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Cover photo: The Dragon Princess offering a precious jewel to the Buddha. The frontispiece for chapter 12, "Devadatta," of the Lotus Sutra, bound as one of the thirty-three ornamental scrolls popularly called the *Heike Nokyo* (Heike Family Votive Sutra), enshrined at the Itsukushima Shrine, Hiroshima Prefecture. The dedication of the *Heike Nokyo* was initiated by the Heike clan leader, Taira no Kiyomori, in 1164, as an expression of his faith. The Threefold Lotus Sutra, along with Kiyomori's invocation and copies of the Heart Sutra and the Amida Sutra, were bound as hand scrolls by thirty-two members of the clan for donation to the Itsukushima Shrine. National Treasure. Story on pp. 26–30.

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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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The Increasing Importance of Dialogue and Cooperation among Religions

by Michio Matsubara

In June of this year, the sovereignty of Iraq was transferred from the United States to the nation's interim government. Now, it is thought that the focus of problems in Iraq will shift from political and military issues to reconstruction and the establishment of peace, which will require the assistance of civil society as a whole.

However, in order to facilitate the reconstruction of Iraq and establish peace in the insecurity-plagued country, aid in the form of financial and other material assistance is not enough. What is more important is how to formulate international cooperation so that war never breaks out again. What contribution can religions make to help ensure a lasting peace in Iraq?

I believe that what is now the most important thing for the world's religionists to do is to have honest and frequent dialogues with their counterparts in Islamic countries for the purpose of deepening mutual understanding. As we all know, there are many throughout the world who misunderstand, and harbor prejudices against, the Islamic tradition. In order to remove such misunderstandings and prejudices, I believe that, first and foremost, there is an urgent need for dialogue among religionists.

But peace is not something that can be easily brought about merely through dialogue among religionists. In this world, there are some problems that cannot be solved through political negotiations or military intervention. It is precisely for that reason that religionists should go beyond having dialogues and just cooperating with other religionists; they must also have repeated dialogues with, and establish relationships of cooperation with, the policy makers of various fields.

Although the history of dialogue and cooperation among religions spans a mere five decades, no one can deny that it is now a worldwide trend. All religions are different in teachings and rituals, so there are bound to be some dis-

agreements among them concerning the outlook for the world or the concept of justice. However, if religionists listen carefully to the voices of their deities, and if they also spare no effort in working together to achieve peace—the common prayer of all humanity—then they will surely be able to overcome the many obstacles facing them. In Japan, where traditions based upon Shintoism had been preserved from ancient times, there has also been acceptance of many other religions, such as Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity; thus, there are quite a few suggestions that Japan could make concerning the future of religious dialogue and cooperation. Therefore, the role and the mission of Japanese religionists are great.

Every person in every country is endowed with an irreplaceable and precious life; we are all brothers and sisters traveling together aboard “Spaceship Earth.” In Buddhist terms, we are all children of the Buddha, and we all have the potential to become buddhas ourselves, while helping others to attain buddhahood as well. We describe this concept with the words “One Vehicle.” It is in this spirit of the “One Vehicle” that Rissho Kosei-kai members have taken part in the Donate-a-Meal Campaign for the past thirty years in a tiny but practical method to help eradicate hunger and poverty. Each month, the members give up several meals—experiencing in some small way pain and discomfort of those suffering from hunger and poverty—and contribute the cost of those meals to the campaign.

In 2006, the eighth assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace will be held in Kyoto, and some of the money collected from the Donate-a-Meal Campaign will be used to cover part of the cost of the conference. In order to ensure that the conference does not stop at being a place where the world's great religious leaders merely congregate, not just the Japanese religionists but the participants from all over the world should make the most of the opportunity offered by this conference to take concrete, practical steps toward achieving better international dialogue and cooperation. □

Michio Matsubara is the director of the External Affairs Department at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters in Tokyo.

Bringing Out the Best in Each of Us

An Interview with Bishop Gunnar Stålsett

The Right Reverend Gunnar Stålsett, Bishop of Oslo of the Church of Norway and formerly a member of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee, was in Tokyo in May to attend the presentation ceremony of the 21st Niwano Peace Prize as the chair of the Selection Committee of the prize.

At that time, DHARMA WORLD interviewed Bishop Stålsett on the responsibility common to people of faith when the threat of terrorism continues in many parts of the world. Bishop Stålsett has also been actively involved in efforts for reconciliation and peace building as a president of the World Conference of Religions for Peace and co-chair of the European Council of Religious Leaders.

How do you see the present world situation, in which many people must live under the threat of terrorism?

I believe that terrorism concerns all of us when we speak about international terrorism. Thereby we say that terrorism is a dimension of everybody's life. A terrorist attack in Spain is a terrorist attack in Europe, and it is a terrorist attack in the world. So the threat of terrorism is in many ways a new world war. And the difficulty with this new world war is that all the rules that we have for warfare are related to types of war other than international terrorism. This creates a very difficult situation on a national and international level. One may ask, for instance, if the United Nations has any appropriate rules and a system for dealing with the threat of international terrorism.

What type of religious wisdom is most needed in today's world?

One of the main challenges today is to transform religion so that it is not part of the problem but part of the solution. We have a long history of religious warfare in every

part of the world. And sadly, even in many conflicts today, religion is a driving force or is being misused as the force of conflict. I believe that it is an obligation for people of faith, people of religion, to bring out the best in their own traditions and to see how they match with the best in other traditions.

For instance, in the Christian faith, we have what we call the Great Commandment, which is to love God above all, and your neighbor as yourself. This fundamental commandment we share explicitly with the Jewish and with the Muslim traditions. But it is a fundamental observation by all the religions that there is respect for that which is holy, and this has to be related to our fellow beings, along with respect for oneself. These three things go together. If we only say you should love God above everything, then that would be an invitation for fanaticism and fundamentalism. Love of God needs to be tried and tested against love and respect for your fellow beings. And there is also the element of self-respect, which means that you take your own role seriously. We must all believe this: "I am a person who can make a difference." This, I think, is expressed in what we call the Great Commandment.

Bishop Stålsett led a delegation from the European Council of Religious Leaders and the WCRP to Kosovo and Serbia in April to meet with senior religious leaders and help reduce tensions between Serbian and Albanian communities.

What can religionists do to bring peace to the world, especially through interreligious cooperation?

Two weeks ago [April 27–29] I led a delegation to Kosovo and to Serbia. Since the war ended there five years ago, the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) has established an interreligious council. And we felt that by providing a forum in which the Muslim and Christian leaders might come together, we were making a real contribution toward bridge-building and reconciliation. And it had really proven to be effective until March of this year. There was a new outbreak of violence: four thousand people had to leave the country; about thirty people were killed; and many churches and mosques were destroyed. So we decided to send a delegation from the WCRP and from the European Council of Religious Leaders to speak to all friends in the Christian community and the Muslim community to try to bring them together. It was very difficult, because the resentment and the anger were so deep; but they accepted our invitation for a meeting later this year, where they will participate together with religious leaders from other parts of Europe, and we will go directly to their experience and ask what they can do. In my view, it is important for those who are in the middle of the conflicts to also develop the solutions to their own problems. That is not something that

is dictated from abroad. The people on the ground need to feel that this is our responsibility. We also have the same situation in Sri Lanka, where the WCRP has been involved, and my country, Norway, which has been involved for a long time, together with Japan. And this shows not only that nations can work together for peace, as do Japan and Norway, but also that religions can work together for peace. And sometimes you get the synergy of both the government and nongovernmental organizations working together.

Please share with us your message for Buddhists.

I believe that the Buddhist tradition is important in today's world. It has a profound ethical basis that relates not only to every human being, but also to creation as such. In my conversations with the Dalai Lama, we shared an element where a Christian and a Buddhist can appreciate each other's contribution, and my appreciation of Buddhist spirituality is particularly related to the concept of respect for every creature and for nature. In the present age, when we see how far we have exploited nature and the environment, we find ourselves in the position of destroying the human habitat for future generations. Here I believe that Buddhist spirituality may reinforce the spirituality of the Christian tradition. □

Buddhism Spreads to the West: Liberation Requires Eternal Vigilance

by Taigen Dan Leighton

The principles of liberty and justice for all as articulated in the U.S. Declaration of Independence resonate strongly with the Mahayana ideal of universal liberation.

In the first half of the Lotus Sutra, on a few occasions Shakyamuni Buddha summons those who might be willing and able to help share the Dharma (the teaching and the truth) revealed in the sutra during the future “evil age” that will come long after the Buddha has departed.

I have always taken this story personally, as if the Bud-

dha were referring to our own time. He must have been speaking about our present age, with its proliferation of nuclear weapons and proposals for “usable” nuclear weapons, as well as of our legacy of nuclear waste from our last half-century’s nuclear energy, waste that will be deadly for tens of thousands of years. Perhaps the Buddha foresaw the current environmental devastation from the pollution of our air and oceans, from global warming and resultant climatic change, from massive deforestation, from all the plant and animal species that have been exterminated in our lifetime, from the abandonment of the Kyoto Protocol. The Buddha must have been warning us about the massive corruption of governments and economic institutions; about terrorism and “preemptive” wars for financial gain; and about massive redistribution of resources and wealth toward those who are already the world’s most wealthy citizens. In such an age, which enshrines greed and overconsumption and thereby has an impact on all of us in our personal awareness and conduct as well, who could possibly bring forth in response the wisdom and compassion of the Awakened Ones?

In the pivotal story in the middle of the Lotus Sutra, bodhisattvas visiting from distant world systems offer to return in such a future evil age to share the teaching. But the Buddha tells them it is not necessary. And thereupon, myriad native bodhisattvas emerge from the open space under the earth where they have been dwelling, and pledge to sustain diligent beneficial practice throughout vast ages of time. This leads to the central revelation of the Lotus Sutra—that the Buddha only seems to pass away into nirvana, as an encouragement for us to practice. In reality, the

Taigen Dan Leighton is a priest in the Soto Zen lineage and Dharma heir of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. He teaches at Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. Rev. Leighton is author or cotranslator of several books, including Faces of Compassion: Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expression; Dogen’s Extensive Record; and The Wholehearted Way. He leads the Mountain Source Sangha meditation groups in the San Francisco Bay Area.

A Zen center in Berlin, Germany—where the search for deeper meaning can take place within a secular society.

Buddha has been present, practicing in the world for an extraordinarily long time, and he will continue to be present for even longer.

How is it that these diligent bodhisattvas, and even the Buddha himself, remain present in this difficult world we are now occupying? What does this story represent and what guidance does it offer for the conflicts and well-being of people today?

Another significant event of the past half century, along with the accumulation of nuclear waste, is the noteworthy spread of Buddhist practice in the West. There have been many gateways for Buddhism's interface with Western culture, including modern psychology, modern scientific insights into neurology and physics, the remnants of contemplative traditions in Western religions, and the search for deeper meaning in increasingly secular, materialist societies. All of these, along with Western feminist insights, have in turn affected the Buddhism that is emerging in this modern transition. But another major avenue for the entry of Buddhist teachings into the West, perhaps especially for the United States, and the gateway I will address here, is the democratic principle of liberty and justice for all. The Mahayana ideals of universal liberation, of benefiting all beings and of awakening together with all beings, resonate strongly with American social ideals of inclusion and freedom.

The principles of liberty and justice for all, along with

the inalienable right of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," were articulated by the founding fathers of the United States. Especially, the writings of Thomas Jefferson offer comparison to Buddhist perspectives. Jefferson's writings remain a touchstone for these worthy principles, despite modern disclosures of his deplorable personal shortcomings, including not only slaveholding, but his having fathered children with one of his slaves. While Jefferson made some efforts toward the abolition of slavery early in his career, he succumbed to the conditioning and economic imperatives of the slave plantation culture in which he was raised. And yet, his enunciations of personal liberty for all, along with those of some of his contemporaries, such as Thomas Paine and Patrick Henry, remain suggestive of modern views of liberation.

Jefferson was thinking of the corruption of governments and the need for sustained public oversight when he said, "The cost of liberty is eternal vigilance." He even once expressed the view that a political revolution might be necessary every twenty years. Of course, the American ideals of political freedom may seem feeble compared with the total liberation and freedom from our own inner greed, hatred, and delusion sought after by Buddhist devotees. However, slightly altering Jefferson's saying to "the cost of liberation is eternal vigilance," we find a rather cogent Buddhist motto. The Buddhist practices of mindfulness and meditative awareness form another manner of ongoing vigilance.

Buddhism did not end with Shakyamuni Buddha's unsurpassed complete awakening. Rather, the Buddhist order had just begun with the Buddha's liberation, and he himself continued ongoing meditation practice throughout his life. Similarly, for Buddhist devotees, in whatever age, the work of liberation from karmic hindrances and for the sake of helping all suffering beings involves sustaining the gaze of vigilant attention. Practically speaking, one must keep vigil over and attend to one's own inner intentions and habitual patterns derived from deep-rooted greed, anger, and confusion. Insight into these habit patterns may be transformative, but it is not usually sufficient to eradicate them. Our humanity includes the recurrence of personal shortcomings.

Jefferson also declared that he vowed "eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man." This reflects the practice or vow of commitment, also central to awakening practice. Unfettered expression of insight and kindness, whether in the personal or societal realm, requires dedication and persistence. One traditional version of the bodhisattva vows is to save all sentient beings, to cut through all delusive afflictions, to enter all pathways to the Dharma, and to realize the Buddha Way. These inconceivable vows cannot be enacted based on rational or intellectual calculations. But they can be supported by vigilant attention to our conduct and awareness, dedication to helpfulness, and humble familiarity with our own limitations.

The Mahayana orientation encompasses kindness and forgiveness both to our own personal situation and to that of the beings in the world around us. This is grounded on the fundamental Buddhist principle of interdependence. All beings are deeply interconnected in ways that we cannot possibly trace. Through "eternal" or continuing meditative vigilance we come to see how we ourselves concoct the process of alienation from the world, how we estrange ourselves by solidifying our sense of separation of self and other. We study this process very closely. Through this work of eternal vigilance we can begin to sense the freedom from fundamental ignorance and confusion that the Buddha proclaimed as he awakened. We can recognize the possibility of radically awakened presence in harmony with totality. Then the Mahayana universal vehicle goes further to show that we cannot be truly liberated if others nearby are suffering. It is not just a matter of clearing up our own psyches in order for us to become happy and free, with all problems resolved. We see that the others around us actually affect us, and that ultimately we are completely connected with them. We truly cannot be completely free while those around us are tyrannized, whether by societal or personal oppression. Ultimately, Buddhist awakening

Thomas Jefferson

requires liberty and justice for all, or justice and liberation for everyone.

So how do we manifest this Dharmic awareness to benefit the world around us? The American principle of separation of church and state, initiated primarily by Jefferson, does not mean divorcing spiritual values from societal concerns. Jefferson was deeply concerned about spiritual and ethical matters in his writings, whatever his personal deficiencies. Separation of church and state was introduced so as to prevent the imposition of any one official dogma about religious values. All individuals were free to find their own ways of worshiping and expressing the sacred. This was not intended to encourage amorality or secular materialism.

In Asian history, Buddhists often retreated from involvement in political affairs, realizing the futility of this when there were no effective cultural or social vehicles for reform. Living in feudal cultures without even the ideals of free speech or representative government, many Buddhists realized that their primary impact on their society might be through expressing an alternative example to the usual worldly pursuits. Of course there have been reform move-

ments by Asian Buddhists, even in the face of great difficulty and societal control. And some Buddhist leaders chose to befriend and try to influence political rulers, as instilling Buddhist values often tempered the use of power somewhat. But we might also recognize that modern democratic principles, even when we see them merely given lip service and cynically abused, provide a fresh opportunity for helpful bodhisattvic activity.

Mahayana perspective may clarify the principle of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” as the pursuit of happiness for all beings. It is noteworthy that Jefferson insisted that this portion of the U.S. Declaration of Independence be changed from an initial draft calling for “life, liberty, and the pursuit of property.” The pursuit of happiness, even when not conflated with pure acquisition of property, has often been expressed in frivolous or even harmful manners, informed by commercial and materialistic consumerism. And yet, when we leaven the pursuit of happiness with the Buddhist intention, “May all beings be happy,” we can understand and act to support happiness in a wider sense. Such happiness would not require hedonistic over-consumption, but would honor the contentment of appreciation and gratitude for that which our life and the world already offers us. We can see happiness as related to a sense of wonder at the beauty of the world, and in the possibility of kindness and cooperation. Buddhist principles might help us share such positive outlooks and also help us respond to societally produced suffering on behalf of others and all.

