

FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

DHARMA WORLD

MAY/JUNE 2005 Vol. 32



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Cover photo: On March 5, Rissho Koseikai celebrated its 67th anniversary with a ceremony in Fumon Hall in the organization's headquarters complex in Tokyo. Some 4,800 members took part in the event, which was relayed by satellite TV to all branches throughout Japan, where similar ceremonies were held simultaneously. In Fumon Hall, forty members from young women's groups offered lighted candles and flowers. Photo: Yoshikazu Takekawa

May/June 2005

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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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Reflections on the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Donate-a-Meal Campaign

by Kinjiro Niwano

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai's Donate-a-Meal Campaign. Those who participate in this movement give up one meal a few times a month and donate the cost of those meals to the relief fund used to alleviate the suffering of the world's hungry. But the collecting of these relief funds is not the sole purpose of this campaign—rather, it is a religious practice through which one can increase one's spirituality by offering heartfelt prayers for the hungry as well as by symbolically sharing the sorrow and the suffering of those afflicted with starvation.

I believe that the reason that this campaign was able to be carried out over a period of three decades is that it is designed so that anyone can participate in it wherever they may be and for as long as they wish. All the money collected through the actual participation of members is pooled together as the Rissho Kosei-kai Peace Fund, which was established to support people afflicted by war or by natural disasters all around the world. In fiscal 2005, the Peace Fund set aside a total of 470 million yen in order for Rissho Kosei-kai to carry out joint projects with other organizations, its own independent projects, and also to offer financial assistance for UN-sponsored activities, emergency aid, and other projects.

The Donate-a-Meal Campaign is not operated only for the above projects now—it is also meant to be utilized on a much wider basis. For example, each year the Niwano Peace Foundation awards the Niwano Peace Prize to honor those who have made distinguished contributions to peace based on the spirit of religion, and provides grants to individuals and organizations engaged in research or activities that help promote world peace and cooperation among religions, and in these roles, too, funds collected through the Donate-a-Meal Campaign are invaluable.

Furthermore, the Niwano Peace Foundation is in the process of developing a South Asia program. In fiscal 2004, it supported, under the theme of “food security,” the activities of three local NGOs in India working to eliminate pov-

erty through constructing irrigation systems and instructing local villagers in agricultural techniques. Further, over the next ten years, plans for the development of similar activities are being made for other districts in India, as well as in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. And for all of those activities, the Peace Fund collected through the Donate-a-Meal Campaign is utilized.

In 2006, the eighth assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace will be held in Kyoto, and part of the

Rissho Kosei-kai member children join a UNICEF fund-raising drive on a busy street, appealing to passers-by for donations.

money needed for the realization of that conference will be supplied from the Rissho Kosei-kai Peace Fund.

Thus, it is easy to see how many different activities are being supported by the Donate-a-Meal Campaign. That is the gift of all those members who participate in the Donate-a-Meal Campaign, and it is given simply in the spirit of a prayer, and with the spirit of sharing the sorrow and sufferings of others. Therefore, I would like to thank, with all my heart, all those members who have reminded me of the truth that “perseverance has its reward.” □

Kinjiro Niwano is chairman of the Niwano Peace Foundation.

The Benefits of Hoza Counseling Sessions

by Nichiko Niwano

Anxiety over human relationships is the main source of stress among people in the workplace and the community as a whole. In an attempt to alleviate that stress, companies and schools often have professional counselors available, and more and more people are seeking their help. We seem to have lost the knack for human relationships.

To alleviate someone's stress, we need to put ourselves in that person's place and listen to what he or she has to say. But to paraphrase the German writer Michael Ende, people who really know how to listen are few and far between. When we are caught up in the busy round of our daily activities, we cannot listen closely to what others have to say. What does listening really mean? And what can we do to be able to engage in heart-to-heart dialogue?

Whether you can truly listen to someone else depends on whether or not you are truly willing to seek the Buddha Way.

If you do not, the other person's words will not sink in and there can be no dialogue. More often than not, today we lead busy lives, almost as if something were chasing us, so we tend to lose the opportunity for leisurely dialogue, whether in the workplace or at home between husband and wife or parents and children. Given the tenor of the times, it is only natural that counselors, who will listen to what we say, come to be seen as necessary.

The founder used to say that in the hoza setting, it is important to listen closely when someone wants to talk or ask about any problem whatsoever. I too believe in the importance of listening closely to others. To listen closely, you have to empty your mind. There can be no dialogue if you are so full of your own thoughts that you focus only on what you want to say without listening carefully to others. You can listen well if you settle yourself and approach others with a totally open mind, willing to learn from whatever they have to say.

The great Buddhist teacher Shinran (1173–1262) said, in effect, “Everything is for Shinran alone.” What he meant was that everything—the Buddha's salvation, the Buddha's Original Vow—was taught for the sake of Shinran alone. The phrase “for Shinran alone” can be considered as conceited, but it is actually the exact opposite: It is, rather, his extremely humble and joyful expression of awareness that everything has been arranged by the Buddha and is intended to improve him.

Shinran called himself “Gutoku,” which means “foolish, bald-headed man.” He regarded himself as the most sinful person in the world. Of course he was speaking from a deep religious conviction. If we could approach this state even a little in our dealings with others, it seems to me that our worries about human relations would disappear. Surely

Nichiko Niwano is president of Rissho Kosei-kai and the Niwano Peace Foundation, a president of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), and chairman of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan). This article is a translation of a recent interview with Rev. Niwano that originally appeared in Rissho Kosei-kai's Japanese periodical Yakushin.

English-speaking members of Rissho Kosei-kai in the United States participating in hoza during a seminar, which was held at Rissho Kosei-kai of Los Angeles in October 2003.

the humility to regard the root of all problems as lying within oneself is the key to dialogue.

Choosing the right words is a very tricky matter. Sometimes we say things that hurt others even though we have no ill intent. Words can either enliven or hurt people. Words can be weapons; we must take great care in using those that could injure others. On the positive side, the simple greeting “good morning” can cheer up a person no end. The Japanese word for greeting is *aisatsu*; both components, *ai* and *satsu*, mean “approach, draw near.” Thus, to greet someone is to draw close to his or her heart.

I often quote what Professor Shigeru Tenmyo at Miyagi University writes about greetings in his book whose title translates as “The Transformational Power of Greetings That Enliven Companies.” He says, for example, that if your hobby is playing golf, polishing your golf clubs is a kind of greeting; and thinking “How beautiful!” when you see a sunset or other natural scene is a greeting to nature and the universe. Whether or not we express a feeling in words, the feeling itself is a greeting. Greetings, he states, constitute “empathy with the subject.” So to gaze on nature and feel its beauty is to empathize with nature.

Thus a greeting is more than just the words; it is the feeling behind the greeting that is important. We have all had the experience of giving our order to the waiter or waitress in a restaurant and receiving a cut-and-dried response. Though the words may be polite, there is no contact of minds when the person simply parrots phrases out of a manual without even looking directly at the

person placing the order. The eyes are the window of the soul. Without empathy for the other person, there can be no real dialogue.

Dialogue in the Hoza Setting

Some people are uncomfortable with the idea of hoza counseling. They do not like receiving advice from others in such sessions, or they are not good at dialogue. Some feel that hoza sessions are simply a forum for chatter about members' personal lives or for staying in touch, and find their willingness to participate waning. At the same time, there seem to be few people these days who can say harsh things for the sake of another. What is important about hoza counseling?

Religious salvation can be called “shattering the ego.” Thus, when you are told something harsh in a hoza session, if you can accept it straightforwardly and without resisting, the shattering of your ego can lead to your salvation. Though the words used may be harsh, the person advising you clearly is someone to be grateful for. Some things are difficult to say. But when you believe that unless you speak clearly the other person will not awaken to the truth, you take your courage in your hands and say what needs to be said. This is something that cannot be done without deep thoughtfulness and compassion.

The Dhammapada says, “Should one find a man who points out faults and who reproves, let him follow such a wise and sagacious person.” Someone who carefully shows you your shortcomings and mistakes is actually a deeply

thoughtful and precious person. If you have the good fortune to meet someone like that, follow and learn from that person.

The Dhammapada also says, “He who speaks gentle, instructive, and truthful words, whose utterances offend no one—him I call a Brahman.” Speaking instructive words does not mean telling people what to do in a hectoring tone. A person who can speak clearly, without becoming emotional or abusive, saying what he or she means in a quiet and measured manner, can convey the truth in a way that does not hurt the listener’s feelings.

The Buddha was a master of dialogue, always teaching in the way best suited to his listeners’ capacity and temperament. He tailored his discourses to their situation and abilities, imparting salvation. As chapter 2 of the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, “Preaching,” says, “After such observation, we see all manner of natural desires of living beings.” Discerning the other person’s capacity, temperament, and desires is important, whoever the person may be. If you just talk *at* others one-sidedly, you cannot empathize with them and truly touch their lives. Of course, there are people who can say what needs to be said clearly and people who cannot. I hope you will determine which type you are and bring your own personal touch to hoza sessions.

The aim of hoza counseling is for each one of us to recognize the Truth and the Dharma and become the kind of person who is aware of the wonder and preciousness of life and gives thanks for it. Therein lies true salvation. The essential objective of hoza counseling is to enable us, through such sessions, to acquire the strength to resolve for ourselves the succession of problems that always arise in life and to become independent while grounded in the Buddha Dharma.

Becoming independent means becoming someone who follows the teaching, “Make of yourself a light, make the Dharma your light,” someone who can live on one’s own in the Dharma’s light even when beset by difficulties. When the Buddha left home and embarked on his search for enlightenment, he visited and followed various teachers, but I do not believe that he ever was dependent on them. We can see that he never lost his independence, taking from those teachers what was worthwhile and discarding what was not. Even when receiving lessons from teachers or engaging in dialogue with deities, ultimately he valued his independence.

Our lives, which are changing day by day, moment by moment, epitomize the truth of impermanence, so problems will constantly keep arising. I hope you will all make full use of hoza counseling as a way to adjust your course when you are led astray by conceit and as a haven from the stormy seas of life. □

A painting by Kano Motonobu (1477–1559) depicting the Ch’an (Zen) patriarchs of the T’ang-period China. One of the six serial works painted on fusuma (sliding doors used as partitions between the rooms) in Daisen-in. Daisen-in is one of the twelve subtemples of the major Rinzai Zen temple Daitokuji in Kyoto. Important Cultural Property. Tokyo National Museum.

Healing Our Suffering World

by Cheng Yen

A Taiwanese Buddhist nun who established a compassion relief foundation nearly four decades ago has seen it grow into a worldwide volunteer organization that assists victims of disasters like the earthquake and tsunami in South Asia last December.

What a world of suffering we live in! Look around at the world today. Just about every day, we see yet another calamity happening in another part of the world. So many people are suffering, and our hearts ache deeply. But through the suffering we also witness true and genuine love. It is because of the suffering that people's love and compassion are awakened. So it is suffering that opens our eyes and our hearts to the truth.

Who in this world does not have suffering? That is why the first teaching the Buddha expounded after reaching enlightenment was the Four Noble Truths, showing us how we may extinguish suffering.

Seeing how people experienced aging, sickness, and death made the Buddha realize that suffering is inherent in everyone's life. But this is only with regard to the natural course of life. There is, moreover, the suffering caused by worldly circumstances—the difference in social classes, the difference between the poor and the rich, and many other circumstances. Struck by these, the Buddha was driven to understand the truth of suffering, and to contemplate how people could be relieved from such suffering. Upon attaining enlightenment, he expounded the Four Noble Truths, showing us the way.

Yes, we live in a suffering world, but are we to just let people continue living in suffering? Shouldn't we think of ways to help them out of their suffering?

The Buddha talked about the Four Immeasurable Minds—loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and giving without attachment—and these could be the medicine for suffering beings. But these can only be effective if we put them into practice.

Those in suffering need love and care, so we need to have

Venerable Master Cheng Yen was born in Chingshui, a small town in central Taiwan, in 1937. When she was twenty-three years old, she left home to become a Buddhist nun. In 1966, she established the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, which has concentrated its activities in the four major missions of charity, medicine, education, and culture. The foundation, which now has over four million supporters, provides disaster relief throughout the world, sending supplies to victims and dispatching volunteers to help them rebuild their lives.

loving-kindness and compassion. So much suffering is created in life—why don't we all love one another? Wouldn't that be wonderful? Wouldn't everyone be happy then? That is the mission of loving-kindness—to promote peace and harmony among people, to inspire people to love one another and give of themselves to help others out of the realization that, living on this planet, we are all connected to one another as parts of a whole.

That is why, in response to the recent tsunami disaster in South Asia, Tzu Chi volunteers worldwide mobilized to raise funds on the streets to help tsunami victims. I continually remind Tzu Chi volunteers that it isn't about how much money we raise, but about bringing the disaster to the atten-

and volunteers immediately formed a relief team. What moves me even more is that doctors in Tzu Chi's hospitals immediately started volunteering to go to the disaster area. Everyone wanted to go. In the end, one of the assistant superintendents, who is an epidemiologist, said, "There's no one more suitable than me," because in the aftermath of the disaster, what was most worrying was the possible outbreak of infectious diseases.

At the time our team went into the disaster area, there were bodies lying about everywhere and the stench was so strong that layers of mouth masks could not block it. The doctors knew beforehand that it would be like this, yet they still wanted very much to be the ones chosen to go there. Without great love, who would dare to go there? So I often say that these volunteers are living bodhisattvas. Who but bodhisattvas would be able to carry out such a deed?

Because of suffering, people's compassion was awakened, inspiring them to go personally to the disaster areas to help those in need. Those who could not go to the disaster areas dedicated themselves to appeal for donations. All around the world, volunteers were doing this. In some places, it was snowing, but the volunteers nevertheless stood out on the streets as it snowed. They truly wanted to help the people suffering in the disaster areas. So they did it all with a very willing heart. Their compassion inspired them to make an altruistic resolution—which was sacrificing their own comfort and leisure to help others. They did so with such joy—even though after a day of holding the donation boxes, their arms had become sore and stiff; yet still,

their hearts were full of joy.

Herein lies the Dharma. In their acts of giving, they are living out the Four Immeasurable Minds of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and giving without attachment. Their acts are motivated by love and compassion. In giving, they experience great joy, and the willingness with which they give of themselves clearly shows their lack of attachment.

There are many stories from the tsunami disaster that let us see what loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and giving without attachment are about.

This time, teams of Tzu Chi volunteers went to Sri Lanka and Indonesia's Aceh Province to provide aid. Besides giving survivors emergency supplies, we treated their wounds and

At a refugee camp near Banda Aceh, Indonesia, the region that was hit hardest by the earthquake and massive tsunami, women search for relatives through portraits of missing children posted by UNICEF in February 2005. Photo: WWP

tion and consciousness of people who are safe and well and thus inspiring their kindness. When a disaster has struck one part of the world, all of us in this global village need to help. This is something we need to realize, and we need to have others realize it as well.

Compassion—seeing people suffering, we cannot bear for them to suffer, and we feel their suffering as our very own. It is because of this that we rushed to Sri Lanka and Indonesia's Aceh Province to help. Otherwise, why would we be there? With Sri Lanka so far away from Taiwan, what does it have to do with us? How are they related to us? Indeed, we are not connected to them in any direct way. It is only because we cannot bear for them to suffer.

As soon as we heard news of this disaster, Tzu Chi's staff

provided free medical care. But we also tried to help heal their hearts. With such a disaster that suddenly took away so many lives, wrenching families apart, tearing from people those dearest to them in this world, we can just imagine the trauma, the grief, the searing pain that survivors were feeling. Though their lives were spared, yet they suffer all the more because of it. So they really need people to reach out to them, to comfort them, support them, and help see them through this painful time.

At the sites where our medical personnel provided free medical care, the volunteers not only treated people's physical ailments, but also tried to heal the survivors' mental anguish. Take Superintendent Lin Shin-zong of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Center, for example. When he led the medical team to serve at our medical station in Hambantota, Sri Lanka, he first led everyone in singing to lighten everyone's minds before they began seeing patients. With patients, he would first express his care for them by holding their hand, giving them a hug, or patting them on the back, as he asked them about their family. It was only after he had made such a connection with the patient that he would begin to address the physical ailments. He cared for everyone just as if they were his own family members. The other medical personnel were just the same.

Through such interactions of love and care, a number of disaster victims who had withdrawn into themselves started to come out of their own inner world again to face reality. Some even began to serve as volunteers, transforming their grief into strength to help others.

One such volunteer was a man named Abdullah. When his neighbor brought him to our medical station, he had neither eaten nor slept for six days and hadn't uttered a word. Every time he closed his eyes, he saw his wife and child, whose bodies he had found locked in an embrace after three days of frantic searching. Tzu Chi's volunteers were very concerned about his health, and quickly sat him down. A volunteer brought him warm water to drink, and prepared hot instant noodles for him. Holding his hand, the volunteer stayed with him, patting his back to express sympathy and encouragement. After a very long time like this, Abdullah finally spoke and began telling the volunteer his story.

After that, Tzu Chi volunteers continued to visit Abdullah regularly. On one visit, the volunteer said to him, "I can understand what deep pain and grief you must be feeling, having lost your loved ones. But when our loved ones have passed away and there is nothing to be done, the best thing we can do for them is to transfer the love we feel for them to other people. Would you be willing to offer the love and care you have for your loved ones to other people, as a tribute to them?"

With those words, Abdullah gradually opened himself. He began to smile again, to talk to people again as he used to, and even returned to his job as a security guard at a factory, astonishing his boss, who had thought he would never recover and return. Since then, Abdullah has also volunteered at Tzu Chi's medical station to offer his care to others.

Indeed, this is what we hope for. Besides helping the people with their critical needs and working to give them permanent homes where they can rebuild their lives, we also hope that these survivors, having gone through such a horrifying disaster, may turn this experience into an impetus for new perspectives. So we hope that through the care

A Tzu Chi volunteer comforts an elderly woman who lost her family to the tsunami. Photo courtesy of the Tzu Chi Foundation.

and support of Tzu Chi volunteers, they may be able to not only stand up again, but also to open their hearts to help others in need. In the past, they had only devoted themselves to their families and loved only their loved ones. It is our hope that having gone through the disaster, they may come to realizations about life, and open their arms widely to embrace others in suffering. In this way, may the time they are given in life go toward the planting of positive seeds of karma, and through this, may the force of the positive collective karma in this world become stronger.

