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DHARMA WORLD

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DHARMA WORLD

For Living Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue

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Cover photo: A Theravada monk at Wat Maheyong, in the historic Thai capital of Ayutthaya, sitting in meditation on a wooden deck on which he sleeps at night, placed in the forest in the precinct of the ancient temple. An umbrella hung above the deck is a mosquito net. During the dry season the monk continues discipline outdoors, meditating and studying scriptures. Photo by Isamu Maruyama.

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Photo: Isamu Maruyama

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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Buddhist-Christian Dialogues on the Lotus Sutra

by Michio T. Shinozaki

In May, the tenth International Lotus Sutra Conference was held in Beijing. It was sponsored by the Chuo Academic Research Institute affiliated with Rissho Kosei-kai and the participants included thirteen scholars of Buddhist and Christian studies from the three nations of China, Japan, and the U.S., in addition to five observers. The theme of the four-day conference, held in a Beijing hotel, was "The Lotus Sutra and Tendai," and the participants delivered papers that later served as the basis for discussion.

The first of these conferences was held in 1994 for the purpose of promoting a deeper understanding of the Lotus Sutra among foreign scholars of Buddhist and Christian studies who had a deep interest in Buddhism.

At that time, most foreign scholars of Buddhist studies and Christian theologians having an interest in Buddhism directed their attention to Zen and Pure Land teachings, which had been well-known to the West since even before World War II. Buddhist philosophy, beginning with the concept of emptiness, was also the center of their interest. On the other hand, the level of interest in the Lotus Sutra was surprisingly low. In order to increase awareness of the excellence of the Lotus Sutra, Dr. Gene Reeves and others organized the first conference, inviting many well-known Buddhist and Christian scholars to take part in the discussions.

As a result of these conferences having been held ten times, knowledge of the Lotus Sutra has spread among Buddhist scholars and Christian theologians around the world, and their understanding of its teachings has increased dramatically. In particular, the Lotus Sutra's teaching of the One Vehicle has become more widely known, which, as a member of Rissho Kosei-kai, the sponsor of the conferences, gives me great pleasure.

Christian theologians have great concern for contemporary society and global problems, and have especially debated the concept of divine intervention and the problems of contemporary society. In contrast, Buddhists have tended to isolate themselves into discussions about internal concerns such as the interpretation of scriptures, the awakening of the self, and religious practices aiming at enlightenment. There was also a tendency to view various social problems in terms of the issue of individuals' awakening, rather than of society itself. In that sense, the discussion between Buddhist scholars and Christian theologians has been very successful, in that it gave Buddhists various new incentives.

Rissho Kosei-kai does not consider the concept of the One Vehicle to be simply a point of doctrine, but rather a living teaching to be practiced. It is a very concrete, practical goal that can assist us in deepening mutual understanding among those of differing standpoints and thought, and also in bringing about the reality of world peace. I am also pleased that many Buddhist scholars and Christian theologians have understood this, and that Rissho Kosei-kai has received great recognition for its endeavors to develop activities according to the concept of the One Vehicle.

Up until now, the Lotus Sutra conferences have served to facilitate discussion mainly between Buddhist and Christian scholars, but it is hoped that this tenth conference will have served as a turning point, and that future Lotus Sutra conferences will include the participation of Islamic scholars and theologians, which will certainly broaden the scope of the deliberations. □

Michio T. Shinozaki is president of Rissho Kosei-kai's Gakurin Seminary. He received a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Vanderbilt University in 1988.

DHARMA WORLD is published in cooperation with the lay Buddhist association Rissho Kosei-kai. Rissho Kosei-kai welcomes access from readers of DHARMA WORLD to its English-language website, which provides up-to-date information about current events and activities of the organization. Anyone interested can browse it by accessing the URL:

<http://www.rk-world.org/>

All Are Precious

by Nichiko Niwano

If we were able to appreciate, from the bottom of our hearts, that each of us is equally wonderful without any exceptions, then how very pleasant our lives would be. The key to achieving this lies in developing an awareness of the truth of the Dharma.

One Life

Our lives are interconnected with everything in the world and are sustained in the here and now through the infinite interrelations of the causes and conditions that are so numerous no one can perceive them all. All things and phenomena arise from these unlimited interrelationships fusing with one another and becoming one. The wildflowers that bloom in the field, the animals, human beings, indeed, all sentient beings, essentially arise from the truth of the Dharma.

When we awaken to this fact, we also become aware of just what a foolish and self-centered, narrow viewpoint it is that judges things only by their appearance or is paralyzed by fixed ideas or prejudices.

Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, known as “the saint of the gutters,” devoted her life to caring for the destitute,

ill people that society had abandoned to life in the streets. When such people were close to death, she would say to them, “You were born into this world because you were needed.” Their faces would become relaxed and they would respond to her, “I am grateful that I was born.”

Despite their poverty and illness, these people realized, because of Mother Teresa’s loving intervention, that they were not alone in the world, that life is precious, and that indeed they were interconnected with other people.

Humbling Ourselves Is Relaxing

People have different natures and abilities, and their faces and bodies differ as well. Everyone has an individual character and distinguishing features that are an expression of his or her own life. The life that each of us has is precious and irreplaceable.

When we realize that our own life is precious, we also will realize that the lives of others are equally precious and that therefore we are all connected as one. When we become as one, then we can understand that respecting and supporting the individual characters and distinguishing features of others is the way to enrich one another.

From this kind of awareness, if, for instance, at the workplace a coworker makes a mistake, instead of criticizing that person or passing judgment, we can humbly recognize that we might have the potential to make the same kind of mistake. We then are able to listen to what that person has to say, and we can give appropriate advice.

In Rissho Kosei-kai, we use the Japanese word *sagaru* (to step down) for our religious practice of humbling ourselves. When we humble ourselves, we feel relaxed; but when we cannot humble ourselves, we become arrogant. If our arrogance becomes aggressive, we end up suffering when we clash with other people.

Let us continue in our efforts to grow spiritually so that we can take deeply to heart the understanding that everyone—not only ourselves but all others as well—has been given a precious life that is uniquely individual, so that we become the kind of gentle human beings who can draw deeply from the feelings and pain of others. □

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).

Spirituality and Development

Relating Social Action and Religious Consciousness

by John Clammer

“Enter with joy into the suffering of the world” —The Buddha

The world in which we live is facing unprecedented problems—problems so severe in fact that for the first time in recorded human history, the survival of our species (and of the many other species that make up the total and interrelated ecology of the world) is genuinely at stake. Environmental degradation (pollution; global warming as the result of excessive carbon dioxide emissions

from industry and traffic; increasing damage to the ozone layer; deforestation; desertification; and the rapid destruction of plant and animal species through urbanization, agribusiness, and use of chemical pesticides) is perhaps at the forefront of these issues. Closely following is resource depletion (easily recoverable known oil reserves are expected to be exhausted by around the year 2030; and the great aquifers that have supplied water to the grain belts of the United States and of the world's most populous nations, China and India, are rapidly being pumped dry). The rising population (3 billion extra humans are likely to be added to the over 6 billion that now inhabit our globe by 2050) will lead to intense pressure on food supplies, itself leading to phenomena such as the over-fishing that has already led to the virtual disappearance of stocks of cod in large areas of the north Atlantic and rapidly diminishing tuna populations in the Pacific. The appearance of new diseases (HIV/AIDS and SARS being among the best known but by no means only ones) are in part related to a decline in immunity resulting from the long-term overuse of antibiotics by the medical profession, environmental changes, crowding, and the rapid transmission of disease because of the density and speed of air travel.¹

John Clammer is professor of sociology at Tokyo's Sophia University, where he teaches the sociology of development and courses in social inequality, contemporary social theory, and the sociology of the arts. He has previously taught at universities in the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Argentina, and Singapore. He has written extensively on the issues of development, and his books include Values and Development in Southeast Asia, Diaspora and Identity, and most recently, with Sylvie Poirier and Eric Schwimmer, Figured Worlds: Ontological Obstacles to Intercultural Relations.

