of contemporary Italian society, met in Rome in April for a two-day exploratory workshop aimed at creating a program that will become a tool for interreligious dialogue to be used in schools, associations, and encounters between faith communities.

The project on religious diversity and antidiscrimination training, proposed by the European Jewish Information Centre (CEJI), a Brussels-based NGO, is based on the programs of the Anti-Defamation League's "World of Difference" Institute, which continue to be successfully applied to schools, companies, universities, communities, police departments, and conflict situations in the U.S., Europe, and the Middle East. The workshop took place April 28–30 at the Dionysia Centre for Art and Culture in Rome's Villa Piccolomini, used exclusively for multicultural and interreligious events aimed at creating better understanding between peoples and nations.

WCRP/Italy sent delegates and was a partner in organizing the participants, and the Community of Saint Egidio, with its 17 years of experience in organizing annual encounters of dialogue and prayers for peace, was also represented.

The meeting began with an infor-

mal dinner, permitting the members to get to know one another in a warm and beautiful setting. During the next two days, people from different religious backgrounds shared and discovered the commonalities, as well as the differences, of their spiritual identities, recalling how their concepts of the metaphysical and ethical order of the universe and humankind were formed, and participated in group exercises on media and religious stereotypes. The exercises, enthusiastically led by Robin Sclafani, CEJI's Director of Training, were based on the personal and social aspects of religious diversity, using the resources of the "World of Difference" Institute. For the first time, an interactive program aimed at overcoming stereotypes and prejudices, and creating an awareness of the great value of differences, was applied to an interreligious dialogue group.

The project, using methods that have proven effective in dealing with racism, xenophobia, and prejudice and discrimination in general, is aimed at addressing intercultural relations in Europe today in the context of developing new, effective strategies in the construction of a multireligious Europe.

CEJI proposes to develop and pilot a new training module addressing diversity and discrimination issues related to religion. This training module is not designed as a form of interfaith dialogue, and it does not propose itself

as an expert in the variety of religious traditions. It is designed in the spirit of antiprejudice diversity education: to recognize and respect multicultural diversity, to confront prejudice and discrimination, and to develop intercultural skills.

The aims of the training module are: to raise the participants' consciousness of the uniqueness of each individual's religious identity and spirituality; to facilitate dialogue and the sharing of experiences; to develop an appreciation for the complexity and richness of religious diversity; and to develop individual skills and institutional strategies for creating inclusive intercultural environments.

In addition to this training module, CEJI is proposing the development of an educational coalition committed to religious diversity, called the FAITH Project, through which civil society can have access to a variety of educational resources and programs that promote interreligious understanding. Furthermore, the FAITH Project plans to develop guidelines and policy recommendations for educational communities that support multireligious societies. Organizations that would like to contribute educational approaches and participate in the FAITH Project are welcome to contact Robin Sclafani at <robin.sclafani@ceji.org> for further information. □

Eva Ruth Palmieri

Learning to Live with a Stronger Faith

by Charlotte Higa

This article is based upon the speech that Ms. Higa delivered at Rissho Kosei-kai of Hawaii on March 14, 2004. In it, she relates how practicing her faith helped her to live her life with more confidence.

My name is Charlotte Higa. I have been a member of Rissho Kosei-kai for over thirty years, and I would like to thank you for this opportunity to share my experiences on this special occasion, the forty-fifth anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai of Hawaii.

I grew up believing that respect and compassion for one's family were very important—whatever the situation, whether a happy event or one of hardship.

The past five years have culminated in a rude awakening that showed me how I perceived my life to be. My father's death in 1999 left me completely empty.

My mother's passing in 1991 had left me and my dad caring for each other's well-being and trying to fill the void left by her death. As years went by, dad developed dementia, and my brother and I tried our best to care for him. Dad got pneumonia in 1996 and was hospitalized. His condition was so critical that he never returned home, as he required twenty-four-hour care. We were left with no choice but to place him in a nursing-home facility. After

three years, he passed away, leaving his legacy to my brother and me. This legacy left by my parents was to help sustain our lives, and I have only come to realize this through the consequences that have since taken place.

My parents and I, together with my brother and his family, had lived in the same house, but in separate living quarters. My parents left us the property on which we lived. My brother's loan application was turned down because the house had actually been used as collateral to help pay for my dad's medical costs. My brother suggested that we sell the house in order to take care of the loan and start fresh. As we prepared to sell the property, I became aware of my sister-in-law's coldness toward me; at the same time, my relationship with my nephew and niece became distant. I never really knew my brother's feelings, because he never really expressed himself with me. This made me feel hurt and depressed.

Trying to accept the fact that we were planning to sell our home was very difficult for me. Because of my attachments to the house and my parents' belongings, I had a very hard time trying to prepare the house. To clean it and to part with all the "treasures" that I had accumulated over the past eighteen years while we had lived there was very painful.

My relatives soon became involved in what they considered their project to help me clean and throw out my "treasures." However, this made me very upset, since they were planning to do this even if I was not at home. I was very adamant that they not help me clean. After that, they treated me like an outcast. This made me even more depressed and confused about family ties and the unconditional love I so believed our family possessed.

My group members, Joyce, Mrs. Nitta, Mrs. Tominaga, Mae, Lori, and Casey Manalo came to my rescue, and I still resisted in cleaning and parting with my treasures. Through all my years as a Rissho Kosei-kai member, I've helped other people, but in my time of need I wanted to do it all by

Charlotte Higa is a member of Rissho Kosei-kai of Hawaii.

Ms. Higa participating in a hoza session held at Rissho Kosei-kai of Hawaii.

myself. My self-centeredness and stubborn attitude caused me to suffer even more. I soon realized that I was alone and could not go through this by myself. I went to receive guidance from the head of the Hawaii branch, Rev. Idei, and he soon made me realize what my parents' wish was. They wanted the best for me when they were gone and left me this treasure. Trying to part with all my possessions made me extremely depressed. But the greatest treasure my parents gave to me was not just the house, but the opportunity for me to live my life by taking care of myself, to love myself, and to be responsible for myself. This was quite difficult, since my parents had always taken care of me.

While trying to part with my possessions, I learned through the teachings that I would also be cleaning my karma. Rev. Idei also suggested that I do "Life Appreciation" services for my ancestors, mainly my parents. By doing monthly services for about two years, I have found much peace within my heart and mind. I had much conflict within myself and many negative thoughts about life, but all that soon changed and I turned toward a brighter path for my life. The Buddha's path was winding, with small and large potholes, sharp curves, and steep hills, but through the practice of my duties at the branch, and with prayers and support from the Sangha and Rev. Idei, my path has become less winding and the holes, curves, and hills have lessened.