How can we in this modern “evil age,” as implied in the Lotus Sutra, sustain the gaze of constant vigilance, both in the public and personal spheres? Buddhist practice principles apply on three levels: to oneself, the awareness and conduct of one’s own body and mind; to all those we associate with directly in the course of our everyday activities when we arise from our particular meditative or other practices; and also to our society and culture, the entirety of the world around us. In this age of globalization and instant mass communication, events all around the world can have an impact on all of us. We cannot avoid our involvement and responsibility in world events.

The bodhisattva precepts can give us guidance in how to respond to the world around us, as well as how to care for our friends and family, and our own hearts and minds. How we each would respond appropriately may be very different depending on our individual capacities and limitations. The Buddhist principle of skillful means, also elaborated in the Lotus Sutra, would indicate that there could be a plethora of helpful modes with which to respond to the difficulties of society, from lobbying government represen-

tatives, to meditating silently for world peace, to acting with kindness toward those around us, to taking on deliberate projects or programs to alleviate specific social conditions that produce suffering.

We might say that all versions of the bodhisattva precepts or ethical guidelines arise from the basic practice of taking refuge in the Buddha. Informed by Buddhist practice, study, a realization of the pain of suffering, and the possibility of responding with calm and kindness, we turn toward that which feels most deeply true and aware. Taking refuge is learning to trust our engagement with reality. Without getting stuck in dogmatic or self-righteous attachment to one particular view of how that might appear, we look to see how we might respond to the troubles of the world, as well as of those around us.

Traditional Buddhist ethical principles provide guidance. One is the teaching of nonharming, *ahimsa* in Sanskrit. This means studying and knowing our own tendencies and habitual reactions well enough so that we do not cause harm in the world. But it also refers to our efforts to stop others from causing harm, not only in our immediate surroundings, but also in the world at large. Of course, actually preventing harm is not always possible. Often there is nothing to be done except to calmly witness, with continuing vigilance, the situation. But the bodhisattva practices of patience and skillful means inform our considerations as we wait to see when we might have an opportunity to respond helpfully in the face of harm.

Another Mahayana imperative with ethical implications is the vow to benefit all beings. Not only self-serving conduct that seeks to surpass others, but any action on behalf of some to the detriment of others is problematic from this all-inclusive perspective. Nationalist or tribal policies and efforts at conquest are revealed as shortsighted when we understand the true interconnectedness of the world we share. We might find a way to benefit ourselves and our friends and family, an exclusive group of people, which may work for a while. But the reality is that we have to consider all beings, and see that we are not separate from them. For example, Palestinians and Israelis are closely related, yet they are trapped in a cycle of vengeance, and many are unwilling to listen to each other’s pain. Some are still attempting to do peacemaking. But there will never be lasting peace until Israelis can hear the pain and suffering of the Palestinians, and until Palestinians also can hear the fear and suffering of the Israelis.

The ten major bodhisattva precepts, which are elaborated in the Brahma Net Sutra, include basic ethical imperatives such as not killing, not stealing, not lying, not supporting intoxication, not indulging in sexual misconduct, and not

nurturing anger. Each of these includes positive aspects as well as negative, as not killing involves supporting life and vitality. Each of the precepts applies not only to our own personal conduct, but also to social values in the world around us. Not killing and supporting life implies activity not only to oppose war, but also to support a reasonable livelihood for people. Ultimately, the precept of not killing requires supporting the possibility of a decent quality of life for all people. The societal implications of this precept involve affording everyone not only a minimal standard of material capacity, but also educating all to find spiritual meaning and nourishment in their lives. Not killing also implies supporting the other forms of life in our environment and upholding a healthy regard for the well-being of the planet.

The precept about not lying involves truth-telling. We try to speak our own truth as best we can, and that includes knowing that we do not know the entire truth. We do not know all the answers. This applies to considering the truth of our own lives, including acknowledging our own personal limitations. And it also applies to looking at the realities of our interactions with those around us, and of our culture. The more we are willing to say what we see, hear each other, communicate and consider other perspectives, and actually work at hearing the truth, the more aware we will be of what is really happening. In our society, this involves being willing to speak the truth to power. This is the realm of Jefferson's "eternal vigilance," which applies to our governments as well as to ourselves. Speaking the truth of society means not just accepting what the mainstream media present, but really investigating and sharing information. This is the practice and the precept of telling the truth.

We now live in a world of fear, in which violence is used against innocent civilians by terrorists and by governments. And our governments seek to increase our sense of fear. Many governmental and economic institutions have become shamelessly corrupt, and the inequities between the very wealthy and those less fortunate around the globe are increasing dramatically. In such a context, the precepts of Buddhist liberation must be applied not only to our own personal way of life, but also to the problems of the world around us. These Mahayana precepts, informed by the attitude of eternal vigilance, give us the possibility of responding with dignity, helping to lessen the suffering of the world. Thus we can act to support kindness and awareness in the world, to promote liberty and justice for all, and to face our fears without seeking to escape from the reality around us. In such a way the teachings of the Buddha, including those of the Lotus Sutra, can still inform and illuminate the world. □

A bronze statue of Kannon (Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara) enshrined in Fumon Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters in Tokyo.

Our World, Our Jewel: Engaged Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra

by Bret Lortie

Although the sutra does not contain specific instructions for changing the world, its liberation theology has spawned many social reform movements, especially in Japan.

Until recently I failed to see any obvious connection between Buddhist practice and active social reform. In my professional work, where I manage the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, a magazine devoted to peace and the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons, I work for positive social transformation through education and open reporting on secretive institutions of power. In my personal life, I have used Buddhist practice to work for inner change and transformation. As Tara Brach said in a seminar I attended last summer, Buddhism provides “a way to formulate a wise and compassionate response to the suffering of the world.” Since encountering the Lotus Sutra last spring, I have found that this dichotomy between individual practice and social justice work has begun to break down.

Perhaps Buddhist practice does not need to be one that ultimately removes the devout practitioner from the world—as has been the case in traditional Buddhism. Refining what it means to embed oneself in the Sangha (the Buddhist community in which enlightenment is possible) opens up new ways to practice compassion. Donald Lopez, a professor of Buddhist and Tibetan studies at the University of Michigan, says in *The Story of Buddhism* that a Buddhist “is generally defined as someone who seeks refuge in the three jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha” (Lopez, 16). The Sangha, he notes, is interpreted in different ways. Sometimes it means specifically those who have obtained nirvana; sometimes it means the community of nuns and monks; other times it means more generally those who follow the Buddha’s teachings. Having read the Lotus Su-

tra, I have become aware of a fourth way to define Sangha: as the world community of which we are all a part.

With the number of movements inspired by the Lotus Sutra that actively engage this larger Sangha—comprising Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike—there must be something in that sutra that inspires its followers to define the term Sangha more broadly than traditional Buddhism does. If, as the Lotus Sutra teaches, everyone is a bodhi-sattva and therefore a potential future buddha, then excluding any being from the Sangha, even through neglect, is to

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look only at what is happening in the present, not at what will be. The numerous bodhisattva stories in the Lotus Sutra are there to provide us role models, says Gene Reeves, a consultant and teacher at Rissho Kosei-kai and a professor of religion at several institutions in the United States and Japan. “They play a role in the ever-present tension between what already is and what is yet to be,” he writes in “Appropriate Means as the Ethics of the Lotus Sutra” (*A Buddhist Kaleidoscope*, 386). In chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra, it says there are as many bodhisattvas as there are grains of sand along sixty thousand Ganges Rivers. The text also teaches that as long as people are buddhas for one another—serving and purifying this buddha-land and helping others practice the Dharma—the Buddha is alive. This buddha-land of ours, we must not forget, is worthy of our care. After all, it was here that Shakyamuni Buddha chose to preach the Lotus Sutra.

Although the Lotus Sutra does not contain specific instructions for changing the world through outreach and activism (just as it never actually preaches the Dharma it promises to teach), its liberation theology has spawned many social reform movements, especially in Japan. Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, based *A Buddhist Approach to Peace* on the Lotus Sutra premise that the problems of people anywhere are the problems of people everywhere. Happiness cannot be realized by one person, Niwano stresses, until it is realized by all. To this end, and among its many other outreach programs, Rissho Kosei-kai founded its “Brighter Society Movement,” in which not only members but also civic groups, local governments, and corporate bodies around the country participate in a spirit of cooperation.

As I read the Lotus Sutra for the first time last spring, I wondered *how* it has inspired and motivated people to work at bettering not just themselves, or their local Buddhist communities, but the larger world. Altruism and service to others is found in traditional Buddhist doctrine, “for example, in the Bodhisattva ideal, where spiritual adepts postpone their own liberation in order to remain in the world to help liberate others,” says Buddhist scholar Kenneth Tanaka (*The Faces of Buddhism in America*, 293). There is something in the Lotus Sutra that calls us to do more. It is what Peggy Morgan, a professor at Oxford’s Westminster College, calls the “wow” factor of the sutra. It says to Buddhists, as one Tibetan woman told Morgan during an interview, “Just imagine that people could be that skillful, that compassionate” (*Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 5, 231).

The origin of the term “engaged Buddhism” is usually attributed to Thich Nhat Hanh and his struggles during the Vietnam War. Today, other Buddhist groups, such as the Japanese Lotus Sutra-based organizations Rissho

Kosei-kai and Soka Gakkai, have continued to deepen that work of social reform. The term engaged Buddhism itself “implies a critique of some Buddhists as ‘disengaged’” from concerns such as war, poverty, and other social problems, explains meditation teacher, scholar, and activist Donald Rothberg (*The Faces of Buddhism in America*, 268). If the Buddha is alive with us today, as the Lotus Sutra insists, we must ask how “skillful means” are being used to purify this buddha-land and expand the Dharma.

Kenneth Kraft, a professor of Buddhist studies at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, explains in *Inner Peace, World Peace* (26), that although socially engaged Buddhists in Japan remain marginal in Buddhist circles, they are actively campaigning for peace in many quiet ways both in Japan and internationally. For example, the Niwano Peace Foundation, chartered in 1978, works toward the realization of world peace by promoting research, education, and political reform as well as the elimination of nuclear war, hunger, and environmental pollution. In such troubled times as ours, the group explains on its website, the involvement of “people of religion” is more important than ever (www.npf.or.jp).

Buddhists such as those in Rissho Kosei-kai and Soka Gakkai extend the meaning of Buddhist precepts beyond personal relationships. For example, the first Buddhist precept forbidding the taking of life can “be extended to include the collective killing done by governments and the damage done to the earth by society” (Rothberg, 274). As the definition of community expands, so does the number of beings who can be liberated.

Masahiro Shimoda, a professor of Asian studies at the University of Tokyo, says that social movements grounded on the discourse of the Lotus Sutra are rooted in the sutra’s fundamental idea that the Buddha’s truth should be continually brought into the present by a teacher utilizing “skillful means.” In “How the Lotus Sutra Created Social Movements,” he writes that the truth in the Lotus Sutra “must be substantiated by evidence in present history” (*A Buddhist Kaleidoscope*, 328). To accomplish this, followers of the sutra start by chanting the sutra, even if only the title. Next, they apply to the present what they learn and gain from their practice by involving themselves in some kind of social reform activity. This verifies, especially for many Japanese Buddhists, the truth they find in the Lotus Sutra. Unlike their counterparts in India, many Japanese Buddhists have not seen the world as merely an obstacle, but as “an important screen on which sacred words must be projected” (Shimoda, 329).

Central to the Lotus Sutra is also the idea that being a bodhisattva is transactional—that is, one cannot be a bodhisattva without someone to be a bodhisattva for. The

sutra also affirms that everyone is a bodhisattva and that interconnection is an inherent part of being human. “What, then, does it mean to be a bodhisattva?” asks Reeves. “Basically in the Lotus Sutra it means using appropriate means to help others. And that finally, for the Lotus Sutra, is what Buddhism itself is” (Reeves, 386).

There are two primary bodhisattva practices outlined in the Lotus Sutra: transforming people and purifying buddha-lands. Through social action, both of these are possible on earth. As people are transformed they gain a better understanding of compassion for all living things (and I consider the earth a living thing)—and then they act in positive ways to transform society and the world. Throughout the Lotus Sutra we see people helping others to obtain something of value. In chapter 8 there is a man who sews a jewel, representing the Dharma, into the robe of his friend. In a later parable, a treasure is hidden in a man’s topknot.

Christopher Queen, a leading authority on Buddhism and social change, says in *Engaged Buddhism* that while Buddhists have historically responded to local challenges, they just as often have “declined or failed to lead in shaping the flow of social change” (Queen, 5). This pattern has been broken. None of today’s most visible Buddhist leaders—including the Dalai Lama, Ambedkar Bhimrao Ramji, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Buddhadasa—“have chosen the most traditional role for a Buddhist leader, that of the forest or temple monk,” which would remove them from outside social and familial connections (Queen, 5). “The liberation theology espoused by today’s Buddhist leaders is

Rissho Kosei-kai members solicit signatures in support of disarmament and the abolition of nuclear weapons near the Atomic Bomb Dome in Hiroshima. The signature campaign, developed nationwide in spring of 1982, collected twenty-seven million signatures. The formal report on the signatures was presented to the United Nations prior to the Second Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament (SSD II) held in June of that year.

based on their own distinctive readings of traditional Buddhist doctrines . . . particularly those of selflessness, interdependence, the five precepts, the four noble truths, nondualism, and emptiness” (Queen, 7).

According to Shimoda, there have been more manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra discovered to date than any other Buddhist manuscript in India, and the text “has initiated

Members of the Nipponzan Myohoji Sangha, a Lotus Sutra-based movement, taking part in anti-nuclear demonstration in New York, along with representatives of atomic bombing survivors. One million people gathered in New York in the largest peace demonstration in history, which took place during the SSD II.

Photo: Ittetsu Morishita

an equally surprising number of social movements throughout the history of Japan” (Shimoda, 319). This hints, he says, at the way the text has been accepted by different societies, illustrating how it comes “alive again to people in a new situation in a renewed appearance with its substance unchanged.” While traditional Buddhist liberation has been obtained through detachment, for engaged Buddhists, liberation is obtained through engagement.

The Lotus Sutra liberates its followers by affirming the transactional nature of being a bodhisattva through its parables and stories. If engaged Buddhism is a liberation theology, then the Lotus Sutra is a collection of marching songs. It may not say directly “Go out and change the world by purifying the environment, getting rid of nuclear weapons, and making peace with your neighbors” (these are some of the activities in which Lotus Sutra followers are engaged), but its stories, and more importantly, its tone, make this mission of ridding the earth of its “pollutions” clear.

When the Buddha first explains to Shariputra in the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra how there are not three Buddha vehicles, but one, he also says that “Buddhas appear in an evil world of five pollutions. . . . When the age is in chaos, the stains run deep, and greedy and jealous living beings acquire unhealthy roots.” The Buddha names these five pollutions as the pollution of the age, the pollution arising from mental agony, the pollution of living beings, the pollution of views, and the pollution of life.

Using nuclear weapons as an example—since this is the kind of pollution with which I have been most concerned—one can see that weapons of mass destruction fall into at least four of these five categories: they are a pollution of our age; they were developed in response to the mental agony (fear) that another power might have the means and will to destroy “us”; they are created by living beings; they are the result of a political viewpoint that distrusts “otherness.”

Michio Shinozaki, president of the Rissho Kosei-kai Gakurin Seminary in Tokyo, says that modernity has created many dead materials that resist the natural cycle–recycle process. These violate nature’s characteristic processes of eternal return, he writes in “A Buddhist Approach to the Ecological Crisis” (*A Buddhist Kaleidoscope*, 396). The U.S. Department of Energy, for example, is attempting to bury excess weapons plutonium expected to accumulate from the dismantling of U.S. and Russian weapons over the next decade under Yucca Mountain in Nevada, promising to isolate it from the environment for at least 25,000 years. (It will take more than 250,000 years for it to be safe!) But in chapter 2, the Lotus Sutra teaches, and all Buddhists recognize, that “nothing exists independently, and that Buddha-seeds grow interdependently.” This “co-dependent arising” runs counter to the idea that anything can be created or disposed of outside of the earth’s natural cycles.

The Lotus Sutra, says Shinozaki, purifies human desires and the environment as it is better understood. Chapter 28

The south portal tunnel entrance of Yucca Mountain, the planned site of a national nuclear waste dump in Nevada.

of the sutra says that a pure person “will be content with few desires and able to do the works of the [bodhisattva] Universal Virtue.” Saving living beings from suffering, an essential part of being a bodhisattva, then becomes a concern of all Buddhists.

Readers of the Lotus Sutra interpret it in many ways. Like the Dharma rain in chapter 5 that falls on everything equally and is only absorbed and used by each plant according to its need, the Lotus Sutra appeals to the reader’s heart in individual and powerful ways. Reeves says that the text’s main purpose may not be “to teach Buddhist doctrines or refute other interpretations or forms of Buddhism, but to incline the reader’s heart, and especially behavior, in a certain way” (384), and in a way that reflects the reader’s interests and personality.