These massive shifts are accompanied by social ones. A rather unexpected one is the rise in the numbers of “environmental refugees”—people fleeing from degraded land, “natural” disasters in fact triggered by global warming and desertification (4,000 villages are at risk in the area north of the Chinese capital of Beijing, from which the outer edge of the desert is now only 150 miles or 240 km away

and moving rapidly south). Poverty is another, and despite the pledge made at the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome to reduce the numbers of people living in poverty by 20 million a year up to the target date of 2015, by which year it was agreed to cut in half the number of people in the world living in poverty and malnourishment, since then the population of the developing world continues to rise and world grain production per capita has actually dropped by 5 percent since 1998, suggesting that the number of those suffering from hunger and starvation is actually increasing. Such conditions, intensified by widening global income gaps, serious health problems (especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where life expectancy is dropping sharply), and over-consumption on the part of the rich (especially in North America, Western Europe, Japan, and Australia) can only promote serious social and political instability. We have certainly entered what the German sociologist Ulrich Beck has called the “risk society”²—a complex and confusing environment full of unexpected problems, many of them the result of our earlier civilizational decisions (to base transport on the internal combustion engine, for example, leading in the long run to pollution, congestion, excessive oil usage, and global warming, or energy production based on nuclear power without due attention to its dangers, or the entirely unsolvable problem of the disposal of radioactive waste) over which as individuals we seem to have little or no control and which our governments seem either to ignore, to create through short term and short-sighted policies, or which, even with all their resources, they are actually powerless to address.

A Worldwide Expansion in Spirituality

But at the same time that humanity is facing these global problems, there has been an enormous expansion worldwide in spirituality. Some of this has taken very deviant forms—fundamentalist groups have arisen within almost all of the world’s major religions except Buddhism—but much of it demonstrates a genuine spiritual hunger and a recognition of the fact that the materialistic and “scientific” solutions to these pressing problems have not worked, but in many cases are themselves causes of the problems. So we have witnessed revivals within the major world religions, a huge crossing of traditional cultural boundaries (the creation of the Western Buddhist Order; the immense international interest in Tibetan Buddhist, Sufi, and neo-Hindu Indian teachers; the emergence of a whole unclassifiable universe of spiritual movements, some with their roots in traditional religions, but others deriving their energy from ecology or the New Age movement;³ an expanding commitment to interreligious dialogue; theories of a coming

new world religion that will synthesize and transcend the characteristics of the existing mainstream religions; and the rediscovery of the neglected mystical dimensions of those religions, especially within Christianity and Judaism (for example, the latter’s esoteric teachings known as Kabbalah). New religious movements populate the sociological landscape.⁴ This is all very exciting and certainly demonstrates a major cultural shift away from the materialistic values that have dominated the world for the last century or more. But it also raises a very significant question: while some of these movements may express a reaction to or fear of the new risk society, how many of them actually address the issues that are now critical to the survival of our world and to the just distribution of its resources and beauty among the human family, and how many are retreats from these issues into an inner world of personal self-development largely cut off from the issues of our time?

Of course, in principle, this is not a new issue. What is new is the urgency and magnitude of the problems and the apparent lack of resources that we have at our disposal to address them. In fact, scattered throughout the traditional religions are clear hints about the link between social and ecological justice, ethics, and spirituality. In the books of the Bible shared equally by Jews and Christians, the prophet Isaiah constantly repeats the theme that “Zion will be redeemed with justice, and her repentant ones with righteousness” in which what the prophet’s God requires by way of “spirituality” is not religious services, ceremonies, and incense, but justice, compassion, and care of all Creation. Buddhism, of course, as expressed in the Heart Sutra, the Vajradhvaha Sutra, and many other sources, cites the ideal quality of the bodhisattva—the enlightened being who turns from nirvana to reenter the world of suffering until all are saved. Mahatma Gandhi perhaps best summed up the compassionate teachings of Hinduism when he said, “The children of God are those who understand the pain of others.” And certainly many mainstream religions have attempted to address issues of justice and suffering—Christian “liberation theology” emerged especially from the colonized and socially deeply divided societies of Latin America, and “engaged” Buddhism has now become a major movement within the international Buddhist community as many of its members struggle with the social implications of their faith, its connections to issues of ecology, human rights, and social justice being two prime examples. But in all of these attempts there lies concealed a fundamental issue—how to connect spiritual concerns such as personal cultivation and engagement with individual existential issues such as death, illness, and personal values

with the collective issues of our age. This is the question to which we will now turn.

Six Ideas Relating Spirituality and “World Concern”

Different religious traditions have tried to answer this in various ways, and a lengthy book could easily be written detailing the paths by which those who understand spirituality to be much more than simply individual self-cultivation, self-transcendence, or personal salvation have tried to relate the individual to the collective, the social, or the environmental. Here I will suggest some solutions to this ancient problem, solutions that I hope might encourage further discussion both of the ways in which spirituality might be related to the great social problems of our time, and to the deepening of conceptions of spirituality itself. I propose that there are six main ideas relating spirituality and “world concern.” These are justice, compassion, connectivity, co-creativity, awareness, and responsibility. Let me expand briefly on each of these and show their profound interrelationships.

In many religious traditions—for example, in Judaism and in some branches of Christianity—the idea of justice is paramount. Justice is not simply law. Rather, it is the much richer concept of practical righteousness, of expressing in action the notion understood in the Judeo-Christian tradition of human beings made in the image of God, or in the Buddhist tradition of the buddhahood of all beings, and so is the embodiment of a radical spiritual democracy—the entitlement of all beings to the fullest and most unimpeded expression of their essential natures and their potentialities. Human politics, rather than being preoccupied with power, is in the light of this to be seen as the pursuit of exactly this justice, expressed in economics, educational provision, universal respect of human rights, access to health care, a decent habitation, and other fundamental human needs, and in respect for and care of the natural environment and its many species, of which humans are just one. But the idea of justice untempered by compassion is a hard one, and one easily abused.

One of the great contributions of Buddhism has been to place compassion at the center of ethical relationships, or even to define ethical relationships in terms of the exercise of compassion. Compassion is really another word for respect: seeing into the essential nature of other beings, nonhuman as much as human, recognizing their struggles and assisting them on their way through life, and so being assisted oneself. Compassion is paradoxical—in one of its aspects it is self-giving, even self-sacrificing, for the benefit of others, but yet in another aspect it is a mysterious process of return whereby that which is given in some sense rebounds to the benefit of the giving self, fulfilling its



The cooling tower at a nuclear power plant in the United States emitting steam. Are the dangers and problems of the disposal of radioactive waste receiving due attention?

essential nature at one level and transcending the pettiness of the ego at another. Compassion, of course, cannot be practiced in a vacuum—it requires a communal context, the presence of others, and so it is an intensely social practice.

