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DHARMA WORLD

JULY/AUG. 2005 Vol. 32



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Cover photo: A young woman in the traditional Shinto costume of a shrine maiden, working at Omiwa Shrine, in Sakurai, Nara Prefecture. Omiwa Shrine is one of the oldest shrines in Japan and it venerates the peak of Mount Miwa as the sacred object of worship. In the medieval period the shrine was the center of the Miwa school of Shinto, a syncretic theology based on Shingon Buddhist doctrine. Photo: PPS

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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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Women in Contemporary Japanese Religion and Society

A shaman called itako communicating with the spirits of the dead at the request of relatives of the deceased on Mount Osore, Aomori Prefecture, in northeastern Japan. The mountain, a sacred site for Japanese shamans, is a composite volcano. On the banks of its crater lake plants are bare because of the constant emission of sulfuric gas from the ground. Photographed in 1954 by Mainichi Shimbun newspaper. Communication with the deceased survives even today, and it is practiced by several women practitioners, or itako, most of whom are blind, during the mountain's annual festivals in July and October.

Women as Shamans, Religious Founders, and Feminists

by Susumu Shimazono

Women play an important role in Japanese religion. In the past, the majority of the shamans of Okinawa and northeastern Japan were female, and most ordinary people recognized their psychic powers. It is also well known that many of the founders of so-called new religions were female. The message of spiritual renewal and salvation of Miki Nakayama (1798–1887) of Tenrikyo, Nao Deguchi (1837–1918) of Oomoto, and Sayo Kitamura (1900–1967) of Tensho Kotai Jingukyo moved many people, including intellectuals.

This is not just because many great female leaders and women endowed with extraordinary psychic powers happened to live in a particular period or region. Behind the phenomenon lies an enduring religious climate conducive to women's activities. In other words, the dominance of male clerics and scholars did not adequately address the religious life of ordinary people, which had a strong tendency to maintain a certain autonomy. I am referring to the domain of folk religion and syncretistic cults.

The many new religions that sprang up in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were underpinned by folk religion and syncretistic cults. That is why many female leaders were active in the initial phase of new religions. Once these groups had established a stable organization, however, men came to dominate their leadership structure. Even so, women were prominent in local outreach, and their record was impressive. New religions were a manifestation of the ability of women rooted in the community to expand and strengthen networks.

In the period from the early nineteenth century to the 1960s, an ethos that saw the ideal woman as a "good wife" took form and spread nationwide. Feminists have criticized the division of labor whereby men went out to work while women kept the home fires burning as blocking women's participation in the wider society and narrowing the sphere of their lives. In the main, I agree, but I would like to add one caveat.

The role of housewife did sometimes have an upside.

Robust networks expanding from a support base of housewives were able to satisfy the desire for recreation, charitable activities, and spirituality. Such networks included the extended family, alumni/alumnae associations, and artistic groups. New religions were one of the most important of these networks. This is strongly linked to the fact that the central norm of new religions is harmony among people. To enhance family harmony on the one hand and expand and strengthen the network of harmony of the community of faith on the other by bringing more people into the fold was the ideal of new religions and the social experience forming the foundation of their view of world-affirming salvation. A passion for expanding and strengthening networks of harmony was the source of the new religions' woman power.

Since the late 1970s, the growth of feminism seems to me to have gone hand in hand with the loss of appeal of women's networks seeking to expand and strengthen this kind of harmony. The role of housewife became less attractive as its demerits became more apparent. Becoming a housewife, after all, meant having to leave the workforce and live in constant fear of social isolation.

But the only prominent model of the "free woman" that has emerged is that of the career woman. And career women do not appear to be all that happy. Thus, the tendency for women to find their major role in building the "order of love" that begins with the family persists. I do not think we can discern the significance of the present current of religious revival and fundamentalism without considering how very deeply rooted this way of thought and feeling is. □

Susumu Shimazono is a professor in the Department of Religious Studies of the University of Tokyo. His special fields are the comparative study of religious movements and the history of religion in modern Japan. He has also taught as a guest professor at universities in the United States, France, and Germany. His recent publications include "Iyasu chi" no keifu (The Genealogy of "Healing Wisdom") and Posutomodan no shin shukyo (Postmodern New Religions).

In the Palace of the Dragon King

by Christal Whelan

The exception to the rule of institutional exclusion of women in Japanese religion seems to be the new religious movements, this scholar says, where some women managed to actualize their visions of a more inclusive world.

Off the coast of the Tango Peninsula, some 25 miles or 40 kilometers into the Japan Sea, lies the forested and uninhabited island of Oshima. According to popular tradition, this is the Palace of the Dragon King of the Sea, and a place so sacred that a man should venture there, if at all, but once in a lifetime. As for women, they have been strictly forbidden entry to the numinous isle for

centuries. Known as *nyonin kinsei*, these gender-based bans that barred women from entering, residing in, or performing religious practices in temples, shrines, sacred mountains, and ritual sites were officially abolished in 1872. Yet as the recent controversy over the UNESCO's declaration of Mount Omine in Nara as a World Heritage site revealed, the law has not always been upheld. Women are still excluded from this sacred mountain.

In response to the criticism of Omine's position, the chief priest of Omimesanji, the Buddhist temple at the mountain's summit, defended the temple's continuing right to exclude women on the grounds of maintaining a venerable "tradition." For many, the UN's selection of the ancient pilgrimage route for such an international honor when it continues to bar women was interpreted as an appalling endorsement of the obsolete ban. Although a modern institution, the UN nevertheless reasoned that "universal access" was not a requirement for World Heritage status, and this in turn prompted a bitter protest in the form of a signature drive in 2004.

Gender inequality expressed in such blatant physical and geographical proscriptions is not in itself surprising, but what continues to be vexing about the Japanese case is the discrepancy between a symbolic valorization of the feminine principle that pervades the culture as a whole and the discrimination against actual women in the society at large. While Shinto should not be conflated with "Japanese culture," it still seems significant that while the glow-

Christal Whelan is currently an Earhart Fellow at the Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs at Boston University, where she is also completing a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology. She was a Fulbright Fellow to Japan from 2003 to 2005 while affiliated with the International Research Center for Japanese Studies, in Kyoto. In 2000 she trained at Mount Koya's Niso Gakuin, where she was ordained in the Shingon tradition. She has published numerous articles and a book in the field of Japanese religion and culture.

ing sun goddess Amaterasu stands at the apex of the Shinto pantheon as the progenitor of Japanese ethnicity itself, real women lack political power, are underrepresented in the professions and the clergy, and typically do not hold leadership positions in mainline institutions.

Contemporary indigenous psychotherapies, such as *naikan*, also draw their inspiration from a feminine principle. *Naikan* takes for granted a “self” socialized for dependence in which the desire to be indulged or passively cared for (*amae*) is a primary component of mental health. The prototype of this emotional structure is the bond between mother and child. In fact, *naikan* practice revolves around the client’s passionate recall of his/her earliest years through a relentless reflection on three questions initially focused on a person’s relationship with the mother: What did I receive? What did I give back? What trouble did I cause? With its roots in Jodo Shinshu’s meditation technique of *mishirabe*, the object of *naikan*’s weeklong scrupulous examination of conscience is meant to engender a realization of dependency in which illness signifies a breach that should generate guilt for gratitude unacknowledged. Even Japanese Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysts seem to concur that maternity rather than paternity lies at the base of “Japanese psychology.” In *Bosei shakai Nihon no byori* (Japan: Pathology of Maternal Society), Jungian analyst Hayao Kawai (currently chief of the government’s Agency for Cultural Affairs) observes that Japanese society only appears to be male dominated, while the maternal principle carries far greater weight in the depths of the psyche. His position seems to affirm the discrepancy mentioned above—women in Japanese society possess symbolic capital but not political power.

From Symbolic Capital to Actual Power

This raises the question of whether it is possible to “cash in” symbolic capital for actual power and when and how this has been achieved by women in Japan. A look at modern Japanese religious history seems to provide some compelling cases. Indeed, one of the most remarkable features of modern Japan is the sudden emergence in the late Edo period (1603–1868) of female religious leaders who managed against all odds to establish large and enduring institutions through actualizing the symbolic power of the feminine at the base of Japanese culture. In part, the success of these women can be explained historically as the gradual opening of a window of opportunity hitherto unknown as the political power of the shogunate began to weaken. One need only recall director Kenji Mizoguchi’s film masterpiece, *The Life of Oharu* (1952), to grasp the oppressive strictures of daily life for women in feudal Japan.

The Nyonin kekkai mon, a gate marking the bounds of a sacred site into which women are prohibited from entering, on Mount Omine, Nara Prefecture.

The Tokugawa government obliged all families to register as Buddhist temple members. Thus, temples served the Japanese people as the custodians of the rites of passage from birth to death.

From a doctrinal perspective, this same Buddhism discriminated against women. One of the major sutras in the Japanese tradition, the Lotus Sutra, expresses the belief that women cannot be saved unless reincarnated as men. In the Kamakura period (1185–1333) this ideology of exclusion became a fixture of Japanese Buddhism. The tenacity with which it was maintained can perhaps be explained as a reflection of the *bushi* culture of the time with its promotion of a male-dominant warrior society. But the Lotus Sutra’s assessment of women expressed a mild condemnation when

compared with other sutras, such as the *Ketsubon-kyo*, which clearly condemned women as impure on the basis of their biology. Blood from menstruation and childbirth sufficed to relegate women to the “Blood Pool of Hell,” which they would share with those who had committed actual crimes involving blood.

Such alarming discrimination against women was not always the case within Japanese Buddhism, however. As told in the *Nihon shoki* (Chronicle of Japan), 46 Buddhist temples had been erected by 626, with 816 monks and 569 nuns to operate them. Thus, from the early formative years to the Nara period (710–94), while Buddhism was controlled by the state, all evidence suggests that nuns were treated on a par with monks. With the establishment of Tendai and Shingon, Buddhism became an organized religious body in the early Heian period (794–1185). By this time the system of state sponsorship of Buddhism had also collapsed, leaving many nunneries in ruins and causing a dramatic decrease in nuns’ vocations. While Tendai and Shingon did not deny women religious education, and even acknowledged the possibility of their becoming buddhas, these schools of Buddhism nevertheless excluded women from entering the clergy. Once again, this stance reflects the dual tendency in Japanese society toward institutional exclusion of women alongside symbolic or, in this case, spiritual inclusion.

The exception to this rule of institutional exclusion seems to be the new religious movements, in which some women managed to seize the opportunity to push against the grain and actualize their visions of a more inclusive world. These religions first emerged in nineteenth-century Japan during the chaotic time of the country’s transition from a feudal to a modern society. Massive urbanization and ensuing social dislocation left a vacuum for most Japanese in terms of meaningful belonging. In traditional rural society a person belonged unquestioningly to a village and was therefore the child of the local Shinto deity, the *ujigami*. Although the colossal anomie caused by the new rootless urban setting required urgent action, unfortunately Buddhism had grown accustomed to its role as guardian of the status quo and census keeper of the shogunate, and it lacked the flexibility to rise to the occasion. In contrast, new religious movements were responsive to people’s current needs. It seems no coincidence then that this first wave of new religions was nativistic or “Shintoesque” and rife with revelations of world renewal. This seems to suggest that the new religions represented rebellions against established Buddhist institutions. Not surprisingly, these movements were often led by powerful, driven, and talented women whose inclusive organizations were intended to create a “free space” in which

people could cultivate a new identity in consonance with the changing demands of a new social climate.

Predictably, the established sects cast a cold eye on these “newcomers.” This prejudice against new religious movements on the part of established sects has continued to exist to the present day. Had these movements remained unorganized and part of the amorphous folk-religious domain, where a niche already existed for “female shamans,” they would have presented little challenge. But instead, these unorthodox women sought acceptance and legitimacy through cashing in their symbolic capital for the real power of establishing institutions. They also refused to compromise their vision even when this meant imprisonment.

Nao Deguchi: Entering the Forbidden Palace

One such woman, Nao Deguchi (1837–1918), founded Oomoto at age 55 after a mysterious dream in the wake of her husband’s death. She then embarked on an odyssey of “recapturing” many of Japan’s sacred sites known through popular legends and recorded in classical works, such as the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters). All but one of these (Kurama-dera) are sacred to Shinto and associated with deities with whom Deguchi wished to form alliances: Meshima, Moto-Ise, Izumo, and Mount Misen. Included among them was also the site of the Dragon King’s Palace, Oshima. This spot carried deep resonance in Japan owing to the works of Shinran, such as the *Shozomatsu wasan* (Hymns of the True, Semblance, and Last). According to these texts, in the final days of Buddhist decadence, or the “last Dharma age,” Buddhism would be whittled down to mere verbal formulas of Shakyamuni that no one would be able to put into practice. In other words, no one would be capable of attaining enlightenment anymore. Hope lay in the fact that the true teachings would be preserved in the Palace of the Dragon King. Chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra narrates the story of the Dragon King’s eight-year-old daughter, eager for enlightenment. When the Buddha’s disciple Shariputra tells her that she cannot attain enlightenment as a female, she instantly offers the Buddha a jewel, transforms herself into a male, appears in the Land Without Impurities, and preaches the sutra itself. All this she does without changing her dragon form. The story illustrates that everyone can attain buddhahood in their present form without undergoing austerities or waiting endless kalpas.

Deguchi’s visit to a site off-limits to women and associated with the Dragon King’s Palace constituted a deliberate and personal reconquest of Japanese religious tradition. She employed another strategy to surmount the Buddhist stronghold. As an illiterate woman, Deguchi was excluded from Buddhism’s rich textual tradition. This merely encour-

aged her to push further into an experiential dimension. Deguchi came to accept only the authority of direct revelation as dictated to her through her automatic writings, compiled in 1893 as *Ofudesaki* (Tip of the Writing Brush). As a female leader of a religious movement, however, she also had to deal with the traditional notion of reincarnation as inherited from Buddhism. Since this forbade women enlightenment as women, Deguchi opted for a gender-bending interpretation. Together with her cofounder, who soon became her adopted son-in-law, Onisaburo Deguchi, she reasoned that while she had the soul of a man he had that of a woman. This served to place her revelation and spiritual status beyond casual speculation.

Miki Nakayama: Sweeping Dust from the Mind

Another gifted woman in the first wave of new religious movements, Miki Nakayama (1798–1887), founded Tenrikyo. She experienced her revelation at age 41 and became the “shrine” of Tsukihi, or “God the Parent.” Her strategies for surmounting tradition were not dissimilar to those of Nao Deguchi. The only source of authority that she acknowledged was the words dictated to her by God the Parent. Predating Deguchi, Nakayama produced her automatic writings between 1869 and 1882, collected as *Ofudesaki*. She wrote these in traditional Japanese poetic form, *waka*, a verse consisting of thirty-one syllables. Altogether, she composed some 1,711 such poems.

Keenly aware of the disparagement of women in Japanese Buddhism, Nakayama urged one of her male disciples to go into the field and look closely at the pumpkins and eggplants: “Did you notice those pumpkins and eggplants? They’re big, aren’t they? The plants bear fruit because the flowers bloom. Not a single plant bears fruit without its flower. Now ponder deeply. The world says woman is unclean, but there is nothing unclean about woman. Man and woman are equally children of God and there is no discrimination. Woman has a duty, a duty to bear children. Her monthly period is the flower. Without the flower there is no fruit” (*Anecdotes of Oyasama, the Foundress of Tenrikyo*).

Sometime in 1874 Nakayama began to wear red clothes. It is not altogether clear why she did this. Some scholars have suggested that she wished to express female blood symbolism or demonstrate empathy with Japanese convicts, who had been required by law two years earlier to wear the color. Whatever the case may be, like Deguchi, Nakayama’s religious faith assumed an intensely embodied form. The religious service she created was likewise “embodied”—a dance performed by 10 masked people representing various deities. According to the rationale, if the performers and audience could unite in spirit, then everyone would

achieve purification. Nakayama also taught a *teodori*, or “hand dance.” She believed that there was no such thing as essential evil. Any person who appeared evil merely had “dust” caked on the mind. The purpose of Tenrikyo’s religious service was to sweep dust from the mind. A mind without dust would be open to the world. Hence, the metaphor of polishing the soul, or *kokoro*, prevalent in many new religions today finds its precedent here.

Sayo Kitamura: Engaging in Frontal Attack

Sayo Kitamura (1900–1967) founded Tensho Kotai Jingu-kyo after World War II. Unlike the previous two founders, who were from areas not far from Kyoto, Kitamura came from the countryside of Yamaguchi Prefecture. A colorful, sharp-witted, and imposing woman, her strategy for storming a tradition that excluded her differed from that of her two female predecessors. She drew far more from existing traditions that included elements from both Tenrikyo and Oomoto. For her, the absolute god of the universe was Amaterasu, who had previously sent Shakyamuni and Christ to offer divine teachings. Within her millennial vision, in this last age the deity had finally descended directly into the belly of Kitamura herself. She viewed human life as a pilgrimage to polish the soul and made constant references to the “world of maggots,” inducing people to leave it and rise with her to the “Kingdom of God.” She performed exorcisms, cut karma, and foretold future events, and was a riveting speaker.

Tensho Kotai Jingu-kyo belongs to the second wave of new religions, which had to contend with Japan’s ebbing esteem after the loss of the Pacific War. Kitamura employed her rhetorical talents to the fullest in morale-raising sermons: “Japan didn’t lose the war. That was merely the passing of an argument between maggots. The real war (the war between God and the Devil) is just beginning. Your ‘sure victory’ is just playing at war, but my sure victory is the victory of the Kingdom of God.” (She further assured her compatriots that Japan would become the spiritual leader of the world and the Japanese language the new lingua franca.)

Where Deguchi and Nakayama had attempted the conquest and reinvention of tradition, respectively, Kitamura’s confrontational personality drew her into public debates, in which she engaged in caustic and unrestrained criticism of established religions, achieving celebrity status through radio programs and newspaper articles. Her singing sermons and *muga no mai*, or “dance of nonself,” earned her the sobriquet of the “Dancing Goddess.” In 1964 she began an eight-month missionary tour around the world, where crowds joined her in her dance of liberation.

Kitamura's most frontal attack on traditional Buddhism was her exhortation to followers to cease all forms of ancestor veneration and traditional burial customs. She encouraged members to throw their Buddhist altars into the sea and make haste to remove their memorial tablets from Buddhist temples. After all, the ashes of the dead were just the "playthings of Buddhist priests." Her pragmatic honesty

had great appeal: A person should be filial to one's parents while they are alive instead of venerating them once they are dead.

The Situation Today

Not all female leaders of new religions today are the founders of these movements. Deguchi's great-great granddaughter, Kurenai, now leads Oomoto. According to a manifesto left by Deguchi herself, the leadership of Oomoto must remain strictly in matrilineal hands. The current leader of Shinnyoen is Shinso Ito, who succeeds both parents who founded this neo-Buddhist sect. The current leader of Mahikari, Sachiko Okada, is the daughter of the founder. Keiko Takahashi became heir to GLA (God Light Association) at age 19 after the death of her father, who founded the religion. An unusual case, Yuko Chino started her own religion, Chino Shoho (later known as Pana Wave Laboratory), after a brush with GLA, which refused her claim to be GLA's true successor.