This relief effort for the South Asian disaster has involved numerous challenges. For example, the volunteers had to take longer, roundabout routes because of hazardous road conditions to transport relief goods into disaster areas.

When Tzu Chi volunteers in Indonesia delivered eleven truckloads of supplies to Meulaboh, Aceh Province, they had to drive for more than 40 hours. Yet there were no complaints. Rather, they felt that as long as they could help lessen suffering, all their efforts, no matter how taxing or painstaking, would be worth it.

In Tzu Chi, we have a special saying—when the work is exhausting and taxing, instead of saying so (which is *xin ku* in Mandarin), we say that we are blessed (*xing fu*). Though the volunteers may be drenched in sweat, they are nevertheless full of joy because they have seized the opportunity to contribute. This sentiment was expressed by every group of volunteers that returned from the disaster areas in South Asia.

This also describes our volunteers from the U.S. very well. They were undaunted by the 53-hour journey from the U.S. to Sri Lanka via Germany and Singapore, and were eager to have a chance to contribute. Volunteers in disaster areas must endure harsh conditions and an exhausting schedule, yet they still give themselves so joyfully and seek nothing in return. Not only that, they even feel grateful. Why? Because they realize that it is only because they are fortunate, healthy, and well that they have the ability to help others. Being grateful for being so fortunate, they want to give back or contribute by dedicating themselves to doing good. Giving with gratitude, they devote themselves with willingness and happily accept all that comes—difficulties and all.

These were just a few of the many touching stories, and what led to all of these acts of genuine love was the suffering of others. Just as the seeds we plant can be seeds of suffering—seeds of negative karma—we can also plant seeds of truth, goodness, and righteousness. In such a world of suffering, we need people who emulate bodhisattvas, who embrace all people with enlightened and lasting love—people who broaden their love to reach out to others, who choose not to enjoy ease and comfort but instead to come out of their ivory towers to be with those in suffering.

With the world as it is, with disasters happening every day, with man-made calamities occurring in countries all across the globe, with the tide of impurity powerful like the massive waves of the tsunami, there is truly a need for people to serve as living bodhisattvas, who through their genuine and enlightened love, touch, inspire, and purify people's hearts. To heal the world, we must begin by purifying the hearts of humanity. Let us all work hard at this, for only when the hearts of humanity become pure can there be peace and harmony in society, and only then can the world be freed from the lasting pain and suffering that accompanies disasters. □

Bodhisattva Manjushri. A polychrome wooden figure sculpted by Zen'en (1197–1258). Crystal inlaid eyes. Height: 43.3 cm. Tokyo National Museum.

The Parable of the Good Physician

by Gene Reeves

The heart of the second half of the Lotus Sutra contains a parable about a wise physician who used skillful means to heal his poisoned children. We are those sick children, and the Buddha is the wise father who uses every means available to save us. We must learn not only how to see the Buddha in others, but also how to let others see the Buddha in us.

Chapter 16, titled “The Lifetime of the Tathagata,” is traditionally regarded as the heart of the second half of the Lotus Sutra, just as chapter 2 is regarded as the heart of the first half of the sutra. Certainly, the central teaching of chapter 16—that the Buddha is still alive—is pivotal for understanding the sutra as a whole.

The Setting

In an important respect, however, this chapter is also a continuation and culmination of a story found in chapters 11 and 15, and needs to be understood in relation to them. In chapter 11, Shakyamuni is seen as the Buddha of all present worlds. In order that the whole body of Abundant Treasures Buddha may be seen, he assembles buddhas from all over the universe. As we have seen, these other buddhas are in some sense representatives of Shakyamuni Buddha. They can be called embodiments of Shakyamuni Buddha. It is clear that the Buddha is somehow present in a vast expanse of space. Then, in chapter 15 Shakyamuni is seen to have been a buddha in this world for countless eons. That is, Shakyamuni says that the many, many bodhisattvas who emerge from below the earth have been taught by him over countless eons. Here the Buddha is present in a vast expanse of time. That chapter ends with the bodhisattva Maitreya and others wondering how someone who has been living and teaching for only a few decades can be the teacher of countless bodhisattvas who lived ages and ages ago.

In chapter 16, all of this is brought together in the teaching that Shakyamuni Buddha is the one universal Buddha,

the Buddha of all times and places, one whose life is extended indefinitely both spatially and temporally, from the extremely distant past into the distant future and in all the directions of the vast universe.

Here, in a sense, the teachings of the Lotus Sutra are brought together into a single focus—the universal Buddha. The Buddha explains that in different times and different worlds he has assumed different names, taught different

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Detail from the Lotus Sutra Mandala, scroll 14, owned by the temple Honpoji in Toyama Prefecture, depicting the parable of the good physician. Painted in 1326–28. Important Cultural Property. Photo courtesy of Honpoji.

sutras, used different teaching devices, and so on as appropriate to the situation, all for the one purpose of saving all living beings.

To illustrate this, the Buddha relates the parable of the good physician.

The Parable of the Good Physician

Once upon a time there was a wise and good doctor with many sons. One day, after leaving home on business, the sons drank some poison that they had found in the house. Returning home, the father found the children writhing on the floor, sick from the poison. By that time, some of them had completely lost their minds, while others were not yet so seriously affected. Seeing that the father had come back, the sons were very happy and begged him to cure them of

the poison. The father consulted his books, prepared an appropriate medicine, and urged the sons to take it to free themselves from their illness, suffering, and agony. Those who had been least affected by the poison saw right away that the medicine was good for them, took it, and were immediately cured. Others, however, had already lost their minds, could not see that the medicine would help them, and refused to take it. The father, realizing what was happening, decided to devise a way to reach them and get them to take the medicine. He told them that he was getting old and would soon die, but was leaving the good medicine for them, with the recommendation that they take it. Then he went away again, and sent back a messenger with news that he had died. The sons, hearing that the father had died, felt lonely, deserted, and helpless. “If our

attention, and to get them to wake up and take greater responsibility for their own lives.

There are some important lessons in this story that we have seen before, but they are worth emphasizing once again.

Medicines

One lesson we might see is that the same medicine is not always good or equally effective for all. Some of the children are immediately cured by the father's medicine; others are not because they don't take it. This medicine is like the rain of the Dharma in chapter 5, the same rain that goes everywhere to nourish all kinds of plants, but is received differently because people are different in their abilities, their backgrounds, and their tastes. In other words, Buddha medicine needs to be different for different people with respect to what medicine will actually work for them. The medicine prepared for and given to the children is not really medicine for them until they take it. A medicine that is not taken, no matter how well prepared and no matter how good the intentions of the physician, is not effective, is not really medicine.

The same is true of the Buddha Dharma. It has to be taken by somebody, has to become real spiritual nourishment for someone, in order to be effective. This is why in the Lotus Sutra, teaching is always a two-way relationship: for real teaching to exist there has to be a teacher, but, equally, there has to be a receiver. The Dharma is not the Dharma until it is received and embraced by someone. But, of course, people are different. That is why the Dharma has to be taught in a great variety of ways, using different stories, different teachings, poetry as well as prose, and so on.

The same is true of religious practices. For some Buddhists, meditation is effective; for others, recitation; for others, careful observance of precepts; for still others, sutra study; and so on. It is through this enormous variety of teachings and practices that the Dharma has been effective and can be effective still. If we insist that there is only one proper way to practice Buddhism, it would be as if the physician in this story decided to let the children die because they did not immediately take the medicine he had offered.

A closely related idea is that even the most heavily poisoned can be saved. Saving them may require more wisdom and more effort, but the father knows that all can be saved. He does not give up just because at first he does not succeed. Though the idea of universal salvation—the idea that all are capable of being saved—is certainly not unique to the Lotus Sutra, it is central to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, and is taught and suggested there in a great many ways. No doubt one of the reasons for the near extinction of the doctrine that there are beings with absolutely no

father were alive he would have been kind to us, and would have saved us. But now he has abandoned us and died in a distant land. We are orphans, with no one to rely on.” But this grief caused them to come to their senses, whereupon they realized that the medicine would be good for them, took it, and were completely cured. Hearing that his sons had recovered, the father returned to his home.

Interpretation

The physician-father, of course, represents the Buddha, and his supposed death is like the Buddha's entry into nirvana, his human death. In reality, though, the universal Buddha, the loving father of the world who is working to save all from suffering, did not die. The Buddha's death and entry into nirvana is a story told in order to get people's

goodness in them who are, therefore, beyond hope of salvation—the so-called “*icchantika*”—has been the enormous popularity of the Lotus Sutra in East Asia. Under the influence of the Lotus Sutra and other teachings, the universality of buddha-nature won out over the idea that some are without goodness of any kind.

Medicine Buddha

Though he does not appear in the Lotus Sutra, Medicine (or Healing) Buddha (Yakushi Nyorai in Japanese) is very popular in East Asia as one who cures people of illness and disease and is prayed to for long life. He is often portrayed as one of a trio of buddhas along with Shakyamuni Buddha and Amida Buddha. An entire sutra is dedicated to his vows, and a famous temple in Nara, Japan, is dedicated to him. But in this story it is not Medicine Buddha but Shakyamuni Buddha who is portrayed as a medicine buddha, as one who has profound knowledge of medicine and seeks to cure those who have become deranged by the poisons of the world.

We should notice that here, as in the parable of the burning house of chapter 3, the dangers—the fire and many other terrible things in chapter 3 and the poison in chapter 16—are found in the fathers’ houses. Some have raised questions as to why the Buddha would be so careless as to have such a dangerous house or why he would leave poison lying around in a house where children are living. This kind of question probably presupposes that the Buddha is something like the Western God, one who is all-powerful and creates and controls the world. But that is not a Buddhist presupposition; quite the opposite. In the Lotus Sutra the point of having the danger occur in the Buddha’s home is to indicate a very close relationship between the Buddha and this world. The world that is dangerous for children is the world in which the Buddha also lives. Even though chapter 16 is in some sense about the everlasting life of the Buddha, here too Shakyamuni Buddha is seen as the Buddha of this world in a very special way. While Medicine Buddha is the Buddha of the East, just as Amida Buddha is the Buddha of the West, Shakyamuni Buddha is the Buddha of this world, this world where suffering has to be endured. He is, in other words, our Buddha in a special way. Because he is not all-powerful, and even suffers himself, he can understand the sufferings of others, be compassionate toward them, and offer wise and compassionate help, just like a wise and good physician. Thus Shakyamuni is our Medicine Buddha, the Medicine Buddha of this world.

Shakyamuni Buddha did not create this world. These parables do not say that the fathers created the burning house or the home of the physician. Shakyamuni Buddha has inherited this world, perhaps even chosen to live in this

world, in order to help the living. That there are dangers in this world, including fires and poisonous drugs, is not something created by the Buddha—they are simply part of the situation that is given to him by virtue of his being the Buddha of this world. It is because of them that good medicine and good physicians are needed here.

A Call to Become Bodhisattvas

In both of these stories of a father and his children, as well as in other stories in the Lotus Sutra, it is important to recognize that the father facilitates the salvation of the children. He does not, and probably cannot, rescue them by force. Nor does he save them by demanding their obedience. He is not one who sets up laws and punishes offenders. Rather, he skillfully creates a situation in which his children are encouraged to save themselves, in one case, by fleeing from the fire; in the other, by taking the good medicine. The important lesson here is, of course, that we too need to recognize and also lead others to recognize that while we have been offered good medicine by the Buddha, while always and everywhere we are being helped by the Buddha, still, we too have to save ourselves. Neither Shakyamuni Buddha nor Medicine Buddha nor any other buddha will do it for us; no one will carry us out of the burning house or force us to take our medicine. We too have to be finally responsible for our own actions, for our own way of life, for our own salvation.

Far from demanding that human beings be obedient to him, the Buddha challenges us to enter and take up the way of the bodhisattva, a way that we can be led to but that we cannot be forced to enter. Like the young poor son in chapter 4, we may need encouragement in order to gradually learn to accept responsibility for the father’s business, for the buddhas’ business, or, like the weary travelers in chapter 7, we may need a resting place, even an illusory resting place, in order to pursue the valuable treasure in our own lives; finally it is we ourselves who have to be responsible.

Various reasons are given in the sutra for why the Buddha has announced his entry into final nirvana when actually he is still alive in this world. For example: “If the Buddha lives for a long time in this world, people of little virtue will not plant roots of goodness, and those who are poor and of humble origins will become attached to the five desires and be caught in a net of assumptions and false views. If they see that the Tathagata is always alive and never extinct, they will become arrogant and selfish or discouraged and neglectful. Unable to realize how difficult it is to meet him, they will not have a respectful attitude toward him.” Here four good reasons are given, to help people overcome arrogance, selfishness, discouragement, and neglect. And it is to illustrate this that the story of the good

physician is told. Thus, it is useful to understand these terms through the vehicle of the parable. That is, in none of these stories is the problem a matter of willful arrogance or selfishness. The children in the parable of the burning house are too absorbed in their play to notice what is going on around them, including their father's attempts to warn them of the dangers. The young man in the parable of the rich father and poor son is simply lacking in self-confidence and self-respect. The children in this chapter are stricken by some poison. All are in need of help and guidance, but what they need guidance for is to accept greater responsibility for their own lives, for the direction and quality of their own lives. In this way, they can, perhaps only very gradually, become bodhisattvas, and take responsibility for doing the Buddha's work in this world.

Buddha and God

In Japan it is quite common to refer to, or pray to, the Buddha and God together, as there has been a kind of synthesis of buddhas and bodhisattvas with Japanese *kami*, Japanese gods. This is not worked out systematically, but serves a practical function of making it possible for people of diverse religious persuasions to pray together and work together. But in a Western context it may be misleading. Some may think that when Buddhists speak of "the Eternal Buddha" and use the phrase "the Buddha and God," they are equating the Buddha with God as most commonly understood in the West. There are, however, very important differences between the Buddha and God which I think Buddhists should be aware of and keep in mind.

The Christian Bible begins with the book of Genesis, with God's creation of the world. Time and history are thought to be quite limited in scope; they begin with God's creation of the world, are punctuated in the middle by the coming of Christ, and will come to an end when Christ comes again to make judgments about the final disposition of both the living and the dead. God is "eternal," living outside of time and history in the entirely nontemporal, nonhistorical eternity. The Buddha, on the other hand, is not thought to be the creator of the world. For Buddhists generally, the universe, history, and time have no beginning and no end, but continue through never-ending cycles from an infinite past into an infinite future. While both the Western God and the Buddha of the Lotus Sutra are called father, the meaning is quite different. God has created the whole universe and basically lives outside of it. The Buddha, on the other hand, has come into the world of suffering and suffers with the living beings of this world. Like others, he participates in the creation of the world at every moment. He does so by being a teacher and medicine giver, not by being a kind of unilateral power. Above all,

the Buddha is a teacher. And it is precisely in reference to his being a teacher that bodhisattvas are so frequently referred to in the Lotus Sutra as children of the Buddha. Those whose lives are shaped by the teachings of the Buddha, by the Buddha Dharma, have been created as much by the Buddha's words as by their biological parents. But, like biological parents, the Buddha does not have absolute power over his children. Like the father in the parable of the rich father and poor son in chapter 4, the Buddha longs for his children to be ready to receive their inheritance from him, his great wealth of the Dharma.

The Buddha can be called the loving father of all, not because he has complete power over others, but precisely because he does not. He cares about his children and seeks to encourage them to do his work, but he cannot force anyone. Rather, he depends on others to do his work, the work of saving others. He does not issue commandments or make laws demanding our obedience; he seeks our help both for saving ourselves and for helping others. This is why what is called for in Buddhism is not obedience but bodhisattva practice, a way of life focused on becoming the best that one can be. And the Buddha, like the father in this story, is one who does not get angry or resort to punishment; he leads and encourages.

Well, you may think, both God and the Buddha represent the ultimate reality do they not? Indeed, some Buddhists may think that the Buddha is a kind of ultimate reality, but the Lotus Sutra is very clear in its affirmation of the reality of this world of ordinary and imperfect things as ultimate reality. Your little finger is as real, even as ultimately real, as anything else in the entire universe. Of course, you have neither the wisdom of the Buddha, the powers of the Buddha, the compassion of the Buddha, nor the life span of the Buddha. But that does not make you any less real than the Buddha.

The Long Life of the Buddha

The bodhisattvas who emerge from below the earth in chapter 15 have to do with the life of the Buddha in the past. And chapter 16 begins with an interesting account of how long ago Shakyamuni became a buddha.

Suppose someone took many billion universes, each consisting of many billion worlds, ground them into fine dust, and went off to the east and, having passed through billions and billions of worlds, deposited a single particle of dust, and then repeated this until all of the dust was exhausted. Then suppose he gathered up all of the worlds, both those where a particle of dust had been deposited and those where none had been deposited, and ground all of those worlds into fine dust. The number of eons that have elapsed since Shakyamuni Buddha became awakened is

Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra inscribed in gold ink on indigo paper. Koryo dynasty period (918–1392) of Korea. 28 x 10.5 cm. Kyoto National Museum.

millions of billions of times larger than the resulting number of dust particles.

But the point of the parable in chapter 16 is not primarily about the past life of the Buddha or even the indescribably long life of the Buddha—it is about our present and our immediate future. We are to understand that, even though stories have been told about the death of the Buddha, even now the Buddha is not really dead. He is still with us, alive in this world, living the bodhisattva way, doing the bodhisattva work of transforming people into bodhisattvas and purifying Buddha lands. “From the beginning” he says, “I have practiced the bodhisattva way, and that life is not finished yet. . . .”