This sociality leads us directly to our third principle—that of connectivity. Buddhism has always taught the principle of dependent arising [origination]—that all phenomena are in fact interrelated and none exist independent of the whole complex network within which they are embedded. This insight is in fact the first principle of sociology—that all human behavior represents not autonomous individual decisions but the outcome of webs of influences, many of which the actor is not even aware exist. From this understanding of causality we see both the fundamentally interconnected nature of human society—realizing that

who each of us is now results from the people, forces, events, and experiences that have collectively shaped us—and our connection to the rest of nature. Whereas until very recently, social scientists tended to argue that humanity and nature were two quite separate spheres of reality, we must now, with the emergence of ecological sociology, see that we are in fact an integral part of that nature. Not only do we consume food, air, water, and other nutrients from nature; we also derive many of our aesthetic experiences from it, and, as we should be becoming painfully aware in a world of global warming and resource depletion, there are no longer any “local” problems. Coal-burning power stations in China create acid rain that poisons lakes and forests in Japan; the plastic bottle that I may casually toss into the sea will never biodegrade but will turn up in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, where it may well become the cause of the death of a dolphin that swallows it, thinking it is a colorful fish. In a globalized and shrinking world, one person’s local problem becomes everybody’s problem. Beneath this is the deeper spiritual principle, embodied not only in Buddhism, but surprisingly for many in Judaism, too, that in a fundamental sense we are all one. When Jews twice daily recite the foundational prayer of the morning and evening services, the *Shema*, they repeat the words “Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is One,” meaning not only their understanding of the uniqueness of God, but expressing a profound principle of nondualism—that everything ultimately is one, and so we are all part of each other, which is true ecologically, since the environment does form a system in which each part is dependent in subtle ways on all the other parts. A tiny change in the composition of the earth’s atmosphere, for example, or a quite small rise in annual average temperatures would make all human and much plant and animal life on our planet unsustainable.

In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam there is an understanding of the world as having been quite consciously created. In Buddhism, while there is no specific creation story, there is also a sense of the universe somehow operating quite independently from us. But as ecology shows, this is not true: my decision to drive a car rather than ride my bicycle in fact affects the structure of the atmosphere, which ultimately affects sea levels, plant life, and weather patterns, just as my flying casually around the world in high-altitude jet airplanes affects the ozone layer, which will show up as an increase in cancer on the earth’s surface far below. Historically, and partly as a result of certain tendencies in Western philosophy, we see ourselves as tenants—as occupying a universe that we did not create and just have to put up with. Today, it is not only our knowledge of ecology that calls this view into doubt, but also developments and rediscoveries within spirituality.

What many traditions are rediscovering is the notion of co-creativity—that our every action affects the universe for good or for bad, not only our physical actions, but even our thoughts, negative or positive energies, and of course the ideologies or collective thought patterns that human groups generate. As co-creators, we all as individuals have a role in shaping the future of the world—but it is not determined. The future is open: the problem is our path-dependency, which has locked us into what some have called “old mind” solutions to what are actually radically new problems.

Co-creativity, of course, implies our fifth principle—responsibility. If the future is open, then we are responsible for it, not some cosmic force or remote deity. Whereas—and quite rightly, given the terrible problems of injustice; cruelty; conflict; gender, ethnic, and caste inequalities; and poverty that have plagued the world unabated—emphasis in the last few decades has been on human rights, but more and more people are seeing that the other side of the rights coin is responsibility. The right to a reasonable livelihood is beyond dispute, but if that right is interpreted as it is by so many, especially in the rich countries, as the right to consume, then the world will be in very serious trouble. If car ownership in China reached the current per-capita ownership in Japan, that nation would have 640 million cars on the road, and to provide roads and parking lots (quite apart from its immense impact on world oil consumption, pollution, and carbon dioxide output) 13 million hectares of land (almost half of the 28 million hectares under rice cultivation in China) would need to be paved, most of it land currently used for growing crops. Some developing world leaders, Malaysia’s former prime minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad loudest among them, have argued that since the rich world already has these privileges, it has no right to deny them in turn to the developing world and to require Third World countries to restrict consumption and preserve their forests. In one sense he is right—the burden of such consumption reduction in fact lies most heavily on the already rich, who are very unwilling to see a decline in what they interpret as their standard of living. But in another, he is profoundly wrong, for in an interconnected world, a global revolution in values, a whole post-materialist phase of human history, is going to be necessary if massive and irreversible problems are not to sweep the whole globe. So far, politicians have been totally unable to construct such a vision, as we have clearly seen in the unwillingness of the world’s biggest economy and biggest consumer to adhere to the Kyoto Protocol. So the vision must come from elsewhere, and on the whole it is coming from new spiritualities and new social movements rooted in such values.

Finally, the Buddha taught that the first precondition of

awakening is awareness, clear perception. In the contemporary world, I would interpret this to mean two things: first, a grasp of the actual reality that we are facing, the ability to penetrate beyond the illusion of business-as-usual promoted by the mainstream politicians, economists, and media; and second, the simple but yet very difficult ability to be, at every moment, awake—to see, beyond the mass of thoughts, images, and noise that fills most of our heads in every waking moment and many sleeping ones, the beauty and amazing fragility and complexity of nature, our own bodies, and other people. This simple awareness is itself revolutionary, for seeing clearly is exactly what the corrupted world of power, special interests, and selfishness cannot endure, since it is the recovery of innocence, and innocence sees reality as it is. In a profound sense, every child is enlightened, something that as adults we have to recover from the fog of deceptions that make up so much of our social world, or what the engaged Buddhist Ken Jones calls “institutionalized delusion.”⁵

Individual Salvation Takes Place in a Social Context

What collectively emerges from these six principles is the idea that true spirituality is a seamless web—like the non-dualistic world that it reflects. The personal and collective are not in opposition, but are simply aspects of each other. As David Ray Griffin suggests, although the word “spirituality” used in a strict sense refers to “a way of life oriented around an ultimate meaning and around values other than those of power, pleasure, and possession,” it logically refers to a person’s ultimate values and commitments, even if these are materialistic and nihilistic. What largely determines the direction of the spirituality is the society in which the person lives, for, as he says, “the relation between a society and its members’ spirituality is reciprocal.”⁶ Hence, we are all responsible for the nature of the wider society in which we live, the quality of its culture, and the nature and content of its educational system. The pursuit of private, individual salvation in fact takes place in a social context; to enhance the possibilities of positive spiritualities flourishing, it is consequently necessary to engage in the task of promoting social change.

Many of the new socio-spiritual movements have grasped this fact. The Indian Hindu-based Swadhyaya movement, for example, now found in many parts of the subcontinent and abroad, actively engages in “development”—such as tree planting and improvement of irrigation and agriculture—from the basis of a theory of human transformation including notions such as understanding work as a devotional act, the impersonal and collective nature of wealth, the merging of the social and the spiritual, and the primacy of meaning. In aiming to encourage very poor Indian vil-

lagers to transform themselves through self-dignity and esteem for their cultural heritage, a sense of becoming (what I have here called “co-creation”); a sense of pursuing worthy ideals and goals, with meaningful participation and group membership beyond boundaries of caste, age, or gender; a sense of being in command of one’s own destiny; and the sense of contributing to, and reflecting justice in, the larger cosmic order, Swadhyaya (which accepts no aid or financial support from outside) has built an extensive socio-spiritual movement that has in many ways successfully challenged egoism, notions of personal wealth, cynicism, and fatalism and has taught an awareness of brotherhood and collective responsibility.⁷

Throughout the world we can in fact find examples of similar movements—Gandhian communities; many organic farming and consumer cooperatives; ecological movements; “green” banking; and, within the mainstream religions, movements such as engaged Buddhism; the search for an Islamic economics; Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant liberation theologies; and a general turn toward what the American activist and theorist Michael Lerner has called “the politics of meaning.”⁸ The challenge now is to clarify and express in action the insights of these forms of socially committed spiritualities. I would argue, in fact, that it is within such movements that the most creative experiments in deciding what kind of future we want are being carried out, and there too we find the seedbed of the value revolution necessary to carry us through this millennium, not merely as survivors of a decaying and degraded ecosystem, but as co-creators of the world of peace, beauty, fulfillment, kindness, and universal justice in which we would like our children to live. □

Notes

1. Lester R. Brown, *Plan B: Rescuing a Planet Under Stress and a Civilization in Trouble* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003).
2. Ulrich Beck, *The Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1992).
3. Diarmuid O Murchu, *Reclaiming Spirituality* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998).
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5. Ken Jones, *The New Social Face of Buddhism* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1989).
6. David Ray Griffin, ed., *Spirituality and Society* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).
7. Raj Krishan Srivastava, ed., *Vital Connections: Self, Society, God—Perspectives on Swadhyaya* (Tokyo and New York: Weatherhill, 1998).
8. Michael Lerner, *The Politics of Meaning: Restoring Hope and Possibility in an Age of Cynicism* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1996).

