

FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

DHARMA WORLD

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Religion in Crisis or "in the Making"?
The Great Stupa of Abundant Treasures Buddha

Buddhist Basics Explained for All

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

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DHARMA WORLD

For Living Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue

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Cover photo: A replica of the frontispiece of scroll no. 4 of the Lotus Sutra scrolls placed in the statue of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni enshrined in the Great Sacred Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters in Tokyo. The painting depicts Shakyamuni preaching the Lotus Sutra on Vulture Peak. In the lower right corner of the painting appears the great stupa of Abundant Treasures Buddha, described in chapter 11.

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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Integrating Monism with Pluralism

Two opposing currents exist in the world today. One is globalization, which seeks to color all the world's cultures and value systems the same hue—in other words, the current of monism in which all of reality is viewed as a unified whole. The other is the current of pluralism, which seeks to allow all the world's cultures and value systems to continue to thrive.

To put this more concretely, the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East illustrate the point well. The Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq were destroyed by overwhelming military force, but these developments cannot be explained simply as examples of the United States seeking to establish American-style democracy and the former Islamic regimes resisting this.

In fact, the opposition between monism and pluralism is not a new phenomenon. It is just a new variation on an old theme in the history in both the East and the West. Buddhism is no exception to this. In the long history of Buddhism, Theravada ("of the elders") Buddhism in the religion's early days, with its emphasis on faithfulness to tradition, can be seen as an example of monism. On the other hand, the development of Mahayana (Great Vehicle) Buddhism is an example of pluralism.

There is a scripture, however, that sought to dissolve the dichotomy and to integrate the two on a higher level—that is the Lotus Sutra. That sutra did not negate either Theravada or the earlier scriptures of the Mahayana tradition to which it belongs. It tried to establish a logical foundation that would ensure the possibility of attaining the Buddha's enlightenment for the adherents of both traditions.

The Lotus Sutra calls this concept the "One Buddha Vehicle." It is a concept that integrates pluralistic and seemingly opposing ideas while acknowledging the plurality of

methods and doctrines that seek to walk together toward a higher goal.

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, sought to realize the spirit of this One Buddha Vehicle concept by advocating interreligious dialogue and cooperation, not only in Japan but worldwide. Today that spirit continues to be promoted by the organization's current president, Rev. Nichiko Niwano, who emphasizes the preciousness of all individual lives. Life itself is what is recognized as of the greatest value by people of all ethnic and religious backgrounds. Life symbolizes the integration of pluralism and monism. This way of thinking is grounded in the spirit of the One Buddha Vehicle introduced in the Lotus Sutra.

Religions are usually categorized as monotheistic or polytheistic, and Buddhism is always ranked as polytheistic. Today many theologians from such monotheistic faiths as Christianity and Judaism are undertaking research on Buddhism. This reflects the sense of crisis they feel in the face of the dangers humanity will confront if we do not strive to create a world in which people of all ethnic and religious backgrounds, and of all value systems, will be able to live in harmony. We must move to find a principle that integrates us all so that we can exist together in peace.

It is my firm belief that no age has ever had a greater need than our own for the One Buddha Vehicle concept of the Lotus Sutra, which gives special favor neither to monism nor to pluralism. □

Michio T. Shinozaki
President
The Rissho Kosei-kai Gakurin Seminary

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

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Grasping That Formless Entity We Call the Heart

by Masahiro Mori

We labor under the delusion that what we see is the truth, causing us to have problems and suffer. To realize how incorrectly we are perceiving things is the first step toward being able to see into our own hearts.

With the astounding achievements of science, it appears that everything in the whole world is heading in a rush toward rationalization. If we assume, therefore, that the human heart is also becoming rational, this is not so at all. Within our hearts, an unending series of contradictions continues to be generated, giving rise to various entanglements and complications.

When we encounter situations that bother us, we get angry. Or we hesitate, thinking, “I want both to agree and to disagree, but if I agree I can’t disagree. . . .” Contradictions are, in other words, worries, troubles, and sufferings, that is, expressions of delusion. So, with respect to the question of whether or not we can give robots a heart, this difficulty of endowing them with delusions is a nearly insoluble one. Robots cannot tolerate contradictions. When we compartmentalize our consciousness—smiling outwardly while crying inwardly—or try to force ourselves to do something

that is the opposite of what we really want to do, we are acting out contradictions, and at present computers cannot do this. That is how complex the human heart is. In fact, the human heart is a mass of worries, troubles, and confusion, and it is just about impossible for us to switch off its delusions.

We All Wear Tinted Glasses

We normally think of ourselves as using our five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch to receive stimuli from the outside world and perceive what is in front of us, which in some cases causes us to feel various emotions.

However, let’s step back. The moment we perceive something, we have already made an error. To begin with, unless we have cleansed our hearts through religious training, we cannot perceive things as they really are. One thing that prevents us from perceiving things as they really are is the restraint imposed on us by language. For example, we have “magic markers” and also small “alcohol lamps.” In that both consist of a small container holding an alcohol-based fluid with a wick inserted, and both are designed so that the fluid moves toward the tip of the wick when in use, they are identical. However, the moment we call them “alcohol lamp” and “magic marker,” we perceive them as completely different things. The same is true with the words “success” and “failure.” Koichi Tanaka, winner of the 2002 Nobel Prize for chemistry, mistakenly switched some containers in the course of his research, and mixed some liquids that he had not intended to mix. However, rather than dismiss this as a mistake, he decided to go ahead and give the experiment a try even so. This is what led to one of the major discoveries of the twentieth century—the development of methods for the identification and structure analysis of biological macromolecules. When the two liquids were mixed, this led to a chemical reaction. If Mr. Tanaka had merely labeled this a “mistake,” he would never have made his discovery.

Another thing that prevents us from perceiving things as

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they really are is the delusion caused by our assumptions. Rev. Nikkyo Niwano speaks about this in his detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra. One day, after lunch, a company employee is walking down a hallway without realizing that he has a grain of rice on his cheek. The president of the company comes down the hall from the other direction, and, seeing the grain of rice, smiles. If the employee is a person always intent on getting ahead, he may think, "Maybe I'm in line for a promotion!" If the employee has secretly taken the day off from work the day before, his heart might skip a beat as he thinks, "Oh, no! I've been found out!"

The only reason that the president of the company smiled was that he saw the grain of rice on the employee's cheek and was amused. This was the true, but invisible, reality. In this way, our own experiences, interests, fixed ideas, and so on influence what we see and hear, and even what conclusions we jump to. Every one of us sees the world through our own uniquely tinted glasses.

If we could look through clear glass, we would be able to see things as they really are. But we see the world through the medium of our egos, which function like glasses tinted with the color of their own private standards, and this causes us to see things in a distorted way.

And then we labor under the delusion that what we see is the truth, causing us to have problems and suffer.

To realize how incorrectly we are perceiving things is the first step toward being able to see into our own hearts.

Our Hearts Rule Our Lives

We do not want to suffer losses. Even if it means that another person will be sacrificed, we want to profit. We want to come out on top. All of these feelings are delusions that exist in everyone's heart. However, we cannot always get what we want, and so we are bound up constantly in the travail of anger, rage, and frustration.

In the Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, it is written that "[The bodhisattva practice] is not

to cut off binding and driving nor to abide in the ocean of driving." "Binding" in this context refers to one's delusions. The Japanese word for this term employs two characters: the first literally means "to bind," indicating that our hearts are bound tightly by our delusions. The other character means "to use," in this context indicating that our delusions are using us, driving us hard. I think that this Japanese term very cleverly illustrates the nature of delusions. Because they are the workings of our hearts, even if we wanted to get rid of them, it would be no easy task. The trick is not to be bound or driven by them.

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When we are being controlled by our delusions, although they come from our own hearts or emotions, we are in a state in which we are unable to control ourselves. Our emotions are directing everything, and we do not realize that our very selves are being ruled by our emotions. We should not let ourselves be pushed around by our emotions. We are the ones that must control them, must control our hearts. To realize this is very important.

The Other Self That Observes the Self

Anger, hatred, envy—we suffer when the heart is being broken into bits by these emotions. When we feel these emotions welling up, it is a good idea to take an unbi-

ased look at ourselves. When we find ourselves getting all heated up from anger, we should try to view ourselves with bemused detachment, thinking, "Hmm, I feel angry. Why am I getting angry?" This is because our anger is probably due to our seeing the facts in a distorted way through those tinted glasses of ego. Just realizing this should result in a considerable cooling off of our emotions.

When we are the ones who sit in the driver's seat, we can then freely control our emotions. When we can skillfully regulate our hearts, even if obstacles appear in our path one after another, we can deftly steer around them. We might even come to enjoy the challenges of a bad road. When we reach this stage, we might even find that life has suddenly become very pleasant! □

Religion in Crisis or “in the Making”?

by Hiromasa Mase

What religion can provide is a moral foundation. Being aware of pressing problems and situations, such as the morality of environmental issues, the morality of the right to life, and the very morality of religion itself, should not religion take some action?

Religion in the Making, the title of a work by Alfred North Whitehead, carries the meaning that religion is a living, moving entity that is always “in the making.” Thus, religion is a living, moving entity that is always progressing toward the future. While on the way to the future, religion is directly faced with various problems and situations that force it to reconfigure itself in various ways. Accordingly, if religion were indifferent toward the future, or indifferent toward those problems and situations, might religion not be said to be in crisis?

While it is reconfiguring itself on the way to the future, what kind of awareness of current problems and situations does religion have? Further, what course of action is it taking in regard to those problems and situations? If it does not have such awareness, and if it does not take any course of action at all, religion can again be said to be in crisis.

It goes without saying that religion is not a philosophy of morality. What religion can provide, however, is a moral foundation. Thus, should not religion, being aware of pressing problems and situations, such as the morality of environmental issues, the morality of the right to life, and the very morality of religion itself, sincerely take some action? Having such awareness and taking such action, should not religion reconfigure itself, that is, undergo some reformation, and become more open on the way to the future? If religion does not reform itself on the way to the future, does not become more open, becomes indifferent to what it can provide in the future, then in this case, too, can religion not be said to be in crisis?

Restoration of Belief

All around us, greenery is being destroyed, wetlands are disappearing, and harmful substances are polluting the air, the seas, and the land. Civilization is on the verge of death. In such a situation, if one mentions the need for religion or faith, one is viewed with great suspicion. For it is precisely when such a situation arises that fundamentalist faiths become hysterical, giving birth to self-righteousness and division. Is it any wonder, then, that many people seem to be allergic to religion and faith? And yet, in the real world, in which people cannot believe in the compassion and love of God or the Buddha, through looking purely at what is really happening, by feeling and understanding it, can we

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not come to know the true nature of what is happening, and can we not experience a restoration of belief and faith?

When children talk about dead fish that are floating in the rivers, parents should worry that their children's bones may contain strontium 90, which may cause them pain. It is because they can share grieving hearts, facing the fact that natural destruction means death. This can be called the compassion or love of religion. Through suffering together with the earth, we greatly broaden the circle of compassion. Having experienced compassion, we begin to reflect upon ourselves and consider who we really are. Thus, by sharing pain and suffering while in the midst of pain and suffering, we come to know that it is not just we who require healing and salvation. This is because through connecting with others, through supporting one another, we all come to learn that life makes networks. Here lies the down-to-earth, true nature of life, namely, we are simply one part in the system of life. Therefore, whether we can affirm the true nature of life has become an important touchstone for us.

When religion talks about "liberating the self" or "freeing the self from the ego," is it not in fact referring to the same thing? When we can free our view from the anthropocentric consciousness of self-love, we feel remorse and repent. Our awareness thus undergoes a great transformation. It appears as a change in the way we relate to all nonhuman beings, and also as a change in our sense of responsibility for them. This type of change is termed "spiritual." Thus, a spiritual journey of self-discovery is now deemed very important. If we become aware of ourselves as having obtained a power that works for the greater whole, then we are in fact blessed with that very power by the thing that caused us to turn toward it. In religion, this is known as "grace."

Born into this great life, my life is alive and living. I am living, having been given life. Ah, how grateful I am! What it is that makes us aware of life in this manner is, it goes without saying, religion. Religion helps us to encounter our real or true self. The "me" that is alive now is not the real "me." What religion teaches is that the true self consists of the self that arises through that which is not the self, the "me" that arises through that which is not "me." The true meaning of liberation as taught by religion is contained herein.

Is this not a view of religion for today? Through knowing the original self, we can find a path leading to salvation and healing. This type of real transformation in human life appears in every religion. In this context, every religion is the "way" and that which exists "on the way," or, in Whitehead's phrase, "in the making." Through their own self-awareness of "a way in the making," all religions can create their own "selves," looking ahead to the future, while escaping from their institutional and dogmatic systems. If that were not

the case, then here, too, might religion not be said to be in crisis?

The Meaning of Spirituality

Religion is thought to exist in nature and to have developed originally from our experiences of being one with the great life of nature. Does an awareness that living life and having been given life are actually one not indicate the mysterious harmony between the spirituality that resides deep within the human heart and the spirituality residing deep within nature?

Buddhism teaches that mountains and rivers, trees and plants, all possess the buddha-nature; Shinto speaks of the divine spirit that can be seen to live within even a drop of dew, a wild bird, or the dawn sky. To Christianity, nature is reckoned to be a "second Bible," the very living body of God. It is, as the visible form of invisible grace, a sacrament. Therefore, nature is a power that has the ability to purify the soul, a hidden secret that reveals God's will.

The word *spirituality* derives from *spirit*. Since *spirit* originally meant "one who breathes," it was used to indicate human beings, animals, plants, and all other living things. Furthermore, the earth itself should also be thought of as a living entity. The earth and the universe are the sources of life, granting us all the elements essential for life and, in effect, continuing the act of creation. Consequently, spirituality is the attitude of revering the preciousness of life more than anything else. It is an attitude taken in opposition when faced with life-threatening forces. A person who is rich in spirituality is someone who can comprehend the true nature of life, someone who can reach the depths involved in reflecting upon the ultimate reality of the deities. Therefore, throughout the world, married couples walking together as pilgrims have steadily increased, and are beginning what might be called a spiritual journey of self-discovery.

While on a trip in the summer of 1995, I met an aging American minister and his wife who were searching for spirituality. They were in the midst of a few weeks' pilgrimage around England, their own spiritual journey of self-discovery. "In the midst of today's rich material culture, our lives are too busy. In our private lives, as well as in our lives within society, we are always too busy. We do not have the time to reflect on ourselves. Then we seem to lose ourselves. Perhaps because we became aware of this, we are now feeling a kind of starvation." So saying, the couple continued their pilgrimage, visiting the nearby old abbeys and chapels.

In America today, people are beginning to feel an emptiness in lives based on interest in financial matters. In order to fill the resulting emptiness, they seem to be turning to

religious things, to spiritual things. Here they transform the framework of their understanding and look for a kind of paradigm shift. In other words, they look for a way to reexamine their views on nature and life and their attitude toward their own lives, and find that this process seems to involve religion.

In that regard, I recall that the minister and his wife said quietly, "Life is a grand gift. We are all embraced in it. We must not run away from it. The source of life is intimately connected with God." When I asked them, "What type of God is that?" they answered me, somewhat hesitantly, "One who not only is transcendent and stands apart from this world but also is immanent and dwells within each of us."

On further consideration, we can say that all beings, all things that have been given life, are sacramental beings. All creations are symbols of God's immanence. Is it not obvious that this immanence is found in spirituality? That we "live, move, and have our being" can only mean that we do so within God. As proof of that, we can come to see that this God is a transcendent God who is immanent, a God of transcendent immanence. This understanding of God is called panentheism. It represents a union of two different modes of thought: pantheism, which embraces the concept of wonder at divine immanence, and monotheism, which embraces the idea of transcendence. The joining of these two traditional and opposing theories of God in a modern approach called panentheism serves as the foundation on which religion is linked to ecology.

When the minister and his wife had completed their spiritual journey of self-discovery, they wrote to me: "To us, spirituality now means silence, or the act of listening; obedience, or the act of following the will of God; prayer, or the act of accepting forgiveness; and community, or the act of reconciliation with others. Through a restoration of intimate connections with nature, ourselves, and our community, we can now sense a kind of healing. Therefore, we feel that the meaning of 'intimate' is equal to that of 'spiritual' or even 'natural'."

Reading that letter, I wistfully recalled the conversation I had shared with that couple when we first met. When they said, "The source of life is intimately connected with God," I had asked them, "What type of God is that?" If I were asking them now, they would not hesitate to reply that God is transcendent but immanent; that we live, move, and have our being within God. This is the utterance of people who have undergone a deep spiritual experience.

Today's interest in ecology is connected to such spirituality, and is bringing about a "green revolution." I feel that in the twenty-first century, together with ecology, religion and spirituality will become very important. The coming age, which will shape the society of the future, will be an

age not of quantity but of quality—that is, the age of concentrating on the value of financial profit will come to an end, and the times will change so that we will enter an age in which high value is sought in the nonphysical aspects of life. That high economic growth has brought about the devastation of the human heart as well as of the environment is clear to everyone. Now, I believe, it is necessary for us to take a proper stand and change that trend. Is it not

"Religion helps us to meet our true self. Our living self is not our true self. Religion teaches that our true self is the self made possible through what is not our self, and our ego is made possible through what is not our ego."

our urgent task to create a life that attaches great importance to quality, one that seeks rich spirituality even within our economic lives?