This is perhaps why I saw connections between the Lotus Sutra and my own work in the areas of arms control and nuclear nonproliferation. Certainly, I thought after reading the text the first time, there must be more literature on the subject. But I discovered that while there has been much written on engaged Buddhism in general, its connection with the environment, and even how the sutra relates to health-care ethics, I could find very little written about the Lotus Sutra and the concerns of the antinuclear or peace movements. To me, the most egregious types of pollution that we humans have dumped on our own buddha-land are nuclear weapons and nuclear waste. If nuclear weapons are not a form of pollution, I cannot imagine what would be. In *Dharma Rain*, Kraft says that Einstein himself may have inadvertently enunciated the first law of eco-karma: “Humanity will get the fate it deserves” (393).

The fact that this is what emerged from the text for me is an example of how the Lotus Sutra itself uses skillful means. By appealing to this interest of mine, it motivates my work and helps fulfill its promise of purifying buddha-lands through my actions. It is like a series of nested Russian dolls, explained Craig Schwalenberg, a fellow seminary student. On the surface of the text is a story, beneath that are interpretations of the story, and at the core is a way of viewing the world and a philosophy that emerges and engages our higher buddha selves.

Paul Swanson, a professor of Christian studies at Nanzan University in Nagoya, says that those seeking meaning in the Lotus Sutra must seek the meaning that is alive and meaningful now. “Precisely because the Lotus Sutra is of immeasurable meanings, it has the potential for providing meaning in our day,” he writes in “The Innumerable Meanings of the Lotus Sutra” (*A Buddhist Kaleidoscope*, 52). In large part, finding such connections hinges on being aware of the potential goodness that surrounds us,

which allows us to grow beyond our local communities. It allows us to foster concern for the ecology of places far away from our own. It can lead to action. It leads us to lifestyles that minimize our impact on the planet. “Who would have thought that the Lotus Sutra has anything to do with modern environmental issues?” Swanson asks. “Yet this is but one example of the immeasurable meanings latent in the Lotus Sutra” (53).

The solutions to modern crises, if we look, can be found in the Buddhist understanding of the relationship between nature and humanity. “Nature is the ideal,” says Shinozaki, it is the process of eternal rhythm of which humans are a part. Ignoring our interconnectedness with nature by abusing others or supporting unjust systems puts us at odds with our own nature (Shinozaki, 395). The “no thinking” or “no action” of Eastern naturalistic philosophy is remedied in the Lotus Sutra by skillful means—every situation has a unique solution. Sometimes it is best to wait and be mindful, as in the story of the father who does not reveal himself to his lost son until the father is near death, but other situations require immediate reason, thought, and direct action. If the father in the parable of the burning house had waited for any length of time before acting, his children would not have survived!

Jamie Hubbard affirms this shift in outlook from inner to outer change by saying that individual action as affirmed in the Lotus Sutra is no longer dwarfed by the great “ultimacy of the cosmic cycle.” Rather, as he writes in “A Tale of Two Times,” it plays a part in the propagation of the Dharma and the betterment of the human condition (*A Buddhist Kaleidoscope*, 204). Thus, the Lotus Sutra strikes a balance between the Western view of time and history (everything is evolutionary—a one-chance-only event) and the Eastern view (all is “eternal return” and cyclical). If we take the Lotus Sutra to heart, it becomes difficult to just accept that the injustices created by humans are inevitable and irreversible and then to do nothing in response. Through skillful means, there is always something that can be done. Sometimes action is direct; other times it is the form of offering comfort and assistance to others. Perhaps we cannot solve every crisis, but we can choose to respond to the cries of the world—whether those cries are nearby or from distant lands. □

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Tokyo National Museum

Segment of the Keron Gojugo-sho Emaki (Picture scroll of Fifty-five Places Associated with the Avatamsaka [Keron] Sutra), depicting the child Zenzai paying reverence to the bodhisattva Manjushri, as part of his journey to fifty-five places to meet various sages in his quest for the way to enlightenment. Color on paper. 28.5 x 25.6 cm. Heian period (794–1185). Important Cultural Property.

Interreligious Dialogue Can Play a Key Role in the World at Large

by Martin Repp

Systematic training in the open exchange of ideas between Christianity and East Asian faiths is offered by the Interreligious Studies in Japan Program being conducted in Kyoto.

For quite some time, interreligious dialogue seemed to belong to the domain of religion only. Recently, however, several factors have made it clear that it may also play a significant role in society, politics, education, and culture at large. First, during the last few decades, the nations of Europe have undergone a fundamental transformation from predominantly Christian countries to multi-religious societies. The historical significance of this change becomes clear when we consider that the thousand-year-old “Christian West” came to a sudden end during the last thirty years. Another factor was the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001, which triggered not only a worldwide attempt to fight terrorism, but also a call for dialogue with Islam. Since then, the word “dialogue” has entered the public vocabulary of politics and mass media. Interreligious communication has come to be understood as an important means to preserve and create peace in conflicts between peoples, cultures, and religions.

Thus, the necessity of interreligious dialogue has become acknowledged; however, the insight into the need for its systematic training is not yet widespread. Dialogue is a

special art of communication; thus its skills have to be acquired through learning. Proficiency in dialogue requires systematic training, especially among multipliers such as teachers, clergy, and so on. In order to clarify this by historical comparison, it may be remembered that the old traditions of educational methods in Buddhist and Christian monasteries and seminaries also included theoretical and practical training in disputation (Lat., *disputatio*, Jpn., *shuron*), which may be called a “precursor” of interreligious dialogue. What is remarkable is that traditional Buddhist and Christian disputation was not limited to internal religious discussion, but also extended to disputes with other religions. Moreover, Buddhist and Christian teachers knew of the need to systematically train young people in communication skills with other religions. Admittedly, these traditional ways of religious disputation followed the principle of “defeat or victory,” which fundamentally distinguishes traditional disputation from modern forms of dialogue. However, even medieval European thinkers, such as Jehuda ha-Levi, Abelard, Nicholas of Cusa, and Raymond Lully, had already developed the idea of a dialogue with a principally open end, which is characteristic for modern dialogue as well. Therefore, if the development of interreligious dialogue is not to follow the rule of “trial and error,” systematic training programs in theory and practice are required. Experiences have to be collected, and contents and methods have to be reflected upon. Thus, well-versed teachers have to train young people in a systematic manner.

In recent years, the Association of Churches and Missions

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Students of the spring 2003 semester of the ISJP, together with the author (left) and Rev. Shinjo Hironishi, former professor of Koyasan University, at Oku-no-in on Mount Koya, the location of the head temple of the Shingon sect, Kongobuji.

in southwestern Germany (Stuttgart)—an ecumenical organization of various mission boards, including the former German East Asia Mission—and two of its partner organizations have initiated such interreligious training programs. One is the “Study in the Middle East” program at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut. Here, students of theology and religious education have the chance to study Islam and to experience dialogue with Muslims in an Oriental context. The second program was established in 2002 at the NCC (National Christian Council in Japan) Center for the Study of Japanese Religions in Kyoto, a small institute of high reputation that pioneered interreligious dialogue in Japan. The Interreligious Studies in Japan Program (ISJP) is designed for students of theology, religious studies, philosophy, and Japanese studies, etc., who are interested in becoming better versed in interreligious dialogue. The curriculum includes classes on all major religions in Japan as well as field trips to religious centers and encounters with their representatives. In such a way, it combines theoretical and practical learning.

The program is conducted according to university semesters, and classes are held in English by specialists in the various fields. Preparation and responsibility for the program lies in the hands of the advisory and executive committees, consisting of professors of various Christian, Buddhist, and national universities, as well as of the study center’s

staff. The curriculum during the fall and spring semesters contains classes on Japanese Buddhism, the reading of classical Buddhist texts, the “new religions” of Japan, and an introduction to the Japanese language. During the fall semester, courses are held also on Shinto, Japanese religious history, and the theology of religions, while the spring semester also offers classes on folk religion, Japanese theology, and theories of interreligious dialogue. The curriculum is designed in such a way that the contents of the classes held during two subsequent semesters do not overlap, and students participating only in one semester receive a general and representative overview of religions in Japan, while those participating in two semesters receive a more comprehensive and deeper introduction. The classes are supplemented by weekly excursions to Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines, and the headquarters of new religious organizations, mostly combined with meeting their representatives. During the fall semester, a one-week trip to Tokyo is also scheduled. During the trips to Tokyo in 2002 and 2003, representatives of Rissho Kosei-kai generously received the students in their headquarters, provided a guided tour through the precincts, and gave lectures on their teaching and practice. This was a very stimulating experience for the students.

Such direct encounters enable the students to collect practical experiences with followers of other religions, to correct

misconceptions, and to build trust and foster mutual understanding. The aim of the two courses entitled “Theories of Interreligious Dialogue” and “The Theology of Religions” is to provide the students with opportunities to reflect theoretically on their practical experiences. The exposure to a foreign culture and to hitherto unknown religions poses considerable challenges for the students; this requires frequent advice, reflection, and discussion. In the beginning, for example, students experience insecurity when they cross the threshold of another religion’s sanctuary for the first time: How should they behave? On the one hand, as Christians, they are not prepared to revere other deities; on the other hand, as guests, they feel that they should show respect toward the religion of their hosts. Experienced guidance and the long-standing trust between the NCC study center and many religions in Japan help to build bridges between hitherto unrelated people of different faiths. Lessons from such concrete encounters are much more far-reaching than those gleaned only from reading books.

In addition to this combination of theoretical and practical learning, another characteristic of the ISJP is its ecumenical approach in both a narrow and a wider sense. In the narrow sense, the ecumenical approach is reflected in the fact that the students, Christian members of the advisory and executive committees, as well as the teachers of the theological courses, all belong to different Protestant denominations and the Catholic Church. However, the ISJP is “ecumenical” in a broader sense, because the members of the advisory and executive committees, as well as the teachers, belong to various religions in Japan. Consequently, we do hope that in the near future young members of other religions in Japan will also participate in this program. Especially, the daily and continuous communication among students of different religions will add another important learning opportunity for interreligious understanding.

Another characteristic of the ISJP should be mentioned. Since interreligious dialogue can only succeed on the basis of a solid knowledge of the other religion(s) involved, the concept of the ISJP is based on an academic way of teaching religions. As such, the ISJP is probably the most compact and competent form of introduction to religions in Japan offered by an academic institution. For this reason, the ISJP is also relevant for students of religious studies, Japanese studies, and the philosophy of religion, who are interested in interreligious encounters and cross-cultural communication. However, on this very basis, and at the same time, since representatives of other religions teach the students as well, the ISJP transcends the traditional methods of religious studies that treat other religions merely as “objects” and not as “subjects” in their own right. Such an approach helps to correct prejudices, misconcep-

Students of the spring 2003 semester, joined by visitors from Germany, having a conversation with a Zen priest at Daitokuji in Kyoto.

Students of the autumn 2003 semester, visiting Miyama town, Kyoto Prefecture, during one of their field trips.

tions, and misunderstandings among the students. This pursuit leads to deeper understanding, mutual respect, and fair criticism on the basis of trust.

There are always a number of students wishing to participate in the ISJP; however, it is still difficult to find scholarships for this purpose. Thus, it would be of great help if more such scholarships could be provided in order to train young people as future participants in interreligious dialogue for the sake of creating and maintaining peace among peoples and religions wherever they later will live and work. Running such a program can only be realized by financial funding provided from outside the NCC study center. Up until now, the ISJP was conducted by the generous support of individuals as well as of organizations. We are especially grateful to the Niwano Peace Foundation and the Tomisaka Christian Center (Tokyo) for generously supporting the ISJP. □

(More information on the ISJP can be found on the homepage of the NCC study center: www.japanese-religions.org)

A German Catholic Priest Brings Zen to Rome

by Eva Ruth Palmieri

This unusual and charismatic clergyman preaches the importance of being open to, listening to, and learning from, the spiritual traditions of others.

Father Johannes Kopp

Father Johannes Kopp is a German-born priest of the Pallottine Order in Rome and a Zen master. At the end of a long, inspiring conversation on the roof of his order's monastery overlooking the skyline of the "eternal city," Father Kopp offered the following reflections.

"When we engage in interreligious dialogue we must speak gently, in soft tones, so that what usually cannot be spoken may emerge—the ultimate truths. Only if we speak softly are we enabled to hear as well. Silence is the ultimate expression of absolute, infinite truth in the interreligious dialogue. In the Gospel of John, the Word and silence are interchangeable. When we take part in dialogue, the infinite is underway, there in the background, and we delve ever more deeply into our own sources. There are no limits. Progressing toward the infinite requires boundaries, but boundaries become bridges that we cross on an ever-extending road leading us to expand further, ever further, never reaching the end of the road. Whoever touches the depths of his own true nature becomes capable of understanding what the other leaves unsaid. We move ever closer, ever closer to the truth, but the truth is infinite and

so our search and task are characterized by constant movement. It is the mystic experience, the numinous quality of our experience of the infinite, the *mysterium tremendum*—as defined by the nineteenth-century German philosopher Rudolf Otto [1869–1937]—that provides the basic and nonverbal ground on which true religious feelings and interreligious communication are built."

During our talk the dome of Saint Peter's Basilica was silhouetted against the blue spring horizon. It seemed to symbolically represent the spiritual roots of this extraordinary priest who helps people of all faiths to discover the depths of their own religious beliefs, and their specific spiritual identities, without ever leading them into syncretism. The name he gives to the infinite is "the Christ," but he realizes that while many might use this name, others might use another, different name. The concepts of an "impersonal" versus a "personal" God—which to some theologians might distinguish Buddhism from other spiritualities or religions—are to him not in conflict, since Father Kopp considers God, or the Ultimate, to be between and beyond these concepts, transcending our familiar

definitions, transcending our “limited” categories of time and space, which do not correspond to reality.

Father Kopp’s Zen Centre is based in Essen, Germany, where his sessions are attended by approximately 1,000 people each year. His Italian liaison is Teseo Tavernese, a writer, disciple, and translator of Father Kopp’s book, *Schneeflocken fallen in die Sonne: Christuserfahrungen auf dem Zen-Weg* (“Snowflakes Fall in the Sun: Experiencing Christ on the Zen Way”). But since the beginning of the new millennium, four years ago, at the request of Italians of all ages and backgrounds, united by a common need for deeper spirituality in their lives—mostly Christians but also Sikhs, Jews, nonbelievers, intellectuals, etc.—he has been holding annual sessions for groups of 40 to 50, as well as the *sesshins*—a word defined as “contact with the heart” or “touching the heart,” says Tavernese, “resulting in a catharsis of tears and pent-up emotions frequently spilling over during the training and clearing the way for deeper understanding.” The content of the five-day sojourns consists of daily motivational speeches by Father Kopp, followed by periods of sitting in silence (25 minutes each) and 5 minutes of coordinated walking. The object is learning to be present in the here and now, and thereby increasing one’s awareness of self, others, one’s spiritual roots, life itself, and of rarely experienced insightful moments unifying past, present, and future.

Father Kopp subscribes to the words of the renowned theologian Hans Küng (who is also an honorary president of the World Conference of Religions for Peace): “No peace between nations without peace between religions. No peace between religions without dialogue between religions.” And dialogue between religions, according to the Catholic Zen master, is truly meaningful only on a deep, nonverbal, mystic level: Rudolf Otto’s “numinous” experience.

Father Kopp reflects on the importance of the *Unschärfe*, the blurred, the out-of-focus, the imprecise, as a premise for this dialogue, comparing it to the *Unschärfe* of the truths of physics, where the line differentiating energy from substance is also necessarily blurred. In the numinous quality of true mystic experience, people of different religious faiths and identities discover their capacities to communicate from the most profound levels of being.

Our conversation with Father Kopp released a flood of memories. The original source of his inspiration, he says without hesitation, was his “happy childhood in a little German town where the Christian faith was naturally, unquestioningly, robustly accepted.” The determining Buddhist input to his Roman Catholic Christianity came about through an initial decision that was not “religious” in the traditional sense. He recalls having decided to quit a secure job with a promising future to become an actor. With

pride, he notes his having won a scholarship and passing a tough entrance exam at the professional Actors Academy of Stuttgart. Memories of his time at the academy include one month of reciting daily chapters 13–17 of the Gospel according to John—Jesus’s final speech to the apostles at the Last Supper. These verses planted the seeds of a spiritual “oneness” paving the way for meditation and Zen in his consciousness, he says. His first contact with Zen was a book by Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, presented to him by his teacher. The true aim of his acting ambitions was “to become a total human being,” so he moved on to a further “life-or-death” decision in terms of ineluctable choice: the priesthood. He was ordained in 1963.