Shakyamuni's Aim, as Revealed by Early Buddhist Scriptures

by Shoji Mori

These sources are the only clues we have to the Buddha's life and thought, since he left no writings of his own, even though they may be colored by the viewpoints of later generations.

Over a long period after the time of Shakyamuni, Buddhism was transmitted through Asia, shaping a distinctive way of thought and culture in each land it reached. The forms it took are so diverse that it is hard to lump them all together as one Buddhism and discern what its aim was. Here I would like to consider what Shakyamuni himself, the fountainhead of Buddhism, aimed for, taking into account the social context of his times.

To tell the truth, it is difficult even to know what kinds of teachings Shakyamuni preached and what kind of life he led. He left no writings of his own, and the scriptures of early Buddhism, which are believed to record his conduct, were compiled three to four hundred years after his death, which means that we cannot rule out the possibility that these accounts are colored by the circumstances of later generations and the views of the compilers.

Nevertheless, the only clues we have to Shakyamuni's life and thought are the early Buddhist scriptures, by which I mean the Pali *vinaya* (rules of discipline) and *Panca-nikaya* (Five Collections of Discourses) and Chinese translations of the four *agamas* and of the *vinaya*, such as the *Vinaya in Four Divisions*. Using these sources, past scholars have sought to discern what scriptures, or what parts of what scriptures, or what teachings, transmit Shakyamuni's actual discourses or reflect old oral traditions.

These efforts have not always been successful, however. Therefore, I will begin by considering what these early Buddhist scriptures' descriptions of Shakyamuni's teachings tell us about his aims. Since I am undertaking the formidable task of seeking to discern the thought underlying

Shakyamuni's words, deeds, and teachings as described in these scriptures, I fear that what I say may be seen as arbitrary and above all that I may dishonor Buddhism and Shakyamuni. If I am mistaken in any way, I sincerely hope that readers will correct me.

Shakyamuni's Teachings

Unquestionably, Shakyamuni's representative teachings are the doctrines of impermanence, suffering, and nonself; the

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Relief at Cave No. 1 at Ajanta, depicting Siddhartha beholding an old man during his outing from his father's palace. Seeing the old man who could barely walk, even with the support of a staff, the young Shakyamuni deeply recognized how life inevitably entails the suffering of aging. Sixth century.

Four Noble Truths; and the Twelve-linked Chain of Dependent Origination. According to my own investigation, the scriptures of early Buddhism in Pali and in Chinese translation mention the doctrine of impermanence, suffering, and nonself or similar teachings 302 times; the Twelve-linked Chain of Dependent Origination and variations, 176 times; and the Four Noble Truths and related teachings, 498 times. While we cannot say that numbers are the be-all and end-all, the fact that no other teachings are preached so repeatedly indicates that these are undoubtedly representative teachings of Shakyamuni. That is why discussions of the teachings of early Buddhism in introductions to and commentaries on Buddhist thought invariably include them.

Let us briefly discuss the content of these teachings. The doctrine of impermanence, suffering, and nonself is explained in terms of the Three Seals of the Law (whatever is phenomenal is impermanent, whatever is phenomenal is devoid of self, nirvana is eternally tranquil) or the Four Seals of the Law (whatever is phenomenal is impermanent, whatever is phenomenal is suffering, whatever is phenomenal is devoid of self, nirvana is eternally tranquil). The Three (or Four) Seals of the Law teach that if we truly know that we are impermanent beings who cannot escape birth, old age, illness, and death, that all this entails suffering, and that we are devoid of self and are powerless to do

anything about the above, and if we cease to be attached to the phenomenal world, we can be freed from greed and released from birth, old age, illness, and death.

The doctrine of the Twelve-linked Chain of Dependent Origination observes that the suffering of birth, old age, illness, and death arises from cause and effect explained in terms of twelve items, including craving and ignorance, and teaches that we can resolve the problem of birth, old age, illness, and death if we sever the relationships among these twelve items. The doctrine of the Four Noble Truths teaches that resolving the problem of the suffering of birth, old age, illness, and death means truly seeing the reality of that suffering “as it is” (the Truth of Suffering) and realizing that its cause is craving and the other defilements (the Truth of the Cause of Suffering), and that because enlightenment consists in the elimination of defilements (the Truth of the Extinction of Suffering), achieving it means practicing the Eightfold Path (the Truth of the Way).

The state of enlightenment gained through these three teachings is expressed as “nirvana is eternally tranquil.” The word translated as “tranquil” is *shanti*, which means “peace” in modern Hindi. But because here it means resolution of the problem of birth, old age, illness, and death that afflicts all sentient beings, it is better translated as “tranquil.”

In sum, these three representative teachings of Shakya-

muni tell us that the greatest problem that we must resolve is that of birth, old age, illness, and death and reveal the way to do so. Since it is believed that Shakyamuni himself left home and undertook austerities in search of a way to resolve this problem, the scriptures explain the motive for his leaving home by means of the story of his “outings through the four gates of the palace”—four outings, when he was still a prince, in the course of which he first observed those phenomena.

Buddhism also teaches that meditation is a means of gaining enlightenment. The objects of meditation in early Buddhism included impurity, suffering, nonself, impermanence, and such phenomena as the gradual decomposition of corpses abandoned in cemeteries. These objects of meditation were grouped as “four types of meditation that eliminate false views,” “ten contemplations of the inherent impurity of objects,” and so on. In Mahayana Buddhism, which developed later, the focus shifted to what these teachings have to say about the realm of the Buddha and the state of buddhahood, and the objects of meditation became the Pure Land, the form of the Buddha, and so on. In early Buddhism, however, the entire emphasis was on birth, old age, illness, and death.

What Underlies Shakyamuni’s Teachings

These teachings were formulated in the context of Indian culture as it was twenty-five hundred years ago; they do not necessarily suit the present day. To seek what Shakyamuni sought, we need to study what underlies those teachings. All the sutras were expounded as “skillful means”; their fundamental position is that the Dhamma, or Law, surpasses verbal description and is transmitted extralinguistically. Thus, we need to seek what runs beneath the words of the teachings, what lies beyond them. That is where we will find what Shakyamuni sought, what underlies all of Buddhism. Here, then, I would like to consider Shakyamuni’s teachings in the context of the broad question, What is Buddhism?

