

FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

DHARMA WORLD

NOV./DEC. 2004 Vol. 31



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Cover photo: The World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) held a symposium titled "Peace Building in Iraq: The Role of Multi-Religious Cooperation" cosponsored by the Japanese Committee (WCRP/Japan) in a hotel in Kyoto on July 22. Some 180 religious representatives from Japan and abroad as well as religious scholars took part, including representative members of the WCRP and WCRP/Japan. Photo by Takao Aikawa.

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DHARMA WORLD

For Living Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue

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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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"Simply Ordinary Men"

by Yoshiaki Sanada

Ignorance of each other's ways and lives has been a common cause, throughout the history of mankind, of that suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world through which their differences have all too often broken into war." Sadly, these words from the Preamble to the UNESCO Constitution were proven all too true with the outbreak of the war in Iraq on March 20, 2003.

The slaughter and destruction of war are not the only things that make it so repugnant. Equally loathsome is the ignorance between peoples, the lack of effort to understand others, which is so evident both before and during a war. The most repulsive thing about war is that it causes one side to label the other as evil and uncivilized and to cover up the real underlying economic and political motives, based on the concern over national interest, with righteous rhetoric that employs such concepts as justice and civilization.

In the political rhetoric of war, we portray ourselves as the defenders of justice and freedom and our opponent as an immoral and tyrannical rogue. We fan the flames of hostility and convince our own people that we are in the right and our enemy in the wrong. Our most powerful rhetorical weapons are abstract religious convictions and such political concepts as "freedom," "democracy," "humanitarianism," and "civilization." But abstractions have time and time again distracted us from the historical realities

before us, causing us to become like cave dwellers who tremble before their own shadows.

Look at the wildflowers of the fields. What makes them bloom? It is impossible, no matter how many books we may read, to really know the true aspects of their form, nature, embodiment, potency, function, primary and secondary causes, effect, and recompense. Shakyamuni tells us in the Lotus Sutra that these are things only "a buddha together with a buddha" can fathom and the average person is likely never to understand.

In the Sutta Nipata, Shakyamuni said: "There are not many various truths existing for eternity, no eternal ones except for assumptions that these truths are eternal. Having reasoned on the basis of their own prejudices they say, 'My way is the truth. The way of others is false.'" (Sutta Nipata, 886)

And again, later in the Sutta Nipata: "Taking a stance on his decisions, and himself as his measure, he disputes further down into the world. But one who has abandoned all resolutions creates in the world quarrels no more." (894)

Until we free ourselves from the fetters of ideology, we will continue to cling to the belief that our own assertions are best and foremost and those of others are wrong. This can only lead to argument, which then escalates to conflict; and from conflict to outright war. If we truly seek peace, then we must first free ourselves from our ideological shackles.

In ancient Japan, Prince Shotoku (574–622), as regent for the empress Suiko (r. 593–628), administered the affairs of state in accordance with the spirit of harmony at a time when a few powerful clans were competing with each other for dominance. Article 10 of his famous Seventeen-Article Constitution states: "Their right is our wrong and our right is their wrong. We are not unquestionably sages, nor are they unquestionably fools. Both of us are simply ordinary men." (*Nihongi*, trans. W. G. Aston)

The starting point of peace ethics and peace politics is to discard ideologies and to recognize that we are "simply ordinary men." And essential for this is constructive and sincere dialogue—whether between religions or civilizations—that seeks true mutual understanding. The word "dialogue" comes from the Greek "dia" and "logos," meaning to speak in obedience to the reason that has been given to us by the gods.

At no time in history has there been a greater need to reflect upon and heed the fervent plea of our predecessors inherent in the Preamble to the UNESCO Constitution. □

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Interfaith Understanding and Collaboration

by Son Soubert

All religious faith is the result of an acknowledgment that something exists beyond our physical longing, life, and understanding.

What is the meaning of religion? If we examine the root of the Latin word, we will find that it is said to derive from one of two verbs: either from *relegere*, meaning “to collect or gather again,” itself stemming from another verb, *legere*, “to pick up,” and by extension “to read”; or from *religāre*, “to bind fast, to tie up,” from another verb, *ligāre*, “to link, to unite.” The same concept underlies the Sanskrit word *yoga*, which may relate to the Latin verb *jungere*, “to join together, to unite” with the letter “n” inserted for euphony. The practice of yoga is intended to help one to unite with the higher sphere, or to gather the material and the spiritual spheres of one’s being together, in order to achieve fulfillment.

In reality, however, what happens is that religions do not help us to achieve this goal, do not serve as the link between peoples, or between us and the higher sphere we aspire to; instead, religions divide peoples into different groups, ostracizing those who do not believe or adopt the same path.

Acknowledgment of Divergences

What, then, is the root cause of this contradiction? Why did religion become a struggle of survival for each religious creed? Why did Judaism, which is linked with the Jewish people, fight in the name of the uniqueness of God, whom it terms Yahweh? Why did Islam, which sprang out of the same sources as Judaism and Christianity, fight and continue to fight these two religious faiths in the name of the same God, whom it calls Allah? It is because these religions are linked to the people who are fighting for their political survival and power. The Christian Crusades to free the

Holy Land from the control of the infidel and the killing of the French Protestants by the Catholics in the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of 1572 are good examples of political struggle for dominance and survival.

The Buddha did not teach violence and killing, but respect for all living beings, including plants. But as soon as he died and was cremated, the kings fought each other for the possession of his ashes. In our mindset, we fight to preserve our own peace. But peace, as the image of the Taj

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Mahal and love, is wishful thinking—when we step toward it, it steps back and gets further from us, and when we step back, it comes forth to us, without ever reaching us. Is peace a mirage and a daydream or a delusion? How can we therefore foster a culture of peace and fraternity?

Political and economic hegemony and ambition are other sources of conflict. There is no easy solution to the problems that they raise. The UN has no religious body or institution to deal with issues of religious conflict. When the Islamic extremists committed suicide by flying planes into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York and into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001, and then when the United States decided upon retaliation against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, first in Afghanistan and later in Iraq, no religious leader could come out with a possible way to solve the problem.

When Islamic leaders came out to say that Islam is a religion of peace, there was no evidence to prove this assessment, especially when we think about its history of fighting, which had its start in the days of the prophet Muhammad. The initiator of the Christian religious faith, Jesus of Nazareth, was a victim of the political situation prevailing during the Roman occupation of Israel. He refused to be defended or protected by his disciple Peter, who drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. Shakyamuni Buddha left his palace to achieve the liberation of humankind from suffering by renouncing all wealth and power and any temptation to use violence.

Islam, like Judaism, from which it drew its inspirations and traditions, has the same story of struggle and fighting in the name of the same God, be it Yahweh or Allah. And both peoples of the same God are fighting each other—the Jewish people and the Palestinians are both fighting for a nation-state. We would have the ironical and critical attitude of the eighteenth-century French philosopher Voltaire, who wondered how God would react or have to choose when the two warring parties, the French and the Prussians, celebrated the same religious office and sang the same “*Te Deum*” before they set forth for battle, asking the same God for victory. We can do naught but recognize that this represents a long-enduring tragedy of humanity, through which various groups have used the name of God for their own selfish purposes and ambitions. Once all these realities have been assessed, how might we contribute to a better understanding among religions? What lay in common for all the religious teachings?

Basic Teachings Are Convergent: Toward an Interfaith Understanding

All religious faith is the result of an acknowledgment that something exists beyond our physical longing, life, and

understanding. In our dichotomous world, the unity of teachings on moral behavior is hidden by religious-cum-political ideologies. Many movements have tried to go to the basic understanding of what makes the unity of religions possible. One of them is represented by a group that was first known as the Oxford Group, and after World War II as Moral Re-Armament (MRA), and today has been renamed Initiatives of Change. MRA was initiated by a U.S. pastor, Frank Buchmann, in the wake of World War II, and it aimed at peace and reconciliation by appealing to individuals to live up to their respective religious faiths, in their own religious traditions. Instead of weapons rearmament, humanity needs moral and spiritual rearmament as a common ground for understanding and cooperation, and this starts with our personal changes based on the review of our actions according to the four moral absolute standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love. The aim is not to find out who is right or who is wrong, but what is right for each of us to do. Reconciliation with our own consciousness, with members of our families, and with those who are our colleagues in the workplace, becomes possible by our having the courage to apologize and to ask for forgiveness. The results, as stated in the *Bhagavad Gita*, are not important, but acts offered to God are not attached to us.

Dialogues among religions were initiated by many religious organizations, such as the initiatives of His Holiness Pope John Paul II of the Roman Catholic Church for joint prayers at the shrine of Saint Francis of Assisi with representatives of the world's religions. These initiatives are in line with the aims of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, now the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), the international conference of which I had the privilege to attend in Princeton, New Jersey, in September 1979. It was in the wake of the Vietnamese invasion and occupation of my country, Cambodia, and at the end of the atrocities committed by the seemingly demonic Khmer Rouge regime. I was in Princeton, and all I could do was to cry out and expose the misery of the Khmer people, the victims of a totalitarian regime. For those who have faith, this was providential. The WCRP started to come to the rescue of the Khmer refugees flocking into the Thai refugee camps or stuck at the Thai borders, from the end of 1979 and into 1980, mostly sending assistance from the U.S. and from Japan.

The Japanese Committee of the WCRP offers the best example of multireligious cooperation. With a Catholic cardinal as president, WCRP/Japan also includes leaders of other religious denominations, such as Shinto and Buddhism, as presidents of various committees. Not only did they come to the rescue of the Khmer refugees, who were Buddhists, but they also extended aid to Afghan refugees,

who were Muslims. In December 2003, I was honored to be able to participate in a multid denominational ecumenical conference organized in Paris by Fondacio, a Catholic organization, and Initiatives of Change, on the question of globalization, ending up with group prayers and lectures from a Jewish rabbi, a Muslim woman, a French Buddhist scholar, and a Catholic priest.

Education and Dialogue among the Religious Denominations

I wish here to write on personal grounds, not on a philosophical or theological plane. I was born in a Khmer family, of which my maternal grandfather, half-Indian from a Gujurati father, and my Khmer mother, were Muslims from the Boora-Dowdee community originating in Persia. Although my grandfather practiced his father's Islamic faith, he was tolerant of the Buddhism practiced by his mother's side. As a child, I used to accompany my grandfather, with my brothers, to the meals of that Muslim community, although I was brought up as a Buddhist. My grandfather stuck to his faith and would not eat pork, as we did; so to harmonize the family's life, my father, who joined his wife's family, sat in front of my maternal grandmother, who was a Buddhist, and would share with her the pork dish, usually a soup, separately from the other three dishes that my maternal grandfather would share with all of us. I thus grew up with an attitude of mutual respect, together with an understanding of each other's convictions, beliefs, and ways of life.

The Khmer people in the cities, more than in the countryside, were open not only to Chinese Confucian influences such as the veneration of ancestors and other traditions, but also, under the French protectorate, to the teachings and rituals of the Roman Catholic Church—and all this was mixed with the native Khmer superstitions and propensity to believe in miracles. But there was a bias against the Muslims, whom we call Chams—from the people of the former Kingdom of Champa, which was territorially absorbed by the Annamese, the present Vietnamese, in the eighteenth century C.E.—the great majority of whom converted to Islam. The bias was curiously the same as the one that the Romans used to have for the early Christians. When a student in classics at the Sorbonne University in Paris, I had to translate a Latin text by an early Christian church historian in which the Romans accused the Christians of indulging in orgies during their religious service of communion. The Khmer Buddhists think in the same biased way concerning the Muslim Chams.

Most of the time, conflicts started from misunderstanding, intolerance, ignorance of the others, compounded with a bias against, and disrespect for, them. In the refugee camp

of Rithisen, inside Cambodia near the Thai border, under the responsibility of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front in the 1980's we once tried to promote freedom of belief and religion, therefore we let the Seventh-Day Adventist Church develop freely. Unfortunately, in the teaching of some zealous Khmer pastors or new converts, Buddhism was considered evil, and its lay practitioners were compared to demonic beings. Therefore, clashes ensued between Khmer Buddhist adepts and Khmer Christian converts. The same thing would happen on a larger scale when people started pointing fingers at one another.

The lessons of tolerance and respect for others are not easy. Tolerance does not mean wild freedom or acceptance of evil. A recent tragic example of intolerance and ignorance was illustrated by the Taliban's destruction of the gigantic Buddha image on the Bamiyan site in Afghanistan, despite international requests to reconsider this action, even including the intervention of the UNESCO director-general. But the Taliban wanted to apply strict Islamic law, which forbids any image-based cult—and they said that the ordinary Afghan people paid some respect to that venerable image, which they took for a woman. The Taliban religious leadership failed to understand that this Buddha image of the Gupta period (fourth–sixth centuries) had been standing there in Bamiyan on guard for many centuries, watching over the Silk Road long before Islam was born and arrived there. This is a matter of cultural and historical education, which in Indonesia is well understood, since Brahmanism and Buddhism preceded Islam with a quantity of monuments and temples, and even literary expressions, such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which are still very much alive in the classical Javanese and Balinese dances.

In a time of economic, technological, and communication globalization, no country can live in autarky as an isolated island. This means that no religion can pretend to live alone in its own ossified form, as some do, since society has also evolved. More and more cooperation, exchange, and understanding among religions are needed to help us find out how to adapt and live in this new environment. This means openness, especially on the part of Islam.

Toward a Universal Theology

Many Western thinkers and theologians have tried through different spiritual experiences to elaborate “a new theological model of the Universe.” The Reverend Father Bernard Senécal of the Jesuits wrote: “In the absence of a real and indispensable mediation between history and eternity, which allows us to choose one religion rather than another, do we not have to invent, in order to replace it, a super-religion of religions—purely theocentric—expressing beyond histori-

cal particularities, the heart of the truth they all share? Is it not such an enterprise that aims at, for instance, the universal theology of religion by W. C. Smith? It is a question of nothing less than a theology emerging from all the religious traditions of humanity, in order to integrate and transcend them at the same time.”¹ But another theologian, J. Dupuis, opposed such “a theology of religions” that defined all the religious traditions and integrated them as not only a utopia, but an a-theological act.² In that sense, J. J. Lipner accused John Hick of naive relativism and ahistorical idealism, when the latter was a proponent of this pluralistic theocentric theology, considered a kind of Copernican revolution of theology.³ Likewise D’Costa criticizes Hick’s model as being rigid and contradictory, which has nothing universal: “His theocentric vision imposed upon the meeting of religions a model which oddly responds to the God of the so-called ‘monotheistic’ religions.”⁴

Despite all this research for a common stand, each faith has difficulty in questioning itself and accepting the validity of others. The exclusive rigidity of Judaism and the other related religions of Christianity and Islam is not ready to accept the way of nonrevelation. On the other hand, the tolerant and nonrevealed philosophies and religions are so open-minded that they do not feel the need to adhere to any other faith. The experiences of such a person

as Ramakrishna in the nineteenth century, or Swami Vivekananda—who experienced the other faiths existing in India, such as Islam and Christianity, and accepted them as equally valid as the Hindu spiritual experience—are rather rare and unique. This was what we used to call syncretism, in the Hindu way. Another guru of the early twentieth century, Sri Aurobindo, also tried to combine the acquisition of modern scientific discovery, such as nuclear science, with faith in order to demonstrate the validity of the resurrection of Jesus through the transformation of the physical material body into a spiritual luminous body through the practice of yoga. Another attempt, along the same lines, is that of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, founder of the Vedic Science and Technology of the Absolute Defense, and his plan is to bring heaven on earth with the progress of consciousness through Transcendental Meditation.

Generations of men have dreamt of a city of God or a Heavenly City on earth. One of them in the early centuries of the Christian era was Saint Augustine (354–430), the bishop of Hippo in North Africa, who wrote the *Letters*, the *Confessions*, and the *City of God*.

Finally, in conclusion, ignorance has to be cast off in order to allow us to see the light. If the forest that prevents our view of the realities is similar to ignorance, then the root sense of nirvana is the end or the negation of this

Representatives of world religions praying together for peace during the Interreligious Gathering of Prayer for World Peace: Dialogue between World Religions and Islam, in August 2002 on Mount Hiei near Kyoto. The gathering was organized by Japanese religious leaders to clarify the misunderstanding about Islam among the public, which was the basic cause of the world climate of prejudice and hatred against Muslims after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the United States.

ignorance-forest. The myth of the cavern as expounded in the *Republic* of Plato and told by Socrates, about a prisoner who lifts himself out of a cavern and sees the light of reality, is not different from the experience of enlightenment. This means that the way of education cannot be disregarded. It is through correct education that a child can grow and follow the correct path toward peace and harmony. In the March/April 2004 issue of DHARMA WORLD, Rev. Nichiko Niwano, president of Rissho Kosei-kai and the Niwano Peace Foundation, and a president of the WCRP, rightly pointed out the “importance of character building,” which cannot be done without moral and spiritual teachings. Greed, selfishness, hatred, and discrimination are as many delusions that obstruct our mind and spirit toward freedom of understanding and liberation, which is the aim of any religion. In Sanskrit, this liberation is called *moksha*; in Pali, it is *mokkha*; and in other religious faiths it is called salvation. At the end, death and life beyond death are the only common questions for humankind. We have to denounce not the evil in others, but the evil in ourselves, if we are to become able to see clearly. The gospel of Jesus of Nazareth denounced the beam in our eyes when we wanted to see the straw in the eyes of our neighbors, saying, “Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam from thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote from thy brother’s eye” (Matt. 7:5). We must learn to cut away the forest that obstructs our view as taught by Shakyamuni Buddha. God does not belong to one group of men—the Muslims or the Christians or the Jews. We cannot put God in our traditions or mindsets or law: “He Who Has No Name” and “He of All Names” was also a deity of the Hindus, if not of the Buddhists, who renounced trying to reach him and stayed at the human level in order to attempt to solve all the sufferings inflicted by men upon their own, all the while doing so in the name of their own reasons or in the name of their God, who surely would not condone any action taken out of any motive other than love and forgiveness. □

Notes

1. Bernard Senécal, S.J., “Jésus le Christ à la rencontre de Gautama le Bouddha,” *Identité Chrétienne et Bouddhisme* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1998), p. 89.
2. J. Dupuis, *Jésus-Christ à la rencontre des religions* (Paris: Desclée, 1994), note 11, p. 320.
3. J. J. Lipner, “Does Copernicus Help?” in: R. W. Rousseau, ed., *Interreligious Dialogue: Facing the Next Frontier* (Montrose, PA: Ridge Row Press, 1982), pp. 154–74.
4. Gavin D’Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986).