The Universal Buddha

What does it mean to say that the Buddha is universal? Though some would take it to be so, this is not, I think, a metaphysical claim about some ultimate reality. When the Lotus Sutra says that the Buddha is somehow embodied or represented in all directions throughout the universe and that his life goes further into the past than we can imagine and that he will continue to be alive in the future, it is not claiming that the Buddha is somehow beyond time and history. It is actually saying something that is nearly the opposite: namely, that no matter where you go, whether on foot or by spaceship, and no matter when in your life, whether celebrating your eighteenth birthday or lying on your deathbed, there is no place and no time in which the Buddha is not available to you.

The father returns home after the children have been shocked into taking the medicine and have recovered. The children are able to see him once again. By taking the good medicine, the Dharma, people are able to see the Buddha, even though he died some twenty-five hundred years ago.

To incorporate the Dharma into one’s life is to be able to see the Buddha. So where does one see the Buddha? Where is the Buddha? The answer of the Lotus Sutra to this is that the Buddha can be found in anybody and anything at all. This is what it means for the Buddha to be universal: he is to be found whenever and wherever we look for him.

Embodying the Buddha

Chapter 16 ends with a very interesting and important verse. The Buddha is speaking:

“I am always thinking:
‘How can I lead all the living
To enter the supreme way
And quickly perfect their Buddha-bodies?’”

The Buddha’s purpose is to lead the living to enter the unsurpassed way and quickly take on the body of a buddha. The Chinese verb that I have here translated as “perfect” might more literally be rendered as “fulfill” or “realize.” The point is that it is something we do or can do. It is an activity, not a dead end. It is an opportunity more than an achievement. The purpose of the Dharma, in other words, is to lead people to act like buddhas, that is, to be doers of the bodhisattva way, and, in this sense, the wider purpose is to enable each of us to be the Buddha in the world for anyone to see. When we do that, when we make it possible for others to see the Buddha, we ourselves will be able to see countless buddhas, not only when we are dreaming, but even when we are most awake.

By embodying the Buddha in our own lives through living the bodhisattva way, we give life to the Buddha in the present. In a sense, we are creating the Buddha, contributing to the shaping of the life that is the Buddha. □

Karma and Character: Fatalism or Free Will?

by I. Loganathan

The Buddha found that the theory of karma was often confused with fatalism, but he turned the message of despair into one of hope. He encourages the sinner to realize that it is never too late to mend.

The Buddha was one of the first, if not the very first, to give due consideration to the problem of fatalism. He addressed this problem because he felt that it was urgently necessary for all those wishing to live this life with a minimum of suffering to estimate accurately the nature and value of their own experiences.

In the Buddha's time, speculation was rife concerning the origin of the universe. Accordingly, based upon the conclusion adopted, the ethical doctrines propounded by the various religious sects were also numerous. The Buddha, however, deprecated such discussion and put forward what can best be described as a positivist religion. He believed that it is not our duty to spend our time and energy in metaphysical inquiries, but to live. He did not assume that the universe had been brought into existence by a deity or a god, and he thought that no system of morality should be founded on such a speculative basis.

Because the Buddha taught unconditional love of humanity and discipline of mind as the basis of religious life, there are people who exclaim that "Gautama Buddha was the positivist August Comte born 2,000 years too soon." In *Indian Philosophy*, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan wrote that true Buddhism, theoretically stated, is humanitarianism, meaning by that term something very like the gospel of humanity preached by the positivist, whose doctrine is the elevation of many through the human intellect, human intuitions, human teaching, human experiences, and accumulated human efforts—to the highest ideal of perfection. Even Alexander Pope in the eighteenth century said, "The proper study of mankind is man."

The chief tenet of humanism taught by the Buddha is faith in the supreme value and self-perfectibility of the human personality. It rejects supernatural revelation. Improvement comes from within. No man or god can save anyone other than themselves. The Buddha emphasized the intelligibility of all phenomena. By so doing, he shifted the focus of human awareness from the mythological and the abstract to the objective and the real.

The humanism of the Buddha is altogether a very humble, very fundamental, and very dynamic doctrine. The Buddha's humanism is humble in that it affirms not only humanity's possibilities but also its limitations. It is fundamental in that the Buddha was the first to propound a doctrine that involved a complete shift in the direction and movement of human thought.

Any given life is merely one link in a long chain of causation, both ends of which are lost to us and cannot truly be discovered through speculation. The present life, the present moment is all that can be really known by us. However, seeing that the past and the future are related through the present, and also seeing how closely humanity's actions of

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today are bound up with its experience of tomorrow, the Buddha urged us all to gain control of our karma at the point at which this is possible—namely, now. Yet in spite of the Buddha's positivism, a speculative and defeatist philosophy has grown up around this idea of karma.

Karma literally means "action." By pure action, human beings become pure; by evil action, evil. Every event is due, or partly due, to previous causes, and is itself the cause, or partial cause, of future events. So what is done in this life helps to shape what happens in the next. The Buddha, as a psychologist, was quite content with the definition of karma as volition. The Buddha repeats this view in "My action is my possession; my action is my inheritance; my action is the matrix that bears me; my action is the race to which I belong; my action is my refuge." The law of karma is the doctrine that takes the place in the Buddhist teaching of the very ancient theory of "souls," which other religions have inherited from the beliefs of the earliest periods of history.

The transmigration of souls, very commonly supposed to be a fundamental tenet of Buddhism, has never been a part of it. The Buddha did not teach transmigration of souls. What he did teach could better be summarized as rebirth. The Buddha held that, after the death of any being, nothing but that being's karma-formations continued.

The Buddha found that the theory of karma was often confused with fatalism. It had been made into an excuse for inertia and timidity, and turned into a message of despair. It said to the sinner: "Not only are you a wreck, but that is all you ever could have been. That was preordained for you from the beginning of time."

The Buddha turned this message of despair into a message of hope by giving a new interpretation to the meaning of karma. The Buddha's law of karma reckons with the material of the context in which each individual is born. While it regards the past as unalterable, it allows that the future is determined by various conditions. The spiritual element in man allows him freedom within the limits of nature. Man is not a mere mechanism of instincts. The spiritual potential in him can triumph over the automatic forces that try to enslave him.

The Buddha's law of karma encourages the sinner to realize that it is never too late to mend. It does not shut the gate against hope. It encourages him to be the conqueror of despair and suffering, guilt and peril.

The Buddhist law of karma allows man the freedom to act in the light of his knowledge. Man controls the uniformities in nature, his own mind, and society. There is thus scope for genuine rational freedom while indeterminism and chance lead to a false fatalism. □

A stone statue of the Tathagata. Height: 42.3 cm. The inscription on the base reveals that this figure was made in 689, the early period of the T'ang dynasty, China. Kyoto National Museum.

The Emerging Euroyana

by Michael Fuss

As Buddhism gains widening acceptance as a European religion, new questions are raised about whether its presence will be lasting, and about the resulting dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church.

Although a comparative newcomer on the European scene, Buddhism is gradually gaining the status of a generally accepted European religion. Increasing numbers of new practitioners are attracted by a religious tradition that has come to Europe in a colorful variety of forms shaped by the major cultures of Asia. For the Buddhist communities themselves, the most interesting question is probably whether this fascination with an apparently exotic religion reveals only a temporary fascination or whether the Buddha's message will be established as a true alternative to the Christian faith. For Christians, on the other hand, the main issue concerns the motives for these rather silent conversions, as they obviously indicate some inadequacy in the spirituality offered by the churches.

Buddhism in Europe today covers a wide spectrum of social realities, from its position as an official state religion in the Kalmyk Republic of the Russian Federation, which has a traditional population of Mongolian and Tibetan Buddhists, to a relatively recent presence in countries with a traditional Catholic majority. The following reflections will not deal with a sociological overview of the dissemination of Buddhist groups in European countries. The main issue shall be to underline the impressive capacity for enculturation that this ancient religion has repeatedly shown on its way from India to such different worlds as China, Korea, and Japan.

A "Third Turning of the Wheel"

Because of the uncertainty of varying degrees of affiliation, obtaining reliable statistics on the figures for European Buddhists is quite difficult. At times it proves almost im-

possible to distinguish between serious Buddhist communities and other groups that simply propagate "Asian" ideas. For instance, one of the most evident cases of an unfounded claim to Buddhist roots is that of Scientology, which has a conflicting orientation but attempts to dress up its commercial interests with some exotic glamour.

At present, a fascinating development of a Western, and

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particularly European, Buddhism is taking place; in traditional terminology one might consider this a “third turning of the wheel” after the constitution of the classical Buddhist confessions of Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. Not unlike the ancient period of intense cultural exchange in the wake of the early “globalization” of commercial relations along the Silk Road, Buddhism today faces once more the challenge of succeeding in the face of a different worldview, with similar difficulties in translating its sacred texts, developing a new terminology, and adapting to formerly unknown cultural and religious traditions. It is the birth of a new and ultimate vehicle, a “Euroyana,” that is going to make Buddhism truly a world religion in the sense that it will have entered the most distant culture, in terms of both geography and underlying religious ideas.

The Buddhist mission to Europe originally began under the great Indian Emperor Ashoka (third century B.C.E.) with a few sporadic missions to Epirus; it finds its completion today as a late consequence of colonialism with a massive arrival of Asian immigrants, as well as with European seekers who are reaching out for a new cultural synthesis. The latter, rather passive, mission by way of questioning, greatly resembles the early model of the famous dialogue between the Greek king Menandros (Milinda) and the Buddhist monk Nagasena (documented in the *Milindapanha*; first century B.C.E.).

Two Complementary Mission Strategies

The contemporary religious landscape closely resembles the pattern of the two interacting halves in the symbolic representation of the Tao. On one side, Western Christianity has established its presence in all cultural areas of the world, whereas, on the other side, virtually all religious traditions of the world can be encountered in any local Christian community. In the case of the Buddhist-Christian encounter, the polarity of interaction is currently shaped by a dynamic enculturation process that reflects complementary mission strategies. Differently from Christianity, which has largely followed the biblical directive of an outgoing mission (“Go into all the world and proclaim . . .”), Buddhism has known how to entice the curious to “come and see” and thus familiarize themselves with the way of the Buddha.

Such an indirect mission meets with the observation that, historically, Europe has not been the source of any of the great religious traditions of the world; it has, however, willingly accepted and amalgamated them with its own native traditions (Greco-Roman, Germanic, Slavic). The splendid world of medieval Christendom with its homogeneity of religious, political, and cultural dimensions held

together under one spiritual authority appears as a bright and unsurpassed *summa culturae* that in turn has been exported to other parts of the world, through mission, colonialism, and economic and technical dominance. The historic arrival of Christianity in Europe (Acts 16.9: “Come over and help us”) seems symbolic for the European capacity of welcoming other traditions if they prove helpful. The present situation of spiritual restlessness seems ideally suited to welcoming once again a religious tradition from abroad into the integrative process that is going to shape the cultural pattern of the new millennium.

Buddhist presence in Europe is primarily the result of a diffusion of ideas rather than of a systematic mission. Over the last few centuries, Buddhism has been perceived as a kind of religious and ethical humanism, attractive primarily because it has been considered a valid alternative to dogmatical and institutional forms of religion. The European heritage provides a broad stream of ideas that has prepared the ground for a formal conversion to Buddhism; the Christian and humanist traditions of the West explain many motives that have set in motion the process of an independent search. In this regard, European Buddhism expresses the latest phase of an ongoing process of spiritual emancipation that, with the arrival of Asian ideas, finally has found its integrative element. To understand this emerging pattern, one needs simultaneously to study the canon of Buddhist texts and the history of Western humanism.

Glimpses into History

The cultural crisis in the wake of colonialism has prompted both a revival within traditional Asian Buddhism and the conviction that there is an important mission toward a spiritually impoverished Occident. Yet the path for the diffusion of Buddhism in the West has also been prepared by a stream of European thinkers. In the first modern period, beginning from the end of the eighteenth century, European intellectuals came into contact with Eastern lore and were attracted by a congenial philosophy. Some, such as Friedrich Schlegel, discovered a “most romantic” nature mysticism; others, like Ralph Waldo Emerson and the American Transcendentalists, were attracted by the monistic idealism; while still others followed the pessimistic world views of Arthur Schopenhauer or Richard Wagner. On the one hand, this process of literary and philosophical encounters continues on a wider basis—the names of Herman Hesse (*Siddhartha*), Berthold Brecht, and Carl G. Jung stand for a wide reception of Oriental ideas. On the other hand, diffused feelings about a “Decline of the Occident” (Oswald Spengler) have prepared a positive recep-

Representing Japanese Buddhism, four Buddhist priests of the Shingon, Tendai, Jodo-shin, and Rinzai sects participate in the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in September 1893. Photo courtesy of the Bukkyo Times.

tion of Oriental ideas as a dawning of the “Light of Asia” (Edwin Arnold; 1879).

A second current, advocating a convergence of Eastern religions and Western occultism, can be dated from 1875, with the foundation in New York of the Theosophical Society by H. P. Blavatsky and H. S. Olcott. Leaving aside here the influence of Olcott on the revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, it can be observed that theosophical mediation of Buddhist ideas in the West has created a very distorted image of an “atheist” religion in sharp contrast to Christianity. *Esoteric Buddhism* by A. P. Sinnett (1883), based upon spiritualist theories, has become a reference text for most theosophists and has created the myth of a “perennial religion” that finds its purest expression in Buddhism. The objectives of the Theosophical Society found their ideal vehicle in the propagation of Buddhism, reducing it, however, to a gnostic-occult tradition, which has impeded an objective approach to the genuinely religious aspects of Buddhist practice. Some leading Western Buddhists, like Christmas Humphreys and Edward Conze, have been members of the Theosophical Society. The esoteric and psychological reductions of such a “perennial religion” of humankind have, incidentally, anticipated the basic tenets of the contemporary New Age movement, which favors Buddhist meditation as a technical tool for mental well-being. Religious pragmatism, metaphysical skepticism, as well as doctrinal and ethical relativism seem to find viable models in Buddhist practice.

A third phase of the missionary encounter began with the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago (1893) and the subsequent activities of Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933) and Daisetz T. Suzuki (1870–1966) in the West.

While A. Dharmapala, under theosophical influence, emphasized the renaissance of traditional Buddhism as compatible with Western religion, D. T. Suzuki simultaneously popularized Zen Buddhism in the West and Swedenborgian ideas in Japan. His many expositions of Buddhist thought have influenced many generations of Western seekers and have established a solid tradition of American Zen as an alternative religion. This wave of Buddhist propagation has now reached Europe as well.

The literati of the “beat generation,” for example, Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder, have further popularized this form of Buddhism. Circles of intellectual dropouts, who attempted to live in the style of the *beau sauvage* in urban settings, have linked Buddhism with alteration of consciousness. Even new Western-style Buddhist sutras have been composed. What the historian Ernst Benz labeled as “Zen-snobism,” has become an underlying stream of the counterculture of the sixties; New-Age centers are its most active promoters. In Europe, some independent meditation masters, like Karlfried Graf Dürckheim (1896–1988), have created a type of European spirituality integrated with many Buddhist ingredients.

The problem of taking cuttings of Zen practice from its Buddhist roots to graft on the tree of Christian contemplation has become acute with the establishment of a Christian Zen tradition by Japanese Zen masters like [Daiun] Harada, [Haku'un] Yasutani, [Koun] Yamada, and [Jiun] Kubota, who had accepted Christian practitioners. Father Hugo M. Enomiya-Lassalle, S.J., (1898–1990) has become the most prominent figure, giving way to a new lineage of “authorized” transmission. Under the guidance of Yamada Rōshi more than twenty non-Japanese Christians (from

India, the Philippines, the U.S., Canada, Germany, and Switzerland) have been granted authority to transmit the teaching; still, it has never been clarified to what extent they can be considered authentic Zen masters. Father Willigis Jäger, OSB, expresses the matter succinctly: “Many can argue whether a Christian can validly do Zen or teach Zen or not. The fact is, I am doing it.”

A particular case of Buddhist presence in Europe is Tibetan Buddhism. Largely because of the particular political situation and the uncontested appreciation of the Dalai Lama as a spiritual leader, this most intricate form of Buddhist practice has won many followers. While there is, on the one hand, an attempt to create a specific Western tradition (Chogyam Trungpa [1939–1987], Lama Anagarika Govinda [Ernst L. Hoffmann, 1898–1985] and his Arya Maitreya Mandala, Ole Nydahl [1941–]), it is, on the other hand, largely the traditional outlook that attracts. Esoteric rituals and temple work, intense meditations, and monastic discipline point to a genuine desire to undergo serious religious training over a long period. Recognition in 1987 of the Spanish boy Osel Hita Torres as the reincarnation of the deceased Lama Yeshe discloses the obvious spread of Tibetan Buddhism into the European sphere.

Some Euroyana Varieties

The silent spreading of Asian values once more challenges the European receptivity and capacity of synthesis. It needs little imagination to characterize the next millennium as a multireligious paradigm. Typical of periods of cultural transition, which have lost the stabilizing support of traditional institutions, is the free play of integrative dynamics. Since Buddhism is primarily a path and a condition of mental awareness rather than a fixed set of doctrines, it will be a determining component in the emerging cultural equilibrium. On the horizon appears a question concerning the predominant elements that emerge from the dialectical polarity between the host and accommodating cultures—the winning “code” will determine the general outlook of the leading cultural framework of the future. Herein lies the enormous challenge of the present transition, in which religious preference increasingly expresses a personal affinity rather than a traditional upbringing.

Not unlike the five disciples whom the Buddha had admitted into his original Sangha, the emerging Euroyana draws on several different “identities” that represent the colorful mosaic of interacting cultural streams, namely: (1) and (2) Mainstream Buddhists or Christians, each engaged in mutual dialogue while retaining their traditional religious identities; (3) “Buddhist Christians,” that is, Christians who have integrated Buddhist elements into their predominantly Christian faith practice; (4) “Christian

Buddhists,” that is, baptized Christians who have intentionally converted to Buddhism and who display the particular attitudes of any religious converts; and (5) relativistic practitioners who indiscriminately accept any religious element from the two (or more) traditions, “transcending” a confessional affiliation in favor of a hypothetical world religion (“New Age”).