Japanese women have unarguably broken through the wall of tradition and achieved positions of leadership within the sphere of new religions. The irony here is that this may be one reason why new religions are currently held in some contempt in Japanese society. This being the case, how do women fare who attempt to remain within Japan's traditional Buddhist sects? During my own training at the headquarters of Shingon Buddhism, Mount Koya, from all of Japan we were just 11 women at the Niso Gakuin, or Nuns' Training Institute. Of those, 2 dropped out after the first term, prior to the rigors of the *shido kegyo*, or 100-day austerities. Except for me, all the women in training were Japanese and mostly from temple families. Some had brothers who were only marginally interested in taking over the family temple as head priest. Thus, the responsibility had fallen to these young women to obtain the license in order to keep the family temple.

During that year of training, only 5 women came to take the entrance examination for the following year. Therefore, it appears that at least becoming a Shingon nun is an unattractive option for contemporary Japanese women. The training itself is extremely rigorous, and future prospects are precarious. At the time, I could not understand the frequent outbursts and lacerating criticism of the head nuns. They seemed driven by an uncompromising perfectionism. Whether we were chanting, performing rituals, eating, walking, sitting, sweeping the floor, or just adjusting our *kesa*, the older nuns expected nothing less than perfection from us. Gradually it dawned on me that without this level of skill we would risk marginalization and be consigned to minor roles in Buddhist temples. How then would we ever find our way to the Dragon King's Palace? □

Sayo Kitamura, founder of Tensho Kotai Jingukyo, making a sermon before a crowd of citizens in November 1948.

Japanese Women and Religion

by Fumiko Nomura

A teacher at a women's university believes that the simplicity of her young students—a quality that goes beyond unaffectedness or earnestness—is what should truly be called “spiritual.”

In teaching the study of religions at a women's university, I am most nonplused by the question “Is religion necessary to human life?” That is because the questioner herself is not distinguishing clearly between religion as an affiliation with a particular organization and the possession of religiosity. Whenever I encounter this kind of question I am reminded of Goethe's words to the effect that “when I think of such an outstanding man having worked himself to the bone over a philosophical way of thinking that serves no purpose, I am saddened.” No abstract reply is persuasive to young students. Students need training in thinking pragmatically. “Let's find an answer through this course.” That is why I present actual situations rather than abstractions in this essay.

I contributed an introductory essay to the 2004 collection of graduation theses by students in my seminar titled “How to Create Spiritual Women University Students”—a rather breezy title for a collection of serious papers. I wrote in part: “It is a fact that ‘ordinary’ young women who were not even aware of the existence of a field of learning called ‘the study of religions’ wrote the papers in this journal. I do not want to forget this. What has motivated me for the past two years is the conviction that the simplicity—a quality that goes beyond unaffectedness or earnestness—of these young women, who are neither exceptionally gifted nor clever navigators of today's standardized education, is what should truly be called ‘spiritual.’”

For a small women's university not affiliated with any religious organization, my school offers a rich array of courses in the study of religions, including “The Study of Reli-

gions,” “Introduction to the Study of Religions,” “Comparative Religions,” and “Japanese Religion.” This is my arena.

Here is an exchange I had with a student in the course of putting together the collection of papers.

“What do you like?”

“*Summer Garden*.”

“Huh? You mean not just any summer garden, but the novel by Kazumi Yumoto?”¹

“That's right.”

It is true that this story of an elementary school pupil's search for the meaning of death is relevant to the study of

Fumiko Nomura, a professor at Kawamura Gakuen Women's University, specializes in American religious history. She is also on the board of directors of the International Institute for the Study of Religions, and has translated Jerald C. Brauer's Protestantism in America: A Narrative History into Japanese.

religions, but that alone is not enough to make a paper. Of the story's key themes, I advised her to focus on "death," eliminating "a child's perspective."

"Do you like movies?"

"I love them."

"What movie that you've seen recently has made the deepest impression on you?"

"Oh, *Shouting Love at the Heart of the World*, of course."²

"OK, let's use that."

We decided to incorporate *A Flower at My Fingertips*, the novel based on the film. The "flower at my fingertips" stands for the ashes of his lover, Aki, that the protagonist, Sakutaro, scatters as the finishing touch of the Buddhist memorial service for her. The film is replete with elements that can be used as teaching materials for the study of religions, such as graves, ashes, and the things one does following the death of a loved one ("Buddhist memorial service," or *kuyo*, is probably too specialized a term).

"Why do you think this movie appealed to so many young people?"

"Because it deals with pure love and the death of a lover."

"Is that all?"

"Well, the actors are cool."

"I see."

Here I gave the student a hint. Death has become all but invisible in daily life. I recommended that she read a paper addressing the way death has been made into a taboo, "Death in School Education: The View of Life and Death Seen in Elementary School National Language Textbooks," by Fumiaki Iwata.³ He discusses how schools frame the subject of death and the question "How can one 'face death' in a form not directly related to a specific religion?"⁴

After thinking a while, the student said, "When we were at school we read *Summer Garden* in National Language. And also *The Fifteen-year-olds League*.⁵ This was intended to give us an idea of the meaning of death. I suppose the movie *Shouting Love at the Heart of the World* is a pop-culture extension of these books." The reason the film was such a hit was not just that it depicted pure love. Deep in their hearts, people want to know the meaning of death. At this point, the student's thesis became oriented to the study of religions.

To backtrack, as study of the abstract question "Is religion necessary to human life?" proceeds, it turns into the concrete question "Why, if religion exists to save people, does war persist?" The students have already become aware that they exist within a religious milieu. World peace, it seems to me, is not a distant ideal but something to build up little by little within the context of one's own life.

I wrote an article titled "*Esperanza* for the Twenty-first Century" for a special feature, "Radiant Life," in the January

On the Coming-of-Age day, twenty-year-old women tying omikuiji, fortunes that they obtained at a Shinto shrine, onto designated cords in the precinct for good luck as new adults.

1, 2001, issue of *Shin Shukyo Shimbun* (New Religions Newspaper). Quoting Ryu Murakami's novel *Kyoko*,⁶ I envisioned the twenty-first century as a journey in search of many *Kyokos* who can treasure small memories and say thank you from the heart. *Esperanza* is Spanish for "hope." It is also a girl's name. This essay is part of that journey. □

Notes

1. The novel *Natsu no niwa* [Summer Garden], by Kazumi Yumoto, has been translated into English as *The Friends* by Cathy Hirano (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996).

2. This film, which opened throughout Japan in May 2004, has been seen by over six million people.

3. Fumiaki Iwata, "Gakko kyoiku ni okeru 'shi': Shogakko kokugo kyokasho ni miru shiseikan," *Gendai shukyo 2004* [Modern Religion 2004] (Tokyo: Tokyodo Shuppan, 2004), pp. 93–113.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

5. Masahiro Mita, *Ichigo domei* [The Fifteen-year-olds League] (Tokyo: Shueisha, 1991). This coming-of-age novel tells how a 15-year-old boy who is worried about his future course and has thought about suicide matures through his relationship with a friend and a young girl, whom the friend has known since early childhood, and who is seriously ill in hospital.

6. Ryu Murakami, *Kyoko* (Tokyo: Shueisha, 1998). *Kyoko*, the heroine, was orphaned as a small child when her parents were killed in a traffic accident. The lonely girl learns how to dance from a GI, José, who had been a dancer. Dance becomes her *raison d'être*. Thirteen years later, at the age of 21, *Kyoko* goes to New York. Her only aim is to see José again, thank him, and earn his praise when they dance together. But when she meets José, she discovers that he is dying of AIDS. Learning that he wants to return to his birthplace, Miami, she drives him south. *Kyoko* was later cinematized, with "*Esperanza*" as its theme music. In my article for *Shin Shukyo Shimbun* I wrote that my *esperanza* for the twenty-first century was to continue my journey, together with students who empathize with *Kyoko*, to encounter many more *Kyokos*.

The Latent Religiosity of the Japanese

by Emiko Namihira

There are many who have awakened to the fact that people cannot be fulfilled through living for themselves alone but are fulfilled by helping other beings.

The Japanese themselves often observe that the Japanese have no religion. The reason this kind of comment is widely accepted is that most Japanese perceive religion in terms of institutions and doctrines. But if religion is seen as belief in a power transcending human existence and as acts expressing that belief, most Japanese are far from being without religion; they are, rather, a deeply religious people. On the one hand, they go to Shinto shrines, where they buy charms and have purification rituals performed; on the other hand, they set up Buddhist altars at home, installing tablets bearing the posthumous Buddhist names of ancestors and other deceased family members. On death anniversaries they either call in Buddhist priests or go to temples to have memorial services performed.

In these and other ways, what we can only call religious acts are an established part of life. Most Japanese, however, see all this not as religion but as customs or folkways. I suspect that many people would explain the reason they perform such ritualistic acts as follows: Once these were expressed and shared within the family, relatives, and the community, but although this practice has dwindled, people perpetuate such observances through force of habit.

In contemporary society, however, we can find activities by people opposed to the overweening importance placed on science and industrial technology. These activities take diverse forms. One example is belief in cults; but when we observe what can be called modern versions of such traditional religious practices as regular visits to Buddhist temples, organized pilgrimages to sacred spots on the island of

Shikoku and elsewhere, sutra copying, and Zen meditation, I am led to believe that the longing for a superhuman being remains alive and well in the hearts of the Japanese. This shows that when people want to heal deep hurts or ease overwhelming anxiety over the future, a way of thought on a different plane from everyday life takes over.

In considering this, we should note the rapid spread of volunteer activities in the wake of the January 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake that devastated the Kobe area. This was not aid carried out as a government obligation,

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Young women checking in as volunteers at the Takarazuka City Hall, near Kobe, on January 25, 1995, after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake that devastated the Kobe area a week earlier.

charitable activities by religious organizations, or mutual aid on the part of friends and relatives; it was spontaneous aid to victims delivered by completely unrelated and unknown people. Even when activities had become organized, the participants continued to flock to the scene of their own volition. We saw the same phenomenon after the Niigata Chuetsu Earthquake of October 23, 2004.

This indicates that when people are clearly suffering, there are always several hundred thousand people around Japan prepared to spring to their aid without expecting any reward. Nor is this limited to assistance for people; it extends to the natural environment and wildlife, as we saw when a Russian oil tanker ran aground off Fukui Prefecture in 1997, polluting the coast with heavy oil.

When we consider what it is that people gain from helping others to whom they have no obligations of mutual aid, it seems to me that it is personal healing. Being healed through helping and healing other beings that have been hurt is a religious act. I believe this shows that there are many who have awakened to the fact that people cannot be fulfilled through living for themselves alone but are fulfilled by helping other beings, even if this has nothing to do with a god, a doctrine, or a scripture.

More women than men are acting freely, unconstrained by social structures and groups. Not only in Japan but around the world, in both developed and developing coun-

tries, it is women who are defining their own existence within a new connectivity through freer ways of thinking and are reaching out to people facing difficult problems. This is partly because, on the basis of their own experience, more women than men are concerned for beings in a position of relative disadvantage, but it is also partly because women find it easier to enter into new, more flexible relationships.

Japanese society, however, does not applaud any formal expression of acts deeply related to religion, such as those motivated, as mentioned above, by the belief that people cannot be fulfilled by living for themselves alone or that one is healed by healing others, or belief in and allegiance to something transcending human existence, thought, and endeavors. That is because the prewar experience of State Shinto having been made a national policy dictating individuals' hearts and minds and their faith led postwar society to turn away from all rigorous discussion of religion within a social and cultural context. This is deeply connected with religion's having been placed out of bounds.

As a result of the taboo on religion and faith, religion has remained in a social and cultural vacuum down to the present. Established religious organizations, too, appear to be hesitant to fulfill a positive social function. I cannot help thinking, though, that the time has come to rethink the significance of the religious spirit and religious action. □

Japan's Mountain Gods

by Jun'ichiro Ishikawa

The Japanese have dwelled in fields and mountains since ancient times. Because the fields and mountains provide the necessities of daily life, people have long worshiped mountain gods as the local guardian deities.

Mountain gods" is the generic term for supernatural beings (*kami*) endowed with numinous power who are believed to dwell in the mountains, rule over the plants and animals of the woodlands and fields, and give rise to forestry products and fresh water. Since ancient times the Japanese have reverently worshiped them and depended upon their supernatural power for protection.

From Nature Worship to Folk Religion

There is something about stratovolcanoes and soaring peaks that stirs people's hearts to worship. The ancient regional chronicle *Hitachi no kuni fudoki* (717–24) identifies Mounts Fuji and Tsukuba as sacred mountains on which gods dwell.

In Shrine Shinto, the national religion of Japan, for the most part shrines (*jinja*) to mountain gods are dedicated to Oyamatsumi no Kami or his daughter Konohana no Sakuyabime, whose name likens her beauty to that of a flower blooming on a tree. These shrines go by such names as Oyamatsumi-jinja, Sengen-jinja, and Sanjin-sha.

Meanwhile, in the ancient folk religion arising from the worship of nature gods and ancestral gods, mountain gods are worshiped in small shrines known as *hokora*, as well as huge rocks, great trees regarded as sacred, trees with unusual characteristics, and other striking natural features that are regarded as *yorishiro*, places through which the gods enter the human realm. They are also enshrined throughout the mountains in *gohei*, sacred staffs hung with strips of cut paper, and a type of evergreen called *tokiwagi*. Concepts of the gods and forms of belief vary by region and occupation, but there are also universal folk customs. The latter are best seen in festivities for mountain gods at New Year and in spring and autumn.

Universal Mountain-God Festivities

Since ancient times the Japanese have dwelled in fields and mountains and made a living from agriculture and forestry, gathering trees and other plants for building and other materials of daily life and for food. Since fields and mountains provide the necessities of life, people worship mountain gods as the rulers of those locales and occasionally hold festivals for them. At the beginning of the year the head of each household goes to the mountain god's *hokora*, to a sacred tree, or to the foot of the mountain lying in the direction considered auspicious for that year. Offering the god a *shade* (a chain of cut white paper suspended from a straw rope demarking a sacred area) or a *shimenawa* (a sacred straw rope hung with various auspicious symbols),

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as well as sake, *mochi* (rice cakes), small fish, and other foods, he prays for a good harvest and for the god's protection in the mountains. He then cuts down young trees and takes them home to decorate the Shinto and Buddhist altars in and around the house at the lunar New Year and pray for a bountiful harvest.

At the time of the spring and autumn mountain-god festival days, the men of a *ko*, or religious association, organized by the community or the neighborhood association, gather in the house of a *ko* member as a mountain-god *ko*, worshiping the god and sharing a meal, thus deepening the ties between the god and people, especially the members of the *ko*.

Farmers' Mountain-God Beliefs

Farmers believe that the mountain god descends from the mountains in early spring, becoming the god of the rice fields and protecting them until returning to the mountains after the autumn harvest to become the mountain god again. This is the belief underpinning the spring and autumn festivals.

In the Kinki region, centered on Kyoto and Osaka, each district of a community worships the mountain god and shares a meal at New Year and on December 7. In the New Year festivities, in the open area in the precinct of the shrine dedicated to the mountain god, the villagers enshrine effigies made of forked tree branches incised with symbolic representations of the male and female sex organs. In some communities the villagers have the two effigies simulate copulation. They also string a thick straw rope between trees, hang hooks made of small branches from it, and celebrate a good harvest and wealth, honor, and good fortune.

In other regions, there is the folk belief that the agricultural god or the earth god travels between heaven and earth on certain auspicious days close to the spring and autumn equinoxes.

The Mountain God as Bestower of Fertility on Trees

There is a widespread custom of abstaining from going into the mountains on days sacred to the mountain god because it is believed that on those days the mountain god "sows the trees" or "counts the trees" or "hunts wild boar," and that whoever enters the mountains will meet with

Mainichi Shimbun

misfortune. These are days for resting from work and blessing the mountain god, evidence of the belief that the mountain god presides over the fertility of trees.

There is also a belief that the mountain god dwells in three-forked trees and trees whose trunk splits into two and then joins again higher up. The sacred trees of shrines symbolize this idea that the mountain god dwells in trees.

Woodcutters' Mountain-God Beliefs

On the first day of the year on which they go into the mountains, woodcutters place *gohei* for the mountain god on the ground under a huge rock or on other natural features and pray for the god's protection. In very rare cases, they lean an ax against a tree and ask permission to cut down the tree. If the ax does not fall over, they take

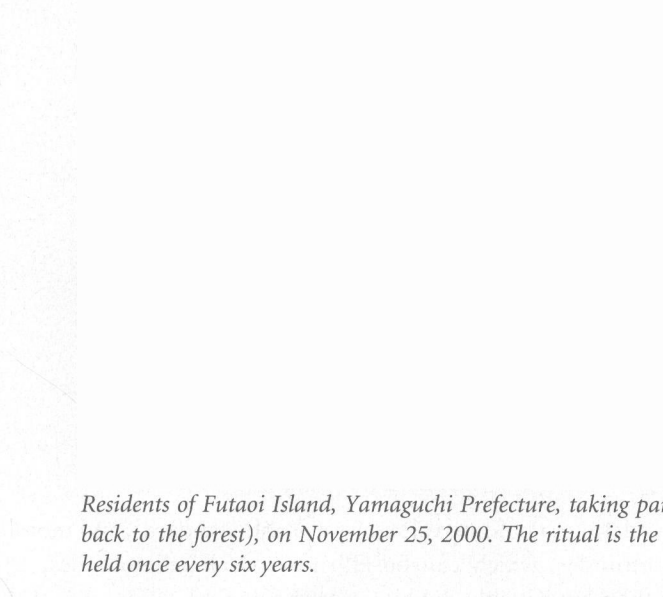
this as a sign of the god's consent and cut down the tree, then stand a twig bearing young leaves on the stump and worship the god. Woodcutters refrain from felling trees in which the mountain god dwells, as well as trees shaped like the *torii* gateway to a Shinto shrine. On days sacred to the mountain god, woodcutters rest from work, offer the god sake and *mochi*, and form a mountain-god *ko*.

Some hanging scrolls to the mountain god bear the words "Oyamatsumi no Kami," "Mountain God," or other divine names, along with a male or female form. Others bear the image of a pair of gods, one male and one female. Generally, the mountain god is believed to be either male or female. Woodcutters believe the god is female, as seen from the following legend. The wife of a woodcutter, seeing him set off for the mountains smartly dressed, suspected that he had another woman on the side and secretly followed him. When she came upon him, she saw a woman embracing his hips as he felled a tree in a dangerous place. Startled, the wife cried out, whereupon the woman (actually the mountain god) disappeared and the woodcutter fell to his death.

Hunters' Mountain-God Beliefs

Hunters worship the mountain god on the border between human habitation and the mountains. Once they cross that boundary they are filled with trepidation and take

Giant cedars consecrated as go-shinboku (sacred trees) on Mount Daihi, Kyoto Prefecture, around which shimenawa (sacred straw ropes hung with auspicious symbols) are applied.