Through the many difficult hardships of settling the family estate, by taking one step at a time, which was the Reverend's guidance to me, I have overcome much of the hurt, pain, and anguish that I felt.

After this horrible experience, I moved to an apartment

and have now been trying my best for the past two years to live my life responsibly. I have realized my brother and his wife are the Buddha. Because of my brother and his wife, I am now able, at age fifty-three, to practice the teachings, and I have also realized that it was the Buddha's arrangement to make my life more meaningful and to live my life with appreciation and thankfulness.

I am so much more confident today than five years ago that I can live my life with a clearer attitude and a much stronger faith that the Buddha and my ancestors are always with me, supporting me, and that the Buddha is always guiding me and sustaining my life.

Through the settlement of the family estate, I came to realize that even in death my parents are watching over me, and I constantly thank them for sustaining my life. My earlier feelings of being alone have since diminished. I know now that they are always with me.

I thank the Buddha for sending Rev. Idei to Hawaii to guide me during this turmoil in my life, and I thank Rev. Idei for his patience and the many hours of his guidance.

I also wish to thank Founder Niwano, Cofounder Myoko Naganuma, and President Niwano, for enduring the hardships they encountered in spreading the teachings—it was because of their suffering and dedication that I could find peace and happiness within myself.

And I would finally like to express my deepest gratitude to my group members. I thank them for their support in holding me up when I was down, for encouraging me when I was about to give up, for not giving up on me, and for their understanding and compassion, which made me feel like family. □

Kuśīnagar, the Place of the Buddha's Death

by Hajime Nakamura

The desolate site of Kuśīnagar leaves no doubt that it is authentic. Excavations have revealed the Nirvāṇa Stupa erected in memory of the Buddha's demise.

The place where the Buddha died is today known in Hindi and Nepalese as Kuśīnagar, and this is the form that appears in the works of Indian scholars. Kusinārā is the Pāli reading. While the common pronunciation outside India is Kuśīnagara, this form is not in fact used in the Sanskrit classical texts, where the refined reading of Kuśīnagarī tends to appear. If scholarship followed the preferred local form, Kuśīnagar would be the version applied.

In actual fact, though, Kuśīnagar is hardly understood in the village itself, but if it is pronounced in the Japanese way as “Koshinagaru,” it is far more readily understandable. This is because the Indian “u” sound is very close to the Japanese “o.” Further, the short Japanese vowel closely resembles the long vowel of Indian dialects, which further complicates the matter. In this sense a study of Sanskrit from books alone is not always useful.

Visiting Kuśīnagar

It is usual to reach Kuśīnagar from Gorakhpur. Though another route, the so-called “Road Nirvana,” runs north from Vaiśālī, a team from NHK, the Japanese public broadcasting company, that went there in February 1986 found it in very bad condition and difficult to travel on. By contrast, the road from Vārāṇasī to Gorakhpur and Kuśīnagar is well paved and widely used. This is because the state of Uttar Pradesh, in whose territory it is located, is the site of the capital and so receives substantial support from the central government. The other route, from Vaiśālī to Kuśīnagar, lies within the state of Bihar, a region of few resources and poor roads.

People generally travel by train from Vārāṇasī to Gorakhpur. If you take a night train, you will reach Gorakhpur in the early morning and then go on to Kuśīnagar by car or bus. When I first visited the town in 1956, that was the

route I took. We left Vārāṇasī at eleven o'clock at night by a narrow-gauge steam train with sleeping compartments and arrived in Gorakhpur at seven the next morning. After eating breakfast in the second-floor dining room of the large station there, we were given a great welcome by a crowd of young men and women. As each of our names was read over a loudspeaker, a girl came forward to place garlands of beautiful flowers around our necks. I realized then how much the Indians relish a lively festive atmosphere.

Gorakhpur is a large city. Its total population is 600,000, with some 290,000 people living in the central district and 310,000 in the surrounding area, according to the *Ency-*

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).

clropaedia Britannica, 15th edition. Its industries include the manufacture of fertilizers, textiles, and sugar, and it is the site of a university famous for its medical department. The city (called Gorakṣapura in Sanskrit, “town of cattle raisers”), is named after the Hindu sage Gorakṣanātha (10th–11th centuries?), or Gorakhnath, whose mausoleum is to be found there.

When I visited the region again in 1976, I traveled to Gorakhpur by a chartered bus on a good direct road. We followed the banks of canals and passed along a toll road (though bicycles could also use it) until the turnoff for Lucknow. Continuing north, we passed over the Sardū, Rām, Gontī, and Gagrā rivers before arriving at Gorakhpur. There are a great number of ponds and rice fields around Gorakhpur; in ancient times this type of landscape probably continued all the way to Kapilavastu, which would explain the name of Gotama’s father (Suddhodhana, “pure rice”).

Kuśīnagar is well north of Vāraṇasī, close to the border with Nepal, but the roadside vegetation differs little from that in the south. Going eastward, we found the southern side (right side) of the road covered with a thick *sāla* forest, a sea of trees. (Such a dense forest is not seen in Bihar, where an ancient civilization flourished, or in Uttar Pradesh.) Since the district includes an Indian air force base, we were not allowed to take photographs. The number of small lakes and swamps suggested that the area has high humidity.

Eventually, fields of sugar cane that stretch everywhere and many canals began to dominate the view. The sight of grazing cattle and attending cowherds served to remind us again that Gorakhpur means “town of cattle raisers.” It was a leading paper manufacturer in Calcutta, J. Majumder, who told me that the city’s Sanskrit name of Gorakṣapura refers to the Hindu sage Gorakṣanātha (literally, “master of cowherds”), whose shrine north of the city contains no statues but only an image of the sage’s footprint carved in stone. Gorakṣanātha was the senior disciple of the Hindu sage Matsyendranātha, a practitioner of a kind of Yoga who is now revered as a guardian deity, particularly in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, where he is regarded either as an avatar of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara or the bodhisattva himself. His statue is paraded on a cart through the streets during an annual festival and his image appears on Nepalese coins with that of Gorakṣanātha. The nineteenth-century British diplomat B. H. Hodgson refers to his cult in his report. All the same, Mr. Majumder, although a fervent believer, could only answer “I don’t know” to my questions concerning when and where these sages lived. This is another good example of the suprahistorical nature of the Indians. In actual fact, it appears that the sages date from the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries, but this is not important to believers.