Buddhist Economics

Born in Bonn, Germany, E. F. Schumacher emigrated to Britain at the age of thirty-five, and later wrote the classic *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, in which

he criticized our extremely materialistic economy and spoke about replacing it with what he interestingly termed “Buddhist economics.” He also proposed the idea that in our economic lives today, what we need to seek out is rich spirituality.

Schumacher’s thesis was an all-out challenge to the contemporary Western concepts of gigantism and materialism. A deep-rooted belief in economic growth and worship of materialism have greatly distorted our social lives. Through valuing nonmaterial things that money cannot buy, we must now restore the healthy social lives of the people. This must be the point of view for the postmodern era.

Small Is Beautiful was a bestseller in Britain in the 1970s. It was quickly translated into Japanese and widely read in Japan, too. The science of economics had given birth to faith in economic growth. In consequence, it had degenerated into a pseudoscience that gave affirmation to insatiable desire. Schumacher proposed a new concept to take the place of human greed, of gigantism and materialism: an economics that would advance along a middle path—Buddhist economics.

Buddhism teaches the Middle Way. Avoiding the path of extreme pleasure, and also avoiding the path of extreme austerity, it promotes the Middle Way. Following the Middle Way, we are led to seek the guide that will lead us to “right livelihood,” or the proper method of living our lives.

It goes without saying that Buddhists are very different from people brought up with Western civilization’s materialistic centralism. Buddhists do not find the real nature of civilization within the desire to amass but within the desire to purify human nature. As Schumacher wrote: “While the materialist is mainly interested in goods, the Buddhist is mainly interested in liberation. But Buddhism is ‘The Middle Way’ and therefore in no way antagonistic to physical well-being. It is not wealth that stands in the way of liberation but the attachment to wealth; not the enjoyment of pleasurable things but the craving for them. The keynote of Buddhist economics, therefore, is simplicity and non-violence.”

Today, such questions as “What are riches?” and “What is it to be truly happy?” are frequently asked. Happiness is determined by how well people have fulfilled their inner desires, by how close they have come to spiritual peace. That being so, the concept of modern economics that one’s standard of living will improve if production and consumption are abundant and one will therefore become happy turns out to be wrong. Even if consumption is one of the processes needed to bring people happiness, it is not the goal. The ideal is to be able to attain the greatest amount of happiness from the smallest amount of consumption. Buddhist economics takes this as its ideal. It is this that Schumacher

admires. He writes: “From an economist’s point of view, the marvel of the Buddhist way of life is the utter rationality of its pattern—amazingly small means leading to extraordinarily satisfactory results.

“For the modern economist this is very difficult to understand. He is used to measuring the ‘standard of living’ by the amount of annual consumption, assuming all the time that a man who consumes more is ‘better off’ than a man who consumes less. A Buddhist economist would consider this approach excessively irrational: since consumption is merely a means to human well-being, the aim should be to obtain the maximum of well-being with the minimum of consumption.”

Schumacher’s Buddhist economics is a type of systematic research on just how well the goal is achieved through the minimum process, and the results of that research were connected to the intention to bring a rich, noble spirituality into humanity’s economic life in order to have an economic life with true quality. This is also an actively simple life created through one’s own will and ideas. It is certainly time to rethink the present economic system of mass production and mass consumption. Can we not realize an economic system that is based upon producing only what the individual needs? We must seriously search for the path of “knowing satisfaction through reduced desire.”

Ecology and Healing

I am living the life I have been given within a greater life. I am living it because I was given life. Ah, how grateful I am! What it is that awakens us to the preciousness of life is, it goes without saying, religion.

Religion helps us to meet our true self. Our living self is not our true self. Religion teaches that our true self is the self made possible through what is not our self, and our ego is made possible through what is not our ego.

To the question of what is the true self, for example, the answer might be “the life I live, which I have been given.” This life can be said to be the life of a god, the life of a buddha. We are all living the lives we have been given, moving, and also existing.

The place in which this life exists is the land, the earth, the universe. This is a place in which great, living nature and diverse beings, ourselves included, live, supporting one another in a symbiotic interdependence. Here, because all beings are inseparable from one another, since all are connected in a living chain of existence, a life-centered ethics of looking at life ecologically and seeing the subject in an environmental relation (or system, like a web) arises. Thus, the significance of a shared existence is born, not only between human beings but even between human and nonhuman beings, which is to say, with nature. This is the foundation

of the concept of symbiosis. Moreover, the foundation that makes a symbiosis between human beings and nature possible is an ecological, biocentric sense of values.

Biocentrism is contemporary spirituality. And it is within that spirituality that the healing of contemporary humanity is to be found. Therefore, it is said that the ecology of biocentrism is the concept of healing, which can bring about the restoration of the connection between humanity and nature. The original meaning of the word *healing* was “that which helps one to become whole.”

That which connects beings that have been healed is a connection based upon trust. Within this connection based upon trust, there come into existence dialogue and cooperation. Phrased differently, dialogue and cooperation are tolerance and nonviolence. And these, precisely, are what we are looking for today in religious ethics. Seen from the viewpoint of religious pluralism, what characterizes each of the various religions is the way to the Truth. And we must all, through introspection, come to see that our understanding and actualization of our own truths are only measures that are still “in the making.” A religion that embraces an understanding of itself as nothing more than “a way in the making” is forward looking. To be forward looking, it must first free itself from a backward-looking position, from clinging to the past, from a rejection or incorporation of other religions. As religious pluralism, which has freed itself from exclusivism and inclusivism, enters the twenty-first century, I am very interested in what kind of fruit religions will bear.

I believe that we should switch from the negative viewpoint of “religion in crisis” to the positive standpoint of looking with hope toward the future, and that if we are to attempt the resuscitation of contemporary religions there will have to be a convergence of the above-mentioned points of view.

Some Problems That Lie Ahead

Here I would like to explain a few problem points.

First, Japanese religions will have to move in a more ecological direction. For example, since Shrine Shinto places more importance on forests than upon its sacred buildings, and even now possesses great depth as a nature religion, it will have to pursue the theme of “nature and humanity,” and will also have to commit itself more fully to the problems of contemporary society. Under the theme of “nature and humanity,” its priests will have to speak out against the destruction of nature, air pollution, water pollution, and the presence of environmental hormones, and offer straightforward and continuous courses of study for its lay members.

This is not something that is being said about Shrine Shinto alone. For, lost as we are among the problems of contemporary society, if we do not do this, religions will not be able to evade censure for their neglect. Since an ecological awareness, on the deepest level, is an awareness that we are part of a larger whole, that we are connected with a larger whole, it is common to all types of traditional spirituality. Buddhism is no exception. Everyone would admit that Buddhism is also close to an ecological type of thinking.

Second, based upon the premise that Buddhist economics promotes the Middle Way, a new financial indicator will have to be created in order to replace gross domestic product. GDP is an indicator that measures wealth by quantity. True wealth, however, consists not of quantity but of quality. Therefore, Buddhism will have to extract from Buddhist economics such an indicator, one that indicates the wealth that sinks deeply into the heart.

Third, if we are going to attempt to resuscitate religions in crisis, we will need to consider where such a path will lead. Will it not be self-liberation and an escape from institutionalization for religion, self-liberation and an escape from dogmatism for faith? Religions that exist within a system will have to escape from that system. That is, we will have to effect a release from the very dogma that has bound our faith. Then a new path will open up to us. Furthermore, it is that very path that should be seen as the maturity of religion, the maturity of faith.

At present, religions group together their believers within a rigid system, within which they also create a hierarchy of spiritual levels. In addition, they preach that exterminating those of a lower spiritual level is good. This is the completely closed situation of institutionalized religions and dogmatic faith. In such a situation religions cannot respond actively to real problems and faith will not grow. Outwardly, religions seem to be prospering and people seem to have some faith, but true religious feeling seems to be vanishing. Professor Noriyuki Ueda of the Tokyo Institute of Technology has described this in his *Shukyo kuraису* (The Crisis of Religion): “Because organizations like business corporations and schools have developed, outwardly our society may seem quite prosperous, but each individual in it feels deprived of all sense of wealth as well as of a *raison d’être*. Becoming aware that our daily world and our religious world are parallel, religions will have to reestablish a place in which true religious feeling can thrive within the religious world.”

I agree with him completely. If religions disregard the actual problems directly facing them and the maturation of belief that is essential to faith, then religion, and even faith itself, will surely be in crisis. □

The Great Stupa of Abundant Treasures Buddha

by Gene Reeves

This story makes free use of unusual images and events to advance a unified worldview indicating that the Buddha is somehow represented throughout the universe.

In chapter 11 of the Lotus Sutra we encounter once again, as in chapter 1, a story that is the product of an incredibly fertile imagination. In a sense, this chapter begins a new and long story within the story that began in chapter 1—a story that extends through chapter 22, albeit with interruptions, and that provides a somewhat different setting from the story thus far. This story, sometimes referred to as the “ceremony in the air” or something simi-

lar, makes free use of unusual images and events in order to advance a kind of universalism or unified worldview. In this article, I will consider the part of this story found in chapter 11. Later, I will look at further developments of the longer story.

The Story

With no introduction or warning of any kind, the chapter begins with a huge stupa, magnificently adorned with jewels and a great many other ornaments, springing out of the ground and coming to rest, hanging in the air before the Buddha and the assembly. As offerings to the stupa, the thirty-three gods had heavenly and rare *mandarava* flowers rain down from their heaven. Other gods, dragons, satyrs, centaurs, titans, griffins, chimeras, pythons, humans, and nonhumans, tens of millions of billions of beings of great variety, made offerings to the stupa with all kinds of flowers, incense, garlands, streamers, canopies, and music, revering, honoring, and praising it.

Soon, from within the stupa, came a loud voice praising Shakyamuni Buddha for teaching the Lotus Sutra. “Well done, well done, World-honored Shakyamuni! For the sake of the great assembly, you are able to teach the Wonderful Dharma Flower Sutra of great impartial wisdom, the Dharma by which bodhisattvas are taught and that buddhas protect and keep in mind. It is just as you say, World-honored Shakyamuni! All that you say is true.”

Astonished at these events, the monks and nuns and lay people present were all filled with both joy and wonder. The bodhisattva known as Great Eloquence, seeing that no one understood what was going on, asked the Buddha why this

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Bronze relief at Hase Temple, Nara, depicting the great stupa of Abundant Treasures Buddha described in chapter 11 of the Lotus Sutra.

stupa had emerged from the ground and such a voice had issued from it. In answer, the Buddha explained that in that stupa there was the whole body of a buddha. A very long time ago in a very distant place, he explained, there once lived a buddha named Abundant Treasures who, while still a bodhisattva, made a great vow that after he had become a buddha and eventually passed away, if anyone ever taught the Lotus Sutra he would have his great stupa rise up before such a teacher, both in testimony to the truth of the sutra and also so that he could hear it taught directly and

praise the one teaching it. It is, the Buddha says, because he heard the Lotus Sutra being taught that Abundant Treasures Buddha has come to this world in this great stupa.

Great Eloquence responded that the congregation would like to see the buddha inside. But the Buddha explained that Abundant Treasures Buddha had also predicted that if such an assembly wanted to see him, to see his whole body, the buddha teaching the sutra would have to invite to that place all of the buddhas throughout the entire universe who embody him. Thus, Shakyamuni Buddha would now need

to assemble all of the buddhas embodying or representing him throughout the universe, that is, all the buddhas in all ten directions.

Then Shakyamuni Buddha emitted a ray of light from the tuft of hair between his eyebrows, illuminating all of those billions and billions of worlds in every direction, so that the congregation in this world could see the magnificence of those other worlds, each with billions of bodhisattvas and with a buddha in each of them preaching the Dharma.

Then, after this world, the *saha*-world, had been suitably purified and decorated for such a visit, all of those buddhas, each accompanied by a bodhisattva, came to sit before the Buddha on a great lion seat at the foot of an extremely tall tree full of jewels.

But there were not enough of these seats in this world, even for the buddhas and their attendant bodhisattvas from just one direction. So Shakyamuni Buddha had to purify billions and billions of worlds neighboring this world and prepare them with lion seats under great, tall, jeweled trees to receive the many buddhas and bodhisattvas. And when that was not enough, he had to do the same thing with billions and billions of additional worlds neighboring the already greatly expanded world. The whole area was transformed in this way into a single pure buddha-land.

After all of them were seated, each of the buddhas instructed his attending bodhisattva to go to Shakyamuni Buddha and ask him, "Are your illnesses and troubles few? In spirit and energy are you well? And are your bodhisattvas and shravakas at peace?" After greeting him and making flower offerings to him, they were to tell him that their buddha would like to see the great stupa opened.

Then, with the whole congregation watching intently, Shakyamuni went up in the air to the stupa and with his right hand opened its door. From the stupa came a loud sound, the kind of sound you hear when the bar is removed from a huge gate. Immediately, the whole congregation could see Abundant Treasures Buddha sitting as if in meditation with a still perfect body on the seat in the stupa. Abundant Treasures Buddha then praised Shakyamuni, saying: "Well done, well done, Shakyamuni Buddha! You have preached this Dharma Flower Sutra gladly, which is what I have come to this place to hear."

The congregation then celebrated by strewing a great many beautiful flowers before the two buddhas. Then, invited by Abundant Treasures to come into the stupa, Shakyamuni joined him on the seat in the stupa.

But then, as the two buddhas were high up and far away in the stupa in the air, those in the congregation on the ground couldn't see them well and wanted to be raised up into the air also. Sensing this, Shakyamuni Buddha raised everyone up in the air, and expressed his desire to have

someone to whom he could entrust the teaching of the sutra; that is, he expressed his concern to have others promise to teach the sutra after his extinction.

The buddhas who have come from all directions, the Buddha explained, will use skillful means to ensure that the Dharma will last for a long time in their worlds.

In the words of the sutra (the translation is my own):

One by one, the buddhas
Have gone under the jeweled trees.
They are like lotus flowers decorating
A clear and cool pond.

Under those jeweled trees,
Seated on the lion seats,
The buddhas are
Brilliant and resplendent.

Just as in the darkness of night
Great torches burn brightly,
From them comes a wonderful fragrance
Spreading over all the lands.

Living beings showered in this fragrance
Are beside themselves with joy,
Like little tree branches quivering
In a great wind.

They use this skillful means
So that the Dharma will live for a long time.

Now, the Buddha asks, will anyone come forward and vow to receive and embrace, read and recite the Lotus Sutra, so that it will live for a long time in this world?

Among all my Buddha-children,
If anyone is able to keep the Dharma,
They should make a great vow
So that it may live for a long time!

But, the Buddha says, this will be a difficult task:

If one taught
All the other sutras,
Numerous as the sands of the Ganges,
That would not be really difficult.

If one picked up Mount Sumeru
And hurled it far away
To innumerable buddha-lands,
That too would not be difficult.

If someone used their toe
To move a great-thousandfold world
And hurl it far away to other lands,
That too would not be difficult.

If one stood on the highest heaven
And for the sake of others
Preached countless other sutras,
That too would not be difficult.

But after the Buddha's extinction,
In the midst of an evil world,
If someone teaches this sutra,
That indeed will be difficult!

If someone
Took the sky in his hand
And wandered around with it,
That would not be difficult.

But after my extinction,
If someone copies and keeps this sutra
Or causes another to copy it,
This indeed will be difficult!

If someone took the whole earth,
Put it on their toenail,
And ascended to the Brahma heaven,
That would not be difficult.

But after the Buddha's extinction,
In the midst of an evil world,
If someone reads this sutra aloud
for even a moment,
This indeed will be difficult!

In the fire at the eon's end,
If someone carried a load of dry hay
Into the fire without getting burned,
That would not be difficult.

But after my extinction,
If anyone embraces this sutra
And teaches it even to one person,
This indeed will be difficult!

If one embraced the storehouse
Of eighty-four thousand teachings
And the twelve divisions of the sutras,
And preached them to others,

Leading those who hear

To gain the six divine powers;
Even if one could do all this,
That would not be difficult.

But after my extinction,
If anyone hears and accepts this sutra
And inquires about its meaning,
This indeed will be difficult!

If one taught the Dharma
And led tens of millions of billions
Of countless, innumerable beings,
As many as the sands of the Ganges,

To become arhats,
With the six divine powers;
Even if one conferred such benefits,
That would not be difficult.

But after my extinction,
If anyone is able to honor and embrace
Such a sutra as this,
That indeed will be difficult!

The Reality of the One and the Many

This story presents us with a very interesting image of the universe as a place in which Shakyamuni and his world, which is our world, is central, and yet Shakyamuni is certainly not the only buddha. First of all, there is the buddha named Abundant Treasures, who comes out of the distant past in a dramatic way in order to praise Shakyamuni Buddha for teaching the Lotus Sutra. The resulting image of two buddhas sitting side by side on a single seat is a unique one. But the very opening of this image is dependent on another, which reaches not into the distant past, but into distant reaches of contemporary space to reveal the innumerable buddhas in all directions. In other words, it is only after the universe has been integrated that the congregation is able to see the image of Abundant Treasures Buddha.