To its serious practitioners, Buddhism overcomes all limitations of philosophical or psychological theories; it is perceived as a true religion that transcends human yearning toward a higher truth. Systematic training in mindfulness, the earnest search for inner tranquillity, and living in harmony with nature develop a capacity to recognize the original nature of things in their impermanence, selflessness, and imperfection. Profound analysis of suffering and existential passivity (*dukkha*) as well as of the ever-changing interdependence of all phenomena (*pratityasamutpada*) leads to a radical liberation from illusions and attachment and inspires ethical principles of universal compassion. The character of *nirvana* (the gradual extinction of vanity) has to be understood in soteriological perspective, not as ontological reality. The Buddhist path to salvation goes beyond language. The representation of God as “person” appears anthropomorphic to Buddhists; yet Christianity also has an apophatic theology that approaches God as the secret mystery of being beyond all imagination. The enormous challenge of an emerging European Buddhism consists in developing a hermeneutical approach that will be compatible with the conceptual framework and theological language of Christianity.

Particular Conditions That Favor a Western Buddhism

Religious affiliation has largely become a question of mentality, and modern pluralistic culture fosters religious preference on the basis of a deliberate choice instead of a traditional upbringing. It seems that Buddhism is attractive for people of all walks of life, offering a choice of practices that prove helpful to creating an inner experience of a transcendent reality, however that may be understood and named.

A meeting with Western Buddhists opens almost certainly with the stereotyped phrase, “According to my practice, Buddhism is . . .”—meaning by “Buddhism” not simply any of its traditional schools, but rather a comprehensive “way of life” that equally integrates philosophical and practical orientation. Such a personalized Buddhist worldview may cover a wide range of aspects, from a preference for an existentialist or nihilistic philosophy to a declared hostility toward church practice, from issues of political nonviolence to an ecological-holistic vision of the universe. One chooses the kind of Buddhism that pleases one best. Western “searchers” thus find a subtle philosophy

People sitting in meditation at a Buddhist center in London. Photo: PPS

of life and a challenging ethic that includes the material environment as well as all living beings. As such it is attractive to the intellectual elite who look for a religious orientation that allows rational reflection and offers detailed explanations to the mysteries of life. At the same time, it appeals to emotionally oriented people since it allows them to develop inner qualities such as loving kindness, sympathetic joy, compassion, and equanimity. Buddhism promotes a culture of silence and offers a systematic cultivation of the mind through its meditative practices. Both its rituals and artistic expressions appeal to aesthetic sentiments, while the practice of martial arts supports a harmony of body and mind. Based on subtle observation of mind and behavior, it appeals to people who are interested in psychological therapies. In a word, the various facets of Buddhism positively match the desire for a holistic psychosomatic well-being, which is currently considered in Western societies as the equivalent of religion. The increasing complexity of life demands a value orientation that is all-encompassing, coherent, and single-minded.

An important aspect of the attractiveness of Buddhism is the nature of its claim to truth, which is methodologically articulated according to a certain heuristic inclusiveness. The honorific title of "Buddha, the Awakened One,"

attributed to Gautama Siddhartha by his disciples when he had experienced the supreme truth, acknowledges him as the peerless teacher, though not the exclusive embodiment of the saving truth. Ultimate wisdom stands independent of the preaching of the Master; it may equally be found in all spiritual traditions, and the first timid steps on the way of mindfulness are as important as its final realization. Parmananda Divarkar, S.J. (in *Vidyajyoti* 62 [1998] 918) has described this structural contrast between West and East as triangular and circular systems. According to him, the Semitic, or West Asian, religions resemble a triangle made up of creed, code, and cult, held together by a book at the center; in contrast, the East Asian religions appear as concentric circles around a core experience of transcendent reality. These widening circles of consciousness, communication, and communion describe the initial awareness of the saving reality by a privileged individual, then a sharing with others of the experience, from which arises a fellowship of kindred spirits, associated with one another in different ways and degrees of bonding. While the triangle appears as closed in on itself, promising a security within at the price of a constant defense against all manner of dangers lurking on the outside, the concentric circles open outward, embracing even larger areas and allowing

The seventh meeting of the International Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter Group, held at a Rissho Kosei-kai facility in July 1994, during which eighteen theologians and scholars of Buddhism discussed the Lotus Sutra.

for a variety of possibilities within a broad unity. Throughout the centuries Buddhism has been able to maintain its identity, drawing sustenance from this kind of abiding experience without much need for an outward defense of its position. In this perspective, throughout the vicissitudes of history Buddhism has maintained a positive tension between a dogmatic system (*Buddhasasana*) and a world-transcending experience (*Buddhadharma*), which today allows a creative acculturation to the particular experience of Western “searchers.”

Meeting Points in Dialogue

The main areas of Buddhist-Christian encounters can be grouped according to four dimensions.

A *dialogue of life* takes place in families with mixed religious affiliation. It covers a wide range, from authentic sharing of personal experience to mutual accusations of sectarianism. This can be a problem between generations or between couples. New fields of interfaith encounters open up in mixed neighborhoods, schools, and interfaith prayer groups. Problems of mutual participation in religious feasts or rites for the celebration of mixed marriages have to be addressed, as well as a revision of educational material for both school and adult education.

A *dialogue of common action* for the integral development of people has been initiated mainly by the network of “Engaged Buddhists.” A particular European initiative is the Plum village near Bordeaux, founded by the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh (1926–). The center’s program of “contemplation in action” rivals in its outreach the Christian community of Taizé in the practice of integral

spirituality. In the field of humanitarian aid, the Buddhist lay movement Rissho Kosei-kai offers relief work in Bosnia. The same movement has recognized the peace activities of the Catholic lay movement known as the Community of Saint Egidio, to which it awarded its 1999 Niwano Peace Prize.

Dialogues of theological exchange are organized occasionally. The European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies, which was inspired by the American Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies and established in 1996, holds a study conference regularly. Following its fifth conference in Scotland in 2003, it is now organizing a sixth conference to be held in St. Ottilien, Germany, in June of this year, under the theme “Conversion and Religious Identity.” The pioneering interpretations of Buddhism by European theologians such as Romano Guardini, Henri De Lubac, or Hans Urs von Balthasar, have not only influenced the position of the Second Vatican Council, but are still a source of inspiration for theological work.

Although not strictly theological, an enormous input to academic dialogue has been provided by contemporary philosophy. E. Husserl, M. Heidegger, M. Blondel, among others, have attracted and still attract Asian students. The Japanese “Kyoto School” (founded by Kitaro Nishida) is only one example of the attempt to develop a global philosophy. Specific European contributions to Buddhist studies have been made in the field of philological and textual studies, beginning from the epoch-making translation of the Lotus Sutra by Eugene Burnouf (1852), the edition of the *Sacred Books of the East* by F. Max Müller, and the publications of the Pali Text Society.

The *dialogue of religious experience* has perhaps produced the most fragrant flowers in the garden of mutual encounters. Out of their common concern for radical *metanoia* (transformation of the mind), both traditions have cultivated a monastic tradition. By sharing their contemplative life, consecrated men and women initiate a “core-to-core dialogue” (Aloysius Pieris, S.J.). Over many years, intense spiritual exchange has been taking place in various monasteries under the able guidance of DIM (*Dialogue interreligieux monastique*).

Response of the European Church

In May 1999, a consultation on the presence of Buddhism in Europe was held in Rome under the auspices of the Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of Europe and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The task of the participating bishops, theologians, and specialists in interreligious dialogue was to review the situation of Buddhist-Christian relations in their respective countries and to offer a pastoral reflection on this new reality, trying to overcome earlier comments by Pope John Paul II (in his “*On the Threshold of Hope*”) and Cardinal Ratzinger, which had provoked sharp reactions from the Buddhist world. While former apologetic positions had been understood in the light of the reception of Buddhism in the Western philosophical tradition as a largely negative worldview, the reflections were now focused on exploring some reasons for the growing interest of baptized Christians in this ancient tradition of spiritual wisdom, which lets the church rediscover important elements of her own tradition such as mystical experience, silence, respect toward all created beings, and an attitude of love and compassion. This dialogical attitude is reflected in the final statement that was sent to all European Episcopal Conferences:

“The Church sees in Buddhism a serious path towards radical conversion of the human heart. From the Church’s own concern to be awake to the Lord’s presence, she cannot but be respectful of a tradition which draws attention to the salvific potential of the ‘here and now.’ The practice of mindfulness creates a sense of a wider silence which nourishes the attitude of compassion. This often overflows into commitment and action. These and other Buddhist practices also encourage those ‘fruits of the spirit’—inner peace, joy, equanimity, etc.—which accompany an intense spiritual discipline” (The *Domus Aurea Paper*, quoted in: *Pro Dialogo*, Bulletin 102 [1999] 343).

However, the adherence to a Buddhist worldview raises questions about all the central themes of Christian theology, especially about the nature of the Creator and the mystery of creation and salvation. Pastorally, the dialogue asks how the church is to respond to those “post-

Christians” who have embraced a very different way of conceiving that mystery. In their recommendations, the consultation called upon Christians to offer hospitality to Buddhists. For Catholics to be hospitable to Buddhists means, in the first place, recognizing that the church is a community that is itself formed by the loving dialogue of God with humankind, and is called, therefore, to live out this dialogue in its relationship with all people as partners in a common pilgrimage. This hospitality implies a renewal of the church’s evangelical responsibility, especially at this critical moment in the transformation of European society at the beginning of the new millennium, toward all those who, for whatever reason, find themselves seeking for spiritual enlightenment outside the visible bounds of the church. In their search for truth they claim to be seeking for an alternative to what is often perceived to be sterile dogmatism. They often feel the church to be overly institutionalized, relying upon outdated and incomprehensible language. Many complain of missing an adequate initiation into personal prayer, meditation, and the experience of integral salvation.

Among pastoral priorities it is recommended that attention be given to the provision of adequate resources for formation and information. Pastoral centers with responsibility for catechesis should take into account the needs arising from the growing presence of “new” Buddhists in Europe. The activities of these centers imply the need for specialists and the formation of people competent to identify principles of spiritual and theological discernment and to exercise a “*diakonia* of the truth” (Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 2, 50). Ways need to be found to bring together adequate resources and reliable materials for education at both school and adult levels, for the celebration of interfaith encounters between Buddhists and Christians, and for various sensitive pastoral issues, such as the spiritual accompaniment of interfaith marriages, hospital and prison chaplaincies, etc.

In short, the dynamics of a Buddhist enculturation into the spiritual landscape of Europe are calling the Roman Catholic Church to an intense dialogue on the level of spiritual experience, urging her to translate the bold mission statement of Pope John Paul II into a pastoral program of witnessing a Christian identity nourished by the experience of God: “My contact with representatives of the non-Christian spiritual traditions, particularly those of Asia, has confirmed for me the view that the future of our mission depends to a great extent on contemplation.” In the shrinking world of today, this concluding vision of the encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, 91, on the mandate of the church has still to be spelled out in the context of an emerging Euroyana. □

Catholic Theologian Hans Küng Selected as Recipient of 22nd Niwano Peace Prize

The Niwano Peace Foundation announced on February 22 that it will award the 22nd Niwano Peace Prize to the Catholic theologian, Dr. Hans Küng, 77, 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 realiz-

ing world peace has won him recognition around the world. The Niwano Peace Prize is awarded on the basis of recommendations gathered from over 1,000 leading figures in 125 countries, which are considered in strict fairness by the Niwano Peace Prize Committee (presently consisting of nine religious leaders involved in religious cooperation and peace movements in their countries) before it reaches a decision.

Dr. Küng entered the Catholic priesthood after receiving master's degrees in philosophy and theology from the Gregorian Pontifical University in Rome. He also studied at the Sorbonne and the Catholic Institute in Paris, and received a doctorate in

theology in 1957. He was appointed by Pope John XXIII as official theological consultant to the Second Vatican Council, a post he held from 1962 to 1965. From 1960 until 1996 he served as a professor of theology at the University of Tübingen in Germany, where he has worked unstintingly to promote the ecumenical movement toward unity among the

various Christian churches. In addition, he has carried out research on the common features and resemblances of religions, taking into consideration not only those that have Abraham, the "Father of Faith," in common—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—but also Hinduism, Buddhism, and others. He has pursued the discussion of the universal values found in religions through his writing, the Internet, and the mass media. These activities have gained him recognition around the world as a pioneer both in theological dialogue and in establishing the universality of religions.

Dr. Küng has declared that there is "no peace among the nations without

peace among the religions, and no peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions." We must all awaken to the responsibility that is common to us all, irrespective of our different religious convictions, and not insist that ours is the only true religion, he has said. God expects us to transcend our individual selves and become agents for realizing world peace in Dr. Küng's view. People who have deep religious faith are in possession of the power to change society and save it, he has said. No single religion, however, can by itself bring about the world peace hoped for by humanity, he believes, adding that this is why interfaith dialogue and cooperation are essential. Having realized this, Dr. Küng has consistently shown respect to all religions while maintaining his position as a Catholic theologian, and pursued the common ethic that lies at the core of all religions. He is also playing a pivotal role in his capacity as one of the presidents of the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

The ethic universally found in all religions has been given a more immediate and applicable form in the "Global Ethic" advocated by Dr. Küng, which addresses the wide variety of problems facing our modern world—violence and war, persecution and discrimination, moral degradation, and the endangered global environment. As Dr. Küng points out: "There has never been an age when a mechanism to relieve the world's distress has been so urgently needed. Fortunately, however, an ethic already exists within the religious teachings of the world, which can counter global distress. This ethic can supply the moral foundation for a better individual and global order: a

Dr. Hans Küng in Jerusalem, during the work for the multimedia project, "Tracing the Way."

vision that can lead men and women away from despair and society away from chaos." He adds that: "By a global ethic we do not mean a single, unified religion beyond all existing religions, and certainly not the domination of one religion over all others. By a global ethic we mean a fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes."

A document drafted by Dr. Küng, "Declaration Toward a Global Ethic," was presented at and adopted by the Parliament of the World's Religions held in Chicago in September 1993. This declaration, which starts by saying "The world is in agony," lays out "Four Irrevocable Directives" that symbolize the universal ethic found in the world's religions. The precept expressed as "Thou shalt not kill," or as "Have respect for life," leads naturally to social and political justice, the promotion of nonviolence, the protection of the natural environment, the permanent abolition of armaments, and so on. The precept expressed as "Thou shalt not steal," or "Deal honestly and fairly," emphasizes the importance of eradicating poverty and establishing a fair economic order. The precept expressed as "Thou shalt not bear false witness," or "Speak and act truthfully," brings to mind the responsibility of the mass media and politicians to give a proper account of what they know. The precept expressed as "Thou shalt not commit adultery," or "Respect and love one another," urges us to reexamine how we should conduct family life, marriage, and relations with others.

Dr. Küng declares: "We confirm that there is already a consensus among the religions that can be the basis for a global ethic—a minimal fundamental consensus concerning binding values, irrevocable standards, and fundamental moral attitudes." The "Declaration Toward a Global Ethic" has made an impact not only in religious circles;

Dr. Küng and other members of the "Group of Eminent Persons," with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, at the United Nations in 2001.

the major American daily *USA Today* made the document available to its forty million readers by publishing it as a full-page article. It has been published around the world, where councils, seminars, and research groups are being held to study it. There are expectations that in future it may bear fruit in the form of a declaration of a global ethic by the United Nations.

Dr. Küng was also one of the drafters of the "Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities," which was proposed by the InterAction Council

and adopted by the United Nations on the 50th anniversary of the UN's "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" in 1998. He was also appointed in 1997 by the secretary-general of the United Nations to join Richard von Weizsäcker, former president of Germany, as a member of the Group of Eminent Persons. As president of the German Global Ethic Foundation since 1995, he has been energetically working to develop all kinds of activities aimed at raising awareness about the global ethic. □

Dr. Küng with Dr. Horst Köhler, president of Germany, during the fourth Global Ethic Lecture held in Tübingen in 2003.

Religious Leaders Meet in Brussels to Discuss the Peace-Seeking Nature of Religion

Last January 3–6 a historic event that amazed many observers took place in Brussels. Over 200 sheikhs, imams, and rabbis, and Jews and Muslims supported by many academics from Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities, met in a conference called “Imams and Rabbis for Peace.” It was held under the auspices of two kings: Albert II of Belgium and Mohamed VI of Morocco. The high religious leadership level and the geographic spread of the delegates was deemed especially significant. Well-known Muslim leaders came from Africa and Asia, including Morocco and Palestine. Of the more than fifty rabbis from around the world, more than half came from Israel.

The conference took place at the historic Egmont Palace and the opening was attended by many dignitaries representing the two kings and governments. The large presence of the European media was notable. Chief Rabbi Bakshi-Doron (chief rabbi of the State of Israel) and Grand Rabbi René-Samuel Sirat (a WCRP president) were the main speakers on the Jewish side, and on the Muslim side, Sheikh Talal Sidr of Hebron, the Palestinian Authority’s minister and the one who signed the Alexandria Declaration of Religious Leaders in January 2005—who is also one of the founders of Hamas and an outstanding advocate of nonviolence and peace, and Dr. Ahmad Toaoufiq.

The event was conceived and actualized through the work of Alain Michel of France who established the foundation called “Hommes de Parole” to implement his dream of peace and coexistence, especially in the Holy Land. The foundation had already or-

ganized a conference in Switzerland in June 2003 aimed at laying the foundations for an Israeli-Palestinian alliance for peace, of which the Brussels gathering was a further step toward consolidating these efforts. The aim of the conference, Mr. Michel said, “was to provide a unique forum for interreligious discussion, in which an influential gathering could demonstrate its mutual opposition to violence, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism.”

This was the very “first world congress of imams and rabbis for peace,” since no similar formal structure of dialogue between Jews and Muslims had previously existed. Its purpose, the organizers said, was to initiate an exchange between the two religious traditions without excluding the participation of other religions, as could be seen by the presence of Catholics, Protestants, and Hindus. In fact, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, one of the most important spiritual masters of Hinduism, delivered a speech during the inaugural session. All speakers emphasized the need for religious leaders to disavow all kinds of violence committed in the name of religion. Organizers described the meeting as “not just yet another interreligious gathering,” but as a religious encounter in the exact meaning of the word, that is to “tie together again,” “to join,” to “bridge a gap between men of different beliefs” through their religious faith.