Cows were truly numerous in the region. It takes an hour and a half to go by bus from Gorakhpur to Kuśīnagar. As we approached Kuśīnagar, we still saw canals but there were also a large number of ponds. This high incidence of small reservoirs seemed to speak of the existence of rice fields. Swans bobbed on the waters of a large inlet and *sāla* groves were scattered here and there. We could also see trains of elephants tied to trees. Streams run a considerable distance inland; Naugarh, on the frontier between India and Nepal, actually means “boatkeeper,” which suggests that water transport formerly extended at least that far. Although the houses are built of brick, they have Chinese-style roofs with a steep pitch, in contrast to the flat roofs that are usual in India. The shape no doubt is related to the heavy rainfall in the region. The landscape was made up of green rice fields, Hindu temples, and solitary cattle.

Early morning in January is quite chilly. Some passers-by had completely covered even their heads with voluminous black cloaks. This is very different from the widely held impression that India is a hot country. All the same, by the time we reached the Nepalese frontier at around noon, it had become rather hot. Eventually we arrived at Kasia, a town fifty-six kilometers from Kuśīnagar. We rested at the Buddha Degree College, a school on the outskirts of Kasia that teaches students from the primary through the tertiary levels. It presents the bachelor’s degree to graduates at the latter level. At our welcoming reception we were formally greeted by an old Indian gentleman with a long beard and wearing a turban.

We finally reached the site of the Buddha’s death, passing in front of a Chinese temple called the Buddhist Temple of the Twin *Sāla* Trees. At all the pilgrimage sites we visited, we found that Chinese people had built splendid temples. Early Buddhist sutras tell us that the district around Kuśīnagar was ruled by the Mallas under a form of republican government, and that the Buddha died at a place on the outskirts of its city, Kuśīnagarī. Later, a number of stupas were built there, but they had fallen into ruin by the time Fa-hsien and Hsüan-tsang traveled to the area. The modern temple is located 400 meters southwest of the Nirvāṇa Stupa. At its center is the Nirvāṇa Hall, a low cement building faced with white *chenam*. A marble temple was built in recent years by the Burmese. It is called Maṭha Kunwar-ka Kot. Most Indians, however, are under the impression that the temple was built by the Indian government. Inside is a long stone statue of the reclining Buddha, reconstructed from fragments of an original sculpture dating from the fifth century. About six meters long, it is covered in gold foil from head to toe in the Burmese fashion, over which is a yellow silk robe. Around it stand a number of parasols. The original statue, which had been badly damaged, was

discovered by A. C. Carlleyle in 1833, and restored by him. The sandstone base has a number of important figures carved on it, including Vajrapāṇi, Subhadda, Ānanda. On the western end, on the lower part of the base, is a carving of a seated male figure, under which is the following Sanskrit inscription:

*deyadhammo'yaṃ mahāvihārasvāmīno Haribalasya /
pratimā c'eyaṃ ghaṭitā Dīne . . . mā(?)śvareṇa//*

(This is the donation of Haribala, superintendent of the great monastery.

Also, this statue of the Buddha was made by Dīne . . . māśvara (?).

Though there is nothing in the inscription that gives us a hint about its date, F. Fleet assigns it to the late fifth century from the calligraphic style. Pilgrims customarily offer flowers to the Buddha and make obeisance. The hall is well illuminated from the high, round windows formed through tunnel vaulting and the interior is thus very bright. In general, the temples that have been built at Indian pilgrimage sites are bright and airy, in great contrast to the dark and somber temples of Japan.

Śāla trees stand immediately outside the hall; these are the so-called twin *śāla* trees. Though not the original trees, they may perhaps be descendants. Fifty-five *śāla* trees grow in front of the Nirvāṇa Stupa, together with *jambu* and mango trees. Among the trees lay the remains of ancient monastic cells and *caityas*; on my December visit, I found water-filled pits on the site of the excavations. Looking back, I could see the great golden Nirvāṇa Stupa rising high above the bare, creeper-entwined, withered *shisam* trees. The area was desolate. The big stupa stands behind the Nirvāṇa Hall; restored in 1927, it was at that time covered in gold foil in the Burmese style, though today the gold has blackened and only the lower surfaces retain traces of the original covering. The lowest part of the spiral triple wheel on the top of the stupa is slightly bent.

This site leaves us in no doubt that it is indeed the site of the Buddha's death. The excavations here revealed the Nirvāṇa Stupa that had been erected in memory of the Buddha's demise. Within the stupa was found a thirteen-line copper inscription dating back to the fifth century that belonged to the former Nibbāna Caitya. The inscription states that the Buddha died at this place. Though there must originally have been an older stupa built by Aśoka, its remains have not been found; they are probably buried beneath the Gupta-period construction. Besides the copperplate inscription, modern excavations have unearthed a number of coins from the time of King Kumāra Gupta (413–55). After the Indian government's Department of Archaeology completed excavations at the site in 1912, the

stupa was restored through the efforts of a Burmese devotee named U Po-kya and other devotees.

Many more stupas were built at a later date in the nearby area. In addition, sleeping among stands of mango, *jambu*, and *śāla* trees are the remains of several monasteries and shrines dating from between the fifth and twelfth centuries. Passing a grove beside the Nirvāṇa Stupa, you come to a small hall called Matha Bhavani Murti Mandir (fifth century). Only a short distance away near the park, it marks the place where the Buddha gave his final discourse. Some say that it is also the spot where Aniruddha offered food to the Buddha. Inside is a large statue of the Buddha in the meditation position with a somewhat stark visage, dating from the time of King Kanishka. Until recent years this hall had been a Hindu shrine.

A travelers' lodge has been built to accommodate visitors and pilgrims. It is a beautiful building with modern facilities, fitting well into its colorful surroundings. It is possible to picnic on the sweeping lawns. At the time of the ceremony in memory of the Buddha's death in 1956, beautiful tents were erected on the lawns to provide refreshments to delegates and to house performances of traditional Indian music.

There is also a Burmese monastery in Kuśīnagar, and there used to be Burmese priests at the Upasatha Hall alongside it. A hall to commemorate Sakyamuni has also been built by the Japanese. It was there that I met a Chinese priest named Shan-hsiu who had lived at Kuśīnagar since 1925. For more than thirty years he had been practicing meditation sitting in a tree. Should he sleep he would fall out of the tree, so he never slept. He recommended this as an excellent way to practice. I realized that the motivation of the Chinese Zen priest Tao-lin and the Japanese priest Myōe (1173–1232), who did likewise, must have been very similar. People had built the priest Shan-hsiu a small white dwelling near the Cremation Mound; though he can barely speak the local language, villagers sense his virtue and bring offerings to him. Shan-hsiu said he could never leave this place, sacred to the memory of Sakyamuni. A Chinese professor who was in our party told us that the priest had walked all the way from China to Kuśīnagar. Language is a strange thing. High-ranking Chinese priests traveling with us who had not until then exchanged a single word with us began speaking animatedly with Shan-hsiu.