Those buddhas present are so numerous that this entire world is not big enough to include even those from just one of the ten directions. We are to understand both that the number of buddhas throughout the universe is incredibly large, and that all of them are, in some sense, subordinate to Shakyamuni Buddha. Thus, Shakyamuni Buddha, as well as being the buddha of this *saha*-world, in which suffering has to be endured, is also a universal buddha—the buddha who is somehow present everywhere.

The exact meaning of the Chinese term used for these many buddhas is not very clear. They can be said to be “representatives,” or perhaps “duplicates” or “replicas” of

Shakyamuni, but I think that they can best be understood as embodiments of Shakyamuni. Certainly, they are not, as some would have it, mere “emanations.” The complex point is that they are both independently real apart from Shakyamuni Buddha and in some sense subordinate to him. Put abstractly, we have here one of several images in the Lotus Sutra in which the reality and togetherness of being both one and many is affirmed—here are both the one central reality of Shakyamuni, somehow represented throughout vast reaches of space, and the reality of many buddhas, each accompanied by lands and bodhisattvas. Nowhere in the sutra is it suggested that these buddhas and their lands are in any way unreal. The other worlds should be less important—to us—than our own world, but that does not mean that they are any less real than our world.

This image of the reality of the sameness of one and many can also be seen in the image of Shakyamuni Buddha bringing together billions and billions of worlds to create a temporary unification of them into a single buddha-land. Their reality as many lands does not disappear when they are brought together to function as one. Later in the sutra they will return to being, as they were, many.

One reason that this holding together of the reality of both the one and the many is important in the Lotus Sutra

is because it provides a general framework for understanding the One Vehicle of many skillful means and provides, in other words, a way of understanding through images how the many ways of Buddhism can all have an importance and reality within one Buddhism.

In this way, Shakyamuni Buddha, as well as being the buddha of this *saha*-world, is at the same time the Universal Buddha—the buddha who, by virtue of his embodiments, is everywhere throughout the universe.

World Affirmation

Whatever else it is, the great stupa is a literary device providing a reason for assembling all of the buddhas from all directions. This stupa springing out of the earth from the past could be material from a dream, or from a rich imagination. But it can also be said that Abundant Treasures Buddha symbolizes the truth, the Dharma that does not change and is a kind of ground or basis for all teaching of the Dharma. In this way, Shakyamuni Buddha can symbolize the teacher of the Dharma. And the two buddhas sitting together on a single seat would indicate both that the teacher is to be respected as much as the truth itself, and the opposite, namely, that however devoted we may be to Shakyamuni Buddha for teaching, we should remember that our devotion should be based on his teaching the

The opening part of chapter 11 from a Lotus Sutra scroll owned by the Nara National Museum, copied in ink on colored paper decorated with gold and silver leaf. Twelfth century. Important Cultural Property.

truth. In other words, for the Lotus Sutra, a dead Dharma, a Dharma that is not alive in the present in this world of suffering, is of no use at all, yet the Dharma will live only if it is the truth.

Such an idea leads naturally to the concern expressed toward the end of the story about the survival of the teaching of the Dharma after the Buddha has died. How is the truth to continue to be made available to people? How is the truth to be taught after the Buddha has died?

The stupa does not come from some distant heaven, but springs up out of the earth. This means that this world and ourselves in it are to be affirmed, as this is where the truth about the nature of reality is to be found, and to be taught. In other words, this world has a kind of buddha-nature within it, here symbolized by the stupa that comes up out of the earth with Abundant Treasures Buddha in it.

So, too, the fact that all of the buddhas throughout the entire universe come to this world, or at least to a purified version of this world, indicates a powerful affirmation of our world. The pure land, this story says, is to be found here. This is the land that Shakyamuni Buddha transforms into a pure land, even if only temporarily.

Thus, three things are here held up together, perhaps inseparably together—Shakyamuni Buddha, the buddha of this *saha*-world, and the teacher of the Lotus Sutra; the Lotus Sutra (the Dharma) that Shakyamuni Buddha teaches in the world; and this world itself, the place where Shakyamuni Buddha lived and taught the Lotus Sutra and where he lives and teaches the sutra still.

Such affirmations are not just sentiments; they are an indication of where our own energies should go—that is, into purifying this world and realizing the buddha-nature of things in this world, thus into both seeing this world as a pure land and transforming it into a pure land.

Shakyamuni as Human

Maybe not so important but still interesting is the common courtesy in the greetings brought to Shakyamuni. After all the buddhas from all over the universe have assembled and seated themselves on their lion seats in the much expanded and purified *saha*-world, each of them instructs his attending bodhisattva to go to Shakyamuni Buddha to ask to be included in the opening of the stupa of Abundant Treasures Buddha. But first, they are told, they should inquire about Shakyamuni Buddha's health, about whether he has any illnesses or worries, and similarly about the health and spirits of the bodhisattvas and shravakas of this world.

These greetings are not just about his physical condition ("How are you?"), but about the Buddha's mental or spiritual condition as well ("How are you doing?"). This tells us

something not only about common courtesy, but also about the nature of the Buddha in this sutra. He is not any kind of all-powerful, absolute being, indifferent to what happens in the world, but one who himself suffers, both physically and mentally.

In the Lotus Sutra there are several ways in which the humanity, or what we would now call the "historicity," of Shakyamuni Buddha is affirmed and even insisted upon. He is placed within fantastic stories, such as this one, in which he can be seen as much more than human, but from time to time we are reminded that this same Shakyamuni is nothing like an all-powerful, creator god. He is the man, we are reminded, who left his father's castle, who became awakened under the bodhi tree, who went to Varanasi to teach, and so on, and, perhaps most importantly, the man who at the end of his life died and was cremated.

The human death of Shakyamuni Buddha creates a problem for those who would follow after him—how to keep him alive despite his death, and how to keep his teaching, the Dharma, alive without him to teach it.

Chapter 11 introduces in a special way the idea that the solution to this difficult problem is a matter of embodiment—the Buddha can be kept alive by the living who embody him by embracing and following his teachings. And it is precisely because Shakyamuni Buddha was a human being—with a human body and other human limitations—that we human beings can be expected to embody the Dharma, that is, be the Buddha, in our lives, despite our having human bodies and very human limitations. It is through being embodied in very imperfect human beings that the life of the Buddha can become so long that it can even be said to be "eternal."

It Will Be Difficult . . .

Having established through the powerful image of buddhas coming to this world from all directions that the Buddha is somehow represented throughout the universe, the chapter ends with an appeal to those who can take up the difficult task of teaching the Dharma after the Buddha's extinction to make a great vow to do so.

The difficulty of teaching the Dharma is expressed in what has come to be known as "the nine easy practices and six difficulties." They dramatically express the difficulty of teaching the Dharma. But this is not done to discourage us. The point, rather, is to have us understand that we too are called, even challenged, not to be teachers of a dead Dharma, of dead doctrine from the distant past, but to be teachers of the Dharma by embodying the very life of the Buddha, which is itself the Dharma, in our whole lives. Through our living the Dharma as much as possible ourselves, the Buddha too continues to live in our *saha*-world. □

Asian Muslims Gather in Bangkok to Promote International Interfaith Dialogue

by M. Abdus Sabur

Secretary General of the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN)

Participants in the AMAN Assembly and International Interfaith Peace Forum held in Bangkok in December 2003.

The Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) is an association of progressive Muslims in Asia. It was founded in 1990 to promote understanding and solidarity among Muslims and other faith communities in Asia toward the empowerment of people and the promotion and protection of human rights, justice, and peace. In recent years, it has carried out peace education and leadership development programs for young people, organized interfaith dialogue programs for peace, initiated awareness-building programs among Muslims and the wider community about HIV/AIDS, and launched AMAN Watch with an aim to expose and publicize human-rights violations.

AMAN brings together those individuals, groups, and Muslim associations in Asia that subscribe to a progressive and enlightened approach to

Islam and that are working to eradicate poverty and for environmental protection, human rights, social justice, interfaith and intercultural dialogue, and communal harmony.

2003 Assembly and Interfaith Forum

Every three years, AMAN organizes an assembly aimed at strengthening understanding and cooperation among its members and partners from other faith communities. In 2003, the assembly and Interfaith Forum took place in Bangkok from December 12 through 14. It was organized in cooperation with the Christian Conference of Asia, the Federations for the Asian Bishops' Conference, the Niwano Peace Foundation, the Asian Resource Foundation, the Youth Coordination Center International, and Quaker International. Over two hundred participants

from Asia and other regions attended the assembly.

Background

The AMAN Assembly was based on an understanding that global peace is under serious threat due to trends of globalization through economic integration, increasing unilateralism, and the practice of double standards in a unipolar world. Growing extremism and violence in the name of religion and the spread of hatred and intolerance also pose serious threats to global peace, progress, and prosperity.

Burdened with a colonial legacy and with the orientation of chauvinistic and patriarchal leadership, nations have failed to meet the aspirations of women and ethnic and religious minorities. Nations continue to use divide-and-rule policies and to adopt militarization as

a means of obstructing people from participating in a process of self-empowerment, and fulfilling their basic needs and ability to live in peace and with dignity.

Being a multicultural and multireligious region, Asia has a responsibility to demonstrate that Asians can contribute to world peace. This can be done by empowering people and by drawing inspiration and the experience of promoting interethnic, interreligious harmony, participatory democracy, sustainable development, and international cooperation based on mutual respect and a shared vision for global justice and peace.

Major Themes and Components of AMAN Assembly 2003

This year's assembly, under the theme "Visions for Global Peace," began with the following five pre-assembly workshops:

1. Conflict Transformation and Study of Peace: Christians and Muslims Study the Techniques of Peace-Building

This seminar followed a three-step process consisting of analysis, technique, and example. On the first day, a Christian and a Muslim presented an analysis of the factors in modern Asia that lead to conflict. Jesuit Fr. Rudy Heredia from Mumbai (Bombay) demonstrated the impact of economic globalization and geopolitical tensions upon local relations between social and religious groups in South Asia. Professor Chandra Muzaffar from Kuala Lumpur offered insights into the interplay of political, economic, social, religious, historical, and psychological factors that have resulted in conflict in various parts of the Asian continent. His sweeping analysis encompassed conflicts in Israel-Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, East Timor, Kashmir, and the southern Philippines.

The second day was devoted to a

study of the techniques of conflict transformation. Dr. Judo Poerwowidagdo of Surakarta, Indonesia, explained in detail the methodology followed in the Jakarta-based Peace Studies Center, which has provided training in conflict resolution to over 1,000 peace activists in Indonesia. Ms. Myla Leguro explained the techniques that their team, sponsored by Catholic Relief Services, has developed to try to resolve tensions among Christian, Muslim, and *lumad* (indigenous) groups in village situations on the island of Mindanao. Mr. Hayatullah Hayat, the director of a demining program in Afghanistan, presented a harrowing picture of how over 30 years of continual warfare in that country has affected the lives of ordinary Afghan citizens.

The sessions of the third day offered a panorama of examples of peace-building efforts in a wide variety of situations in Asia. Professor Alih Ayub of the Ateneo de Zamboanga outlined the interreligious efforts at peace-building promoted by the Salam Peace Foundation in Mindanao. Ms. Rose Wu of the Hong Kong Christian Institute and Mr. Ma Quiang, a researcher in Guangdong (Canton), discussed relations between religious groups in contemporary China. Several participants, such as Sr. Sheeba Jose from Allahabad, India, and Ms. Mina Ziayi from the Afghan capital of Kabul, focused on interreligious efforts in favor of the rights and status of women. Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer, a social reformist from Mumbai, described the political forces behind confessional tensions and communal riots in India. Professor Seyyed Hasan Husseini from Tehran laid the groundwork for an inclusivist understanding of religions according to Islam.

The Muslim-Christian sharing took place not only in the intellectual realm, but also on the spiritual level. Each day began with readings from the Bible and from the Qur'an, to which the

participants listened in silence and then shared their insights. It was generally agreed that coming together before the scriptures of the two religions was an important element in terms of creating the sense of common purpose that developed throughout the course of the seminar.

The participants recommended to the sponsoring bodies that seminars on peace-building be initiated in all Asian countries. The preparation of trainers who are well equipped with sound knowledge and experience in peace-making techniques is a first priority. To this end, the three organizations will make available a list of centers that offer training in the study of peace.

2. Poverty and Peace

Poverty is one of the major conditions under which violence and conflict take root. In spite of modern technology and increased food production, millions of people remain under the poverty line. The policies of the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), imposed on the governments of third-world countries, have made peasants more indebted than they ever were before.

The role of faith communities and NGOs toward the empowerment of peasants and the strengthening of peasant organizations remains limited. There is a growing realization that the best way to deal with the question of poverty, food security, and the dignified livelihood of the common masses is to empower the poor, marginalized peasants and to strengthen their organizations. This is so that they can participate effectively in policy planning and have access to resources and the ability to manage them effectively toward self-reliance.

The workshop felt that poverty is not a natural phenomenon at all. Rather, it is the result of systematic exploitation of the weak and the power-

less by the rich and powerful at global, national, regional, and local levels. The present unequal, exploitative, and manipulative power structure at the global and national levels, represented by multinational corporations, the WB, the IMF, the WTO, and the state machinery itself in the developing world, perpetuates poverty. The workshop also felt that peace is not the mere absence of war; rather, it is the price paid by the poor to enrich the powerful. Meaningful and durable peace can only be achieved once poverty is eradicated. For this, we will have to organize and empower the poor at the grass-roots level and develop linkages among

and national institutions of oppression, for unless the causes and sources of poverty are identified and eradicated, peace will not be forthcoming.

In the workshop there was a general consensus that any assertive action on the part of the people or networks willing to resist exploitation and oppression in whatever form and at every level should be enlightened and guided by human values and spiritual quests from multiple religions, doctrines, philosophies, and disciplines.

3. Multiethnic Asia: Peace, Cooperation, and Sustainable Development

Asia is the most culturally diverse re-

gion to preserve and promote diversity. There is a need to educate both the citizens of the world and their governments to fulfill their obligations as required by this declaration.

There is also a need to reexamine the concept of globalization in order to make it more inclusive and socioeconomically equitable. The empowerment of people of all communities through education should also be attempted most urgently and universally.

The situation of minorities is quite critical in many countries. In many areas, the minorities had to migrate after the creation of new nation-states, due to political reasons and communal tension. There is a need not only to recognize all existing ethnic minorities, but also to preserve the distinct ethnic minorities.

Before initiating any "development" program, an impact assessment (covering socioeconomic and ecological aspects) of the area and the concerned ethnic minorities should be made by independent experts. Plans should then be discussed with the concerned population and appropriate authorities.

Given the critical situation of the cross-border ethnic nationalities, trans-border cooperation and solidarity are crucial at this point.

4. Empowerment of Women in the Muslim World

The Muslim world is not monolithic in terms of governance and endowment of resources and opportunities. There is a general perception, though, that compared with women in other societies, women in the Muslim world have fewer opportunities to attain higher education and find jobs and are deprived of equal rights to participate in decision-making processes because of Islamic traditions and cultures. This workshop aimed at providing a forum to examine the real situation, identify major obstacles, clarify misconceptions, share experiences, express views from

The earnest exchange of opinions among participants was a highlight of the conference.

them, as well as network across multidisciplinary groups. The workshop also felt that the redistribution of wealth and the cessation of all kinds of discrimination—ranging from gender exploitation to ethnic cleansing at the global, national, and local levels—is imperative to building peace. It can be achieved by slashing monstrous defense expenditures by all national governments and removing global trade barriers that grossly favor the industrial world. It was also felt that a concerted effort should be made toward developing better awareness of the causes of poverty—for example, how corporate capitalism functions and keeps poverty alive through the global

region of the world, yet, in the pursuit of nation building, the governments of Asia tend to be wary of such diversity, seeing it more as a threat than a resource. Peace, cooperation, and sustainable development remain the aspirations of multiethnic Asia.

Diversity is a natural state of human society. There is a need to recognize, acknowledge, and respect diversity. The principles upon which diversity should be based have already been clearly and comprehensively enunciated in 1948 in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which provides basic and fundamental guarantees to everyone. The problem before us is how to harness the full potential of this decla-

within, and formulate ways and means to overcome the problems to empower women and to ensure fairness, equality, justice, and the promotion of peace.

Strategies for Women's Empowerment

The concept of empowerment must be redefined and reexamined in specific social and cultural contexts depending on the problems faced by women in a particular society.

There is a need for research work, both theoretical and empirical, to better understand women's problems and to identify the areas in which empowerment is needed. The most important data required in this context are demographic attributes and socioeconomic aspects.

Muslim women need to be empowered in the areas of economics, education, health, social and cultural affairs, and politics through decision-making processes.

Obstacles that deprive women of the benefit of economic, educational, and social development must be removed.

5. Youth for Peace

The world has witnessed conflicts in different forms throughout the ages. While trying to achieve peace, there has always been some form of intervention by youth, upholding the principle of nonviolence. Due to this long tradition, youths from countries throughout Asia gathered in Bangkok at the Youth for Peace workshop, held as part of the triennial AMAN Assembly and International Interfaith Peace Forum, and expressed their solidarity in the cause of peace.