A statue of eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara (Kannon) made of Japanese cypress, now in the possession of the Nara National Museum. Height: 46.6 cm. Inlaid crystal eyes. The statue was made up of several pieces of wood, which were joined by the split-and-join technique. The body of the bodhisattva was painted with gold and cut gold-leaf was applied on the clothing. Words on the surface of the interior of the sculpture and a small scroll found in it reveal that this Kannon statue was made by Zen’en, a Kamakura-period sculptor in 1221.

Faith and Interfaith in Britain, 2004

by Richard Boeke

A leading advocate of interfaith dialogue calls on us to develop a sense of oneness with all that lives, taking the first step in a spiritual life.

All religion is linked to place. Japan has its holy mountains and forests, waterfalls for *misogi* (purification) and great *torii* gates marking the path to the infinite. Similarly, Britain is nourished by the White Cliffs of Dover, the lochs of Scotland, and the Lake District pictured by poets and immortalized in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter. The dream of many families is summed up in an old song, "I don't mind growing old with you to have and hold, in an English country garden."

What is the real religion of Great Britain? Is it gardening, football, cricket, the Beatles, or shopping? When a member of the Beatles said, "We're bigger than Jesus!" he was just making an honest observation. While traditional Christianity is still strong in the suburbs, it is declining in the cities.

Japan and Great Britain have much in common: a love of gardens, passionate pop singers, and a ritual of tea. Both were island empires. In both, for centuries, the king/emperor was head of the state religion. As Japan is divided into four main islands, Britain is divided into England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Millions of British have a reverence for nature that is much like that of Shinto. In Britain there are thousands of public footpaths leading out of towns and cities into forests and meadows far from motorways. From the great monoliths of Stonehenge to the mystery of Loch Ness, the Ramblers' Association (Britain's largest organization for walkers), the National Trust, and the Druids preserve access to nature with a passion.

I once asked a Shinto priest the meaning of his chant. He replied, "It is a very old chant. No one knows what it means." Hundreds of Anglican priests could say much the same about the creeds they recite each Sunday in church. With Bishop John Robinson in his book, *Honest to God*, they reject the dogmas of the Virgin Birth and of the

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Dr. Boeke, with his fellow interfaith leaders in Britain, on the occasion of his installation as minister of the Unitarian Church of Horsham, in 2003. On the left are Imam and Mrs. Abduljalil Sajid of Brighton; in the center are Alan Ruston, past president of British Unitarians, and Rabbi Jacqueline Tabick, chair of the World Congress of Faiths; and in front of Dr. Boeke is WCF president, Rev. Marcus Braybrooke.

Trinity. They agree with Scottish Bishop Michael Duke, "There has been an intellectual dishonesty among too many of the clergy. Fearing to disturb the faithful, we have stood in the pulpit as fundamentalists, even when our training has taught us otherwise."¹

The battle of dissent with the establishment is a major theme of British history. From 1550 to 1650 the Reformation opened a two-way split in British society: Henry VIII divorced both wife and pope to create the Anglican Church, the Church of England, the Church of the Establishment.

On the other hand, millions of dissenters followed Martin Luther in affirming, "A simple peasant armed with scripture is equal to Popes and Councils." The Baptists and Levelers joined Cromwell in decapitating Charles I. Their Commonwealth did not last in England, but exiles from Britain created their dream in North America, Australia, and New Zealand. In recent years the Conservative Party largely represented the establishment, while the Labour Party largely stood with workers and dissenters.²

In March 2004, the World Congress of Faiths (WCF) hosted three days of preparation for the "Parliament of the World's Religions" which was held in Barcelona, July 7–14 this year (<www.cpwr.org> or <info@cpwr.org>). We were hosted by Brahma Kumaris, a world religious movement in which all the top leaders are women. We took off our shoes, ate good vegetarian food, and enjoyed thousands of daffodils in the 55-acre garden. Here Lewis Carroll, the author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequel, *Through*

the Looking-Glass, sometimes entertained the young girl who was the inspiration for those classics, together with her friends. Led by Reformed Rabbi Jackie Tabick, we reviewed the events leading up to the present religious situation.

The twentieth century was a time of transformation. Half a generation of young British men died in World War I. Less than thirty years later, at the end of World War II, the British Empire was closing down. India and Pakistan came into being; colonies in Africa became new nations. From East Africa, over one million Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs were forced into exile. Most moved to Britain.

They were joined by relatives from the Indian subcontinent. English cities like Leicester, Birmingham, Manchester, and Bradford became home

to two million Muslims, and thousands of Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Zoroastrians, and Baha'is. Curries replaced "fish and chips" as the most popular food in Britain.

The September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, followed by the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, brought a sense of urgency to the Parliament of the World's Religions. It was held in a Spain still mourning the railway bomb attacks in Madrid. We face violence around the world. Israel and Palestine remain open wounds. The Parliament attempted to take steps to defuse "religiously motivated violence." In the words of Hans Küng to the 1990 Congress of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), "[There can be] no peace among nations without peace among religions."

During the WCF meeting in March, there was an outstanding talk by Brian Pearce, director of the Inter Faith Network (IFN), U.K. A dozen years ago he led in organizing the IFN with very little financial support. Since then, the IFN has facilitated the creation of over 200 local Inter Faith councils.

The IFN brings together leaders from large and small religions. It was facing a budget crisis, when the events of September 2001 suddenly made governments aware of the need to work with many religions. The IFN remains independent, but the government funds 40 percent of its budget. Both the Home Office and the Foreign Office quickly set up Faith Initiative Sections (<www.fco.gov.uk/forums>).

In the discussion following the talk, a Muslim leader told of meeting staff members from many religions in the British offices, and then going to America and meeting the staff of the U.S. Faith Initiative, all of whom seemed to be evangelical Christians.

WCF President Marcus Braybrooke provided a survey of world movements in interfaith dialogue and cooperation since the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions³ in Chicago—the beginnings of the IARF in 1900, followed by the WCF in 1936, the Kyoto beginning of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) in 1970, the creation of the United Religions Initiative following the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations (1995), and creation of the International Interfaith Centre at Oxford in 1993.

All of these groups were represented at the July Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona. Rev. Braybrooke views the three 1993 observances of the 100th anniversary of the World's Parliament of Religions as a move to a different plateau of interfaith friendship—in 1993 in Bangalore, in Ise, and in Chicago—those present found that we have moved beyond ignorance and prejudice, and that no one religion has a monopoly on goodness or salvation. Rev. Braybrooke told us that “we shall only have the strength to challenge the destructive and life-threatening forces at work in our world, if we are deeply rooted in the spirit. . . . Only as we sense in our innermost being our oneness with all life, will we be renewed in our service of each other and of our world.”

Pause for a moment, and sense your oneness with all that lives.

Sense gratitude. This is the first step in a spiritual life. I close with this poem that I wrote at sunrise on the last day of the WCF conference in March:

Dawn at the river—
Pink clouds mirrored in the water.
Four swans a-swimming.
A choir of blackbirds and robins;
The baritone of a barking dog.

Frost on golden daffodil.

Dr. Boeke making a presentation at a workshop during the Parliament of the World's Religions held in Barcelona in July.

Flora's temple on the hill.
A distant “folly,” an ancient church.
Note the oak, cypress, redwood, birch.

Last night, over the river,
A crescent moon and Venus.
Now, stillness mirrored in the water—
Moss on stone beside the boathouse.

A time to stop and be still.
Release the demons of work and will.
Then, like duck, goose, or swan,
Plunge in the stream of life. □

Notes

1. Bishop Michael Duke, “Face to Faith,” *The Guardian*, August 16, 2003.

2. While the majority in Britain professes to be Christian, most only attend church for special occasions, such as child blessings, marriages, and funerals (“Hatch, Match and Dispatch”). On the other hand, several million are committed to new evangelical-style Christianity, many with connections to American evangelical churches. Around one million have taken the “Alpha Course,” which teaches a male-dominant Trinitarian Christianity, with questions like, “How do we know the Holy Ghost is male?”

3. Books by Marcus Braybrooke on interfaith include *Pilgrimage of Hope* (1992) and *Faith and Interfaith in a Global Age* (1998).

All of Us, Everywhere, Are Life's Children

by Nichiko Niwano

This concept, Rev. Niwano says, is itself the invaluable spirit of living in a world of coexistence. The following is the text of the address delivered by Rev. Niwano to the 43rd General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) held in Long Beach, California, on June 25.

I would like to thank the Unitarian Universalist Association for giving me this opportunity to address the General Assembly.

It has been my honor to enjoy cordial relationships with many leaders of the UUA, including its past and current presidents. It was an especially great honor in March of last year to have UUA President Reverend William Sinkford present his congratulations at the ceremony marking the sixty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the organization I represent, Rissho Kosei-kai.

When I look out at all of your kind faces, I am reminded of the cheerful smiles of the founding president of the UUA, Dr. Dana McLean Greeley; Dr. Homer A. Jack; and, of course, Dr. Malcolm Sutherland, the dean of Meadville/Lombard Theological School in Chicago.

The friendship shared by Dr. Greeley and my father, Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, is a model of ecumenical action. And I remember, as if it were yesterday, the many kindnesses of Dr. Sutherland, who gave students from Rissho Kosei-kai the opportunity to study at Meadville/Lombard Theological School. UUA members refer to my father as Dr. Greeley's "soul mate," and I also feel that all of you are part of my family, my "soul mates."

The first exchange between the UUA and Rissho Kosei-kai took place in January 1968 when Dr. Greeley and Dr. Jack, on a global trip seeking dialogue and exchange with different religious leaders, called upon my father at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo. At that time, the U.S. was caught up in an intense nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union and was bogged down in the Vietnam War.

Dr. Greeley remarked that the number of religions in the world shows how one Truth exists in different countries and therefore religions can play their roles in the current world only when they cooperate on the basis of that

universal Truth. Founder Niwano had been seeking a way of interreligious cooperation in the belief that if religious leaders see through the ultimate aim of religion, they should be able to take common action beyond religious differences. Dr. Greeley's idea thus struck a resounding chord in him. They joined hands and together made friendship and dialogue among religious leaders the basis for greater action. A mere two years after their first meeting, they realized the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), which brought some three hundred religious leaders from thirty-nine countries to Kyoto, to discuss the religious practices of those leaders in three fields—disarmament, human rights, and development.

In the thirty-four years since then, the WCRP has held

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 chairman of the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations.

seven world assemblies. At present, all the ten major global religions participate in the WCRP, which consists of over fifty national chapters. It has grown into the largest association of religious leaders in the world. I think that in the twenty-first century, with ethnic strife affecting every region of the world and religious conflict coming to the surface, especially in the problems seen in Afghanistan and Iraq, the WCRP's activities are all the more valuable because there has never been so much expectation placed upon religious wisdom as there is today.

Buddhism teaches that all living creatures in this world have been brought into being through dependent origination, that all existence is interrelated, and that all beings are mutually dependent on one another because together they form one immense cosmic life. When we realize this Truth, other people's suffering and pain become our own. All people are our brothers and sisters, our family. We are "children of life," having transcended differences of race and religion, because we are sustained by one cosmic life. While we recognize our superficial differences, once we have discovered the common ground of being "children of life," we also realize that the world is one.

Awareness of the preciousness of our own lives leads to respect for the lives of others. Once we have opened our eyes to this fact, we can overcome the enmity in our hearts and have consideration for others. Then, we cannot help but bow our heads humbly before God and the Buddha. We Buddhists describe this sense of the universality of life by saying that we are all "the Buddha's children." In Christian teaching, the phrase "God's children" conveys the same meaning. And to use a more universal expression, we are all "life's children."

Although our countries, races, religions, and cultures may be different, all of us live on this earth as the children of life. This common sympathy is itself the invaluable spirit of living in a world of coexistence. I believe that the religious wisdom so sorely needed today is none other than this awareness of the dignity of life.

Rissho Kosei-kai is a lay Buddhist organization founded by my father, and I am its second president. The Lotus Sutra is the text in which we Rissho Kosei-kai members take refuge and through which we work on improving our character. While cooperating with people of other faiths, we undertake activities meant to bring peace to our families, communities, countries, and the world. We experience Buddhist teaching through everyday life, and three of our most important, basic religious practices are revering ancestors, filial piety, and bodhisattva practice.

When we look at the roots of our own lives, we see that our parents and ancestors have brought us into the world. Filial piety toward our parents and paying homage to our

ancestors are ways of expressing gratitude for the lives we have received. Filial piety and homage to ancestors teach us to repay this debt.

Bodhisattva practice means being kind to others and doing our utmost for other people—in other words, breaking through the shell of self-centeredness and living in such a way that our own energy is devoted to the happiness of others. This spirit, when simply restated, is that of "putting others before oneself." We do not lead our lives alone; we are able to live through the blessings of nature and other people. We work to bring happiness to the people around us because we want to repay whatever interdependence we have with them, whether or not it is readily apparent to us.

In Rissho Kosei-kai, we understand bodhisattva practice as "putting others first," and we try to put this into practice as we lead our daily lives. Wishing from our hearts for the happiness of others and doing our utmost to bring it about provides a far greater joy than self-centered living; this can be called the purpose of life for Buddhists.

For some years now in Japan, the crimes committed by youths have become increasingly heinous. I mention this because at Rissho Kosei-kai, we have made our goal "putting the home in order." By "putting the home in order" we mean putting the family in order, the goal being to have a family filled with warmth. The basis of world peace, too, can be said to be the family. Harmony among family members is also the root of the larger ideal of world peace.

We Rissho Kosei-kai members chant the Lotus Sutra before the Buddhist altar placed in each of our homes, praying to and kneeling before the revered objects enshrined therein and giving thanks for the blessings received thereby. Home is the place of rest and relaxation; it is also the place in which are cultivated a heart and mind that have faith in God and the Buddha. Building peace in such a home begins with family members respecting one another. In the morning, the family exchanges "good mornings" and when one calls another's name, the reply is a cheerful "yes"—and I do sincerely hope that when this practice of peace in the family is broadened to include the surrounding community, we are on the way to building world peace.

What Dr. Greeley and my father, Founder Nikkyo Niwano, built by visiting each other's families and organizations was a profound friendship that was literally one of "children of life." And now, the young members of Rissho Kosei-kai and the UUA are certainly following in their footsteps. We are all one family living in one world. I would like to conclude my address today with a promise that from now on, we will continue helping one another in our personal development, working together, and making every effort to bring peace to the world.

Thank you very much. □

Buddhism and Forgiveness

by Joseph S. O'Leary

Christianity is based on the event of divine forgiveness. In some early Buddhist texts, the emphasis falls not on forgiving, but on the foolishness of taking offense in the first place.

The terrorist incidents of September 11, 2001, did not elicit many memorable responses from religious thinkers. Buddhists floated some tentative ideas on the Internet about “the causes and conditions giving rise to suffering” (Gene Reeves) and the need “to see our own karmic responsibility for the terrible acts that have befallen us” (David R. Loy). The Christian rhetoric of forgiveness and reconciliation was scarcely heard at all. Here, I wish to suggest, with reference to the failure of Christianity in Northern Ireland, that in order to formulate the message of forgiveness intelligently and persuasively, we should root it in the Buddhist analysis of causes and conditions.

The thirty-year nightmare in Northern Ireland has inspired poems and dramas and many volumes of sociological and political reflection. It is only now, as the dust begins to settle, that the deepest theological lessons can be drawn from the conflict. These lessons will not amount to a total understanding, for theological inquiry often deep-

ens our sense of ultimate bafflement. But at least the effort to reflect on the painful episode prevents us from simply writing it off as a regrettable lapse into “un-Christian” behavior, or as merely a political imbroglio in which religion had no essential role. One hypothesis that theology might explore is that our entire way of constructing our identities, especially our religious identities, has been fundamentally deluded. Such delusive constructions of rigid identities are just the kind of thing Buddhism is good at diagnosing and healing.

Here I shall examine some Buddhist literature in the hope of finding some grains of healing insight. The Christian resources have come to seem a futile rhetoric, and talk of forgiveness and reconciliation has fallen on jaded ears as a facile, predictable response or a noxious moralizing. What makes Buddhism a promising resource for dealing with entrenched attitudes of fear and hatred is its capacity for probing analysis. This analysis aims at a practical therapeutic effect, but it also has a keen intellectual grip. Its systematic pursuit of psychological and ontological insight gives its approach to the human condition an invigorating quality, and allows it to form close connections with the modern anthropological sciences. It can help to revitalize the tired Christian ideas of love and forgiveness and restore to them a compelling logic and a grounding in the real, showing that the Gospel message too is not mere idealism but has immediate practical force. Buddhist therapy aims to be precisely tailored to the ailments it would

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address. Christian language needs to find the same precise functionality, cutting away the accumulated bombast of centuries and soberly adjusting our words to realities. For such a reform, a cool gaze from the outside is required, and Buddhism is the most constructive and enlightening of such external perspectives.

The Northern Ireland conflict has had a paralyzing effect on the minds of many in the Irish Republic. We have been reluctant to waste mental energy on a situation that has generated so much heated rhetoric with so little fruitful discussion. Buddhism brings a fresh, neutral perspective, allowing calm examination of the problem. When the Three Poisons—clinging, aversion, and delusion—put forth such ripe fruits as in Northern Ireland, they provide promising material for a diagnosis of bondage that can become a map of release. Most nations and churches prefer to forget historical trauma rather than to learn from it. But our responsibilities toward later generations may demand an unflinching gaze at the historical record and what it reveals. Otherwise the new generations will be condemned to repeat the mistakes of the old.