The famous Hirañṇavātī (Hiraṇyavātī) River is today only a narrow stream that flows immediately north of the Cremation Mound. Buddhist literature tells us that once gold was found in its waters, and indeed its name means "place where gold is produced." It is possible to see the town of Kasia a little way off to the north across the fields that cover the landscape. Since it was December 8, we

The Nirvāṇa Hall, a modern temple building at Kuśīnagar, the place where the Buddha entered nirvana.

could not see what crops grew in the fields; the only crop we could make out was sugar cane, and what looked like palm trees in places.

Kuśīnagar in Historical Records

Fa-hsien described first a place called Rāmagrāma, before relating the forlorn and broken-down appearance of Kuśīnāgara.

“Five *yojanas* east from the Buddha’s birthplace is a country called Rāmagrāma. The king of this country, having received an [eighth] portion of the Buddha’s relics, returned to his country and built a stupa there, which was called the Rāmagrāma Stupa. A pond lies beside the stupa, in which dwelt a dragon that always guarded the stupa and made offerings to it day and night. [Eventually] King Aśoka appeared in the world and, intending to destroy the eight stupas and build 84,000 stupas [to house the relics], pulled down seven and was about to destroy this stupa [as well]. Then the dragon showed itself and took King Aśoka into his palace, where he had him observe all the things prepared for offerings and said to him: ‘If you can offer something greater than these, pull down the stupa and take [the relics] with you. I will not dispute you.’ King Aśoka, realizing that those things prepared for offerings were not of this world, immediately returned [to his capital].

“The area surrounding the stupa turned into a wilderness, and there was no one to clean and sweep around it.

[However], a herd of elephants always came and brought water in their trunks to wash the ground, as well as various kinds of flowers and incense to present as offerings to the stupa. At one time a pilgrim came from some country and intended to offer veneration to the stupa. But seeing the elephants he was very afraid, and climbed a tree and hid there. When he [saw] the elephants making offerings according to the Law, however, he was greatly saddened that there was no monastery from which to offer veneration to [the stupa] in the park and that elephants had to do the sweeping and cleaning. Thereupon the pilgrim abandoned the great prohibitions [he had been following], and became a *śrāmaṇera*. By himself he cleared away the grass and trees, put the area in order, and made it pure and clean. [Then] he appealed to the king of the country to make a dwelling place [there] for priests, and himself became the head of the temple. Even today priests continue to live there. This happened quite recently, and from that time until now, a *śrāmaṇera* has headed the temple, generation after generation.

“Three *yojanas* east from here is the place where the Prince [Siddhārtha] sent back [his attendant] Chandaka with his white horse, and there too stands a stupa. Four *yojanas* farther east [we arrived] at the Charcoal Stupa [where the ashes from the Buddha’s funeral pyre are enshrined]. There also is a monastery here.”

Next Fa-hsien describes Kuśīnāgara.

"Going a further twelve *yojanas* east [of Rāmagrāma], we arrived at Kuśināgara. North of the town is the Twin [Śāla] Grove, on the bank of the Hiraṇyavatī River, where the World-honored One entered *parinirvāṇa* with his head placed to the north. There are also the places where Subhaddha was the last to attain enlightenment, where offerings were made for seven days to the World-honored One in his golden coffin, where Vajrapāṇi laid aside his golden vajra, and where the eight kings divided the relics [of Śākyamuni]. Stupas and monasteries were erected at all these places, and even today they all still exist. There are very few inhabitants in this town, only [a small group of] priests and [a few] private houses.

"Twelve *yojanas* southeast from here is the place where the Licchavis wanted to follow the Buddha to his *parinirvāṇa*. The Buddha refused them, but [they] would not leave the Buddha and return, so he caused a wide and deep ditch to appear, which they could not cross. [Then] the Buddha gave them his bowl as a keepsake and had [them] return to their homes. A stone pillar stands at this place, with an inscription about the above engraved on the upper [part of] it."

After Hsüan-tsang, too, gives a detailed description of Rāmagrāma in the *Ta-T'ang hsi-yü-chi*, he briefly describes Kuśināgara. We will look here only at his description of Kuśināgara.

"The capital of the country of Kuśināgara has fallen into ruin, and the towns and villages are in a sad state. The brick foundations of the old city are more than ten *li* in circumference. Its inhabitants are very few, and the towns are desolate.

"There is a stupa in the corner of the city, built by King Aśoka. It was the old house of Cunda. Within the dwelling is a well, dug when [Cunda] was about to make an offering [to Śākyamuni]. Though a great deal of time has passed, its water even now is pure and clean.

"Three or four *li* northwest of the city we crossed the Ajitavatī River. [Note: This is the name by which it is commonly called. In the past it was called the Aciravatī in a local dialect. This is what was called the Hiraṇyavatī, the 'river of gold.'] Not far from the western bank is the *śāla* grove. The *śāla* is like the oak; its bark is greenish-white and its leaves are glossy. Four trees are particularly tall. This is the place where the Tathāgata died. Within a large brick monastery here is a reclining nirvāṇa figure of the Tathāgata, lying with his head to the north. Alongside [the monastery] is a stupa, built by King Aśoka. Though its base is ruined and leaning, the stupa still reaches a height of more than two hundred feet. In front is a stone pillar on which is described the event of the Tathāgata's nirvāṇa. There is an inscription, but the date of the death is not recorded."

Hsüan-tsang's biography, the *Ta-T'ang Ta-tz'u-en-ssu Hsüan-tsang fa-shih-chuan*, gives a description similar to that of the *Ta-T'ang hsi-yü-chi*.

"Passing through the forest, [we reached] the country of Kuśināgara. This country is also extremely desolate. In the northeastern corner of the city is a stupa, built by King Aśoka.

"Here is the site of Cunda's house.

"Inside the dwelling is a well, said to have been dug in order to prepare a meal for Śākyamuni. Even now the water remains clear.

"Three or four *li* northwest of the town they crossed the Ajitavatī River. Near the bank is a *śāla* grove. These trees resemble the oak; they have a green bark and their leaves shine white. There are here four trees of about the same height. This is the place of Śākyamuni's nirvāṇa.

"At that place there is a temple built of large bricks. Within is a nirvāṇa statue of Śākyamuni, reclining with the head placed to the north. Beside [the temple] is a great stupa, three hundred feet in height, built by King Aśoka. There stands, too, a stone pillar to describe the event of the Buddha's Nirvāṇa, but there is no record of the date [of the death]."