This workshop was organized to enable representatives of youth organizations that are engaged in peace work to come together and share their field experiences and their understanding of peace, as well as to facilitate the drafting of recommendations and possible strategies that might be utilized by participants upon their return home.

Practical strategies that took into consideration the concept of peace in the context of multiethnic, multicultural Asia and reasserted the value of youth participation in the promotion of peace, were delineated as follows:

Recommendations

Coordination among networks should be developed, and partnerships with groups and individuals who are engaged in the promotion of peace, inclusive of youth and adult initiatives, should be built up.

Intergenerational dialogue should be promoted and youths should be encouraged to act as partners in social development.

It must be acknowledged that conflict can exist in "peacetime" and that all members of society, whether rich or poor, urban or rural, youth or adult, can be directly or indirectly affected by causes and sources of peace disturbances.

Work should take place at the grass-roots level in order to remove contributing factors, such as poverty, unemployment, and the lack of education that can deprive youth of positive development.

Regular reflection and meditation can help to clear the mind and can also succor the soul and reinforce one's commitment to working for peace.

International Interfaith Peace Forum

On December 13, 2003, the Interfaith Peace Forum began with messages of support from Dr. Ahn Jae Woong, general secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia; Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue; Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan; and Dr. William Vendley, secretary general of the World Conference of Religions for Peace. Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer, chairman of AMAN, and Mr. M. Abdus Sabur, secretary general of AMAN, outlined the

purposes of the Interfaith Peace Forum.

An interreligious panel chaired by Dr. Chaiwat Satha-Anand, founder and director of the Peace Information Center of Bangkok's Thammasat University, addressed the theme of new visions for world peace. Professor Seyyed Hasan Hussein of Sharif University of Technology in Tehran explored the Islamic bases for interreligious cooperation for peace. Mr. Shin'ichi Noguchi, secretary general of the Tokyo-based Niwano Peace Foundation, outlined the grounds for peace according to the Buddhist Lotus Sutra. Ms. Kamla Bhasin, president of India's Women's Network for Peace, offered directions for alternative thinking; and Fr. Thomas Michel, director of the Jesuit Secretariat for Interreligious Dialogue, presented ten preconditions necessary for the establishment of peace.

The Forum continued with addresses by Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, president of the Malaysia-based International Movement for a Just World, and by Mr. Madhav Kumar Nepal, former deputy prime minister of Nepal. Both speakers focused on the interaction of global forces and local tensions and offered proposals for nonviolent resolutions of conflicts.

Conclusion

At this point in history, when divisions and despair, intolerance and hatred, greed and consumerism, abject poverty and the accumulation of power and wealth are so dominant, the search for an alternative paradigm that is rooted in the diverse religions and cultures of Asia is of the utmost importance. Nonviolence, simple lifestyles, unity in diversity, mutual respect, the sharing of resources, and just governance ought to be released from scriptures and constitutions and be practiced in day-to-day life. This was the call that echoed and vibrated throughout the AMAN Assembly and Interfaith Peace Forum. □

Ugandan Religious Leaders' Group Named to Receive 21st Niwano Peace Prize

The Niwano Peace Foundation has decided to award the 21st Niwano Peace Prize 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. Having asked for recommendations from about 1,000 well-informed people in 125 countries around the world, the Niwano Peace Prize Selection Committee conducted its deliberations in strict fairness before coming to their decision. The

Niwano Peace Prize Selection Committee was set up in May last year on the occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Niwano Peace Prize and consists of ten religious leaders from around the world who are involved in movements for peace and interreligious co-operation. This is the committee's first selection of an individual or organization for the prize. The ARLPI is also the first organization from the African continent to receive the prize.

The ARLPI is an organization in northern Uganda in which the members of different religions and sects,

including Islam and Christianity (Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican), work together. Since its establishment in 1998, it has followed the path of non-violence to end armed conflict, to nurture human resources for the task of creating peace, and to 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 Acholi tribe of northern Uganda has dominated the country's military

Members of the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative (ARLPI) hold a peace mediation meeting in the bush with the commanders of the Lord's Resistance Army.

establishment from the time of the British colonial occupation up until the rule of the most recent former government. The present government's military, however, is dominated by people belonging to tribes from the south. Guerrilla war in northern Uganda has been intensifying, centering around the dissatisfied remnants of the former military elite. In particular, in the midst of civil war with government troops, an anti-government group called the "Lord's Resistance Army" (LRA) has repeatedly committed grave human-rights abuses against ordinary citizens. It has destroyed homes, schools, clinics, and other village infrastructure and has unceasingly committed acts of murder, violence, and plunder. Kidnapping of small children and young people by the group has become a daily menace; so far the number of kidnapped is said to be as high as 20,000.

Fearing murder, pillage, and kid-

napping, people have fled their homes to seek refuge elsewhere; many of them unavoidably ending up living in camps. Prolonged LRA attacks have resulted in an internal refugee population within Uganda of over 1 million, half of whom are children. The war intensified in June 2002, spreading the conflict from the districts of Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader in northern Uganda, where it was formerly confined, to other districts. Deteriorating security has undermined economic activity, prolonging a situation in which food can neither be grown nor purchased freely. Many of the refugees rightly fear attacks by the LRA should they return home, while at the same time they are considered "anti-government sympathizers" by government forces because they belong to the same tribe as the LRA, and so find themselves helplessly caught between the two.

In the midst of this situation, this

Ugandan Archbishop John B. Odama, addresses a peace rally held in his country.

year's prize recipient, the ARLPI, has been building up its campaign to promote dialogue between the Ugandan government and the LRA. As a result of a direct meeting with Uganda's president, the ARLPI has been designated the official government repre-

Top Ugandan religious leaders of the Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant faiths pay a solidarity visit to the ARLPI to try to find ways of ending the conflict in northern Uganda.

sentative for peace negotiations. The ARLPI has also received a request from the LRA leadership that it serve as mediator between the LRA and the government. Although the negotiations are irregular, and there are a great many difficulties in carrying out talks in the area of conflict, a path to peace has been sufficiently cleared.

The ARLPI consistently relies on nonviolence in its work toward a peaceful resolution to the conflict. It sponsors “prayer gatherings” and marches for peace, which attract a great many ordinary citizens who have been harmed by the hostilities. Gatherings are held at sites where massacres have occurred and participants express their clear intent to reject violence. A peace march was held in Gulu on December 21, 2002, where a large number of people called for dialogue and an end to the war.

The ARLPI also sets up peace committees in areas that have suffered from the conflict, and nurtures those who can cooperate in the pursuit of peace. It carries out training programs for volunteers that teach them to deal with conflict (through negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and the peace process), heal trauma, and enhance their communication and leadership abilities. As a result, a body of people for peace is being created at a steady pace. In addition, the district peace committees send the ARLPI information that is invaluable in its tasks of publishing reports and press releases. The economic situation in the southern part of Uganda around the capital city of Kampala is relatively good, so interest in the suffering of people in the north is low. As a way of breaking through this apathy toward the problems in the north, the high-credibility surveys and reports by the peace committees play an important role in creating a trend in domestic and international public opinion in support of peace.

The ARLPI also places great impor-

Archbishop Odama preparing to sleep together with the children in the street. Standing is the vice general secretary of the ARLPI, preparing his jacket and bedding to sleep on.

tance on the education of small children and young people in the refugee camps. How the coming generation of young people is educated will determine the future basic nature of the country. The ARLPI introduced an education program in 2001 and is serious in its pursuit of educating people to support peace. Outside the refugee camps, as well, there are growing numbers of children who cannot pay their school fees due to the disruption of the economy, so the ARLPI offers a school-fee support program. Another major problem is that when children who have been kidnapped return, there is often nobody in the village community to take them in, so the ARLPI is working to set up shelters for these children and provide them with a viable living environment.

The ARLPI's motto is “Together for Peace.” It places its greatest priority on cooperation not just within the tribe, but among all people, including regional leaders, members of elected assemblies, domestic and international NGOs, soldiers, farmers, and so on.

It has expressed its basic outlook as follows: “Peace is a long-term group

effort that demands everybody's involvement. We have a vision of our land where people will be able to travel without fear, children will go to school and not have to fight, women will go to till their fields without fear of being raped or abducted, people will sit by the fireplace in the evening and sleep quietly in their homes, former rebels will be forgiven and reintegrated in their villages, displaced persons camps will be dismantled, and soldiers will be able to patrol without guns.” This vision of very ordinary life is a symbolic expression of the extreme conditions plaguing Uganda today.

Leading members of the ARLPI have said, “The ARLPI is engaged not in doing purely human work, but in cooperating with God.” Despite differences in their religions, all the districts' religious leaders work together to raise their voices as one in calling for an end to violence—by doing so, they believe that they can clearly speak for the people and for God. As religious leaders, they made the decision to be the servants of their people and to testify for their faith; even now they are risking their lives to carry on their work. □

Using the Right Skillful Means

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.

WE are told that the inclusion of *dharani* (syllables believed to have mystical power) in the Mahayana sutras helps to explain the increasing esotericization of Japanese Buddhism. *Dharani* were the basis of the esoteric prayer rituals used in many Japanese temples, as they are of the *kaji kito* (ritual prayers to the gods and the buddhas for specific benefits) still in use today. The inclusion of *dharani* in such rituals should not be considered as simply a way of ensuring the financial support of a temple through the fees collected for the performance of the rituals. Rather, *dharani* were introduced because they provided a practical method of ensuring the salvation of ordinary people. The people also sought salvation in their Buddhist faith.

Most of us are not Buddhist scholars. We are devoting ourselves to conducting bodhisattva practice, vowing to lead lives that will enable everyone to be glad that they have lived. If all we want to do is to deliver a well-constructed discourse, then we can speak in a logical manner about religious theory. If we really want to be of use to people as sincere Buddhists, however, and to bring others to liberation, we must pay attention to and use all the innumerable methods of helping others to reach salvation, or skillful means, available to us.

In the process of doing this, we must always consider if we are using the right skillful means for a particular situation and if it will lead to the manifestation of the buddha-nature in the person we are counseling. We will inevitably sometimes feel lost and troubled, but that is a measure of

the truth of our actions. In fact, the more earnestly we undertake our responsibility, the more we are forced to ask ourselves if what we are doing is correct, if it is enough. That is the way in which heartfelt prayer is born. The anguish we feel that brings this on can truly be said to be the awe-inspiring anguish of the bodhisattva.

I understand that it is only in the Lotus Sutra that the Buddha himself directly declares that he is the father of all and that all are his children. Certainly the Lotus Sutra seems to be unique among the sutras in the way it deals with the relationship between parents and children. I am sure you will quickly remember such parables as the one about the wealthy man and his poor son, the one about the burning house, and the one about the excellent physician and his sick children. Running constantly through these tales is the love of the parents for their children. The children are completely oblivious of their parents' feelings, however, and turn their backs on them. But the Buddha believes that at some point they will return to the place where he is, learn to understand and respect his feelings, and awaken to the buddha-nature within themselves. He is waiting for them.

Whenever I chant the sutra and feel that I am coming into direct contact with the Buddha's heart, I am suffused with a warm feeling of deep gratitude and indebtedness to him. It is said that one of the Buddha's special qualities is his ability to wait with supreme patience. "Believing and waiting" is a cardinal characteristic of those who guide others.

The Essence of Buddhist Training

There is a story that a young Chinese novice priest who had only recently entered the monastic life visited the Ch'an (Zen) master Chao-chou (778-897) and asked to be taught the ultimate state to be attained by Buddhist training. Chao-chou asked him, "Did you eat your rice gruel

Nikkyo Niwano, the late founder of the Buddhist association 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.

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (third from left) chats with local members in Yamagata Prefecture in June 1969.

this morning?" "Yes, I did," the novice replied. "Then you had better wash your bowl," Chao-chou said, and vanished into a back room.

The Zen master was suggesting that the act of washing one's bowl after eating is the very essence of Buddhist training. In other words, Buddhist training does not involve something special. Rather his words indicate that one should do now what has to be done now. Let us say that you go to a teacher and receive instruction, and you then put into practice what you have learned. What Chao-chou meant is that an act that seems to be most ordinary can be the most important, and the most difficult, thing to do. This relates to something I have spoken about earlier, that what is generally considered "easy practice" can in fact be the most difficult of all.

We tend to think of religious training and enlightenment as being something we cannot easily attain and of a different dimension from everyday life. At the same time, however, we could understand that religious training and enlightenment do not exist apart from everyday life. Washing one's face in the morning and eating breakfast can be part of Buddhist practice. When people who have gone through life doing things by force of habit become aware of this, their lives take on a completely different aspect.

When I was raising my children, I would say to them, "When you are undressing, think about when you were putting on your clothes." We need to become aware of the debt we owe to everything around us and not to shirk the things we have to do. Taking daily events for granted, even such as the responsibilities of a husband or wife or the

children going off to school in the morning, becomes a thing of the past. We can then lead lives of deep gratitude for everything in our surroundings.

Motivations of Faith

In the past, when we asked members what their motivations for joining Rissho Kosei-kai were, I often found that they had written "to venerate my ancestors" or "for spiritual training," even when their real reason involved questions of illness or poverty, thinking that those reasons were not admirable. By contrast, today a great many people become members because they really want to venerate their ancestors, to undertake spiritual training, or to cultivate their wisdom for life.

In addition, many members have different backgrounds, skills, and interests. This means that special efforts must be made to help them realize the true meaning of life. We find in the Lotus Sutra the phrase "traveling in this *saha* world." We cannot apply just a single pattern to the way we disseminate the Buddha's teachings in contemporary society. We must teach using many different methods, according to the needs of each individual.

Bodhisattva practice focuses on others first, not on the self. Undertaking religious training just for one's own happiness is not bodhisattva practice. The famous American industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919) once said the following wise words: "No man becomes rich unless he also enriches others." He carried out his enterprises in accordance with the bodhisattva way without knowing it. The endeavor of striving with all our might to

bring about the happiness of others successfully cultivates our character. We will not succeed in accomplishing our goal of perfecting ourselves if we only keep waiting for the goal to be achieved.

The Swiss philosopher Henri Frédéric Amiel (1821–82) wrote in his *Journal intime*: “When the heart changes, so do attitudes. When attitudes change, so do habits. When habits change, so does the human character. When the human character changes, so does human life.” It is easy enough to say “when the heart changes,” but to change the heart may be the most difficult of all things to do. The hardest thing of all is to change one’s own heart. That is why we join the Sangha and strive to change our attitudes where fellow members can watch over us.

Truly it can be said that our hearts will change spontaneously as the shadow follows the form. It is generally said that form determines content. As you keep your “form” (attitude) as a religious practitioner within the Sangha, your heart, habits, and character change, as does your whole life. A wonderful tomorrow awaits you. It is because I want all of you to have such a wonderful tomorrow that I often ask you to guide and lead others to the faith.

There is a strong tendency in today’s world for people to distinguish between themselves and others. So when we urge people to think of others first before themselves and to feel a sense of oneness between themselves and others, it may be the case that they do not really feel inclined to do so. Some people think the word “others” refers only to other people and does not include themselves. Instead, we should interpret the word as an important teaching that instructs us to consider ourselves as an extension of the self to others. In short, it means to be in another’s shoes. Deepening the feeling of the sense of oneness between oneself and others requires a true understanding of the interpenetration of the ten realms.

People debate whether the original basic nature of human beings was “good” or “bad,” but what is more important is to realize that the ten realms of both good and bad are contained within a single individual. When we really understand that we possess within us every state of mind from the hells to the buddhas, we are able for the first time to truly forgive others, empathize with them, and believe in them. If we lack this realization we cannot experience the sense of oneness with others. To recognize the interpenetration of the ten realms as taught in the Lotus Sutra forms the foundation for establishing a sense of oneness between the self and others. When we realize how important it is to be thoughtful toward others, we will no longer be so ready to criticize mistakes they may make, but will understand—through putting ourselves in their positions—that we could just as easily have made the same errors ourselves. □

Shakyamuni Buddha preaching the Dharma on a jeweled pedestal, painted in the Kamakura period (1185–1333). The painting scroll demonstrates strong influence of China’s Sung and Yuan dynasty painting technique, and is one of the three scrolls forming the triad, hung with the paintings of the bodhisattvas Samantabhadra and Manjushri on either side. Colors on silk. 117 x 58.2 cm. Important Cultural Property. Nara National Museum.

A Buddhist Education in a European Country: Austria as a Case Model

by Myoshin-Friedrich Fenzl

Austria has discovered that five principles are necessary in order to improve Buddhist education in non-Buddhist countries—but the most important task should be the training of competent Dharma teachers.

Years ago, in the spring of 1983, Buddhism was accorded legal status in Austria. It was the first time Buddhism had been officially recognized in continental Europe. In legalizing Buddhism, the Austrian government bestowed upon Buddhists all the rights and privileges followers of the major religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam had long enjoyed in Austria.