Residents of Futaoi Island, Yamaguchi Prefecture, taking part in the Shinto ritual of Kami-okuri (sending the mountain god back to the forest), on November 25, 2000. The ritual is the highlight of the festival dedicated to the mountain gods, which is held once every six years.

great care. For instance, they are forbidden to use ordinary language, instead speaking a special mountain argot. They have stepped out of the profane world into the sacred domain of the stern mountain god, where they go to great pains to avoid the pollution associated with death and blood from childbirth. They pray to the god morning and evening, and whenever they kill a large beast, like a bear or a boar, they offer thanks to the god with various rituals there and then.

Hunters have legends of a hunter assisting the mountain god in childbirth and of the mountain god giving birth to 12 children in one year. According to one legend, the mountain god asked two hunters (or two parties of hunters) to assist her with childbirth. One refused and the other accepted. After giving birth, the god punished the first and rewarded the second with good hunting. The successful hunter is worshiped as the ancestral god of hunters. As we see from this legend, the mountain god is both female and a fertility god. The “12 mountain gods” of eastern Japan apparently signify the 12 months of the year; this number is also closely linked to the belief that the god has 12 children. In summer the mountain god becomes the god of the rice fields and is seen as a kind of earth-mother deity generating all things.

Belief in the Mountain God as the God of Childbirth

In eastern Japan the mountain god is revered as the god of childbirth. Folk customs include mountain-god *ko* made

up of women and ceremonies to welcome the god at the time of childbirth. A woman desiring an easy birth forms a *ko* with other women to worship the mountain god and share a meal at New Year and on December 12. When a woman is about to give birth, her family releases a horse to bring the mountain god to her home, whereupon she gives birth without worry.

The Mountain God and Ancestral Spirits

Along with the Buddhist belief that the spirits of the dead proceed to the far-off Pure Land, the Japanese hold to the belief that the spirits of the dead dwell in the mountains for a time, where they are purified, then merge with successive generations of ancestral spirits and become gods (*kami*). Ancestral spirits are said to watch over their descendants from the mountains. At New Year and the midsummer Bon Festival, two of the most important events in the Japanese calendar, people bring the spirits, along with certain plants, from the mountains to their homes and enshrine the spirits there. After several days they see the spirits off again. As we can see from the view of ancestral spirits symbolized by such folk customs, ancestral spirits and the mountain god have shared characteristics.

In the realm of folk religion, which has no fixed doctrines or rituals, the nature of the mountain god and the mode of belief are complex and vary with region and occupation. For mountainous Japan, mountains are a sacred realm of exalted gods. □

Toward a Global Ethic

by Hans Küng

The 22nd Niwano Peace Prize was awarded to the Roman Catholic theologian Dr. Hans Küng, president of the Global Ethic Foundation in Germany and Switzerland. Together with his contributions to interfaith dialogue and cooperation, Dr. Küng's advocacy of a "Global Ethic" as a way of realizing world peace has won him recognition around the world. The prize was presented in Tokyo on May 11. The following is Dr. Küng's acceptance address.

There are dreams that never come true, and on the other hand one can experience realities in life that one would never have dreamed of. Indeed, when I first traveled to Japan as a young professor in 1964, or later when I visited Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters and had the privilege of meeting Founder Nikkyo Niwano in 1982, it never came to my mind that I might one day stand here as a laureate of the prestigious Niwano Peace Prize. This prize is an extraordinary honor for me, and I am deeply grateful to the Niwano Peace Foundation for having selected me as this year's laureate.

I consider this distinction a threefold encouragement: for me personally as an acknowledgment of my lifelong activities for ecumenism among the Christian churches and for dialogue among religions; for the Global Ethic Foundation for Intercultural and Interreligious Research, Education, and Encounter, of which I am the president; and for all those around the world who strive for a global ethic as a basis of harmony among human beings and thus a more peaceful world.

I receive this prize precisely for my efforts to promote a global ethic, and I would therefore like to recall some of its dimensions. Certainly you are all aware that a global ethic is not a new ideology or superstructure. It will not make the specific ethics of the different religions and philosophies superfluous; it would be ridiculous to consider a global ethic a substitute for the discourses of the Buddha, the sayings of Confucius, the Bhagavad Gita, the Torah, the Sermon on the Mount, or the Qur'an. A global ethic is nothing but the necessary minimum of common values, standards, and basic attitudes, in other words, a minimal basic consensus

relating to binding values, irrevocable standards, and moral attitudes, which can be affirmed by all religions despite their undeniable dogmatic or theological differences and should also be supported by nonbelievers.

This consensus is formulated in the Declaration toward a Global Ethic (Parliament of the World's Religions, Chicago, 1993). The global ethic as presented in the Chicago Declaration is based on two principles without which no human community or society can survive. First, what is common to all human beings is their humanity, and therefore "every human being should be treated humanely," according to his or her inalienable human dignity, the foundation also of universal human rights. This principle still remains very formal, and therefore the declaration recalls a second principle, which is found and has persisted in many religious and ethical traditions of humankind. This is known as the golden rule of reciprocity: "What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others." In positive terms: "What you wish done to yourself, do to others." It is striking to discover that this basic rule of human behavior appears already in the Analects of the Chinese master Confucius, five centuries B.C.E., and can indeed be found, in slightly differing formulations, in the teachings of all religions.¹ In the scriptures of Buddhism it reads: "A state that is not pleasant or delightful to me must be so for him also; and a state which is not pleasant or delightful for me, how could I inflict that on another?" (Samyutta Nikaya).

These guidelines of humane behavior exist in all religions and also in nonreligious ethics and can therefore form the basis for a humanist ethic, in the sense that it should be

Dr. Küng delivering his acceptance address during the presentation ceremony of the 22nd Niwano Peace Prize on May 11.

acceptable for all human beings. A Buddhist leader at the Chicago Parliament told me that through the four directives he could hear the voice of the Buddha. He certainly thought of the four precepts formulated in the Suttanipata: "I vow to abstain from killing living beings. I vow to abstain from taking what is not given. I vow to abstain from sexual misconduct. I vow to abstain from lying." (A fifth precept does not encounter consensus among religions; it only occurs in Buddhism and some other religions and is therefore not included in the Global Ethic Declaration: "I vow to abstain from taking intoxicants.") Others may hear the voices of their own religious or philosophical traditions through the Chicago Declaration.

Herein lies the unique value of the Chicago Parliament and of its declaration: For the first time in the history of religions a representative group of leaders from all religions worldwide agreed on a set of common ethical guidelines. The goal and thrust of the Global Ethic Declaration join the deep inspirations of Founder Nikkyo Niwano and of President Nichiko Niwano, which continue to guide the activities of Rissho Kosei-kai for interfaith cooperation and peace.

The Lotus Sutra and the Teachings of Nikkyo Niwano

Let me therefore recall Founder Nikkyo Niwano's four-point-program for world peace, based on the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and laid down in his booklet *Some Thoughts on Peace* in 1984.² He worked untiringly all his life to translate these convictions into practice and thus became a pioneer of interfaith cooperation and peace work in Japan, in Asia, and worldwide, and he made Rissho Kosei-kai a pow-

erful and universally acknowledged movement for reconciliation, dialogue, and peace.

His four points seem to touch insights that are also developed in the Global Ethic Project.

1. Founder Niwano recalls the bodhisattva practice of believing implicitly that all people are brothers and sisters, because the various peoples, races, and nations are all equally the children of the Buddha. He calls on people of religion to stand in the front ranks to realize this truth. The awareness of the unity of the human family seems to me a basic prerequisite for peace, and the Declaration toward a Global Ethic states: "We are interdependent. Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole, and so we have respect for the community of living beings, for people, animals, and plants, and for the preservation of Earth, the air, water, and soil."

2. Nikkyo Niwano emphasizes the Buddha's teaching that it is wrong to deprive others of life, to dispossess others of what is theirs, to lie in order to justify oneself, and to speak ill of others through hatred. He therefore calls on people of religion to engage in "planting the roots of virtue." Here it becomes clear that the principles and directives of a global ethic can be identified also in the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha.

3. Nikkyo Niwano further calls on all people who are resolved to do good, regardless of their religion, to "join others who are determinedly seeking the ideal," which means to cooperate for the common good. Yes, world peace can only be furthered through a coalition of all people of goodwill, be they religious believers or not.

4. Finally, Founder Niwano puts as the fourth requisite

Dr. Küng (back row, far left) at a meeting of the InterAction Council in Vienna, 1997.

“to aspire after the salvation of all the living”: against egoism, in a spirit of service to others. He understood salvation, liberation from suffering, never as a merely spiritual value but as an eminently social task, on both the individual and the collective level. The Global Ethic Project shares these thoughts by emphasizing that everyone has not only rights but also responsibilities for fellow human beings, and also for all living beings and the environment.

The Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities

A further significant international development in the ongoing process toward a global ethic is the link of the InterAction Council of former heads of state or government with the Global Ethic Project.³ The IAC was founded in 1983 by the former Japanese Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda (who passed away in 1995) and still has its secretariat in Tokyo. The IAC members (at present about 30) develop analyses of global political, economic, and social problems and recommend solutions. They encourage international collaboration on such issues and communicate their findings directly to heads of government and other decision makers.

The synergy between the IAC and the Global Ethic Project was mainly due to the general concern for ethical issues of its then chairman, Helmut Schmidt, the former chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, and his specific search for universal human values on behalf of the IAC, supported here in Tokyo by Secretary General Isamu Miyazaki and the highly efficient Keiko Atsumi. As the 1993 Declaration toward a Global Ethic had already proposed a set of such values, I was approached by the IAC to

assist in drafting a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities. Such a declaration was considered by the council an appropriate expression of the relationship between human rights and responsibilities. The declaration was adopted by the council in 1997. The text follows closely the structure of the Declaration toward a Global Ethic and turns its principles and irrevocable directives into responsibilities of individuals and the community. The IAC suggests it should be understood as a support to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from the angle of ethics.

This declaration can also be considered an attempt to reconcile two approaches: the Western emphasis on the individual person and his or her rights, and the so-called Asian tradition of considering the community first, focusing on the duties of the individual toward the community. Hence the IAC Declaration can serve as a useful element in the debate on the intercultural validity of universal human rights. At this point it is, however, good to recall that both declarations—Chicago and IAC—are first of all moral appeals and not juridical documents.

In December 1999 the third Parliament of the World's Religions convened in Cape Town, following those held in Chicago in 1893 and in 1993. One of the main tasks of the 1999 parliament consisted in building upon the process of the past six years and in concretizing further the Global Ethic Project. This was done on the basis of a “Call to Our Guiding Institutions,” those institutions that play a decisive and influential role in society: religion and spirituality; government; agriculture, labor, industry, and commerce; education; arts and communications media; science and medicine; international intergovernmental organizations;

and organizations of civil society. They are invited to adopt the principles and directives of the global ethic and to apply them to concrete issues.⁴

Unfortunately, the following Parliament of the World's Religions, in Barcelona in 2004, while offering an interesting forum of encounter and discussion, was far less concerned with the Global Ethic Project. This is the more regrettable as the process of globalization of economy, communication, and technology in our world needs to be accompanied by a globalization of ethic.

Our Globalizing World Requires Wisdom

Advances in science and technology have so significantly broadened our horizons and deepened our awareness of the world around us that many feel that the wisdom of the great religions and philosophical traditions is irrelevant to our modern education. Surely, globalization has greatly expanded the data, information, and knowledge available for our use and consumption, but it has also substantially undermined the time-honored ways of learning, especially the traditional means of acquiring wisdom. We cannot confuse data with information, information with knowledge, and knowledge with wisdom; we need to learn how to become wise, not merely informed and knowledgeable.

There are three essential ways to acquire wisdom worth special attention in our information age: the art of listening, face-to-face communication, and the cumulative wisdom of the elders. The wisdom of the great religious and philosophical traditions teaches us how to be fully human. The cumulative wisdom of the elders refers to the art of living embodied in the thoughts and actions of a given society's exemplars. Only through exemplary teaching,

teaching by example rather than by words, can we learn to be fully human. We cannot afford to cut ourselves off from the spiritual resources that make our life meaningful.

Learning to be fully human involves character building rather than the acquisition of knowledge or the internalization of skills. Cultural as well as technical competence is required to function well in the contemporary world. Ethical as well as cognitive intelligence is essential for personal growth; without the former, the moral fabric of society will be undermined. Spiritual ideas and exercises as well as adequate material conditions are crucial for the well-being of the human community. Cultural competence is also highly desirable. Ethical intelligence is necessary for social solidarity. Spiritual ideas and exercises are not dispensable luxuries for the leisure class; they are an integral part of the life of the mind that gives a culture a particular character and a distinct ethos.

Conclusion

When presenting my thoughts about a global ethic, I sometimes meet with skepticism and doubts: Can a global ethic be realized? Will people not always act against such principles? In his Global Ethic Lecture at Tübingen University in December 2003, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan gave an encouraging answer to this question, and I would therefore like to conclude with his words: "What is my answer to the provocative question that I took as my title? Do we still have universal values? Yes, we do, but we should not take them for granted. They need to be carefully thought through. They need to be defended. They need to be strengthened. And we need to find within ourselves the will to live by the values we proclaim—in our private lives, in our local and national societies, and in the world."

I thank you again, ladies and gentlemen, for the great honor, encouragement, and joy I feel in this beautiful ceremony. □

Notes

1. A list of such formulations is presented in Hans Küng and Helmut Schmidt, eds., *A Global Ethic and Global Responsibilities: Two Declarations* (London: SCM, 1998), pp. 68–69.
2. Nikkyo Niwano, *Some Thoughts on Peace* (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 1984), pp. 38–41.
3. Küng and Schmidt, eds., *A Global Ethic and Global Responsibilities*. See also the InterAction Council's website, <www.interactioncouncil.org>, from which the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities can be downloaded in many languages.
4. The "Call to Our Guiding Institutions" can be obtained from the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, P.O. Box 1630, Chicago, Illinois 60690-1630, U.S.A., website: <www.cpwr.org>.

Dr. Küng (at right), with former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, on the occasion of the second Global Ethic Lecture, in Tübingen 2002.

Living by the Precepts

by Nichiko Niwano

Buddhists have the Six Perfections and observance of the five precepts as the standards of daily life. We are taught to live by the Buddha's precepts. Why is keeping those precepts important?

We generally associate the word "precept" with prohibitions and taboos. In Mahayana Buddhism the influence of self-directed admonitions is stronger than that of other-directed regulations. What does that mean? What do we gain from living by the precepts?

Founder Nikkyo Niwano said that the rules of conduct that lay Buddhists like us should follow are the five precepts, the basic principles for all Buddhist believers. The five precepts are the instructions not to kill, not to steal, not to engage in sexual misconduct, not to lie, and not to abuse intoxicants. Not to kill means not to take the life of a human being or any other living thing. Not to steal means not to take what belongs to another. Not to engage in sexual misconduct means not to indulge in improper sexual relations. Not to lie means exactly that; lying hurts not only

others but also oneself. Not to abuse intoxicants means not to drink alcoholic beverages in a way that causes trouble for others; Nichiren, however, did permit the use of alcoholic drinks for health reasons.

We tend to see precepts as rules forbidding us to do this or that: don't do this; you mustn't do that. But in Mahayana Buddhism the five precepts have a more positive meaning. This is because we have received the precious gift of life; we have been given life as human beings. The great Zen teacher Dogen (1200–1253) said, "This life and death of ours is actually the venerable life of the Buddha." This teaches us the essential truth that the life of deluded ordinary people, who discriminate between life and death, is actually, in essence, the life of the Buddha. This means that to treat our own lives and those of others lightly is to slight the life of the Buddha. Strictly speaking, therefore, we should never be able to harm or take the life of another, or of ourselves. The spirit of sincerely and simply extolling the wonder of life underlies Mahayana Buddhism.

The rule against killing is central to the five precepts. Its meaning, in addition to not taking the life of any living thing, is not to treat one's own life thoughtlessly. For example, feeling inferior to other people—to always disparage oneself as being inferior in any type of ability in comparison with others—violates the precept against killing.

There was a time when I myself used to feel obsequious in the presence of the founder, awed by his brilliance and greatness and convinced that I could never follow in his footsteps. This sense of servility, called *higeman* in Japanese, can lead to a false kind of pride. *Zojoman* is the excessive self-confidence that causes one to look down on others; its opposite is *higeman*, the lack of confidence that causes one to look down on oneself. When we belittle ourselves and live in dissatisfaction, we have no vitality, so we cannot appreciate the true value of life.

When Rissho Kosei-kai members undertake an assigned

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duty or deliver a religious testimony, they often begin by uttering the phrase “Unworthy as I am. . . .” While I realize that this beginning expresses the virtue of humility, I think it is important to conclude by saying, “From now on let us strive with a rounded heart, like that of the Buddha.” A rounded heart has no hollows of disparagement or protuberances of self-pride. It is the most succinct description of a heart like that of the Buddha. When we think according to petty human standards we become servile; when we gain a little skill in something we become conceited. We do this over and over. Oscillating between the valley of despair and the heights of euphoria, we remain uneven and unstable. But when we awaken to the preciousness of life and become able to feel truly thankful for it, both servility and conceit disappear and our hearts become full and rounded. We can

They are difficult to define exactly, but one way of expressing the meaning of “good” is the golden rule, “Always treat others as you would like them to treat you” (Matthew 7:12). As the Dhammapada says, “He rejoices in this world, and he rejoices in the next world: the man who does good rejoices in both worlds. ‘I have done good,’ thus he rejoices, and more he rejoices on the path of joy.”* Putting it simply, I believe that doing good means revering life and harmonizing with others, not hurting their feelings. The original meaning of *shila*, the Sanskrit word translated as “precept,” is the inculcation of good physical and mental habits. The stance of heartfelt repetition of harmonious good things is crucial in supporting our daily life as Buddhists.

It is important, though, that we not be bound even by the idea of good and evil. If we are, our thinking about good and evil becomes rigid rather than subject to the law of impermanence. The Buddha Dharma conveys the state of an absolute realm transcending good and evil. The third line of the “verse of commandment of the seven buddhas” is “To purify one’s mind.” I take “purify” to refer to impermanence itself, the state of not being bound. Both good and evil are subject to endless change. It is said that one who is capable of great evil is also capable of great good. Thus not being bound is crucial.

What we call good and evil are, at bottom, determined by worldly standards. The Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue says, “What is sin? What is blessedness? As one’s own mind is void of itself, sin and blessedness have no existence.” We normally judge things by the world’s standards, but the realm of the Buddha transcends those standards. The sutra also says, “The ocean of impediment of all karmas / Is produced from one’s false imagination.” Thus all sin and suffering arise from delusion, from our disordered, false thinking.