If fixated notions of identity acerbated the strife in Northern Ireland, the Buddhist dismantling of such notions could remove the seeds of future conflict. Each of the Three Poisons brings the others in its wake. To hate is to grasp at a fixated sense of one's own identity and a delusive image of what one hates. Buddhist meditation discerns and dissolves these unwholesome passions and the reifications they project. It produces the calm insight that can create a less toxic world by dissolving the basis of many forms of violence. People in the grip of rage or fear are unlikely to be open to the arcane wisdom of Buddhism. But that wisdom becomes less arcane when conveyed through a method of immanent analysis or deconstruction, logically showing the illusoriness of rage and fear themselves. In this sense, folly is its own undoing, and "the evil passions themselves are enlightenment."

Buddhist Approaches to Forgiveness

Christianity is based on the idea, or rather the event, of divine forgiveness: "As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also [must forgive]" (Col. 3:13). Why was this reality so little actualized in Northern Ireland? Even now, when a measure of rational political coexistence has been achieved, there is little cordiality or friendship between the Christian communities of the area. Such cordiality would be the fruit of mutual apology and mutual forgiveness, but even that seems to be far from people's minds. The word "forgiveness" is not a popular one; it sounds like the jargon of sentimental preachers. It is easier to forget than to forgive, for

forgiveness implies a relationship with the one to be forgiven—that is not desired. But peace-building means cultivating a mutuality of concern with the one that had been comfortably categorized as the enemy. It also involves defusing the religious and national ideologies that have bred intolerance, hatred, or violence.

The topic of forgiveness may seem at first sight remote from the concerns of Buddhism. Buddhism does not conceive of ultimate truth in the guise of a personal God. Its concepts of error and defilement do not readily translate into the biblical notions of sin and guilt. The Buddhist solution to unwholesome dispositions is to overcome them by following the path that leads to release; acts of pardon and grace have little to do with it. In some early Buddhist texts, the emphasis falls not on forgiving, but on the foolishness of taking offense in the first place:

"He abused me, he struck me, he overcame me, he robbed me"—in those who harbor such thoughts hatred will never cease.

"He abused me, he struck me, he overcame me, he robbed me"—in those who do not harbor such thoughts hatred will cease.

(*Dhammapada* 1.3–4; trans. Radhakrishnan)

In contrast, biblical rhetoric is full of references to enemies, slanderers, persecutors. Buddhism might unmask a delusion here, rather than go on to talk of forgiving one's enemies and blessing one's persecutors. Biblical salvation is atonement for evils that have already occurred; but Buddhist salvation is more an effort to prevent the evils from arising in the first place. When they have already arisen, it calmly proceeds to dismantle them by going back to their roots. One universal process of karmic causality presides over all evils and the cure for them. Even the ultimate goal of undoing the chains of karma and entering the freedom of nirvana is attained through following this analytical procedure. There is no supernatural dissolution of bondage to evil by an act of grace (at least in early Buddhism). Thus, when we seek resources in Buddhism for a clarification and underpinning of the biblical ideas of sin, forgiveness, grace, reconciliation, and atonement, we face the risk that these notions themselves will disappear in light of Buddhism's higher wisdom.

There is a deep tension between the Indian wisdom that grasps ultimate reality in impersonal terms and regards ideas of a personal creator as at best provisional skillful means (*upaya*) for those who need them, and the Christian conviction that ultimate reality is most fully and concretely known when it gives itself the voice and face of a personal

God. Even as we remain convinced of the primacy of the personal God of Scripture, we can allow the impersonal conceptions to play against it critically, providing a perspective that prevents the drama of sin and forgiveness from being reduced to an infantilizing schema of placating an offended Father.

Mahayana ("Great Vehicle") Buddhism, with its plethora of savior figures, makes place for a warmer, more positive conception of forgiveness than we find in early Buddhism. But even there, salvation centers not on forgiveness but on release from delusion and suffering through meditative insight into the nature of reality. Buddhism queries the reality of the passions that make forgiveness necessary and also queries the reality of the objects of those passions. My anger, resentment, and hatred are delusions, and so is the crime or offense the other is thought to have committed against me. Indeed, my very concept of "myself" and of "other" is pervaded by delusion and fixation. Even if these Buddhist ideas were totally untrue, it would still be very wholesome to meditate on them at a time when national, ethnic, and religious identity has so often shown a murderous face.

The person harboring resentful thoughts may as a matter of fact have been abused, struck, overcome, or robbed, yet his brooding on this imprisons him in delusion and fixation. Memory of past offenses plays a huge role in contemporary culture, and there is insufficient reflection on the dangers of clinging to such memory. Much current rhetoric makes the hurt, anger, traumatization felt by victims into a kind of sacred cow that cannot be questioned. Instead of seeking to heal and dispel their wounds, victims are encouraged to nag at them and to seek "closure" by some form of vindictive payback. Hatred is still regarded as a strength rather than a poison. One must seek to understand the rage of the oppressed, but without forgetting how rage tends to become blind and rigid, feeding on itself. Rage finds stereotyped expression in destructive acts. Its delusional aspects must be undone if the energy of indignation is to be converted into flexible and strategic action.

Equanimity is the attitude most prized in early Buddhism, not only because it is the condition for the effective practice of loving-kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy, but because it excels these as a realization of spiritual freedom. The balanced person never takes offense. Yet in Mahayana Buddhism, balance tends to yield pride of place to compassion, and forgiveness becomes more than a matter of spiritual freedom. Within the altruistic bodhisattva ideal, the bodhisattva recognizes in the enemy an occasion for practicing forbearance. But he also practices forgiveness for the enemy's sake.

To regard your enemy as your best friend, as a bodhisattva sent to help you, is an attitude enjoined by the Lotus Sutra, which shows the Buddha describing his archenemy, Devadatta, as one who benefited him in a previous existence and one who is destined to become a great buddha. What facilitates such attitudes in Buddhism is the notion that there is no permanent identity in either the offender or the offended. Practice of the art of forgiveness entails willingness to recognize our own lack of substantial being, the totally contingent, dependently arisen, empty texture of our existence and our history. Compassion (*karuna*) is based on realizing the equality of oneself and others and also practicing the substitution of others for oneself.

Note that when the bodhisattva discovers some offense that might induce rage, he sees it instead as an occasion to practice forgiveness. The memory of past wrongs is put to a spiritually profitable use. Following the lead given by the Vatican on Ash Wednesday, 2000, churches everywhere should integrate into their liturgies ceremonies of apology for wrongs inflicted in the past and also ceremonies of forgiveness for wrongs suffered. The point of this is freedom—freedom from the burdens of guilt and of bitterness, and freedom to relate with other communities from whom we have been alienated for centuries by a refusal to apologize or to forgive.

The Kenosis of the Collective Ego

The Northern Ireland tragedy thrived on essentialism, which in Buddhism is the most fundamental form of ignorance (*avidya*). "Irish" and "British," "Unionist" and "Nationalist," "Catholic" and "Protestant" were positioned against one another in rigid contrast. The powerful hold of these abstractions is difficult to explain. Consider the fear and rage we feel when our inflated image of our self is dented by telling criticism, or by the Buddhist teaching that there is no separate self and that we exist only as a sequence of dependently co-arising occasions. Adherents of religious traditions are gripped by the same fear and rage when their tradition is convicted of error or wrongdoing. They will elude the criticism by pointing to an inner core of the tradition that is immune from error or sin, just as we cling to the image of an inner self. From a Buddhist point of view, religions are merely skillful means, shaped in function by constantly changing historical conditions, so that a religion that boasts of its unchanging core is by that very token becoming an unskillful, dysfunctional affair, a blockage to enlightenment. It is certainly no coincidence that two Christian cultures notoriously resistant to change—Ulster Protestantism and Irish Catholicism—should have been involved in the Northern Ireland conflict. The dispute between

Nationalism and Unionism is on its own a deadly clash of essentialisms, but its religious underpinning fits it like a glove. Like faded beauties who are blind to their wrinkles, these traditions are oblivious to the mismatch between their self-image and the political and religious realities of contemporary Europe. It may be that the more deluded one's self-perception, and the more ridiculous it makes one look to bemused observers, the more resistant it is to correction.

The Buddhist middle way is the way of balance between substantialism (or essentialism) and nihilism (or total loss of identity). There is no separate self. The self is dependently co-arising at every moment in intricate interaction with the various conditions of its existence, including past moments on the continuum of its karma. The self that exists now is not the self that existed in the past, nor will the future self be the self that exists now. Instead of grasping at self as a separate reality and worrying about its survival, we should deal with the here and now, with the conditions making for bondage and for release.

Letting go of representations of a fixed ego is a way to reconnect ourselves with the total interrelationships within

which our existence in reality is taking place, to reconnect ourselves with the cosmos or with the dependently arising thusness of things.

Formations of continuity, such notions as career, success, lifework, vocation, marriage, or such notions as the soul, variously subject to the disease of sin and the healing of grace, are products of grasping. The temporal continuum such notions attempt to reify is full of discontinuities between one moment and the next. The self is a sequence of fleeting occasions. Formations such as church, nation, race, and ancestry are also products of grasping, collective ego-obsessions, painful delusions. Studying the historical process of the formation of the discourse that produced these entities, one realizes that their dissolution is inscribed in their construction. Their continuity is that of a constantly rewoven story, and when the web entangles us it is time to start retelling the story, differently, or even tearing the conventional web to let some ultimate awareness come through—awareness that there exists nothing but dependently arising occasions.

The substantialized self is provided with a grandiose mythic history. The same is true of a nation's idealized

Photo: AP / WWP

A Roman Catholic woman looks out from her shattered window toward the Protestant side of the peaceline in Alliance Avenue in North Belfast, Northern Ireland, on August 22, 2002, the day the rioting between Catholics and Protestants broke out.

self-image. Revisionists seek out facts that show the heterogeneity of history and its shifting alliances in order to reveal the unitary nationalist reading of history as a product of the *imaginaire*. As the differences between the present and the past come into sharper focus, the pure identities posited by ideologically shaped history are shown to be constructs of recent vintage. Revisionism does not fix the absolute objective truth about history, for that too is a delusory goal. But it can free us in the present from the fixated stories about ourselves that prevent us from apologizing for or forgiving the crimes of the past.

The extreme of substantialism, whereby one asserts oneself, goes hand in hand with the extreme of nihilism, whereby one negates the other. Only we are real and substantial. When we insist on the purity and completeness of the Catholic faith, we tend in the next breath to negate the Protestant faith, failing to see that a blow against the Christian faith is a blow at Catholicism itself. Dogma itself can hardly be taken as an unambiguously benign achievement, given the amount of blood spilled in its name. It breeds “attachment to views” by its very nature, and instills in those with right views a sense of superiority over those with wrong. True, “right view” is the first step on the Buddhist Eightfold Path. If dogma were a wholesome, right view in a Buddhist sense, it would only be our excessive attachment to it that would be diagnosed as unwholesome. In any case, the fundamental Mahayana scriptures, the Perfection of Wisdom sutras, consider all views to be ultimately wrong views. We are familiar with the idea that objectifications of God may be distortions. But for Mahayana, objectification of anything at all, as when we name or conceive such items as chairs and tables, is a false way of thinking, having at best a provisional, conventional validity.

Language about God—like language about self, nation, world—has at best only a conventional validity. To insist emphatically on any view about God is to build too much on a fragile foundation. Dogmatic assertion has a very limited and modest role and is always outstripped and overshadowed by a sense of its inadequacy to the ultimate reality that it seeks to point to from within conventional discourse.

Religious traditions are dependently arisen formations, human language serving as conventional vehicles of ultimacy, skillful means that often become unskillful when we forget their function as a mere means and try to make them substantial ends in themselves. What does Christianity’s very concrete identification of God, culminating in Christ as the incarnate Word of God, really mean? Buddhism strongly affirms that the ultimate cannot be defined. The Johannine God is not substance but spirit, love, light. The Incarnation of this God means that a certain disposi-

tion of conventional forms allows the emptiness of God to shine through—thus the story of Jesus becomes an eloquent Word revealing the empty face of God.

In traditional usage “God” functions like the stable character in a traditional novel, anchoring the coherence of religious and philosophical discourse. In current discourse, God as stable character is yielding to God as space of deconstruction. If we think of God as a gracious encompassing reality, we also know that it is a reality that cannot be securely pinned down, and that reveals itself in its withdrawal as what forever eludes our grasp. Similarly the stable self to be redeemed, the soul, is yielding place to a process of liberation or redemption that goes on collectively and in which the individual’s story finds its context. When we try to pin down our individual identity and its destiny, we fall back on some frozen myth about who we are and miss out on the changing life that is going on all around us. James Joyce, who spent his life battling against the rigidity of mind he found in his homeland, pushes awareness of the constructedness and fluidity of identity almost to the point of a Buddhist deconstruction of self, as he shows how character is pieced together out of an ever-changing bundle of possibilities. The self arising and passing is a nonself, a self that knows itself to be an ephemeral conventional construct. Joyce’s soundings of Irish speech and consciousness reveal how the mind is bound by cultural stereotypes and how a web of fabrications interposes between it and the real.

The Ontology of Apology

Today we are taking the first steps to a culture of forgiveness when it will be normal for nations to work at forgiving those who have injured them and seeking forgiveness from those they have injured. When nations actively set out to seek forgiveness for the wrongs they have inflicted, they make it easier for the wronged nations to express forgiveness, and even in some cases to ask for forgiveness in return. The hour of apology has struck for the churches in particular, for crimes of the past were often sanctioned by Christian rhetoric that allowed them to be committed in good conscience. Popes launched Crusades with the cry, “*Dieu le veut!*” (God wills it!), and not until Islam had ceased to threaten Europe did people doubt this. Elizabeth I congratulated her genocidal adventurers in Ireland, telling them they had given glory to God.

The scandal of religious crime is a topic for endless meditation and analysis, not to be swept away by an opportunistic expression of regret. The crimes of the past are too often seen as something ultimately unintelligible, part of the unfathomable mystery of evil, of original sin. Instead of seeking healing through radical analysis it is easier to shrug and sigh about being a Church of sinners, with the

fatalistic implication that we are bound to sin again in the future. Such language is designed to prevent recognition of the fact that it was not weak, lukewarm Catholics but saintly and orthodox ones, including Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, and Saint Robert Bellarmine, who vilified Jews, preached Crusades, and lit the fires of the Inquisition. Is it not food for reflection that if even our canonized saints did not escape such blindness, how can we ever hope to do so? Perhaps we cannot forgive the crimes of the past on behalf of their victims, but we can learn that our own crimes, conscious and unconscious, will also need forgiveness, unless we have indeed attained a state of enlightenment that both Christianity and Buddhism agree to be rare. Seeing the errors of the past should be the first step to seeing our own errors. The depths of blindness that history reveals are the depths in which we still grope, but the study of history makes us aware of our state, and can be a step to awakening.

Apology is still not popular in Christian circles. The Stuttgart Confession of 1945, in which German church leaders repented for the suffering caused by Nazism (no mention of the Holocaust), provoked widespread anger in German churches, media, and politics. What makes apology and forgiveness difficult is that they imply an emptying of the self, a humiliating kenosis. Institutions are as self-protective as individuals, fearing that too much humility will result in a sellout, a dissolution of inherited identity.

Religion has performed a noble task in upholding the victim's memory and using it to instill vigilance for the rights and freedoms of oppressed people. To expose the sacred history of these wrongs to a revisionist reading, it is felt, would be a betrayal of the dead and a form of blaming the victim. It is true that one of the effects of historical oppression is to induce a great lack of self-confidence in the victims—Jews, gays, and colonized peoples have often suffered from self-hatred. Ancestral memory turns poisonous when it becomes a source of resentment and self-righteousness, breeding the sense that revenge is a sacred duty, or that the results of historic injustice must be undone by such methods as ethnic cleansing.

The fixated quality of such memory is based on the purism with which the myth of identity is upheld. Ireland, cast in the role of eternal victim, fails to see that the role has become stale and rotten, and that the crimes recently committed in the name of that victimhood are not a glorious affirmation of unchanging identity but a proof that identity is a process of perpetual change, for the glorious patriot of yesterday is revealed as the contemptible terrorist of today. People feel that it is wholesome and uplifting to swear by an unchanging identity, religious or national. To realize that any identity, any orthodoxy, is no more than

a provisional arrangement allows one to engage with the treasured past of one's ethnic or religious tradition in a more skillful way. This frees one to criticize the past with the confidence that one's always shifting identity will benefit from the exercise.

The practice of apologizing for the crimes of one's predecessors or accepting forgiveness in their name raises many tantalizing problems. By what right do we speak on their behalf? And what good does our apologizing do for their victims? It is good to meditate on this issue, for it is another path leading to the Buddhist insight into the non-substantiality of the self. To recognize the gap between the present "Ireland" and the past "Ireland" is to be freed from a fixated sense of identity.

Even when apology or forgiveness bears on a crime committed by an individual in his or her past life, the one forgiven is no longer precisely the one who committed the crime. The crime was the product of myriad conditions that can neither be recreated nor undone. Apology and forgiveness in regard to long past events are bound to work with simplistic reifications of those events and with feelings about them that are full of delusion. But the effect of these practices is to break the hold of this reification and delusion, for it replaces one set of attitudes toward the past with another set that lays a better basis for present and future relationships. Apology and forgiveness allow the past to be past, so that it need no longer shed its blinding shadow on the present. Coming to terms with the past is futile if pursued as an end in itself. The active initiative of apology and forgiveness takes the past as theme for addressing present relations between the one who apologizes and the one who forgives. To be skillfully brought off, such initiatives must be more than arbitrary spur-of-the-moment gestures. They should be the result of long reflection, just as the realization of nonself comes from long practice of meditation and analysis.