Austrian Buddhists had worked hard for passage of this legislation and were duly elated, but once legalization was achieved, there emerged the awareness, particularly for younger Buddhists, of a basic, overshadowed concern—the education of Buddhist children and teenagers in the country. Some called for decisive steps toward the creation of a Buddhist educational system, one that would be comprehensive enough to address the multiple needs of the Buddhist society in Austria for decades into the future. Thus was the Austrian Buddhist Association conceived as a religious body that would design curriculum for Buddhist instruction and issue general direction for the training of religious teachers.

The Roman Catholic belt of European nations stretches across the continent from Spain and Ireland in the west to Poland, the native country of the present pope, in the east. Austria sits in the middle, with 87 percent of the population belonging to the Roman Catholic Church. Although in many cases the affiliation is nominal, the intellectual and cultural imprint of Roman Catholicism on Austrians has been profound.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, education in Austria was dominated almost exclusively by the Roman Catholic Church, which administered thousands of schools on all levels. My father, for example, and many members of my family, attended Kremsmuenster Abbey, a monastery grammar school that dates back to the eighth century, a time when Nara emperors ruled Japan. Several Catholic secondary schools developed excellent reputations both within the country and abroad. But even more effective than

the instruction of young people in school was the subtle teaching of a Catholic education at home, the purpose of which was to mold a child into a devotee of the Catholic faith and its institution in the mundane world—the church.

It is the goal of the Austrian Buddhist Association to foster an atmosphere that offers similar nurturing and guidance to young Buddhists.

The Austrian Religious Act authorizes the instruction of a legalized religion in any government school attended by three or more children of this religion. But for Buddhists, the obstacles to such instruction appear at a more fundamental stage.

The Situation within the Family

The first obstacle arises at the smallest cell of human society—the family. People familiar with Buddhist communities in Central Europe are aware of the fact that, more

Myoshin-Friedrich Fenzl, leader of the Jodo-Shin movement in Austria, is the founder and deputy chairman of the Buddhist Society of Salzburg, which promotes a variety of Buddhist and interreligious activities, including meditation sessions, lectures, video performances, annual Buddhist festivals, religious education for children and youth, and hospital chaplaincy.

often than not, only one member of a family is of the Buddhist faith, usually the father. This situation produces not only isolation of the Buddhist father but also serious shortcomings in the religious education of the children. If the non-Buddhist spouse is an ardent follower of another faith, it is likely that she is a Christian. Marriages of a Buddhist to a Muslim or Hindu are extremely rare in Central Europe, although it may be quite different in East Asia. Christians are obliged by their church and admonished at every opportunity—such as weddings, baptisms, and confirmations—to teach their children the message of Jesus Christ. In recent times, there have been instances as well of conservative Christian priests' refusing to baptize a child if one parent is a nonbeliever or if both parents do not promise to raise the child in the Christian faith.

The Buddhist partner in a marriage with a non-Buddhist is faced with a difficult predicament. He feels obliged by Buddhist tolerance to grant concessions to his partner. He faces social surroundings that are at best indifferent to Buddhism. Often his own family, as well as his wife's, is Christian, partly by tradition, the so-called certificate-of-baptism Christians, and partly by devotion. His neighbors, friends, and teachers of his children are Christian. The Christian partner receives the moral support of her priest, minister, or church congregation. But where can the Buddhist partner find the support necessary to bring up his children in the Buddha Dharma and to teach his children the noble doctrine of the Enlightened One?

Buddhists in Central Europe, moreover, tend to live geographically distant from one another—80 percent of all German-speaking Buddhists live isolated from one another—and so derive no support from community. Nor is it the practice of Buddhist societies to cultivate the spirit of Buddhist solidarity or to develop a strategy for Buddhist education of their youth. It comes as no surprise then that most children of such mixed marriages are brought up in the Christian faith. In my more than forty years of practical mission work for the Dharma, I have encountered repeated instances where very devout Buddhists have yielded to the pressure of their Christian surroundings and made the choice not to educate their children in the doctrine of Shakyamuni. What a pity! Even the most tolerant Buddhist cannot but feel that this is wrong, that the Buddhist spirit of tolerance and goodwill has been misused.

Buddhist education should begin in the selection of the marriage partner. I often appeal to our young Buddhist men and women to give the same importance to the religious faith of their prospective partner as to sex appeal, profession, health, or fortune. The question of religious education and the concessions the partner is prepared to grant in that regard are crucial for a sincere, harmonious mar-

riage, one that gives a depth to the relationship between two people of different faith.

The Situation in Society

The second obstacle is social.

Western society has been modeled by two thousand years of Christianity. During this time, the doctrine of Jesus Christ has made its imprint upon our culture in art, music, and literature. The great, imperishable masterpieces of Occidental spirit betoken this influence, as do folklore, customs, and festivals that mark the change of seasons. In a similar way, this should be the goal of a Buddhist education: to form the outlook and conscience of a generation of young Buddhists in substance.

While schools in Austria today are largely secularized, Christian religious instruction remains a compulsory subject. Parents have the right to keep their children out of such classes, and teenagers upon the age of fourteen can choose to stay away on their own. Nevertheless, to do so is neither simple nor practicable.

Particularly in small towns and villages where prejudice is more virulent than in cities with anonymous masses of people, children who opt out of Christian instruction run the risk of being treated as outsiders and discriminated against. The position of these children becomes even more vulnerable should their parents occupy a prestigious place in society—as a doctor, teacher, official, or businessperson, for example—and should their lives be in the public eye. In Austria, such discrimination has been known to occur more often in the west, with its traditional provinces along the German and Swiss borders, than in the east, where the capital, Vienna, is located.

It is not to be denied that a child living as a Buddhist in a Christian society will have to renounce many things a Christian child enjoys—Christmas and Santa Claus, for one, confirmation and holy communion for another. On these occasions, a Christian child is the center of the family life; apart from the gifts received from parents and relatives, there is the anticipation of joy, of being with friends and schoolmates. Buddhist children, unable to enjoy the same pleasure, may experience the bitterness of frustration and a sense of inferiority.

Through the years, I have often heard the opinion that it is preferable for children to be brought up alongside their classmates or playmates than to have attention drawn to them for their religious difference. This in fact was the fate of all but thirteen of 147 young Tibetans reared by foster parents in Switzerland in the early sixties. As reported in a study by a Swiss and a German ethnosociologist, these Swiss foster parents, despite a promise to His Holiness the Dalai Lama that the children would grow up in the

Buddhist faith, were largely concerned that “the children might have felt isolated if they had had another religious education than their foster brothers and sisters and their schoolmates.” This same point of view was articulated by interracial couples in Austria in which the Asian partner was Buddhist.

Obviously, we must seek to avoid situations where Buddhist children in a Christian society are considered social outlaws or become victims of frustration and isolation. I recently submitted recommendations to authorities in Austria and Germany about how Buddhism could be taught in families and in society. It is important, it seems to me, that Buddhist children have their own holidays and festivals to celebrate. And particularly on days when Christian children have their festivals, Buddhist children should know the warmth and affection of their parents. Children should be offered special experiences—a journey to see something dear to their heart, animals or flowers or works of art. These should be days they will remember.

I ask you, why shouldn't we arrange special Buddhist festivals for children? These festivals would give children a sense of belonging to the Buddhist community much more than a dull, sophistic lecture or meditation for hours.

At the same time, it is critical that Buddhist religious education not ignore the Christian religion nor its practices. Buddhist youth will benefit from knowledge of Christian religious behavior, on the one hand, and appreciation of the many Occidental works of art and music inspired by the Christian faith, on the other. But the rights and responsibilities of Buddhist parents must be insisted on. Bringing up their children, teaching them the faith of their parents, is an indivisible right of all citizens in democratic society, and it is a genuine human right, whatever the religion.

Buddhist organizations should be vigilant on a national and international level that this human right is not violated. It should be the public stance of Buddhism in a European society of the future. And it should be the responsibility of individual Buddhists to teach their children the noble truth of Shakyamuni Buddha.

The Lack of Buddhist Literature

This is the third obstacle—the dearth of Buddhist literature in Austria.

Most Buddhists in the West make their first acquaintance with Buddhism through the written word. Long before they attended their first Buddhist service or their first course in meditation, they read a Buddhist book, whether discovered by chance in a bookstore or received from a friend or colleague.

There are more buyers of Buddhist books than there are members of Buddhist societies and communities. The large

number of Buddhist titles published each year assumes a broad and receptive public for Buddhist thought. Their availability satisfies a general interest in Buddhism even as it provides Buddhist parents and teachers with useful advice for educating their children and affords young people the opportunity to approach Buddhism through literature appropriate to their age. It is regrettable, however, that of the many diverse titles of Buddhist literature published for the international market, only a limited number are available in the German language.

Not all Austrians and Germans have command of the English language sufficient to read Buddhist literature in English with any fluency; for young people the number is even smaller. Moreover, Buddhist books that are available often address an Asian or American readership specifically,

Buddhist religious instruction taking place in Salzburg.

and their context is not easily translated to the culture of Central Europe. It is therefore absolutely necessary that a body of Buddhist literature be produced for Austrian and German readers in German and other European languages.

The Absence of a Buddhist Religious History in Europe

Finally, Buddhism has little history or tradition in Europe. The peculiar situation of Buddhists living surrounded by Christianity suggests both obstacles and needs for establishing a Buddhist educational system.

Buddhists in Asia are able to look back to a long history of Buddhist education, which has proven its feasibility through centuries, but Buddhism in the West is a matter of terra incognita. Certainly there are different ideals for a Buddhist education in Europe, depending on the school of Buddhism and whether it tends toward the philosophical or the religious. On the whole, however, there are principles of a Buddhist educational system that all can agree upon.

For the immediate future, the following should be taken into consideration:

(a) The training of a cadre of Buddhist Dharma school teachers. This cadre should be recruited from professional teachers, social educators, youth psychologists, and the like. The list might also include students who envision a teaching career and, as well, laymen who are interested in and have a talent for education.

(b) Seminars promoting the Buddhist religion and Dharma school teachers.

(c) Weekend courses and meetings for instruction and counseling of parents and educators.

(d) An annual Buddhist youth summer camp—for children between the ages of eight and fifteen—where the study of Buddhism is interspersed with play and social events.

(e) A project to establish a Buddhist kindergarten or nursery school in the German-speaking area of Europe as a model for further undertakings.

The State of Buddhist Religious Instruction in Austria

Upon the recognition of Buddhism by the Austrian government, the board of the Austrian Buddhist Association submitted to the Ministry of Education a curriculum for Buddhist religious instruction. This curriculum became official with the ordinance of May 20, 1992.

According to this ordinance, Buddhist religious instructors are paid by the Ministry of Education, and school authorities are obliged to provide suitable facilities for Buddhist religious instruction. All that is required, as stated above, is a minimum of three children whose parents desire a Buddhist education for them. At present, sixteen male and female religious instructors teach the noble truth of Shakyamuni to pupils in the primary and secondary levels in seven of Austria's nine provinces.

Among the students are native Austrians as well as East Asians who have been resident in Austria for years. Some years ago a Buddhist final examination, known in Austria as "Matura," was introduced; since then, more than a dozen students have passed this examination successfully. (Buddhist religious instruction was the subject of a special program recently on Austrian television.)

The superintendent of Buddhist religious instruction is Kurt Krammer, a teacher at a commercial high school. He is the chairman of the Buddhist Society of Salzburg and himself a Buddhist religious instructor.

Buddhist religious instructors are currently trained by correspondence courses and three-day seminars, which are held three or four times a year. It is the devout wish of all Austrian Buddhists that an institute of religious education be established in the medium term. □

White-robed Avalokiteshvara (Byakue Kannon) seated on a rock protruding from a pond and looking at the moon reflected in the water; thus the painting is called the Suigetsu Kannon-zo (Image of Avalokiteshvara with water and the moon). Byakue Kannon is a favorite theme in Zen painting. Painted in ink on silk. Hanging scroll. 88 x 38.7 cm. Kamakura period (1185–1333). Important Cultural Property. Nara National Museum.

How the Buddhist Experience Changed My Life

by Mike Murry

An American member of Rissho Kosei-kai addressed the anniversary celebration of Shakyamuni's attaining of supreme enlightenment held at the Los Angeles branch on December 7, 2003. He described the many changes in his life for the better brought about by his introduction to Buddhism.

Today, December 7, marks a milestone of importance in my life. On this day back in 1978, I first went to work for the Hughes Aircraft Company. Fourteen years later, in the summer of 1992, I attended a retirement party for one of my coworkers, and there I met Mr. Jim Hodgkin. We talked for a while, and he discovered that I had an interest in the Japanese language and computers. I remember him telling me that I would get much better at Japanese if I had some Japanese people to converse with on a regular basis. Also, he said, the Japanese Buddhist association he attended had some computer software that needed looking at for various reasons. In this way, Mr. Hodgkin tried to interest me in his branch of Rissho Kosei-kai. At the time, I didn't understand the meaning of the word *hoben* (skillful means), but I soon learned to recognize it in action, since Mr. Hodgkin and his wife, Chako, never missed an opportunity to apply the concept to me.

Because of deteriorating economic conditions, I could see my career at the company coming to a close and I knew I would soon have to find something else to do for a living. Also, my two sons, Stuart and Vincent, had only one more year to go in high school and I could see that they wanted to leave home and start independent lives of their own. It made me proud to see them grow up, but I also knew that their leaving would create an enormous hole in my life. To fill that terribly empty space, I began to visit the Rissho Kosei-kai branch in Los Angeles. The people seemed friendly enough, even though I could not understand much of what they said, and it seemed to me that I could find something worthwhile to do there, while trying to get through a period of great personal change.

Almost immediately, Mr. Hodgkin began putting pressure on me to formally become a member of the branch. At the time, I didn't know the Japanese word *michibiki*

(guiding others to the faith), but I certainly understood the idea when I experienced someone practicing it on me. I really had no desire to join any type of organized religion, since I had pretty much given up on that sort of thing many years ago while serving in the Vietnam War. Still, I wanted to learn how to recite the prayer service in Japanese and so I figured that in return for this opportunity to learn I would have to give something back to those who had given so much to me. Besides, I considered Mr. Hodgkin and his wife well-meaning people with no children of their own, so I agreed to become a *michibiki-no-musuko* (son in faith) for a while, just to see what would happen.

Needless to say, things started happening immediately. Since I could not understand the Japanese language or branch procedures all that well, I had to depend on others who spoke English to explain things. One gentleman in particular gave me my first piece of really useful advice. "Just stand still and look lost," he told me. "Pretty soon a little Japanese lady will come around and tell you what to do." I tried to follow this advice but soon grew frustrated because every little Japanese lady I met told me something different. I finally learned to listen to what all the little Japanese ladies told me, but only to follow the instructions given by the last one. Once, a really tiny Japanese lady came up behind me and straightened out my *o-tasuki* (a sash with the *o-daimoku* written on it), which had somehow gotten twisted in back. I did not know her name so I called her "O-tasuki Sensei," by way of thanks. She seemed to find that hugely amusing and would always laugh when I called her that. I later found out that she was Reverend Nakamura's mother and the founder of the Los Angeles branch. How embarrassing!

Since I did not understand much but wanted to get along with everyone, I developed the unfortunate habit of

Mr. Murry (center) and Mr. Hodgkin (right) during a lecture on Buddhism held at Rissho Kosei-kai's Tokyo headquarters. They took part in the Second Pilgrimage of Global Awakening to the headquarters in April 1995.

smiling and agreeing with the things people said to me. It took me a while to stop doing this. I found one Japanese gentleman in particular almost impossible to understand. He would come up to me, smile, and say something that sounded like "Paa-king-gu." I would say "Hai," and then learn that I had agreed to take care of cars in the parking lot. One time this smiling man approached me, put his hand on my shoulder, and said something that sounded like "Mando." I agreed and then found out that I would have to carry this large portable wooden lantern around central Los Angeles as part of the Nisei Week Parade. In time, I

learned the word *o-yaku* (role), and came to appreciate just what it meant. I also learned to feel true gratitude for the opportunity to do good work for the benefit of others.

Many branch activities and duties began to fill up my time, until I really had more than enough to do every week. I began working on the prayer service in Japanese and had pretty much learned how to recite it within two years. As part of my donation, I started cutting the trees and bushes that surround the branch property. It took me years to get those wild bushes down to manageable size. I went on group pilgrimages to Japan and had many interesting experiences as a result. I continued participating in Nisei Week Parades, and I spent many enjoyable evenings celebrating at the parties that followed these events. After drinking too much at one of these celebrations, I woke up in the middle of the night to find that Chako had taken my car keys and locked me in one of the downstairs offices so that I could not drive home that night. Since I could not get out to go to the bathroom, either, I spent a very uncomfortable night until people arrived the next morning and let me out.

My association with Rissho Kosei-kai has helped me meet many new friends from Japan and other countries, too. I found that wherever I went in the world, from Bangkok to Taipei, I could always find a little piece of home at the local Rissho Kosei-kai branch. I especially remember one experience at the Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo, when I sat between a Korean gentleman on my left and a Chinese gentleman on my right. As each of these men recited the sutra in his individual language, I recited my sutra in

English-speaking members taking part in a hoza session during Dharma on the Move, a gathering of U.S. members held in the Los Angeles branch in October 2003.