Although essentially we partake of the precious life of the Buddha, when we are influenced by delusion we are unaware of this and hurt both ourselves and others. The Sutra of Meditation says, “Let him sit upright and meditate on the true aspect [of reality].” If we do this, we will see clearly that we inflict suffering on ourselves through delusion. When exposed to the light of the Buddha’s wisdom, eventually our sin and suffering dissipate like the early morning mist. Living as Buddhists means breaking free of delusion, receiving the Buddha’s wisdom and awakening to the preciousness of life, and resolving to strive for self-improvement—indeed, being impelled to do so out of gratitude. □

* Juan Mascaró, trans., *The Dhammapada: The Path of Perfection* (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 37.

Rev. and Mrs. Nichiko Niwano congratulate H.H. Pope Benedict XVI on his papal inauguration during a private audience in the Clementine Hall at the Vatican on April 25.

then give expression to the true value of life just as it is and live with genuine clarity of understanding.

The Changing Nature of Good and Evil

When we hear reports about juvenile crime these days, we have the feeling that many young people have no clear standards of right and wrong. What is the true meaning of right and wrong, of good and evil?

An anecdote relates that the Chinese poet Po Chü-i (772–846) once asked the Ch’an (Zen) priest Niao-k’e, “What is Buddhism?” Niao-k’e replied by quoting the “verse of commandment of the seven buddhas” (the seven buddhas of the past, including Shakyamuni): “To do no evil, / To do only good, / To purify one’s mind, / This is the teaching of the buddhas.” What is meant here by “good” and “evil”?

The Bodhisattva Never Disrespectful

by Gene Reeves

It is significant that this bodhisattva tells everyone he meets, including those who are arrogant, angry, disrespectful, and mean-spirited, that they are bodhisattvas.

In a story told by Manjushri in the first chapter of the Lotus Sutra, we find a bodhisattva named “Fame Seeker.” This bodhisattva, we are told, “was greedily attached to lucrative offerings, and, though he read and memorized many sutras, he gained little from it and forgot almost all of them. That is why he was called Fame Seeker. But because he had planted roots of goodness, this man too was able to meet innumerable hundreds of thousands of billions of buddhas, make offerings to them, and revere, honor, and praise them.” In a subsequent life he became Maitreya Bodhisattva, who will be the future Buddha.

In a story told by Shakyamuni Buddha in chapter 20, we find a somewhat similar bodhisattva, one named Never Disrespectful, a monk who “did not devote himself to reading and reciting sutras, but simply went around bowing to

people.” And this bodhisattva in a subsequent life became Shakyamuni Buddha himself.

Here’s the story.

The Story of Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva

The Buddha tells the bodhisattva Great Strength about another buddha named Majestic Voice King who lived long, long ago and taught what was appropriate to those who were seeking to become *shravakas* or *pratyekabuddhas* as well as bodhisattvas seeking supreme awakening. His time was followed by that of another buddha of the same name, who was succeeded by twenty billion other buddhas, all with the same name.

Following the first of these buddhas, during an age of Merely Formal Dharma when there were many arrogant monks, there was a bodhisattva monk known as Never Disrespectful. He was called this because whenever he encountered anyone or any group of people, be they monks or nuns or laypeople, he would announce that he would never dare to disrespect them or make light of them because they were all actually bodhisattvas on the way to becoming buddhas.

He did not devote himself to reading or chanting sutras, but simply went around bowing to people and telling them why he would never disrespect them, never put them down. Of course, people resented his constant assurances that they would become buddhas in the future, and they often cursed and abused him, sometimes throwing things at him and forcing him to run away and hide in the distance. Yet he continued for many years the same practice of constantly refusing to put anyone down and assuring everyone that they were on the way to becoming buddhas.

When he was about to die, from the sky Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva heard the entire Lotus Sutra that had been preached by the Buddha Majestic Voice King. By

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keeping this sutra, his eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind were purified, enabling him to prolong his life for countless ages and to preach the Lotus Sutra to a great many people. Seeing his fantastic powers, many people, including those who had abused him, came to respect and follow him and receive the Dharma from him. And after the end of his extremely long life, he was able to meet millions and millions of buddhas and was able to preach the Lotus Sutra to them and to their followers. As a consequence of this, he was able to meet still more millions and millions of buddhas and preach in their presence.

This bodhisattva, the Buddha says, was Shakyamuni Buddha himself in a previous life. It was Shakyamuni's preaching of the Lotus Sutra in former lives that enabled him to attain supreme awakening. And the monks and nuns and laypeople who abused Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva, after suffering for an enormously long time from not seeing a buddha or hearing the Dharma or being in the community, are now, says the Buddha, present in the congregation as the five hundred bodhisattvas, five hundred nuns, and five hundred laypeople who do not falter in the pursuit of supreme awakening.

Disparaging, Despising, and Disrespecting

In some translations of the Lotus Sutra this bodhisattva is called "Never Disparaging" or "Never Despise." This is a curious matter. In the existing Sanskrit versions he is called *Sadāparibhūta*, which means "always held in contempt" or perhaps "always despised." But the Chinese translation, Ch'ang-pu-ch'ing (*Jōfukyō* in Japanese pronunciation), means "never treating lightly," though this name by itself can easily be understood to mean "never despise." The problem arises when we think about the meaning of this story.

In the Lotus Sutra, bodhisattvas, especially those appearing in the last eight chapters, including this bodhisattva, are intended to be models for us, at least to some degree. I do not mean that we are supposed to behave exactly like any of these bodhisattvas, especially not like Medicine King in chapter 23. But these bodhisattva stories are clearly intended to teach us something about the conduct of our own lives.

So what is being taught in chapter 20? Surely it is not that we should never despise others. Of course we should not despise others, but not doing so is hardly a challenge. Most people, I believe, never, or at least nearly never, despise other people. We might occasionally meet someone we do not like, but we do not usually go around despising others. Teaching people not to despise others would be telling them not to do something they would not do anyway.

But all of us, all too often I believe, do in fact speak and act in ways that are disrespectful of others. Usually, I sup-

pose, this is not deliberate or intentional, but arises from being careless or busy or self-absorbed or just ignorant of what may create feelings of being put down in others. So never being disrespectful is a serious challenge for each of us. And that, I believe, is what this chapter intends to teach us—that we should always and everywhere respect other people, all other people. This means finding the good in others, even if, as in the case of Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva, they are throwing sticks and stones at us.

Of course, the Sanskrit name of "Always Despised" is also very appropriate, as the story does tell us that this bodhisattva is always despised. But it also tells us that he is always respectful of others, undoubtedly in an exaggerated and, at least for some, unpleasant way. But he always sees the potential in others to become a buddha, and therefore always shows them great respect. He is never disrespectful.

Three Phases of the Dharma

Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva, we are told, lived in an era of Merely Formal Dharma. In Buddhism it is often taught that there are three, or four, phases of the Dharma, what we might think of as phases in the life of the Dharma. The first can be called the phase of True Dharma; the second, Merely Formal Dharma; and the third, the End of the Dharma. One common interpretation has it that in the first phase, the phase of true, real, correct or right Dharma, following the life of a buddha in the world, the Buddha's teachings are taught and practiced and awakening is possible. We can think of this as a time of living Dharma, a time when the Dharma has a deep impact on people's lives. In the second phase, the teachings are practiced but awakening is generally not possible because the teachings are only superficially held and practiced. In the third phase the teachings exist but they are not practiced at all, not embodied in the lives of people. They can be called "dead" teachings, and thus there is no awakening. Sometimes a fourth phase is added, a period in which the teachings themselves are no longer present. Eventually, another buddha emerges and the cycle begins again.

While this pattern of phases is quite common in Buddhism, we do not find it in the Lotus Sutra. There we find the End of the Dharma mentioned directly only twice, and perhaps indirectly twice, but never in connection with the phases of True Dharma and Merely Formal Dharma. These first two phases, on the other hand, are often mentioned together, often suggesting that there is a two-phase cycle in which a new phase of True Dharma follows a phase of Merely Formal Dharma. In chapter 20, this two-phase cycle is clearly endorsed. Setting the scene for the appearance of Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva, we are told that "After the True Dharma and Merely Formal Dharma had entirely

disappeared, another buddha appeared in that land.” And this event of a period of True Dharma not only preceding but also following a period of Merely Formal Dharma is said to have happened two trillion times in succession!

The term that I have translated as Merely Formal Dharma is sometimes called “semblance” or “imitation” or “counterfeit” Dharma. The Chinese character used for the name of this phase basically means “image,” as a statue or picture of a buddha is an image of a buddha. In such a period, Buddhism is characterized by formality and lack of depth. Buddhist monks become proud of learning the teachings, sutras, and ceremonies, but there is little real application of the teachings in the world. Institutions and other teaching devices, formalities of various kinds, tend to be elevated to ultimate importance. People fail to see the buddha-nature in themselves or in others.

We can only speculate as to why this three-phase cosmology is not in the Lotus Sutra. My sense of it is that in the context of the Lotus Sutra it is not appropriate to believe that the End of the Dharma, the third phase, is inevitable. Virtually the whole thrust of the Lotus Sutra is to encourage keeping the Dharma alive by embodying it in everyday life. It simply would not make good sense to repeatedly urge people to keep the Dharma alive by receiving, embracing, reading, reciting, and copying it, and teaching and practicing it if a decline of the Dharma were inevitable. The Lotus Sutra teaches that the bodhisattva path is difficult, even extremely difficult, but it cannot be impossible. Even the many assurances of becoming a buddha that we find in the first half of the sutra should, I think, be taken as a kind of promise that awakening is always possible.

We can, of course, understand the three phases not as an inevitable sequence of periods of time, but as existential phases of our own lives. There will be periods when the Dharma can be said to be truly alive in us, periods when our practice is more like putting on a show and has little depth, and periods when the life of the Dharma in us is in serious decline. But there is no inevitable sequence here. There is no reason, for example, why a period of True Dharma cannot follow a period of Merely Formal Dharma. And there is no reason to assume that a period has to be completed once it has been entered. We might lapse into a period of decline, but with the proper influences and circumstances we could emerge from it into a more vital phase of True Dharma. A coming evil age is often mentioned in the Lotus Sutra, but while living in an evil age, or an evil period of our own lives, makes teaching the Dharma difficult, even extremely difficult, nowhere does the Lotus Sutra suggest that it is impossible to teach or practice the true Dharma.

In the West we like to see things neatly divided into two.

If something is not true, it is false. If it is not real, it is fake. If it is not good, it is evil. If it is not alive, it is dead. Such an attitude, I believe, is deeply rooted in Western religious ideas of there being a final determination of all souls as worthy either of everlasting bliss or everlasting punishment.

If we approach the idea of three phases of the Dharma with such a dualistic assumption, from a perspective of True Dharma, it is nearly inevitable that we will think of the second phase, the Merely Formal phase, as simply not-true, lumping the phases of Merely Formal Dharma and of End of the Dharma together and failing to appreciate the very important notion here that there are three phases of the Dharma, not merely two. If, on the other hand, we were to look at the first and second phases from a perspective of the third, we could say that they, both the first and the second, are not the decline or end of the Dharma. Both perspectives are partly correct: the second phase, the phase of Merely Formal Dharma, is neither True Dharma nor the End of the Dharma.

It is the fact that Shakyamuni Buddha, who was once alive and who taught the Dharma, died. He became a “historical figure,” someone really dead in an important sense. In his place were put such things as relics, stupas, pictures, and statues as objects of devotion. Compared with a living human being, such things are dead. And then these dead things are put into museums and become even less alive. Or temples housing them become museums, tourist attractions, or funeral parlors, where the Dharma can be said to be dead. Teachings may be followed, but not in a very profound or sincere way.

But while an image is not the real thing, neither is it without value. It can be a way of keeping the Buddha alive, though not in the way he was alive as a historical human being, alive within us. I will always be grateful to “the Buddha” in the basement of Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts with whom I sat quite regularly when experiencing difficult times as a student. I did not receive the whole Dharma, the living Dharma, from that Buddha, but I did receive something very valuable. So, too, if a temple comes to function mainly as a tourist attraction, or as only a place for funerals and memorial services for the dead, it may serve as a skillful means to lead some to deeper interest in the Buddha Dharma.

Far from leading to the decline of the Dharma, Buddha images in museums, temples that are no longer “real” temples, and the like can become very important ways of introducing people to Buddhism and Buddhist practice, thus giving rise to True Dharma. Teachings that are not followed in a very profound way can nonetheless be gateways to more sincere practice. This is, I believe, one reason that in the Lotus Sutra, periods of Merely Formal Dharma are not

necessarily followed by periods of the End of the Dharma but rather by new periods of True Dharma.

Bodhisattva Practice Begins with Respecting Others

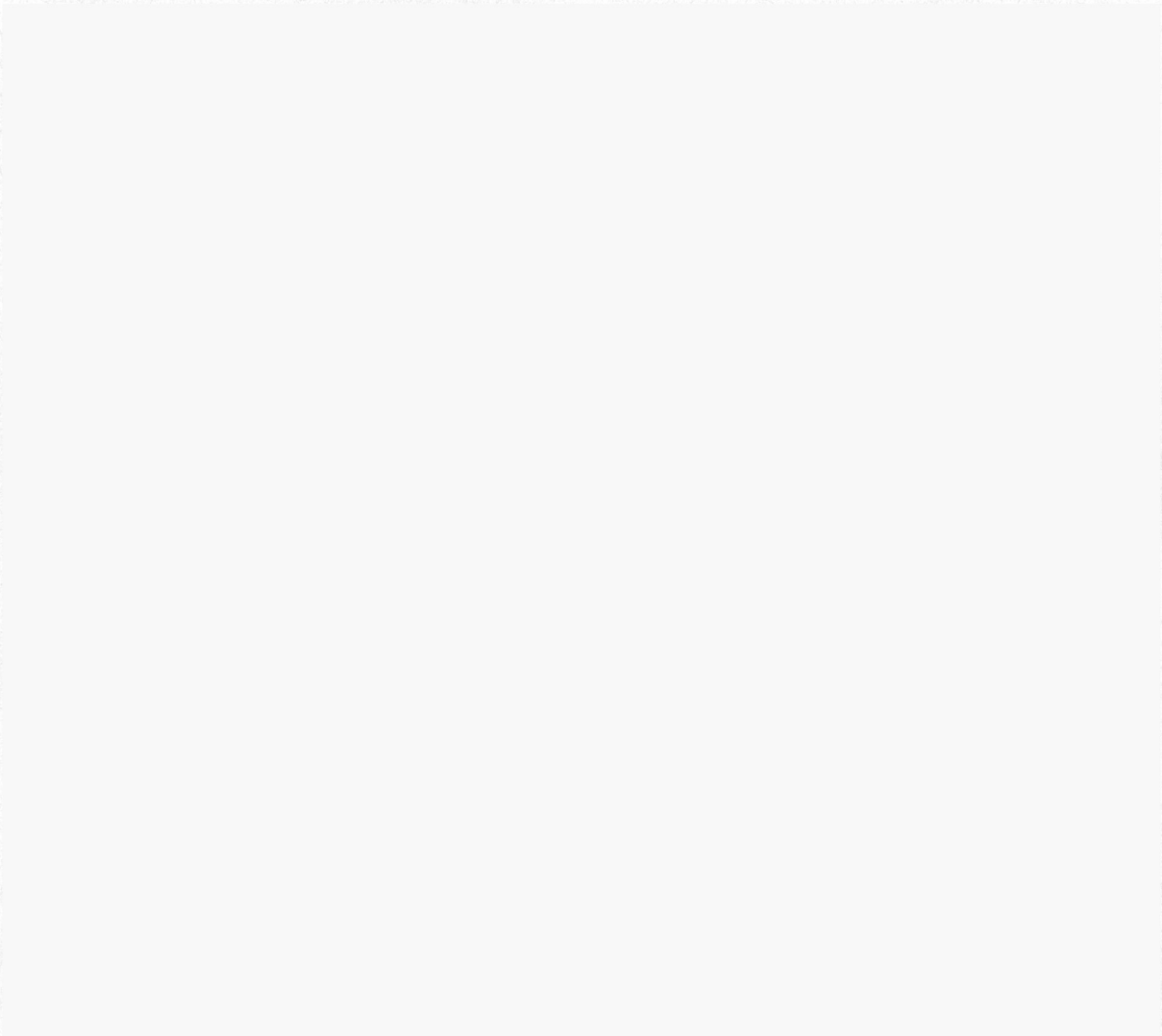
Teachers of the Lotus Sutra often say that it teaches the bodhisattva way of helping others. Unfortunately, this is sometimes understood to mean intruding where one is not wanted, interfering with the lives of others, in order to “do good.” But the story of Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva may lead us to see that doing good for others begins with respecting them.

Such respect may involve seeing the potential in others to become a buddha. But we should not think that becoming a buddha is merely something that happens to another; its deeper meaning is that others can become buddhas for us. That is, if we sincerely look for the potential in some-

one else to be a buddha, rather than criticizing or complaining about negative factors, we will be encouraged by the positive things that we surely will find. That is, by looking for the good in others, we should come to have a more positive attitude ourselves and thus move along our own bodhisattva path. By recognizing the buddha in all those he met, Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva was eventually able to become a buddha himself.

In earlier chapters of the Lotus Sutra, it is the Buddha who is able to see the potential to become a buddha in others. But here it becomes very clear that seeing the buddha or the buddha-potential in others is something we all should practice, both for the good of others and for our own good.

Respecting others, recognizing their buddha-potential, though it may often involve being kind, is not the same as



Frontispiece to chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra scroll owned by Enryakuji. Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva is depicted at the bottom as being chased by two men holding sticks.

kindness. Nor does it mean always praising others. Sometimes criticism is what is most needed. In my own experience as an employer, I have sometimes found it necessary to take the harsh measure of firing people from a job, forcing them to do something about some serious problem, such as alcoholism, for example. In the Lotus Sutra as well, in chapter 4 we find the father speaking to his workers, including his son, in a “rough” manner, saying such things as “Get to work! Don’t be so lazy!” Knowing when to be critical and how to be critical without being hurtful is itself an art, for which there are few rules.

Over and over again in the Lotus Sutra we are encouraged to “receive, embrace, read, recite, copy, teach, and practice” the Lotus Sutra. Thus, the fact that we are told that Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva did not read or recite sutras is quite interesting. I think it is an expression of the general idea in the Lotus Sutra that, while various practices are very important, what is even more important is how one lives one’s life in relation to others. The references to bodhisattvas who do not follow normal monastic practices, including reading and recitation of sutras, but still become fully awakened buddhas indicates that putting the Dharma into one’s daily life by respecting others, and in this way embodying the Dharma, is more important than formal practices such as reading and recitation.

This is why showing respect for others needs to be as sincere as possible. If we take being respectful to be only a matter of formality, only a matter of being polite, then we will likely miss the significance of what is being taught in the story of Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva. Bowing to others is one of the ways in which he shows respect for those he meets; it is not his respect itself. Respect for others is something in one’s heart that can be expressed, more or less well, with words and gestures such as bowing, but that should not be confused with its expressions.