For people to discuss the injuries and grudges that have poisoned their relations for centuries, working together on them so as to build toward radical reconciliation is not only a realization of the central Christian and Buddhist aims; it is a task that has become imperative for all nations today, given what we know of the lethal potency of unrepented and unforgiven historical crimes. The forces that unleash mass carnage may seem more powerful than those behind our first faltering steps toward a culture of reconciliation. But those are the forces of illusion and fixation; these are the forces of reality. In a world of total interdependence and constant change, the fixated discourse of hate declares war on reality, and is immediately obsolescent, though it may persist in its delusion for a long time, creating a hell on earth. □

WCRP Holds Symposium in Kyoto with Iraqi Religious Leaders

The World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) held a symposium titled "Peace Building in Iraq: The Role of Multi-Religious Cooperation" cosponsored by the Japanese Committee (WCRP/Japan) in a hotel in Kyoto on July 22. Some 180 religious representatives from Japan and abroad as well as religious scholars took part, including representative members of the WCRP and WCRP/Japan. The Japanese participants included, from Rissho Kosei-kai, President Nichiko Niwano, as a president of the WCRP, and Chairman Katsunori Yamanoi; and executive committee members of the Awake to World Peace Committee.

The WCRP invited six religious leaders from Iraq to participate: Dr. Fuad Muhsin Hamash, senior representative of the Iraqi Islamic Party; Sheikh Hayder Abdulzahraa Ereebi,

special representative of Ayatollah Seyed Hussein Al-Sader in Alkhdimiya Hawza; Majid Ismail Mohammad, director of Foreign Affairs of the Kurdish Ulama Committee; Dr. Abdul Salam Al-Kubeisy, director of Foreign Affairs for the Ulama Committee; Archbishop Gabriel Hana Kassab, a representative of Patriarch Emanuel Dely (Chaldean Community); and Seyed Hassan Bahralulom, a representative of Grand Ayatollah Seyed Mohammad Saeed Al-Hakim in Najaf.

After addresses by Peter Cardinal Seiichi Shirayanagi, president of WCRP/Japan, and Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky, vice moderator of the WCRP, Dr. William Vendley, secretary-general of the WCRP, led the panel discussion, with the invited Iraqi religious leaders as panelists. From the discussion the participants learned about the importance of the interreligious cooperation

among the various religious communities in Iraq as well as with religious communities abroad for the country's reconstruction. □

Iraqi Religious Leaders Visit Rissho Kosei-kai

On July 25 eight leaders of religious communities in Iraq had a talk with President Nichiko Niwano in the Horin-kaku Guest Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai's Tokyo headquarters. Rev. Katsunori Yamanoi, the organization's chairman, and Dr. William Vendley, WCRP secretary-general, were also present.

The Iraqi religious leaders had been invited to the Kyoto Symposium on July 22, which the WCRP and its Japanese Committee jointly sponsored. Referring to the symposium, President Niwano told them he felt it would be very significant and helpful for him to deepen his understanding of the current situation in Iraq. Rev. Seyed Hassan Bahralulom said that he and

WCRP symposium participants discuss the importance of multireligious cooperation for the rebuilding of Iraq in Kyoto in July.

Iraqi religious leaders visiting Rissho Kosei-kai's Tokyo headquarters.

the other Iraqi religious leaders had come to Japan as messengers of peace, and although his nation was still overwhelmed by hardship after the war, Iraqis hoped to achieve world peace in cooperation with people in Japan. During the meeting he also expressed his hope that Rissho Kosei-kai would undertake relief activities in his country, especially for children. He emphasized that promotion of interreligious dialogue could be a foundation for peace and stability in the world. He concluded by expressing his anticipation of the further development of cooperation with members of Rissho Kosei-kai. □

Rissho Kosei-kai Youth Meet Iraqi Religious Leaders

More than 300 of Rissho Kosei-kai's youth members gathered at the organization's headquarters on July 25 to hear firsthand the opinions of the eight visiting Iraqi religious leaders about the mission of religious people and their expectations of religious youth.

Archbishop Gabriel Hana Kassab, a member of the Executive Committee of the Interreligious Council of Iraq, which is a subsidiary organization of

the WCRP, said that youth's passion and action based on genuine sentiment has given Iraqi leaders courage and helped sustain their efforts. Dr. Abdul Salam Al-Kubeisy, director of Foreign Affairs for the Ulama Committee in Iraq, said that religious people should continue efforts to build peace even if the results are not immediately obvious. According to Sheikh Hayder

Rissho Kosei-kai Sends Delegate to 2004 Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona

On July 7–13, 2004, the Parliament of the World's Religions, an international interreligious assembly, was held in Barcelona with some 7,400 participants from 75 countries. The assembly was sponsored by the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR), which had organized an assembly in Chicago in 1993 called the Parliament of the World's Religions, as a centennial celebration of the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. It also hosted the second modern assembly of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town in 1999. At the invitation of the CPWR, Rissho Kosei-kai and the WCRP sent delegations to the parliament.

At a preparatory gathering July 4–7

Abdulzahraa Ereebi, a special representative of Ayatollah Seyed Hussein Al-Sader in Alkhdimiya Hawza and a member of the Executive Committee of the Interreligious Council of Iraq, religions teach that though our lives are beset by difficulties, we should do our best to overcome them and never succumb to evil or take any action we will come to regret.

In a question-and-answer session, Dr. Al-Kubeisy explained that one of the most important aims of religious education in Iraq is to teach the young that we should befriend people of other faiths and opinions. Dr. Fuad Muhsin Hamash, senior representative of the Iraqi Islamic Party, emphasized that the mission of people of religion is instilling a sense of right and wrong in the young. Finally, Dr. Hamash told the gathering that since young people have many talents and the capacity to persevere, they can contribute to world peace. □

at Montserrat, near Barcelona, Mr. Yasutomo Sawahata of Rissho Kosei-kai Geneva described Rissho Kosei-kai's hoza counseling sessions as an example of settling local conflicts at the grass-roots level and cited Rissho Kosei-kai's Donate-a-Meal Campaign as an example of sustainable peace activities. Rev. Kyoichi Sugino, director of the World Wide Service of the WCRP, gave a presentation on the WCRP's history and activities around the world in a symposium held on July 9 and discussed its Interreligious Council of Uganda, which tackles the problems of HIV/AIDS. Ms. Megumi Hirota of Rissho Kosei-kai of the UK assisted at a workshop held on July 10 and gave a presentation on the Buddhist concept of peace. □

18th Peoples and Religions Meeting Held in Milan

On September 5–7 the 18th International Meeting: “Peoples and Religions” took place in Milan, Italy, under the theme “Religions and Cultures: The Courage to Forge a New Spiritual Humanism.” Some 350 people from 70 countries took part, including religious leaders, politicians, and other civic leaders. Rissho Kosei-kai sent a delegation including Rev. Keiichi Hashimoto, director of its General Affairs Department; Mr. Yasutomo Sawahata of Rissho Kosei-kai of Geneva; and Ms. Megumi Hirota of Rissho Kosei-kai of the UK. In the context of the current trend of globalization and the frequent acts of terrorism around the world, as in Iraq, Madrid, and the Russian town of Beslan, participants exchanged opinions in forums and round-table discussions, prayed for peace and marched in a peace procession in the course of the three-day meeting.

In the opening ceremony, Russian Orthodox Bishop Feofan Achourkov, bishop of northern Ossezia in Russia, where Beslan is located, said terrorists in Beslan rejected his efforts to mediate the hostage crisis. Referring to the massacre of Russian schoolchildren, he said the only way to eliminate terrorism is to remove its causes.

On September 6–7 the participants divided into groups for 36 round-table discussions of such themes as “The Civilization of Coexistence,” “Disarming Terror: A Role for Believers,” “Interreligious Dialogue in a World at War,” and “Religions—the Sources of Conflicts?” In one round-table discussion at a Milan hotel on September 6, Rev. Hashimoto gave a keynote speech titled “Japanese Religious Humanism.” In his speech, Rev. Hashimoto explained Rissho Kosei-kai’s peace activ-

Buddhist representatives during a prayer service for peace, which was held on September 7, the last day of the International Meeting in Milan.

ities, including the Donate-a-Meal Campaign, from a humanitarian viewpoint. He explained how Rissho Kosei-kai’s principal aim of the peaceful resolution of conflicts applies to conditions throughout the world since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States.

On the final day of the meeting, an appeal for peace was adopted. It says, “From the depth of our respective religious traditions, we understand more profoundly how fear, terrorism and war put humanity at risk of self-destruction and how human beings end up surrendering to that very evil they aim to oppose.” The appeal emphasizes that “dialogue is the path which gives a future to the world, making it possible for all to live together.” The appeal concludes, “From Milan, we ask first ourselves, and then all men and women of goodwill, to live the courage of a new humanism, founded on our respective faiths. This is the only way we see to build a world of peace.” On September 7, after a prayer service for peace and a peace procession, the closing ceremony was held.

Sponsored by the Italian lay Catholic Community of Saint Egidio, the international meeting is held annually in different European cities to carry on the spirit of the 1986 Day of Prayer for Peace called for by Pope John Paul II in Assisi. □

Rissho Kosei-kai Peace Fund Decides on Emergency Support for Sudanese Refugees

In the Darfur region of western Sudan, ethnic conflict between nomadic Arabs and settled agriculture-oriented African villagers continues unabated since it broke out in early 2003. Because of violent raids on villages by Arab militia known as the Janjaweed, who are believed to be supported by the Sudanese government, tens of thousands of Sudanese civilians have lost their lives and some 200,000 have fled the fighting and attacks into neighboring Chad. In August, at the request of the UNHCR, the Rissho Kosei-kai Peace Fund decided to donate 5 million Japanese yen in emergency humanitarian aid for the relief of displaced Sudanese civilians. At present, in cooperation with the Chad government and local and international nongovernmental organizations, the UNHCR operates 10 refugee camps near the Chad-Sudanese border. The influx of new refugees, especially women and children, increases the need for more refugee camps. Heavy rains often interrupt smooth transportation of refugee relief goods. The need for aid is increasing as well, day by day. □

The Importance of the Ninth Lotus Sutra Conference

by Christopher Rupp

Opportunities for meaningful interdisciplinary academic dialogue held in an atmosphere conducive to intellectual growth are quite rare. The Ninth International Conference on the Lotus Sutra, held from June 28 through July 1 in Shiga Kogen in the quiet mountains of Nagano, was one of these opportunities. The outstanding facilities, beautiful scenery, and caring attention of the Rissho Kosei-kai staff enabled a stimulating week of both intense academic discussion and rewarding time away from the conference room.

Twelve paper presentations took place over the course of three days. The

general theme of the conference was “Buddhist and Christian Practices,” a sweeping category that invited and received a broad spectrum of individual papers. On the final day of the conference, Dr. Gene Reeves, lead organizer of the event, confessed that he had been concerned that this topic might be problematic due to both its substantial breadth and the fact that the Lotus Sutra itself did not appear in the title. However, as the papers and discussion described below clearly demonstrate, the conference remained true to its namesake, and the freedom of such a broad topic facilitated some truly insightful dialogue.

Dr. Thomas Kasulis (Ohio State University) started things off on the evening of June 28 with a paper entitled “The Comparative Study of Religious Practices: Mantra, Nembutsu, Litanies, the Kyrie, and the Jesus Prayer.” Using a new methodological approach designed to reinterpret the problematic duality of practice vs. belief in the study of religion as a single continuum instead of a pair of opposites, Professor Kasulis used the examples mentioned in the paper’s title to demonstrate five steps upon this spectrum. Next he proceeded to connect his work to the Lotus Sutra by looking at the parable of the burning house found in chapter 3. When the father uses what at first appears as simple deception to deliver his sons to safety,

what the sutra calls *upaya*, or “expedient means,” is really only a necessary adjustment in technique, not a substantive metaphysical shift, from a Buddha transmitting the undisguised Dharma to a follower who is prepared to receive it. This paper was an outstanding choice to begin the conference, as it not only inspired a lively discussion, but also provided an experimental methodology that recurred throughout the week.

Professor Kang-nam Oh (University of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada) began the next morning with his paper, “Jesus Prayer and *Odaimoku*.” His presentation and the ensuing discussion served two major purposes: first, as the participants came from such diverse backgrounds, many learned of a tradition of repetitive prayer with which they had been previously unfamiliar. Second, Dr. Oh’s primary thesis, namely that the paper is not a comparative study but rather a demonstration that significant depth of understanding of one practice is essential for a substantive grasp of the other, led to an interesting conversation about the very nature of cross-cultural understanding. For example, both of Dr. Oh’s ritual practices involve the constant repetition of a few simple syllables, but grow out of completely different concepts of achieving religious understanding. How, then, Dr. Elizabeth Galbraith (St. Olaf College,

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The post conference forum at a Rissho Kosei-kai facility in Tokyo.

Northfield, Minn.) asked, do scholars use similar practices to gain understanding in the presence of such divergent belief systems? This question figured prominently in many subsequent conversations.

Dr. Alice Keefe (University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point) was next with her paper, “Icons and the Lotus Sutra.” Very concerned with the sexist fallout of subject-object dualism in both Western religion and the interpretation of non-Western religions by Western scholars, she used her paper to look deeply into the mechanics of vision, into the space between the one who sees and the object seen. In his response, Dr. Wei Dedong (Renmin University of China, Beijing) noted that, in the case of Western scholars’ treatment of Asian religion, this fallout is not limited to gender issues; indeed, he argued, this is the root cause of any number of such interpretive missteps. The discussion then turned to the concept of seeing as embodiment, which led to a question from Dr. Galbraith: “If seeing the Buddha is becoming the Buddha, then is seeing Jesus becoming Jesus?”

The final paper of the session came from Professor Dennis Hirota (Ryukoku University, Kyoto). As the title “Revelation as Sacrament” indicates, he examined the role of revelation in the Lotus Sutra, utilizing commentary from both Shinran and the twentieth-century Protestant theologian Karl Barth. Given the content of the previous discussion, he was quick to point out that the transcendence implied by his use of “revelation” is not that which is informed by subject-object dualism; rather, it is an expression of the limited nature of human perception. Dr. Michio Shinozaki (Rissho Kosei-kai Gakurin Seminary) agreed that *upaya* supports the idea that language is insufficient to express the divine, but with the caveat that faith comes *with* understanding, not in the absence of it. Similarly, Dr. Reeves pointed out that *upaya* in the Lotus Sutra is not emphasizing the inadequacy of language, but is instead an expression of the usefulness of language, employed creatively, to communicate understanding.

Dr. Joseph Bracken (Xavier University, Cincinnati) began the afternoon

with his paper, “Ignatian Indifference and Buddhist Detachment.” In this study Dr. Bracken applies a comparative methodology to the discipline put forth by Saint Ignatius and the Buddhist concept of detachment. He argues that both have the same goal, namely “spiritual freedom through a disciplined life.” As an example he compares the parable of the prodigal son from the Gospel of Luke with the tale of the impoverished son in chapter 4 of the Lotus Sutra. He points out that, in the biblical story, nothing is required of the son in order to return home, while the son in the Lotus Sutra must work through many trying situations before taking his rightful place in the family. The discussion for this paper turned primarily on two points. First, Dr. Reeves pointed out that there is an inherent difficulty in comparing the mind of the Buddha (where detachment is complete and no single description is possible) with the specific teachings of a single man; Dr. Keefe thought that instead it might be more effective to use a specific aspect of Buddhist practice. Second, the comparison of the two parables led to a

lively discussion regarding the role of the will in spiritual growth; perhaps, Dr. Keefe suggested, the Western tendency to locate the will within the individual is a source of difficulty for Western scholars.

The next paper, titled "Buddhist Ecological Ideas and Practices," by Dr. Wei Dedong explored the role of Buddhism in an age of ecological chaos. He argued that an ecological crisis is really a crisis of the mind; thus, it is in the mind that ecological work must be done. The theory of dependent origination, which holds that all constituent elements of the world are conditionally dependent on other such elements, is the philosophical basis for Buddhist ecological ideas. Thus, the actions of one element (e.g., human beings) that harm another element (e.g., the earth's natural environment) will eventually be revisited upon the agent of harm. The discussion brought out two quick facets of Christianity that require development in this area: first, Christianity does not recognize the intrinsic value of nonhuman life, and second, the concept of "stewardship of creation" is not sufficiently stressed in Christian theology. However, as Professor John Yokota (Kyoto Women's University) pointed out, it may be Western Buddhists who will save Buddhism in the environmental sense, as the East Asian Buddhist establishment has not been sufficiently active in protecting the environment.

Dr. Li Silong (Peking University) capped off the evening with his paper, "On the Theory of Inherited Evil in Tiantai Buddhism." A complicated philosophical explication, this study was partially inspired by the events of September 11, 2001, when the rhetoric of good and evil assumed such a prominent role on the stage of international politics. In the comparative spirit of the conference, Dr. Li pointed out that, unlike the Christian God, the Buddha is not the judge of evil; rather,

the wisdom of the Buddha leads Buddhists away from evil. The discussion headed for the realm of ontology and the nature of evil, but Dr. Galbraith brought us back to the idea of practice with a question regarding the existence of innocent hardship in a world where karma is the source of suffering. Dr. Reeves answered that karma leaves room for "accidental suffering," and Dr. Oh made the astute observation that without undeserved pain there is no evil at all.

Professor Darrol Bryant (University

and thus is subordinate to Lotus devotion, Dr. Reeves added that, as the central religious activity in Japan, ancestor worship is still crucial. Also, he added, working for world peace is an essential feature of the vision of Rissho Kosei-kai founder, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano; thus, there is a strong sense of "descendant worship" as well.

Dr. Yokota followed this with his paper, "Practice in the Buddhist Tradition," which argued that the development and expansion of lay practice within the Lotus tradition has had a

The participants enjoy a guided tour of Zenkoji temple in the city of Nagano.

of Waterloo, Ontario) began the second full day of papers with "The Lotus Sutra and Rissho Kosei-kai: A Christian Reading," which he described as the "attempt of a non-buddhologist to process and comprehend the Lotus Sutra and Rissho Kosei-kai." A conversation about the respective nature of sin in Buddhism and Christianity—including the reluctance on the part of some scholars of Japanese Buddhism to use the word "sin" at all—ensued, followed by a discussion of the role of ancestor worship in Rissho Kosei-kai practice. While Dr. Shinozaki pointed out that in the Lotus tradition ancestor veneration is an example of *upaya*

profound effect on the role of practice within it. It also reminds us that Japanese religious traditions have never operated in isolation; they have always been in some sort of dialogue with other belief systems. In his presentation, Dr. Yokota commented on the presence of monotheistic traits in Japanese Buddhism, which shifted the conversation to the historical exclusivity of Lotus-centered traditions. Dr. Shinozaki clearly expressed that Rissho Kosei-kai members are "intentionally aware" that the group is not exclusivist, a fact that tends to mitigate historical associations of the Lotus tradition with claims to primacy. Dr.