Japanese. I cannot possibly describe what that felt like, but I will never forget it.

I have also had many valuable opportunities to visit other Rissho Kosei-kai branches in America to attend seminars and meetings. I especially remember one seminar I attended at the Hawaii branch. As you may know, we call Hawaii the Rainbow State for very good reasons: you can see rainbows everywhere, all day long. Anyway, I got up early one morning and found myself alone in front of the altar. Outside, I could see the most beautiful rainbow. The setting seemed so peaceful that I decided to do a little meditation before everyone else got up to begin their day. I put on a recording by Enya, a beautiful Irish singer who has just the most perfect voice, and sat down to clear my mind. Right away, I noticed the pictures of Founder Niwano and Cofounder Naganuma that always hang on the walls behind the altar. The founder's picture showed this cheerful gentleman with a warm and friendly smile. The other picture showed something quite different, something I have never understood. The picture of Cofounder Naganuma never showed her smiling, and I wondered if, as an exercise, I could make her do so. I must have spent an hour trying to make that picture smile and I got totally lost in the effort. Finally, I sort of awoke to realize that other people had gotten up and were walking quietly around trying not to disturb me. I felt really good afterward, but I never got her to smile at me. I do think, though, that the exercise revealed to me some of the deep sadness and understanding that she knew.

Establishing a connection with the world of Buddhism has benefited me in so many ways. Since I began learning Buddhism at Rissho Kosei-kai, I also became involved with other Buddhists from other countries and traditions. In time, because I also have a little background in Mandarin Chinese, I went to visit Hsi Lai Temple in Hacienda Heights, just out of curiosity. I met a little Chinese lady there, a Buddhist nun, who offered me a job at a new Buddhist university in the city of Rosemead. I went to work there and shortly afterward met another Chinese lady that I fell in love with and married two years later. In view of all this, it seems to me that all my experiences with Buddhism since joining Rissho Kosei-kai have had a unifying effect on my life. Things seem more related to me now. I can see how one thing has led to another and how hard work and opportunities to learn have resulted in much positive growth and happiness.

As I have said, my experiences at the Los Angeles branch and elsewhere in the Buddhist world have changed my life in ways that I could not have imagined twelve short years ago. Looking back on it all and looking forward to the future, I wouldn't exchange a minute of it for anything else

Mr. Murry with his wife, Carol Wu (right), and his wife's brother (center), a Buddhist monk, standing before the entrance to the main temple of Fo Guang Shan monastery in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. They are joined by Mr. Murry's younger son (left), with his fiancée.

in this life. This branch has been my branch since the first day I walked in the front door. I will always think of this branch as my branch and all of the members here as my Sangha. Life changes and people come and go, but some things stay with us for years and years because of the power of memory. I have reasons for leaving America early next year, since I plan to retire in southern Taiwan. I like the lifestyle there and I especially like the fact that people speak several different languages and practice interesting forms of Buddhism and Taoism. I think I can relax there and learn many new things in the years that I have left in this lifetime. Still, a big piece of my heart will always remain here. Wherever I go in the world, I will always carry a little piece of this place with me. I love you all more than I can say and I did not want to leave without telling you this.

In my early days of learning to recite the sutra, I came upon the phrase: "*Masa ni shiru beshi, kono tokoro wa sunawachi kore dojo nari.* (Know that this very place is the place of practice)." Of all the phrases I have recited over the years, this one has always seemed the most meaningful. I came here to the Los Angeles branch expecting to work on some computer software, but I wound up learning to work on myself. In this place, I started learning to practice, and now I feel that I can take the practice with me to any other place that I might live. I could not have learned so much, though, without the encouragement that so many people have given me. Coming to this place eleven years ago changed my life for the better and I will always feel the deepest gratitude to everyone here, past as well as present, for your help and understanding. I thank you again from the bottom of my heart. □

Mike Murry is a member of Rissho Kosei-kai of Los Angeles.

Once-in-a-Lifetime Meetings

by Nichiko Niwano

Every year brings new encounters, and new encounters, we hope, will bring a year of hope. To make this a reality it is crucial that we treasure the “once-in-a-lifetime meetings” that each day brings us. 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 a meeting can change a person’s life. Although we have valuable encounters, often we remain unaware of them. What should we do to have good meetings? Please teach us what position we should adopt on a day-to-day basis.

As we greet the promise of spring, let us value the spirit of once-in-a-lifetime meetings and resolve to have good meetings. The saying *ichi go ichi e* can be loosely translated as “once-in-a-lifetime meeting.” Human life is a succession of meetings and partings. On the basis of the truth that all phenomena are impermanent—that all things in the world

constantly undergo change—we experience repeated meetings and partings.

Whether we can make this life an enriching one depends on whether we can value our encounters as “once-in-a-lifetime meetings.” For example, in the commuter train on your way to and from work or school, you cross paths with many other people. These are not meetings in the strict sense. No matter how many people and things we come into contact with, “If the mind is elsewhere, the eye takes nothing in,” as the saying goes. We sometimes fail to notice important encounters, we overlook them.

Meetings can change the course of one’s life. There is a Buddhist episode symbolic of this, the meeting between Shariputra and Ashvajit. Ashvajit, one of the five monks who had heard Shakyamuni’s first sermon, in Deer Park, was begging for alms outside the king’s palace. Shariputra, struck by Ashvajit’s refreshing attitude, found himself drawn to the monk. “What does your master teach?” Shariputra asked. “My master,” replied Ashvajit, “teaches that all things arise through causes and conditions.” Moved by these words, Shariputra renounced the world and became a disciple of the Buddha, together with his close friend Maudgalyayana.

What enabled Shariputra to meet Ashvajit? Shariputra was impelled by something within himself: his aspiration to enlightenment. It was this that gave him the insight to see at a glance that Ashvajit was no ordinary person. Shariputra’s wholehearted wish to encounter the ultimate truth, the teaching of truth, led to his meeting with Ashvajit.

Meetings are a matter of karmic connections. There is a Japanese saying which means that even chance meetings with strangers are the results of causes from former lives. The path life takes is determined by the way in which we

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).

accept this karma. In chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra, "Tactfulness," it is written that "the seeds of buddhahood sprout through causation." In other words, the way we perceive the karmic conditions we encounter determines whether or not we can follow the Buddha Way, become happy, and taste the joy of the Dharma.

Buddhism teaches the suffering of meeting with what is hated and the suffering of parting from what is loved. The former means that we cannot avoid meeting with people and things that we dislike; the latter, that we will inevitably part even from the people we love most. It is human nature to want not to meet with those we dislike and not to part from those we love. But very often it is precisely the people we dislike who are the most valuable to us. A disliked boss or senior mirrors us to ourselves. Our feeling of dislike for someone is due to our unconscious recognition that we have something in common with that person.

On the other hand, it is painful to part from those we love. There is nothing we can do about true sorrow and pain. At such times all we can do is grieve and weep to the full, immerse ourselves totally in our sorrow. The Christian poet Jukichi Yagi, who died in 1927 at the age of only 29, wrote:

Entering fully into my suffering,
I found there no suffering, only living.

He means, I think, that when we feel sad and wholeheartedly plunge into that sorrow, it brings new awareness. Experiencing this kind of pain and sorrow enables us to understand the suffering and sorrow of others. Through this we can penetrate the truths of impermanence and dependent origination. In this tactful (compassionate) means of bringing us to know the truth I see an invisible arrangement by the Buddha.

In short, the aspiration to enlightenment leads to good meetings. Can you tell us about your own once-in-a-lifetime meetings?

One such meeting was with my kendo teacher, Tokichi Nakamura, who had a school called Taigijuku. I studied kendo from the autumn of my second year of high school into my university years. The teacher was stern but very human. Through kendo he taught me how to behave properly as a Japanese. One indelible memory is of something that happened in the summer vacation of my third year at university. I asked the teacher if I could spend two months as a live-in disciple (which meant living in his house and helping with household chores while being taught), and he

consented. Every morning I rose at five o'clock, scrubbed down the corridors and toilet, and then had a morning kendo session with the teacher in the dojo. In the middle of the day I did assorted chores, and at night I practiced with the many kendo practitioners who came to the school.

This rigorous regime at the peak of the summer heat tired me out, and one day, after about a month, I went home without saying anything to the teacher. The next day he came to our house and, standing in the entrance, scolded me in a voice that rang throughout the house. "What do you mean, requesting two months' practice and then breaking your promise? Since I promised to take care of you for two months, you are now the same as my child. Now, come back."

I was taken back to the teacher's house. That night, after an unusually rigorous kendo session, I received a thorough dressing-down from the teacher. I felt as though a steel rod had been driven into my heart. He was stern, but his straightforward scolding left me feeling refreshed.

Other once-in-a-lifetime meetings were with Masahiro Yasuoka (1898–1983), an authority on Eastern thought, whose writings provided me with much food for the spirit, and Katsuzo Nishi (1884–1959), founder of the Nishi health method, who provided the stimulus that led me to undertake fasting.

When we talk about once-in-a-lifetime meetings, we tend to recall only good experiences; but actually, unpleasant and painful experiences also provide us with once-in-a-lifetime meetings. If we could accept both comfortable and uncomfortable people as our teachers, we would truly value karmic connections and make the most of them.

We have a habit of judging things as good or bad. For example, we say, "The weather is good today," or "The weather is bad today," but of course weather is not really good or bad. It is just sunny or rainy or cloudy. It is we who label it good or bad.

Living in the here and now means living each moment fully. When we live fully, we do not have time to label things as good or bad. Tung-shan (807–69), the Chinese founder of the Ts'ao-tung school of Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism, wrote, "I am always earnest wherever I am," a passage redolent of the tension of life. To live earnestly in this moment, the here and now, means not merely persevering but also striving to progress along the Buddha Way, taking refuge in and following the Way.

"The here and now" means each unique, praiseworthy time and place. The past has gone; the future has not yet arrived. To fix our eyes firmly on the here and now and live fully is the only thing for us to do. When we live earnestly in the here and now, every day is a good day. □

The Last Words of the Tathāgata

by Hajime Nakamura

According to the Buddha's final utterance, the purpose of Buddhism is twofold: to realize the impermanence of all things and to devote oneself to religious training.

The Buddha then gave his final discourse; all texts include it, but the Pāli version, the Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, is the simplest.

“(1) Then the Venerable Master said to the young Ānanda: ‘You people may later think, Ānanda: “The teacher who has instructed us in the teachings is no more. We no longer have a teacher.” However, it should not be seen like this, for the Dhamma that I have spoken for you and the Vinaya that I have set out for you will be your teacher after my death.’” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, VI, 1)

The living Buddha was about to disappear, but his teachings (Dhamma) and the precepts (Vinaya) would remain as the authority for later followers. This idea was understood in a practical sense in early times, but it later developed into the doctrine of the Law Body (Dharmakāya). The Buddha then cautioned his disciples to question what they did not understand and to come to an understanding through thorough comprehension.

“(5) Then the Venerable Master said to the *bhikkhus*: ‘It may be, *bhikkhus*, that a *bhikkhu* has doubts or suspicions about the Buddha, or the Dhamma, or the Community, or the Path, or the practice. [At that time,] *bhikkhus*, ask, so that you do not have regrets later, saying “We were in the presence of the Master, but we could not ask him personally when we were face to face with him.”’ When he spoke thus, the *bhikkhus* were silent. For a second time . . . and a third time the Venerable Master said to them: ‘It may be, *bhikkhus*, that a *bhikkhu* will have doubts or suspicions about the Buddha, or the Dhamma, or the Community, or the Path, or the practice. [At that time,] *bhikkhus*, ask, so that you do not have regrets later, saying “We were in the presence of the Master, but we could not ask him person-

ally when we were face to face with him.”’ [When spoken to in this way,] the *bhikkhus* remained silent all three times. Then the Venerable Master said to the *bhikkhus*: ‘You may hesitate to question the Master, *bhikkhus*, because of your respect for him. *Bhikkhus*, ask [like] one companion does to tell another: When he spoke thus, too, the *bhikkhus* were silent.’” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, VI, 5)

While human beings differ one from another, there is a strong tendency among Japanese and Koreans not to ask

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).

The Buddha entering nirvana beneath the twin sāla trees. Unearthed in Gandhara. Peshawar Museum.

questions, out of respect for the teacher. At university, Western students enjoy asking questions, though there are even differences here. I noticed that in the southern states of the United States students would merely ask questions, while those in the northern states seemed to enjoy getting into academic disputes with their professors; I had the strong impression that they liked argument for argument's sake.

The Buddha then gave Ānanda timely instruction.

“(6) Then the young Ānanda said to the Venerable Master: ‘It is marvelous, Revered One, it is strange. I joyfully believe that in this gathering there is not one *bhikkhu* who has doubts or suspicions about the Buddha, or the Dhamma, or the Community, or the Path, or the practice.’

“You have spoken, Ānanda, from your pure faith. However, the Tathāgata has this knowledge: “In this gathering

there is not one *bhikkhu* who has doubts or suspicions about the Buddha, or the Dhamma, or the Community, or the Path, or the practice. Even the last from among the five hundred *bhikkhus* will enter the stream of the sage, and will never backslide, so certain is it that he shall attain correct enlightenment.”” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, VI, 6)

The next verse is particularly well-known as encompassing the whole of the last discourse.

“(7) Then the Venerable Master said to the *bhikkhus*: ‘Now, *bhikkhus*, I say to you: “All conditioned things pass away. Perfect your practice untiringly.” These were the last words of the Tathāgata.” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, VI, 7)

The words above can be interpreted as meaning to train ceaselessly toward human perfection. The Buddha commanded in his final utterance: “All that is produced is

Right: An image of the Buddha entering nirvana enshrined in a temple built near the site in Kuśīnagar where the actual event occurred.

Below: A relief of a disciple of the Buddha who moans over the Master's entering nirvana, carved on the wall of the pedestal on which the Buddha lies.

destroyed and disappears. Strive steadily to attain your goal.” According to the Buddha’s last words, the purpose of Buddhism is twofold: to realize the impermanence of all things and to devote oneself to religious training. The words about impermanence are given special poignance and significance by the fact that Sakyamuni himself was old and dying. To emphasize this impression was certainly the intention of the compilers of the *suttanta*. All the teachings of Buddhism can be incorporated into that phrase. In later times, however, as Gotama was becoming deified as the Buddha, theological thought came to be added to the various translations of the sutras and we find expressions that point to the rarity of the appearance of a buddha and the excellence of his physical form. Ernst Waldschmidt has followed those developments closely. The other versions of the *suttanta* have preserved the basic teaching that because all

phenomenal things are impermanent, we must work hard to forward our religious training, but above and beyond that we find many expressions that emphasize the miraculous nature of the Buddha’s appearance in the world (like the blooming of *udumbara* flowers out of season). Such expressions are in direct proportion to the degree that the Buddha had been deified when the text was being compiled.

The Buddha’s Death

The Buddha’s death is described in the “Parinibbāna” section of the *Samyutta-nikāya*.

“(1) At one time the Venerable Master was staying at Kusinārā and it was there, between the twin *sāla* trees in the *sāla* grove of the Mallas at Upavattana, that he entered complete tranquillity [*parinibbāna*].

“(2) At that time the Venerable Master said to the

bhikkhus: 'Perfect your training diligently. All phenomenal things pass away.' These were the last words of the Tathāgata." (Saṃyutta-nikāya, I, 6, 2, 5, 1–2)

The succeeding sentences are almost identical with the account in the Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta. The Buddha entered each of the four stages of the highest meditation as he wished, and emerging from the fourth stage, immediately and utterly passed away. The Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta continues:

"(8) Then the Venerable Master entered the initial *jhāna* [the first stage of meditation]. Arising from the initial *jhāna*, he entered the second *jhāna*. Arising from the second *jhāna*, he entered the third *jhāna*. Arising from the third *jhāna*, he entered the fourth *jhāna*. Arising from the fourth *jhāna*, he entered the stage of the abode of the infinity of space. Arising from the abode of the infinity of space, he entered the stage of the abode of the infinity of consciousness. Arising from the stage of the abode of the infinity of consciousness, he entered the stage of the abode of nothingness. Arising from the stage of the abode of nothingness, he entered the stage of the abode of neither perception nor nonperception. Arising from the stage of the abode of neither perception nor nonperception he entered the concentration of cessation of perception and feeling.

"Then the young Ānanda said to the Venerable Anuruddha: 'Venerable Anuruddha, the Venerable Master has entered *nibbāna*.'

"Friend Ānanda, the Venerable Master has not entered *nibbāna*. He has entered the concentration of cessation of perception and feeling.'

"(9) Then the Venerable Master arose from the concentration of cessation of perception and feeling and entered the stage of the abode of neither perception nor nonperception. Arising from the stage of the abode of neither perception nor nonperception, he entered the stage of the abode of nothingness. Arising from the stage of the abode of nothingness, he entered the stage of the abode of the infinity of consciousness. Arising from the stage of the abode of the infinity of consciousness, he entered the stage of the abode of the infinity of space. Arising from the stage of the abode of the infinity of space, he entered the fourth *jhāna*. Arising from the fourth *jhāna*, he entered the third *jhāna*. Arising from the third *jhāna*, he entered the second *jhāna*. Arising from the second *jhāna*, he entered the initial *jhāna*. Arising from the initial *jhāna*, he entered the second *jhāna*. Arising from the second *jhāna*, he entered the third *jhāna*. Arising from the third *jhāna*, he entered the fourth *jhāna*. Arising from the fourth *jhāna*, the Venerable Master immediately entered perfect *nibbāna*." (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, VI, 8–9)

The disciples no doubt discussed their Master's spiritual condition at the time of his death. However, linking it to the theory of the four *jhānas* is clearly a later accretion.