Even a Single Flower

The relation between sincere respect and its expressions in gestures and words is something like the relation between True Dharma and Merely Formal Dharma. Expressions of respect, even when respect is not sincerely felt, can still be good. What we can think of as ritual politeness—saying “Thank you” when receiving something, even if we do not feel grateful; asking “How are you?” when greeting someone and not even waiting for a response; saying “I’m sorry” when we do not really feel sorry—can all contribute to smoother social relations. Just as True Dharma is greater than Merely Formal Dharma, being truly grateful is greater than merely expressing gratitude in a merely formal way, and heartfelt sincerity is greater than merely conventional

politeness, but even social conventions and polite expressions can be an important ingredient in relations between people and can contribute to mutual harmony and respect.

When we bow in respect before a buddha image or a picture of Founder Niwano, or before an image of Christ or a Christian saint, is it an expression of deep respect or merely a habit? When the object of our sutra recitation is to get to the end as quickly as possible or to demonstrate skill in reading rapidly, is our recitation anything more than a formality? When we take a moment to pray with others for world peace, are we expressing a profound aspiration for world peace, an aspiration that is bound to lead to appropriate actions, or are we simply conforming to social expectations? Probably in most cases, the truth lies somewhere in the middle, where our gestures and expressions are neither deeply felt nor completely superficial and empty. It is possible, after all, to be a little sincere or a little grateful. We should, of course, try to become more and more genuinely grateful and sincere, but we should not disparage those important social conventions, often different in different cultures, found in one way or another in virtually all cultures.

In chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra we find such expressions as this:

Even if little children at play,
Use reeds, sticks or brushes,
Or even their fingernails,
To draw images of Buddha,

All such people,
Gradually gaining merit,
And developing their great compassion,
Have taken the Buddha Way.

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If anyone goes to stupas or mausoleums,
To jeweled or painted images,
With flowers, incense, flags, or canopies
And reverently makes offerings;

Or if they have others perform music,
By beating drums or blowing horns or conch shells,
Or playing pipes, flutes, lutes, harps, mandolins, cymbals, or gongs,
Producing fine sounds and presenting them as offerings;

Or if they joyfully praise
The Buddha’s virtues in song,

Even with just a tiny sound,
They have taken the Buddha Way.

If anyone, even while distracted,
With even a single flower,
Makes an offering to a painted image,
They will eventually see countless buddhas.

If making an offering with just a single flower while being distracted can be a sign of taking the Buddha Way, surely such things as expressions of gratitude or apology, even superficial ones, can be signs of respect for others. Just as “merely formal” Dharma is better than no Dharma at all, small signs of respect are much better than no respect at all.

You Too Are a Bodhisattva

Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva tells everyone he meets, even extremely arrogant monks, even those who are angry, disrespectful, and mean-spirited, that they have taken the bodhisattva way. If what he says is true, surely whenever we make even superficial expressions of gratitude or apology, we are to some degree showing respect, a sign that, like Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva, we too have—to some slight but very important degree—taken the bodhisattva way that will lead to our awakening.

It is significant that Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva tells everyone he meets, including those who are arrogant, angry, disrespectful, and mean-spirited, that they are bodhisattvas. This is one more expression of Lotus Sutra universalism, of the idea that everyone is to become a buddha and therefore is to some extent a bodhisattva already. Normally in Buddhism, bodhisattvas are thought to be extremely high in rank, second only to buddhas. In typical Buddhist art this is expressed by showing bodhisattvas dressed in the fine clothes and wearing the jewelry of princes. But here we are to understand that everyone, including very ordinary people, is a bodhisattva. Though his appearance is not described, it is easy to imagine Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva himself as an ordinary monk. Of course we should respect great bodhisattvas and great people, but part of the message of this story is that there is a bodhisattva to be respected in everyone you meet.

The message is clear: if ordinary people are bodhisattvas, surely you who hear or read the Lotus Sutra should understand both that everyone you meet can be a bodhisattva for you and that you yourself can be a bodhisattva for others. This is one of the ways in which the central message of the Lotus Sutra, the One Vehicle Sutra, is expressed. □

A wooden statue of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Kannon) at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters in Tokyo.

The 19th IAHR World Congress Discusses the Role of Religion in Issues of Conflict and Peace

by Gaynor Sekimori

One of the largest congresses ever held by the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) took place in Tokyo from March 24 to March 30. Organized by Professor Susumu Shimazono of the University of Tokyo, who also serves as president of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies, it attracted over 1,600 participants. The world congress is held every five years by the IAHR, which is made

up of thirty-five national and four regional member associations. This year, five plenary sessions and seventeen sessions (averaging eighteen panels in each), broadly covering the theme, "Religion: Conflict and Peace," were held in conjunction with a special session devoted to Japanese religions and the study of religion. There was in addition a rich cultural program, including special evening sessions and opening and closing receptions that allowed participants to mingle and exchange ideas and information. Given the vast scale of the conference, it is inevitable that each participant was able to experience only a tiny amount of what was available. I would therefore like to report here on that segment of the conference that I participated in directly, and pass on certain observations that I made at the time.

The conference was held at the Takanawa Prince Hotel complex in Tokyo, in a number of buildings situated amid beautiful gardens that are a famous site for cherry blossoms. Participants kept a close eye on buds as they appeared on the trees, but unfortunately unseasonably cold weather delayed the blossoms and the conference was over before the trees bloomed. It did not, however, prevent a party for viewing the cherry blossoms being held at the nearby temple, Zojoji, as part of the cultural program that en-

abled overseas visitors in particular to sample various aspects of Japanese life and culture. The frequent rainstorms that occurred intermittently throughout the week did little to dampen the enthusiasm of participants.

The conference opened on March 24 with addresses by IAHR officials, including Noriyoshi Tamaru, the congress chair, Peter Antes, president of IAHR, and Armin Geertz, chair of the International Congress Committee, as well as congratulatory speeches by H.I.H. Prince Mikasa, the honorary congress chair, and Prime Minister Jun'ichiro Koizumi (in abstentia). Two performances of Japanese music provided the opening and closing fugues: one on the Japanese hand drum by a performer who has been designated a "Living National Treasure" and the other an exhibition of Buddhist chanting (*shomyo*) according to the Shingon tradition. The opening symposium, entitled "Religions and Dialogue among Civilizations," followed, with four panelists presenting a variety of views concerning whether or not the clash of civilizations and religions is the main threat facing the world today, and suggesting the possibilities and limitations of dialogue among them. The plurality of religious, cultural, and academic viewpoints covered suggested that it can only be through the appreciation of diversity that critical issues

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President of the IAHR, Professor Peter Antes, addressing the Opening Ceremony on March 24.

can be fruitfully discussed. This brings to mind the important work that the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) has done over the years. The reception that followed in the evening was attended by what seemed like almost all participants. Many of us found it virtually impossible to eat for talking, as we discovered colleagues old and new from around the world. Again, the musical entertainment furnished us with another aspect of Japanese culture, this time Gagaku (ancient court music) performed by a group based at Zojoji.

Of interest to readers of DHARMA WORLD was the panel held early in the conference entitled "The Lotus Sutra and Peace." Chaired by Gene Reeves, it discussed various aspects of the influence of the Lotus Sutra on society, particularly in terms of its potential for resolving conflict. Hiroshi Kanno spoke on inclusivism and tolerance in the Lotus Sutra; Chieko Osawa, on the sutra's influence on the writer Kenji Miyazawa; and Michio Shinozaki, on

Nikkyo Niwano's understanding of peace based on the sutra. The discussion of the influence of Lotus Sutra teachings on Kenji Miyazawa held great interest for me, as I can see considerable Miyazawa influence on the works of the great animation artist, Hayao Miyazaki, known worldwide for his film *Spirited Away*. It would be very interesting, therefore, to examine Miyazaki's work from a religious perspective. In addition, the WCRP sponsored a panel, chaired by Yoshiaki Sanada, which discussed peace studies and the role of people of religion in the modern world.

Two other panels that attracted considerable interest discussed the religious dimension of Japanese popular culture and the nature of Japanese Buddhism. The former was concerned with how *anime*, *manga*, and music portray religious themes, either intentionally or subconsciously. Western culture, though increasingly influenced by Japanese *anime* and *manga* through film, computer games, and the printed

media, does not tend to associate such media with religious proselytization, so Mark McWilliams's presentation on how comic books are used within the new religion called Kofuku no Kagaku (Institute for Research in Human Happiness) gave many participants a new dimension of understanding about Japanese religious culture. The latter panel provided various perspectives on the study of Japanese Buddhism, particularly from the viewpoint of the dominance of Western discourse about religion on the way it is studied both in Japan and abroad. Lucia Dolce in particular provided a fascinating glimpse of the way Japanese Buddhism has been seen in the West since the seventeenth century, particularly of the way Buddhist images were portrayed through the European gaze.

On the evening of March 25, the ethnographic filmmaker Minao Kitamura (Visual Folklore, Inc.) presented a two-hour documentary of the annual mountain-entry ritual practice of

Panel on the Lotus Sutra and Peace.

Haguro Shugendo called Akinomine ("Autumn Peak"). Shugendo rituals are essentially private, and traditionally it was forbidden to discuss their content with outsiders. This film represents the first time movie cameras have been allowed inside the temple Kotakuji at Mount Haguro, Yamagata Prefecture, where the ritual takes place over nine days in August each year. A capacity audience of around 200 heard an introduction from the pre-eminent scholar of Shugendo, Hitoshi Miyake, before the film started. The Akinomine ritual takes the form of a religious drama of death and rebirth in the mountain, and Mount Haguro preserves what is considered a medieval form of a mountain-entry ritual that can no longer be found anywhere else in Japan. The importance of the ritual itself within Japanese religious and cultural history cannot be overestimated. The film had previously been shown at a number of venues in Tokyo and around Japan, as well as in London and Edinburgh. Although the soundtrack was in Japanese, I prepared an English translation which I read out in conjunction with the Japanese, and which is also available on the Internet (www.mfj.gr.jp/film/narration_haguro_f.pdf). The reality of Shugendo is not

widely known, even in Japan, and it is not surprising that the film attracted wide interest.

On March 27, a day of excursions, each with a religious theme, was offered participants. *Goma* fire ceremonies were performed, for example, at the Shingon temple of Yakuoin on Mount Takao, west of Tokyo (famous for a Shugendo fire-walking rite in early March) and at Kawasaki Daishi near Yokohama. The variety of religious sites in Tokyo was well demonstrated by the tour that visited the Meiji and Yasukuni shrines and the ancient temple of Sensoji in Asakusa. One of the most popular tours took participants to Kamakura, famous for its Great Buddha, the Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine, and the venerable Zen temples of Kenchoji and Engakuji.

On the same day a series of panels on Japanese religions, where Japanese was the chief medium of discussion, was held. It began with a special session chaired by Paul Swanson (Nanzan University, Nagoya), and with Makoto Hayashi (Aichi Gakuin University) as respondent, looking at religion and politics in Japan. Helen Hardacre (Harvard University) took up the thorny issue of constitutional revision and its implications for religious groups and

organizations, stressing that the stances they take will "largely define the position of religion in Japanese society" in the coming years. Fumihiko Sueki (University of Tokyo) looked at the combinatory nature of Japanese religion, where a clearcut division between "Shinto" and "Buddhism" did not exist formally before the religious changes that took place in the 1870s and did not disappear even after the government legislated to clarify what belonged to each. Sueki believes that modern Buddhism has been too concerned to appear rational and so has tried to gloss over its esoteric, magical, and even funerary elements. He calls such surface rationalization the "upper structure" and contrasts it to a "lower structure" that includes the above elements. Thus he criticizes modern Buddhism as having failed to deal openly with the faith of the people. These ideas are of great interest to me from my own concern for Japanese religion as a whole with the results of the nineteenth-century policy separating Shinto and Buddhism and the establishment of Shinto as the state ideology down to 1945. The third speaker was Yoshio Yasumaru, who spoke about issues concerning the separation of religion and state in modern Japan and the way that "freedom of religion" was interpreted.

I was involved again that afternoon, in a panel organized by the Association for the Study of Japanese Mountain Religion (Sangaku Shugen Gakkai) called "Shugendo and Mountain Beliefs and Practices in Japan." Hitoshi Miyake, the president of the association, opened the panel with a paper entitled "Shugendo and Mountain Beliefs and Practices," where he made reference to the designation of the sacred mountains and pilgrimage routes of Kii Peninsula as a World Heritage site in 2004. Shugendo emerged from this region and was formed into an independent organi-

zation around the thirteenth century, centered on priests from the esoteric Tendai and Shingon schools who went to the mountains to gain spiritual power, which became the pivot of their magico-religious activities. It represents a combination of native beliefs, Buddhism, Taoism, and Yin-Yang divinatory practices (Onmyodo) and it was an important current in medieval religion (Akeshi Kiba). Christian missionaries who lived in Japan in the sixteenth century wrote of its existence in their reports to Europe (Hartmut O. Rotermond). During the early modern period it centered on great mountain shrine-temple complexes and village *shugenja*, who performed a variety of religious services for their communities and were closely involved in local ritual events (Kesao Miyamoto). It was banned in 1872 by the Meiji government as part of their policy to separate Buddhism and Shinto, though the way the policy was carried out was not uniform among Shugendo centers, being affected by local interests and conditions (Gaynor Sekimori). However, after the Second World War, religious organizations were given the freedom to operate independently, and female practitioners in particular have greatly increased in recent years, in what was traditionally a male-only preserve. Where restrictions on female practice still remain, questions have been raised about whether this represents religious differentiation or social and gender discrimination (Masataka Suzuki). This session drew a near-capacity audience, again attesting to the interest Shugendo has evoked in contemporary academic circles.

This emphasis on my personal interests is perhaps misleading, as there was a very great variety of reports that were presented at the conference. Social engagement, home schooling, New Age movements, bioethics, the media, “nonreligious” spiritual cul-

The Closing Ceremony of the congress on March 30.

ture, religion and science, death, suicide and euthanasia, medicine and healing, and abortion and infanticide were issues covered in regard to the social dimension of religion. There were a large number of papers on the major world religions as well. Islam was discussed from a variety of perspectives: Islamic views on war and peace; the Shari’ah in contemporary Nigeria; Muslim discourses on otherness and selfhood; Muslims and human rights in Europe; secularism and modernization; globalization; and gender issues, among others. Christianity too was examined from different national and historical perspectives: in China and among Chinese diaspora communities; its mission history in China, Ethiopia, India, Japan, and Paraguay; its attitudes to conflict and peace; Christian communities in a cross-cultural context; the social dimensions of modern Japanese Christianity; etc. Buddhism and Judaism, Jainism and Taoism, ancient religion and modern shamanism also received considerable attention.

There were also a number of panels that discussed the arts and music within religion. Participants had the additional opportunity to examine various facets of these themes through

the special exhibition of “folk-masks” of deities used by performers in the religious dance dramas called *kagura*, through the special lecture on the “Ten Ox-herding Pictures” of Chinese Ch’an (Zen), and through a delightful performance of Syrian music by Muhammad Qadri Dalal on the oud (lute), accompanied by a performance of Aleppan songs from the Hebrew, Syriac, and Arabic traditions that intermingle in that city. I was particularly delighted by the *kagura* performance centering on the dance of the mountain deity (Gongen-mai) that closed the conference. It was given by the Otsugunai troupe from Mount Hayachine in Iwate Prefecture (a former Shugendo mountain), and gave many of us the opportunity to be “bitten” by the lion-headed deity to be purified and to pass beneath its body to be reborn.

I was also delighted at the degree of interaction and dialogue that was achieved among all the scholars present. I look forward to the further internationalization of my own field of Japanese religious history, as Japanese and foreign scholars continue to work together, enriching one another, and the field, with their own particular academic strengths. □

Representatives of All Faiths Mourn the Passing of Pope John Paul II, Tireless Promoter of Peace and Religious Reconciliation

Over one million people attended the funeral service held on April 8 in Saint Peter's Square commemorating the death of His Holiness Pope John Paul II. Among them were over 200 world leaders and over 50 representatives of non-Christian religions. It was the first time ever that such a variegated assembly of leaders from different religious traditions, including Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism, took part in a papal funeral service. On behalf of Risho Kosei-kai, Rev. Michio Matsubara, director of the External Affairs Department, took part, along with two staff members of the interfaith dialogue division.

This unprecedented interreligious attendance at a papal funeral testified to the late pope's commitment to promoting dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and non-Catholic religious traditions as affirmed in *Nostra Aetate*. That revolutionary document, proclaimed by Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965, during the Second Vatican Council, sanctioned the church's reproof of "any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion."

In regard to Hinduism and Buddhism, in this same document the church affirms that it will regard "with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men." At the same time it renounced the charge that Jews are responsible for the death of Jesus Christ, paving

the way to improved Jewish-Catholic relations. The establishment of the Permanent Bilateral Committee for Dialogue between the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Holy See, which has had very successful dialogues in Rome and Jerusalem, is one of the most prominent outcomes of this interreligious course.

But it must be said that the process is still in the making and the path leading to interreligious understanding has not yet reached the grassroots level. Dr. Anthony J. Cernera, president of Sacred Heart University in Bridgeport, CT, said that it takes at least half a century for new church laws and teachings to "become integrated in the life of local churches." Dr. Cernera said that although the spirit of *Nostra Aetate* is being received into the life of the whole church, the process of reception "is not yet complete."

The promotion of interfaith understanding was regarded by many as the cornerstone of Pope John Paul II's pontificate. In particular, the pope's efforts were centered on bridging the 2,000-year-old divide that had separated Judaism from the Catholic Church. In 1986 John Paul II made a historic visit to Rome's synagogue. He was the first pope ever to enter a Jewish temple. "He opened a new page in Jewish-Christian relations, he put a definite end to 2,000 years of suffering and misunderstanding," said Italy's former chief rabbi, Elio Toaff.

In the year 2000 the pope visited Jerusalem and made a plea for forgiveness to the Jews. He reiterated this *mea culpa*—admission of guilt—in Saint Peter's Square, where on "behalf of all Catholics" he pleaded forgive-

ness for the sins committed against non-Catholic faithful throughout the centuries.

During his 26-year pontificate, Pope John Paul II established diplomatic relations with the State of Israel and apologized for the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition, during which tens of thousands of Jews were tortured and killed in the church's name.

But the very first and foremost interreligious endeavor extending a hand to all world religious traditions took place in 1986, when the pope called for an interreligious prayer service in the city of Assisi, Italy. On that historic occasion the pope prayed together with Buddhists, Jews, Shintoists, Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Protestants, Sikhs, and many more. The Assisi basilica thus became a symbol of love and universal peace. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Pope John Paul II brought 200 religious leaders from all over the world to pray for peace in Assisi in January 2002.

The pope also met with the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan Buddhist leader, at least four times, and visited India, the world's largest Hindu nation, in 1991. The Vatican held constructive talks with Buddhist leaders and was involved in exchange programs between Catholic and Buddhist groups.

Yahya Sergio Pallavicini, vice president of Italy's Muslim Religious Community, said that the memory of the teachings of Pope John Paul II will forever be carved in the minds and hearts of the members of Italy's Muslim Religious Community, who have "had the honor of setting his intellectual openness as an example to follow."

Pope John Paul II vehemently put into practice the principles of understanding and dialogue with Islam as affirmed in *Nostra Aetate*: "to work sincerely for mutual understanding" with Muslims and to "preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit

of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom."