Rabbi Joseph Sitruk, chief rabbi of France, said: “The assembly is an important moment because it carries hope and freedom for a disillusioned world.” Dr. Abdullah Sajid, a senior figure in the Muslim Council of Britain and former imam of Brighton, said,

“We should stand shoulder to shoulder to name and shame the tiny minorities of agitators and extremists within our own communities and stress respect for the sanctity of life.”

Father Bernard Ugeux, Catholic priest and director of the Institute of Science and Theology of Religions of Toulouse, France, who attended the congress as an external observer, said that “for many Israeli rabbis, this was the first time they engaged in such a direct dialogue with imams, and for some the very first time they entered a mosque, that of the Belgian capital city!” According to former chief rabbi of France Samuel Sirat, “The fact that everyone could express themselves in their own language greatly facilitated fruitful communication.” He added that now “the media will no longer lead people to believe that every religious figure hides a terrorist in disguise.” This point was stressed at several stages during the congress. One participant pointed out that too often the media prefer to spread a culture of fear rather than to give a platform to the voices of moderation, which can contribute to reconciliation. The openness exists in religious thinking but is often marginalized by the media, many participants agreed. “Since we are openly united in certain circumstances, let us not be afraid of being seen side by side,” was one joint comment.

The three-day conference was divided into three plenary sessions and nine workshops attended by smaller groups of speakers, who in this way were able to get to know each other and establish an ongoing productive line of communication. “A major goal of the conference is the development of networks of personal relations and friendships as the basis for continuing the improvement in relations between the two communities,” organizers said.

The congress started with the testimonies of religious leaders who lived

or are still living in countries with a majority religious tradition that is not their own. The topic served as a reminder that sharing experiences of coexistence is vital to continue the dialogue and find solutions to conflicts. Rabbi Claude Sultan spoke of his life in Morocco, where he always experienced fraternity and hospitality. Imam Bukhari, whose family left Uzbekistan to move to Jerusalem to found a center of Sufism, established a pacifist movement that tries to discover common bonds between Arabs and Jews in Israel.

In the session on "Knowledge, Acceptance, and Mutual Recognition," several speakers pointed out that Israeli-Palestinian peace can be achieved by reflecting on what is common "to our two traditions." It is only through the efforts of all to get to know the other in their specificity while sharing the same universal aspirations that this peace can be brought about, stressed Chief Rabbi Guedj.

A moment of unity that participants said was unprecedentedly moving came when a joint prayer was recited for the victims of the December tsunami: all the participants got to their feet around the tables in the elaborate conference hall. Rabbis and imams, along with several Christian clerics, stood side by side and bowed their heads in silence. "This proves that rabbis and imams can work together for a common goal," Rabbi René Sirat said.

Messages expressing support for the conference were sent by leading religious and political individuals. "We can make a better world if we are committed to the principles of altruism—wisdom and compassion and fairness," were the words of His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan. "You can rely on our determination, and the willingness of the Kingdom of Morocco, which has never neglected its efforts to give peace

and dialogue a chance between cultures and religions of the Book," said Andre Azoulay, advisor to King Mohammed VI. "I share your hope that if Judaism and Islam are examined without prejudice, the notion of peace and the rejection of violence will emerge as common and fundamental principles," were the words of former prime minister of Israel and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Shimon Peres. Similar messages of support and encouragement were sent by Kofi Annan, secretary-general of the United Nations, Romano Prodi, president of the European Commission, and Cheikh Mokhtar Sellami, former chief mufti of Tunisia, among many others.

The congress ended with the solemn commitment of the religious representatives to persevere on the road of dialogue on which they set out in

coming to the event, in particular through a series of suggested concrete actions. The creation of a Standing Committee of Rabbis and Imams whose task will be the public condemnation of all acts of Islamophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism committed in any part of the world was announced. All participants promised to transmit to their respective communities a message of peace and to promote encounters and dialogue between the communities.

A final declaration was issued in the four languages spoken during the conference, in which participants affirmed their commitment "to strive to end all bloodshed and attacks against innocent human beings that offend the right to life and dignity given by the Almighty to all human beings." □

Eva Ruth Palmieri

Rissho Kosei-kai Celebrates 67th Anniversary

On March 5, Rissho Kosei-kai celebrated its 67th anniversary with a ceremony in Fumon Hall in the organization's headquarters complex in Tokyo. Some 4,800 members took part in the event, which was relayed by satellite TV to all branches throughout Japan, where similar ceremonies were held simultaneously.

In Fumon Hall, 40 members of young women's groups offered lighted candles and flowers. After sutra chanting led by Chairman Katsunori Yamanoi, President Nichiko Niwano offered a dedication prayer. Then Rev. Yamanoi gave an address on behalf of Rissho Kosei-kai. Referring to the current renovation of the Great Sacred Hall and President Niwano's nationwide dissemination tour for the 2006 centenary of Founder Niwano's birth, he urged members to reflect on the significance of the founding of Rissho

Kosei-kai, which has disseminated the Buddha's teachings among so many people. In a commendation ceremony, President Niwano handed letters of appreciation and gifts to senior members who had contributed significantly to the organization's development over many years.

After a representative of the members gave a speech of testimony to the faith, Rev. Yasumi Hirose, president of the Oomoto Foundation, made a congratulatory speech. Referring to the history of Rissho Kosei-kai's contributions for the welfare of humanity and world peace, he said he would continue his dedication to the Oomoto Foundation, to make it a beacon in today's world. Then President Niwano, in his speech of guidance, emphasized understanding and accepting the Buddha's teachings and conveying them to others. □

The Real Purpose of Prayer

by Kinzo Takemura

It might be wise when we pray to recognize that we may be treating the Buddha as a mere means to attain our own desires.

Founder Nikkyo Niwano was fond of saying, “Nothing makes me happier than to see how members of the faith have been saved by the teaching.” By the same token, he would also say, “It makes me sad when I hear that people are complaining that nothing good has happened to them as a result of joining the faith.”

No action is more religious in nature than prayer. Humans have engaged in prayer since prehistoric times. When we speak of prayer, we naturally include emotions of gratitude and reverence, love and adoration, devotion and conviction. Of course, even though a person’s whole world can undergo a complete change as a result of prayer, sometimes nothing at all happens.

Sometimes prayer can help people feel and act more calmly, leading them in a better direction. Sometimes it awakens normally dormant spiritual energy, causing it to rise up and bestow upon us the courage to go on with life.

Humans are weak, mortal beings. There is nothing wrong with honestly opening your heart with all its pain and suffering to the Buddha and asking for salvation and divine assistance. You do the very best you can and leave the rest to the Buddha. If you take whatever happens as the Buddha’s answer and maintain an attitude of obedient submission, this confers on you true peace of mind.

However, sometimes the reason that people pray is not to

express their devotion to the Buddha, but rather to entreat the Buddha to make their wishes come true. It might be wise to pay attention to whether we are actually putting our own desires first and treating the Buddha as a mere means to get what we want. In this sense, however, praying for world peace or the happiness of others is a wonderful thing.

Myoe (1173–1232) was a renowned priest who is said to have restored the Kego sect of Japanese Buddhism. He was a pioneer in the movement to reinvigorate the established Buddhist sects in the face of new developments happening in the early Kamakura period. He had many supporters, drawn by his purity, including the retired emperor Go-Toba. One day, someone asked Myoe to say a special prayer for him; this was most likely a wealthy man. What was Myoe’s reply? Rendered into modern speech, it went something like this:

“I am praying from morning until night for all the people in the world and you are one of them. Therefore, I hope you do not mind if I do not pray expressly for you alone.”

He went on to say, “If what you wish is something that should be granted, then it probably will be. Even if I eschew equality and embrace partiality to make a special request to the gods and the buddhas, I don’t think they will hear me. To begin with, the Buddha granted his compassion to all people, as if he considers each and every one of them his only child. In spite of this, you are not getting what you want—might not the problem lie within yourself? Your trouble is not some punishment by the Buddha—rather the source of the problem can probably be found in you yourself.

“If a baby unwittingly puts poison in its mouth, its par-

Kinzo Takemura, now retired, was the director of the Overseas Mission Office (now the International Faith Dissemination Group) of Rissho Kosei-kai and the president of Kosei Publishing Company. He served for many years as chief secretary to the late Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, founder of Rissho Kosei-kai.

ents will immediately snatch the poison out. The baby might get upset and start to cry. In the same way, even though you are temporarily in a certain situation against your will, eventually things will work themselves out. Do not [look only at your present unfavorable situation and] feel bitter toward the gods and the buddhas.”

This was the answer given by Myoe.

If you think about it, he was right. The Chinese character meaning “to pray for” (*nen*) is a combination of two characters—the one for “now” placed over the one for “heart.” This character also implies prayer in which you sound the depths of your heart and ponder what you find there.

Thus, when you pray, you must first reflect on the stubborn attachments lying deep in your own heart as you bring your hands together. That is what I think. . . .

There are people who complain, “I pray from morning until night but nothing happens,” as if they are blaming the gods and the buddhas that divine favor is not forthcoming even though they are praying so hard. However, if we think about it, nothing happening is a good thing—after all, an uneventful outcome is a lot better than a calamity!

Feelings of Guilt

A few years ago, *Bukkyo* (Buddhism) magazine (No. 47) published an article by Toshitaka Tashiro of Doho University in Nagoya. The article told the story of a mother who took her five-year-old daughter to the United States in the

hopes of receiving a heart transplant. The sick child’s condition deteriorated rapidly, but no donor could be found. Eventually, it became too late to perform the operation, and the child died. Looking back on that time of waiting, the mother said that every week she felt particularly expectant on Friday night.

Why Friday night? I suppose she knew that on Friday night many Americans hop in the car with the whole family and go somewhere. With Saturday and Sunday still ahead, Friday night is a time for parties and drinking, and therefore of accidents caused by drunken driving. When traffic accidents happen, the first victims are small children. This means a higher likelihood of a donor being found on a Friday night. Even knowing that what she was hoping for was not a good thing, no doubt the mother could not help herself. She also probably prayed that a donor could be found as soon as possible.

Later, when she could look calmly back at how she was during that time, she was able to honestly recall that she was waiting for someone to die, even though it was for her own child’s benefit. Most of us would probably pray for the same thing if we found ourselves in her position.

Human beings are truly weak. When we are in trouble and see no way out, we pray for our suffering to cease or to be delivered somehow from our trouble. At the same time we feel a certain shame at our own presumption. We cannot help feeling some embarrassment to be calling on the Buddha to help us when we are in trouble, even though in our everyday life we

do not try to do anything that might please the Buddha.

However, I wonder whether our prayers will be heard should we lose that sense of shame and stop wondering if we are really worthy and qualified to be praying for something.

If I pass an entrance examination, it means that somebody else has to fail. If I win the chance to live in a rent-controlled apartment, it means that somebody else is going to be disappointed. When the news reports that a typhoon is coming, we get worried and pray that it will avoid us. When it veers off, we feel greatly relieved, but that also means that somewhere else, other people will be weeping as the typhoon hits and floods their fields, destroying their crops.

Thus we can see that although prayer seems to be a simple thing, in reality it is a very serious matter. □

The Dharma Taught Me Self-Reliance and Equality

by Pradeep Saksena

An Indian travel agent describes how his curiosity about Japanese Buddhism led to his visiting Tokyo and discovering the bodhisattva practice of Rissho Kosei-kai.

I run a travel agency in New Delhi that makes numerous arrangements for many tourists from Japan. I came to be interested in the fact that the destinations many of them requested always included some historical places related to Buddhism, such as Sarnath, Rajgir, Kushinagar, Bodhi Gaya, and Lumbini. I was born in a Hindu family, so I grew up taking it for granted that Buddhism is a part of Hinduism. Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, is still venerated as one of the Indian deities. Therefore, in dealing with so many Japanese tourists, I came to wonder why they are so interested in the Buddha, even though he was born in India about 2,500 years ago. One day we welcomed a group of Japanese monks. At first, I thought they also wanted to visit such places for sightseeing, just like all the other Japanese tourists, but my preconceptions about their visit were soon removed. They began to offer prayers to the

Buddha, and it appeared distinctly different from the rituals Tibetan monks performed, which I had seen before. A guide by profession, I had some knowledge about Tibetan refugees in India, including their religion and lifestyle. I had also had some experience in coordinating tours for Japanese tourists to Dharamsala in Northern India, where the largest Tibetan Buddhist community in the country is located. Through such experiences of guiding Japanese tourists and monks, though I did not have enough knowledge to perceive the true nature of the teaching they were following, I came to be very interested in the teachings of Japanese Buddhism.

Encounter with Rissho Kosei-kai

At that time I could only satisfy my interest in Japanese Buddhism through reading several books. At the same time, I began to study the Japanese language, because I wanted to understand not only their Buddhism but also the Japanese mentality. I managed to speak a few Japanese words when I guided Japanese tourists. Nearly five years after I came to have an interest in Buddhism, I made the acquaintance of a Japanese businessman, Mr. Joe Fujii, who was visiting India for sightseeing. I guided him to some important Buddhist sites as I usually did. We soon became very good friends. He was formerly a dealer of imported cars working for Yanase Co., Ltd. But when his father founded a company to take care of funeral ceremonies for members of Rissho Kosei-kai, he joined that business. So that was the first time that I learned through him that there are some lay religious organizations in Japan that follow the Mahayana teachings. I had little knowledge about such organizations, but from that time I gave serious thought to the idea that one day I would like to go to Japan to gain experience through living together with monks or lay members of a Buddhist organization.

On August 3, 1999, I took a flight to Japan. In his office

Pradeep Saksena is the director of the Delhi Dharma Center of Rissho Kosei-kai in the Indian capital.

Mr. Saksena addresses the participants in a ceremony to welcome new minister of the South Asia faith dissemination area held at the Delhi Dharma Center on January 26 of this year.

in the Marunouchi section of Tokyo, I asked a favor of Mr. Fujii: I requested that he contact some Buddhist organizations and introduce me to them. Printing out a map showing the site of Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters from his computer, he soon began telephoning the headquarters to arrange for an appointment for me. Because he was not available at that time to take me to the headquarters, I had to go there by myself by taking the subway. Honestly speaking, it was very hard for me to reach there on the very day I had arrived in Tokyo for the first time, even though I am a professional guide in India.

When I came to Japan, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, was hospitalized. He later passed away on October 4, a few months after I came. So I feel very sorry that I missed the chance to meet him. But on the day when the founder's funeral ceremony was held, I heard that Mr. Fujii was driving the funeral car. I was very much moved by this. Without his help and connections, I would not have had the chance to meet the Dharma.

Realizing the Bodhisattva Practice

When I was a college student, I volunteered as a social worker. I had a strong feeling that I needed to do something to help others. But I may have been more or less selfish. I did not care for others' feelings very much. However, after joining Rissho Kosei-kai's Itabashi Branch in Tokyo, because Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters had arranged this

for me, and attending the hoza counseling sessions and other religious ceremonies, I realized that I was gradually beginning to change. By chanting the sutra readings together with other members, I felt that my heart and mind were being purified. I came to think that I did not want happiness only for myself. When some members were able to find solutions to their problems through the discussion and guidance in the hoza sessions, and they experienced true happiness and expressed their thanks to all members, I also felt happiness, naturally.

In India, we are very much accustomed to seeing people in terms of the religions into which they were born. Indeed, the Buddha was born into a Vedic background: his parents were following the Vedic teachings of Hinduism. But the Buddha himself lived a life as a normal human being, teaching the truth that everybody is equal—everybody has the potential to become a buddha. Therefore, the Buddha's teaching of the bodhisattva practice is for everybody. The Buddha was just a preacher who expounded the Dharma for all people to understand. Actually, after the Buddha's nirvana, people formulated his teachings into a religion. But I believe that living as a practitioner of the Dharma is not a religion in a sense. So when I began practicing the Dharma under the guidance of the Itabashi Branch members, I did not think that I had converted to Buddhism. I was nonetheless able to realize the importance of self-reliance and the spirit of equality through the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai.

In other words, I could grow spiritually. When I had left India, I simply wanted to learn about Buddhism. But by learning about Buddhism and practicing the Dharma together with Rissho Kosei-kai members, I felt that I was developing a positive outlook.

Uplift the Poor

In India, many problems arising from the caste system remain unsolved. Discrimination by birth and violence against the people called the harijans (also known as “out-castes,” or “untouchables”) are considered the most serious examples. The majority of such people are poor. They have to go to a different temple to offer prayers. They even have to go to a different place to drink water from a tap or well. Such things still continue in some parts of India. So when I returned to India, what I wanted to do first was something to help others, whoever they may be, through the dissemination of the Dharma. Therefore, I decided to open a Dharma center in Delhi for this purpose as a lay religious organization. My wish was fully realized when the Itabashi Branch members agreed to support my project. It was officially opened in 2003 as the Delhi Dharma Center under the supervision of Rissho Kosei-kai’s headquarters. Now, we also have wealthy persons from higher castes, too, among our members. But most members are from the lower castes and they are poor people. I am always concentrating as local leader of the center on saving them because they are really hoping that they also can live ordinary lives like ordinary human beings. They are human beings, but they are not always treated like human beings. They want to grow, but people in higher castes tend to look down on them. Even in the hoza sessions or other meetings held within the Dharma Center, when all members come and sit together, people of the higher castes react with surprise and bewilderment. They complain to me, shouting, “Saksena, they cannot sit with us.” But I always encourage them to do the bodhisattva practice for all people. Even sitting together in a meeting is very difficult for Indians, and sometimes it provokes someone to anger. This is the main reason that the doctrine of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is considered very important for India, because it teaches the importance of equality and the need to remove social injustice. Likewise, we are also trying to do our best through following the teachings of Founder Nikkyo Niwano.

Polishing the Buddha-Nature

At present, my most important goal is to organize a community in which all members can share happiness with others and can shine with a clear light to abolish the darkness symbolized by the caste system. That is why the Delhi Dharma Center is open to all people, whatever religion

they follow. We are not living alone. We can all live together by respecting, understanding, and helping one another.