Let us compare these descriptions with the materials we have at hand today. A copper plate inscribed with the words "[parini]rvāṇa caitya" was found in the relic chamber of the stupa adjoining the colossal recumbent image during excavations there. Vincent A. Smith conducted a detailed investigation based on the records of Fa-hsien and Hsüan-tsang, and concluded that the actual Kuśināgara must be in Nepal, near Little Rāptī (Airāvati) River and also around the confluence of the Gaṇḍak and Little Rāptī rivers at somewhere about the coordinates 84°51'E., 27°32'N. What is today called Kuśinagar, he insists, is Veṭṭhadīpa (Viṣṇudvīpa).

According to the records of Fa-hsien and Hsüan-tsang, Kuśinagara was in ruins when they visited the place in 406 and 637, respectively. Monasteries were being built in Kasia in the fifth century and should still have been existing in the seventh. Hsüan-tsang remarked that the road had fallen into disrepair; if this road was the route through the Somsar Range, it may agree with his remark.

Nevertheless, I think that it is difficult to prove Smith's hypothesis conclusively. Very few large reclining nirvāṇa statues of the Buddha can be found today in India; just about the only other one is in the Ajantā Caves. It is very unlikely that such a statue would not have been highly esteemed by the local people in the fifth century. Perhaps the fact that Hsüan-tsang recorded that the monastery was in ruins reflects his disappointment at its scale.

To be continued

Salvation Always Has a Cause

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 the summer heat arrives with full force and we sometimes face the problem of a water shortage during a long period without rain, we often hear people talking about being careful in the use of water. But however much we are urged to give serious consideration to the importance of water, I think that if all we do is turn the matter over in our minds we will not make much of a contribution toward saving water.

Someone once said to me, "There is a big difference in how people react when they are told to be careful in using water between those who grew up in farming families and saw their parents despair as sunny days without rain continued and those who have not had that experience." This is quite true. Words that are just something we hear and those that reflect an actual experience are as different as day and night in terms of how we react to them.

Religious belief similarly depends on actual experience. For example, it is like understanding the difference between hot and cold. Just as we have to feel something hot and something cold to truly recognize the difference, we have to experience religious belief for ourselves.

A certain religion teaches that it is necessary to go outdoors if you want to meet God. It is not good to keep yourself closeted. It is important to meet all kinds of people and have all kinds of experience, for it is through these people and experiences that God will come to you and teach you various things.

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

There is a well-known Latin saying "*Vox populi, vox Dei*" (The voice of the people is the voice of God). I am convinced that if you have the seeker's spirit, you will be able to meet God in the street.

In Japan, Zen practitioners undertake a type of ritual begging called *takuhatsu*, perform manual tasks such as cleaning and gardening (*samu*), and engage in seated meditation (*zazen*). All of these are considered religious practices. I am fully convinced that such begging teaches priests to go into the streets and meet people, that such manual tasks bring them into contact with the world of nature, and that seated meditation teaches them to confront their true selves.

In Rissho Kosei-kai, guidance work (*o-michibiki*), religious instruction (*tedori*), and volunteer service are all practices to polish the buddha-nature imbued within us, that is, our true selves. If all we do is encourage members to persevere and devote themselves to religious training, practices that should create happiness rather than just removing suffering may instead just remove happiness and create suffering in its place. It is of the greatest importance for us to experience how much joy we are able to receive through our religious practice and how much merit can be gained. We should not strive only to make our practice difficult and demanding and nothing more.

The Concept of Cause and Effect

I wonder if we have a tendency to think about being saved and about divine protection only when something occurs that benefits us. If we experience joy or disappointment only according to the results we gain, our faith would not last long.

As we know from the Buddhist concept of cause and

effect, anything that results arises from some origin. It would be a pity if we completely forgot the very important cause because our gaze was fixed only on the result. Rather, possessing a good heart is the cause that brings us salvation and divine protection.

We should not be overly pleased or overly disappointed only according to the results we experience. Instead, we should delight in having a good heart, which serves as the origin of the results we hope to achieve. For example, people with the tendency to grumble who realize that their constant complaining is their greatest fault and causes those around them to feel depressed might strive to stop that behavior. Likewise, people who erupt angrily whenever something they do not like occurs might restrain themselves, realizing that such outbursts only serve to diminish all at once the merits they have accumulated. It is a truly wonderful thing when such people are then told by those around them how they have changed. This is what the sutras call “donning the armor of forbearance and defeating the great general.”

We know that we only have to wait a short while at the red traffic signal before the green signal comes on. It would be foolish to become upset because we cannot wait for the change. No matter how happily we drive along with a series of green signals in our favor, we know that sooner or later green will give way to yellow, and then to red. Sometimes we forget this obvious fact.

Interestingly, the kanji characters expressing the concepts of “busy” and “to forget” are both made up of the same two components: “lose” and “mind.” If we make the center of our religious training not just the enjoyment of its results, but acquiring the good heart that is the cause of achieving happiness, the benefits of our practice will be beyond counting. It is this, and this alone, that composes the true way to salvation.

The Lesson of Evolutionary Development

Tiny primitive forms of life like the amoeba are quite simple in their internal structures. The larger the life form, the more complex its structure is, since it developed through evolution. Consequently there are great differences between, for example, small birds and large mammals. Human beings have the most advanced and complex structure of all, composed of bones, muscles, nerves, and internal organs. There is a very important lesson in the fact that through the evolutionary process a close relationship exists between external form and what is required internally to maintain that form, depending on the creature’s size.

I do not have to point out that as Rissho Kosei-kai has continued to grow as an organization, the religious guidance at its core has had to become more detailed. It there-

fore is necessary to go back from time to time and see whether or not at some point it has become formalized or diluted in content.

The proprietor of a large chain of family restaurants made the following self-assessment: “We may have made a great mistake in considering our millions of customers merely as numbers. It seems we have forgotten the necessity of considering each of them as an individual with an appetite to be satisfied.” That is certainly a meaningful reflection on a grand scale. The more the number of customers increases, the more important it is to provide each of them with good service.

We need to ponder together carefully whether or not our branches have weakened from their original mission of existing for the sake of each member and remain places where all members can discover true happiness.

My faith has sometimes been criticized as a hodgepodge, and I have been accused of casually incorporating the words of historical figures of Japanese Buddhism, as well as of other faiths, including Christianity. Rather than resenting this criticism, I feel indebted to the principal of my elementary school, Denkichi Daikai, for the education he provided me.

As I wrote in my autobiography, *Lifetime Beginner*, Mr. Daikai would admonish us to be kind to others and to revere the gods and the buddhas. With the principal’s words in mind, I would ring the bell at our home Buddhist altar every morning without fail and bow with my palms together to the spirits of the deities honored in our home shrine. On my way to school I would always bow to the images of Koyasu Kannon (Kannon as the bringer of painless birth) and Jizo (the bodhisattva who protects children in particular). I remember some people said I was strange because I did this.