Dating the Buddha's Death

No records remain that give us the exact date and time of the Buddha's death. The Pāli Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta and Sanskrit text contain no such information, while the Yu-hsing-ching states that the four great events of the Buddha's life—his birth, going into homelessness, enlightenment, and death—all occurred on the same day, the eighth day of Vaiśākha, the second month in the Indian calendar. The eighth had come to be considered an auspicious day, since it was then that the twice-monthly *uposatha* meeting was held.

"On what day was the Buddha's birth? On what day was the enlightenment? On what day was the passing into *parinirvāṇa*? It was on the day the *Puṣya* star appears that [the Buddha] was born; [on the day] the *Puṣya* star appears that [he] went into homelessness; on the day the *Puṣya* star appears that [he] was enlightened; and on the day the *Puṣya* star appears that [he] entered *parinirvāṇa*. What gave birth to the most venerable of all two-legged beings? What made [him] emerge from the thickets of suffering? What made [him] attain the highest Way? What caused [him] to enter the city of nirvāṇa? The *Puṣya* star gave birth to the most venerable of all two-legged beings. The *Puṣya* star made [him] emerge from the thickets of suffering. The *Puṣya* star made [him] attain the highest Way. The *Puṣya* star caused [him] to enter the city of nirvāṇa.

"On the eighth day the Tathāgata was born; on the eighth day the Buddha went into homelessness; on the eighth day [he] attained enlightenment; and on the eighth day he took up his entry to nirvāṇa. On the eighth day the most venerable of all two-legged beings was born; on the eighth day [he] emerged from the thickets of suffering; on the eighth day [he] was made to attain the highest Way; and on the eighth day [he] was made to enter the city of nirvāṇa. In the second month the Tathāgata was born; in the second month the Buddha went into homelessness; in the second month [he] attained enlightenment; and in the second month he took up his entry to nirvāṇa. In the second month the most venerable of all two-legged beings was born; in the second month [he] was made to emerge from the thickets of suffering; in the second month [he] was made to attain the highest Way; and in the second month [he] was made to enter the city of nirvāṇa.

"The *sāla* flowers were in full bloom and rays of light shone forth. At the place where he had been born, the Tathāgata took up his entry into nirvāṇa. All the people

The temple built in Kuśīnagar commemorating the Buddha's entrance into nirvana.

praise and venerate the *parinirvāṇa* of the Compassionate [One]. He transcended all fear and determined to take up his entry into nirvāṇa.”

This section outlines the important events of the Buddha's life. Buddhists of South Asia celebrate all these events on the same day, though to the Japanese it may seem strange to talk of “celebrating” the Buddha's death. The *parinirvāṇa* of the founder is marked only in Buddhism and Jainism; there is no such ceremony in Hinduism. The day, being a holy day, is celebrated as a festival.

Hsüan-tsang's report is somewhat different because of his critical attitude:

“The records of people of the past [concerning the date of the Buddha's death] say that the Buddha entered *parinirvāṇa* at the age of eighty on the fifteenth day of the second half of the month of Vaiśākha. This corresponds to the fifteenth day of the third month [of the T'ang Chinese calendar]. The Sarvāstivādins, however, say that the Buddha entered *parinirvāṇa* on the eighth day of the second half of the month of Kārttika, which corresponds to the eighth day of the ninth month [of the calendar]. Other schools have different explanations for [calculating from] the Buddha's nirvāṇa. Some say it was more than twelve hundred years ago, some say it was more than thirteen hundred years ago, some say it was more than fifteen hundred years ago, while others say more than nine hundred years have passed but not more than one thousand.” (*Ta-T'ang hsi-yü-chi*, fasc. 6)

The *Ta-T'ang Ta-tz'u-en-ssu Hsüan-tsang fa-shih-ch'üan*, a biography of Hsüan-tsang composed by Hui-li and supplemented by Yen-ts'ung, says much the same.

“According to legend, Śākya[muni] lived eighty years in this world, and entered nirvāṇa on the fifteenth day of the second half of the month of Vaiśākha. This is the fifteenth day of the second month. However, the Sarvāstivādins say that Śākya[muni] entered nirvāṇa in the second half of the month of Kārttika. This would be the eighth day of the ninth month. Some say that from the time of the nirvāṇa until now is twelve hundred years, others say thirteen hundred years, or fifteen hundred years, or more than nine hundred years but less than a thousand.”

The scholar Shinjō Mizutani comments on this:

“There are, broadly, three hypotheses concerning the length of Śākyamuni's life. The Fo-pan-ni-yüan-ching and the Fang-teng pan-ni-yüan-ching say he was seventy-nine; the Ta pan-nieh-p'an ching and the Chin-kuang-ming tsui-sheng-wang-ching (fasc. 1) that he was eighty; and the Chang a-han-ching (fasc. 4), the Tsa a-han-ching (fasc. 35), and the P'i-nai-yeh tsa-shih (fasc. 38) that he was more than eighty. It is generally held that he was eighty [when he

died]. There are more than fifty theories concerning the year of the Buddha's death, which I cannot state here, but that I have broadly summarized in this fascicle, II-2, note 4. Hsüan-tsang himself presents theories without indicating their sources, and he may have been reluctant to accept one or another in an effort to avoid complications.”

The date of the Buddha's death is uncertain. Pāli Buddhism holds that the death occurred on the night of the full moon of the month of Vaiśākha, as did the enlightenment. The birth, enlightenment, and death are all celebrated by South Asian Buddhists as the Wesak Festival (though there is evidence, regarding which further research is necessary, that in ancient India the three were celebrated separately).

Though meeting the needs of the Buddhists of South Asia, where there is little awareness of seasonal differences, this was not satisfactory to those of East Asia where the climate is very different. Here, the day of the Buddha's death, traditionally the fifteenth day of the second Indian month (Vaiśākha, in actuality corresponding roughly to the present month of May), was adopted directly as the fifteenth day of the second month of the Chinese and Japanese calendars, a time of year when it is still cold, with no spring growth yet occurring, and therefore deemed appropriate to the *parinirvāṇa*. The Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta states that on the day of the Buddha's death, “the *sāla* trees gave forth flowers in full bloom out of season. Those flowers fell upon the body of the Tathāgata, sprinkling and scattering over it in veneration. Heavenly *mandarava* flowers fell from the sky upon the body of the Tathāgata, sprinkling and scattering over it in veneration” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 2). It is the legend which, it is said, gave rise to the passage in the *Heike monogatari* (Tale of the Heike) that “the color of the flowers of the twin *sāla* trees reveals the truth that what has prospered must decline.” Those who are used to a climate of four distinct seasons, like the Japanese, may interpret the statement in the *suttanta* to mean that the Buddha died in winter, when flowers do not bloom. In fact the coolest period in the region around Kuśīnagar is between November and December, but many flowers do indeed bloom. When I traveled there in the month of December, my party of pilgrims from abroad and I were presented with garlands of beautiful flowers and had flowers scattered before us, reminiscent of the description in the *suttanta*. By February, it becomes very hot, very different from the Japanese image of ritual celebration of the Buddha's death. In India, flowers are always in bloom; the passage in the *suttanta* is largely metaphorical. Its intention is to evoke feelings of the wonders that preceded the *parinirvāṇa*.

To be continued

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 7

The Parable of the Magic City

(7)

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

TEXT “Suppose there is a fearful region, through which lies a perilous and difficult road, five hundred yojanas [in length], far from the abodes of men. [Suppose] there is a large company wishing to pass along that road to the Place of Jewels, and they have a guide, wise and astute, who knows well the perilous road, where it is open and where closed, and who leads the company that wish to cross this arduous [region].

COMMENTARY *A perilous and difficult road, five hundred yojanas [in length].* This road symbolizes Buddhist practice. It is by no means an easy road, and it does not lead quickly to its destination. Rather, it is a long route, along which various difficulties lie in wait. But unless it is traversed, the Buddha Way remains unattained.

• *Jewels.* This signifies true happiness.

TEXT [Suppose] the company he leads become tired on the way and say to the leader: ‘We are utterly exhausted and moreover afraid and cannot go any farther; the road before us stretches far; let us turn back.’ The leader, [a man] of much tact, reflects thus: ‘These [people] are to be pitied. How can they give up such great treasure and want to turn back?’

COMMENTARY *Become tired.* This expression refers to the mental state of having lost interest and courage and wishing to turn back. Such timidity is what most hinders not only Buddhist practice but also everything you do.

TEXT Reflecting thus, by a device, in the midst of the perilous road, past three hundred yojanas, he mystically makes a city and says to the company: ‘Do not fear, and do not

turn back. Here is this great city in which you may rest and follow your own desires. If you enter this city, you will speedily be at rest; and if you [then] are able to go forward to the Place of Jewels, you proceed.’

COMMENTARY *In the midst of the perilous road, past three hundred yojanas.* This passage should be interpreted as “a little more than three hundred yojanas along the difficult road five hundred yojanas long.” This implies considerable practice of the Buddha Way. Without this amount of practice the company would not benefit from being shown the apparition of the magic city.

TEXT “Thereupon the exhausted company greatly rejoice in their minds and praise [their] unexampled [fortune]: ‘Now indeed we escape this evil way; let us speedily be at ease.’ Then the company proceed into the magic city, imagining they have arrived at their destination, and are settled in comfort.

COMMENTARY The magic city symbolizes the shravaka and pratyekabuddha stages. The Place of Jewels is the final objective of Buddhist practice, that is, the attainment of the Buddha’s wisdom and enlightenment. The Buddha Dharma is the teaching pointing the way to that goal. There is but one truth.

Shakyamuni (“the leader”) wants to lead all people to that final objective, but many are unaware of his real intention. Thus they think vaguely that the Place of Jewels means a happy life. If, however, Shakyamuni said clearly from the first that the happy life they were seeking could not really be achieved without realizing the Buddha’s wisdom, many people would be unable to follow his guidance, feeling in-

timidated by the lofty nature of his teaching. Therefore he deliberately conceals that point.

Even the vague happiness that people seek is not easily attained, however. As they strive toward it but never reach it, the majority of people tend to grow tired and lose heart. This causes the mind of retrogression. It is then that the great leader, well versed in the wisdom of skillfully leading according to the person and the situation (“tact”), shows them a goal easy to attain, giving them hope and heart. This is the peace of mind, free from suffering, attained when the defilements are removed: that is, the shravaka and pratyekabuddha enlightenment. Since such enlightenment is within relatively easy reach, people take heart, continue their practice, and are able to reach that peaceful state. Thus the passage says “imagining they have arrived at their destination, and are settled in comfort.” They think they have already been saved.

TEXT When the leader perceives that the company are rested and are no longer fatigued, he makes the magic city disappear, and says to the company: ‘Come along, all of you, the Place of Jewels is at hand. I [only] created this past large city for you to rest in.’

COMMENTARY The members of the company relax within the city, resting and regaining the will to act. This means that when one reaches the shravaka or pratyekabuddha stage, the defilements disappear, the mind becomes continually peaceful, and life’s suffering is completely forgotten. At this point one feels the urge to find a new goal and progress toward it. That is what it means to be human. Without such feelings, there could never be any progress.

The great leader (the Buddha) understands human beings to the core, and so, choosing the appropriate time, makes the magic city disappear and urges the company on, telling them, “The shravaka and pratyekabuddha stages represent only temporary enlightenment, partway to true enlightenment, which is still further on. It is not far now, however, so be of good heart as you journey on.”

An extremely important point here is that the enlightenment of shravakas and pratyekabuddhas is by no means futile, for it is undoubtedly on the right path to true enlightenment, but it is merely partway to the goal. If one had deviated from the main route one would have to return to it, but that is not necessary. One has only a little further to go. The magic city does not symbolize futility; it is merely mistaken for the final destination.

TEXT “Bhikshus! So is it with the Tathagata. At present he is your great leader acquainted with all the distresses, the evils, the perils, and the long-continued [processes of]

mortality, from which you must be rid and removed. If living beings only hear of the One Buddha Vehicle, they will not desire to see the Buddha nor wish to approach him, but think thus: ‘The Buddha Way is long and far; only after the long suffering of arduous labor can the end be reached.’

COMMENTARY The Buddha now explains the parable. He sees clearly that the various defilements, born of attachment to phenomenal changes, are difficult to surmount, like a long, steep mountain path, yet they can be eradicated. This phenomenal world undergoes constant change, and as long as we let ourselves be attached to phenomena, we will experience the pain of losing what we love and the distress of having to deal with what we dislike. As a result the defilements arise, and toss us hither and thither. Such a way of life, being swayed by defilements, is what is called the evil way, which is likened to a perilous way in the parable.

It should be quite clear therefore that evil does not really exist in itself. The evil way is that which gives rise to the defilements through attachment to phenomena. Thinking evil to be substantially real and trying to conquer it by eradicating it is as useless as trying to erase a shadow instead of the actual object. If, however, we do away with that which has created the shadow (attachment to phenomenal things), the shadow itself will disappear.

It is immediately apparent that if large trees planted around a rice field prevent the rice from growing because they block the sun, the only way to attain a good rice yield is to chop them down. It is useless to try to get rid of their shadow any other way. The trees (attachment to phenomena) must come down. Knowing this, the Buddha realizes that the evil ways of birth-death and defilements are perilous and so must be removed.

The Buddha Way, however, does not mean that people become as still as the waters of a lake, eradicating their defilements. We must not become attached to the notion of removing the defilements but rather turn them around so that they work for good in the world, creating harmony within that activity. This is the Buddha’s wisdom, and Mahayana nirvana. Rather than make water into a lake and leave it be, we channel it so that it provides energy serving society, making electricity, irrigating fields, or providing transport routes.

Since such a teaching seems to deal with great matters affecting society and humanity as a whole, those who are suffering from personal troubles will think that the deliverance promised has little relevance to them. Though the salvation of society and humanity is in fact the true salvation of the individual too, those caught up in suffering are not drawn to this teaching, since such an ideal seems no

Chapter 7, "The Parable of the Magic City," from the Lotus Sutra, inscribed by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.

more than a distant dream. This psychological state is described by the Buddha: "If living beings only hear of the One Buddha Vehicle, they will not desire to see the Buddha nor wish to approach him."

TEXT The Buddha, knowing that their minds are feeble and low, by his tact, when they are on the way, to give them rest, preaches the two [stages] of nirvana.

COMMENTARY *Their minds are feeble and low.* The Buddha sees through their cowardice, weakness, and low spirits in thinking that the ideal of the Buddha Way is too lofty to follow.

TEXT If [those] beings dwell in [these] two stages, then the Tathagata proceeds to tell them: 'You have not yet accomplished your task. The place where you are dwelling is near the Buddha wisdom. Take note and ponder that the nirvana which you have attained is not the real [one]! It is only that the Tathagata, through his tactfulness, in the One Buddha Vehicle discriminates and speaks of three.'

COMMENTARY *Speaks of three.* These three are the three vehicles of shravaka, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva. They are not three separate paths; they are not different from the One Buddha Vehicle. They just represent stages along the way.

TEXT It is just as when that leader, in order to give rest [to his company], magically makes a great city and after they are rested informs them, saying: 'The Place of Jewels is

at hand; this city is not real, but only my magic production.'"

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

"The Buddha Universal Surpassing Wisdom / For ten kalpas sat on the wisdom throne, / The Buddha Law still unrevealed, / Still unaccomplished the Buddha Way. / Heavenly gods and dragon kings, / Asuras and other beings / Constantly rained celestial flowers / To pay homage to that buddha. / The gods beat their celestial drums / And made all kinds of music. / Fragrant breezes swept away the faded flowers, / While raining others of fresh beauty. / When ten minor kalpas had passed, / Then he accomplished the Buddha Way. / Gods and men in the world / All were ecstatic in mind. / The sixteen sons of that buddha, / All with their followers, / Thousands of myriads of kotis around them, / All went to the buddha. / Bending low at the buddha's feet, / They begged him to roll the Law wheel: 'Holy Lion! With rain of the Law, / Fill us and all others!' / Hard it is to meet a world-honored one; / He appears but once in long ages, / And [then] to awaken the living / He shakes all things.

COMMENTARY *To awaken the living he shakes all things.* He agitates the spirits of all living beings to bring them to enlightenment.