In Father Kopp’s *Weltanschauung* (worldview), the infinity and unity of God and all being and existence is essential, a concept echoing that of Pope John Paul II, who, in his first encyclical, stated that “Jesus Christ is the center of the cosmos and history, and to him my thoughts and feelings are turned.” This vision of a cosmic, mystic Christ encompassing all in all as a universal reality can be actualized through Zen.

Father Kopp discovered meditation early in his priestly calling. His provincial superior and then his bishop recognized his leanings and sent him to Japan where, from 1974 to 1985 he studied Zen with a series of masters: Karlfried Durkheim, the former cultural attaché at the German Embassy in Tokyo, who became an expert on the samurai spirit; Hugo M. Enomiya-Lassalle; and especially his Zen master, Koun Yamada Roshi, who taught and qualified him through eleven years. He was declared a master of Zen by Yamada Roshi, who gave him the name of Ho-un (Dharma Cloud).

When this unusual and charismatic Catholic Zen master preaches the importance of being open to listening to, and learning from, the spiritual traditions of others, you can be sure his actions are consistent with his words. “The enlightening (‘light’ in both of its meanings) spirit of humor (etymologically related to ‘spirit’) is typical of Hasidic Judaism, and I often reread Martin Buber’s *Tales of the Hasidim* to find new inspiration.”

Perhaps most important, Father Johannes Kopp is providing spiritual nourishment and guidance to souls famished for fresh sustenance. In helping them to find the sources of their spiritual identities, he is also helping them to hear, see, and speak to others, giving new impetus to interreligious dialogue and helping to pave the endless path toward world peace and infinity. □

Eva Ruth Palmieri, who lives in Rome, worked for the Embassy of Israel to the Vatican for several years and has a deep personal interest in interreligious dialogue.

Compassion in Everyday Buddhist Life

by Nichiko Niwano

The following is the text of the address delivered by Rev. Niwano at a Buddhist-Christian symposium held at Castel Gandolfo in Italy, April 23–28. Noting that “compassion begins with unselfish consideration for others,” he concludes that the ultimate goal is for all human beings to attain happiness.

I would like to begin by expressing my deep gratitude and respect to Ms. Chiara Lubich, president of the Focolare Movement and host of this conference, and to everyone associated with this first Buddhist-Christian Symposium, for inviting me here for the opening. It is an honor for me to have the opportunity to speak today on the theme of the Dharma, Buddhist compassion, and Christian agape.

Through the long period of the friendly relationship between Ms. Lubich and my father, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano,

both of our lay organizations, the Focolare Movement and Rissho Kosei-kai, have sought the quintessence of interreligious cooperation beyond differences in their respective religious faiths. This symposium itself offers an opportunity to reaffirm the success of our efforts for interreligious cooperation.

Rissho Kosei-kai was established sixty-six years ago by my father. From its founding, it has been a lay Buddhist organization professing that “lifestyle is an expression of faith” and “faith is an expression of lifestyle.” Rissho Kosei-kai members, while they lead their lives as members of families and of society, emphasize learning the Buddhist teachings and applying what they have learned in their everyday lives.

Today, my theme is “Compassion in Everyday Buddhist Life.”

Buddhism, as taught and revealed to us by Shakyamuni, is said to be the teaching of the Buddha and, at the same time, the teaching that makes us aware that we are potentially buddhas. Buddhism is often called the religion of wisdom and compassion, and when we inquire further into this idea we find that the most important thing is opening our eyes of wisdom and thereby bringing ourselves and others to salvation.

The basis of Shakyamuni’s teaching which I have learned is that “all things are impermanent” (that is, all things in this world are changing unceasingly from one moment to the next), and “all things are devoid of self” (that is, no form of existence has eternal, changeless reality). In short, these can be summarized as the “concept of impermanence.” I understand this as the basic wisdom of the Buddha.

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 Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan).

Through this concept of impermanence, we are capable of appreciating and understanding wonder, preciousness, and gratitude for the life we are given; in addition, we are filled with a sense of solidarity with other people and feel affection and concern for them. Such feelings actually make up compassion. Wisdom and compassion are one and the same; we could say that intellectually, this perception is wisdom, and emotionally, the same perception is compassion.

Looking back at the life of Shakyamuni, we see that when he first left his home and led an ascetic life seeking the truth, he did so because he wanted to achieve salvation for himself. Thus, he came to realize that only when all living beings were saved would he himself have reached true salvation. This realization resulted from wisdom. Therefore one's own salvation depends on achieving wisdom. The salvation of others likewise depends on achieving wisdom. And so, to transmit to others the wisdom by which one achieved salvation is the essence of compassion.

What, then, is compassion according to Buddhist teaching? First of all, it is "relieving suffering and giving pleasure." The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra says:

Great benevolence is giving pleasure to all living beings.
Great sympathy is taking away suffering for the sake of all living beings.

In this verse, we see that relieving suffering and giving pleasure are divided into both benevolence, which gives pleasure, and sympathy, which relieves suffering. If we try to define the former in terms of our own life, it means that we lead our lives praying that our existence makes the world a little more pleasant. The latter indicates that we lead our lives praying that through our existence the suffering and worry in the world are reduced.

In Japanese and Chinese, the word "compassion" is a compound made up of one character meaning benevolence and another meaning sympathy or pity. "Benevolence," for example, is the prayer in our hearts that life grows and develops, as seen in parents hoping that their children become healthy, happy adults. However, such growing and developing does not continue forever; growing, when seen from a different perspective, also means that we lead our lives always with the ultimate goal of death. This is sad for human beings, and gives rise to "sympathy" in our hearts.

The concept of impermanence insists that we look at life and see it as it is: one aspect of life is growing and developing, and another is that all things born into this world must grow old, die, and perish. Clearly seeing the true aspect of life deepens the compassion in our hearts.

Christianity is called the religion of love (agape), while

Buddhism is the religion of compassion. In this context, compassion could be the crux of Buddhism. Compassion is the dynamic relationship between oneself and others, and some people say that "compassion begins with unselfish consideration for others."

Quoting a passage from the Nirvana Sutra, Dogen, founder of the Soto sect of Japanese Buddhism, described compassion this way: "I will never myself cross over to the other shore, until I have first made others cross over." In other words, "Although I myself have not yet attained awakening, I will first help others to do so." Put in different words, "Although I myself have not yet attained happy circumstances, I will do my utmost for the happiness of other people." The Zen master Dogen teaches that the mental attitude of benefiting others is compassion and that the central tenet of the Buddha Dharma is to generate compassion.

Furthermore, Nichiren, founder of the Nichiren sect of Japanese Buddhism, told us, "I, Nichiren, dare to say that one and the same suffering of all living beings can in its entirety be called the suffering of myself." This means that the suffering of all people is completely the same as the total suffering experienced by Nichiren. These words expressed the compassionate heart of Nichiren, who accepted onto himself the burden of all of humanity's suffering.

As seen in Shakyamuni's words, "May all living beings be happy, be safe, be at peace," he always had great compassion in his heart. We can take these words as a message meaning that our supreme happiness and our reason for living are found in fully embracing in ourselves the compassionate heart that wishes for the happiness of all people.

If I may take a moment to summarize, in this brief treatment we can see what Shakyamuni and the many great Buddhist teachers and priests of Japan in the past thought about compassion, and therefore we can understand how important compassion is in the Buddhist teachings.

Now I would like to turn to the topic of compassion in everyday Buddhist life. Take a moment to consider the expression, "Our practice of compassion comes from a manifestation of determination, in other words, from a vow." I am always telling myself and the members of Rissho Kosei-kai, "Wake up each morning with hope and a vow, go through the day striving and advancing spiritually, and at night go to sleep with gratitude." Here I have added to someone else's phrase the words "a vow" and "advancing spiritually," and by doing so give religious meaning to our everyday lives.

Though there are a great variety of vows in Buddhism, the following Four Universal Vows of the Bodhisattvas are what all the buddhas wish for in common:

However innumerable sentient beings are, I vow to bring about their release.

However limitless my defilements are, I vow to extinguish them.

However immeasurable the Buddha's teachings are, I vow to learn them.

However infinite awakening is, I vow to attain buddhahood.

The first vow is the vow to help countless people to cross over to the other shore, or awakening. The second vow is the vow to dispel delusions of unlimited number. The third vow is a vow to study the profound teachings of the unfathomable Buddha Dharma. Finally, the fourth vow is a vow to attain the highest awakening. Every bodhisattva takes these four vows, which express the wishes of all the buddhas. Ultimately, though, I think the essence is conveyed by the first of these vows. Although the vows are broken down into four, they can be simply summarized in the one vow, because the wishes of the buddhas and human beings are one and the same. "To save all people, to bring salvation to all living beings"—that is the only wish of the buddhas, and that is also the wish of human beings.

After attaining awakening, the Buddha is said to have lived another forty-five years, during which he disseminated the teaching. His endeavors to do so throughout his life began from the great compassion with which he could not help but strive to open everyone's eyes of wisdom (the Buddha's insight). He wanted people to dispel even the smallest suffering or attachment that they experienced. Also due to his great compassion, he wanted them to fully grasp wisdom, and therefore preached wisdom to the people he encountered.

As I noted earlier, "compassion begins with unselfish consideration for others"; that is, compassion is the dynamic relationship between oneself and others. Even so, in modern times consideration for the "other" is weakening and it seems that we live in an age in which coexisting with other people is undervalued. The "other" not only indicates other people, but also refers to living beings other than human beings—and to the mountains, rivers, plants, and trees that make up the natural environment. We human beings are not living alone. We live surrounded by all the interconnections of many different people, animals, plants, our physical environment, and so on. In that sense, we can say that our lives are sustained through the help of others.

These days we can hardly say that relations between people or with the environment are going smoothly. I think that at the level of individuals and at the level of ethnic groups and nations, conflict arises because we try to take advantage of each other. When it comes to animals, and the

natural environment as well, our main concern is the human ego and therefore we think only of how to exploit them. Due to egocentric human behavior, our world is plagued with problems: crime, social unrest, ethnic conflict, depletion of natural resources, pollution, and all kinds of environmental destruction of the earth.

Such matters, all of them, have their cause in modern people belittling religious teaching—for which my heart is full of regret.

Ours should already be an age of coexistence. The beloved Japanese poet and storyteller Kenji Miyazawa was also a man who had profound faith in the Lotus Sutra. Some eighty years ago he wrote, "Until the entire world is happy, there is no happiness for the individual." In Japanese and Chinese, the word "world" is composed of two characters. A Buddhist interpretation of the first character includes the past, present, and future in eternal time, and the second expresses the north, south, east, west, up, and down of infinite space, that is, the entire universe. We can call Miyazawa's words an important message of spirituality and an accurate expression of compassion and coexistence in the contemporary sense.

My father, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, taught us the importance of being compassionate through bodhisattva practice with the simple phrase, "Others first." The Risho Kosei-kai Member's Vow ends with the words, "We pledge ourselves to follow the bodhisattva way to bring peace to our families, communities, and countries and to the world." Our wish is to enlarge the circle of harmony from our families to include our regions and our societies, and then enlarge it again to bring peace to the world; ours is a movement attuned to the idea of "Think globally, act locally."

One example of this is the Donate-a-Meal Campaign. Three or four times every month, Risho Kosei-kai members forgo one meal, and then donate the cost of those skipped meals to the organization's fund to help people suffering from poverty, regional conflicts, natural disasters, and other difficulties. There are so many people in the world who cannot obtain sufficient food. To experience the sensation of an empty stomach and share the suffering of those without enough to eat, even if only slightly, and to extend the hand of cooperation to them is the primary purpose of the Donate-a-Meal Campaign. It is significant for us to experience hunger, to know firsthand the Buddhist spirit of sharing in suffering and sorrow and thereby nurture the compassion in our hearts, and to commit ourselves to the act of donation with prayers for peace.

In the twenty-nine years of the Donate-a-Meal Campaign, from its inception in 1974 through 2003, some nine billion Japanese yen in offerings have been collected and used to provide assistance to countries in Asia, Africa,

Central and South America, and Europe. Another program, the Campaign for Sharing Blankets with People in Africa, was begun in 1984, prompted by a request from UNICEF. Since then, members and nonmembers alike have been called on every year to donate blankets. To date, well over three million blankets have been collected and distributed to refugees and needy people in various African countries.

Then, beginning in 1994, in cooperation with several nongovernmental organizations, we have undertaken on-site humanitarian assistance around the world, when regional conflicts or natural disasters have occurred. In addition, we have been conducting the Little Bags of Dreams Campaign for children who have suffered from regional conflicts in Europe, distributing to them attractive bags filled with stationery items, items of daily use, small toys, and messages of encouragement. Recently in Afghanistan also, we have been supporting activities to improve living conditions, such as the distribution of blankets and the reconstruction of schools.

Such activities are hardly enough; nevertheless, they arise from the compassion in the hearts of our members who wish to realize the Buddha's vow to "save all people."

Last year, the world went through much unrest and tension due to the outbreak of the war in Iraq. Following the acts of terrorism in the United States in 2001, revenge has seemed to be the dominant trend in world politics. Hatred has been repaid with hatred, and so there is no end to acts of terrorism and retaliation against them. And so, the trouble between people goes on.

These circumstances make me wonder if in modern civilization both the East and the West have not lost sight of their respective ideals. For centuries, Western civilization has tended toward cool, scrupulous analysis, while Eastern civilization has emphasized tolerance and harmony. What matters most is that East and West should work together to make the best of their particular merits.

Because of the age in which we live, I believe that all of us need to bear in mind the Buddha's words in the Dhammapadam: "Hatred is never conquered by hatred; hatred can only be conquered by compassion."

At the same time, I would like to offer for your consideration the tranquillity that is another traditional characteristic of Eastern culture. In this modern age of sometimes violent change, human beings need to promote an atmosphere of stillness, create environmentally soothing spaces,

Rev. Niwano receives the 2004 Luminosa Award for Unity for his long-standing efforts for interreligious cooperation, at Mariapolis Luminosa, a facility of the Focolare Movement, in Hyde Park, New York, on July 7.

and lead lifestyles that allow them to contemplate matters with serenity. Sometimes it is necessary to become a "silent person."

To return to the Buddha, he is called Shakyamuni, the World-honored One. The "muni" means "wise man" or "holy man," and also indicates a practitioner who masters silent practices. Certainly, one facet of Shakyamuni was "silence"—a man who quietly proceeded alone. Learning from Shakyamuni and having tranquillity in our hearts—that is what is needed for all of us today.

Shakyamuni teaches us that one thing we can practice in daily life is "meditation on compassion." In order to nurture a compassionate heart, we first must confirm that we ourselves want to be happy; then we become aware of the obvious fact that there is no such thing as being happy alone. Therefore, meditation on compassion must be a constant prayer that all living beings may be happy.

I would like to leave you with a final thought. At the beginning of my talk, I mentioned that Buddhism is a religion of wisdom and compassion. By means of the compassion rooted in the Buddha's wisdom, we lead people to salvation, and at the same time their salvation is linked to our own joy and salvation. The Buddhist ideal of "the complete fulfillment of acquiring one's own benefits and benefiting others" will bring us a life of savoring the supreme delight of learning the Buddha Dharma. I think that is how devout Buddhists lead their lives today.

Thank you for your attention. □

The Dragon Princess

by Gene Reeves

In this tale, the Lotus Sutra teaches us that women are as capable of becoming fully awakened buddhas as men; it also forces us to challenge our own assumptions about gender and gender roles, and shows us that each and every one of us is already a buddha in the process of becoming.

In the second part of chapter 12 (“Devadatta”) of the Lotus Sutra, the bodhisattva Accumulated Wisdom—one of the attendants of Abundant Treasures Buddha, who was still sitting with Shakyamuni Buddha in his great stupa in the air—proposes to Abundant Treasures Buddha that it is time for them to return home. But Shakyamuni stops them, saying that the bodhisattva Manjushri, someone with whom they would enjoy discussing the Dharma, will soon be back, and that they should therefore wait for him before going home.

Soon after, Manjushri emerged from the sea, paid his respects to the two buddhas sitting in the stupa, and exchanged greetings with the bodhisattva Accumulated Wisdom. Asked by Accumulated Wisdom how many he had led to the Way, Manjushri asked him to wait a minute to see for himself, and immediately countless bodhisattvas—who had been taught nothing other than the Lotus Sutra by Manjushri—also emerged from the sea.