India is considered a very special country in the world in three aspects. First, it has the largest-scale democracy in terms of the numbers of the electorate. Also, it has numerous languages and religions. It is said that if you move even two hundred kilometers, you can hear several different tongues. And about 80 percent of all Indians are Hindu. We have Christians and Sikhs. We have Jains, too, who are followers of Jainism, which has survived for more than 2,500 years—since the time of Shakyamuni himself. But the largest non-Hindu group is the Muslim community. Our members never see people by religion, however, so if Muslims want to join us, we always welcome them. But they take their creed very strictly. It is not easy for them to become members of the center. Yet now we have six young Muslims. I have begun a Japanese-language class inside the Dharma Center for the members because, through my own experience as a guide, I thought that providing them the opportunity to learn Japanese would be helpful for them one day. Sometimes the Muslims come to the center only to join the class. Gradually, they become interested in our social activities for the needy and the hoza sessions. They really intend to join us, but their parents will not allow them to do so. For that reason, we cannot have the installation ceremony for enshrining the focus of ancestor veneration in their houses, but, frankly speaking, all of the six Muslims are positively taking the chance to participate in civic activities and are also chanting the Lotus Sutra and joining the hoza sessions together with the Hindu members. I have already introduced them to the Itabashi Branch members in Tokyo. The Itabashi members warmly welcomed our new members, who not only follow the Qur’an, but also seek the Buddha Way at the same time.

Whether one is a Hindu or Muslim is of no import because we live in harmony here, and I am proud to be an Indian and to have been born in the birthplace of the Buddha. We are all just polishing our hearts and our minds through practicing the Dharma. We all have to find the buddha-nature in ourselves and to learn to see it in all others. I believe that this is what the founder wished us to do. In such a way, we will be able to revive the spirit of the Mahayana tradition in India, the land of its birth.

It is my humble request to all members of Rissho Kosei-kai all over the world to visit the land of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Delhi Dharma Center and let us work together on dissemination, outreach, and donations to poor and needy people. I am very thankful to our beloved founder, Nikkyo Niwano, and to President Nichiko Niwano for giving us such a wonderful teaching of the Dharma of equality, filled with happiness for everybody. □

The Buddha's Teachings Save the Children

The mother of an elementary-school boy who was then nine years old describes her personal experience with one of his classmates who was seen as the main cause of the chaos that was disrupting school for everyone.

What am I to do?, Harumi Ogawa sighed to herself as she stared down at her sleeping son. Akiya, age 9, had been down for the past two days with a fever of 40° C (104° F).

The chaos at school was partly responsible for his fever. Akiya's third-grade class was already in a state of near collapse by May 2003, only one month after the start of the school year. Harumi had been shocked at the poor discipline of the class when she attended the parents' visiting day that had suddenly been called by the school just a couple of weeks before. She watched as two boys in the class pounded their desks, raised their voices, and wandered in and out of the classroom at will. They weren't

quiet for a moment. Every so often, older students passing by in the hallway would kick the classroom door. The students all seemed uptight, bickering with and hitting each other. Yet the teacher just turned her back and kept on with the assignment of the day, simply ignoring the chaos all around her.

Things had come to a head just a few days before. One of the main perpetrators of the chaos in the third-grade classroom, a boy named K, had gone and disrupted a sixth-grade class. An angry sixth-grade boy, wielding a cutter-knife in his hand, had chased K all the way back to the third-grade classroom, and as soon as he caught the third-grader, the sixth-grade boy held the cutter knife to his neck. "I'm going to cut you up." "Go ahead, I dare you!" Nothing worse happened after that, but the whole class was traumatized by what they had seen.

Some kids stopped eating. Others complained of stomachaches every morning. And still others, like Akiya, suffered raging fevers. The parents heard about the cutter-knife incident, not from the teacher, but from the children.

"That teacher is no good. It's not safe to send my boy to school." Harumi wasn't the only parent who felt this way.

All Are the Buddha's Children

"We can't put up with this any more. That teacher must go. And while we're at it, those troublemaking children should be kicked out, too." A number of parents started insisting that the only thing to do was to file a written petition with the local school board. Harumi wasn't sure. It seemed the right thing to do, yet at the same time. . . .

One day, at the local branch of Rissho Kosei-kai, the then branch head, Rev. Hiroyo Shimomura, stopped Harumi and asked, "How is your son's class doing these days?" Harumi told her about the cutter-knife incident and how upset all the parents were.

"What a painful experience," Rev. Shimomura sympathized. "But you know, everyone's life is precious. Don't try to exorcise them just because of the trouble they are causing. The teacher and those children are crying for help. You've got to stop and listen to them." Rev. Shimomura spoke softly, but her gaze was steady and strong.

After thinking on Rev. Shimomura's words, Harumi arranged to have K's mother speak at the next parents' meeting. This was the first time Harumi and the other parents were to learn something about the boy and his family background.

They learned that the family had just moved to the area in April, and that the boy was still uncomfortable at his new school. They heard that a bad bout of the mumps had left him nearly deaf in his right ear and his difficulty in hearing made him irritable. And they learned that the

Harumi Ogawa is a member of the Minami-Tama Branch of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo.

mother was working full-time and found it hard to spare time for her son. Suddenly the parents' anger faded. They all agreed that they needed to work together to put the class back on track.

This was not an easy task. Harumi befriended the mother and paid her frequent visits. She listened to the mother pour out her worries about her husband, her son, and her work. One day people started to notice a change in the mother. "Why, K's mother has become so kind!" Sure enough, the change was evident in her face, for now she seemed relaxed and peaceful.

Look into Your Children's Hearts

Encouraged by Rev. Shimomura, Harumi next began to coax her son to become friends with his troublesome classmate. But Akiya was reluctant.

"I can't become friends with K. He's rough and mean. He's wicked."

Harumi choked. She remembered how she had told Akiya to keep away from the boy. "Mother will do something about him," she had reassured her son. But then Akiya continued.

"Come to think of it, though, I'm kind of wicked, too, when I fight with my friends. I guess we're pretty much alike. I'll try to make friends with him after all." And he did, beginning the very next day. Akiya's friendship whittled away at K's brash defenses.

While all this was going on, the other parents also had prevailed upon the school to allow them to come into the classroom and help the embattled teacher. Harumi joined them, teaching the children sign language, a hobby of hers, and at other times reading them stories out loud. She worked hard to pay close attention to each and every child in that classroom.

One day, Harumi was reading a story to the class when K suddenly stood up to wander out of the classroom as he had always done before.

"Whoa! Not so fast. You're not going to run away." Harumi grabbed the boy and looked into his face. K gazed right back at her with a smile.

Why, this boy is lonely. That's why he causes such a fuss. He wants us to pay attention to him, Harumi thought to herself.

The parents' endeavors finally brought their reward, and the class began to settle down. The children played together and the communication with the teacher was much better than it had been.

It was the second term now.

"I'm home!" Harumi rushed to the door to greet her son. There was Akiya with several other boys, including K. They all started talking to her at once.

"Mom, we want to collect the pull-tabs on soda cans. You're supposed to be able to turn them in for a wheelchair. Mom, tell us how we can do that."

"Saito's grandma has trouble walking and we want to get her a wheelchair."

"K told us if we wanted to know more about this kind of volunteer work we should ask Akiya's mom. He said you would know what to do."

The boys clustered around her as Harumi went to her computer and started searching for information on the Web. No sooner had she printed out some pages than the boys grabbed the paper and rushed off. "We're going to take these to our teacher."

Why, of course! We all want to help others. I should have seen the buddha-nature in these children. Harumi apologized silently to the boys for her negligence and offered up a prayer of thanksgiving.

Very soon the whole class, both teacher and students, were involved in the pull-tab collection campaign. A collection box was set up at our branch, too, and the members happily cooperated. Once a month, Akiya and six or seven of his buddies would go to the branch and collect the pull-tabs in the box. It wasn't long before the whole school was collecting pull-tabs.

Teacher, students, and parents were working together at last. By the end of the school year, the third-grade class that had once seemed on the verge of disintegrating was a cohesive whole, and not one student was left out of the group.

"The classroom seems so much smaller now than it did a year ago," said one mother, as happy tears rolled down her cheeks. "I guess it just means the children have matured and grown." And that's not all, thought Harumi to herself. We parents have learned something from the children. We've grown up too.

The late afternoon sun pours into the branch hall, which echoes with the sound of children's laughter. Harumi smiles as she watches the excited children count out the latest batch of pull-tabs. She trembles to think of what might have happened if she and the other parents had not tried to work things out with the children that day a year ago.

Our first thoughts were only for our own children. We were willing to cut out the teacher and the troublemaking children just to protect our own. If we had gone that route, we could have caused irreparable damage to the hearts and minds of all our children. We may never have gotten to see these shining, smiling faces.

Rev. Shimomura's words echo in Harumi's mind: "The Lotus Sutra teaches how to bring life to everything." Harumi's gaze returns to the children and her heart is filled with a thankful prayer. □

Venerated as a Human Being

by Hajime Nakamura

Early Buddhists looked up to Sakyamuni as a great teacher who had been able to control his own passions. He exemplified the ideal of human existence.

As the Buddhist Saṅgha grew and changed, the image of the founder it venerated also grew and changed. Gotama was called the Buddha (“Enlightened One”) because he had realized eternal Truth (the Dharma); by this reckoning, all who realize the Truth must equally be buddhas. The designation “buddha” implies neither a supernatural existence nor a mysterious being. It does not suggest that such a person might be some kind of transcendental deity.

The early Buddhist sutras show considerable differences between their earlier and later strata. The earliest stratum of texts treats Gotama simply as a superb human being, one who is addressed by the deities in the second person. It is very hard to view the Buddha portrayed in the Sutta-nipāṭa as just a religious figure or a philosopher; we must also regard him as a man. In general, Buddhists of later times called Gotama “Sakyamuni”; in the earliest period, though, his disciples addressed him as “Sakka.” This informal style of address appears only in verse; it is found nowhere in prose. It seems, therefore, that early Buddhists thought of Gotama primarily in terms of his membership of the Sakya clan.

Opponents or nonbelievers called the Buddha “the samaṇa Gotama,” that is, the ascetic Gotama. In ancient verse, however, Sakyamuni was addressed without any honorifics, merely as “Gotama.” Not only did lay believers speak to him in this way; we can also find examples of ordained disciples using the same form of address. Brahmins, and occasionally Brahmins who had taken refuge in the Buddha, addressed him politely, using “bho Gotama.” Brahmins also seem to have called his disciples simply “Gotama.” The expression “Gotama Buddha” appears relatively late in

verse. In the eyes of later Buddhists, addressing the Buddha merely as “Gotama” without any title showed a lack of respect.

In another example of ancient verse, a Brahmin youth and a *bhikkhu* address Gotama as *mārisa*. This is almost the same as *mādisa*, which is equivalent to the Sanskrit *mādrśa*, meaning “a person the same as myself.” In using this form the Brahmin youth was addressing Gotama as a close friend; there is no sense here of any move toward deification. Ordinary people tended to call Gotama *bhikkhu* (“alms-seeking monk”), regarding him as an ascetic

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).

undertaking meditation alone in the forest. Ancient verse also contains instances of Brahmanical terms being used as forms of address. For example, the title *brāhmaṇa* was often given to a wise person or to one who had perfected his training. Though Gotama Buddha was doubtless such a person, the term never has this sense in the prose sections. In the earliest period of Buddhism, Brahmins were highly respected by all sectors of society. The followers of Buddhism also acknowledged this fact, so the term *brāhmaṇa* appears in the oldest texts. As Buddhism grew and gained power, however, Buddhist monks came to be venerated above Brahmins, so there was no longer any need to refer to a perfected person as a *brāhmaṇa*. In the early days of Jainism as well, a true practitioner was called a *māhaṇa*. In fact, instances of “Brahmin” used as an epithet for the ideal practitioner in both Buddhist and Jain poetry is believed to predate the Aśokan period, for the Aśokan edicts show clearly that Buddhism and Jainism were by then distinguished from Brahmanism.

Another term used to describe a practitioner of Buddhism in the early period was *isi*; for example, *isi* was used in ancient verse to refer to buddhas in general. In a large number of cases, the Buddha or Gotama is called *mahesi* (“great sage”). Ancient Jain verse, too, follows similar usage, referring to those perfected in practice as *mahesi*. Though Gotama was called “*deva* seer” (*devisi* = *devarṣi*) in the most ancient texts, this term seems to mean a seer who can be ranked among the *devas*, or a *deva*-like seer. Such usages confirm that in the earliest period, followers of both Buddhism and Jainism viewed their founders as *mahesi* in the Brahmanical sense.

With the growth of the idea of the seven buddhas of the past (that Sakyamuni was the seventh in a line of past buddhas), Gotama was called the “seventh great sage from among the sages,” and addressed as “the seventh sage.” In India since the time of the Ṛg Veda, seven sages (*vipra*) were believed to have existed. Who these seven were varies with tradition, but the idea of seven remained firm. Even in later times people tended to associate the number seven with the word “sage”; Buddhism probably inherited this thinking. However, with the Buddha’s gradual deification, Buddhists preferred not to call him a sage; we find many cases where the term *mahesi* in the verse has been replaced with *bhagavant* in the prose sections of the sutras.

Like other religious leaders of the time, Gotama was also called *muni*, as in Sakyamuni, “sage of the Sakya clan,” or *mahāmuni*, “great sage.” This usage was extended to those who were his disciples. *Muni* is a noun derived from a root that means “to consider”; it referred originally to a wise man or sage. *Muni* is used in this sense in Brahmanical and Jain texts; the Jain usage of *mahāmuni* to refer to sages, in par-

ticular to its founder Mahāvīra, was taken over by Buddhism. Following the popular derivation, however, Buddhists probably believed that a sage (*muni*) was so called because he preserved silence (*mauna*). There are cases where *muni* is interpreted adverbially to mean “preserving silence and not performing evil.”

Another epithet widely used in the Buddha’s time was *vedagū*, meaning “one with a knowledge of the Vedic texts,” “one who knows the Vedas,” or “one skilled in the Vedas.” We find many instances of *vedagū*’s being used to refer to Gotama or to those perfected in practice. Other epithets include *viditaveda* (“one who knows the Vedas”) and *tevijja* (“having the three *vijjas*”), one who possesses the three forms of knowledge. The three forms of knowledge are usually interpreted as the ability to know the former lives of oneself and others (Pāli, *pubbenivāsānussati-ñāṇa*), the ability to see anything at any distance (*sattāniṃ cutūpapāta-ñāṇa*), and the ability to destroy the defilements (*āsavānaṃ khaye ñāṇa*). In the early stages of Buddhism, however, they more probably referred to the three Vedas, since early texts refer to a Brahmin proficient in the three Vedas as *tevijja*. The Buddha and other accomplished people were also called *brahmapatta* (“one who knows Brahṁā”) or *nahātaka* (= *snātaka*, “a youth who has completed his studies as a Brahmin, who has bathed, and who has returned home”). Another form of the latter is *brahmabhūta* (“he who has become a Brahṁā”). Figures respected in Brahmanism, such as the Vedic scholar (*śroṭiya*) and the religious wanderer (*parivrājaka*), were described in ancient Buddhist verse as people who had pursued religious training and who could manifest the virtues emanating from that training. The prose sections of sutras composed after the expansion of Buddhism, however, lack such explanations.

A further Brahmanical influence was the application of the special family name Aṅgīrasa to Gotama. When Gotama is addressed in verse he is often called Aṅgīrasa, meaning “shining one”:

“(12) Then the lay believer Candanangalika, before the Venerable Master, spoke praise in suitable verse:

“The sweet-smelling red lotus
Opens in the early morn,
Its perfume unspent.
Behold the radiance of the Aṅgīrasa [Buddha],
Like the sun lighting up the heavens.”

In the Ṛg Veda, *aṅgīras* denoted beings midway between the realms of human beings and *devas*, and which mediated between them. It included beings such as heavenly children, human ancestors, and those people who shared and conferred the blessings of the gods on human beings.

Originally the term appears to have meant those who acted as messengers between the gods and human beings. The term derives from the root *aṅg* and has a linguistic connection with the Greek word *angelos* (“angel,” translated from the Hebrew word meaning “messenger”). That the fire god Agni was believed to have been an *aṅgiras* fits this interpretation well. Manfred Mayrhofer, however, rejects such explanations as unreliable and thinks that *Aṅgiras* was the name of a sage (*ṛṣi*); its plural form *aṅgirasah* he explains only as “eine Klasse von höheren Wesen mit Agni an der Spitze” (“a class of exalted beings with Agni at their head”). Clearly, *Aṅgīrasa* represents a kind of spiritual being in the *R̥g Veda*, and as such the word was used to refer to the Buddha in the verse just quoted from the *Saṅyutta-nikāya*. It is an epithet found only in the oldest layer of verse in the Pāli *suttas* (for example, *Theragāthā*, 536), not in any prose section. This fact implies that when Buddhism arose, it maintained links with Vedic culture that were severed as it developed. Interestingly, Buddhaghosa interpreted *Aṅgīrasa* as “the rays of light [*rasmiyo*] emanating from the Buddha’s body [*aṅga*].” This, however, is no more than a roundabout popular interpretation of its derivation. In the *R̥g Veda*, *Aṅgīrasa* seems to refer to a group of magicians viewed as heretics by orthodox Brahmins. Members of the *Aṅgiras* tribe, however, were said to be endowed with youthful vigor, to be undying, to be “heavenly children,” and to be the “seven sages (*vipra*).” This belief indicates that the later idea of the seven buddhas of the past, and of the seven sages, was influenced by the thought of the *R̥g Veda* and later texts.

In addition, the names of mythological beings of the time were often employed. For example, *Sakyamuni* and *Buddha* are both described as *nāga*; this epithet probably derives from the earlier custom of addressing in this way those who have perfected their practice. In early Jainism, too, *Mahāvīra* was called *nāga*. Buddhism apparently took over this usage and applied it to its own founder. The epithet *nāga* as applied to the Buddha seems to have meant “elephant” rather than “dragon” or “snake.”