In his *Shobogenzo Zuimonki* (Record of Things Heard from the Eye Treasury of the Right Dharma), the Zen master Dogen wrote: “We must respect even the plainest Buddhist statues made of mud and wood, however ordinary they may seem, and honor the sutras, however shabby their bindings may look. . . . If we sincerely respect them, we surely shall receive happiness in return.” I understand exactly what he meant. It is important to have the mind of being able to bow before that which deserves reverence.

Not long ago someone said to me, “I saw a concrete Jizo image on sale at a department store. I thought about buying it and putting it in my garden. What do you think?” I would be pleased if this idea was inspired by a genuine interest in Buddhism, but I said to him, “If your plan is just to place the image in your garden as an ornament, with no religious purpose at all, I think it may be better not to buy it.” □

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 8

The Five Hundred Disciples Receive the Prediction of Their Destiny

(1)

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

INTRODUCTION The Lotus Sutra could well be called “the sutra of prediction of attaining buddhahood,” since it teaches the truth that all living beings can become buddhas. We have seen already how the five great disciples—Shariputra, Maha-Kashyapa, Maha-Maudgalyayana, Subhuti, and Katyayana—received their predictions of buddhahood; this chapter extends the granting of predictions to an ever-increasing number of disciples, as well as to nameless shravakas, twelve hundred people altogether. Gradually the predictions are coming closer and closer to ourselves.

The question remains why, if predictions, or promises of prediction, were given to twelve hundred people, this chapter was titled “The Five Hundred Disciples Receive the Prediction of Their Destiny.” One explanation (though there are others) is that it was because the five hundred disciples together received the prediction that they would become buddhas with the same title, Universal Light Tathagata.

TEXT At that time Purna, son of Maitrayani, having heard the Buddha preach in such a wise, tactful, and opportune fashion, and having heard the prediction of the great disciples’ Perfect Enlightenment; having, moreover, heard the stories of their former destinies, and also having heard of the sovereign, transcendent powers of the buddhas; having [thus] received such unexampled [teaching], his heart was purified and in ecstasy. Immediately he rose from his seat, went before the Buddha, prostrated himself at his feet, then withdrew to one side, gazing upon his honored countenance without for a moment turning away his eyes,

COMMENTARY *Preach in such a wise, tactful, and opportune fashion.* This refers to the discourses of the chapters

“Tactfulness,” “A Parable,” and “The Parable of the Herbs.”

• *Having heard the prediction of the great disciples’ Perfect Enlightenment.* Purna had already seen and heard Shakyamuni guaranteeing that Shariputra (in the chapter “A Parable”) and Maha-Kashyapa and three other great shravakas (in the chapter “Prediction”) would attain supreme enlightenment.

• *Heard the stories of their former destinies.* Purna had heard, in the discourse of the chapter “The Parable of the Magic City,” about the causes and conditions relating to the teachings of all the buddhas and the relationship between master and disciple of all the buddhas, stretching from the Buddha Universal Surpassing Wisdom to the sixteen bodhisattva-shramaneras, and then to himself and the other followers of the Buddha.

Before we proceed further, I would like to give an outline of the personality and achievements of Purna. He was born in a village near the Buddha’s hometown of Kapilavastu. Since his mother’s name was Maitrayani, he was called Purna, son of Maitrayani. His father was a fabulously rich Brahman who was the teacher of Shakyamuni’s father, King Shuddhodana. Purna was fair-skinned, with a high-bridged nose and finely chiseled features, suggesting that he had some Caucasian blood. Tradition says he was versed in the Vedas, the sacred books of Brahmanism, possessed the gift of eloquence, and could speak sixty languages.

Even today India has seventeen major languages, and more than a hundred if further broken down. Indians who leave their native villages to go to a neighboring area often find they are unable to communicate with the local people. Thus it is not difficult to imagine what a powerful weapon

for spreading the teaching a command of sixty languages would have been.

Purna was born in the same year as Shakyamuni, and as he grew up he decided that, just as his father was the teacher of King Shuddhodana, he would one day be the teacher of Prince Siddhartha, who, because of his surpassing intelligence, was sure to become a great king. Therefore he decided to leave his home and become a monk in order to practice the Way. Without a word to his parents, he went to the Himalayas with twenty-nine companions to practice asceticism, and there, it is said, attained the four *dhyanas* (meditational states) and the five supernormal powers.

There came a time when he perceived, using the ability called “the divine eye,” that the erstwhile prince had become the Buddha and was preaching the Dharma at Deer Park. In great delight he set off for Deer Park with his companions, and all were allowed to become disciples of the Buddha. Purna was a very serious person of high capacity, and as he listened to and practiced the teachings with great devotion, he became respected in the community as one of its most accomplished members. He was particularly good at explaining the Buddha’s teachings clearly and simply, and this, added to his facility with languages, brought him renown as foremost in teaching the Dharma. His name later became a well-known metaphor in China and Japan for an eloquent person.

His eloquence was not merely a superficial skill with words in the usual social sense. As we have seen, he had a deep understanding of the teachings and was able to explain them so as to make them comprehensible to, and to move, his hearers. In addition Purna was extremely courageous and possessed an iron will, never becoming disheartened in matters concerning the Dharma, whatever difficulties he faced. A famous story is told of him. When the disciples were permitted to travel far and wide to spread the Dharma, Purna asked that he might be allowed to go to Shronaparanta, a Greek colony he knew well. Shakyamuni said, “Purna, the people of that land are violent tempered, cruel, and abusive. If you were abused and humiliated by them, what would you do?”

“World-honored One,” rejoined Purna, “however much I were abused, I would think the people of that land wise and sympathetic as long as they did not beat me or throw stones at me.”

Then Shakyamuni asked, “What if you were beaten or stoned?”

Purna replied, “Even if they beat me or threw stones at me, I would be thankful as long as they did not take their swords to me.”

Shakyamuni asked once again, “What if they should take their swords to you?”

“Even if they took their swords to me, I would be thankful as long as they did not kill me.”

“What if they should kill you?”

Purna answered, “Even if they should kill me, I would think the people of that land wise and sympathetic, for they would be liberating me from the bonds of my physical body.”

Shakyamuni, having heard this, praised Purna, saying, “Very well, Purna. You have acquired complete mastery of perseverance and should be able to instruct the people of that land.” Thus Shakyamuni allowed Purna to go to Shronaparanta to disseminate the teaching.

It is said that Purna took only three months to gain five hundred followers in that land. His eloquence derived from his unswerving faith, and his courage was based on thoroughgoing forbearance. He provides a model for us all.