Then Accumulated Wisdom asked Manjushri if he had encountered anyone, anywhere in his vast travels, who had followed the Lotus Sutra so well that they were qualified to become a buddha quickly. Manjushri replied, “Yes, the clever eight-year-old daughter of the dragon-king¹ Sagara. She has entered into profound meditation, has understood all of the main teachings, and is wise, eloquent, compassionate, generous, kind, and gentle. She quickly aspired to

awakening and entered the path of the Way. Yes, she is able to become awakened quickly.”

Accumulated Wisdom, recalling that Shakyamuni had devoted enormous time and effort to achieving awakening,

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expressed doubt that this girl could do so in a moment. "It's unbelievable," he said.

Even before he had finished saying this, however, the girl herself appeared and went over to Shakyamuni and made obeisance to him, expressing the thought that only he could know whether or not she is qualified to attain awakening because he alone knows that she has truly heard the Dharma and will preach the great vehicle way in order to save all beings from suffering.

Shariputra then spoke to the girl, expressing conventional belief: "It is impossible to believe that you could speedily achieve awakening; the body of a woman is too impure even to receive the Dharma, never mind become a fully awakened buddha! Only those who have practiced strenuously for many ages can become truly awakened." Adding that she could never become a Brahma-king, Indra, a Mara-king, a holy wheel-rolling king, or a buddha, since they all have male bodies, he asked how she could possibly expect to become a buddha.

The girl, taking a valuable jewel she had with her, offered it to the Buddha, who accepted it immediately. Then she asked Shariputra and Accumulated Wisdom whether the Buddha had accepted the gem quickly or not. The two of them responded, "Very quickly, indeed." And she said, "With your supernatural powers, watch me as I become a buddha even more quickly!"

Then the whole congregation saw her suddenly change into a man, carry out all the bodhisattva practices, and go to the pure world in the south, where she sat upon a jeweled lotus flower, attained supreme awakening, acquired the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of a buddha, and began to teach the Dharma all over the universe.

Shariputra, Accumulated Wisdom, and everyone else in the congregation—the bodhisattvas and shravakas, the monks and nuns, and the human and non-human beings—accepted her teaching amid great rejoicing.

Women Can Become Buddhas

Taken in context, the main purpose of this story is very clear: women are as capable of becoming fully awakened buddhas as any of the monks who would have been the early hearers of the story. Later, this story would be used appropriately to say the same thing to women. As indicated in the previous installment, chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra contains a message of universal salvation, a powerful reinforcement of the idea found throughout the sutra that all living beings have within them the potential to become fully awakened buddhas.

Some have made much of the fact that the girl in this story is transformed into a male before becoming a buddha.²

There are many stories in Buddhist sutras of such gender transformations. All can be seen to be reflections of a belief that a buddha must have a male body, as the thirty-two marks of a buddha include a reference to a penis.

It is thought that, in India, this belief that buddhas always have male bodies was seldom if ever challenged. It remained basically unchallenged in East Asia as well, with the remarkable exception that in Chinese culture the Indian bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, who was considered male, was transformed into Guanshiyin,³ the bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, who is both male and female and widely recognized in East Asia as a buddha. While this remarkable bodhisattva will be discussed later in this series, we would do well to recognize here that the textual basis for this understanding of Guanyin is chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra, in which it is said that Guanyin can take on any form in order to help others. Thirty-three such forms are listed, the first of which is the form of a buddha.

The compilers of the Lotus Sutra no doubt assumed that Avalokiteshvara would have to be a male buddha. While today we can regret the fact that early Buddhists failed to challenge the assumption that a buddha must always have a male body, it is not surprising that it was simply assumed in this story of the Dragon Princess.

It is an incorrect representation of the story, however, to claim that the sutra "insists" on such a transformation. What is insisted on is the claim that even a girl can become a buddha. Since by definition buddhas are male, the story simply describes in one brief phrase how her body was transformed into that of a male during the process of her becoming a buddha. There is no insistence that such a transformation has to take place, it is rather simply assumed to be a necessary step in becoming a buddha.

It seems evident that many generations took this story to be a proclamation that women are as capable of becoming buddhas as men. When Japan's Emperor Shomu (701–756) established the "national temple" system throughout the country, in each district one temple was established for ten monks and another, a nunnery, for ten nuns. While the whole system was related primarily to Mahavairocana Buddha and the Avatamsaka (Jpn., Kegon) Sutra rather than to Shakyamuni and the Lotus Sutra, in the nunneries it was the Lotus Sutra that was installed and recited for the protection of women, most likely because the Lotus Sutra contained the story of the Dragon Princess.

Today, much, if not all, of the world is gradually undergoing something of a transformation with respect to what people think about gender. Women insist on equality with men, resulting in some quite remarkable changes in social structures and cultural habits in much of the world. The

story of the Dragon Princess can be used to support the ideal of equality between men and women, as that was its obvious purpose.

That the story retains what we see as the incorrect assumption that buddhas are always male can be used as an occasion for us to challenge our own assumptions about gender and gender roles. It is easy for us to recognize that the assumption in the Lotus Sutra that buddhas must be male is both unnecessary and undesirable, but it is not as easy to see our own unchallenged assumptions about the nature and appropriate roles of men and women. We might even think that the assumption found in this Lotus Sutra story comes to us a gift of the Buddha—it is an opportunity for us to become more awakened.

Can Animals and Youth Become Buddhas?

Not only is the Dragon Princess female, she is also a dragon, a mythical animal, and she is very young, only eight years old. In this, we might see affirmation of the possibility that animals and youth can become buddhas. But nothing of the kind is actually said in this chapter of the sutra. For the purposes of this story, it is as if the girl were human, and, apart from her introduction, that is the way she is treated in the story. We do not imagine her as a dragon but as a girl. And the description of her as being only eight years old stands in direct contrast to Manjushri's description of her as having understood all of the main teachings and being wise and eloquent.

I believe that we should understand that while the sutra does, at least in principle, affirm the potential of animals and children—indeed, in all living beings—to become buddhas, what is being held up here are the particular claims that women can become fully awakened buddhas and that it is possible to become a buddha quickly.

Sudden Awakening

In the context of the Lotus Sutra, it is not surprising to find that an animal or young person can become a buddha, but that anyone can do so suddenly is quite surprising, surprising because it goes against the sutra's often repeated assertion that the way to becoming a buddha is very long and arduous. Indeed, this is the point of the tale of the weary travelers and the fantastic castle in chapter 7. This tale about the Dragon Princess is

the only place in the Lotus Sutra that states that one can become a buddha suddenly.

At least in Japan and China, and quite likely in India as well, there was controversy over whether or not sudden awakening is possible. What we find in the Lotus Sutra can be taken as another example of the sutra's tolerance of diverse views. It seems to say that becoming a buddha is normally, perhaps almost always, a long and difficult path, but that there can be exceptions. Rather than articulating this exception as a kind of doctrine, however, the sutra simply makes it part of a story, illustrating the exception without entering into debate on the subject.

True awakening is difficult and rare; sudden awakening is extremely rare. If profound awakening happens at all, and certainly if it happens suddenly—in ourselves or in others, like those at the end of this story—we too should be amazed and grateful. But let us not suppose that there is some shortcut to true awakening through the use of drugs or some other esoteric practices. True awakening normally takes much time and effort.

We might also note that the sudden awakening in this story is highly qualified by Manjushri's observations about what the Dragon Princess had already attained. From his description, we know that she had already become a bodhisattva who aspired to become a buddha. She had already made considerable progress on the Way and demonstrated great compassion before becoming a buddha suddenly. Thus, she was especially ready to become a buddha suddenly.

The Way of a Princess

There are other elements of this story that might be held up for our own benefit. For example, like Shakyamuni Buddha, the girl is the child of a king. She leaves a palace—which in the Lotus Sutra is always a symbol of luxury and comfort—in order to come into this world to help others by becoming a buddha.

Princes and princesses are supposed to stay in

The Dragon Princess offering a precious jewel to Shakyamuni Buddha. The frontispiece for, and the opening part of, chapter 12, "Devadatta," bound as one of the thirty-three ornamental scrolls popularly called the Heike Nokyo (Heike Family Votive Sutra), enshrined at Itsukushima Shrine, Hiroshima Prefecture. National Treasure.

their palaces, where all is clean and comfortable, and settle down with another prince or princess to produce royal heirs. Not many of us live in palaces today. Or do we? The palace can be understood as the comfort and security of tradition and conventional wisdom. Like Shakyamuni himself, the Dragon Princess, our buddha-in-the-making, is a convention breaker who does the unexpected. Imagine how shocked the venerable Shariputra and Accumulated Wisdom, both presumably monks well up in years, must have been when this young girl turned to them, demanded to know whether or not her jewel had been accepted by the Buddha quickly, and instructed them to watch her. This is not the way that young girls are supposed to behave toward their elders. It was not the way things were done then; it is not the way they are done now.

Like many great religious leaders, that girl is highly unconventional. Jesus, Saicho, Dogen, Nichiren, Mahatma Gandhi, and even Nikkyo Niwano were not conventional people. We have heard the story about Shakyamuni Buddha leaving his father's palace and his own wife and child so often that we forget that that story too is about shockingly unconventional behavior. For that matter, virtually the whole story of early Buddhism is about unconventional behavior and lifestyles—a group of young men leaving comfortable homes to become wandering beggars who encourage other young men to leave their homes and families to take up a life of begging!

The Dragon Princess resorted to unconventional behavior not to be unconventional but to make a point. She needed to get the attention of these men in order to teach them something. In other words, she was unconventional, but unconventional for the purpose of helping others. Maybe the world needs more people who are willing and able to be unconventional for the sake of helping others.

The Princess as a Buddha

We are told at the end of the story that, as a buddha, the Dragon Princess began teaching the Dharma all over the universe. But it is also relevant that in her very being and in her actions, she teaches the Dharma to Shariputra and the bodhisattva Accumulated Wisdom in the process of becoming a buddha. And this is witnessed by the whole congregation, which in turn is then taught by the girl who has become a buddha. And we hearers or readers of the story are also offered an opportunity to witness this whole scenario. In this way the Dragon Princess is our teacher, one who leads us to Buddha-wisdom. It is important to see that she can be a teacher of the Dharma and a buddha for us even during the process of becoming a buddha. In challenging Shariputra and the bodhisattva Accumulated Wis-

dom, though still in the body of a girl, she was already a buddha, even though they could not yet see that.

Seeing with Supernatural Powers

The idea of seeing a buddha is almost a constant theme in the Lotus Sutra. At times, seeing a buddha can be equated with being a buddha. As we saw in the story of the Buddha and Devadatta, at least one of the things that make the Buddha a buddha is his ability to see the buddha in others.

So it is not insignificant that, toward the end of this story, the Dragon Princess tells Shariputra and the bodhisattva Accumulated Wisdom that they should watch with their supernatural ability to see. Such holy powers are nothing less than the fantastic powers of the human imagination. Shariputra and the bodhisattva Accumulated Wisdom learned to see what others could not see—a mere girl becoming a buddha—because they were enabled to transcend their normal vision and their normal, conventional ways of thinking. They were transformed by the Dragon Princess into men who could see like a buddha; they became able to see the buddha in the girl.

That is all that we are asked to do by the Lotus Sutra—to use our imagination to see further and deeper than we have ever seen before: to see the buddha in others; to see the positive potential in others—both their inherent good and their good for us. It is seldom if ever easy to do this, but we already possess such holy powers, and they can be awakened through the story of the Dragon Princess—a girl who becomes a buddha and who is a buddha in the process of becoming. □

Notes

1. In India, this king and his daughter are actually *nagas* (serpents), and they are often depicted as large king cobras. In Southeast Asia, however, they are thought of as mythical sea serpents and are often depicted as such in Southeast Asian Buddhist temples, though they usually resemble large snakes more than dragons. But Chinese translators of Buddhist texts did not have *nagas* in their imaginations. They were, however, quite familiar with dragons, an old symbol of good fortune in China. Thus, typically, *naga* was translated into the Chinese word for “dragon,” and that is why dragons are so prominent in East Asian Buddhist temples and absent from those in Southeast Asia.

2. See, for example, Lucinda Joy Peach, “Social Responsibility, Sex Change, and Salvation: Gender Justice in the Lotus Sutra,” in *A Buddhist Kaleidoscope: Essays on the Lotus Sutra*, Gene Reeves, ed. (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 2002), pp. 437–67.

3. “Guan-shih-yin” is the Chinese pronunciation of the most common translation of Avalokiteshvara into Chinese. It is often shortened to Guanyin. In English publications, these names are often seen as Kuan-shih-yin and Kuan-yin. In Japanese, they are pronounced “Kanzeon” and “Kannon.”

Tenth UN Symposium on Northeast Asia Held in Kanazawa

On June 7–9 the United Nations Association of Japan held the 10th United Nations Symposium on Northeast Asia in Kanazawa, Ishikawa Prefecture. Thirty-six participants, including government officials and scholars from nine Asian-Pacific countries, as well as United Nations officials, were present. The participants reviewed the results of past symposiums and discussed current problems in Northeast Asia. Attending on behalf of Rishso Kosei-kai was Rev. Masamichi Kamiya, deputy director of the organization's External Affairs Department.

During a plenary session, Prof. James Cotton of the Australian Defense Force Academy said that the annual symposia have served as important opportunities for continued dialogue on peace and security in Northeast Asia. During the subsequent question-and-answer session, Rev. Kamiya commented that the symposium's policy of allowing government officials, journalists, and representatives of NGOs to participate in individual capacities had kept discussions fair and balanced. The participants also discussed such topics as "The Role of the Military Today," "The Korean Peninsula," and "Food, Energy, and Ecological Security." Rev. Gijun Sugitani, secretary-general of the Japanese Committee of the WCRP, made a presentation during one of the plenary sessions, emphasizing the importance of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, in which participants respect mutual differences, as means of promoting peace and human security. During the symposium Mr. Yoshikazu Shimizu, a member of the board of directors of the United Nations Association of Japan, and Mr. Tsutomu Ishiguri, director of the

United Nations Regional Center for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific, expressed appreciation for Rishso Kosei-kai's long-standing support of the United Nations through its Peace Fund. □

Iraqi and Japanese Religious Youth Discuss Peace in Iraq

On May 16–17 the Rishso Kosei-kai Youth Division organized an emergency meeting at a hotel in Amman, Jordan, under the theme "Religious Youth for Peace in Iraq and Beyond: A Consultation between Youth Religious Leaders from Japan and Iraq."

The participants in the meeting included eight religionists of Iraq, who took part from such organizations as the Iraqi Islamic Party, the Aldawa Islamic Party, the Ulama Committee, and the Ulama Kurdish Committee. The ten participants from Japanese religious organizations included the director of the Rishso Kosei-kai Youth Division and the chairman of the Youth League of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan).

At the meeting, participants learned about the suffering of Iraqis in the aftermath of the war and the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime. The participants heard not only about damage to the nation's social infrastructure, the high unemployment rate, and the lack of social welfare services caused by the war, but also about the importance of the religious values sustaining Iraqis as guiding principles in their daily lives. At the end of the meeting, a joint statement was adopted and read out. In it, the religious youth raised questions about a range of problems—political, economic, and cultural—that have affected them since the war. The statement expresses their hopes, and calls for the establishment of a network of

religious youth in Iraq, support for education, and acquiring the necessary technology for their country's reconstruction. It also calls for an understanding of, and respect for, Iraq's history, human rights, and spirituality, as well as efforts to meet the acute need to improve their country's relations with the rest of the world through the international network of the World Conference of Religions for Peace. □

JEN Transfers Relief Activities in Serbia and Montenegro to Local NGO

On May 31 JEN, a multiorganizational nonprofit group, of which Rishso Kosei-kai is a member, announced the conclusion of its activities in the Serbia-Montenegro region of the former Yugoslavia. After its founding in 1994, JEN started relief activities as emergency aid in the region after the outbreak of ethnic conflicts and other civil disturbances. JEN continued supporting the reconstruction process in the region for about ten years. It expanded its activities of contributing food and medical equipment to refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and held workshops emphasizing the need for counseling services. In cooperation with JEN, Rishso Kosei-kai organized and sent volunteer groups to distribute bags of toys, stationery items, and daily necessities through the organization's Little Bags of Dreams Campaign. In recent years, JEN's support activities aimed at helping refugees become self-reliant. After the close of its offices in Belgrade and Nis, JEN's various activities were to be taken over by a local NGO whose establishment JEN supported. JEN also announced it would continue its activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the former Yugoslavia. □

With the Buddha at the Starting Line of Life

by Rika Fujii

From a childhood filled with fear and distrust of others, one woman became aware, through the Buddha and others, that she does not live in isolation but is supported by many people who care.

I was a miserable high-school student. Bullied at school and compelled to study for university entrance exams at home, I didn't trust anyone. "What am I living for?" I saw no value in my own existence. All I wanted was to go far, far away to any place where there was nobody who knew me. Looking back, I realize now that it was this feeling that drove me to enter a residential college in Saitama Prefecture near Tokyo, having left my hometown in western Japan.