In a similar fashion, *Sakyamuni* and *Buddha* are also called *yakkha*. In later times buddhas and *yakkhas* were thought of as diametrically opposed, but in the most ancient stratum of the sutras, *yakkha* appears as an epithet of the Buddha. *Yakkha* is equivalent to the Sanskrit *yakṣa* and the Old Māgadhī *jakkha*. *Yakṣa* derives from the root *yaj* (“to make offerings,” “to celebrate”) and means “a spirit that receives offerings.” The word appears frequently in the *R̥g Veda*, though in spite of interpretive efforts by scholars, its meaning there remains unclear. What is certain is that *yakṣa* did not mean what later Buddhist writings indicated, a “demigod” or “monster.” All we can say with confidence

is that *yakṣa* in the earliest sense signified a spiritual and supernatural being.

Jainism shares the earliest Buddhist idea of *yakkha*. In Jain scriptures, *jakkha* is mentioned with *nāga* and *bhūta* (“spirits”) and is considered a kindly being: “Endowed with the various virtues, the *jakkha* lives in the upper realms [of the heavenly world] and shines like a radiant being.” Archaeological evidence also adds to our information. Numerous statues of *yakkhas* dating from the Maurya and Śuṅga dynasties have been found; although inscriptions identify them as *yakkhas*, all are depicted with comely and bright faces and none exhibits weird or frightening characteristics. These portrayals bear out the assumption that *gāthās* extolling *Sakyamuni* (or the Buddha) as a *yakkha* belong to the period up until the Maurya dynasty, or at the latest before the establishment of the Śuṅga dynasty. We can also assume that descriptions of the *yakkha* as a fearful being postdate the Śuṅga dynasty (after 75 B.C.E.).

We have seen how in the earliest period Buddhism used epithets derived from Brahmanism; at the same time it also employed terms belonging to the various sects that had evolved in opposition to Brahmanism. Non-Brahmanical religious practitioners were called *samaṇa* (Skt., *śramaṇa*), “one who seeks the Way.” Buddhism also followed this stance, and therefore Gotama was called *samaṇa*. Non-Buddhist people called him “*samaṇa* Gotamo.” (Later, when Buddhism spread to China, the Chinese translated *śramaṇa* using *tao-jen*, meaning “a person of the Way,” from the “Heaven and Earth” chapter of the *Chuang-tzu*, a classic written by the fourth-century B.C.E. Chinese sage Chuang-tzu.) Because this was the usual term of address for religious practitioners of the time, Chinese Buddhist usage followed suit. As the process of deifying Gotama proceeded within Buddhism, however, this mode of address came to be used by non-Buddhists only; Buddhists invariably used the expressions World-honored One or Buddha. This change is apparent if we compare the verse and prose sections of the early Buddhist sutras.

“Buddha” itself means no more than “enlightened one.” Practitioners of Jainism in the earliest period were called “buddhas.” In the Jain text *Isibhāsīyāṃ*, all renowned philosophers (even if they were not Jain) were called “buddha.” In China, the Sanskrit term “buddha” was written with the characters 佛陀 (*fo-t’uo*), but the word was usually abbreviated to 佛 (*fo*), or its simplified form, 仏. In a private communication, the late lexicographer Tetsuji Morohashi pointed out that the right-hand element of the character *fu* (弗) clearly signifies the negative and that the related character 沸 (*fei*), for example, whose left-hand element means water, refers to the bubbling and boiling of water, thus to a changed state of that element. Similarly, “buddha” could be

interpreted as meaning a man who is more than a man. Although I must leave the evaluation of this suggestion to experts, I feel that it is likely to be correct.

Another term used during the Buddha's time was *kevalin*, referring mainly to those *samaṇa* who had attained perfect wisdom (*kevala*); Jainism employed it in this way, thus preserving this usage down through the centuries. In the earliest period of Buddhism, the Buddha was also called *kevalin*, but later this epithet, which other religions also used, was discarded.

In a small portion of ancient verse we find the Buddha being referred to as *gaṇin* ("one who leads a band of disciples"). This form of address was applied to famous religious teachers in general (for example, the leaders of the six sects contemporaneous with Buddhism). It in no way implies that Gotama was godlike, but rather that society regarded him in the same light as other religious leaders of the time. In this sense he was addressed with the honorific Master (*satthā*).

Besides being a person who had seen the Truth, Gotama was one who preached it (*saccavādin*). Jain sages, too, were respectfully termed *saccavāi*. Being one who spoke the Truth, "the Perfected One [Tathāgata] never lies. What was voiced could not be erased." Gotama was, then, a person endowed with all the virtues of a religious figure. He was one who had separated himself from greed (*vītaraṅga*), he had overcome the defilements, and he had conquered the forces of Māra. Therefore he was a conqueror (*jina*) and a victor (*viṇṇasamgāma*); those who followed him could also be termed "conquerors." Following the same pattern, Gotama (or the Buddha) might also be called Mahāvīra ("great hero"). This epithet was not restricted to the Buddha; *bhikkhus*, such as Mahāmoggallāna, were also addressed in this way. Sometimes simply *vīra* ("the strong," "hero") was used. That the Buddha was regarded as *vīra* is proof that he had not yet begun to be deified. In the earliest period, Jainism, like Buddhism, called its practitioners of high attainment "the strong." In both Buddhism and Jainism, those who had perfected their training were termed Jina and Mahāvīra.

Sakyamuni had overcome all delusions and had "reached the other shore of existence" (*bhavassa pārāgū*). Yet reaching the other shore was not an attainment of Sakyamuni alone; the same could be said for all those who had achieved their goal in religious practice. In Jainism practitioners were called *pārāgāmin* ("those who have set out for the other shore"). Here is another instance where Buddhism incorporated epithets from other religions. That Sakyamuni was also called *cakkhumat* ("one with eyes or vision"), *samantacakkhu* ("one whose eyes are everywhere"), and Eye of the World means merely that he was endowed with pow-

ers of insight. Ordinary practitioners, too, could be called *cakkhumat*; here, "eyes" are considered to be bestowed on ordinary people.

Because the Buddha was completely human, he was addressed as "the supreme of all human beings" or "the supreme of all living beings." Sometimes he was also called "supreme among gods and human beings." In other words, he was the lord (*janinda*) of all. He was considered a great man, but even so people viewed him in personal terms, using expressions such as "my father" and "my grandfather." He was no more and no less than a "good friend" to all people, as we are good friends to one another in this present world.

The various epithets of Gotama just discussed could be applied to the Buddha or to any religious practitioner, for both were equally human with essentially no difference between them. This idea of the Buddha is considerably different from that which became prominent as a result of the growth of Buddha worship in Aśoka's time. The verses that include these epithets seem to have been composed before the rise of the Maurya dynasty, or at the latest by the time of its third king, Aśoka.

Other epithets for the Buddha or Sakyamuni include:

- *akutobhaya* ("one who has no fear"): Theragāthā, 289.
- *anantagocara, apada* ("[the Buddha of] infinite range of perception, the trackless one"; i.e., one who has no desires and thus leaves no footprints): Dhammapada, 179, 189.
- *antimadehadhārīn* ("one who holds the last physical body"; i.e., one who has no more rebirth): Itivuttaka, 38 G.
- *antimasarīra* ("one who has the last physical body"): Aṅguttara-Nikāya, vol. 1, p. 165 G.
- *asayhasāhin* ("one who has borne the unbearable"): Theragāthā, 536.
- *balappatta* ("one who has attained the [ten] powers"): Saṃyutta-Nikāya, vol. 1, p. 110 G.
- *dhammappati* ("the lord of the Law"): Theragāthā, 758.
- *dhammarāja* ("the king of the Law"): Theragāthā, 389, 399, 889.
- *nirupadhi* ("one who has no defilements"), *nirupadhī, nirupadhika*: Saṃyutta-Nikāya, vol. 1, p. 5 G, p. 141 G; vol. 4, p. 158 G; Udāna, V, 6.
- *parisāsu visārada* ("one who has no hesitation in the assembly"): Saṃyutta-Nikāya, vol. 1, p. 110 G.
- *sahājanetta* ("coinciding eye" [wisdom; "coinciding" derives from the fact that Buddhahood (enlightenment) coincides with the eye (wisdom)]): Suttanipāta, 1096.
- *sammāvimutta* ("one who has attained right liberation"): Saṃyutta-Nikāya, vol. 1, p. 109 G.
- *sumedha* ("one who excels in wisdom"): Saṃyutta-Nikāya, vol. 1, p. 144 G.

- *suṇuttavādin* (“one who teaches the Truth”): Theragāthā, 1111.
- *upāyakusala* (“one who is versed in skillful means”): Theragāthā, 158.

Later Buddhism held that the Buddha had been born into this world in order to become the Buddha. Sakyamuni himself, however, never laid claim to such views. “You and I, for reasons that we do not understand clearly, will long dwell within birth and death and will not cease from rebirth.” In this statement, Gotama is speaking as a human being, reflecting on the human condition. He, too, walks the world of delusion.

Early Buddhists looked up to Sakyamuni as a great teacher who had been able to control his own passions. The student Jatukaṇṇin spoke thus of him: “Hearing of a hero [who has overcome the defilements], of a man who has no sensuous desires, I have come here to ask him [the Buddha], who has crossed the raging stream, about being without sensuous desire. Speak to me of the state of tranquillity, man with vision! Master, speak to me as it really is. The Venerable Master [the Buddha] behaves, controlling the various sensuous desires, as the brilliant sun conquers the earth with its brilliance. One of great wisdom! Speak to me, who is with little wisdom, of the Dhamma. I would know about doing away with birth and old age in this world.” Another student, called Bhadrāvudha, came to him with the same earnest request: “Hero! Many people from various regions have come wishing to hear your words. For their sakes, explain it to them well, for you know this doctrine as it is.” Similarly, Sāriputta said: “As the one with vision [the Buddha] is seen by the *devas* and people of the world, he has dispelled all darkness [of ignorance] and alone has attained the joy [of the Dhamma]. I have come here with a question, on behalf of all those who are fettered, to you who are the Buddha without obstruction and without deceit, you who are venerable of those following him [*tādi*], you who are the enlightened one [Buddha].”

Sakyamuni exemplified the ideal of human existence. He had “removed all dust and stain, been seated in meditation, accomplished all that he had to do, been unstained by the defilements, and gone to the far shore of all phenomena.” This is clearly an idealization of the historical figure of Sakyamuni, yet there is no emphasis here, in the earliest stratum of the sutras, on the belief in miracles or superhuman powers. In this sense the figure of Sakyamuni as presented here is markedly different from that of later sutras. Verses such as the ones just quoted leave us in little doubt that Sakyamuni, respected and looked up to as the founder of Buddhism, was a historical person.

To be continued

The Buddha seated on the lotus pedestal, a Korean painting which is now in the possession of the Kyoto National Museum.

The Precept Against Killing and Acting Against Violence

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.

Human beings, all of us, are sustained in our lives by consuming other living things. Even rice, the staple food of the Japanese, can be considered in this way. The rice seeds sprout into the seedlings that we plant, which in time develop the grains that we harvest, hull, and eat. In doing this, we destroy the life of the rice, but we do so as living beings within a vast circular system. In that sense, I think that the worst thing is for us to be guilty of indifference to all of our actions that threaten or destroy other forms of life, and to the willful destruction of our natural environment. "Do not kill" is the first of the five precepts for lay Buddhists, and it teaches us that we must not deprive other living beings of the life that all possess. What makes me appreciate the severity of Shakyamuni's teaching is his comprehension of how all living beings exist and function together, through his realization of this truly essential point that we may overlook if we do not exercise due care.

However, even if we say that everything, including rice and vegetables, possesses life, it is a fact that human beings cannot survive without eating. Therefore, we must never forget that our lives are sustained by the taking of other forms of life, and we should always retain a sense of gratitude to them. We are all alike in cherishing our own lives, so we must not do harm to others, must always take care in how we use things, and must never cause damage to other living beings unnecessarily.

If we took the sense of the precept to the extreme, and took no form of life at all, we would all die. Of course, rice and vegetables have life. So do insects such as flies, mosqui-

toes, and moths, and so do the bacteria and viruses that cause diseases like cholera and cancer. If we refused to kill any of these as a matter of principle, human beings would die in great numbers, and that too would be a violation of the precept. Shakyamuni, who made the Middle Way the core of his teaching, would not have encouraged any extreme interpretation of the precept. We know this because he never forbade even his closest disciples to eat fish.

How should lay Buddhists like ourselves, living in the contemporary world, interpret the precept against killing? First, we must never, under any circumstances, kill another human being. By carrying this out, we could eradicate war from our world. Second, we must not kill any living being, including plants, without good reason. Third, we should not kill any form of life, whether birds, animals, fish, or insects, for our own pleasure. These three injunctions reflect, I believe, the spirit of the Middle Way.

When we think about the dignity of life, we tend to think simply about human beings, with other living beings considered inferior. This attitude is not accepted by Buddhism, which teaches that all sentient beings possess the buddha-nature—that there is nothing in all the phenomenal world that does not possess the seed for attaining buddhahood. The Buddha, after being awakened to enlightenment, taught us that everything has life, and the life of one thing is mutually supported by the lives of everything else, because of the inherent buddha-nature within all things. It is essential that everyone living in the world today not only comprehend this, but put it into action through ethics and morals. Unless people take on this responsibility, the world will never improve.

Chapter 5 of the Nirvana Sutra contains the following story: Once there was a monk called Realizing Virtue. He was skilled at religious discourse and taught widely. Monks who had broken the precepts felt great resentment against

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him and planned to attack him with sticks and blades. Hearing this, the king, Having Virtue, sought to protect the Dharma by making war against the evil monks, and so saved Realizing Virtue from harm. The king, however, was gravely wounded and died of his injuries. He was reborn in the Pure Land. So must we protect the Dharma when it faces decay.

Mahakassapa had once asked the Buddha, "Is it a violation of the precepts for bhikkhus to be protected by lay people carrying weapons?" "No," came the reply. "It is not a violation of the precepts for lay people to carry weapons to protect the true Dharma. However, those weapons must not be used to take life."

This is a very important teaching for us today and we must examine it closely. In short, we are told that it is all right for ordinary people to take up "sticks and blades," in the words of the sutra, only in order to protect the truth, but that it is not right to kill anyone. Shakyamuni did not, under any circumstances, support violence and made a virtue of protecting the Dharma even at the sacrifice of one's own life, like King Having Virtue. In other words, resistance is right, but killing is wrong.

Devadatta was a brilliant man, a cousin of Shakyamuni as well as his disciple. However, he was unable to reach supreme enlightenment because of his strong ego. Seeing

the other disciples leading their lives in spiritual fulfillment, he became impatient, feeling that he was being left behind. His resentment grew to such a degree that he determined to rebel against the Buddha. He made several attempts on Shakyamuni's life and attempted to set up a rival religious community.

Once, Devadatta dropped a large boulder on Shakyamuni from a high cliff. Luckily, it broke into two during its descent; the smaller portion hit the Buddha's foot and injured it, causing extensive bleeding. Seeing the injury to their master, the disciples lost all patience and determined to capture Devadatta. However, Shakyamuni calmed them and returned to the place of retreat, enduring great pain.

Thus Shakyamuni did not allow violence to be met with violence. All the same, he also did not permit the truth to be distorted. When Devadatta gathered followers about him and created an independent group within the Sangha, the community of Buddhist believers, he instigated a drastic reform plan regarding the precepts. Shakyamuni flatly rejected the plan as being too extreme and against the spirit of the Middle Way. This was the trigger for Devdatta's secession and formation of a separate organization. Many of Shakyamuni's own followers joined him, but despite the damage this caused, it did not cause the Buddha to shift his position in the slightest. He held fast to the truth.

We must not forget this point. Regarding the destruction of "things," Shakyamuni maintained a position of nonresistance. However, he absolutely rejected any transgression of the truth. He was really a man of great courage.

Enduring anything for the sake of the Dharma, not only withstanding it but also being ready to go anywhere to actively preach it—this is the apex of the religious attitude for the apostle of peace who is devoted to nonviolence. This is encapsulated in the words of the famous saying in the Lotus Sutra: "We will not love body and life, but only care for the Supreme Way." That saying means that there must not be even one person anywhere who has not been brought into contact with the supreme Dharma. In comparison with that, our own lives are as nothing. This is the fervent expression of the mind of a person who lives in the truth and dies with compassion.

This spirit flows in the blood of many Asian people, and was manifested in the person of Mahatma Gandhi. He inspired three hundred million citizens of India and, without ever resorting to violence, he led India to freedom from three hundred years of British colonial rule. The example of his independence movement shows that a civil revolution does not have to be accompanied by bloodshed. May his belief in nonviolent resistance be supported by people everywhere in the world as an activity for peace that does not bring shame to the gods and the buddhas. □

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 10

A Teacher of the Law

(1)

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

Now the predictions of buddhahood to the bhikshus are finished. The bhikshus' downcast or solemn faces have lit up with joy. With this chapter, the direction of the Buddha's discourse changes completely. He turns his gaze to the eighty thousand (that is, the exceedingly large number) of bodhisattvas present and speaks to them through the Bodhisattva Medicine King, who is standing in the front row.

Chapters 10 to 14 ("A Teacher of the Law" to "A Happy Life") are called the "concluding part" of the first half of the Lotus Sutra. This part expounds what spiritual merit one can attain, what kinds of good deeds one can do, and how one can be useful to people and society when one understands and puts into practice the teaching of the sutra. It also urges the assembly to receive and keep the teaching, practice it, and spread it for the sake of many people. In his discourse so far, Shakyamuni has repeated over and over again that all human beings can become buddhas. In this chapter, "A Teacher of the Law," he speaks exhaustively about what a person must actually do to become a buddha and what kind of people will be able to do so. The person addressed is the Bodhisattva Medicine King. In addressing the bodhisattva by name, the Buddha is speaking to all bodhisattvas. Thus from now on it is only bodhisattvas whom the Buddha teaches directly.