The goal Buddhists should aim to achieve is to become buddhas. *Buddha* is the past participle of the Sanskrit and Pali verb *budh*. A. A. Macdonell, in *A Practical Sanskrit Dictionary*,¹ defines *budh* as “awake, regain consciousness; be awake or wakeful; become aware of or acquainted with; notice, give heed to; perceive, understand, learn, know, know to be, recognise as; deem, regard as; think of any one.” Therefore, *budh* means to know or understand in the ordinary sense; it does not signify apprehension through mystical or transcendental experience or conviction gained through rigorous mental discipline or insight resulting from deep thought. It refers to the commonplace mental activity of seeing and knowing that the apple falls from the

tree. This does not exclude the mental process involved in discovering the law of gravity through observing the falling apple, but at least the word does not signify that sort of thing alone. Thus, *buddha* means “one who has known.”

Does this mean, then, that we are all buddhas, because we are always knowing things? The important thing here is *what* it is that one knows. Needless to say, that is truth, but what Buddhism means by truth is not the same as what Christianity or European philosophy means.

Truth in the Buddhist sense is expressed by two classes of words. One is abstract nouns derived from the demonstrative pronoun *tad*, which means “this” or “that.” Representative examples are *tathata* and *tattva*. These have generally been translated into Chinese in a variety of ways signifying, roughly, “suchness” or “truth,” but in more everyday parlance *tathata* and *tattva* mean “what is, as it is.” The word *tathagata*, a synonym for *buddha*, means one who has come (*agata*) from truth (*tatha*).

The other class comprises words corresponding to the English verb “be.” One such word is *as*, represented by its present participle, *satya*. The “Truth” of the Four Noble Truths is a translation of *satya*. Another verb corresponding to “be” is *bhu*, whose past participle, *bhuta*, is also translated as “truth.” In the Mahayana Buddhist phrase “the true aspect of all things,” “true aspect” is a translation of *bhuta*. The original meaning of these words is “things as they are.”

In other words, what Buddhism calls truth is something that can be indicated by the demonstrative pronouns “this” or “that”; it refers to a familiar, concrete phenomenon that *is*, not something universal and invisible, concealed behind phenomena. If it were something behind phenomena, it could not be indicated by “this” or “that” and would call for mystical apprehension or deep insight. If, however, it is something that exists before one’s eyes, it can be seen and understood by cognition on the level of *budh*. On the basis of the two classes of words discussed above and their Chinese equivalents, I consider “truth” in the Buddhist sense to mean “what is, as it is.”

Reality includes both things that are beautiful and things that are ugly, things that we do not want to see. There are many good people, but it is a reality that there are also people whom it is hard to forgive. In Buddhism, however, all are “truth.” It is only natural, then, that the Four Noble Truths regard both the suffering of birth, old age, illness, and death and its cause, the defilements, as truths. Of course because impermanence (birth, old age, illness, and death) and suffering and nonself are truth, we are taught to truly know these and are asked to contemplate the doctrine of the Twelve-linked Chain of Dependent Origination, which teaches how birth, old age, illness, and death arise. Naturally, the state of enlightenment gained as a result is also

truth, the Truth of Extinction. Therefore, Buddhist truth has nothing to do with such values as good, beauty, and wisdom.

If we think carefully about these teachings, however, we realize that “know” does not refer solely to cognition. If we know birth, old age, illness, and death as they are, this must generate the action of severing the defilements that cause them, leading to confirmation of the enlightenment that removes attachment to this world and craving and releases us from birth, old age, illness, and death and to severance of the relationships among the twelve items. If one knows deep down that one is ugly, one strives to become beautiful. The level of self-knowledge giving rise to such effort of itself is *panna* (Sanskrit, *prajna*), which is translated as “wisdom.” In discussing the doctrine of impermanence, suffering, and nonself, I used the phrase “truly know.” In Pali this is *yathabhutam pajanati*. *Yathabhutam* means “what is, as it is” (truth as truth), and *pajanati* means “to know with the wisdom of *panna*.”

Therefore, while the mental process of *budh* is something commonplace, we can see that it is far from easy to elevate it to the level of knowing what is, as it is. The reason the phrase “know thyself” is so weighty is that it is impossible ever to fully know oneself as one is. On the other hand, if *budh* is elevated to the level of knowing what is, as it is, all becomes buddha. That is why the Four Noble Truths are held to be “the supreme teaching of all buddhas,” the Twelve-linked Chain of Dependent Origination to be an immutable truth regardless of whether or not the *tathagatas* are born into this world, and Shakyamuni is held simply to have known that.

It is far from easy to know what is, as it is. The Eightfold Path and the Middle Way are therefore presented to us as teachings we must practice to achieve this. The Eightfold Path comprises the eight right ways of living: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Central is right view. This means the attitude of endeavoring to see what is, as it is. If we strive to see what is, as it is, this will lead to right thought, right speech, and right action.

In order to see what is, as it is, we must rid ourselves of all fixed ideas and preconceptions. Removing prejudice is the Middle Way. The worldview of Buddhism holds that all things are causally connected. In other words, all things are formed and connected by direct and indirect causes and that no noncontingent, eternal, absolute entity exists. Because different conditions and circumstances lead to different results, we must not see anything in fixed terms, and there is no room for preconceptions. If we see things in terms of fixed ideas or preconceptions, we judge them only according to certain conditions and circumstances, and

that must be called prejudice. Removing fixed ideas and preconceptions means seeing things in accordance with the Middle Way, which is devoid of prejudice.

The practice of the Middle Way is the practice of compassion, in which one regards others’ sorrow as one’s own sorrow and others’ joy as one’s own joy. Underlying almost all fixed ideas, preconceptions, and prejudices is the sense, grounded in ego, that only I am right; only I should be respected; only I am absolute. The practice of compassion alone, whereby one abandons self and puts others first, is consonant with the Middle Way and cultivates the wisdom to know what is, as it is.

Shakyamuni expounded the doctrine of impermanence, suffering, and nonself and other specific teachings so that people might attain wisdom through them. It is precisely because anyone can attain this wisdom that Buddhism recognizes many buddhas; Shakyamuni himself made it clear that he was not the only buddha. Put simply, anyone who can know what is, as it is, is a buddha, and therefore Shakyamuni encouraged all people to become buddhas. In other words, Shakyamuni awakened to the fact that all sentient beings will attain buddhahood.

The Sangha and Its Governing Principles

Because I believe that the wisdom attained by Shakyamuni is reflected in the way his sangha, or community, was run, next I would like to consider the sangha and what it tells us about what Shakyamuni sought. There is much about this that we do not yet fully understand, however; the following discussion is based largely on my own way of thinking at this time.

The sangha created by Shakyamuni can be divided into two forms. One was the present sangha (*sammukhikhuta-sangha*), the other the sangha of the four quarters (*catuddisa-sangha*), the universal sangha comprising all the Buddha’s disciples. A present sangha was a group of at least four *bhikkhus* (Sanskrit, *bhikshus*), or monks, who generally acted collectively. It is surmised that a sangha probably consisted of one leader or master, several “primary disciples,” and their disciples. This is easiest to understand if we imagine an Indian extended family, with the head of household, his sons, and their families. One leader and three primary disciples constituted the minimum complement necessary to constitute a sangha. If each primary disciple then collected three disciples, the sangha would grow to thirteen members. Of course in some cases a primary disciple would leave with his own disciples to set up his own sangha. If all the members of the original sangha agreed, this splitting off did not cause a schism. Thus present sanghas grew through a process like cell division.

The sangha of the four quarters comprised all the pres-

ent sanghas, but because the means of long-distance transportation and communication needed to organize them into a whole had not been developed, the sangha of the four quarters remained an abstraction. There was no way to gather the members of all present sanghas in one place and build a consensus among them.