Pope John Paul II was also the first Roman Catholic pontiff to set foot in a mosque, which he did during his visit to the Holy Land in the year 2000. In his address at the Umayyad Mosque, he said that Muslims and Christians should "offer each other forgiveness" for all the times they "have offended each other."

In the same year, the pope made a trip to Egypt, where he had a memorable and historic encounter with Dr. Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, one of the foremost authorities in the Islamic world and the grand imam of Al-Azhar. "The pope was a wise man," the grand imam said, commenting on the pope's death; "he was one of those people whom the world deeply needs and whom we will all miss," for "he devoted his life to bringing peace throughout the world." The imam said that during his visit to Al-Azhar, the late pope delivered a beautiful speech centered on the importance of forgiveness. "He emphasized that existing differences between religious faiths must not prevent human cooperation" and highlighted the importance of "knowing the other" different from us. The imam said he is grateful to the pope for having openly made a clear distinction, in the aftermath of September 11, "between terrorism and the Islamic faith."

Monsignor Felix Machado, undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, said he received countless messages of condolence on the pope's death, by phone, fax, e-mail, "and even personal visits" from people of other religions.

Among others, messages of condolence were sent by the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church. Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf praised the pope as a peacemaker and bringer of interreli-

gious harmony. Naveed Walter, Catholic president of Pakistan's *Human Rights Focus*, said the pope was a "champion of peace and justice and ambassador of love throughout the world." Haifa Chief Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen, representing the Permanent Bilateral Committee for Dialogue between the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Holy See, said that Pope John Paul II was the first to say "that our Biblical Covenant was eternally valid and not outdated or replaced by the New Covenant of the Christians."

Lebanon's President Emile Lahoud declared three days of official mourning and said the pope "shared with the Lebanese people their pain in the difficult days they overcame and planted hope in their hearts when they united to rebuild their nation."

"In terms of reconciliation with the Jews, I believe that Pope John Paul II was the greatest pope in the history of the Vatican with respect to his relationship to the Jewish people," said Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean and founder of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, an international Jewish human rights organization dedicated to preserving the memory of the Holocaust by fostering tolerance and understanding. Rabbi Hier paid homage to John Paul II for being the first pope "to apologize for Catholics who failed to help Jews during the Nazi period, ... the first to visit a concentration camp and to institute an official observance of Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, at the Vatican."

Ven. Chao Khun Rajchavijitra, monk and deputy dean in the Suthatheapwararam Buddhist Temple in Bangkok, described the late pope as a man "who devoted his entire life to the world" and surmised that "having reached full development in his previous existence, [he] has become an inspiration to lead [us] toward perfection." □

Eva Ruth Palmieri

Vatican Invites President Niwano to Inaugural Mass of Pope Benedict XVI

On April 24, the inaugural Mass for the 265th pope was celebrated in Saint Peter's Square at the Vatican. On behalf of Risho Kosei-kai, President Nichiko Niwano attended along with delegates from more than 150 countries, international organizations, and various faiths. Sitting in the front row, along with President Niwano, other representatives from Japan included Ven. Kojun Handa and Ven. Ryoko Nishioka, of the Tendai Buddhist Denomination, and Rev. Keishi Miyamoto, chairman of Myochikai.

In his homily, the pope asked for the support of all the faithful and urged young people to give themselves to Christ.

On the following day, the pope received delegates of various faiths from around the world in audience and stressed his commitment to interreligious dialogue. Later, Rev. Niwano had a private audience with the pope and congratulated him on his election. They shook hands, and the pope encouraged Rev. Niwano to collaborate with him for world peace. In his message to the pope, President Niwano said: "It is the wish of every religion to bring about a world in which all life is respected. In this regard, too, our hearts are as one with that of the Holy Father, and I hope that we will continue to progress in that direction step by step, having joined hands with the world's religious leaders." As the president of the Japanese Committee of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), he urged the Vatican's further cooperation for the success of the eighth assembly of the WCRP, to be convened in Kyoto in 2006. □

A Leadership of Openness and Interreligious Dialogue

A Visit with His Holiness Pope John Paul II

by Ignacy-Marek Kaminski

In the author's student days in Krakow, Poland, the young Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, the future Pope John Paul II, served as a spiritual counselor. Professor Kaminski, now a permanent resident of Japan, met the ailing pope in his Vatican apartment in January, with his two Eurasian children. He believes that the late pope's legacy of open leadership and interreligious dialogue will long live in people's hearts.

The unexpected invitation to spend a private evening with the late Pope John Paul II at his Vatican home on Sunday, January 16, 2005, took my Eurasian children by surprise. Like many other young people who had grown up in multicultural families with different religious traditions, my adult children have never considered themselves as Christians alone. The Sweden-born Akane and Tokyo-born Ken seem as comfortable in a Buddhist temple as in a Catholic church.

Have these two adult offspring of a Polish Catholic father and a Japanese-Korean Buddhist mother been mistaken believing that one might find emotional comfort in the houses of prayer belonging to different cultural traditions? Is their mother's value system better than their father's in helping to solve that particular problem? Or is there another compass to help them navigate between the at times contradictory values of their parents? For them, globalization and interfaith dialogue are not abstract terms, but represent very personal dilemmas that they must come to terms with daily.

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Our religious experiences are never abstract: they are always very personal and intimate. Regardless of our cultural and ethnic differences, we all search for the meaning of life and death. Anthropological studies confirm that there has never existed a human society without a belief system. Regardless of whether we believe in one God, or in more than a single God, there is something that unites us all as people: our shared humanity. Before we became Japanese, Christians, Buddhists, refugees, leaders, or soldiers, we all were born as human beings. We often forget that our primary identity has always been as a human being first and foremost. Face-to-face human encounters have been central in shaping our individual lives. Sometimes these chance encounters affect our lives immediately for bad or good, and we do not dwell on them any more. Other times, it takes years to comprehend that what we thought was just a series of unrelated events was actually a process that shaped not only our own lives, but the lives of our children. And what does an anthropologist father do when he discovers he is not able to solve his offspring's spiritual dilemmas? He takes them for a trip, hoping that they will encounter new people and learn firsthand from their joy and sufferings.

A few hours after arriving in Rome, we checked into a hotel near Saint Peter's Square and went for a walk. I noticed two unarmed Swiss guards wearing historical uniforms and guessed that they were standing before one of the entrances to the Vatican. I asked the children to wait

and entered the gate separating Rome from the world's smallest state.

The Italian carabinieri-guard seemed astonished: A gray-haired man just walked in and mentioned Pope John Paul II and his personal secretary, Archbishop Stanislaw Dziwisz, as the two people he was hoping to meet. When I showed him an old letter in Polish inviting me to come by whenever I happened to be in Rome, he made a few calls. A while later he passed the receiver over to me, saying that His Excellency Archbishop Dziwisz was on the line. Stanislaw sounded as warm as in the old times when he was still a young priest and the future Pope John Paul II was the forty-nine-year-old Cardinal Karol Wojtyla in Krakow. Stanislaw said he wanted to meet my children and asked if we had time at six that evening.

Three hours later we arrived at the same security post. The guards were different, but they neither asked for our IDs, nor made any security body-checks. We were advised to walk up the slope, turn left, and ring the bell at a particular entrance. While we hesitated, the small doorway opened automatically. We passed the empty narrow corridors leading to an inner courtyard. We encountered no one except the carabinieri guarding another obscure door. He said that someone would come to meet us. The small door opened and Stanislaw gave me a hug and invited us inside a tiny elevator that links the yard with the papal apartment. On the way up, he smiled at my children, saying they were now older than I was when we had first met in Krakow in 1968.

Stanislaw closed the elevator door, took me under the arm, and led us deeper into the pope's private apartments. The interior was simple, and the atmosphere warm and very domestic. The four of us took seats at a large wooden table near a glass-enclosed bookshelf and talked. "How does the Holy Father feel?" I asked about the pope's fragile health in our native Polish. "He suffers very much but doesn't give up," Stanislaw sighed. He had been the pope's personal secretary for the last forty years. He held the bleeding Holy Father in his arms when he was almost assassinated in 1981, and then remained with the increasingly frail pope twenty-four hours a day.

We talked about the time when the future pope was still a young bishop, a robust mountain hiker, and an accomplished skier. His appointment to the high church office did not prevent him from spending nights outdoors in a sleeping bag, and, if necessary, from traveling by a delivery truck, sitting on flour bags. He had already been appointed one of the youngest cardinals, but he continued to spend his every New Year's holiday skiing and writing in Zakopane. I remember his humbly furnished attic room at the home of the Gray Ursula Sisters: an old bed, table, and

chair, with a water basin in the corner. The sisters used to run an orphanage where I had spent five years of my childhood. Sometimes I met the cardinal in my former orphanage and we talked about outdoor life and books; Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea* was his favorite novel, and only a few people knew his pen name, Andrzej Jawien. And now his name was John Paul II and my children and I were sitting with Stanislaw in his Vatican home and recalling the memories of our shared Polish past: "I remember our car trip from the Zakopane mountains back to Krakow. He was in such robust health then. After a skiing day, the cardinal still kept working in the car at his movable pulpit. . . ." Stanislaw smiled: "Yes, those were the old days. It was a very good car, but he sold it soon after you were exiled from Poland." I wondered aloud why the cardinal had sold the car that was a gift from North American Catholics. "He needed the money to finish the construction of a church. . . . So he sold his American car to get the roof over a new church in what was then Communist Poland. That's why, Marek!" Stanislaw mocked me and turned his attention to my children: "Your father has always questioned everything since his student days. It got him into troubles at times, but questioning is what young people should do, isn't it?" He jokingly shared with my children anecdotes about my frequent troubles with the Communist authorities during my studies of law and anthropology in Krakow and Warsaw.

He recalled the papal trip to Japan and asked my children about the difference between their life in Japan and in Europe. He seemed intrigued by their answers and wanted to learn more about their religious and cultural experiences. Then he asked them casually: "Would you like to meet the pope this evening?"

It took them a while to comprehend what he was saying. They asked Stanislaw where they should go. He said that they did not need to go anywhere. "The pope will come to this room soon."

While waiting for the pope, he asked me to tell him more about the people of different faiths I had met during my cross-cultural field research. We talked about my nomadic life among Okinawans, Ainu, Greenlanders, Gypsies, and other minority groups. Then he spoke with my children about their Japanese-Korean-Polish roots and the papal global trips. "Some of your father's books that we have here are in Japanese, Swedish, and other languages we could hardly read. Which language do you feel most comfortable with, Akane?" My daughter admitted that Japanese and English were easier for her than Polish and Swedish. When he finished probing her, he turned to my son. "And why do you speak Polish better than your sister, Ken?"

Stanislaw questioned him about his summer studies at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow last year.

Our conversation shifted among several languages and touched the common religious dilemmas of cross-cultural young people: Whose faith should they follow? Stanislaw said to my two youngsters: "I have something to help you keep your Eurasian heritage alive." He led us to a smaller room and picked up two books as gifts. One was a photo album of papal journeys. The other one was a numbered edition of the pope's personal memoirs. "We have also two small Japanese gifts for you and the Holy Father." My daughter and son handed him in return two ancient kimonos. Stanislaw scolded them for spending money for the gifts and joked that if they did not want him to resell the presents, they should hand their kimonos to the pope personally. Then he asked me if they go to church in Japan. Stanislaw smiled with understanding when I said that sometimes they follow me to the Christian churches, and other times I follow them to the Japanese temples and shrines to learn more about their mother's religious traditions. We continued to talk about the real-life dilemma of children growing up in cross-cultural families and the impact of their parents' divorces on their future lives. He introduced me to the pope's latest writings on interfaith dialogue and memories of his visits to synagogues, mosques, temples, and other houses of prayer. "The different cultural experiences are always enriching," he said, and then he left us for a moment. A while later, Stanislaw was saying to Akane and Ken that the author of the books they had in their hands was now expecting them.

When I saw His Holiness's stooped figure at the end of the same table that we had just sat at a few minutes earlier, the warm feeling of home was overwhelming. Though he looked different from the robust outdoor man I remembered from the Polish mountains, his probing eyes had not changed much. The pope's eyes were alert and remained focused on me. Instead of resting, he fatherly shared his Sunday evening with a man who had just dropped in unannounced at his Vatican home, and had brought two Eurasian youngsters' religious dilemma with him.

I held this dear old man's hand in mine and looked in his eyes and wished him good health. The illness made it difficult for him to speak and move. Telling him that I would never forget what he did for my mother when she was still alive and we needed his help, I reported to him on my anthropological work and my multicultural family. I told him about visiting with my son the Ursula Sisters' orphanage in Zakopane, about my daughter's performances in Japan's Takarazuka musical theater, and about the death of my mother. He listened to me intensely, as he always did.

Thirty-seven years had passed since I shared my personal troubles with him at his Krakow home in 1968. At that time, the young Cardinal Wojtyla lived at the Archbishop's Residence and his home was always open to students seeking his pastoral advice. And when I came to him with my family problems at the age of twenty-one, Cardinal Wojtyla offered to go to my hometown to meet my mother, a widowed teacher with five children. That it was a 100-km-long car journey for him did not seem to matter. He was a priest first, and a high church official later. His personal intervention helped us to solve our family difficulties. He told me that I should feel free to call on him whenever I needed to. Sometime later he introduced me to his young secretary, Stanislaw Dziwisz. Since then, we have remained in touch by letters and e-mail. A few weeks before he was elected Pope John Paul II, my daughter was born in Sweden, and he sent his birthday wishes to her in the fall of 1978. Twenty-six years later, that Polish-Japanese-Korean baby, Akane, who was born in the year of his election to the papal throne, has grown into a young musical actress. And when she came to him wishing him good health, the ailing pope embraced her affectionately, as if he were still an ordinary parish priest and not the leader of one billion Catholics. The heavy workload of his high office might have stooped his body, but it did not affect his heart.

I watched the Holy Father smile at my daughter while she was introducing herself in Polish by her name Akane-Jadwiga. He blessed her. The hand that touched Akane's face is the same hand that was injured by a pistol shot fired by a Turkish would-be assassin in 1981; his arm moved with difficulty and he was momentarily short of breath. I was so close to him that I heard him struggling with his shallow breathing. The TV coverage may have shown how much physical effort every single word and gesture required from him, but it hardly gave an insight into the courage of his spirit and the strength of his will: he knew that his still sharp mind would remain imprisoned inside his rapidly ailing bodily frame; and now that great soul has been released from his suffering and taken home to heaven. Being around that courageous man was the most humbling moment I have ever experienced in my life. And watching the suffering John Paul II listen attentively to my Tokyo-born son, Ken, introducing himself in Japanese-accented Polish as Ken-Stanislaw, I was not only touched, but I was also learning to grasp the universal power of the pope's fatherly love. By sharing his daily agony with us, he transformed his public suffering into a spiritually powerful message: It is love that keeps us alive, and every single life, however painful and small, is equally sacred. He offered the twenty-two-year-old Eurasian student his fatherly blessing

The author holding one of the antique kimonos that he and his two children presented Pope John Paul II as their gifts from Japan.

and then gave a little gift to each of us: a replica of his personal rosary.

We spent the remaining time singing his favorite songs together with the young Polish priests who joined us in the meantime. An hour went by, but the Holy Father did not want to leave us. I was overwhelmed by a feeling of being at home with an ailing father whose illness had brought his multicultural family closer together to cheer him up. Though he could really not sing anymore and spoke with great difficulty, he was visibly cheered by the songs reminding him of healthier days. One of the sisters brought a plate of his favorite Polish cakes, but he could hardly eat any. He invited his guests to enjoy the fried cakes in his stead. Even eating required a tremendous effort for him. He did not hide his increasing fragility and his dependence on the help of others, and he shared his suffering with us like any other father would. Being around him filled me with joy and sadness, and I could not avoid recalling his favorite book, *The Old Man and the Sea*. I am sad that he will no longer be able to share these very private Sunday evenings with his many friends.

Around seven-thirty it was time for John Paul II to retire for his evening prayer. I left two of my books for him and bade farewell to Stanislaw. He asked me to drop by whenever I might be around. I was already halfway down the hallway when I realized that Akane and Ken had not followed me. When they finally joined me, they told me that Archbishop Dziwisz had stopped them from leaving until they took more of the pope's favorite cakes.

Eating the Polish cakes, we mingled with the busy street crowd. We spent the remainder of the evening at a small pizzeria that we had passed a few hours earlier. The whole experience seemed unreal. When we arrived at our hotel at nine, a courier from the Vatican newspaper *Osservatore Romano* was already waiting for us with a dozen large photos. The following morning when we received another dozen, my children finally comprehended that their evening encounter with John Paul II had really taken place a day earlier, on Sunday, January 16, 2005.

Two weeks later the pope was rushed to the intensive-care unit at Gemelli Hospital. His condition was critical. Stanislaw remained with him around the clock. The pope wanted to return to his Vatican home. Nine days later he was back. He appeared with small children at the window to bless the well-wishers gathered in Saint Peter's Square. He prayed and worked as much as his health allowed him. By the end of February 2005, the pope's life was in danger again. He was saved at the last moment by an emergency tracheotomy.

We worried very much and prayed for his recovery.

Between these emergencies Stanislaw found time to send cards with encouraging words to the Swedish-born Akane and her Japanese-born brother, Ken. Why did he do it? I search for the meaning behind these small signs and symbolic encounters. Perhaps they are symbolic reminders that our thoughts and shared love matter. Perhaps he was telling us that, no matter how much we may feel separated by physical distance and our different cultural experiences, we are not alone. Perhaps as long as we will be able to share our love with one another across cultural borders and faiths, we will remain close. I do not know the answers. And there are more questions crossing my mind when I recall my past encounters with Pope John Paul II and think about the children born of parents belonging to different religious traditions.

Will cross-cultural marriages become a natural part of globalization as children seek emotional comfort in their parents' houses of prayer, be it a Buddhist temple, a Christian church, a synagogue, a mosque, or any other peaceful place for reflection over the meaning of being human? Will the new generations born into an increasingly globalized world feel more at home with the search for interfaith dialogue of John Paul II and the other spiritual leaders than their parents did? Do global leaders need to hide their prolonged ill health behind heavily guarded privacy in order to command our respect? Or might our witnessing the personal suffering and death of a great religious leader inspire us as people and generate a genuine respect based on compassion? □

The Beginnings of Deification

(1)

by Hajime Nakamura

In outward form, Sakyamuni was no different from other bhikkus. Later depictions of him with beautiful hair and a halo, surrounded by disciples, were errors in terms of historical truth.

Gotama Buddha was originally viewed simply as the “greatest of all human beings” and a “good friend.” This human image, however, was soon superseded as Gotama underwent a process of deification. In the previous chapter we saw how certain of his epithets fell into disuse or were abolished as they came to seem unsuitable to his increasingly deified status. Others may have continued to be used sparingly and unobtrusively. A very few, employed from the earliest times through the process of deification, became honorific titles specific to Buddhism.