Until this time people had held to the idea that there was a distinction between shravakas and bodhisattvas. In the dis-

course in the earlier chapters the Buddha emphasized that there was no essential difference among shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas, that all were bodhisattvas, walking the path toward buddhahood. To prove his statement, he gave predictions of buddhahood to many shravakas (including pratyekabuddhas). This is why the listeners from this point on are exclusively bodhisattvas. They are still the same people as before, but they have been changed within themselves. Thus the Buddha addresses them all as bodhisattvas.

TEXT At that time the World-honored One addressed the eighty thousand great leaders through the Bodhisattva Medicine King, [saying]: "Medicine King! Do you see in this assembly innumerable gods, dragon kings, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings, as well as bhikshus, bhikshunis, male and female lay devotees, seekers after shravakahood, seekers after pratyekabuddhahood, seekers after bodhisattvahood, and seekers after buddhahood? All such beings as these, in the presence of the Buddha, if they hear a single verse or a single word of the Wonderful Law Flower Sutra and even by a single thought delight in it, I predict that they will all attain Perfect Enlightenment."

COMMENTARY *Gods.* Gods (or *devas*) are deities inhabiting the heavenly realms.

• *Dragon kings, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kinaras, mahoragas.* See the November/December 1991 issue of DHARMA WORLD.

• *Human and nonhuman beings.* The Buddha says here that if human and nonhuman beings, the former including ordained male and female practitioners and male and female lay devotees, hear a single word or verse of the teaching of the Lotus Sutra and experience for even a moment an upwelling of joy arising from gratitude, they will be able to become buddhas. This shows how important an honest and frank emotional response to the teaching is as a factor in salvation and enlightenment. I am sure there is no one, however brilliant, who has not experienced a deep response to the words of a teacher, a leader, or people of old. The late Mumon Yamada, one of the greatest Zen masters of modern times, wrote of his reaction when, in his youth, he read the following passage in a sutra titled Entering Bodhisattva Practice (Bodhicaryavatara), translated into Japanese by Ekai Kawaguchi (1866–1945), a famous priest, Tibetan explorer, and linguist:

If we could cover the world with cowhide, we could walk barefoot anywhere. This, though, is impossible. If, however, we put shoes on our feet, it is as if the world were covered with cowhide. It is likewise impossible to make the world into the ideal realm we would wish. If, however, we arouse the aspiration for enlightenment, if we wear the shoes of forbearance, the world immediately becomes the ideal heaven of our mind. When we once arouse the aspiration for enlightenment, devoting ourselves body and mind to all living beings, ordinary beings at that moment can become buddhas. If the technique of turning iron into gold were discovered, it would be a wonder of the world. But an ever greater wonder is that ordinary beings can become buddhas.

This represents exactly the thought expressed in this chapter. Yamada wrote that when he read the above passage he was so moved that he determined to take ordination. What moved him created the Zen master. This is the merit of delighting in the teaching by a single thought.

The same applies to secular matters. For example, Japan's first Nobel laureate, Hideki Yukawa, as a senior high-school student in the pre-World War II system of education, heard a lecture by Albert Einstein, then on a visit to Japan. So affected was he that he decided to specialize in theoretical physics. Thus the world-famous scientist Hideki Yukawa was born. A flexible mind that can be directly moved by the words of the great is a springboard to greatness.

The teaching of the Buddha is the greatest of all great things. If a person who hears the teaching is sincerely moved

by and believes in it, that person will attain limitless heights. As such people steadily increase in number, the world will, of its own accord, grow more and more beautiful, becoming the Land of Tranquil Light.

The Buddha therefore tells us here that those who hear a single verse or a single word of the Lotus Sutra, the essence of the Buddha's teaching, and even by a single thought delight in it, will attain buddhahood. Of course this is out of the question when gratitude lasts for a very short time and then matters return to where they started. As I have said already, the guarantee of buddhahood is conditional upon a long period of religious practice. Gratitude is the seed of buddhahood. We have to nurture that seed ceaselessly, watering it diligently so that it will produce a shoot, grow a stalk, give forth leaves and flowers, and bear fruit. This is what religious practice means.

Human beings have a double potentiality: to rise to buddhahood or to fall to the four evil realms of hell, hungry spirits, animals, and asuras. We rise or fall according to whether our deeds are good or evil. If we feel gratitude (initial joy) upon hearing the Buddha's teaching, our mind begins to move toward the Buddha. Perhaps we can think of this mental movement by applying the physical law of inertia. The experience of joy pushes us in the direction of the Buddha, and provided no other force is added, we will continue to move that way. Thus the Buddha says, "If they . . . even by a single thought delight in it, I predict that they will all attain Perfect Enlightenment."

As is often the case with ordinary people, the deep emotion caused by initial joy is diluted with the passage of time or is weakened by the agitation of various delusions. Thus the original emotion can be pulled back toward the four evil realms. That is why we do not proceed directly toward buddhahood but tend to move unsteadily, veering left and right. In view of this, religious practice and veneration (or the making of offerings) are of great importance.

Religious practice is fivefold (described in detail in the sutra below): (1) to consciously renew the determination to receive and keep the teaching without faltering, (2) to study the teaching over and over again, (3) to implant it in the mind, to the extent of memorizing it, (4) to explain it for the sake of others, and (5) to spread it as widely as possible. Veneration (also detailed in the sutra below) is to show deep gratitude for the Buddha and his teaching, and to express sincerity through worship and other practices. Pursuing religious practice and making offerings tirelessly continually renews delight in the teaching, so that progress toward buddhahood gradually speeds up and we move ever higher, even if we are swayed by the opposing forces of defilements and delusions.

This shows the relationship linking the initial joy upon hearing the teaching with religious practice and the making of offerings. Since this is an important element in the teaching of this chapter, I hope that you will engrave it deeply on your mind.

TEXT The Buddha [again] addressed Medicine King: “Moreover, after the extinction of the Tathagata, if there be any people who hear even a single verse or a single word of the Wonderful Law Flower Sutra, and by a single thought delight in it, I also predict for them Perfect Enlightenment.

COMMENTARY What is taught in this chapter is aimed in the main to people living in later times. In other words, we can say that we ourselves are here being instructed in what we should do. I hope you will continue reading with this in mind.

TEXT Again, let there be any who receive and keep, read and recite, expound, and copy even a single verse of the Wonderful Law Flower Sutra, and look upon this sutra with reverence as if it were the Buddha, and make offerings to it in various ways with flowers, perfume, garlands, sandal powder, perfumed unguents, incense for burning, silk canopies, flags and banners, garments, and music, as well as revere it with folded hands: know, Medicine King, these people have already paid homage to ten myriad kotis of buddhas and under the buddhas performed their great vows; therefore, out of compassion for all living beings they are born here among men.

COMMENTARY The five items—receiving and keeping the sutra, reading it, reciting it, expounding it, and copying it—are called “the five practices of teachers of the Law.” They represent five important practices for those who spread the Lotus Sutra. “Receiving and keeping” the sutra is said to be “the intensive practice,” while the other four are said to be “the assisting practices.” This division derives from the view that the intensive practice is the most basic practice of the five. If this practice is not firm, the others lose their meaning. “Receiving” is to believe deeply in the teaching, that is, to take refuge in it. “Keeping” is to persevere in devotion.

The first of the assisting practices is given as “reading,” which is literally to read the sutra; this practice includes reading aloud, reading to oneself, and listening carefully to others’ reading. “Reciting” is to memorize. This applies to reciting words that have been memorized and to going over the meaning of the sutra in the mind. The teaching becomes firmly planted in the mind when it is repeated without any visual aid.

“Expounding” is to explain the meaning of the sutra to others. Its purpose is of course to spread the teaching, but at the same time it benefits the one doing the explaining. When we expound it for the sake of others, we often come across points of difficulty that force us to reconsider what we have learned and to study it more deeply. We are also given a chance to reflect on defects in our own faith and understanding when we teach others. This means that even if we ourselves do not have a perfect understanding, we must progressively expound the teaching to benefit others. If questions arise, we can seek answers with teachers or leaders or go to books to resolve them. Teaching others is extremely important, a practical illustration of the teaching of the Lotus Sutra that we are saved together with others.

“Copying” has two kinds of significance: to spread the teaching widely and to deepen one’s own faith and understanding. The Lotus Sutra came into being before the development of printing. Therefore it could not be widely distributed unless it was manually copied. This is why copying was given such great importance. In the present day, the sutra can be spread through print, film, radio, television, and all other forms of mass communications. This is how we should understand copying today, noting that its interpretation has changed somewhat since the sutra was written. All the same, copying in the original sense retains considerable significance even now. By carefully copying each word of the sutra, its spirit becomes embedded in our whole body and mind. This is all the more important as a form of religious practice when we consider the restless modern world in which we live.

• *Make offerings to it in various ways with flowers, perfume, garlands, sandal powder, perfumed unguents, incense for burning, silk canopies, flags and banners, garments, and music.* These are called “the ten kinds of offerings to the Buddha.” See the commentary on chapter 6, “Prediction” (March/April 2003 issue of DHARMA WORLD), for an explanation of sandal powder and perfumed unguents.

The sutra does not mean that we must perform these ten kinds of offerings literally. The forms have changed with time, sect, and economic conditions. What is important is the sincerity with which we express devotion and gratitude. Sincerity will always manifest itself in some form, and a poor offering made sincerely is of far more worth than a splendid gift offered for form’s sake.

One time, King Ajatashatru invited Shakyamuni to a meal. Even after the Buddha and his followers had returned to their monastery, the king, still feeling he had not made sufficient offerings to the Buddha, consulted with his ministers and decided to offer lamps. He ordered his servants to prepare almost five thousand gallons of oil and place lights

all along the road between the gate of the royal palace and the monastery and more in front of the Buddha himself.

The news of his offering soon made the rounds of the city. On the edge of the city there lived an old woman called Nanda. She had a sincere faith in the Buddha and continually wanted to make offerings to him, but being low in social status and so poor that she rarely knew where her next meal was coming from, she had to abandon the idea. When she heard that the king was making an offering of lamps, she was moved to offer a single lamp of her own. But she had not even one coin with which to purchase oil. Therefore she went into the city to beg and received two coins. With these she went to the oil merchant to buy oil. The merchant said to her, "Why are you spending two coins to buy oil when you are so poor you should be buying food to stay alive?" She replied, "I have heard it is only possible to meet a buddha once in a hundred kalpas. Fortunately, I have been born into the world at the same time as the Buddha, and so I have always wanted to make offerings to him. I have heard that the king is making a great offering today and am eager myself to offer one lamp, to bring merit for myself in the next world."

The merchant was deeply struck by her words and gave her a whole pint of oil for her two coins. In great joy the old woman went to the Buddha's monastery and offered him her one lamp, praying deeply in her heart, "May my sincerity manifest itself so that this lamp will burn the whole night through undimmed." During the night the multitude of lamps offered by the king went out one by one, some blown out by the wind, others extinguished when the oil ran out. A watchman relit those that he could, but he could not light them all. The light donated by the old woman, though, was not blown out by the wind and did not run out of oil, and it burned the whole night through.

When dawn broke, the Buddha asked Maudgalyayana to extinguish the remaining lamps. He walked around putting them out, but strangely there was one that he could not extinguish, however hard he tried. Three times he extinguished it, and three times the flame rekindled. He then tried to extinguish the lamp with his robe, but the flame burned even more brightly than before. Then he used his supernatural powers to conjure up a great wind. At this the flame emitted a great radiance, which illuminated the cosmos from the Brahma heaven to the three-thousand-great-thousandfold world.

Seeing this, Shakyamuni said, "Maudgalyayana, desist. This light is lit by the merit of a buddha who will appear in a later world. It cannot be extinguished, even by your supernatural powers. The old woman who offered it will, thirty

kalpas after departing from this world, become a buddha called Sumeru Radiance Tathagata." This tale, "The Pauper's Lamp," is found in the Sutra of Ajatashatru's Prediction and the Sutra of the Wise and Stupid.

Thus, the sincerity of an offering is all-important; there is no need to quibble about forms. It is sufficient that people express their sincerity in the way that suits the individual and the occasion. What is vital is the expression. Often we hear people assert that it is the mind alone that counts, and think that it is enough to have devotion and gratitude in their hearts. This is a quibble from those who do not understand human psychology. Their veneration and gratitude can gradually weaken and disappear; they can never grow and expand. Only by expressing itself in action can the mind grow more and more profound, and as it grows in profundity it must continue to express itself in this way. This recurring circulation is what causes people to grow in humanity, and is the reason religious practice and the making of offerings are necessary.

• *These people have already paid homage to ten myriad kotis of buddhas and under the buddhas performed their great vows; therefore, out of compassion for all living beings they are born here among men.* This is a very important passage. These people have not taken refuge in the Buddha Dharma for the first time in this life; in former lives too they served numerous buddhas, made offerings, and made the bodhisattva vow to bring living beings to liberation. As a natural result, they were people who should have become buddhas in former lives, people who had attained the stage closest to buddhahood. These bodhisattvas though, out of compassion for the living beings suffering in the *saha* world, have been reborn as human beings into this world so that they may work to save all living beings.

Those who are drawn to the excellent teaching of the Buddha Dharma, who practice it, and who strive to deepen their faith in it have something magnificent about them. Those who do not have such endowments will rarely turn toward the Buddha Dharma, however much others recommend it. This must be considered a manifestation of causes and conditions from former lives. There can be no doubt that, as the sutra says here, they are people who in former lives also heard the Buddha Dharma, took refuge in the Buddha, looked up to him, made offerings to him, and practiced his teaching. If such people follow the same pattern of action in this life, teaching others and bringing them to liberation, in the future they will definitely become buddhas. The Buddha clearly states this in the next passage.

TEXT Medicine King! If there be any people who ask you

what sort of living beings will become buddhas in future worlds, you should show them that those are the people who will certainly become buddhas in future worlds.

COMMENTARY “Those are the people who will certainly become buddhas.” The Buddha here indicates the type of person who will attain buddhahood. These words are a great profession. In the next passage he explains why this is so.

TEXT Wherefore? If [my] good sons and good daughters receive and keep, read and recite, expound, and copy even a single word of the Law Flower Sutra, and make offerings to it in various ways with flowers, perfumes, garlands, sandal powder, fragrant unguents, incense for burning, silk canopies, flags and banners, garments, and music, as well as revere it with folded hands, these people will be looked up to by all the worlds; and as you pay homage to tathagatas, so should you pay homage to them.

COMMENTARY One who is drawn to the excellent teaching and serves it devotedly and faithfully has already cultivated his or her buddha-nature to a great extent. Therefore that person is close to the Buddha’s enlightenment. The very existence of such a one is to be honored, worthy of homage by all people. In terms of the truth, this person is to be highly valued as a human being. We all must alter the way we regard human value. There are too many cases in recent times of people being the center of popular adulation for purely worldly reasons. Reverence for such people cannot contribute to true human progress.

The sutra goes on to explain further.

TEXT Know! These people are great bodhisattvas who, having accomplished Perfect Enlightenment and out of compassion for all living beings, are willingly born in this world, and widely proclaim and expound the Wonderful Law Flower Sutra. How much more those who are perfectly able to receive, keep, and in every way pay homage to it!

COMMENTARY *These . . . out of compassion for all living beings, are willingly born in this world.* Earlier (see the November/December 1998 issue of DHARMA WORLD) I discussed how people are reborn in the six realms of rebirth (or existence) according to their good or evil karma. These realms are stages where people either are at the mercy of the defilements, unaware of their own true worth (buddha-nature), or seek only their own enlightenment. The bodhisattva, however, is one who deserves to become a buddha but renounces rebirth in a Pure Land out of compassion for living beings and aspires to be reborn as a human

being. This bodhisattva is not reborn as a result of good or evil karma but because of his or her profound compassion and aspiration to save all living beings. This is called “birth by aspiration” and is what is meant by “willingly born.”

Anyone therefore can act as a bodhisattva, aware that he or she has been born as a bodhisattva into this world for that purpose, for buddhas and bodhisattvas are able to be reborn as they will, in whatever body and place they wish. In other words, they can incarnate themselves freely. Thus we must consider that a person in this world who receives and keeps the teaching of the Lotus Sutra and who devotes himself or herself to its dissemination, though appearing to be an ordinary person no different from others, may actually be a buddha or bodhisattva who has transformed himself or herself to save the world. Such a person is deserving of the highest veneration.

It is also important that we ourselves realize this. Such a realization is not selfish pride, considering oneself to be enlightened or virtuous when one is actually not, but a sacred awareness. Holding to such a sacred awareness, we cannot do anything disgraceful. We cannot help living a life that is of benefit to other people and to society. Moved by what wells up from the depths of our heart, not only those things that are passively pure, we cannot help contributing to the dissemination of the Lotus Sutra, acting naturally to benefit others. This is the state of the bodhisattva.

• *Born in this world.* This has almost the same meaning as being born as a human being. Originally the Chinese compound signifying “human being” (made up of two characters, “person” and “between”) did not refer to an individual human being at all but to the relationship between human beings. This derives from the Buddhist view of human beings, that people do not live in isolation from others but among them. I hope that you will remember this. (See the March/April 2004 issue.)

• *Expound.* “Expound” here means to proclaim the teaching according to person and situation. The teaching of the Lotus Sutra is not confined to what is written in the scripture titled the Lotus Sutra. All true teachings that save people and the world can be called the teaching of the Lotus Sutra. This understanding is especially important at the present time. We should refrain from the narrow view that sees the Lotus Sutra as just a specific work.

To be continued

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

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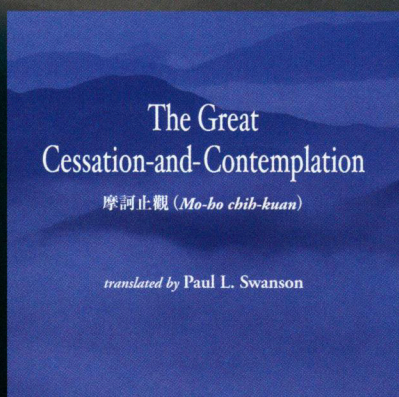
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