Of course the leader of the sangha of the four quarters was Shakyamuni. But this sangha was not run in a centralized manner. Each present sangha was autonomous and administered independently. We can regard this as an expression of the view of humanity that holds that anyone who is able to know what is, as it is, can become a buddha.

Symbolizing this, when the five *bhikkhus* who were Shakyamuni's first disciples attained the state of *arahant* (Sanskrit, *arhat*), it was said, "There were six *arahants* in the world" (*cha loke arahanto honti*). In other words, Shakyamuni grouped himself with the five disciples, making no distinction between himself and them. Later, when Yasa became an *arahant*, there were seven, and when four and then fifty friends of Yasa's became *arahants*, there were eleven and then sixty-one. In every case, Shakyamuni himself was included in that number.

It is believed that this principle was fundamental to the idea that the present sangha was the basis of sangha management. It was thought that the sangha ought to be governed by *kamma*. The Pali word *kamma* (Sanskrit, *karma*) means "action." In Buddhist parlance, *kamma* is usually translated into Japanese as *go* when it refers to individual actions, but when it refers to the actions of the sangha it is transliterated as *konma*. *Kamma* was also the name given to the measures the sangha had to determine in a meeting, such as one at which a *bhikkhu* confessed transgression of the precepts. The methods used were *natti-kamma* (Sanskrit, *jnapti-karma*), or "one motion"; *natti-dutiya-kamma* (Sanskrit, *jnapti-dvitiya-karma*), or "one motion and one proclamation"; and *natti-catuttha-kamma* (Sanskrit, *jnapti-caturtha-karma*), or "one motion and three proclamations." In *natti-kamma*, a measure was passed when the *bhikkhu* leading the meeting moved it. In *natti-dutiya-kamma*, it was passed when a proclamation (resolution) was made after the measure had been moved. And in *natti-catuttha kamma*, three proclamations were required. The method used depended on the gravity of the matter. Usually, consensus—unanimous agreement—was required. In special cases majority voting was used, but this was frowned upon and is believed to have been resorted to very seldom.

The above indicates that the present sangha was accorded independent operation and that the views of all members were respected; it was an extremely democratic organization. That does not mean that it was permissible for individual members simply to assert their personal views. If it

had been, it would not have been realistic to make consensus the default method of determining measures. It is a truism that if six or seven people gather it is very hard to get them all to agree.

Therefore, it is believed that in most cases the will of the leader became the will of the sangha. To ensure this, collusion and sometimes unfair behind-the-scenes scheming were encouraged. That was because the will of the leader of the meeting—probably the leader of the sangha—was taken to reflect the Dhamma. In other words, opposing the wishes of the leader was *adhamma*, or against the Dhamma. Therefore, the sangha was run by the leader, who sought the agreement of the members. Actually, Shakyamuni arbitrarily laid down the above-mentioned rules for governing the sangha, probably because of these underlying considerations.

This governing method was adopted because the supreme objective of sangha management was *samagga*, concord, as indicated by the sangha's inordinate fear and abhorrence of schism. This is abundantly clear from the fact that causing schism was grouped with matricide, patricide, killing an arhat, and wounding the person of Shakyamuni and causing him to shed blood as sins consigning the perpetrator to the Avici hell, the lowest hell. The sangha was the sangha precisely because the members were in concord; causing schism threatened its very *raison d'être*. The rules governing the operation of the sangha stipulated that causing schism was *samghadisesa*, one of thirteen offenses requiring suspension. Strangely, it was not classed among the gravest sins, which required permanent expulsion, but probably that was because expulsion itself contradicted the principles of the sangha. The reason majority voting, which symbolizes democratic decision making, was shunned was that it risked splitting the sangha.

In short, the method of governing the sangha was to respect the character and free will of each and every *bhikkhu* while ensuring concord; in other words, the sangha aimed to blend these seemingly contradictory principles. Given a worldview based on dependent origination, though, there was no contradiction, for only when concord in the sangha was maintained could individuals' character and free will be ensured, and only when individuals' character and free will were ensured could the concord of the sangha be maintained.

Shakyamuni's View of Society

Next I would like to examine what Shakyamuni's aim was by considering his view of society and his relationship to society. Below I will summarize the way the early Buddhist scriptures explained the birth of this world and of society, drawing on the Chinese translation of the Pali account in

the Agganna-suttanta, part of the Digha-nikaya (Collection of Long Discourses).

This world continually evolves, passes away, and re-evolves. When the world was about to be formed, sentient beings had been reborn in the Heaven of Radiance. They had no need of food, emitted light, and flew through the air. The world consisted of water and was in utter darkness. When, after a long period, beings were about to descend from the Heaven of Radiance and be born into the world, earth emerged from the water. But beings still had no need to eat, emitted light, and flew through the air with “divine feet.”

After that, savory earth (*rasa-pathavi*) appeared, beings began to eat it and, losing divine feet, began to walk upon the earth. No longer emitting light, they were in utter darkness. Thereupon the sun, moon, and stars emerged. Days and nights became distinct, and months and years appeared. Then those who ate a lot became ugly, while those who ate sparingly became beautiful. The beautiful beings became proud, the ugly beings became envious, conflict arose, and the savory earth disappeared.

After that, fragrant outgrowths (*bhumi pappataka*) appeared on the earth and beings ate them, again beauty and ugliness appeared and conflict arose, and the fragrant outgrowths disappeared.

After that, naturally ripening rice appeared on the earth, people ate it, male and female forms appeared, lust arose, and people began to build dwellings. So far, people had been born metamorphically, but now for the first time they were born viviparously. And finding it tedious to gather only the rice they needed, some people began hoarding rice. In this way people began to compete to store rice, and after they had harvested the rice it ceased to grow.

Then people began dividing rice fields and building boundaries around them. Because of this, thieves appeared and litigation increased, and therefore people began choosing men of imposing size and handsome mien to pass judgment. This was the beginning of kings, and the *khattiya* (Sanskrit, *kshatriya*) caste arose.

From time to time people appeared who found worldly life onerous and retired to the forests, living by begging. This was the beginning of the brahmins. Some, however, did not meditate but made recitation of sacred texts their calling. They formed the brahmin caste. Other people appeared who engaged in trade and accumulated wealth, forming the *vessa* (Sanskrit, *vaishya*) caste. Still others engaged in hunting and odd jobs, forming the *sudda* (Sanskrit, *shudra*) caste. Some members of these four castes appeared who shaved their heads, donned robes, and shunned society. This was the beginning of the *samanas* (Sanskrit, *shramanas*).

The above account, of course, belongs to myth, but it is worth noting its viewpoint that it is the activities of sentient beings that created the world and society. In short, both the world and society are formed by dependent origination, that is, various causes and conditions, and society has gradually degenerated, all due to our excessive greed.

The Maha-parinibbana-suttanta (Sutra of the Great Decease) begins with the following episode. King Ajatasattu of Magadha, wanting to conquer the land of the Vajjis, a confederation of city-states to the north that straddled the River Ganges, sent his chief minister, Vassakara, to Shakyamuni to ask about his chances of success. Shakyamuni replied that if the Vajjis observed the following seven conditions, it would be impossible to defeat them:

- “1. The Vajjis hold frequent, well-attended assemblies.
- “2. The Vajjis meet in concert with one another, act in concert with one another, and do what they have to as Vajjis in concert.
- “3. The Vajjis do not establish rules without precedence, they do not abolish what has been established, but proceed according to the traditional laws of the Vajjis established in the past.
- “4. The Vajjis respect, honor, revere, and salute their elders of experience and long standing, and consider their recommendations worth listening to.
- “5. The Vajjis do not forcibly abduct women and girls of good family [*kula*], or force them to live with them.
- “6. The Vajjis respect, honor, revere, and support shrines [*cetiya*] of the Vajjis both within and without [the city] and do not abandon their offerings [*bali*], which are in accordance with the law, offered and made in the past.
- “7. The Vajjis offer and extend proper protection, defense, and support for *arahants*, so that *arahants* who have not come yet may come to live there and those already living there may live there in peace.”²

As we see from this, Shakyamuni taught that if the Vajjis had a republican form of government and observed it rigorously, they would not decline. It is surmised that the land of the Sakya (Sanskrit, Shakyas) tribe, where Shakyamuni had been born and reared, probably had this kind of political system, as well. Such a system was called a sangha, and Shakyamuni introduced its method of governance to his own sangha. Therefore it is believed that the sangha reflected his own idea of the ideal political system. Thus, the above episode concluded with the Buddha's instruction to his disciples that the sangha should observe these conditions and that if it did it would prosper.