Bracken added that, while one cannot completely secularize a religious text without destroying its meaning—a tradition must have at least a “preferred form of veneration”—what needs to be avoided is the point where one form needs to be everybody else’s as well.

Dr. Shinozaki then presented his paper, “Kannon’s Compassion: the Thinking of Nikkyo Niwano,” which explains the role of Kannon, as described in chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra, in Rev. Niwano’s explication of compassion. Briefly, he makes two major points. First, Kannon can both deliver believers from suffering through unconditional love and provide those believers with a model through which they themselves can ameliorate the suffering of others. Second, Kannon’s “compassion” is different from the Western idea of compassion, as it involves no sympathy or pathos—these bring with them human attachments and cravings—but rather lies in perfect balance between wisdom and compassion. The Japan scholars agreed that for this very reason translating *jihi* as compassion is problematic for Westerners. The ensuing discussion returned to two familiar and related themes: the concept of embodiment and the pitfalls of comparative methodology. Regarding the former, Dr. Kasulis made the point that Kannon’s compassion is already there, and it is up to the human being to recognize and embody it; in Buddhism, action is not the product of an outside agent but rather a “product of overlapping spheres.” Returning to the second theme mentioned above, Dr. Bracken comments that, as agents are necessary in Christian ethics, this is another sticking point for Western scholars.

The penultimate presentation, “Agape and Bodhisattva in Shusaku Endo’s *Silence*” from Dr. Galbraith, seeks to peer into Japanese Christianity through the writing of Endo, a famous twentieth-century Japanese author who

was also a practicing Roman Catholic. She points out three major aspects of Japanese Christology that shed light on much of the comparative discussion described above: first, the omnipotent God is replaced with a suffering savior; second, the Christ figure takes a maternal form; and third, the image of the savior becomes a combination of Kannon and the Virgin Mary. The question, then, is this: Can one compare the suffering of Christ to that of Kannon? She argues a cautious “yes.” In her response, Dr. Keefe not only agreed with this idea but took it a step further, suggesting that the Buddhist notion of suffering may provide the essential meeting ground for Christ and the bodhisattva.

Dr. Reeves provided the final presentation of the conference with his paper, “Guanyin Devotion as the Practice of Buddhism.” This presentation and discussion brought together several recurring themes of the conference, from Guanyin (Kannon) herself to compassion, religious practice, and both the difficulties and potential of interfaith dialogue. The paper points out that Guanyin may be where Buddhism can get out from under the accusation that it is merely devotion to emptiness; it also suggests that Guanyin worship may be the most ubiquitous Buddhist practice in all of East and Southeast Asia. Furthermore, it happens at a real-world, day-to-day level that is often devoid of the discussion of abstract philosophical systems. This Buddhism, what Dr. Reeves terms “lowland Buddhism,” is in many ways what Rissho Kosei-kai is practicing; an activity-based practice that finds its legitimacy through engagement. Dr. Reeves pointed out that in the Lotus Sutra there is no Buddha unless the Buddha is alive in the world; in this sense, he argues, the Lotus is very nearly the opposite of the Christian concept of the wide gulf between the divine and the human. Dr. Bracken

brought the discussion to a close with the trenchant observation that when we look at religious practice through the lens of activity as opposed to that of nomenclature, issues of language and doctrine become significantly smaller obstacles to meaningful inter-religious dialogue.

With the presentations completed, July 1 brought us a chance to witness a Rissho Kosei-kai service in Nagano, after which congregation members hosted a delicious lunch. From the moment we arrived until our bus pulled out of the parking lot, the hospitality of the members was beyond compare. After lunch we received a guided tour of the temple Zenkoji, then returned to Shiga Kogen where we spent the evening learning about three aspects of Rissho Kosei-kai in practice. First, Yukimasa Hagiwara gave a brief talk about the International Faith Dissemination Group, the branch of Rissho Kosei-kai devoted to introducing its teachings outside of Japan. Second, Masakazu Goto of the External Affairs Department gave a description of the group’s concrete goals as contextualized in Rissho Kosei-kai’s philosophy and ultimately in the Lotus Sutra itself. Finally Shin’ichi Noguchi, executive director of the Niwano Peace Foundation, outlined the purpose and activities of this important affiliation of Rissho Kosei-kai.

On July 2 we returned to Tokyo, where the conference participants took part in a forum in which ordinary members of Rissho Kosei-kai were able to ask questions regarding the visiting scholars’ research. Finally, Rissho Kosei-kai staff held a closing reception that evening, once again demonstrating incomparable hospitality. Here, many conversations begun in the conference room at Shiga Kogen continued, new friends were made, and another successful International Conference on the Lotus Sutra came to a close. □

Two Nuns: Mahaprajapati and Yashodhara

by Gene Reeves

By admitting women into the Sangha as nuns, the teaching that all are equal won out, but the reality of the monks' sexual desire and of consequent disrespect for women did not go away.

Mahaprajapati: Stepmother of the Buddha and the First Nun

According to legends not found in the Lotus Sutra, the mother of Shakyamuni, Maya (or Mahamaya), died shortly after giving birth to the future Buddha, Gautama. Maya's younger sister, called Gautami, was responsible for raising Gautama, subsequently married his father, King Shuddhodana, and thus became Gautama's stepmother.

Some years later, one source says it was five years after the beginning of the Sangha, the community of Buddhist monks, and following the death of her husband, Gautami along with others requested permission from the Buddha to become a nun (*bhikshuni*). At first the Buddha was very reluctant to admit women to the growing society of monks, but following the insistence of Ananda, who was Shakyamuni's cousin, with the Buddha's consent she became the first Buddhist nun, possibly the first nun of any kind, and was given the name Mahaprajapati.

Most stories about Mahaprajapati are not so much about her as they are about her efforts to keep the future Buddha from fleeing home, surrounding him with innumerable beautiful young women, seeing that his every desire was met and so on. In the Lotus Sutra, however, the very brief story is about her being reassured of becoming a fully awakened buddha herself.

Yashodhara: Former Wife of the Buddha and Mother of Rahula

Yashodhara was one of possibly several wives of Shakyamuni, and the mother of their son Rahula. In Buddhist

sutras and other texts a great many stories can be found about Yashodhara, her good looks, and her haughty personality.

She was a cousin of Shakyamuni, famous for her beauty, as was Shakyamuni himself. Their first meeting is said to have occurred in this way: Wanting to find a proper bride for his son, Shakyamuni's father had a collection of jewelry made for Shakyamuni to distribute at a party to which all of the lovely young women of the land were to be invited.

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In this relief excavated at Nagarjunakonda, Andhra Pradesh, India, King Shuddhodana (left) is depicted deeply discouraged to learn from Prince Siddhartha's personal servant, Chandaka (center), that his son had left the palace to become a mendicant. Yashodhara (right), cast down by the deep grief, is being consoled by her attendant. 3rd–4th centuries C.E. Nagarjunakonda Museum.

The king's aides were told to carefully watch to see which woman was most attractive to him. But when the women actually came to the party, Shakyamuni showed no interest in any of them.

Just as the party was about to end, one young woman came in late, with a huge entourage. Her name was Yashodhara and she approached the handsome prince without hesitation or embarrassment to ask for her gift. "I'm sorry," said Shakyamuni, "the jewelry is all gone. You should have come earlier." "Well," she replied, "why didn't you save something for me?" Then Shakyamuni offered her his own ring and his own necklace. But she declined these presents, turning away from Shakyamuni. In another version of this story, she accepted the necklace and then asked, "Is this all I'm worth?" In either case, she had gained his attention!

The king, Shakyamuni's father, soon sent a messenger to Yashodhara's father to ask for his daughter's hand in an arranged marriage. But he refused, indicating that he would give his daughter only to a young man who could prove that he was superior to all others. Thus, a kind of Indian Olympic games were held, with contests in such things as mathematics, writing, swordsmanship, horseback riding, boxing, and so on. Naturally, Shakyamuni won all the contests. He and Yashodhara were soon married at a great, splendid wedding ceremony.

Yashodhara became famous for her independence—for example, she refused to wear a veil. When criticized for this, she replied that a noble woman who controls her mind and senses will be properly veiled even when she is naked, for one's sins cannot be covered even by a whole pile of robes and veils.

When Shakyamuni returned home for the first time after becoming a monk, his father the king was overjoyed, but Yashodhara was still overcome with sadness and grief because her husband had left her. On this occasion, she alone did not leave her room to come to meet him. So Shakyamuni went to her room along with two disciples and was able to help her overcome her grief, in part by explaining that he had found a very great treasure.

Several days later, when Yashodhara arranged for their son, Rahula, to see his father for the first time, she told him to ask his father to give him a great treasure. The boy did this and then followed the Buddha into the forest, later becoming a monk himself.

Yashodhara then turned into a kind of recluse, keeping to herself inside the palace. Several years later, after King Shuddhodana had died and Mahaprajapati had become a nun and established a community of nuns, Yashodhara walked to where the nuns were staying and became a nun herself. Subsequently she studied with Shakyamuni fre-

quently, saw her son, Rahula, often as well, and became a great nun.

The Lotus Sutra

Mahaprajapati, accompanied by six thousand nuns, and Yashodhara with her own followers, are mentioned together in chapter 1 of the Lotus Sutra as among those present in the great assembly that had gathered to hear the Buddha. Curiously, they are mentioned after a list of shravakas, monk-arhats who are part of a group of twelve thousand, and before a contingent of eighty thousand bodhisattvas. A number of both shravakas and bodhisattvas are named individually. The two nuns do not seem to fit into either category, shravaka or bodhisattva.

Chapter 13 is where these two nuns make their main appearance in the Lotus Sutra. The chapter, entitled “Encouragement to Uphold the Sutra,” is about a succession of bodhisattvas, arhats, and other people, including the two nuns Mahaprajapati and Yashodhara, who vow before the Buddha that after his death they will continue to teach and spread the sutra far and wide. Because of the earlier close family relationships, the underlying psychology may be complex, but on the surface the story of Mahaprajapati and Yashodhara found here is quite simple.

Mahaprajapati, described as the sister of the Buddha’s

mother, along with six thousand nuns all got up from their seats, put their palms together in veneration, and looked intently at the face of the Buddha. Then the Buddha, addressing her with the familiar “Gautami,” asked her why she was looking so perplexed. “Deep down,” he asked, “are you perhaps a bit worried about the fact that I have not mentioned your name among those to whom I have given assurance of becoming supremely awakened buddhas?”

Then he proceeded to assure her that in ages to come, still accompanied by the six thousand nuns, she would become a bodhisattva who is a great Dharma teacher, gradually fulfilling the bodhisattva way and eventually becoming the buddha named Seen with Joy by All the Living. As that buddha, she would in turn assure six thousand bodhisattvas, presumably her six thousand nun followers, of supreme awakening.

Yashodhara, here described as the mother of Rahula and a nun, thought to herself, “Among the Buddha’s assurances of supreme awakening, I’m the only one here who hasn’t been mentioned!” Then the Buddha assured her that she too would become a great Dharma teacher by doing bodhisattva practice under hundreds of thousands of billions of buddhas in ages to come, gradually fulfilling the bodhisattva way and eventually becoming the buddha called Having Ten Million Shining Characteristics.

Photo: PPS

Sri Lankan Buddhist nuns visit a Buddhist sacred site featuring large stone sculptures, including one of the Buddha entering nirvana, at Polonnaruwa, the country’s capital in medieval times located 170 km northeast of Colombo.

The two nuns, full of joy, then praised the Buddha for giving them peace of mind and promised to go everywhere to proclaim the Lotus Sutra, even to other lands in other regions.

Encouragement

The reason for the chapter title, “Encouragement to Uphold the Sutra,” may be obscure, as it is not so much that the bodhisattvas or nuns are encouraged as that they themselves promise or make a vow to endure and persist in teaching the sutra despite rejection and persecution.

This concern and promise follow from the request of the Buddha at the end of chapter 11:

After my extinction,
Who will be able to receive and embrace,
Read and recite this sutra?
Let them come before the Buddha now
And declare their vow!

Now, here in chapter 13, bodhisattvas respond,

We will love neither our bodies nor our lives,
But care only for the supreme way.
In ages to come, we will protect and uphold
What the Buddha has entrusted to us.

.....

We are emissaries of the World-honored One.
Facing multitudes without fear,
We will teach the Dharma well.
May the Buddha rest in peace.

Words such as these were very important to Nichiren and to many of his followers over the centuries, who suffered abuse and persecution as a consequence of being ardent, sometimes fanatical, devotees of the Lotus Sutra.

Who then is being encouraged to uphold the sutra in chapter 13? It is the hearer or reader who should be encouraged, just as Nichiren was. If so many arhats and bodhisattvas and nuns can uphold the sutra in dark times despite abuse and persecution, surely we can. The encouragement of the title should be our encouragement.

Female Bodhisattvas

Though it may not seem obvious to us now, a central point of the story of Mahaprajapati and Yashodhara is related to the main theme of the whole sutra—universal salvation or the potential of all living beings to become a buddha. If, as many scholars believe, chapter 12, with its story of the

dragon princess, was added to the Lotus Sutra relatively late, this chapter would have been needed to make it quite clear that becoming a bodhisattva and eventually achieving full awakening is not something limited to men.

Not only Mahaprajapati and Yashodhara but also Mahaprajapati’s six thousand nun followers as well are to become great Dharma teachers, gradually fulfilling the bodhisattva way, and are to be assured of reaching supreme awakening. There is no mention of these nuns having to become male. Clearly, as Dharma teachers and bodhisattvas at least, they are female.

This teaching of universal salvation, of the potential in all living beings to become buddhas, is always also about us, the hearers and readers of the Lotus Sutra. The focus of the chapter is the question of how the Dharma, the teachings of the Buddha, will survive in a hostile world without Shakyamuni Buddha to teach them. The answer is that it is a responsibility of bodhisattvas to teach and proclaim the Dharma everywhere. Among such bodhisattvas are women. This means that anyone can grow spiritually through encountering women and that one can meet the Buddha in a woman. This was very important in the development of Buddhism in China, and subsequently in the rest of East Asia, as it fostered the growth of the cult of Guanyin, in which the Buddha is encountered in female form.

That the women in this story are both nuns should not be taken to mean that nuns are the only women in whom we can meet the Buddha. Mahaprajapati is a nun, but she is also Shakyamuni’s aunt, and Yashodhara is a nun, but she is also Shakyamuni’s wife and the mother of their son, Rahula. The fact that they have had nonmonastic roles is important. It means that while we can see the potential to be a buddha in nuns, this potential and power can also be seen in aunts and mothers, and, of course, in any woman.

We might wonder why these two women come last in a succession of assurances of becoming a buddha. Perhaps it was to give them a special place, but more likely it has to do with the enormous importance in the Lotus Sutra of chapter 10, “Teachers of the Dharma.”

In earlier chapters of the Lotus Sutra various shravakas, beginning with Shariputra, are assured of becoming buddhas in the future. This is brought to a kind of conclusion in chapter 9, in which Ananda and Rahula and two thousand shravakas are given assurance of becoming buddhas.

Then chapter 10 opens with the Buddha expressing as fully as possible the central theme of the Lotus Sutra. “Do you see,” he says to Medicine King Bodhisattva, “the innumerable gods, dragon kings, satyrs, centaurs, titans, griffins, chimeras, pythons, humans and nonhumans, as well as monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, those who seek to become shravakas, those who seek to become pratyeka-

In what is called the Tatsunokuchi persecution, Nichiren (seated center), who is about to be executed, is saved by a sudden flash of lightning in the sky. Detail from the Nichiren Shonin Chugasan, a scroll with an illustrated text on the life of Nichiren that is owned by Ikegami Honmonji, Tokyo.

buddhas, and those who seek the Buddha way? I give to all such beings my assurance that if they hear a single verse or a single phrase of the Wonderful Dharma Flower Sutra and even for a single moment find joy in it, they will attain supreme awakening.”

Then he goes on to say, “What’s more, after [my] extinction, if there is anyone who hears even a single verse or a single phrase of the Wonderful Dharma Flower Sutra, and for a single moment finds joy in it, I assure them also of supreme awakening. Again, if there are any who receive and embrace, read and recite, explain or copy even a single verse of the Wonderful Dharma Flower Sutra, or look upon this sutra with reverence as if it were the Buddha himself, or make offerings to it in various ways with flowers, incense, necklaces, powdered incense, paste incense, incense for burning, silk canopies, flags, banners, robes, or music, as well as revering it with palms together, you should understand, Medicine King, that these people have already made offerings to ten trillion buddhas and under those buddhas have worked to fulfill their great vow. . . .

“Medicine King, if anyone asks you what sort of living beings will become buddhas in ages to come, you should show them that these are the people who will certainly become buddhas in ages to come. Why? Because if any good sons or good daughters embrace, read and recite, explain, or copy even a single phrase of the Dharma Flower Sutra, or make offerings to it in various ways with flowers, in-

cense, necklaces, powdered incense, paste incense, incense for burning, silk canopies, flags, banners, robes or music, as well as revering it with palms together, these people will be looked up to and honored by the whole world. Offerings should be made to them as if they were tathagatas. You should understand that these people are great bodhisattvas. . . . How much more true this is of those who are able to receive and embrace this whole sutra, and in various ways make offerings to it! . . .

“If any of these good sons and daughters, after my extinction, is able, even in secret, to teach to one person even one phrase of the Dharma Flower Sutra, then you should understand that they are emissaries of the Tathagata, sent by the Tathagata to do the work of the Tathagata. How much more true this is of those who teach this sutra everywhere for others before great crowds of people!”

It would be difficult to be any clearer than this: anyone is capable of receiving and embracing the sutra and of teaching it to others. With this clearly established as the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, the reader should be prepared for chapter 13 and its emphasis on nuns and women as bodhisattvas. In chapter 13, it is said that the two nuns are to become “Dharma teachers.” In no previous occurrence of the Buddha giving assurance to someone of their becoming a buddha was this done.