Gotama, as one who had realized the Truth, was called Buddha, meaning “enlightened one.” In later times this was the most widely used epithet of Gotama Siddhattha, but because “buddha” referred to any person who had realized the Truth, it was an epithet common to Jainism as well. Thus Mahāvīra, its founder, was also called Buddha. In India in general, *buddha* means simply “wise,” in contrast to *mūḍha* (“foolish”). It is very likely that the word was thus incorporated into Buddhism in the sense that the other sects used it. It could also have the connotation “awakened.” In Buddhism, Gotama was called Buddha from a relatively early period, and at times he even referred to himself in this way. This designation, too, was applied to him before he attained enlightenment. Although “buddha” eventually became the standard term for the ideal human being, in the earliest period of Buddhism religious mendicants were all called “buddhas.”

The Suttanipāṭa says: “A *bhikkhu* should not wander around at an unsuitable hour [that is, after noon]. He should go to a village for alms at the stipulated time, for attachments form when one wanders out at an unsuitable hour. Therefore, all those [*buddhā*, in the plural] who have awakened do not wander out at an unsuitable time.” Here, the expression “all those [*buddhā*, in the plural] who have awakened” derives from “buddha.” The usage does not

imply the buddhas of the three periods of past, present, and future, but rather sages who were ordinary people concerned about whether or not it was suitable to walk about after noon. Early Buddhists did not understand “buddha” in the same way their later counterparts did; to them, any wise person or seeker of the Way was a “buddha.” In this sense, “buddha” and “bhikkhu” were synonyms, and their presence signals the period when there was no differentiation in their usage. The separation of “bodhisattva” and “buddha” similarly was the product of later thought. We must abandon the scholarly viewpoint of Buddhology if we are to understand the figure of the Buddha as portrayed in the earliest texts, such as the Suttanipāṭa.

Numerous buddhas were spoken of, honored, and revered. The heretic Devadatta, too, called himself a “buddha.”

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).

Aññā-Koṇḍañña became enlightened on hearing Gotama expound the Four Noble Truths; therefore he, too, was a buddha. The Buddhist usage corresponds to that of the Jain scriptures, which designates all sages of whatever sect as “buddha,” and also to the use of “buddha” for the Buddha’s disciple Śāriputta.

Gotama Buddha was also called “saṃbuddha.” In the epics this meant “understanding all things well.” In Buddhism the term means “awakened one” or “one who has correctly realized the Truth.” Here it refers not only to Gotama Buddha, but also to any person who has perfected his or her training. The Jain tradition says that Pārśva, precursor of Vardhamāna, referred to “one who has realized the Truth” as *saṃbuddha*. The epithet *sammāsaṃbuddha* (“perfectly enlightened one”) gained currency somewhat later. Enlightenment was described as “perfect” (*saṃbodhi*); it was said that “the Tathāgata has attained full enlightenment.”

In the sutras, Sakyamuni is addressed mainly as Bhagavā. In both the Vedas and the epics, *bhagavā* (from *bhagavat*) was the term by which a disciple addressed a teacher. In Hinduism, too, a thousand years after the time of Gotama Buddha, students continued to call their masters “bhagavan.” Bhagavā is clearly an epithet that Buddhism adopted from Hinduism. An identical usage, by a Brahmin student for his teacher, appears in the oldest verse sections of the Buddhist sutras. The term was used from a quite early period, not only in Buddhism, but in Jainism, too, and Bhagavat has been employed from a very early time right through to the present to refer to the founder, Mahāvīra. By contrast, with Gotama’s growing deification this term took on a high religious significance, and in the Chinese translations was usually rendered as World-honored One. In certain cases it meant not the actual Buddha (*rūpa-kāya*), but the transcendent absolute (*dhammakāya*). (It is thought, incidentally, that the root of the word means “master.”)

Following this thread of discussion, the Buddha, in addition to being referred to as the embodiment of the Dhamma (*dhammakāya*) and as one with the Dhamma (*dhamma-bhūta*), was also revered as the embodiment of the god Brahman (*brahmakāya*) and as one with Brahman (*brahma-bhūta*). Thus the dignity and power of Brahman, the absolute figure of the Upaniṣads, was added to the Buddha’s holiness. Eventually the Buddha that lay behind Sakyamuni became the object of belief; it was thought that the ultimate Buddha had taken human form to appear among human beings. This idea which had its origins in early Buddhism, developed within Mahāyāna Buddhism, and in Japan it was expressed in terms of the native deities’ being avatars of the buddhas and bodhisattvas (*honji suijaku*). Throughout, the thinking is consistent.

The epithets “buddha” and “bhagavat” were apparently considered the most apt terms for describing the ideal personality, and as such were used in compound form, *bhagavā buddho*, even in comparatively early texts. This usage is confirmed in Maurya-dynasty inscriptions, where the Buddha was called Revered Master (Bhagavat), as well as simply Buddha, and, on occasion, the two together, Bhagavat Buddha. Gotama, in particular, was called Buddha Sakyamuni. Just as Buddha was used in Jainism, Bhagavat was employed as an epithet both in Jainism and Hinduism. (In Buddhism, however, Bhagavat was apparently the more reverential form. In the *Questions of King Milinda*, the ruler, a non-Buddhist, called Sakyamuni “Buddha,” while the Buddhist elder Nāgasena called him “Bhagavat.”)

The Buddha (or *sāvaka*) was also called *pūjāraha* (“he who is worthy of respect”). In the same way, “buddhas” or religious practitioners were referred to as “those who should be respected” (*arahā* = *arhat*); this term was used in the other, non-Buddhist sects as well. In Jainism its usage continued for a long time, with the result that Jainism was also known as Ārhatā. In Buddhism *arhat* later came to mean one who had perfected Hinayāna training, but who was not in fact a buddha. Because *arhat* posed conceptual problems in translation, it tended to be transliterated rather than directly translated into Chinese; when more explanation was considered necessary, a Taoist term from the “Great Ones Worthy of Respect” chapter of *Chuang-tzu* meaning “perfect man” was used. This term eventually found its way into translations of Buddhist scriptures as well; it was borrowed especially by Ch’an (Zen) Buddhism.

Another epithet of the Buddha was Tathāgata (“Perfected One”). In the epics this word meant “having become a splendid being”; in that sense it entered ancient Buddhist verse as an epithet meaning “perfect.” Thus when applied to human beings, Tathāgata had the meaning of “one who has practiced in this way and gone forward” and “perfected one.” This meaning appears, too, in the Jain scriptures, while even in the Pāli scriptures an outstanding religious master of the time was called Tathāgata. It evidently was a form of address common to all the non-Brahmanical schools of the time.

In the oldest Buddhist texts, *tathāgata* means nothing more than “respected religious practitioner.” “Do not offend the *tathāgatas* [religious practitioners]” (*māsādesi tathāgate* [Theragāthā, 280]). The commentary identifies these respected religious practitioners as “distinguished disciples of the Buddha” (*tathāgate ti ariyasāvake*). There is no sign here of the later division between *tathāgata* and *sāvaka*. Gotama called himself *tathāgata*, and *bhikkhus* like the disciples of the Buddha were also referred to in this way. Tathāgata was synonymous with a *bhikkhu* who had erased all

stain. We also find *tathāgata* and *arhat* joined as a compound (*tathāgato arahā*) in the sutras. In a similar way, one who had perfected his practice was referred to as “such a one” or “thus-like person” (*tādin*). In later times, however, such epithets were reserved for the deified Buddha alone.

The Buddha was also called “the one endowed with wisdom and deeds” (*vijjācaraṇa-sampanna*), an epithet that had already appeared in ancient verse. Since the same epithet occurs in Jainism, it undoubtedly originated outside Buddhism, for in the Bhagavad Gītā the ideal Brahmin is considered one who is endowed with wisdom and controlled deeds (*vidyāvinayasampanna brāhmaṇa*).

We can see from the preceding discussion that the most important of the Buddha’s epithets whose use survived down through Buddhist history were those that referred to Indian religious practitioners as a whole; Buddhism merely adopted them for its own use. This fact only gives further weight to my contention that Gotama Buddha was in his life and ideas little different from the general type of religious practitioner existing during his time. When portraying the Buddha, later sculptors and painters committed grave errors. They regarded him as being essentially different from other *bhikkhus*. Because *bhikkhus* tended to cut off their hair, they showed the Buddha as having hair. According to the testimony of the sutras, however, Sakyamuni was one *bhikkhu* among many and he remained a *bhikkhu* after becoming enlightened and beginning to teach. He was, in fact, called “hairless one” (*muṇḍaka*). He may have looked very much like the modern-day *bhikkhus* of Sri Lanka. Of course, when he was undertaking severe ascetic exercises by himself he would not have cut his hair, but after he had formed his community he would surely have done so.

In outward form, Sakyamuni was no different from other *bhikkhus*. Artists of later times depicted him with beautiful hair and a halo, and surrounded by his disciples; this is an error in terms of historical truth. Clarifying historical fact will destroy the image drawn by later Buddhists. To do this, we ourselves must be very clear about what is fact and what is not. Gotama as a *bhikkhu* with shaven head and simple robes is the Indian ideal of twenty-five hundred years ago. Buddhist statues began to be made around the beginning of the common era, reflecting ideals established by Buddhists. We need to look beyond these artistic portrayals to the more basic elements—no more, no less.

Nevertheless, Sakyamuni’s deification had already begun in the sutras themselves. As we have already seen, even the oldest of the discourses recorded in the sutras exhibit signs of this tendency. It is only in some of the slightly later

verses, however, that we begin to see examples of epithets that seem to derive from Buddhism itself.

One of these is the epithet *sugata* (“blessed one”). In Chinese this was translated as *shan-shih* or *shan-ch’ü*. A Mahāyāna sutra does not refer to Sakyamuni when it employs *sugata*; there the word merely means “happy.” In later times in India, Buddhists were generally referred to as “followers of the Blessed One” (*saugata*), a term derived from *sugata*. We also find verse examples of Sakyamuni’s being called the “charioteer of men who are to be tamed”; “the best and foremost of charioteers” also occurs.

In ancient India the horse was of equal importance with the cow as a beast of labor. A special occupation was developed for those who could control the horse with the whip, called “controller of horses” (*assadamma-sārathi*). In this sense the Buddha was termed “controller of men” (*purisadammasārathi*); linguistically the words for “horse” and “man” were interchanged. These expressions, which belong to the later group known as the “ten epithets,” also appear in verse. Another such epithet is “master of gods and men”; directly translated, this becomes “master of the world together with the gods.” However, a further example from the group, “he who knows the world” (*lokavidū*), does not appear in verse; it emerged only in the later prose sections.

Gradually these epithets were collected into groups. The most important appear in the *Therīgāthā* as follows: “I pay homage to the revered master, he who should be respected, he who has correct understanding” (*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa*). The ten epithets, which emerged later, are conventionally regarded as consisting of those that are listed in the table below. These epithets do not appear in the verse sections, only in the prose. It appears

The Ten Epithets of the Buddha

	Sanskrit	Pāli
1.	Tathāgata	Tathāgata
2.	Arhat	Arahat
3.	Samyaksambuddha	Sammāsambuddha
4.	Vidyācaraṇa-sampanna	Vijjācaraṇa-sampanna
5.	Sugata	Sugata
6.	Lokavid	Lokavidū
7.	Anuttara	Anuttara
8.	Puruṣadāmya-sārathi	Purisadamma-sārathi
9.	Śāstā-devamanuṣyānām	Satthā devamanussānaṃ
10.	Buddha-bhagavat	Buddha-bhagavant

that Tathāgata was added to the basic group at a later time.

Furthermore, certain epithets that were formerly applied to Gotama came to be forbidden later. For example, in the earliest sutras laypeople would address Sakyamuni in the second person as *tuvaṃ*. According to the *Vinaya*, however, when Sakyamuni met his former companions in Deer Park after his enlightenment, they “addressed him by name and with the epithet *āvuso* [friend]”: “When they spoke to him thus, the Revered Master said to the five *bhikkhus*: ‘*Bhikkhus*, do not address the Tathāgata by name, or with the epithet *āvuso*. The Tathāgata, *bhikkhus*, is a perfected and fully enlightened being.’” The Chinese translation, the *Ssu-fen-lü* (the Dharmagupta Vinaya), shows a further step in the process of deification and stresses that there can be no mere friendship with the Buddha: “The five *bhikkhus*, seeing the seated Tathāgata, called to him by name and with the epithet *tuvaṃ*. At that time the Buddha said to the five *bhikkhus*: ‘Do not call [me who is] the Tathāgata by name or with the epithet *tuvaṃ*. The Tathāgata, fully enlightened to the Truth, is the powerful and limitless victor. Should you call the Tathāgata by name or with the epithet *tuvaṃ*, your sufferings will be immeasurable throughout the long night.’” In the prose sections of the sutras, it was already considered a grave crime to talk to Sakyamuni using the epithet *āvuso*. It was similarly considered serious misconduct for a person to do so using *tuvaṃ* (“you”), even in ignorance.

When Sakyamuni was journeying alone through Magadha, he begged to stay one night at the house of Bhaggava, a potter of Rājagaha. There was already a wandering almsman staying there, a man called Pukkusāti, who had long wished to meet the Buddha. When he discovered that evening in the course of conversation that his fellow lodger was Sakyamuni, he was very surprised and overcome with remorse that he should have unknowingly addressed him informally using the word “you”: “Then the Venerable Pukkusāti thought: ‘Truly it is the Master I have met. Truly it is the Sugata I have met. Truly it is the fully enlightened one I have met.’ Rising from his seat and arranging his robe over one shoulder, he bowed to the ground, touching his head to the Venerable Master’s feet, and said: ‘A transgression [*accaya*] overcame me, and I acted as a fool, an ignorant one, and an evil one. I beg you to acknowledge my transgression, my supposing that I could address the Venerable Master as “you,” so that I might be restrained from doing so in the future.’” Pukkusāti seems to have spoken thus out of a feeling of deep respect for Sakyamuni. There is therefore something unsatisfying about Sakyamuni’s reply: “Truly, *bhikkhu*, a transgression overcame you, as it overcame a fool, an ignorant one, and an evil

Head of the Buddha, unearthed in Gandhara, 2nd century. Height: 31.6 cm. Kyoto National Museum.

one, for you supposed that you could address the Venerable Master as “you.” Since you see this transgression as a transgression and confess it according to the Dhamma, I acknowledge it for your sake. There is growth in the regulation of the *arahant*, so that whoever sees a transgression as a transgression and confesses it according to the Dhamma might be restrained from doing the same in the future.” We would expect Sakyamuni to grant forgiveness in the face of a *bhikkhu*’s remorseful apology, for that is the behavior common to all peoples. Could the historical Sakyamuni really have uttered the cold words we find in the sutra? A religious leader who had become lost in his own importance may well have done so, but the figure in this *sutta* is completely different from the Sakyamuni portrayed in ancient verse. In the extract just quoted, the Buddha merely repeats Pukkusāti’s words; that is, words are merely being put into his mouth, in another instance of the phenomenon of deification.

Gradually the sutras came to view the Buddha as more and more of a god: “Whatever wealth there is in this world or the next, or whatever splendid jewel there is in the heavenly realm, none is equal to our Tathāgata. This splendid jewel exists in the Buddha; through this truth may there be happiness.”

To be continued

The Tranquil Realm of Nirvana

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 daily practice of one's faith.

Where does the wool that was used to make your sweater come from?" "Where were the flour and other things used in the bread that you eat produced?" "Where does the fuel you use to heat your home come from?" If we trace all the steps, through production, processing, and transportation, that make up all the things we eat and use in our daily lives, we will realize how many hands they pass through, of people both in faraway countries and in our own land. Countless numbers of people are responsible for making sure that we have the things we need. From the opposite point of view, all those people can earn their livelihoods because we buy the sweater, eat the bread, and use the heating fuel. These are truly give-and-take relationships.

When we look at things from an even broader viewpoint, we can truly appreciate the scope of those relationships, which embrace all living creatures (including human beings) and plant life, the soil in which the plants grow, and even bacteria, as well as the sun, air, and water. These connections were explained by Shakyamuni according to the law of causality: "When this exists, that exists; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not exist; with the cessation of this, that ceases." There is nothing in this world that exists completely independently of everything else. Every material phenomenon arises, exists, and ceases through an involvement with countless other things. We can summarize causality, that is the Buddhist law of dependent origination, by saying that this is a world based on give-and-take relationships.

This is an unchanging truth, whether in the distant past

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

or the eternal future, and it permeates everything, from the macrocosm of the evolution of the universe to the microcosm of an individual life. It is something of which we can be certain. This truth teaches us something of great importance that should guide our attitudes to life and our way of thinking as a human being. Further, it does not permit us to deny that each grain of sand, each blade of grass, and each person has been created for a purpose, and exists because its existence is necessary. So by turning our thoughts to this fact, it should become clear to us that we too have been born into this world for a reason and through necessity, and therefore our lives have great meaning and dignity. If we are able to realize within ourselves the significance of our existence, then it is only natural that we should turn our eyes to all that exists around us and to all those who live with us in the world. Beyond any doubt, we are able to conclude that all of existence has a reason and a necessity.

When we regard the makeup of the universe in the broadest terms, we can understand that, despite the unceasing movement of unknowable billions of stars and their cycle of coming into being and destruction, within each moment the universe preserves a significant harmony. Since human society is a part of this universe, it achieves its true form when it is in correspondence with the universe. Human beings are in essence equal, but to our eyes they display many different forms and shapes. Though they are constantly on the move and always changing, while putting a value on interacting with one another, they need to create a solid harmony among themselves. It is only when such a harmony is achieved that people can attain true peace of mind and their society will be truly happy. "Peace within harmony"—this is the Mahayana understanding, as well as the modern interpretation, of the Buddhist idea of the tranquillity of nirvana.

It goes without saying that all people are fundamentally

In October 1991, Founder Niwano gives guidance to local members from the Bangkok liaison office of Rissho Kosei-kai at the Thai capital's Don Muang International Airport. Sitting at his left is the then chairman of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Motoyuki Naganuma.

equal. Yet it is also a fact that they all have differences—in gender, in strength, in character, and in ability. If we ask why such differences exist, it is simple enough to explain them in terms of the Buddhist truth of causes and conditions from past existences. If we go beyond that, however, all we can say is “This was meant to be” or “The universe needs this.” Our eyes function to allow us to see, our heart functions to pump blood through our body, and our bowels act to remove waste products. None of these organs can do the job of any other, and each performs its own respective essential task. It is because such differences exist in infinite variety that harmony can be maintained. Society likewise is made up of a great diversity of people and it is this diversity which gives it its flavor and provides the stimulus for growth.

Those who truly believe in Buddhism cannot but feel deep gratitude to all the people and objects that surround us, for they have fully awakened to the truth of the law of dependent origination. Since Buddhism speaks of the eternity of the life-force, a true Buddhist is broad in his or her understanding and does not act in error motivated by selfish desires. Buddhism is concerned first and foremost with the harmony of the whole, and so teaches the tranquillity of nirvana, in other words, the peace of mind that is to be found from complete harmony with our surroundings. An important teaching is that nothing that exists has any permanent “self.” In other words, a give-and-take relationship is at the heart of everything in the universe, which means that a true Buddhist accepts implicitly the principle of living that one helps oneself by helping others.