Actual societies in Shakyamuni's time, however, tended to be despotic kingdoms that were growing in power,

including the kingdoms of Magadha and Kosala, which provided the major backing for Shakyamuni's sangha. Even if Shakyamuni's own ideal was republicanism, he did not advocate revolt against Magadha and Kosala, contenting himself with praising the superior points of republicanism in an oblique fashion. Rather, he tended to defer to the powers of the day. For example, he devised a rule forbidding anyone to persuade military officers and soldiers to renounce secular life without leave from the king, on the grounds that doing so would put the kingdom in a difficult position in time of war—even though *bhikkhus* were already forbidden to approach military men. He took the same attitude toward those suffering from slavery and debt; slaves were required to get permission from their owners and debtors to repay their debts before they could enter the sangha. Although there was a proposal that the sangha be recognized as a place of sanctuary, it was rejected.

In fact, while the Agganna-suttanta's account of the formation of the world taught the equality of the four castes, Shakyamuni made no attempt to develop a social movement advocating recognition of their equality. Underlying this was the fact that the sangha's rigorous monasticism,

which prohibited *bhikkhus* from engaging in any productive or economic activities, meant that they had to depend on lay believers for all the necessities of life. A more fundamental factor, however, was what Shakyamuni was aiming for.

Shakyamuni saw sentient beings as they were and, identifying the key theme as resolution of the problem of birth, old age, illness, and death, taught a variety of teachings to enable this. He also saw society as it was and truly understood its various realities. These included truths that should be affirmed and truths that should be denied. The way the Vajjis governed themselves belonged to the former category; the caste system and war, to the latter.

For the sangha, however, which was predicated on the pursuit of the same values, a system was put in place that was able to persuade all members to accept Shakyamuni's wishes. If society had been republican, a way would have been provided for realizing Shakyamuni's principles through democratic means. But in actual society, with its diverse political and value systems, it was considered inadvisable to totally repudiate a particular sense of values or rigidly insist on one's own sense of values.

A group of Theravada monks who dwell in mountain caves at a forest hermitage in southwestern Sri Lanka descending the mountain to receive alms in the morning. They spend the rest of the day meditating, both sitting and walking, and studying scriptures.

Society is also derived from dependent origination, being formed on the basis of diverse relationships. That being the case, Shakyamuni took the position that there was no one absolute, so a single standpoint should not be forced on everyone. Thus, his aim was that “harmony is to be valued,” to borrow the opening words of the Seventeen-Article Constitution of Japan’s Prince Shotoku (573–621). The Maha-parinibbana-suttanta says that if *bhikkhus* continue to perform pure deeds over a long period, eventually those will be transmitted to the world, which will benefit many people, make many people happy, and lead to making other people’s sorrow one’s own, and will benefit both heaven and human beings and make them happy. The belief, I think, was that all things are linked by relationships of dependent origination, and that one should exert a gradual influence and avoid needless disruption.

Mahayana Elaborations of the Doctrine of Dependent Origination

Shakyamuni’s aim was that all sentient beings attain correct wisdom and become buddhas. Because everything is made up of various causes and conditions, it is necessary to remove all fixed ideas and preconceptions and establish a way of seeing things that is grounded in the Middle Way.

Shakyamuni did not establish a single absolute in any sense. For that reason, from early Buddhism to Mahayana Buddhism a truly diverse array of teachings was preached. In one sense that made teachings ambiguous and difficult to understand, and led to what can be seen as a lukewarm attitude toward social issues. For example, of course Buddhism was opposed to war and the caste system, but this position never developed into a social movement. That was because concord was the social value it aimed to establish.

In addition, the teachings of the early Buddhist scriptures, at least, come down to the solution of the problem of the birth, old age, illness, and death of sentient beings. On the surface, it must be admitted, the early Buddhists clearly aimed to cultivate peace of mind and had no interest in world peace. But the later Buddhists of the *abhidharma* period rephrased “birth, old age, illness, and death” as “arising, staying, changing, and perishing” or “formation, continuance, decline, and disintegration.” This elevated individual birth, old age, illness, and death to the objective level of the creation, development, decline, and extinction of the world and of society. That was not necessarily the achievement of later Buddhists, however. We should see it as having been connoted by Shakyamuni’s teachings.

In regard to causality, too, in early Buddhism the Twelve-linked Chain of Dependent Origination was taught to explain the birth, old age, illness, and death of sentient beings. In *abhidharma* Buddhism, however, the doctrine of

dependent origination was elaborated into “the six causes, four secondary causes, and five fruits.” This expanded the scope of the teaching from the birth, old age, illness, and death of sentient beings to the arising, staying, changing, and perishing of the world and of society, and in line with this the doctrine of dependent origination was reframed so as to explain the formation, continuance, decline, and disintegration of the world and of society.

Thereafter, Buddhism developed into Mahayana Buddhism. The religion spread to Southeast Asia, China, Tibet, the Korean Peninsula, and Japan. Meanwhile, various elaborations of the doctrine of dependent origination emerged: *dharma-dhatu* (Dharma realm) dependent origination, which holds that everything originates in the Buddha realm; *alaya-vijnana* (storehouse consciousness) dependent origination, according to which the entire world emanates from the root consciousness that each one of us possesses; and *tathagata-garbha* (*tathagata* embryo) dependent origination, the teaching that both birth-and-death and nirvana exist through the *tathagata* embryo, the potential for attaining buddhahood inherent in all sentient beings. In Japan, Kukai (774–835) drew upon *dharma-dhatu* dependent origination to formulate the teaching that all originates from the six great elements (earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness).

During this process of elaboration, various sutras supposedly preached by Shakyamuni, who had actually died long before, were created: the Prajnaparamita-sutra (Perfection of Wisdom sutras, or Wisdom sutras), the Saddharma-pundarika-sutra (Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law, or Lotus Sutra), and the Pure Land sutras, to name just a few. But they were not criticized as fabrications misrepresenting Shakyamuni. In fact, we can interpret these changes and elaborations as expressions of what Shakyamuni aimed for.

If we take the worldview that everything arises through dependent origination, there is nothing that does not change. Both the world and society are groupings of individuals. If each and every one of us strives to see what is, as it is, while good leaders gain consensus (concord), promoting what should be promoted and redressing what should be redressed, the world and society will change and the Buddha realm will be realized in this world. That, I believe, is what Shakyamuni aimed to achieve. □

Notes

1. A. A. Macdonell, *A Practical Sanskrit Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1929).

2. Hajime Nakamura, “The Seven Principles of Stable Government,” *DHARMA WORLD*, July/August 2001, p. 38.

The Path to Peace as Seen in Mahayana Buddhism

by Makio Takemura

The author sees a peaceful society as one in which all people can be their own protagonists, as it were, and can fully achieve self-realization.