We might wonder also about the reluctance of the Buddha to admit women into the monastic community

mentioned very briefly earlier when discussing the story of Ananda in chapter 9. Undoubtedly there was some tension in the early Buddhist community of monks between two matters: on the one hand, the teaching that all are equal in that all are bodhisattvas with the potential of becoming buddhas, and, on the other hand, the reality of sexual desire in monks who have renounced their sexuality. By admitting women into the Sangha as nuns, the teaching won out, but the reality of the monks' desire and often of consequent disrespect for women did not go away.

Upholding the Sutra

What does it mean to “uphold” the sutra? The Chinese character used here can mean such things as “keep,” “hold,” “uphold,” or “take care of.” Usually, when translating it in the Lotus Sutra, I like to use the term “embrace.” It occurs in several combinations that are important in the Lotus Sutra, especially (in Japanese pronunciation) as *juji*, “receive and embrace”; *buji*, “honor and embrace”; *goji*, “protect and embrace”; and *jisetsu*, “embrace and explain”; and there are many others. I like to use “embrace” because, for the Lotus Sutra, what is involved is not a matter either of storage or of defending, but of following or adhering to the teachings of the sutra by embodying them in one's life.

But in chapter 13, what is of most direct concern is propagating the sutra in the face of great difficulties, spreading its teachings to others despite many obstacles, leading others to embrace it. So here, in the title of chapter 13, it seems fitting to think of being encouraged to “uphold” the sutra.

Please do not worry.
After the Buddha's extinction,
In a frightful and evil age
We will teach far and wide.

Though many ignorant people
Will curse and abuse us
Or attack us with swords and sticks,
We will endure it all.

In an evil age of a muddled eon,
Full of dreadful things,
Evil spirits will take possession of others
To curse, abuse, and insult us.

But revering and trusting in the Buddha,
We will wear an armor of patient endurance.
In order to teach this sutra,

We will endure all such difficult things.
We will love neither our bodies nor our lives,
But care only for the supreme way.
In ages to come, we will protect and uphold
What the Buddha has entrusted to us.

Repeatedly we will be driven out
And exiled far from stupas and monasteries.
Remembering the Buddha's orders,
We will endure all such evils.

Wherever in villages and towns
There are those who seek the Dharma,
We will go there and teach the Dharma
Entrusted to us by the Buddha.

We are emissaries of the World-honored One.
Facing multitudes without fear,
We will teach the Dharma well.
May the Buddha rest in peace.

We do not know what circumstances in India led to this kind of anticipation of abuse and persecution of followers of the Lotus Sutra, but, especially for Nichiren and his followers, these words could be seen as anticipating their own experience and as a powerful encouragement to endure suffering and persist in teaching the sutra to others no matter how great the difficulties.

Most of us do not face such extreme persecution for teaching the Lotus Sutra. But most followers of the sutra certainly do face difficulties, especially from those who are antagonistic toward the sutra and toward those who seek to teach it. And in most, if not all, of the world, such antagonism may be directed more intensely toward women. We know that Mahaprajapati and Yashodhara had to overcome great difficulties and even hostility toward women in order to become nuns and teachers of the Dharma.

There are other kinds of difficulties as well, difficulties in understanding the sutra, difficulties in translation and interpretation, difficulties adequately embodying the teachings of the sutra in our everyday lives, difficulties in teaching or preaching it, difficulties in sharing our enthusiasm for the sutra. For those who want to uphold the Lotus Sutra, there is no shortage of difficulties. It is all too easy to become disheartened and discouraged and want to give up.

Chapter 13, especially perhaps the final verses, can be a wonderful encouragement to continue despite such difficulties. If others have faced terrible abuse and persecution, surely, we, too, can face difficulties and survive. □

Giving Thanks Today for the Trials of Yesterday

by Yoshie Sugawara

*A member who is a working wife and mother learns from her chapter leader
that she herself was partly responsible for problems not only
with her teenage son, but also with her husband.*

Dad, the shed needs painting. I'll do it." "Thanks. That will be a big help." As I listen to this simple exchange between my husband and son, I am engulfed by a warm feeling. There was a time when we struggled with our son's juvenile delinquency and I never thought we would see this day. The joy I savor now, I know, is because, through hoza sessions, I have discovered a whole new way of life.

Homework

Our problems with Akitomo began when he was sixteen. He sped round on a motorcycle without a license, and he and his friends would sit in his room day and night sniffing glue.

"Do you know what time it is? Go home before we get into trouble with the neighbors!" I would storm into my son's room late at night, but we would end up in a bitter fight, and for days I could not sleep in peace. My husband and I did not know what to do. We wanted to die; we were worn out both emotionally and physically.

My mother-in-law saw our desperation and consulted with the area leader of the local Rissho Kosei-kai branch. This led to an invitation to go to the branch, where I attended a hoza session for the first time. I poured out everything to Mrs. Kimie Makino, the chapter leader, and suddenly the tension I had been feeling for so long was released. At this point, Mrs. Makino threw an unexpected question my way:

"Mrs. Sugawara, how is your relationship with your husband?"

"But I'm worried about my son, not about my husband," I answered. But she persisted. "Mrs. Sugawara, it takes both parents to raise a child. A couple has to care for and help each other. Problems with the children occur when there is a problem between the parents. Do you talk with your husband?"

"Well, my husband tends to work late. We don't have much time to talk."

"What about dinner?"

"I'm tired from working, too, so I usually eat first and go to bed before he gets home." At the time, I was working every day at my family's fish shop.

"You know, I think you could make your husband very happy if you ate dinner with him." Saying this, Mrs. Makino gave me some "homework." I was to do three things: stay up until my husband came home; eat dinner and talk with him; and sleep in the same room with him.

Yoshie Sugawara is a member of the Toyama Branch of Rissho Kosei-kai.

Mrs. Sugawara enjoys a chat with her fellow members before a hoza session at the Toyama Branch.

I felt like I was being directed on a totally different tangent. After all, I had come to get advice about my son. But if this would help solve our problems, I was willing to give it a try. I resolved to do my “homework” as best I could.

Practice

At a hoza session several days later, Mrs. Makino asked me if I had been able to do my “homework.”

“No. It’s too embarrassing somehow.”

I was finding it difficult to eat with my husband and hold a conversation with him.

“Don’t worry. I know you can do it,” she encouraged me. Others in the community chimed in. “Listening to Mrs. Makino’s advice to you reminded me that I had been forgetting to express my gratitude to my own husband,” said one woman. “I’ll do my best, so I hope you will, too. Let’s work at this together.”

The community shared everything at the hoza sessions. We talked about our joys and sorrows; laughed together and cried together. Here was a place where I could say anything and people would listen. I had kept so much to myself, but here there was comfort and it was easy to open up.

I found the hoza sessions irresistible. It was not long before I was rushing to finish work so that I could attend hoza every day. Encouraged by the support of Mrs. Makino and my companions in the community, I finally dared to sit down to a meal with my husband. His reaction: “You know, it was lonely eating by myself with only the television to keep me company.” I had not realized how lonely he had felt. For the first time, I was hearing my husband speak of his innermost feelings, and I apologized.

When I reported this to Mrs. Makino, she gave me a new assignment. Go, she said, to the homes of your son’s friends.

An Awakening

My son’s friends all came from homes where both parents worked. The parents did not seem to talk to each other much. I was taken aback to learn that these parents had no idea their sons were coming to my home every night. When I mentioned this at a hoza session, Mrs. Makino asked, “And how did you feel about these other families?”

“They seemed totally uninterested in their own children.”

“Hmm. If they aren’t talking to each other, they probably aren’t talking to their children very much, either. How about you? Do you have conversations with your son?”

“Well, no. I seldom speak to him first.”

“Maybe that’s making your son feel lonely.”

“Ahh. The mothers I met. What I saw in them was myself!”

Come to think of it, when I got home after work every night, I’d make dinner, but after that I was too tired to have much to do with either my husband or son. Not only had I been making my husband feel lonely, I had denied my own son his mother’s love.

“I thought that a parent’s love was shown by making sure that one’s children never wanted for things or money.”

“Mrs. Sugawara, you can’t convey love with things or money. What do you suppose your son really wanted?”

What my son wanted was a loving home. And when he couldn’t get it, he sought comfort in his friends and in sniffing glue. How sad and lonely he must have been!

I felt so bad about what I had done. I rushed home as soon as I could and immediately apologized to Akitomo.

“I didn’t realize how lonely you were feeling. I’m so sorry.”

Thereafter I made a special effort to show my love for my son, hugging him and talking to him as much as possible. Like melting ice, our relationship softened and deepened over time.

Recalling all of this now, I realize that I would never have been able to build a good relationship with my son if we had not had the problems we had. I might have lost touch with my son and my relationship with my husband might have remained distant and cold. I can look back on those difficult days now with thanksgiving, for within our troubles was hidden the Buddha’s compassion. And it was the hoza sessions that helped me to see this. □

The Final Rites for the Buddha

by Hajime Nakamura

*Both Sanskrit and Pāli texts mention that perfumes, garlands,
and musical instruments were brought, suggesting that
these were standard items at funerals.*

Immediately after the Buddha's death, the Mallas of Kusināra took charge of the funeral arrangements. The Pāli Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta describes this as follows:

“(13) Then the Mallas of Kusināra ordered their servants: ‘Gather perfumes, garlands—and all the musical instruments that are in Kusināra.’ Then the Mallas of Kusināra took perfumes, garlands—and all the musical instruments, as well as five hundred sets of cloth, to the Mallas’ sāla grove of Upavattana where the Venerable Master’s body was lying. Arriving there, they spent the day honoring, esteeming, worshipping, and venerating the body of the Venerable Master with dance, song, music, garlands, and perfumes, and raising awnings and erecting surrounding cloth partitions.

“At that time the Mallas of Kusināra thought thus: ‘Today is not a suitable time for the cremation of the body of the Venerable Master. Tomorrow we will cremate the body of the Venerable Master.’ And then, honoring, esteeming, worshipping, and venerating the body of the Venerable Master with dance, song, music, garlands, and perfumes, and raising awnings and erecting surrounding cloth partitions, they spent the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth days.

“(14) Then on the seventh day the Mallas of Kusināra thought thus: ‘We have honored, esteemed, worshiped, and venerated the body of the Venerable Master with dance, song, music, garlands, and perfumes. Now we will carry [it] to the south of the city along the road that passes to the south, carry [it] out of the city by the road that leads out of the city, and south of the city we will cremate the body of the Venerable Master.’

“Then the eight chiefs of the Mallas, having [washed] their heads by putting their heads in the water and put on new robes, thought: ‘Now we will lift up the body of the Venerable Master to carry it,’ but they were not able to do so. Then the Mallas of Kusināra said to the Venerable Anuruddha: ‘The eight chiefs of the Mallas, having [washed] their heads by putting their heads in the water and put on

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).

At Kuśinagar, the place where Shakyamuni died and was cremated, now stands the Nirvāṇa Hall, which attracts many visitors.

new robes, thought: “Now we will lift up the body of the Venerable Master to carry it,” but they were not able to do so. What is the reason for this, Venerable One?”

“Vāseṭṭhas, your intention, and the intention of the devas, are different.”

“(15) ‘But, Venerable One, what kind of thing is the intention of the devas?’

“Vāseṭṭhas, your intention is, having honored, esteemed, worshiped, and venerated the body of the Venerable Master with dance, song, music, garlands, and perfumes, to carry [it] to the south of the city along the road that passes to the south, carry [it] out of the city by the road that leads out of the city, and south of the city cremate the body of the Venerable Master. However, Vāseṭṭhas, the intention of the devas is, having honored, esteemed, worshiped, and venerated the body of the Venerable Master with dance, song, music, garlands, and perfumes, to carry [it] to the north of

the city along the road that passes to the north, entering the city from the north gate, carry [it] to the center of the city by the road that passes through the center of the city, and go through the eastern gate to the shrine of the Mallas called Makuṭa-bandhana, east of the city, and there cremate the body of the Venerable Master.”

“Venerable One, we will act according to the intention of the devas.” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, VI, 13–15)

The Sanskrit text is even more detailed. Both Sanskrit and Pāli texts mention that perfumes, garlands, and musical instruments were brought, suggesting these were standard items at funerals. Playing “all the musical instruments” may sound strange, and the description of singing, dancing, and music performed before the corpse may seem unbecoming at a funeral. However, even today, Hindu funerals are characterized by loud chanting of sacred scriptures and the playing of musical instruments, and in terms of noise

there is little to distinguish a funeral cortege from a wedding procession. Such a custom in all probability dates back to the Buddha's time. Chinese and Korean funeral customs are close to the Indian in this sense, while those of Japan and Europe are subdued. The playing of music has the very real function of preventing mourners from being overcome by grief and of restoring their spirits. In Japan, funerals of the Sōtō Zen sect, in particular, cater to this need to some extent by allowing the striking of bells.

“(16) At that time, even the rubbish heaps of Kusinārā were covered knee-deep in *mandārava* flowers. Then the devas and the Mallas of Kusinārā honored, esteemed, worshiped, and venerated the body of the Venerable Master with heavenly and human dance, song, music, garlands, and perfumes and carried [it] to the north of the city along the road that passes to the north, entering the city from the north gate, carried [it] to the center of the city by the road that passes through the center of the city, and went through the eastern gate to the shrine [*cetiya*] of the Mallas called Makuṭa-bandhana, east of the city, and there deposited the body of the Venerable Master.” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, VI, 16)

People of the time considered it a desecration or a pollution to place a corpse in, or to bring it through, a settlement. W. Caland reported that the ancient custom was to take it to the east or the west of a village or town. On the other hand, later Indian texts (such as the *Laws of Manu*, V, 92) say that they should be taken to the north. Here, though, the custom is tempered by the wish of the devas and so can be ignored. Perhaps the passage implies that the Buddhists were in the habit of going against ancient funeral custom.

Concerning the veneration of the body, the Pāli text (VI, 16) involves both the human and the divine: “Then the devas and the Mallas of Kusinārā honored, esteemed, worshiped, and venerated the body of the Venerable Master with heavenly and human dance, song, music, garlands, and perfumes.” The Sanskrit text, by contrast, abandons the human veneration completely and attributes it entirely to the actions of the devas. Such an abandonment of the human aspect is a measure of the growing deification of Sakyamuni and an acceleration of the religious.

Preparations for the Cremation

The Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta states that the Buddha, while still alive, gave detailed orders concerning his cremation.

“(10) ‘Revered One, what should we do with the remains of the Tathāgata?’ ‘Do not concern yourselves with honoring the remains of the Tathāgata, Ānanda. You should rather strive for the true goal, and practice the true goal. Be earn-

est, be zealous, and be intent on the true goal, never flagging. There are, Ānanda, wise Khattiyas, wise Brahmins, and wise householders who have a pure faith in the Tathāgata; they will honor the remains of the Tathāgata.” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 10)

The above statement is a possible instruction if we consider the Buddha's beliefs and practice. The following passage, by comparison, was almost certainly added by a later editor to bring dignity to the description of the cremation.

“(11) ‘But how, Revered One, do we deal with the Tathāgata's remains?’ ‘You should, Ānanda, deal with the Tathāgata's remains in the same way as those of a world-ruling monarch [a wheel-rolling king].’

“‘How, Revered One, are the remains of a world-ruling monarch dealt with?’

“‘Ānanda, the remains of a world-ruling monarch are wrapped in new cloth. After they have been wrapped in new cloth, they are wrapped in carded cotton cloth. After they have been wrapped in carded cotton cloth, they are wrapped in new cloth. In this way the remains of a world-ruling monarch are wrapped in five hundred layers of cloth. Then the remains are put into an iron oil-vat, which is covered with another iron vat. After a funeral pyre of all kinds of perfume is built, the remains of the world-ruling monarch are cremated. Then a stupa for the world-ruling monarch is erected at a crossroads. Thus, Ānanda, are the remains of a world-ruling monarch dealt with.

“‘In the same way, Ānanda, as the remains of a world-ruling monarch should you deal with the remains of the Tathāgata. A stupa should be erected for the Tathāgata at a crossroads. Whoever worships there by offering garlands or perfumes or cosmetics with a pure heart and faith will reap benefits and happiness for a long time.

“(12) ‘Ānanda, these are the four persons worthy of being honored by the erection of a stupa. What are these four? People should erect a stupa to honor a Tathāgata, Arahant, and Buddha; people should erect a stupa to honor one who has enlightened himself; people should erect a stupa to honor one who has practiced having heard the teachings of the Tathāgata; and people should erect a stupa to honor a world-ruling monarch. And for what reason, Ānanda, should people erect a stupa to honor a Tathāgata, Arahant, and Buddha? At the thought, Ānanda, that “This is the stupa of the Tathāgata, the Arahant, the one who has attained true enlightenment,” the hearts of people will be purified. Having thus purified their hearts, those people, following death and the breaking-up of the body, will be reborn in a good place, in a heavenly realm. This is the reason, Ānanda, that people should erect a stupa to honor a Tathāgata, Arahant, and the one who has attained true enlightenment.

“Again, Ānanda, for what reason should people erect a stupa to honor one who has enlightened himself? At the thought that “This is the stupa of the Venerable Master, one who has enlightened himself,” the hearts of people will be purified. Having thus purified their hearts, those people, following death and the breaking-up of the body, will be reborn in a good place, in a heavenly realm. This is the reason, Ānanda, that people should erect a stupa to honor one who has enlightened himself.

“Again, Ānanda, for what reason should people erect a stupa to honor one who has practiced having heard the teachings of the Tathāgata? At the thought that “This is the stupa of one who has practiced having heard the teachings of the Tathāgata, the Arahant, the Buddha,” the hearts of people will be purified. Having thus purified their hearts, those people, following death and the breaking-up of the body, will be reborn in a good place, in a heavenly realm. This is the reason, Ānanda, that people should erect a stupa to honor one who has practiced having heard the teachings of the Tathāgata.