TEXT . . . and reflected thus: “Wonderful is the World-honored One. Rare are his doings according to the many kinds of earthly dispositions. By tactful wisdom, he preaches the Law to and lifts all beings out of every condition to let them get rid of selfish attachment. No words of ours can declare the Buddha’s merits. Only the Buddha, the World-honored One, is able to know the natural inclinations of our inmost hearts.”

COMMENTARY *Wonderful.* This word expresses the Buddha’s virtue, which is far superior to that of any other person.

- *Rare are his doings.* What is done by the Buddha is rarely seen in this world; that is, he is able to accomplish easily things that are beyond the capacity of others.

- *By tactful wisdom.* This phrase means “with the transcendental knowledge of skillful means” or “by the wisdom to preach the Law using skillful means.”

- *He . . . lifts all beings out of every condition to let them get rid of selfish attachment.* Some people are attached to wealth, coveting it and clinging to it. Others are attached to fame, coveting it and clinging to it. Still others are attached to the fulfillment of sensual desires, coveting it and clinging to it. The Buddha’s teaching releases us from greed and attachment and brings us to a truly peaceful state of mind. Notice that the sutra says “get rid of selfish attachment,” not “suppress selfish attachment.” However much we try to suppress our desires, we can never keep them down completely. Rather, we must convert them into positive energy to perfect the self (benefit the self) and advance society (benefit others). Doing so, we will discover that the evil that arises from greed and attachment disperses like mist, of its own accord. This is the heart of Mahayana teaching.

TEXT Thereupon the Buddha addressed the bhikshus, [saying]: “Do you see this Purna, son of Maitrayani? I have

always styled him the very first among all the preachers of the Law and constantly praised his varied merits.

COMMENTARY *Merits.* This term signifies the virtues and the function of leading others and saving the world. (See the May/June 2002 issue of DHARMA WORLD.)

TEXT He has been zealous in guarding and helping to proclaim my Law. Among the four groups he has been able to display and teach it with profit and delight [to them]. Perfectly interpreting the Righteous Law of the Buddha, he has greatly benefited his fellow followers of brahma conduct. Aside from the Tathagata, no one is able to equal the lucidity of his discourse.

COMMENTARY *Zealous.* As a Buddhist term, “zealous” means wholeheartedly endeavoring.

- *Guarding and helping to proclaim.* “Guarding” is the passive or conservative action of firmly maintaining the teachings so they do not disappear from the world. “Helping to proclaim” is the active or progressive function of aiding the Buddha to spread the teachings rapidly. When both the conservative and the progressive work together, the teachings, like all things, will continue to prosper. Each of us tends to be more conservative or more progressive, but neither inclination is sufficient in itself. The juxtaposition of “guarding” and “helping to proclaim” reminds us of the importance of both the conservative and the progressive.

- *Display and teach it with profit and delight.* The teachings are first given in a summarized form (“display”), next their meanings are explained at a deeper level (“teach”), then people are led to practice them and profit from them (“profit”) so that they finally experience the joy of keeping them (“delight”). By the fourth stage, the teachings have become firmly lodged in the mind. These four stages represent the basic order of leading people to the Buddha Way. (See the March/April 2004 issue of DHARMA WORLD.)

- *Perfectly.* This indicates “with nothing left out.”

- *His fellow followers of brahma conduct.* This phrase refers to his companions in the pure practice. (See “holy deeds” in the March/April 2002 issue.) The expression “fellow practitioner” is also found.

- *No one is able to equal the lucidity of his discourse.* Purna is fluent in speech, has persuasive power, and can bring all to an understanding of the teachings. The power to move his hearers deeply means he commands the power of language to the highest degree.

Since the word “eloquence” is open to misinterpretation, I would like to discuss it a little further here. What is most fundamental and important is that a person’s eloquence and fluency are based upon the true Law. Fluent speech must

be derived from words rooted in, and flowing from, the universal truth. There are eloquent speakers who can skillfully incite others. They stir up the desires of their listeners and fan their emotions, pulling them forcefully toward self-centered argument. Since such people have a strong grasp of the weaknesses of the mass mind as well as an excellent knowledge of mob psychology, the multitude is swayed without realizing it. Group frenzy can result. Unless their speech is based on the universal truth, however, the success of their agitation can be only temporary; as time passes, these agitators will lose people’s trust, their strength will weaken, and their supporters will scatter. Numerous examples from history attest to this.

Even worse than those who incite others by their words are those fluent speakers who force people to concur with their point of view by intimidation. They take advantage of human weaknesses, such as fear, warning people that they and their families will suffer if they do not join a particular sect or group. There are religious organizations that coerce people into joining them by stirring up emotions of dread and terror; this is far more vicious than mere incitement, and is an utter misuse of the power of words.

In the final analysis, incitement and intimidation are cunning methods of manipulation; they may pull people in temporarily, but their success can never endure, for people’s good sense will eventually open their eyes to the truth. True eloquence must flow from the universal truth, appeal to people’s good sense and win their affirmation, and have the power to deepen that understanding until it becomes belief. Shakyamuni and Purna were eloquent speakers possessing this kind of true persuasive power. We cannot hope to reach their level, but we can imitate them in terms of guiding people according to the true Dharma. We should never forget this.

One more thing we can learn from the eloquence of Shakyamuni and Purna is that we should use the words best suited to the understanding of our listeners. Scholars tell us that Shakyamuni generally discoursed on the Law in the Magadhi language, the vernacular of Magadha, the region where the Buddha’s teaching activities were concentrated. As we can surmise from the principle of preaching according to the hearer, Shakyamuni used a more elegant form of language when teaching people of the upper strata of society and the local dialect when teaching in places like Shravasti and the Jetavana monastery, in the country of Kosala. What I would like to emphasize is that Shakyamuni did his best to avoid difficult abstract terms and affected words, making it his principle always to use language that could be easily understood. The following anecdote offers ample proof of this.

One day two bhikshus, brothers and former students

of the Vedas, came to Shakyamuni and said: “World-honored One, we perceive that the bhikshus of the Sangha, coming from different places, different families, different backgrounds, different countries, and different clans, are sullying the words of the Buddha using their own languages and dialects. We, therefore, would like to render the Buddha’s words into the elegant meter of the Vedas. May we have your permission to do so?” Immediately the Buddha replied, saying flatly, “You must do no such thing. It would not be at all appropriate.”