Nirvana, which Shakyamuni spoke of as the ideal realm to which all should aspire, may be expressed in contemporary terms as “absolute peace.” Such a realm of absolute peace is one in which we become one with the great life-force of the universe, that is, the Eternal Original Buddha and understand that we are brought into being by this life-force and are a part of it. In this realm, the life we lead is no different from the truth of the universe, no gap exists between ourselves and the universe, no moving of one against the other, and not only in our minds but also in our society we are completely in a state of peace.

How can we make our minds one with the great life-force of the universe? We can realize this state by learning the Buddha's teachings and practicing them so that we are able to cast off all selfish attachments. It is for this very reason that Shakyamuni gave us his teachings. How can we attain a state of genuine peace both in our minds and in our societies? True peace among human beings will be achieved when all of us who have cast our attachments aside join hands to reform our society. It was for this reason that Shakyamuni placed so much value on the community of Buddhist believers, the sangha.

It was the Buddha's plan that a world of absolute peace would be created as we drew closer to the ideal realm, both in body and mind. As long as we remain devout Buddhists, it should be entirely natural for us to simply follow the Buddha's teachings and to reach our goal of lasting peace through the dual aspect of striving to improve our minds and our society, and thus working effectively to bring genuine peace to the world. □

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 10

A Teacher of the Law

(2)

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

TEXT Know, Medicine King! These people will of themselves abandon the recompense of their purified karma, and after my extinction, out of pity for all living beings, will be born in the evil world and widely proclaim this sutra.

COMMENTARY *These people will of themselves abandon the recompense of their purified karma.* Karmic recompense is the retribution related to one's deeds (karma). Since the people mentioned in the text have accumulated purified deeds, they are worthy to be reborn in the heavenly realm. They have abandoned such retribution, however, and have sought rebirth in the defiled and polluted human world out of compassion, in order single-mindedly to bring relief to all living beings.

TEXT If these good sons and daughters, after my extinction, should be able [even] by stealth to preach to one person even one word of the Law Flower Sutra, know these people are Tathagata apostles sent by the Tathagata to perform Tathagata deeds. How much more so those who in great assemblies widely preach to others.

COMMENTARY This chapter is deeply relevant to the achievements and teachings of Nichiren, who often quoted this pivotal passage to show that he himself was the Buddha's messenger. All who practice the teaching of the Lotus Sutra should repeat it until they have memorized it.

TEXT Medicine King! Even if there be some wicked person who out of an evil mind, throughout a whole kalpa, appears before the Buddha and unceasingly blasphemes the Buddha, his sin is still light, [but] if anyone, even with a

single ill word, defames the lay devotees or monks who read and recite the Law Flower Sutra, his sin is extremely heavy.

COMMENTARY This is another essential passage. It has very close links with a passage later in the same chapter, which reads: "Medicine King! In every place where [this sutra] is preached or read or recited or copied or its volumes are kept, one should erect a caitya of the precious seven, making it very high, spacious, and splendid. But there is no need to deposit relics. Wherefore? [Because] in it there is the whole body of the Tathagata." Since this is so, let us consider the two passages together in order to understand fully the Buddha's intention.

The Buddha here teaches us that we should not depend upon any person but should depend upon the Dharma itself, that the Dharma is to be respected more than any individual. Thus he says that however much a person may speak ill of the Buddha, "his sin is still light," but should a person speak ill of one who believes in and practices the Lotus Sutra, "his sin is extremely heavy." How unselfish, rational, and respectful of the true Dharma these words are! I believe they represent the true spirit of the Buddha, which should always be remembered by all those who practice the Buddha Dharma in this corrupt age, serving as a means of self-admonition.

It would be a grave mistake, however, to interpret the words to mean it is all right to make light of people. Recall that the Dharma arises through people. The perpetual Dharma (truth), existing from the beginning of the cosmos, was realized by Shakyamuni and taught by him, becoming the basic Law upon which the lifestyle of countless people is based. Those who teach and spread the Dharma should therefore be regarded with the same veneration as the

Dharma itself. Shakyamuni admonishes us against attaching too much importance to any person, against regarding a person in an idolatrous way, operating under the illusion that a person has absolute power. As evidence for this, the Buddha states in the following verse section: “If anyone in the course of a kalpa / Unceasingly cherishes a wicked heart / And, with angry mien, rails at the Buddha, / He commits an infinitely heavy sin.” This is very natural. What would happen if we brought shame on ourselves by abusing and humiliating some great benefactor of ours? In the end we would disgrace our own character and fall into hell. This would be a grave sin. How much more so if we said even one word against Shakyamuni, the great benefactor of all living beings.

Unfortunately such people are occasionally found. There are those who denounce Shakyamuni as no more than an empty shell. This is an example of the consequences of misunderstanding the Buddha’s words about venerating the Dharma rather than any person. To call the Buddha’s great disciple Nichiren the Original Buddha, as some people of later times have, is to confuse the means and the end, casting aside Shakyamuni, our great benefactor who taught the true Dharma in order to save all living beings. Nichiren was truly a great man, but his greatness lay in his ability to reinterpret Shakyamuni’s teaching for his own time, revitalizing it, and practicing it himself with courage. Always, though, at the base of Nichiren’s teaching was the Lotus Sutra preached by Shakyamuni.

To consider Nichiren to be the Original Buddha is to forget the Dharma and depend on the man. The greatest pity about this is that such people have forgotten their gratitude to Shakyamuni, the sacred personage recognized by people all over the world and the greatest benefactor of Eastern spiritual culture in particular, and are unable to venerate him, having forgotten all their natural human feelings. However much we may rationalize it, people who have lost their pure and natural feelings no longer have much value as followers of a religion. Not only that, they trample on human beauty. They have willfully cast away all that is most valuable in human beings. They are truly to be pitied. And it is not simply a question of pity. If such ideas took hold in society, the results would be ominous. We must all, holding to the true Dharma, sweep away this kind of false view.

If we understand the words of the sutras in a shallow way and stick rigidly to them, forgetting to look at what underlies them, we can easily fall into the type of mistake outlined above. Therefore we need to read the words of the sutras over and over with all our concentration.

TEXT Medicine King! He who reads and recites the Law

Flower Sutra—know! That man has adorned himself with the adornment of the Buddha, and so is carried by the Tathagata on his shoulder.

COMMENTARY *That man has adorned himself with the adornment of the Buddha.* The beauty of a buddha who has perfected the thirty-two primary marks is bestowed upon him as well. His state, reading and reciting the Lotus Sutra with all his attention, is solemn and beautiful like that of a buddha. It is as if his body glowed with a golden radiance.

• *Is carried by the Tathagata on his shoulder.* We are utterly undeserving to be carried on the Tathagata’s shoulder, and so what gratitude we must feel! The sentiment is the same if we follow the interpretation of the Sanskrit version: “He carries the Tathagata on his shoulder, he who carries this sutra on his shoulder.” Since the whole body of the Tathagata appears within this sutra, we are actually with the Tathagata whenever we read and recite it. Let us therefore continue to read the sutra with thankful hearts.

TEXT Wherever he goes, he should be saluted with hands wholeheartedly folded, revered, worshiped, honored, and extolled, and offerings made to him of flowers, perfumes, garlands, sandal powder, perfumed unguents, incense for burning, silk canopies, flags and banners, garments, edibles and dainties, and music; he should be served with the most excellent offerings found among men. He should be sprinkled with celestial jewels, and offerings made of celestial jewels in heaps. Wherefore? Because, this man delighting to preach the Law, they who hear it but for a moment thereupon attain Perfect Enlightenment.”

COMMENTARY *Wherever he goes, he should be saluted.* Wherever he goes, people must turn toward him and worship him. That is, the Buddha Dharma never changes, wherever it is, and so the Dharma is venerated everywhere.

• *The most excellent offerings found among men.* Here we find the various types of offerings listed, but the greatest of them is the practice of the teaching.

• *He should be sprinkled with celestial jewels, and offerings made of celestial jewels in heaps.* All kinds of beautiful things should be scattered on and around such a person as an action expressing devotion and praise. The main objects so sprinkled were powdered incense and flowers. The practice of scattering flowers as an offering continues to this day. “In heaps” appears in the Sanskrit text as “piled up like mountains.” The significance of offering celestial jewels is that the Lotus Sutra is the teaching to instruct not only human beings but also the inhabitants of the heavenly realm. Therefore the deities of the heavenly realm must venerate those who read and recite the Lotus Sutra with

those offerings. When we read and recite the Lotus Sutra, we must think upon the fact that the heavenly beings are also praising us for our action.

• *Because, this man delighting to preach the Law, they who hear it but for a moment thereupon attain Perfect Enlightenment.* This passage is the basis for the teaching by Nichiren that the attainment of buddhahood in this body is possible through the power of the Lotus Sutra. It is thus very important in the study of Nichiren's teaching.

• *But for a moment.* This phrase translates the Sanskrit word *muhurta*, meaning one-thirtieth of "a whole day and night," forty-eight minutes. Incidentally, one three thousand and six hundredth of a *muhurta* is called a *kshana*, that is, 0.8 second, though there are also other interpretations.

TEXT Then the World-honored One, desiring to proclaim this meaning over again, spoke thus in verse: "Should one wish to abide in the Buddha Way / And accomplish intuitive wisdom, / He must always earnestly honor / The keepers of the Flower of the Law.

COMMENTARY *Intuitive wisdom.* This is the kind of wisdom that wells up from within an individual and is capable of its own accord of seeing things, and carrying them out, correctly. It is not necessary to apply the strength of will to interpret something or resolve it. We ordinary people possess this intuitive wisdom, but it often appears in the wrong direction. It is the Buddha's intuitive wisdom that is always one with the true Dharma, that never errs. Even though we have not yet reached that stage, if we constantly study the Buddha Dharma and work to understand it, we can attain a stage very close to that wisdom. This stage is described by Confucius: "At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired without transgressing what was right." It is the stage of absolute and unrestricted freedom. We should all strive to reach that stage.

TEXT Should one wish quickly to attain / The perfect knowledge [of the Buddha], / He must receive and keep this sutra, / And honor those who keep it.

COMMENTARY *Quickly.* As I have mentioned already, "quickly" refers not so much to speed as to progressing along a path without deviation. Though other paths may eventually lead us to the same goal, study of the teaching of the Lotus Sutra is the most direct path.

• *The perfect knowledge [of the Buddha].* As I have already discussed, this term means the highest wisdom, or the perfect ability to discern both the aspect of equality and the aspect of distinction of all phenomena.

TEXT Should one be able to receive and keep / The Wonderful Law Flower Sutra, / Know, he is the Buddha's apostle, / [Who] has compassion for all living beings.

COMMENTARY *Compassion.* This is not an emotion felt just on the surface of the mind, but a deep feeling of compassion that seeks to bring relief to all beings.

TEXT He who is able to receive and keep / The Wonderful Law Flower Sutra, / Giving up his pure land, / And, from pity for the living, being born here:

COMMENTARY *Pure land.* This is the world where buddhas and bodhisattvas are reborn.

• *Being born here.* "Here" means the unclean, defiled human world full of distress.

TEXT Know, such a man as this, / Free to be born where he will, / Is able, in this evil world, / Widely to preach the supreme Law. / You should, with celestial flowers and perfumes, / Garments of heavenly jewels, / And heaps of wonderful celestial jewels, / Pay homage to [such] a preacher of the Law. / In evil ages after my extinction, / Those who are able to keep this sutra / Must be saluted and revered with folded hands, / As if paying homage to the World-honored One. / With the best of dainties and abundant sweets, / And every kind of garment, / This son of the Buddha should be worshiped / In the hope of even a momentary hearing.

COMMENTARY *Best of dainties.* "Dainties" here refers to offerings made to the Buddha.

• *Every kind of garment.* This phrase means a collection of robes and bedclothes, not all sorts of garments.

TEXT In future ages, if anyone is able / To receive and keep this sutra, / I will send him to be among men / To perform the task of the Tathagata.

COMMENTARY *The task of the Tathagata.* This means the Buddha's deeds, instructing and saving all living beings.

TEXT If anyone in the course of a kalpa / Unceasingly cherishes a wicked heart / And, with angry mien, rails at the Buddha, / He commits an infinitely heavy sin. / But anyone who reads, recites, and keeps / This sutra of the Law Flower, / [Should one] abuse him even a moment, / His sin is still heavier.

COMMENTARY *He commits an infinitely heavy sin.* To abuse a person who has realized the true Dharma or a

preacher of it is to speak ill of the true Dharma itself. There is no heavier sin. One who does so willfully commits this deadly sin.

Let us take the opportunity here to examine a little more closely the connection between sin and punishment. The word *sin* has connotations of evil, pollution, and offense. The Japanese word for sin, *tsumi*, derives from the verb *tsutsumu*, meaning “wrap around” or “envelop.” However sin is defined, whether as evil or pollution or offense, it arises from that which envelops and covers the human essence (the buddha-nature). The buddha-nature is the true, the good, and the beautiful; a state in which delusion has hidden and covered the buddha-nature is evil. The buddha-nature is pure and radiant; that which hides and covers it is pollution. The buddha-nature is perfect and harmonious; a fault caused by hiding and covering it and by making its workings imperfect is an offense.

Therefore we must not misunderstand the “children of sin” of Christianity and the “defiled beings” of Buddhism as referring to the essence of human beings. They only describe the human condition in phenomenal terms. If people see themselves in this way alone, as children of sin or as defiled beings, their sin and defilement will not disappear, for they have become attached to that which covers the human essence and think it real. It is like regarding the clothes one wears as part of one’s own body, or the dirt adhering to one’s hands and feet as part of one’s flesh.

Just as the skin’s radiance reappears once physical dirt is removed by soap and water, so the buddha-nature, which is one’s essence, shines forth once the thought that sin is real is removed from the mind. Thus in the Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue we are taught: “Should one wish to repent of it, / Let him sit upright and meditate on the true aspect [of all things]. / All sins are just as frost and dew, / So wisdom’s sun can disperse them.” We should not think of sin as having any real existence, but look upon the buddha-nature shining brightly within the covering of sin. If we do so, the ultimately unreal sin will disappear as frost and dew do in the morning sun. This is sin’s true character, understood when we “sit upright and meditate on the true aspect [of all things].”

Punishment is the chastisement of the sinner, and the chastiser may be either the person who has committed the sin or those who have connections to that person (or society or the state). Leaving aside discussion of the first case for now, I would like to examine the second case. Those connected to the sinner include other people, society, and the state. Children who do bad things are chastised by their parents or teachers, while evildoers are punished by society and criminals by the state. I do not think I need to go into detail, since these are facts known by all. But people, asking

why misfortune and unhappiness are thus inflicted on society, are unaware of the causes of evil phenomena. To call such phenomena the Buddha’s punishment is a grave mistake.

The Buddha does not exist in a relative relationship with human beings, so he cannot punish people’s sins. Since the Buddha gives life to all things in the universe, he has no need to be so small-minded as to punish individuals for their sins. Even at the very instant a sin is committed, the Buddha continues to sustain the life of the perpetrator, and makes no distinction between the “good person” and the “bad person.”

Who then punishes a person? Needless to say, it is the person’s own sin that does so, the delusion that covers and encloses the buddha-nature with which the person has been endowed. Because delusion hides the buddha-nature, the person strays from the path of upright behavior, with resulting adverse phenomena like friction and clashes with those around him or her or a ruined life. This is self-inflicted punishment.

Chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra, “The Bodhisattva Never Despise,” says: “At that time, the four groups, bhikshus, bhikshunis, upasakas, and upasikas, with angry minds slighted and condemned me, therefore for two hundred kotis of kalpas they never met a buddha, never heard the Law, never saw a sangha, and for a thousand kalpas underwent great sufferings in the Avici hell.” This illustrates what I have been saying.

This punishment was not inflicted from without; the “four groups” themselves closed their eyes, so they did not see the Buddha, and stopped their ears, so they did not hear the Dharma. Therefore they could not dissolve the delusion, pollution, and evil enveloping their buddha-nature and suffered as if they were in the Avici hell. This is self-inflicted punishment.

To summarize, sin is that which arises because the buddha-nature is covered and hidden, while punishment is the unhappy phenomena that occur as a result of that covering (delusion). Phenomena are nothing but the covering that forms on the very surface of one’s being. If we look deep within, the buddha-nature continues to shine as radiantly as ever. If, therefore, we can gaze intently upon our buddha-nature, without any artifice, that is, “sit upright and meditate on the true aspect [of all things],” both sin and punishment will instantly disappear.

To return to the text, we also find the phrase “his sin is still heavier.” This is the sin of willfully closing one’s eyes to the true Dharma. When a person abuses a teacher of the true Dharma, the covering that hides that person’s buddha-nature becomes ever thicker.

Despite the fact that the Buddha himself is the enlightened

one who awakened to and taught the true Dharma, why does he say that abusing practitioners of the Lotus Sutra is a sin even heavier than speaking ill of the Buddha? The answer derives from the greater importance, as well as difficulty, of preaching the true Dharma in later times. Shakyamuni himself remained calm and unperturbed, however much he was abused. Moreover, when he was alive, his personal greatness and virtuous majesty made it possible for him to lead those who persecuted teachers of the true Dharma to a correct understanding of the Law. This was not necessarily so in the later age of decay.

What is more, the Buddha taught that the Lotus Sutra was the teaching to relieve people of later ages. This explains why he said that practitioners of the Lotus Sutra in later times would be ever more highly venerated.

TEXT Anyone who seeks after the Buddha Way / And for a [complete] kalpa, / With folded hands, in my presence / Extols me in numberless verses, / Because he thus extols the Buddha / Will acquire infinite merit.

COMMENTARY *Because he thus extols the Buddha / Will acquire infinite merit.* To praise the Buddha is to extol him as the enlightened one who awakened to the true Dharma and at the same time to praise the true Dharma itself. Thus it is not surprising that one who does so will acquire infinite merit. By the same token, one who abuses the Buddha abuses the true Dharma, and this sin causes one to fall into the evil realms of rebirth. It is therefore odd that we should seek to receive merit when we venerate the Buddha. If on the other hand our worship consists of praise to the one who awakened to the true Dharma and gratitude to him for bequeathing us the teaching of the true Dharma, merit will arise of its own accord. It is not given, but arises. This is the sense of the word *acquire*.

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.

*Stone relief of the Buddha triad sculpted in the T'ang period of China. 39.3 x 32 cm.
Depth: 12.8 cm. Kyoto National Museum.*

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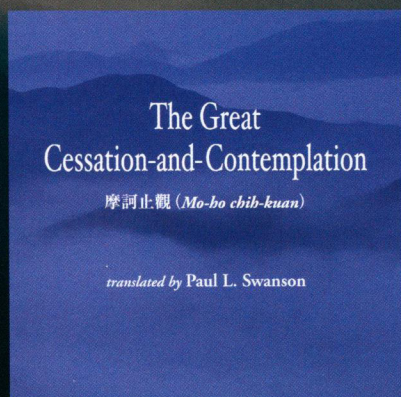
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