“Again, Ānanda, for what reason should people erect a stupa to honor a world-ruling monarch? At the thought that “This is the stupa of a righteous king who honors the Dhamma,” the hearts of people will be purified. Having thus purified their hearts, those people, following death and the breaking-up of the body, will be reborn in a good place, in a heavenly realm. This is the reason, Ānanda, that people should erect a stupa to honor a world-ruling monarch. These are the four persons, Ānanda, worthy of being honored by the erection of a stupa.” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 11–12)

By comparison with the above, the following description is more likely to have been based on what actually happened, and is reflected in the former.

“(17) Then the Mallas of Kusinārā asked the young Ānanda: ‘Venerable Ānanda, how should we deal with the remains of the Tathāgata?’

“You must, Vāseṭṭhas, deal with the remains of the Tathāgata as you would those of a world-ruling monarch.’

“How, Ānanda, are the remains of a world-ruling monarch dealt with?”

“Vāseṭṭhas, the remains of a world-ruling monarch are wrapped in new cloth. After they have been wrapped in new cloth, they are wrapped in carded cotton cloth. After they have been wrapped in carded cotton cloth, they are wrapped in new cloth. In this way the remains of a world-ruling monarch are wrapped in five hundred layers of cloth. Then the remains are put into an iron oil-vat, which is covered with another iron vat. After perfumed wood has been piled into a pyre, the remains of the world-ruling monarch are cremated. Then a stupa for the world-ruling

monarch is erected at a crossroads. Thus, Vāseṭṭhas, are the remains of a world-ruling monarch dealt with. In the same way, Vāseṭṭhas, as the remains of a world-ruling monarch should you deal with the remains of the Tathāgata. A stupa should be erected at a crossroads for the Tathāgata. Whoever worships there by offering garlands or perfumes or cosmetics with a pure heart and faith will reap benefits and happiness for a long time.’

“(18) Then the Mallas of Kusinārā ordered their men to collect their carded cotton cloth. At that time, the Mallas of Kusinārā wrapped the remains of the Venerable Master in new cloth. After they had been wrapped in new cloth, they were wrapped in carded cotton cloth. After they had been wrapped in carded cotton cloth, they were wrapped in new cloth. In this way the remains of the Venerable Master were wrapped in five hundred layers of cloth, put into an iron oil-vat, covered with another iron vat, perfumed wood was piled into a pyre, and the remains of the Venerable Master were placed on top of the pyre.” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, VI, 17–18)

Though the description in the above section (VI, 18) certainly seems to be exaggerated, the cremation would have been held following a somewhat similar form. Even today in India, bodies are cremated after being wrapped in new cloth. Because a number of mythical and miraculous elements have accrued to the order of the Buddha’s funeral service, it is difficult to judge how much is historical fact. All the same, I feel that the above description may have a certain resemblance to what happened. Similarly, though the myth of the wheel-rolling king developed at a later period, the funerals of kings in the Buddha’s time must have been carefully performed.

Mahākassapa’s Late Arrival

All the texts treat Mahākassapa’s absence from the death-bed of the Buddha as significant. The Pāli version says that Mahākassapa and his companions had been delayed.

“(19) At that time the Venerable Mahākassapa was walking along the main road from Pāvā to Kusinārā with a large band of five hundred *bhikkhus*. Leaving the road, the Venerable Mahākassapa sat down at the foot of a tree. At that time a certain Ājīvika was walking along the road from Kusinārā to Pāvā, carrying a *mandārava* flower. Seeing the Ājīvika coming in the distance, Mahākassapa said: ‘Do you know of our master, friend?’

“Yes, friend, I know him. Seven days ago from this day, the *samaṇa* Gotama died. It is because of that that I am carrying this *mandārava* flower.” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, VI, 19)

It is interesting to note that the Ājīvika had honored Sakyamuni, even though he belonged to a different religious

The remains of the Buddha depicted as being placed in an iron oil-vat, which was covered with another iron vat, before being cremated. A relief unearthed at Gandhara. 2–4th century C.E. Indian Museum.

affiliation. Even today Hindu ascetics take flowers and water flasks to attend ceremonies honoring the Buddha. It would be going too far to say that all Ājīvikas of his time esteemed the Buddha, but at the very least this episode shows that there were some who respected him as a teacher. Perhaps the Ājīvika carried the flower as a mark of mourning the death of a great religious figure. We are shown here a mark of Indian religiosity, that different religious groups do not necessarily exclude others of a different affiliation.

Another point of interest is that besides Anuruddha, of all his chief disciples, Ānanda and Mahākassapa are mentioned in connection with the Buddha's death, the latter not even present at the deathbed. Despite the difference in ideas between Ānanda and Mahākassapa, they were both very close to Sakyamuni. A great number of paintings of the Buddha are to be found in the caves of Tun-huang, and in

most cases he is portrayed flanked by those two disciples. Did the historical fact revealed in the *suttanta* continue to influence iconography right through to that time? We should also observe that Mahākassapa was leading a large band of *bhikkhus*. Ānanda, still being comparatively young, did not yet have followers to lead. It is possible to conjecture that while Mahākassapa taught Gotama's early thought, Ānanda transmitted his later and newer ideas.

The *suttanta* gives further descriptions of the lamentation of the disciples.

“(19 *continued*) And those *bhikkhus* who had not yet separated themselves from the passions stretched forth their arms and raised them, weeping, and threw themselves down like rocks, writhing and turning, saying: ‘The Venerable Master has died, all too soon. The Blessed One has died, all too soon. The Eye of the World has hidden himself, all too

The cremation of the Buddha's remains. A relief excavated at Gandhara. Indian Museum.

soon.' However, the *bhikkhus* who had separated themselves from the passions patiently endured, their minds thoughtful and aware, saying: 'All things that have been made are impermanent. How can this not be?'" (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, VI, 19)

Only one person rejoiced in the Buddha's death. Even a great religious figure could not conquer the minds of all. Already a heterogeneous element had entered the Saṅgha.

"At that time there was an old *bhikkhu* who uttered words that were not fitting to the occasion." (Waldschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, p. 422)

"(20) At that time sitting within the group was a *bhikkhu* who had gone into homelessness in his old age, called Subhadda. That Subhadda who had gone into homelessness in his old age said to the other *bhikkhus*: 'Cease, friends, do not grieve and weep. We are well released from the Great Ascetic. We were always troubled with his remonstrances to do this or not to do that; now we can do as we please, or not do as we please.'" (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, VI, 20)

A troublesome figure was now gone, and the *bhikkhu* said that they could breathe more easily.

"Mahākāśyapa [Mahākassapa] was not happy to hear these words." (Pan-ni-yüan-ching)

According to the Pāli version, it was Subhadda who criticized his master, yet it was hardly possible that the Subhadda who had been ordained at Sakyamuni's deathbed could have criticized his master, uttering the words reported above.

The Pan-ni-yüan-ching in fact transliterates the last disciple Subhadda as "Hsü-pa," and describes the critical one as a member of the Śākya clan called T'an-t'ou.

This criticism doubtless occurred. It is unlikely that the compiler of the suttanta, anxious to revere the founder of Buddhism, would willingly have included such an irreverent passage. However, the incident made such an impact that he was unable to discard it. That it was transmitted shows two things. First, Gotama was a prudent man who set in place meticulous standards governing the behavior of his followers. Though there did not yet exist the systematic precepts and regulations of later times, the Buddha must have outlined a considerable number of prohibitions as the occasion arose. Second, there were those among the newer disciples who were not happy with those prohibitions. This implies that the danger of schism was present from very early times.

Mahākassapa did not reprimand Subhadda, but turning to the disciples, told them to be calm and to stop their weeping.

"Then the Venerable Mahākassapa said to the *bhikkhus*: 'Cease, friends, do not grieve and weep. Has not the Venerable Master already told you that all things that are beloved and delightful are subject to separation by birth and death, and that after death their state is of another order? How can this be? Whatever is born, whatever exists, whatever is made is subject to decay; there is no law that exists that

says that what is subject to decay does not decay.” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, VI, 20)

The Cremation

The proceedings for the cremation are recorded in detail in the suttanta.

“(21) Then the four chiefs of the Mallas, having washed their heads by putting their heads in the water and put on new robes, thought: ‘Now we will light the funeral pyre of the Venerable Master,’ but they were not able to do so. Then the Mallas of Kusinārā said to the Venerable Anuruddha: ‘Anuruddha, the four chiefs of the Mallas, having washed their heads by putting their heads in the water and put on new robes, thought: “Now we will light the funeral pyre of the Venerable Master,” but they were not able to do so. What is the reason for this, Venerable One?’

“Vāseṭṭhas, your intention and the intention of the devas are different.’

“But, Venerable One, what kind of thing is the intention of the devas?”

“Vāseṭṭhas, the intention of the devas is this. The Venerable Mahākassapa is walking along the main road from Pāva to Kusinārā with a large band of five hundred *bhikkhus*. The funeral pyre of the Venerable Master will not be lit until Mahākassapa has revered the Venerable Master by placing his head at the [Buddha’s] feet.’

“Venerable One, we will act according to the intention of the devas.”

“(22) Then the Venerable Mahākassapa went to the shrine of the Mallas called Makuṭa-bandhana in Kusinārā to the funeral pyre of the Venerable Master. There he [bared his right shoulder,] covered his [left] shoulder with his robe, placed the palms of his hands together, circumambulated the pyre three times with his right shoulder facing the pyre, and, uncovering the feet of the Venerable Master, revered him by placing his head on them.

“The five hundred *bhikkhus*, too, covered their [left] shoulders with their robes, placed the palms of their hands together, circumambulated the pyre three times with their right shoulders facing the pyre, and revered the Venerable Master by placing their heads on his feet. When Mahākassapa and the five hundred *bhikkhus* finished thus revering the Venerable Master, the Venerable Master’s funeral pyre ignited of itself.

“(23) When the Venerable Master’s body was burned, only the bones were left, the top layer of the skin, the under layer, flesh, sinews, and joint fluid all having been consumed so that not even the ash of their cinders remained. Just as when butter or oil is burned, no soot or ashes remain, so when the body of the Venerable Master was burned, only the bones were left, the top layer of the skin, the under layer,

flesh, sinews, and joint fluid all having been consumed so that not even the ash of their cinders remained. And of all the five hundred robes, only the outermost and the innermost were burned.

“When the Venerable Master’s body had been cremated, a stream of water appeared in the sky and fell, extinguishing the funeral pyre of the Venerable Master, and a stream of water gushed forth from a storehouse of water [beneath the earth], extinguishing the funeral pyre of the Venerable Master. The Mallas of Kusinārā extinguished the funeral pyre of the Venerable Master with perfumed water of various kinds.

“Then the Mallas of Kusinārā honored, esteemed, worshiped and venerated the bones of the Venerable Master with dance, song, music, garlands, and perfumes for seven days in their meeting hall, having made a lattice of spears and encircled it with a wall of bows.” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, VI, 21–23)

Since the funeral proceedings were held at the Mallas’ shrine (Mallānaṃ cetiyaṃ) and at their meeting hall (*agrāgāre mahāmaṇḍale*), their best hall, it had the status of a public, official event. According to the Sanskrit text, though, the cremated remains were placed “in a golden flask on a golden funerary stand.” Since this does not appear in the Pāli text, it is clearly a later embellishment.

One and a half kilometers east of the Nirvāṇa Stupa at Kuśinagar, at a place known as Ramabhar, there is a large mound, only partly excavated, which is thought to have been the stupa built on the site of the Buddha’s funeral pyre. Formerly covered with grass and trees, it was cleared in 1956 at the time of the anniversary celebrations of the Buddha’s birth. When I visited it that year, I found the mound covered with bricks. We could scramble over it, but the bricks would crumble and fall off. I felt there was a pressing need to do something for its preservation. From the top of the mound I could see an empty chamber, without a ceiling. By the time of my next visit in 1976, though, the whole area had been made into a park and the mound was surrounded by a fence. This seems to have minimized the likelihood of further disintegration.

The Pāli Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta (VI, 17) states that the cremated remains of a tathāgata, like those of a universal monarch, should be placed within a stupa (large mound) erected at a crossroads. Since it seems unlikely that such a large mound could have been built within the week before Mahākassapa arrived, it is more than likely that the mound was erected in a later time, followed by the development of the legend. Perhaps a large mound was built later on the spot where the cremation had taken place. Today a fine road surrounds the mound.

To be continued

Human Beings Cannot Live Alone

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 daily faith.

We must never forget to ask what kind of feelings Shakyamuni evinced when he taught, not only when we trace back his teachings to understand their origins, but also when we wish to understand their validity for the future.

There are many issues that spur us to consider future ramifications. One of the most important of those is environmental pollution. It is a matter of concern that can no longer be considered just a local or even a national problem, but is an issue of a global scale. While we in the present are its perpetrators, those who come after us will be its victims since its tremendous effects will have an impact on our children, our grandchildren, and many future generations.

We live in an age in which individuals cannot expect to only experience retribution for their past wrongs, but one in which our present deeds will also have an effect on everyone in the future. Although we are accustomed to venerating the spirits of our forebears in our devotions, we must also think about those who will follow after us. Perhaps we should call this "venerating the future."

We should consider now the kind of lifestyle to adopt, adding the perspective of those who will be our descendants to the veneration of our forebears. We cannot allow ourselves to wallow in the comforts of the present, heedless of their future consequences.

However strong we might strive to be as individuals, it is

not possible for human beings to live in isolation. We must share our strengths, for without a meeting of minds on issues affecting all of us, a successful human society cannot exist. Unfortunately, however, contemporary people seem to be losing the willingness to make an effort to build such a society. Despite the crowds who throng our urban centers, many people in them feel a deep loneliness and seem unable to establish warm contacts with others.

People today seem to devote most of their efforts to freeing themselves from the intervention of others and to restraining themselves from becoming involved in the affairs of others. By being unable to maintain meaningful contact with others, they encourage feelings of loneliness.

The results of a survey conducted by the Japanese Nursing Association among employees of fifty listed companies in the twenty to fifty age group attracted much attention. Of particular interest was the response rate to the question "Have you ever felt so unhappy that you wanted to die?" One in four respondents answered "yes." When asked, "At such times, is there anyone in whom you can confide?" sixty-four percent replied that there was no one. Even though we sometimes hear of a renewal of religious interest, these survey results should give us pause and make us reflect on whether religion really has been playing a part in easing such feelings.

Planning for the Future

It is no longer said, as sometimes happened in the past, that people who have caught a cold should douse themselves with water to revive their flagging spirits. As customs change, so do religious activities, including those of Rissho

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Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (center) has an informal round-table discussion with the directors of the youth groups of Rissho Kosei-kai branches at the Great Sacred Hall on November 7, 1991.

Kosei-kai's branches. From now on, our branches should contain the elements that make them places of amenity, like oases in their communities, and enable members to interact pleasantly and effectively with the people of their community, cultivating their humanity in order to make a genuine contribution to society. What is most vital in this is the participation of members and their determined efforts to think of ways to improve branch activities.

It hardly needs saying that the concept of wealth does not involve material riches alone. A rich mind is one that has the capacity to think about other people in society and in the world at large who are less fortunate. The world of the future will need people who can help each other, like members of the Sangha and their common faith in Buddhism, and there will be a growing need to create such communities.

Shakyamuni taught that it does not matter how much people listen to the teachings. If they do not practice them, it is as if they have heard nothing. Thus he placed an emphasis on the importance of religious practice. How wonderful it would be if all Rissho Kosei-kai members were to create a community that might enable those gathered together to joyfully and cheerfully engage in the kind of practice that leads to true happiness.

What then is the best way to encourage members to participate in Rissho Kosei-kai branch activities and make determined efforts to find ways to improve them? By now, most of us have heard about the loneliness of crowds. Despite the fact that large numbers of people live in close proximity in urban centers, warm feelings shared among them are increasingly rare. All the same, people do talk to one another in special situations, such as fishermen who do not know

each other cheerfully discussing the day's catch, or mountain hikers greeting each other on the trail, or train passengers who are strangers to each other joining in complaints when there are delays.

Such communications stem from shared experience. It goes without saying that sharing common experiences brings people closer together. What kind of common experience are they going to share when members are invited to join branch activities? Of course there are differences, depending on the age group, for example, or the characteristics of the locality in which members are living, and it is important to consider these when planning how best to utilize the situation to provide a good experience for members.

Since I have never made any special study of philosophy, I cannot offer a conclusive statement, but it is my understanding that Western thought is centered on human reason. On the other hand, there is a tendency in Eastern ways of thinking—and Buddhism is the representation of this—to consider the ultimate to be the buddha-nature inherent in all human beings, while paying close attention to ignorance and defilements, in other words, those ugly desires that also reside in human nature. Buddhism contains an insight that penetrates to the limits of human nature, recognizing that it is capable of performing terrible deeds in trying to fulfill personal desires.

History teaches us that many ideologies have developed at different times as influence on various societies, and sometimes on the entire world. One after another, many of these turned into empty theory and lost all influence because they did not sufficiently concern themselves with the fundamental ignorance lying deep inside human nature. □

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 8

The Five Hundred Disciples Receive the Prediction of Their Destiny

(3)

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

TEXT “And worshiping the tathagatas, / And guarding the treasury of the Law, / He shall afterward become a buddha / Whose title will be Law Radiance. / His domain, named Excellent Purity, / Will be formed of the precious seven, / And his kalpa be called Jewel Radiance. / His bodhisattvas, a great host, / Infinite kotis in number, / All accomplished in great transcendent [faculties] / And perfect in dread powers, / Will fill that domain to the full. / Numberless also will be his shravakas / With the three clear [views] and eight emancipations, / Who have attained the four unhindered wisdoms. / Such will be his monks.

COMMENTARY *Dread powers.* This term indicates the wonderful power of exerting a good influence on other people almost without their knowing it.

• *Monks.* The Chinese character *seng*, translated as “monks,” is an abbreviation of a compound that means *sangha*, the community of bhikshus. Another Chinese compound used to translate “monk,” *seng-lü*, also originally had the same meaning as *sangha*. The character *lü*, incidentally, derives from a character meaning “backbone,” the chain of individual vertebra. Thus monks are those who are closely linked to their fellow practitioners to become the central pillar of society as a body.