In Japan we read the sutras in Chinese translation or in a formal Japanized form of Chinese, and so we tend to think that the Buddha’s words are solemn and impressive in tone. In actual fact, they were spoken mostly in Magadhi, simply and often wittily, easily understood by all. This too teaches us something very important that we should remember. When preaching the Law to others, we all have a tendency to use Buddhist terms and difficult expressions, trying to be impressive and lacking any real sympathy for the needs of our listeners. This goes against the Buddha’s original intention and is of little effect in leading people to an understanding of the Law. Those who spread the Buddha’s teaching must have a good command of the type of language that takes into consideration each person and each situation.

A final important point is that true eloquence is not mere fluency but the kind of speech that produces the best results regarding a particular need. It is said that Shakyamuni gave eighty-four thousand sermons, suggesting falsely that he spent every available moment preaching the Dharma. This was not the case; he only said what was necessary when it was necessary. He always avoided argument for argument’s sake. In the India of his time, there were more than sixty philosophical and religious sects besides Brahmanism, and all engaged in philosophical debate with one another, discussing such things as whether the world was eternal or finite. Shakyamuni refused to reply to any such questions put to him by his disciples, since these were subjects beyond human understanding, about which there could be no proof. Even if they could be understood, such questions had no direct relation to the relief of people and the improvement of society. Therefore he forbade the discussion of such metaphysics, calling it morally neutral (*avyakrta*).

Shakyamuni did not always use words alone in teaching the Law; his actions expressed a nonverbal teaching, and we can imagine that these had the same weight and value as the discourses. It is also conceivable that the Buddha frequently gave wordless discourses, as for example when he silently held out a golden lotus flower to his audience (see the November/December 2002 issue of DHARMA WORLD).

He was a man of few words even in the course of daily life, and when his presence and voice were not required, he sat quietly in meditation. This great silence has been likened to a vast subterranean lake infinite in depth. When the time came to preach the Law, that inexhaustible and infinite store came welling up.

In our own religious lives, too, we should refrain from eloquence in form only and be deeply mindful of the original purpose for which we should train ourselves in attaining true eloquence through our practice of the Dharma.

In summary, when preaching the Dharma we must be aware of five points:

- (1) Our attitude must always be based on the true Dharma.
- (2) We must use the language that is most easily understood by and most suited to our listeners.
- (3) We should, appealing to the good sense of our listeners, help them truly with their understanding of the Buddha’s teaching and lead them to deepen that understanding until it becomes feeling and belief.
- (4) It is important that we preach the Law not only through words but also by our actions.
- (5) Firm mental preparation is necessary before teaching the Law verbally.

Purna’s reputation as “the very first among all the preachers of the Law” was probably based on his fulfilling these elements.

TEXT Do not think that it is only my Law that Purna is able to guard and help to proclaim. He also under ninety kotis of buddhas in the past guarded and helped to proclaim the Righteous Law of the buddhas. Among those preachers of the Law he was also the foremost. And in regard to the Law of emptiness preached by the buddhas, he was clear minded and penetrating; he attained the four degrees of unhindered wisdom; he has ever been able to preach the Law with judgment and in purity, without doubt and perplexity. Perfect in transcendent bodhisattva powers, he maintained brahma conduct to the end of his life.

COMMENTARY *The Law of emptiness.* This refers to the teaching of emptiness (*shunyata*). “Emptiness” has a broad meaning. In simple terms, it is the principle that nothing in this world exists in isolation from other things or has an ontological substance (self) that remains eternally unchanged. All things arise and perish through causes and conditions (dependent origination); this is the real aspect of all things. The Buddhist view of the world and human life arises from the truth that all people and all things are originally equal and that they are sustained by the compas-

sion of the Buddha and are also always in a great harmony. The teaching of emptiness leads in turn to a lofty view of salvation: ultimate peace of mind is attained when one has equal compassion (a sense of unity) for all people and all things and one is in great harmony with all people and all things. The Law of emptiness is the fundamental truth of Buddhism (see the January/February 1993 issue of DHARMA WORLD).

- *The four degrees of unhindered wisdom.* “Unhindered” means without obstruction or stagnation, absolutely free and unrestricted. The four degrees of unhindered wisdom (the four *pratisamvids*) refer to the four kinds of free and unrestricted wisdom that are important for understanding and expressing the Dharma. They are as follows:

- (1) The unhindered wisdom of the Dharma: the ability to understand clearly the truth that is the basis of the teaching.

- (2) The unhindered wisdom of the meaning of the teaching: the ability to have thorough and unobstructed knowledge of the content and meaning of the teaching.

- (3) The unhindered wisdom of language: the ability to have a good command of the most suitable words when preaching the Dharma.

- (4) The unhindered wisdom of preaching: the ability to preach the Dharma to others with a free and unrestricted feeling, on the basis of the above three wisdoms.

- *To preach the Law with judgment and in purity.* This means that one has no selfish mind at all when preaching the Dharma to others. One preaches the Law to bring one’s listeners to true salvation, without any wish for reward, any intention to make a display of one’s own knowledge, or any desire to be considered great. This is what it means to preach the Law “in purity.”

- *Perfect in transcendent bodhisattva powers, he maintained brahma conduct to the end of his life.* Purna continually taught the Law for the sake of the people in the way described in this passage, and so in his actions was already a bodhisattva. Being also endowed with the various supernatural powers of a bodhisattva, he was essentially a fine bodhisattva. Nevertheless, being modest and unassuming, he maintained the lifestyle of a bhikshu and obeyed the precepts of purity all his life, so continuing his pure practice (“brahma conduct”). Therefore people looked upon him as a shravaka, as we will see in the next installment.

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.

White-robed Kannon (Avalokiteshvara) seated in front of a waterfall. An ink-brush painting by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.

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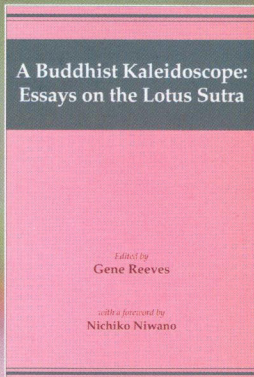
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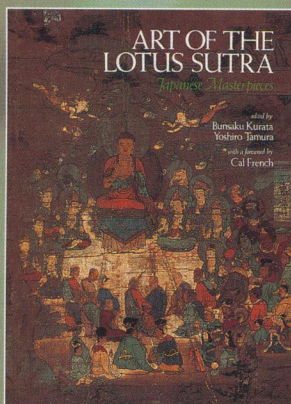
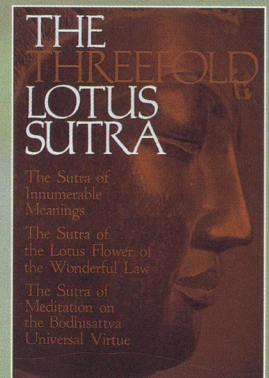
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