Even there, however, I distrusted people so much that every day was tension-filled with groundless fear, and it was not long before I had to be hospitalized because of poor health. When I came back home, I withdrew into seclusion. I had left home once and did not want to return. I didn't want to see anyone. People gave my parents all kinds of advice. However, I felt that my parents somehow kept a

Ms. Fujii with fellow public health nurses in her hometown.

distance from me, and that made me feel even more inferior.

One day the district group leader of the local branch of Rissho Kosei-kai came to invite me to attend a service. I went, albeit reluctantly. The minute the chapter leader caught sight of me, she exclaimed: "Welcome back. We have been waiting for you." Suddenly, I was overtaken by the tears I had been working so hard to hold back. "It's OK for me to come back here. It's OK for me to be here," I thought to myself with relief. For the first time ever, I felt the value of my own existence.

Over the next month, I continued to attend services at the branch. At first, I was hesitant and tended to avoid people. I didn't know what to say when they asked me about school. Gradually, however, as I joined in the Sangha activities, I regained my trust in people. And somewhere

Rika Fujii is a member of the Kita Hiroshima Branch of Rissho Kosei-kai in Hiroshima Prefecture.

along the line I found myself actually communicating and expressing my own feelings. Above all, I learned to accept myself, both my good and bad aspects, and to recognize that my own life was important and valuable.

I believe now that the Buddha made me aware that I do not live in isolation but am supported by many, many people. Thanks to this experience, I have gotten to know the Buddha and have come to the starting line of my life with the Buddha at my side.

Today, I work at the town office as a public health nurse for the nursing care insurance department. I have had many experiences in my visits to people needing nursing care. In particular, I am reminded of my own despair during my high-school years when I encounter patients who wail, “With a body like this, what is the point of being alive?”

I treasure my relationships with these people, and I hope to serve them in the same way that others have served and helped me. □

The Mainstay of My Work

by Michihiro Mochizuki

Taking things for granted, we can fall into the habit of doing things only because they have to be done. One man caught himself doing this and was able to renew his work with a loving, caring spirit.

I currently work as a professional caregiver at a home for elderly people requiring special care. Most of the people there have senile dementia or are handicapped in some way or are completely bedridden. They need help with all the daily chores of life—eating, bathing, and taking care of bodily wastes. I began this work vowing to do my best to provide the kind of care these people needed,

but somewhere along the line I found myself working only out of a sense of obligation. I also caught myself labeling the pliant, obedient elderly patient as a “good” person and the recalcitrant, difficult patient as a “bad” person. I wasn’t grateful to be serving these people. In fact, I felt they should be grateful to me for taking care of them. When I realized how much my feelings had changed, I was so disappointed in myself that I even thought about quitting.

“Let’s stop and think this through one more time,” I thought to myself. I resumed my morning and evening sutra chanting before the home altar, something I had become very lax about. I made a renewed effort to join in the youth group workshops and *hoza* counseling sessions held at the branch. And through these activities, I learned a valuable lesson: work is a medium through which we can grow and mature. At that time I made a new vow to myself. From now on I would try to learn from my interaction with the elderly people who depended on my care.

Since that time I have at last gained the sensitivity to realize how difficult it must be for these people to have to depend on others for tasks that they would normally be able to take care of themselves. The Buddha’s teaching is my mainstay and the support I need to continue my work and fulfill my tasks as a caregiver who can squarely face the sufferings of life, aging, illness, and death. □

Michihiro Mochizuki is a member of the Kofu Branch of Rissho Kosei-kai in Yamanashi Prefecture.

The Buddha's Death Is Mourned

by Hajime Nakamura

The early Buddhist texts tell us that the disciples grieved over the death of their master. But the Buddha's passing was one with the natural law to which all living beings are subject. It was not a retribution for sin or an atonement for the sins of others. It was simply a manifestation of the law of impermanence.

The Buddha's death has from ancient times been described in poetry. Brahmā is said to have spoken the following verse:

All living beings in this world must finally abandon their bodies.

Even as the Master, without peer in the human realm, the great practitioner endowed with [wisdom's] power, he who has attained perfect enlightenment,

Has passed away [*parinibbūta*; Skt., *parinirvṛta*].

(Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, VI, 10)

Here Brahmā is the mouthpiece for the acute awareness among the Buddha's contemporaries that even the greatest sage among living beings cannot evade death. This utterance is followed immediately by a verse spoken by Sakka (*Sakko devānam Indo*):

All things that are produced are truly impermanent;

They but come into being and fall into decay.

Such production and decay are brought to an end.

[Perceiving] the tranquillity of these [things which are produced] is bliss.

(Ibid.)

All compounded things are in a state of flux, coming into existence and then decaying; having arisen they must pass away. The greatest joy is to have brought them to quietude. The verse is well-known as a short summary of the teaching of impermanence. It appears in a variety of translations in

the Chinese sutras; perhaps the most widely quoted version is:

All conditioned things are impermanent,

For they arise only to decay.

When there is an end to arising and decay

There is the peace of nirvāṇa.

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).

It is also the basis of the Japanese *Iroha* verse, which contains each of the syllables of the Japanese script:

*I ro ha ni ho he to chi ri nu ru (w)o
wa ka yo ta re so tsu ne na ra mu
u (w)i no o ku ya ma ke fu ko e te
a sa ki yu me mi shi (w)e hi mo se su*

[The verse is read in modern pronunciation as:

*Iro wa nioedo chirinuru o,
Waga yo tare zo tsune naran
Ui no okuyama kyo koete
Asaki yumemiji ei mo sezu.]*

Colors are fragrant, but they fade away.

In this world of ours no one remains unchanging.

Today cross over the deep mountains of conditioned things

And there will be no more shallow dreams, no more drunkenness.

According to the various sutras that relate the Buddha's last journey, the above-mentioned verse by Sakka was recited on the occasion of Gotama's passing. Thus in Sri Lanka, *bhikkhus* chant it at funerals and later give sermons on the subject of impermanence; this is very different from the long sutra recitations that form the backbone of Japanese funeral services.

The *Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta* attributed the above verses to Brahmā and Sakka because those two deities from very early times had been regarded as protectors of Buddhism. Sakka (Indra) had been the most powerful of the Vedic gods, while Brahmā was the focus of one of the most popular cults at the time when Buddhism developed. Gotama's divine character was emphasized by having these two divinities express their devotion to him.

Anuruddha, the disciple of the Buddha, then recites a further verse:

Already his breathing has stopped, he whose mind is at peace.

The Sage, free from all desire, has passed away, attaining peace.

With undaunted mind, he has endured his suffering:

His mind has become liberated, as an extinguished flame.

(*Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta*, VI, 10)

Ānanda spoke the following verse:

Fearful was that which then occurred;

The hair of all stood on end,

When he who had attained supreme and correct enlightenment passed away.

(Ibid.)

According to the prose section, this "fearful" event was a great earthquake.

"When the Venerable Master passed away, entering *nibbāna*, a great earthquake occurred, frightening, hair-raising, accompanied by the drum of heaven [thunder]." (Ibid.)

Such a legend no doubt grew up in later times to add impact to the Buddha's death.

The Pāli text has Ānanda recite the final verse, as does the *Ta-pan-nieh-p'an-ching*, since their compilers no doubt considered that the attendant Ānanda must have had a part to play. Nevertheless, the original version in fact named only Brahmā, Sakka, and Anuruddha. Perhaps this means that Anuruddha did actually recite some kind of verse at the time of the Buddha's death. Yet, because the compilers wanted to show the devotion of the two great deities to the Buddha, they brought them in before Anuruddha. An early version of the text can be found in the Sanskrit version and the *Pan-ni-yūan-ching*.

A common device used to emphasize the impact and significance of the Buddha's death was the insertion of the presence of many deities and disciples. The *Yu-hsing-ching*, for example, introduces various gods and disciples of the Buddha at this point. Having devas, especially powerful ones like Brahmā, praising the Buddha is too an indication of a move toward Sakyamuni's deification. Thus the Pāli, Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Sarvāstivādin texts all have Brahmā, Sakka, Anuruddha, and Ānanda composing verses of lamentation; all are common in that the verses are attributed to the same speakers. Why these particular four protagonists appear is debatable. Perhaps of all his disciples, only Anuruddha and Ānanda were with him when the Buddha died. Or at least, of all the disciples who were there, the two of them were considered the main figures. The choice of the deities also focuses attention on two powerful and important devas of the time (Indra was the central deity of the Vedas, while Brahmā was considered the creator and master of the world). From very early times considered the two great protector deities of Buddhism, they both appear constantly in Buddhist sculpture in that role. The verses of lamentation, composed well before the composition of the *suttanta* and regarded as having some connection with the circumstances of the Buddha's death, seem to have been linked to these four speakers.

The *Yu-hsing-ching* presents a far greater number of persons expressing grief; there are eighteen such verses, beginning with one by Brahmā. Thought to have been a considerably later addition to the text, most are spoken by

deities. Thus the text presented is the lamentation of the gods over the Buddha's death; the Buddha's significance is authenticated by the deities themselves.

The various texts are not constant in the names of those who recited the verses. The verses had been memorized from ancient times to transmit the circumstances surrounding the Buddha's death, and when the various texts were written down they were included or discarded according to the needs of the compiler, which accounts for the different attributions. The Chinese Yu-hsing-ching has a particularly large number of verses purporting to teach the doctrine of impermanence, which are spoken by a variety of deities, disciples, and other people, including the Buddha's mother, Māyā.

Though the various texts differ in points of detail, there can be no doubt that they transmit the prevailing mood at the time of the Buddha's death. Gotama passed away peacefully, surrounded by his disciples and followers, an exemplar to all ordinary people. His passing left no cloud or stain; those remaining were all filled with loving-kindness and affinity toward one another. That to gather around the deathbed of a sage was an ideal for all living beings is expressed already in the oldest of the Upaniṣads, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*:

"Speech does not desert one who, knowing thus, that this [Brahman] is speech, meditates upon speech. All living beings gather around him. Having become a god, [he] goes to where the gods are [after death]." (*Bṛhad. Up.*, IV, 1, 2)

As this ideal developed, it came to be applied to the deathbed of Sakyamuni and led eventually to the idealization represented by the so-called nirvana pictures. The Buddha's death took on ever greater importance as Buddhism expanded, and it came to be depicted on a grand scale as a metaphor of compassion. Of particular interest is the way that representations of the nirvana in art underwent change. According to the oldest Buddhist texts, only human beings and deities had gathered to lament the Buddha's passing. When, however, we examine depictions of the nirvana in the Tun-huang caves, on the western borders of China, we find animals and birds widely included in the grieving throng. Early examples of this development can perhaps already be seen in Gandharan art, where fragments of reliefs showing many animals, birds, and deities gathered suggest, though the identification is by no means certain, that they were originally part of nirvana scenes.

In Japan such nirvana pictures are noted for the large numbers of birds and animals appearing in them (for example, that owned by the Shingon sect on Mount Kōya). According to legend, though, there was no cat at the deathbed. Folktales relate that of all the animals only the cat did not hurry to reach the Buddha before he died. This

also accounts, they say, for its omission from the twelve calendrical signs. However, in Buddhism itself there is no evidence that the cat was disliked, and in fact it appears from time to time in *Jātaka* stories. Despite the tradition in Japan that the cat is not depicted in nirvana scenes, there actually are instances of its appearance even there. For example, the large-scale sculptures of animals in the nirvana scene at Hōnenji in Takamatsu, Kagawa Prefecture on Shikoku, include a cat, as does the massive picture (18.15 m. x 8.8 m., 59.9 ft. x 29 ft.) popularly known as the "Cat Mandala" at Gokokuji in Tokyo. It is said that the painter of the latter work, Kanō Tanenobu, included the cat because of his affection for his own cat, which was always with him while he was engaged on the picture.

Lamentation of the Disciples

When they realized the Buddha had died, the disciples threw themselves on the ground, weeping.

"[When the Buddha died] those few *bhikkhus* who had not yet separated themselves from the passions [*avītarāga*] stretched forth their arms and raised them, weeping, and threw themselves down like rocks, writhing and turning, saying: 'The Venerable Master is dying, all too soon. The Happy One is dying, all too soon. The Eye of the World is hiding himself, all too 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, 10)

Those who had not yet attained enlightenment wept, while those who had achieved true realization did not, according to the compiler of the *suttanta*.

"Then the Venerable Anuruddha 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?'" (*Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta*, VI, 11)

According to the Pāli text, both Anuruddha and Ānanda spent that night conversing about the Dhamma. Then Ānanda, following Anuruddha's orders, set off for Kusinārā to announce the Buddha's death to the Mallas. When he arrived they were discussing business in their meeting hall; hearing that the Buddha had died, "they were stricken with grief and sorrow, and their minds were overcome with anguish. Some tore their hair and wept, stretched forth their arms and raised them, wept, and threw themselves down like rocks, writhing and turning." (*Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta*, VI, 12)

The Buddha's passing was one with the natural law to which all living beings are subject. It was not a retribution

A road leading to Kuśināgara in the dusk.

for sin or an atonement for the sins of others. It was simply a manifestation of the law of impermanence.

The Nirvana Ceremony and Nirvana Pictures

A ceremony to mark the death of the Buddha has been held on February 15 (the fifteenth day of the second month) since ancient times in Japan. It is known by a variety of names, including *nehan-e* (nirvana ceremony), *jōraku-e* (ceremony of perpetual joy), *nehan-ki* (nirvana memorial), and *butsu-ki* (buddha memorial). “Nehan” derives from the Chinese transliteration of the Prakrit form of the Sanskrit *nirvāṇa* and the Pāli *nibbāna*. The term originally indicated a state devoid of human delusion; it became the term commonly used to refer to Sakyamuni’s death. In both China and Japan, the Buddha in ancient times was considered to have died on the fifteenth day of the second lunar month; it became a custom on that day for temples to commemorate the Buddha’s death by hanging up large pictures depicting the nirvana scene and reciting the Fo-ichiao-ching (*Butsuyūikyō-gyō* in Japanese).

The early Buddhist texts tell us that the disciples grieved over the death of their master; the Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta describes the sorrow of Ānanda, the disciple closest to the Buddha.

“And the young Ānanda entered the dwelling, leaned heavily against the doorpost and wept. ‘Ah, I am still one with much to learn and have much to do. Yet the master

who has compassion for me is passing away.” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 13)

The deities of heaven and earth also wept.

“They are tearing their hair and wailing, stretching forth their arms and raising them, weeping, throwing themselves down like rocks, writhing and turning, saying: ‘The Venerable Master is dying, all too soon. The Blessed One is dying, all too soon. The Eye of the World is hiding himself, all too soon.’” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 6)

The figures in the relief of the nirvana scene belonging to Hōryūji, in Nara, represent this grief well.

Services marking the Buddha’s birth, attainment of enlightenment, and so on are considered to have been held on separate occasions in ancient times. In India and South Asia, however, the nirvana was rarely commemorated and all of the observances were subsumed into one ceremony, for it was commonly believed that Sakyamuni’s birth, attainment of enlightenment, and death all should be observed on the same day, the day of the full moon in Vaiśākha, the second month of the traditional Indian calendar. This day actually corresponds to the middle of May, according to the solar calendar. In Sri Lanka, it is called the Wesak Festival. In Vietnam it is known as “Buddha’s Birth,” and includes the commemoration of the nirvana. Indian Buddhism, incidentally, associated the Buddha’s death with the blooming of flowers.

“Then at that time the *sāla* trees gave forth flowers in

Reproduction by Ryusen Miyahara of an hanging scroll at Kongōbuji on Mount Kōya, Wakayama Prefecture, depicting the Buddha's entrance into nirvana. The original painting, completed in 1086, has been designated a National Treasure.

full bloom out of season. Those flowers fell upon the body of the Tathāgata, sprinkling and scattering over it in veneration. Heavenly *mandārava* flowers fell from the sky upon the body of the Tathāgata, sprinkling and scattering over it in veneration.” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 2)

That many flowers had fallen upon the body of the Tathāgata in veneration was not an extraordinary demonstration of imagination for Indians, for it must be remembered that flowers bloom the whole year around in southern India, and moreover, the nirvana was considered

to have occurred in the second month, well into spring. From this point of view there is no contradiction in the words of the Japanese Buddhist priest and poet Saigyō (1114–1190):

May it be that
I die in the springtime,
Beneath the blossoms,
In the second month
When the moon is full.

Of course, if this is understood to be the second lunar month according to Japanese usage, a certain discrepancy arises, since it is not common for flowers to bloom at that time.