TEXT In the worlds of the eastern quarter, / Five hundred myriad kotis of domains, / Brahma palaces shone with light / Such as never was before. / All the Brahmas, seeing this sign, / Sought till they reached the buddha. / They honored him, strewing flowers, / And offered him their palaces, /

Entreating him to roll the Law wheel / And extolling him in verse. / The buddha, knowing the time had not yet come, / Received their entreaty but sat in silence. / From three [other] quarters and four directions, / The zenith and the nadir [they] likewise [came], / Strewing flowers, offering their palaces, / And begging the buddha to roll the Law wheel: / 'Hard it is to meet a world-honored one; / Be pleased, in thy great compassion, / Widely to open the gates of the sweet dew / And roll the supreme Law wheel!' / The world-honored one of infinite wisdom, / Receiving the entreaty of that throng, / Proclaimed for them the various laws of / The Four Noble Truths and Twelve Causes and Conditions: / 'Ignorance on to old age and death, / All exist because of birth. / All such distresses as these, / All of you must know.'

COMMENTARY *All exist because of birth.* This law teaches the truth that because the condition of birth exists there is being, and that without birth there is no being.

TEXT While this Law was being proclaimed, / Six hundred myriad kotis of nayutas / [Of beings] ended all their distresses, / All becoming arhats.

COMMENTARY *Nayuta.* This is an Indian unit indicating a hundred billion.

• *Arhats.* They are people with no more delusions and worthy of respect by all, that is, they have attained personal enlightenment. (See the May/June 1992 and the May/June 1998 issues of DHARMA WORLD.)

TEXT The second time he preached the Law / Thousands of myriads, as the sands of the Ganges, / Not following ordinary methods, / Also became arhats. / From that time forth the Way attainers / Were incalculable in number; / To count them for myriads of kotis of kalpas / Would not reach their end.

COMMENTARY *Not following ordinary methods.* See the commentary on "without being subject to all the [temporary] laws" in the January/February 2004 issue of DHARMA WORLD.

• *Way attainers.* They are those who have attained the fruit of the Way, manifesting the results of their practice of the Buddha Way.

TEXT Then the sixteen royal sons / Who left home as shramaneras / Unitedly entreated the buddha: / "Proclaim the Law of the Great Vehicle! / We and our companies of followers / Would all accomplish the Buddha Way. / We would be like the World-honored One, / With wise and perfectly pure eyes."

COMMENTARY *Companies of followers.* This phrase refers to those who guard the monarch as his retainers.

• *Wise and perfectly pure eyes.* The wisdom eye is one of the five types of vision of the Buddha (see the May/June 2002 issue of DHARMA WORLD). To say it is perfectly pure means that it is foremost among eyes of wisdom, the most penetrating wisdom eye, capable of knowing that all phenomena are empty.

TEXT The buddha, knowing his sons' mind / And the doings of their former lives, / By countless reasonings / And various parables / Preached the Six Paramitas / And the supernatural things, / Discriminated the real Law of / The way bodhisattvas walk, / And preached this Law Flower Sutra / In verses [numerous] as the sands of the Ganges.

COMMENTARY *Reasonings.* This term refers to a preaching method called "preaching by causality" (see the July/August 1996 issue of DHARMA WORLD).

• *The Six Paramitas.* These are the six virtues that bodhisattvas should practice (see the March/April 1994 issue).

TEXT When the buddha had preached the sutra, / In a quiet room he entered meditation; / With concentrated mind he sat in one place / For eighty-four thousand kalpas. / All those shramaneras, / Perceiving he would not yet emerge from meditation, / To infinite kotis of beings / Expounded the buddha's supreme wisdom, / Each sitting on a Law throne, / Preaching this Great Vehicle Sutra; / And, after the buddha's rest, / Proclaimed and aided his teaching of the Law.

COMMENTARY *This Great Vehicle Sutra.* The teaching's purpose is to save many other people rather than to strive for one's own perfection alone. Some say that it is called the Great Vehicle (Mahayana) because it allows large numbers to ride upon it; others say that "great" means "wonderful."

• *The buddha's rest.* "Rest" here means to pass peacefully into nirvana, that is, a buddha's death.

• *Proclaimed.* The shramaneras spread the teaching of the buddha and showed the world its true value.

• *Teaching of the Law.* This phrase signifies instructing by the Law, that is, causing people to change for the better through the buddha's teaching.

TEXT The number of living [beings] saved by / Each of those shramaneras was / Six hundred myriad kotis of beings, / As [many as] the sands of the Ganges. / After that buddha was extinct, / Those hearers of the Law, / In every one of the buddha lands, / Were [re]born along with their teachers.

COMMENTARY *[Re]born along with their teachers.* If for example a person in this life heard the Law from Shakyamuni, in the next life too he or she would be born in the domain where Shakyamuni would dwell and would hear the teaching once again from him, even though the buddha land was completely different and the Buddha's name had changed.

TEXT These sixteen shramaneras, / Perfectly practicing the Buddha Way, / Now dwell in the ten directions, / Each having attained Perfect Enlightenment. / Those who then heard the Law / All dwell with the buddhas. / Those who [still] remain shravakas / Are gradually taught in the Buddha Way. / I was amongst the sixteen / And formerly preached to you. / Therefore, by my tactfulness, / I lead you on to Buddha wisdom. / Because of this former connection, / I now preach the Law Flower Sutra / To cause you to enter the Buddha Way. / Be careful not to harbor fear!

COMMENTARY *Because of this former connection, I now preach the Law Flower Sutra to cause you to enter the Buddha Way. Be careful not to harbor fear!* "Former connection" refers to the fundamental cause and condition that have continued since ages past. The Buddha tells his listeners not to harbor fear, for this is not the first time they are hearing his teaching; they have sat before him continually over former lives. This experience has given them sufficient preparation to hear the highest teaching. Thus the Buddha encourages them, saying, "You should not be fainthearted, for you definitely have the ability to understand."

TEXT Suppose there be a perilous way, / Cut off and full of venomous beasts, / Without either water or grass, / A region of terror to men. / An innumerable multitude, thousands of myriads, / Wish to pass along this perilous way, / A road indeed far reaching, / Through five hundred yojanas. / Then appears a leader / Of strong sense and wise, / Clear headed and of resolute mind, / Who in peril saves from all danger. / [But] those people all become exhausted / And speak to the leader, saying: / "We now are weary and worn / And want to turn back from here."

COMMENTARY *Then appears a leader of strong sense and wise, clear headed and of resolute mind, who in peril saves from all danger.* This important passage describes the characteristics of a good leader. "Of strong sense" means to have a good memory and be rich in knowledge, which includes wide experience and deep wisdom. "Clear headed" is to be prudent and discreet, and "of resolute mind" is to be good at making decisions (not vacillating, having the mental strength to act firmly on those decisions). A person who,

combining these qualities, can rescue living beings from danger has the qualifications of a leader.

TEXT The leader reflects [thus]: 'These fellows are much to be pitied. / How can they want to turn back / And miss such great treasure?' / At that instant he thinks of a device: / 'Let me exert supernatural power / And make a great magic city / Splendidly adorned with houses, / Surrounded with gardens and groves, / Streamlets and bathing pools, / Massive gates and lofty towers, / Full of both men and women.' / Having made this transformation, / He pacifies them, saying: 'Do not fear! / Enter all of you into this city, / And let each enjoy himself at will.' / When those people had entered the city, / Their hearts were full of joy; / All thought [only] of rest and ease / And considered they had been saved. / When the leader knew they were rested, / He assembled and addressed them, saying: / 'Let all of you push forward! / This was only an illusory city. / Seeing you all worn out / And wanting to turn back midway, / I therefore by a device / Temporarily made this city. / Do you now diligently advance / Together to the Place of Jewels.'

COMMENTARY *Temporarily.* This word means an expedient as opposed to the true, a substitute as opposed to the real. Thus the Chinese word for "authority," made up of the characters for "temporary" and "power," is something given a person provisionally; it is not the person's essential power. It is said therefore to be a mistake to yield to authority that is not in accordance with the truth. Similarly the Chinese word for "rights," made up of the characters for "temporary" and "benefit," are the benefits one can enjoy under protection of the law, but they too are ultimately temporary. Therefore it is an error to think of rights as essential human power. In order to live in a truly correct way as a human being, in some cases one needs to abandon dependence on rights. Modern people appear to be too attached to the temporary, and to have forgotten how to live truly as human beings.

TEXT I, too, in like manner, / Am the leader of all [beings]. / Seeing the seekers of the Way / Midway becoming wearied / And unable to cross the perilous ways / Of mortality and earthly cares, / So I by my tactful powers / For their relief preached nirvana, saying: / 'Your sufferings are ended; / You have finished your work.'

COMMENTARY *You have finished your work.* You have completed your practice as shravakas and pratyekabuddhas.

TEXT When I knew you had reached nirvana / And all become arhats, / Then I gathered you all together / And

preached to you the real Law. / Buddhas by their tactful powers / Separately preach the three vehicles; / [But] there is only the One Buddha Vehicle; / It is for the resting place that two are preached. / Now I preach to you the truth; / What you have reached is not the [real] extinction. / For the sake of [obtaining] the Buddha's perfect knowledge, / Exert yourselves with the utmost zeal!

COMMENTARY *Perfect knowledge.* This is not the perfect knowledge that is one of the "three wisdoms" (the wisdom that discerns that all things are ultimately equal, the wisdom that distinguishes clearly the discriminative aspect of phenomena, and the supreme wisdom [the Buddha's perfect knowledge] that integrates and makes the fullest and best use of the first two wisdoms). It is wisdom in the more general sense of knowledge of the truth of all things.

TEXT [When] you have proved the perfect knowledge, / The ten powers, and so on of the Buddha Law, / And perfected the thirty-two signs, / Then that is the real extinction.

COMMENTARY *Ten powers.* See the July/August 1992 issue of DHARMA WORLD.

• *Thirty-two signs.* See the September/October 1992 issue.

TEXT The buddhas, the leaders, / For the sake of giving rest call it nirvana, / But perceiving this rest [should be] ended, / They lead them [on] into Buddha wisdom."

COMMENTARY Thus we come to the end of chapter 7 of the Lotus Sutra, "The Parable of the Magic City." Let us consider the parable itself once again.

On the surface, the parable is a teaching for those who practice the Buddha Way. It repeats the two important principles, treated also in the "Tactfulness," "Parable," and "Faith Discernment" chapters, that (1) in the Buddha Way there is only One Vehicle, not two or three, and (2) people differ in ability, character, and surroundings, and so the Buddha has to first preach separately the shravaka, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva ways in order to relieve them and gradually raise their capacity; that is important in order to lead all people to the highest enlightenment.

We should not regard these principles as a mere repetition of former teachings, however. The Buddha's introduction of another parable adds a further nuance to the discourse. To this point his main purpose has been to help people realize the true worth of skillful means (tactfulness). Through the parable of the magic city he makes them realize more deeply that skillful means constitute the truth itself, and at the same time encourages them to make a

fresh start based on this realization. In other words, he strongly urges them to progress further even after a certain enlightenment has been attained. If we cannot feel the spirit of encouragement in the parable, we lose more than half the value of the teaching of this chapter.

How should we as lay Buddhists take this encouragement? We are not the bhikshus who listened to the discourse directly. Therefore I think most of us would feel that there is a considerable difference between ourselves and the listeners. In the most fundamental sense, however, there is no difference at all between the practice of the Buddha Way and the practice of human life itself. How we live our daily lives is the practice of the Buddha Way. I think, from this point of view, that we need to interpret the teaching of this parable in practical terms and put it into action in our lives. In that case, what should we grasp through the parable?

The long, steep road is our life's journey, filled with difficulties and suffering. All people loathe suffering and want to escape from it. It is only natural that people suffering from ill health desire to get well and people suffering from economic difficulties strive to shed their troubles. It is the way of this changing world, though, that things do not always go to plan. Life's suffering is not completely eliminated when a person regains health or becomes wealthy, for other worries and anxieties crowd in. How then do ordinary people in general deal with such painful, difficult situations? We can divide such people roughly into three types.

The first, the worst type, turns to an immoral or depraved life, reasoning that the only thing to do is live a short life and a merry one without worrying about anything. The second type is more honest, though the person remains caught up with the surface aspects of life; the person spends his or her whole life living amid suffering while making every effort to escape from it. The third type is also an honest person, who, in a way giving up on life, decides to try to avoid suffering by working just hard enough to eat and gaining what little pleasure comes his or her way. Probably the third type represents the greatest number. They do not harm society, for all they try to do is remain safe, but in the process their lives lose their true meaning. Humanity can never advance if society is dominated by such people.

Living beings, and human beings in particular, possess the inherent imperative to progress; this is how life should be correctly lived. If this imperative is ignored, if people do not continue their course but stop halfway, they are throwing away their human worth. If we suddenly say this, though, to people in the midst of troubles, we will be jumping the gun. This is why Shakyamuni first taught many ordinary people the correct way to get rid of their everyday suffering.

This is the enlightenment of emancipation based on the law of dependent origination, that phenomenal appearances are neither fixed nor eternal, only temporary manifestations, and so constant peace of mind can only be attained when attachment is destroyed and the mind is liberated from phenomena.

This is truly a wonderful teaching. When we realize its truth we gain enormous relief. Whereas we have previously been distressed by our attachment to money, material objects, pleasures, or changing circumstances, if we can take the longer view that all such things are merely temporary appearances, even if our actual conditions do not change they will no longer bother us. Of course there are considerable differences among people in the amount of time it takes between hearing the teaching and actually reaching that longer view. This is why considerable religious practice is necessary. Nevertheless, the prospect of overcoming suffering through the teaching gives people great hope. This state of mind is that which the leader showed the company when he conjured up a magic city and said, "You will be relieved when you enter that city."

While they were feeling relieved after having attained that state of mind, the leader made the magic city disappear and revealed to them the ultimate ideal, saying, "Go just a little further, and you will find the true way of life as human beings." Having already attained a relatively high state of enlightenment, the people regained their spirits and set out once again. What is this ultimate ideal? In modern terms it is a creative life, the great harmony of all things.

When we were still ignorant of the Buddha Law and struggling amid our pain and difficulties, we wanted desperately to break free. Hearing the teaching that we must transcend phenomena, we gained mental relief. Nevertheless, we had not yet arrived at the true way of living as human beings, for what we had attained was still a kind of escape. Even though we ourselves had fortunately escaped from suffering, many other people were still living in suffering. To realize only our own enlightenment while being aware that others are still suffering is merely selfish isolationism, a flight from human life. The true and correct human response must be to say: "I will go forward along the Way together with all others; I will find my happiness together with all others." This responsibility to others is a natural outcome when we recall the Buddhist sense of "human being," discussed above.

To live as a true human being means to set aside one's own peace of mind and strive for the happiness of others. This is called the practice of benefiting others and the bodhisattva way. To embark upon this path entails new troubles and anxieties. However, these are not the former

passive ones but sublime labors that we have willingly taken upon ourselves in order to benefit others. Such difficulties will never turn into suffering but will actually fuel a new determination. Working for others is in itself an excellent means of improving oneself and experiencing growing joy in life.

To rest within the magic city (individual peace of mind) is to be static. To leave that situation and move forward is to be active. A person's value as a human being depends on the degree to which he or she is active and makes progress. To remain static is to abandon that human worth. Therefore, even though we have attained peace of mind in the magic city, we must not remain there too long but must set out again soon, full of renewed activity.

There are many kinds of activities. Some result in retrogression, others in deviation from the main purpose. Of course these are negative activities, bringing unhappiness to the self, injury to others, and harm to society. Activity must be directed toward the proper course. Such activity is creative and leads to harmony.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my explanation of this chapter, creativity means to make something of value, something that will bring happiness to the self, to others, and to the whole of society; any little thing will do, including a refined and noble mind, good words, art that beautifies life, products that enrich life, and action that helps society to function. If we could steadily engage in such activity, minute by minute, day by day, our lives would become truly worthwhile, filled with aspiration.

If we create that which brings happiness to the self, others, and society in accordance with our individual character, ability, and occupation, what we create will without doubt contribute to a great harmony. It is upon this harmonious condition that the peace of society as a whole and the happiness of humankind depend.

It is true that society changes continually, but we can find significance in that change when it is not random and meaningless but imbued with harmony and creativity. All creative activity has worth for human beings, and when all the harmonious elements eventually link to form a perfect great harmony, the happiness of humankind will for the first time be assured. This is the stage of Mahayana nirvana, the Place of Jewels.

To be continued

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

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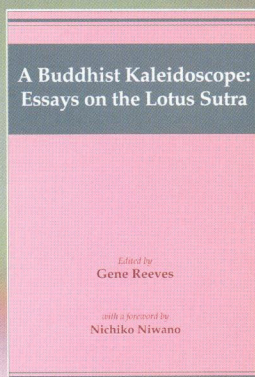
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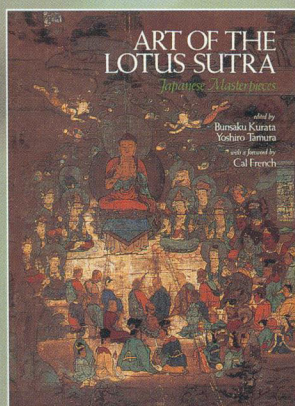
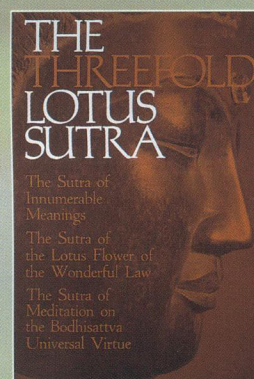
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