Though it is often said that religious faith is a matter for the individual, this reflects the small-vehicle way of thinking. Even if an individual is saved, he or she will find it very difficult to generate the energy needed to liberate society as a whole. If there is a close-knit community of

religious believers in society, however, the individuals’ spiritual energy is magnified tenfold or a hundredfold and can work for society. We should remember that the words *seng* and *seng-lü* always indicate two or more practitioners and indicate the practitioners’ solidarity.

TEXT All the living in that domain / Will be free from carnal passions, / Pure and born by transformation, / Adorned with all the signs. / Joy in the Law and pleasure in meditation / Shall be their food, with no thought of other; / No womankind will be there, / Nor any evil ways. / The Bhikshu Purna, / Complete in all his merits, / Shall gain this pure land / Where the wise and sages abound. / Such are the boundless things of which / I have now but briefly spoken.”

COMMENTARY *Adorned with all the signs.* These signs are the thirty-two primary marks of physical excellence of a buddha.

TEXT Then the twelve hundred arhats of self-reliant mind reflected thus: “Delighted are we to gain this unprecedented [experience]. If the World-honored One would predict for each of us [our future destiny] as for the other great disciples, how glad we should be!”

COMMENTARY *Arhats.* These are people who have attained personal enlightenment, having accomplished the practice of the small vehicle and having removed all their

A tapestry displayed in the Horin-kaku Guest Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters in Tokyo, made from a painting by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, depicting Shakyamuni preaching the first discourse at Deer Park, Sarnath, after attaining enlightenment. Kaundinya, one of the five ascetics who heard the teaching, attained the first stage of enlightenment.

defilements; they are worthy of the respect of the world, since they have attained the highest state among shravakas.

TEXT The Buddha, knowing the thoughts in their minds, addressed Maha-Kashyapa, [saying]: "These twelve hundred arhats: let me now in their presence and in order predict [for them] Perfect Enlightenment. Among this assembly, my great disciple Kaundinya Bhikshu, after paying homage to sixty-two thousand kotis of buddhas, will become a buddha whose title will be Universal Light Tathagata, Worshipful, All Wise, Perfectly Enlightened in Conduct, Well Departed, Understander of the World, Peerless Leader, Controller, Teacher of Gods and Men, Buddha, World-honored One.

COMMENTARY *Kaundinya*. He is a historical figure who, having listened to the Buddha's first discourse, at Deer Park, was the first to reach the first stage of enlightenment, and became Shakyamuni's first disciple. Thereafter Shakyamuni called him Ajnata-Kaundinya, or Enlightened Kaundinya, the name he went by for the rest of his life.

Kaundinya was born into a Brahman family near Kapilavastu and was famous for his powers of divination. Since he is said to be the youngest of the Brahmans called by King Shuddhodana to predict the future of the newborn Prince Siddhartha, his innate capability must have been impressive indeed. When he found out that the prince had left the palace to renounce the world, he and four companions became wandering monks (one legend

says that they were sent by the king to protect Siddhartha), followed him, and practiced austerities with him in the woods near Gaya in the kingdom of Magadha.

Kaundinya therefore had a close relationship with Shakyamuni from the time of the prince's birth. He was a tolerant, compassionate, and learned man, skilled in teaching and leading others. Though he was one of the most senior monks in the Sangha, he was modest in manner and, seeing the attitude of young and influential monks like Shariputra and Maudgalyayana who behaved in a hesitant way, retired into the forest to undertake a life of quiet meditation. He served Shakyamuni devotedly and tirelessly all his life.

TEXT Of [the rest of] those arhats, five hundred—Uruvilva-Kashyapa, Gaya-Kashyapa, Nadi-Kashyapa, Kalo-dayin, Udayin, Aniruddha, Revata, Kapphina, Vakkula, Cunda, Svagata, and others—all will attain to Perfect Enlightenment, all with the same title, namely, Universal Light."

COMMENTARY *Uruvilva-Kashyapa, Gaya-Kashyapa, Nadi-Kashyapa*. These renowned brothers are commonly called "the Three Kashyapas." They too were from a Brahman family and were converted by Shakyamuni during his journey from Deer Park to Rajagriha in Magadha. They were among the most senior of all the disciples. (For the legend of their conversion, see the November/December 1995 issue of DHARMA WORLD.)

• *Kalodayin*. This person was the most problematic and unconventional of the Buddha's disciples. Born on the same day as Prince Siddhartha, he was the son of the Brahman who was chief minister to King Shuddhodana. He grew into a handsome young nobleman, full of talent, eloquent, lively to the extent of wildness, and very attracted to women. He had a splendid physique and excelled at sports, being second only to Prince Siddhartha in archery. It seems that Kalodayin's relationship with the prince was like that of a fellow student. He was a typical merry, wild young nobleman.

King Shuddhodana made the most of Kalodayin's abilities, employing him as what would today be termed a foreign minister or a roving ambassador, and Kalodayin was very successful in this important position. When the king got wind of the prince's plan to enter religious life, he made Kalodayin the prince's attendant, in an attempt to woo him toward a liking for worldly pleasures. Kalodayin was certainly the very person for the task.

Kalodayin, carefree and cheerful by nature, strove to weaken the prince's resolve by leading him toward a life that fully affirmed life's delights. He spoke eloquently about the prince's disgust for women, telling him he had been just regarding them as objects of passion. "If you try approaching women with respect," he said, "you will feel completely different about them." This was a view of women characteristic of Kalodayin. He also tried to bind the prince by friendship, saying, "Friends help each other and give each other the courage to weather the storms of life. Friendship is a very good thing."

Since the prince's resolve to renounce the world was deeply and firmly rooted, however, nothing Kalodayin said could move him. It can be said that his efforts actually served to strengthen the prince's resolve. Following the prince's departure from the palace, Kalodayin held great authority as a senior minister in Kapilavastu, and his lifestyle continued as before. Because of the friendly relations with the neighboring kingdom of Kosala, he often went as an envoy to its capital, Shravasti. There he lodged with the minister Megha. Being tempted by Megha's wife, Gupta, he suddenly became afraid of people's gaze. After Megha's death he openly took Gupta as his local wife through the political machinations of King Prasenajit. This Gupta was the woman who later became a bhikshuni, following Kalodayin after he became a bhikshu, and who caused a problem by seducing him.

When King Shuddhodana heard that his son had attained enlightenment and become a buddha, he sent frequent messengers urging him to come home, but all of them remained with Shakyamuni and became his followers. Not a single one returned. Still distraught three years after

Shakyamuni had attained enlightenment, the king finally sent Kalodayin as a messenger to Shakyamuni. Since Shakyamuni himself considered that this was the right time to visit his father, he decided to return to Kapilavastu. Overjoyed, Kalodayin returned with his report. By that time, however, he himself had already been instructed by Shakyamuni and been ordained.

Though Kalodayin was a bhikshu, he seems to have retained much of his former wildness. He led young shramaneras (novices) around the villages, making fun of people and creating noisy disturbances. He beat young monks and made them cry, fought with followers of other religious teachings, and shot down crows that were nesting in the woods near the Jetavana monastery with his bow, becoming the focus of criticism from lay believers. That was not all. One day he happened to catch sight of the naked figure of Mallika, the famous wife of King Prasenajit (she was later converted by Kalodayin). Full of pride, he announced what he had seen publicly and made a bonfire in King Prasenajit's garden and burned it up. He was truly an unruly monk.

Shakyamuni of course warned Kalodayin seriously about his behavior, and at such times he repented wholeheartedly. Yet eventually the spirit of mischief would again arise in his heart and he would cause further trouble. Yet no matter what he did, it was hard to hate him, and since he was often kind to people, he won their affection and trust. Shakyamuni seems to have watched carefully over his nature.

As might be expected of someone with such a character, once he attained personal enlightenment Kalodayin showed great skill in spreading the teaching. He was especially skilled at preaching to families. Many a time he brought husband and wife together to the Buddha's Law; in Shravasti alone he led one thousand households to take refuge in the Buddha's Law, in this respect surpassing all other monks in the Sangha. His final act was an attempt to reform a housewife he had previously converted, who had maintained a relationship with a bandit leader. He was deceived by the woman, who was hopelessly in love with the bandit, and was killed by the man. It was a martyrdom somehow typical of his life as a whole.

Kalodayin was a man with many weak points, but these defects became strong points after his enlightenment. This gives us much food for thought. We should really respect Shakyamuni for his great tolerance in bringing Kalodayin to such a high level of spiritual attainment.

• *Udayin*. He had been a page of Siddhartha's since the prince's childhood. He later became a disciple of the Buddha, but no particular achievements or incidents about his life have been recorded.

• *Aniruddha*. Ashamed of himself for having dozed off in Shakyamuni's presence, Aniruddha vowed not to sleep again for the rest of his life and eventually went blind. His natural purity and his stubbornness are both apparent in this anecdote. I have already related the heartwarming story of how Shakyamuni helped the blind Aniruddha thread a needle to mend his ragged robe (see the May/June 1992 issue of DHARMA WORLD). He was one of the Buddha's ten great disciples.

• *Revata*. The elder brother of the famous Shuddhi-panthaka, Revata was the son of a Brahman of Shravasti. He was well versed in the Brahmanic teachings and had five hundred disciples. Once when he was preaching in a grove outside the city he noticed that the townspeople had flocked out to greet some travelers. Upon inquiry his disciples informed him that the travelers were Shariputra and Maudgalyayana. Revata said to his disciples, "Those two men are of the same Brahman birth as I. How spineless they are to be following Shakyamuni, a Kshatriya. I can't see any reason that people should be coming out so excitedly to see them." Among his disciples was one who believed in the Buddha's teaching. "That is not how it is at all," he replied. "Those two men have attained enlightenment and are of great stature and virtue."

By nature a faithful, modest person, Revata mulled over what he had been told for days. One day he went secretly to a grove on the outskirts of the city, where he saw a bhikshu walking quietly. Asking for instruction, he was told in a kindly manner the rudiments of the Buddha's teaching. Having heard them he wanted to take refuge in the Dharma at once and visited the bhikshu frequently to receive the teaching from him. Finally he took ordination from that bhikshu. During the day he studied the teaching and at night he practiced samadhi. In the course of religious practice his mind became unhindered and he finally attained unrestricted freedom. At this point he visited the Jetavana monastery for the first time, met Shakyamuni, and became his disciple.

Unlike his brother, Shuddhi-panthaka, Revata's innate capability was great, but he is not known for any unusual incidents. He was highly respected as an elder by the Sangha, especially for the depth of his meditation. (One tradition says that Revata was Shariputra's youngest brother.)

• *Kapphina*. Kapphina was born a prince into a Shakya royal household. He was a close friend of Aniruddha's from childhood. Immediately after Shakyamuni's return to Kapi-lavastu he took ordination, with Ananda and Aniruddha, adoring Shakyamuni. Abandoning his royal position, he sought the Way. As a bhikshu he was of surpassing virtue and was considered the foremost in heroic effort in practice. It is said that even the Buddha respected him.

• *Vakkula*. Vakkula was born in Kosambi, the capital of the kingdom of Vamsa, but nothing is known about the circumstances of his ordination and how he became a disciple of the Buddha. He was a senior monk in the Sangha and was praised by Shakyamuni as the foremost in good health and few desires. Legend says that eighty years or so after he became a bhikshu an old friend visited him. In answer to his friend's questions, he replied, "For eighty years I have neither worn robes offered by lay believers nor eaten anything that was not donated as alms. I have never entered the lodgings of bhikshunis, nor have I had a novice to look after me. I have never been ill, and I have never leaned against a wall or a tree. I will enter nirvana on death seated in the lotus position." This shows how selfless and disinterested and how diligent in religious practice Vakkula was.

Vakkula seems to have known his natural endowments very well; he did not attempt to vie with prominent men like Shariputra and Ananda in preaching the Dharma, saying, "I stay out of the teaching work," but devoted himself quietly to deep contemplation of the Dharma. It is said that when he died at the age of one hundred and sixty he entered nirvana in the presence of a large number of bhikshus, seated in the lotus position, as he had forecast. In all his years he never taught one word of the Dharma.

Legend says that many years later, when King Ashoka made pilgrimage to the sites associated with Buddhism with his ministers, he paid his respects at the stupas of Shariputra, Maudgalyayana, and Maha-Kashyapa at the Jetavana monastery. When he came to Vakkula's stupa, he turned and asked the minister beside him, "What were the achievements of this person in his life?" The minister replied, "He was praised by the World-honored One as being foremost in good health and few desires. However, he is said to have never preached the Dharma for the sake of the people." Ashoka said, "I will give a donation of only twenty shells [roughly twenty U.S. cents in today's currency] to one who strove only for his own liberation and never taught the Dharma to others." Previously he had donated gold at the stupas of the other great disciples. No sooner had he made the donation, though, than the shells all fell off the stupa and came rolling back to Ashoka's feet. A tradition has it that the ministers were deeply impressed, saying, "Vakkula remained a man of few desires even after death, and did not accept even a mere twenty shells."

One who does not preach the Dharma to others lacks qualification as a bodhisattva. People have different natural gifts and personalities, however, and it was perhaps unavoidable that there should have been such an idiosyncratic person among the Buddha's many disciples. In Vakkula's case, too, it might be said that he instructed people by preaching the Dharma without words, through his lack of

desires and his diligence in religious practice, and in this sense he too could be a bodhisattva in the guise of a shravaka. That is why Shakyamuni predicted Vakkula's future buddhahood.

• *Cunda*. Cunda is an alias of Revata's younger brother, Shuddhi-panthaka. Unlike his brother, Cunda was very backward intellectually. After his brother's ordination, he spent his days idly, unable even to undertake household duties because of his handicap. Eventually he too was ordained at the urging of his brother. He was not even able to remember his own name, however, and wore a plaque around his neck with his name written on it. As a monk he was ordered for a start to memorize only one verse: "Commit no evil of body, word, and mind; do not harm sentient beings; contemplate emptiness in right mindfulness; thus will you escape unprofitable suffering." For three months he went out into the nearby fields trying with all his might to memorize the words, but was unable to do so; young shepherds playing nearby did so, however. He held the boys in high regard and had them recite the verse for him. At the end of the three months there was an assembly of bhikshus, where the monks spoke of what they had realized through their experience, but Cunda was unable to remember the verse. His brother encouraged him to the end, but finally pushed him out of the Jetavana monastery, saying, "Leave the Sangha, because you are completely incapable of learning the Buddha Dharma."

Shakyamuni found Cunda crying outside the gate of the monastery and asked him what was wrong. Still crying, Cunda replied, "I am so stupid I can't learn the Buddha Dharma any longer." In reply, Shakyamuni told him in verse:

"He who realizes his own foolishness is wise.
One who calls himself wise, being stupid,
Is truly a fool."

In addition Shakyamuni gave him a broom and ordered him while sweeping to memorize the words

"Sweep away all dust;
Remove all grime."

Thereafter, Cunda tried hard every day to memorize the words as he swept. However, no sooner did he memorize "Sweep away all dust" than he forgot "Remove all grime," and if he said "Remove all grime" he could not produce "Sweep away all dust." Whenever he forgot, he grabbed a nearby bhikshu and had the monk tell him the words. He thus strove with all his mind to master his task.

Doing something intently is a formidable thing. Not only did Cunda come to memorize the words, but he realized

that the dust was mental dust and the grime was mental grime, and so rid his mind of all stain and became utterly refreshed. One day his brother, Revata, went to him thinking to try to teach him again, but as soon as he saw Cunda's face he noticed the nobility that now marked it. Revata was astounded and said, "You've attained enlightenment!" Cunda just looked at his brother with shining eyes, in silence. The rumor that Cunda had gained enlightenment spread, both within and without the Sangha, creating a great sensation. People following other beliefs commented sneeringly, "If the Buddha Dharma is something that a fool like him can gain enlightenment in, it can't be worth much!" Even people in the Buddhist order remained half in doubt. And so Shakyamuni compassionately confirmed Cunda's enlightenment to all inside and outside the Sangha, taking Cunda with him when he went out and ordering him to preach to the bhikshunis. At last Cunda had become a leading figure in the Sangha. Cunda is a valuable example to us concerning the difference between secular wisdom and religious enlightenment.

• *Svagata*. Svagata was an elder renowned for his supernatural powers. He had a weakness for liquor, however. Once Shakyamuni found him lying drunk in front of the monastery gate; it is said that this misconduct was a valuable lesson to the bhikshus. Nevertheless, since he received his prediction of buddhahood, he must have accumulated much fine merit.

It is of great significance that all these people were given the same title, Tathagata Universal Light, signifying the tathagata who would illuminate every part of the world. It was already decided that five hundred such tathagatas would appear in the world, and seven hundred more would also become tathagatas, since later we will see the same prediction, "The other band of shravakas will also be like them." Furthermore, as indicated by the Buddha's later words, "To these, who are not in this assembly, do you proclaim my words," people like the five thousand shravakas who had previously left the assembly, and even ourselves as the Buddha's disciples of a later time, are also assured of becoming the Tathagata Universal Light through learning the teaching of the Lotus Sutra and putting it into practice. As the number of buddhas titled Tathagata Universal Light gradually grows, the world will become the Land of Tranquil Light, perfectly illuminated. This is truly a wonderful prospect.

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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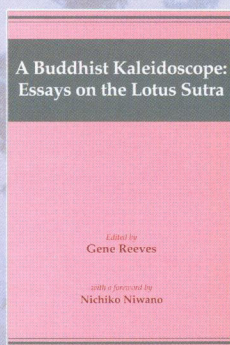
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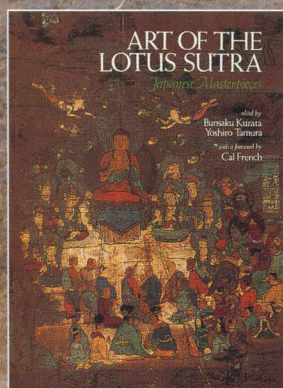
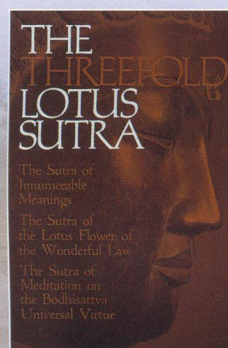
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