The various Buddhist festivals (*maha*) observed in India were translated into Chinese by words having concepts such as “great meeting” or “feast.” Though Indian Buddhist texts mention a great variety of such observances, no references can be found to anything like a nirvana ceremony. Hsüan-tsang, however, mentions something very much like it, which he witnessed at Bamiyan in Afghanistan, the site of the world’s largest images of the Buddha, carved into a mountainside.

“Two or three *li* east of the [royal] city, there is [a certain] *saṃghārāma*, in which there is a statue of the Buddha in the sleeping position, depicting his nirvana. It is more than one thousand feet long. The ruler of this country, whenever he holds alms assemblies [where donations are made to all people without discrimination], donates all his possessions, from his own wife and children down to his most exquisite jewels. When the government office’s warehouse becomes empty, he gives even his own body. Then the officers, from his ministers to the retainers, redeem all of these from priests. They consider this to be their duty.” (*Ta’ang hsi-yü-chi*, I)

Thus the local ruler sponsored a ritual in which offerings were made before a large-scale sculptural representation of the nirvana. These offerings included royal jewels, his wife and children, and even himself. Such an ideal appears often in Buddhist scriptures like the *Jātaka* stories. People would offer money to buy the various offerings; such ceremonies had become the customary way of making donations to the community of the ordained. The fact that Hsüan-tsang described this in such detail suggests it was unfamiliar to him.

There can be no doubt that similar observances were followed throughout Buddhist Asia. Nirvana statues have been found at Kuśīnagar in Uttar Pradesh and at Mathura. Similarly, there is a huge reclining figure portraying the Buddha immediately before his death carved into a cliff at Polonnaruwa, the old Sinhalese capital that flourished from the fourth century C.E. through the eighth century. The standing figure of Ānanda (7 m. in height) grieves at the Buddha’s head. It may be readily surmised that ceremonies were held before such statues, although it is doubtful if they occurred either in the lunar or solar second month; rather, they must have taken place on the fifteenth of Vaiśākha, well into spring. Since India and most of the countries of South Asia experience heat throughout the year, so that flowers are always in bloom, there is no incongruity in the fact that they should observe all the impor-

tant anniversaries of the Buddha’s life on the same day. People in East Asia, however, where the climate is remarkable for its seasonal changes, and particularly the Japanese, with their keen awareness of the changing seasons, did not find this suitable. In China, and then in Japan, the anniversaries were separated: the birth was celebrated on the eighth of the fourth month, a time of flowers and contentment; the enlightenment was observed on the eighth of the twelfth month, when the weather usually is cold and crisp; and the death was commemorated on the fifteenth of the second month, in the bleakness of midwinter. Thus the nirvana ceremony in Japan combines a memorial rite for Sakyamuni with the developed Japanese seasonal sense.

It is unclear when the nirvana ceremony was first observed as a custom in Japan. The *Jiyō nikki* (Record of Annual Events) of Hōryūji, copied in 1366, makes mention of such a rite being performed in the Great Lecture Hall there and implies that similar ceremonies had taken place before. It is likely that they began around the same time that rites to mark the Buddha’s birth were first performed in about 1119. The nirvana ceremony was revived there on February 15, 1983.

Representations of the Buddha’s nirvana have long been favored by Asian Buddhists. Through them they can cherish the memory of Sakyamuni and enter a quiet and peaceful state of mind. Only stone or metal sculptures on this theme remain in the South Asian countries, and the very medium prevents a fine, detailed portrayal of emotion. However, Japanese nirvana paintings, particularly the one in the possession of Kongōbuji on Mount Kōya which is a national treasure, are both richly colored and well planned, and moreover they contain a large number of figures full of individuality and feeling. As a whole, these are expressions of the deepest religiosity. They may be described as the ultimate expression of the Japanese understanding and development of the continental tradition into a unique aesthetic. When I have visited the various countries of Asia I have taken with me miniature reproductions of the Kongōbuji picture in order to encourage people to understand both the particularity and the universality of Japanese religious art. I am very happy that now a full-scale reproduction exists so that they may experience more vividly the impact of the original.

The nirvana picture that must have decorated the Great Lecture Hall at Hōryūji from around the thirteenth century has not come down to us. The one used at present was painted in 1711 by Saiganji Kokan to fit the dimensions of the hall. Indian representations of the nirvana date from a very early period; the majority of them are reliefs in stone.

To be continued

The Danger That Democracy Faces

by Nikkyo Niwano

This essay is part of a continuing series of translations from a volume of inspirational writings by the late founder of Rissho Kosei-kai. DHARMA

WORLD will continue to publish these essays because of their lasting value as guidance for the practice of one's faith in daily life.

I have the impression that the influence of Marxism has decreased since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and even those who still extol socialism, while deploring the wrong turn that Soviet socialism took, are fewer today.

Marxist theory holds that the workers are exploited and impoverished by the continuing growth of capitalism. Therefore they must change the economic system through revolution, as a result of which capitalism inevitably will collapse. This seems to me just another kind of faith, and Marxists can be thought of as a type of fatalist. Although things did not turn out in accordance with this theory as if history were nothing more than a train following a timetable, we cannot simply interpret the result as a victory for democracy and a failure for the idea of socialism.

Because democracy is a system for adopting the better policies from among various options, if members of a democratic society do not contribute sound thinking to their society it could face serious future dangers. An excess of individual license in the name of personal freedom leads to uncontrolled selfishness and a society in which mob rule and disorder can prevail. There could be the possibility that in such a society, when the people in general want to follow a certain policy, there would be no accepted public opinion as to what the policy should be. A social atmosphere would then develop in which people became irritated at the preva-

lence of mob rule and yearned for a strong leader to exert power. That would open the door to what we call fascism. Fascism is something we must avoid at all costs. In that regard, religion, which allows everyone to develop as moderate human beings, is absolutely essential in a democratic society.

Following the end of World War II, defeated Japan and victorious England, France, the Netherlands, and some other countries gave up their colonies. And as the end of the twentieth century approached, something that was not expected occurred—not only did the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union end, but the Soviet Union itself collapsed and separated into fifteen countries, one of which is Russia, with the prospect of further disintegration taking place. Several years later, with the reversion of Hong Kong to Chinese rule in 1997, colonies had almost disappeared from the face of the earth. There were only about sixty nations in existence at the beginning of the twentieth century, but that number had grown to nearly two hundred by the century's end. We can understand from this just how many countries had previously been colonies. Of course, it is a cause for joy that so many countries should have gained their independence. On the other hand, this has led to the increased likelihood of war breaking out as people face the severe challenges of their future coexistence. Unless the hearts of people change, the world will become an increasingly difficult place in which to live as the number of nations increases. We should remember the words of the Buddha in the Dhammapada: "Victory begets enmity; the defeated dwell in pain. Happily the peaceful live, discarding both victory and defeat."

With the aim of repenting for their previous policy of

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

totally controlling the destinies of others, the former colonial powers should resolve to take the initiative in the new century for sharing their wealth with those in less privileged parts of the world. They should do so with complete awareness that there can be no tomorrow for this world unless we all determine that the goal of happiness is one that everyone must share.

The Roots of Democracy

The origins of democracy can be traced back to ancient Greece. Around the seventh century B.C.E. autocratic rule prevailed and ordinary people played little or no participatory role in government. Eventually some individuals awoke to their responsibility as human beings and began to become more involved with governance, but because people in general did not share these feelings and had little social awareness, autocratic rule once again became standard.

It was only with the development of the Renaissance in fourteenth-century Italy and the growth of opposition to medieval despotism and the autocratic rule of church leaders that democracy once again had the opportunity to bloom. Since this incipient democracy emphasized individual freedom, this encouraged the rise of liberal humanism, from which the doctrine of self-interest was born.

That is why I cannot help being apprehensive that contemporary democracy too will fall prey to self-interest and selfishness, and feel that there is a real danger that it will be brought down by the seeds that are inherent within it. We need to consider carefully the widespread idea that we should be tolerant of everything in the name of "freedom" or "democracy."

We must confront squarely anything that threatens genuine democracy. At the same time, we must never return to the autocratic system of the past. In order to ensure this in the face of the difficult choices before us, we must all learn to practice self-restraint.

I believe that all of us must develop a heightened sense of responsibility, must control our selfishness, and must cultivate the attitude of being content with what is sufficient. Instead of returning to the totalitarian ideas of the period before World War II or clinging to the extreme individualism of the postwar years, we should rather seek out, in the words of the Roman poet Horace, the "golden mean" between the two extremes. Where should we look for this? I believe that religious faith is absolutely essential to our search. I am not indulging in special pleading as a person of religion by saying this, but do so because this is an issue that deserves the careful attention of each and every one of us. Much time will have to be expended on the search, but that only emphasizes the great importance of the matter. □

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano visiting the Trinity Saint Sergius Monastery in Zagorsk, northeast of Moscow. In September 1982, Rev. Niwano visited the Soviet Union at the invitation of the Russian Orthodox Church. He met with top religious leaders, including Patriarch Pimen and Metropolitan Filaret, with whom he discussed religionists' responsibility to cooperate in the cause of world peace.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 8

The Five Hundred Disciples Receive the Prediction of Their Destiny

(2)

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

TEXT “All the people of those buddha periods spoke of him as ‘the true disciple’ [shravaka]. Thus Purna, by such tactfulness, has benefited innumerable hundreds and thousands of living beings and converted innumerable asamkhyeyas of people to achieve Perfect Enlightenment. For the sake of purifying [his] buddha land, he has constantly done a buddha’s work and instructed the living.

COMMENTARY This passage merits special attention.

• Purna, by such tactfulness, has benefited innumerable hundreds and thousands of living beings. Here, “tactfulness” (skillful means) refers to the fact that Purna, though having already attained the bodhisattva’s state, in his modesty always acted as if he were still only a shravaka. Since he had this attitude, the people around him, as well as people at large, could associate comfortably with him and readily listened to his teaching. As time went by, unconsciously they were influenced by his attitude to life and, guided by his great power of instruction, came to understand the Buddha Dharma, expressing the aspiration to practice it until attaining supreme enlightenment. This provides a very important lesson for us in disseminating the teaching or leading others to the teaching.

While people will kneel before a person of great dignity and virtue, like Shakyamuni, and concentrate on listening to that person’s teaching, they may not be so ready to give their heartfelt trust to a person of lesser stature. If we pretend to be better than we really are, we only alienate our listeners and make them feel we are difficult to approach.

Here Purna’s attitude provides us with a good model. He walked with the multitude, no more than half a step ahead. The people thought of him as a comrade and followed him because they trusted him as a leader. Walking with him, they were unconsciously influenced by him and led along the correct path.

“Walking half a step ahead” is a method of leadership that shows a clear grasp of mass psychology. If one walks abreast with other people, that is, if one acts in the same way as people who know nothing of the Buddha Way, one is not qualified for leadership. Climbing a mountain is the same. The guide does not stride ten or a hundred paces ahead, although he or she probably has the ability to do so, but stays just a little way in front of the group, providing a model for those following. When necessary, the guide can provide suggestions or give orders, ensuring that all arrive safely at the summit together. This is the action of a true leader. If the leader rushes to the summit alone and only oversees the group from a distance, the beginners among his or her followers will merely be confused even if ordered to do this or that. Instructing people in the Buddha Dharma is exactly the same. People will not follow someone who speaks while staying aloof from them, even if that person has reached a high level of enlightenment. Unless a teacher descends to the level of the people and guides them with loving care, true instruction is impossible.

Shakyamuni applied such a way of preaching. If he had suddenly preached about the highest enlightenment, everyone would only have been perplexed. Therefore he began

with familiar, elementary teachings and guided people step by step. If even Shakyamuni, with his incomparable persuasive power, employed this method of teaching, how can we expect to get good results if we teach the profoundest doctrine from the very beginning with no thought for our listeners' needs? With some people it can be appropriate and correct to start by preaching immediate benefits, saying to people perhaps, "If you achieve peace of mind through studying the Buddha's teaching, your physical health will improve and your circumstances will change for the better." With people of a more intellectual bent, it is fine to begin by discussing the law of dependent origination, the Three Seals of the Law, and the like.

In any case, what is most important when instructing beginners about the Dharma is to guide them warmly, with tender care, from half a step ahead, and not to be overbearing, separating oneself from them, and also not to take on a condescending air—"I am enlightened and you are not." In this regard, Purna is truly an excellent model for us lay practitioners of the teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

- *To achieve Perfect Enlightenment.* This means to cause to aspire to Perfect Enlightenment (*anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*), the supreme and ultimate enlightenment of a buddha.

- *Buddha land.* This term refers to the land where a buddha instructs living beings. Since a buddha does not live in a special realm of his own, it refers to our own world.

- *A buddha's work.* This phrase means all the actions a buddha takes to teach and save living beings as a result of his original vow (*purva-pranidhana*). Today the term is often used to refer to memorial services to transfer merits to the spirits of the departed, but the original meaning of the term is not so trivial and passive.

TEXT "Bhikshus! Purna also was the foremost among the preachers of the Law under the Seven Buddhas and now is again the foremost among the preachers of the Law under me.

"Among the preachers of the Law under future buddhas in this Virtuous kalpa, he will also be the foremost and will guard and help to proclaim the Buddha Law.

COMMENTARY *The Seven Buddhas.* These buddhas are also called "the seven Buddhas of the Past": of the innumerable buddhas who have appeared in the world since the distant past, they are explained by Shakyamuni as those who have had a great influence on the present. They are Vipashyin, Shikhin, Vishvabhu, Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, Kashyapa, and Shakyamuni himself. There is a famous verse, "the verse of commandment of the seven Buddhas,"

that was taught by Shakyamuni as the teaching common to all those buddhas: "To do no evil, / To do only good, / To purify one's mind: / This is the teaching of the Buddhas."

- *Future buddhas.* Of the seven buddhas mentioned above, the first three appeared in the previous kalpa (the kalpa of Adornment), while the last four appeared in the present kalpa (the Virtuous kalpa). Thus, Shakyamuni is the fourth buddha to have appeared in the Virtuous kalpa. He states that the "future buddhas" include the bodhisattva Maitreya, who will appear as the fifth buddha of the Virtuous kalpa.

- *Virtuous kalpa.* For ease of understanding I will begin by discussing "the four kalpas." This was the view that people in ancient India had of the nature of the universe, the method they used to describe the formation, continuance, and destruction of one world and the emergence of the next. This process they divided into four periods:

- (1) The kalpa of formation, consisting of twenty small kalpas, the period during which the world is formed and animal and vegetable life comes into being.

- (2) The kalpa of continuance, consisting of twenty small kalpas, the period during which the world continues, maintaining more or less its present form.

- (3) The kalpa of destruction, consisting of twenty small kalpas, in the course of which all life disappears, the whole world is destroyed, and everything returns to a state of nothingness.

- (4) The kalpa of emptiness, consisting of twenty small kalpas, the period during which all that had form no longer exists.

When the kalpa of emptiness runs its course, the cycle begins again, and the cosmos resumes its infinite cycle of growth and destruction.

We are living in a kalpa of continuance. It is called the Virtuous kalpa because during that time seven or a thousand buddhas will appear (there are conflicting interpretations of this).

TEXT "Also in the future he will guard and help to proclaim the Law of incalculable, infinite buddhas, instructing and benefiting innumerable living beings to cause them to achieve Perfect Enlightenment. For the sake of purifying [his] buddha land he will ever diligently and zealously instruct the living.

COMMENTARY *Also in the future.* This phrase means "also in the kalpa of continuance in the future." The world in which we live will be destroyed and return to nothingness, and in the new world that will be formed Purna will perform his buddha's work again. In other words, even though he will be reborn, he will continue his practice to

become a buddha. This is something for which believers must be very grateful.

TEXT “Gradually fulfilling the bodhisattva course, after infinite asamkhyeya kalpas, in that land he will attain Perfect Enlightenment and his title will be Radiance of the Law 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 *Radiance of the Law Tathagata.* This title means a buddha whose enlightenment is especially radiant in the Dharma. This is certainly a worthy title for Purna.

TEXT “That buddha will make [his] buddha land of a three-thousand-great-thousandfold universe [of worlds as many] as the sands of the Ganges, with the precious seven for its earth, its ground level as the palm of the hand, free from hills and valleys, runnels and ditches, and its midst filled with terraces of the precious seven. The palaces of its gods will be situated nearby in the sky, where men and gods will meet and behold each other.

COMMENTARY *That buddha will make [his] buddha land of a three-thousand-great-thousandfold universe [of worlds as many] as the sands of the Ganges.* This passage means that this universe will become the land to receive the instruction of Radiance of the Law Tathagata. In other words, the entire universe will take refuge in that buddha’s teaching, and as a result the whole will turn into an ideal society of peace. Chapter 21 of the Lotus Sutra, “The Divine Power of the Tathagata,” says, “Thereupon the worlds of the universe were united as one buddha land.” This is based on the same idea. It may be more accurate to say that these words express the Buddha’s great confidence in the future world.

• *Men and gods will meet and behold each other.* Whereas the inhabitants of the human realm chase after the five desires and their lives are dominated by the defilements, the beings of the heavenly realm are free from the five desires, are not bound by the defilements, and so are pure of body. Therefore we tend to think that the human realm and the heavenly realm are clearly divided and are separated by a vast distance. If Buddhism spreads correctly throughout the entire human realm, however, very little distinction will remain between the two. Human beings have various desires, but when they understand Buddhism from the depths of their hearts and take refuge in it, all their desires become purified and the defilements disappear (see the July/August 2004 issue of DHARMA WORLD). At this point human beings occupy a lofty state no differ-

ent in value from that of the heavenly beings who are free from all desires.

As the heavenly and human realms approach each other, the inhabitants of both come to mingle and devote themselves together to turning this world into a peaceful land. Such is the profound connotation of the phrase “men and gods will meet and behold each other.”

An interesting episode is associated with the translation of this phrase into Chinese. An earlier translation of the Lotus Sutra, Dharmaraksha’s *Cheng-fa-hua-ching*, had “where gods will behold men, and men will behold gods.” This conforms with the original Sanskrit text and the Tibetan translation; Dharmaraksha translated the original directly. Kumarajiva, however, could not find in the translation the far more profound meaning that the phrase should contain and thought deeply about what the sutra intended here. He discussed it with his assistants, and one of them, Sengjui, suggested that it might mean “men and gods will meet and behold each other.” Kumarajiva slapped his knee with delight and adopted that interpretation in his translation. This episode well expresses the pains Kumarajiva took to bring out the spirit of Shakyamuni in his translation.

Like other sutras, the Lotus Sutra was not written down by Shakyamuni but was compiled by followers five or six hundred years later from discourses the Buddha gave just before his death. While a scholar would consider that a faithful translation of each word expresses the sutra’s intent, a person of religion considers a true translation to be one that grasps the spirit of Shakyamuni’s teaching and expresses it suitably. This is the reason Kumarajiva’s translation is so highly regarded. History proves just how excellent it is. In areas where the Lotus Sutra was circulated in the original Sanskrit text or in Tibetan translation it is hard to consider that a great many people were saved by it; at least, its power of instruction does not remain strong today. In contrast, people in China and Japan, who have studied the Lotus Sutra through Kumarajiva’s translation, have continued down to the present time to give the sutra their deep faith and gain liberation through its message, and as a result its influence has grown stronger and stronger. In Japan particularly the sutra has acquired more believers than anywhere else at any time, and today its spirit is being spread vigorously throughout the entire world.

Despite the fact that people of various countries have different capabilities and needs, Kumarajiva’s translation of the Lotus Sutra has been prominent in bringing the essential spirit of Shakyamuni to them all.

TEXT “There will be no evil ways and no womankind, [for] all living beings will be born transformed and have no carnal passion. They will attain to the great transcen-

dent [powers]: their bodies will emit rays of light; they will fly anywhere at will; their will and memory will be firm; they will be zealous and wise, all golden-hued, and adorned with the thirty-two signs.

COMMENTARY *Evil ways.* This phrase refers to the undesirable realms of hell, hungry spirits, animals, and asuras, that is, evil minds.

- *No womankind.* In Shakyamuni's India, women were considered to be inferior to men. Shakyamuni, however, taught that both males and females were honorable beings, endowed equally with the buddha-nature. He made women his disciples and predicted their future attainment of buddhahood. Here "no womankind" must be interpreted as meaning all discrimination based on sexual differences between male and female will completely disappear.

- *Will be born transformed.* Indian thought at the time of the Buddha considered that there were four modes of birth (*catasro yonayah*): (1) birth from the womb (*jarayu-ja*), as in the case of human beings and other mammals; (2) birth from an egg (*anda-ja*), as in the case of birds; (3) birth from moisture (*samsveda-ja*); and (4) birth by transformation (*upapadu-ja*), rebirth through the force of karma from ages past. We can interpret birth by transformation as meaning rebirth as a spiritual human being (as opposed to a human being who clings to the physical body) as a result of the good karma accumulated while striving to practice the Buddha Way.

- *Their bodies will emit rays of light.* The "rays of light" symbolize wisdom, the manifestation of truth and the destruction of the darkness of delusion. People of extremely high spiritual achievement are considered to emit radiance from their bodies. The Buddha and his disciples, and also Jesus Christ and his disciples, have traditionally been depicted in art with a halo, a representation of the virtue, the personal radiance, of a sage. We too have the important role of acquiring such radiance of character through our bodhisattva practice so that we can illuminate the world.

- *They will fly anywhere at will.* Being able to fly freely and unrestrictedly means they have reached the perfect freedom of buddhahood, having realized the Buddha's wisdom and being no longer swayed by phenomenal changes.

TEXT "All the beings in his domain will always have two [articles of] food—one, the food of joy in the Law; the other, the food of gladness in meditation.

COMMENTARY *One, the food of joy in the Law; the other, the food of gladness in meditation.* Food is essential for the nourishment of the body. Similarly, these two kinds of delight are the food that nourishes the good roots (good acts) and

Purna, one of the six surviving statues of the Buddha's ten great disciples at the temple Kofukuji in Nara, sculpted by Shogun Manpuku in the eighth century. Hollow dry lacquer. Height: 148.8 cm. National Treasure.

wisdom that are important for the practice of the Buddha Way. The joy of hearing the true Law and the delight of practicing thoroughly the true Law are essential foodstuffs, not only for human beings but for all those who inhabit the Pure Land, as well. That is to say, however pleasant a realm people inhabit, or however high a mental stage they have reached, unless they continue their spiritual advancement they cannot find life worth living; to put it more plainly, there is no true value in life itself.

This is an extremely important point for lay believers. Ordinary people tend to be attached to material life and seek happiness in it. We should consider, though, that true human worth is found in the height of spiritual accomplishment, and true human delight in deep spiritual joy. Thus, “the food of joy in the Law” and “the food of gladness in meditation” are important expressions.

TEXT “There will be a host of infinite asamkhyeyas and thousands of myriads of kotis of nayutas of bodhisattvas who have attained the great transcendent [faculties] and the four [degrees] of unhindered wisdom, and who have excellent ability in instructing all kinds of beings. His shravakas cannot be told by counting and calculation, and all will attain perfection in the six transcendent [faculties], the three clear [views], and the eight emancipations.

COMMENTARY *The four [degrees] of unhindered wisdom.* See the July/August 2004 issue of DHARMA WORLD.

- *The six transcendent [faculties].* See “the six divine faculties” in the July/August 1992 issue.
- *The three clear [views].* See the May/June 2001 issue.
- *The eight emancipations.* See the March/April 2003 issue.

TEXT “The domain of that buddha will be adorned and perfected with such boundless excellencies as these. His kalpa will be named Jewel Radiance and his domain named Excellent Purity. The lifetime of that buddha will be infinite asamkhyeya kalpas, and the Law will remain for long. After the extinction of that buddha, stupas of the precious seven will be [erected] throughout all that domain.”

COMMENTARY *The domain of that buddha will be adorned and perfected with such boundless excellencies as these.* This depicts the ideal society. The true beauty of a country is not material adornment but adornment with the people’s virtues. The perfection of human society depends not upon achieving material prosperity but upon accomplishing the workings of virtue. We should interpret this as a biting denunciation of present-day society.

TEXT At that time the World-honored One, desiring to proclaim this meaning over again, spoke thus in verse: “Bhikshus! Listen to me attentively! / The Way [my] Buddha son has walked, / Through well studying tactfulness, / Is beyond conception.

COMMENTARY *Listen to me attentively.* In the Chinese translation, this phrase connotes “listen wholeheartedly and realize clearly.” Young people today show a remarkable tendency not so much to “listen” as to “hear.” Hearing something passively while doing something else is an attitude that is half-hearted at best. I am extremely concerned for the future of Japan and the world if this attitude does not change, if people do not give their full attention to listening to that which they should hear and do not cultivate an attitude of attentive listening. Shakyamuni’s words “Listen to me attentively!” have assumed a substantial weight in my mind recently in particular, and whenever I read those words they resonate with me. I hope they do for you, too.

• *Buddha son.* Here, this term means a disciple of the Buddha. One who deeply believes in the Law of the Buddha and who transmits it correctly can be said to be a true child of the Buddha, and so Shakyamuni says “Buddha son.” This passage may become clearer if we rephrase it as “The Way a Buddha son, having learned skillful means (tactfulness) well, has walked cannot be conceived.” “Cannot be conceived” means “beyond the understanding of an ordinary mind.”

TEXT “Knowing how all enjoy mere trifles / And are afraid of the greater wisdom, / The bodhisattvas therefore become / Shravakas or pratyekabuddhas. / By numberless tactful methods / They convert the various kinds of beings, / Saying: ‘We are but shravakas, / Far removed from the Buddha Way.’ / They release innumerable beings, / All completing [their course]; / Even the low disposed and the neglectful / Gradually become buddhas.

COMMENTARY *Afraid of the greater wisdom.* The “greater wisdom” is the wisdom of the Buddha. Since the Buddha’s wisdom is so profound and vast, ordinary people are apt to keep a respectful distance from it, thinking it far beyond their capabilities. But even the teaching in its elementary stages, as long as it is the true Dharma, is indisputably part of the Buddha’s wisdom and thus part of the course along the way to the perfect wisdom of the Buddha. A leader who has a good understanding of mass psychology helps people enter into the teaching by tactfully starting from a stage that they feel they can approach.

• *The bodhisattvas therefore become shravakas or pratyekabuddhas.* This too is a kind of tact, or skillful means, since one who has already attained the bodhisattva stage takes on the guise of a shravaka (one who practices through learning) or a pratyekabuddha (one who practices through actual experience) in order to lead people to the teaching.

• *Saying: 'We are but shravakas, far removed from the Buddha Way.'* If people hear others say, "We are still shravakas in the middle of our practice; it is absurd to think we are anywhere near the Buddha's enlightenment," they will feel reassured, will feel an affinity with them, and will be prepared to follow their lead. The words "The bodhisattvas therefore become shravakas or pratyekabuddhas . . . saying: 'We are but shravakas'" indicate that bodhisattvas generally make such a contribution. It is obvious that the Buddha's statement is a premise to declaring that Purna himself is a remarkable illustration of this working of bodhisattvas, judging from the context (and also from the passage "All the people of those buddha periods spoke of him as 'the true disciple' [shravaka]"). I hope you will be aware, in reading the passages that follow, that the Buddha's words are uttered specifically in praise of the virtues of Purna.

• *The low disposed.* This refers to desiring the inferior teaching and having no aspiration for the Great Vehicle.

• *The neglectful.* This refers to being negligent in aspiring to the Great Vehicle.

TEXT "Inwardly hiding their bodhisattva deeds, / Outwardly they appear as shravakas.

COMMENTARY This is a fine verse, vividly expressing the modesty and seriousness of a leader. I heartily recommend that you memorize it.

TEXT "With few desires and disliking mortal life, / They truly purify their buddha land.

COMMENTARY These are very suggestive words. The practice of the small vehicle has as its aim detaching oneself from the world's impermanence (*samsara*), that is, liberating oneself from attachment to phenomena and making oneself pure in body and mind. In other words, the practice of the small vehicle seeks the enlightenment of the individual. By contrast, the practice of the Great Vehicle is the purification of the buddha land, the practice of working to beautify society as a whole and to bring it peace and happiness. These bodhisattvas, Purna in particular, seem to be practicing in order to attain personal enlightenment, but in actuality they have entered the ranks of the common people in order to lead them gradually to true happiness.

Surely this is the meaning of "They truly purify their buddha land."

TEXT "They show themselves possessed of human passions / And seem to hold heretical views.

COMMENTARY *Human passions.* "Passions" here indicates "the three poisons" of greed, anger, and foolishness. These three defilements are said to be the most typical poisons that harm human beings. Because the bodhisattvas actually demonstrate the three poisons, they make people realize how terrible they are.

• *Heretical views.* Sometimes this expression means simply false views or mistaken ideas (*drishti*). At other times it refers to widely held ideas (heretical views of the non-Buddhist schools) that on the surface seem imposing and splendid. Here the expression is used in the latter sense.

Since there is some truth even in "heretical views," bodhisattvas do not deny such thoughts from the outset. Sometimes they first teach people how to judge those thoughts calmly and impartially so they can realize for themselves that they are in fact heretical, and by doing so cause people to aspire to seek the true Dharma. A survey of modern society soon persuades us of the pragmatic nature of these teachings. We should never deny out of hand other religions or religious sects and the religious beliefs of others or be prejudiced against them, but deal with them reasonably, displaying tolerance and patience to gradually guide these people to the true Dharma.

TEXT "Thus do my disciples / Tactfully save all beings. / If I fully explained / The varied [future] transformations, / Beings who heard of them / Would be perplexed and puzzled.

COMMENTARY [*Future*] transformations. Bodhisattvas do not necessarily look like the figures we see in statues and paintings, for they appear in society in a variety of human forms. This statement I am sure will seem dubious to many, for the idea that bodhisattvas are to be venerated as beings who are entirely different from human beings is firmly fixed in the popular mind. If, though, buddhas and bodhisattvas were superhuman beings, Shakyamuni would never have said that all living beings can become buddhas, and would never have preached the Lotus Sutra, which was taught to transform all people into bodhisattvas and buddhas in the end.

I repeat, bodhisattvas are not superhuman. We too become members of the community of bodhisattvas when we strive to benefit others, and become buddhas when we

attain supreme enlightenment. This world therefore is home at this very time to many bodhisattvas. Some of these bodhisattvas even lead people to enlightenment by revealing their own defilements and heretical views. If I mentioned all the actual examples of the actions of such bodhisattvas, many people would be thrown into confusion and doubt, not realizing that the world is so full of them.

TEXT Now this Purna / Under thousands of kotis of former buddhas / Has diligently maintained his course, / And proclaimed and protected the Law of the buddhas. / He has sought supreme wisdom / And under the buddhas / Has shown himself the superior disciple / In learning and wisdom. / In preaching he has been fearless, / Able to cause all beings to rejoice; / He has ever been tireless / In aiding Buddha tasks.

COMMENTARY *Maintained his course.* The “course” here refers to the path of the religious practice that one must undertake in order to improve one’s character.

• *Learning.* The Chinese word translated as “learning” literally means “hearing much.” That is to say, it refers to rich knowledge attained by listening to many things, understanding them, and memorizing them. It may be said to be the distinctive feature of shravakas.

TEXT “Having achieved the great transcendent [faculties], / Acquired the four unhindered [powers of] wisdom, / And known the faculties [of others], keen or dull, / He has always preached the pure Law. / Expounding such principles as these, / He has taught thousands of kotis of beings, / Leading them to rest in the Great-Vehicle Law, / And himself purified his buddha land. / In future he shall also worship / Infinite, numberless buddhas, / Protect and aid in proclaiming the Righteous Law, / And himself purify his buddha land. / Constantly with tactful methods / He shall fearlessly preach the Law / And lead incalculable beings / To attain perfect knowledge;

COMMENTARY *The four unhindered [powers of] wisdom.* This is the same as the four degrees of unhindered wisdom (see the July/August 2004 issue of DHARMA WORLD).

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.

An ink painting of Bodhidharma by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano. The calligraphy above the drawing is a portion of a verse in the Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, one part of the Threefold Lotus Sutra, which means: Should one wish to repent of it [the ocean of impediment of all karmas] / Let him sit upright and meditate on the true aspect [of reality]. / All sins are just as frost and dew, / So wisdom’s sun can disperse them.

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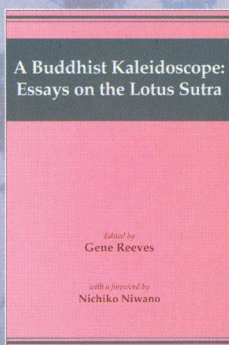
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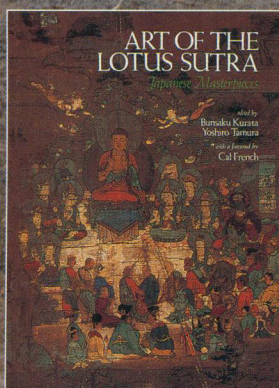
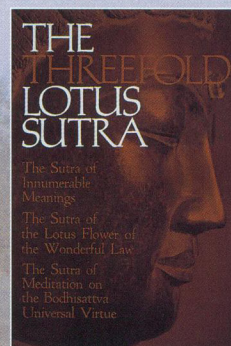
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