The justice of the Iraq war has been questioned. Indeed, it may be asked whether the exercise of force is permissible even in a just cause. On the other hand, if a dictator is robbing his people of just about everything in life, does this mean we must stand by and ignore the situation because the exercise of force should be repudiated? Of course it would be best if people could be liberated from an unjust regime by judicious application of dialogue and pressure. But if that is impossible, what should we do?

Here, however, I do not intend to address a specific state of affairs. I want to raise the question of whether peace can be achieved simply if there is no exercise of force, or whether the absence of war equals peace. Even if there is no war, a society where oppressive and violent rule prevails can hardly be said to be peaceful. In truth, oppression of the populace is not seen in dictatorships alone. Even in societies professing democracy, the powerful, the regime, and the mass media may, consciously or unconsciously, be manipulating the people and imposing particular sets of values and patterns of behavior. In these cases, their very invisibility makes such controls hard to deal with. What state, then, does peace refer to?

Peace, Harmonious Coexistence, and Buddhism

I see a peaceful society as one in which all people can be their own protagonists, as it were, and can fully achieve self-realization. It is a society in which people with all kinds of ways of thinking coexist and in which all can pursue their own goals. In other words, it is a society that has achieved

“harmonious coexistence (Jpn., *kyosei*).” A peaceful society is not merely one in which physical violence has disappeared; it can more correctly be described as one that has realized harmonious coexistence.

In thinking about harmonious coexistence, we face a variety of challenges. We need to think about harmonious coexistence not only of differing cultures and religions and differing nations and ethnicities, but also of members of a particular group (for example, the nation and the region), such as minorities and the majority, men and women, the

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disabled and the able-bodied, and old people and young people, as well as the economically advantaged and disadvantaged, and those who have adapted to an information-technology society and those who have not. Today, too, there is vigorous advocacy of harmonious coexistence not only among people but also between human beings and the environment. Indeed, harmonious coexistence with the environment means harmonious coexistence between the present generation and future generations, people today and people in the future. In the face of these diverse challenges, we need to think about the issues each one entails.

Above I said that peace is the realization of harmonious coexistence, but in discussing harmonious coexistence we need to address an extremely wide array of issues. Of course I cannot go into all of them here. And Buddhism, rather than providing direct answers to actual issues, tends to focus on people's internal issues and issues of thought and principles. How to surmount this sort of limitation is an important issue. In this essay, as a starting point for thinking about the realization of peace and harmonious coexistence, I will concentrate chiefly on how to break free from the self that can be—indeed, is—actually or potentially harmful to other people and how to gain clues for dealing concretely with the various issues of the future. Below, I will inquire into what Buddhism teaches about introspection into the self as wrongdoer, realization of the essential relationship between self and others, and practice of the path to a symbiotic self, or a self that has achieved harmonious coexistence.

Introspection into the Self as Wrongdoer

Buddhism sees human existence as being veiled in ignorance. Everyone is enveloped in ignorance and fundamentally unable to see the truth. Therefore, a person who is convinced that he or she is correct may in fact be mistaken. Confronting this fact is important. Only when one understands it can one stop clinging rigidly to personal opinions or to a particular position and flexibly arrive at a valid view. Prince Shotoku (573–621), in the face of the grim reality of the internecine strife of his day, began his Seventeen-Article Constitution with the words “Harmony is to be valued.” He went on to write, “For all men have hearts, and each heart has its own leanings. Their right is our wrong, and our right is their wrong. We are not unquestionably sages, nor are they unquestionably fools. Both of us are simply ordinary men. How can any one lay down a rule by which to distinguish right from wrong?”¹ The words “both of us are simply ordinary men” are truly important. It is this frank realization that leads to the attitude of learning from, and respecting, one another.

The fundamental fact of ignorance gives rise to the

many defilements. It follows inevitably that we are unable to remove those defilements. In its analysis of the mind, the Vijnanavada (Consciousness-only) school of Mahayana Buddhism teaches that there are six defilements (*klesha*) and twenty auxiliary defilements (*anuklesha*). The former are also called fundamental defilements, the latter lesser, or “branch,” defilements. The fundamental defilements are ignorance, greed, anger, pride, doubt about the teachings, and false views. Anger and false views, in particular, are defilements that disrupt peace and harmonious coexistence and exacerbate our antagonistic tendencies. False views are broken down into five types: the view that a real self exists; extreme views; perverse views; stubborn, perverted views; and attachment to heretical practices. The first, the view that a real self exists, is the belief in a lasting self. This attachment to self, or ego, is the basis of aggression toward, and oppression of, others.

The observation that stubborn, perverted views—that is, rigid adherence to one's own views—themselves represent a defilement deserves deep reflection. For example, when a person uses the words of an absolute being to insist on the correctness of his or her views and oppose others, appeasement and mutual tolerance are difficult, if not impossible. Buddhism declares that attachment to a particular standpoint is itself a mistake. This is because it understands that ultimate truth does not reside in subjective understanding. It behooves us to discern and understand the meaning of the attitude toward truth encapsulated in the identification of stubborn, perverted views as a fundamental defilement.

Meanwhile, the angry heart is one that rails against suffering and its causes. When the cause of one's indignation is another person, one's indignation is directed against that person. This jeopardizes peace. In reality, though, anger at that which displeases one is human nature. But the defilements are not synonymous with what we call evil; they are what trouble a person. When one feels anger, one worries and hurts oneself, thus hindering one from realizing one's essential life. That is why one should remove anger and aspire to good. When one does, one also enriches one's relations with others.

Buddhism also talks about good and evil. According to Vijnanavada, good is that which benefits oneself and others for two lives; in other words, it is that which benefits not only oneself but also others by according with the wish of their essential lives, in both this world and the next. Evil is that which harms oneself and others for two lives; in other words, it is that which hurts oneself and others by differing from the wish of their essential lives in both the present life and the next life. To achieve peace and harmonious coexistence, we need to remove that evil. Ignorant beings that we are, however, we never cease generating defilements. It may

be impossible for ordinary people to overcome this. Even so, fully realizing that we are all deeply defiled works to steer us in a better direction than not realizing it.

Pride, another of the fundamental defilements, refers to comparing oneself with others and seeking to protect oneself. This too is an issue with regard to benefiting oneself and others. From the viewpoint of peace and harmonious coexistence, pride is a great problem because, in today's global economic system, it leads to dancing to the tune of the "logic of capital" and seeking monopoly or privileged consumption of scarce resources.

Let us now look at some of the auxiliary defilements. These are divided into major, intermediate, and minor. The intermediate auxiliary defilements, shamelessness and lack of modesty, are particularly important, as are the minor auxiliary defilements: wrath, enmity, hypocrisy, worry, jealousy, parsimony, deceit, trickery, causing injury, and arrogance. Wrath, enmity, worry, jealousy, and causing injury are variants of anger and closely related to wrongful action. These minor auxiliary defilements, even more than the fundamental defilements, arise constantly in actual situations. If we look into our own hearts, we cannot help seeing that these feelings are swirling within us. As the Chinese Buddhist master Shan-tao (613–681) said, "Greed, anger, evil, lies, deceit, and wiles have a hundred ends, and thus the evil mind is difficult to attack. They are like venomous snakes and scorpions."

Why do we so often generate such feelings? Of course they are caused by ignorance, whose origin we cannot identify, and which is fundamentally why we are attached to self. Because we focus solely on our own affairs, we cannot be seriously concerned with the affairs of others, lack consideration for others' feelings, lose the sense of compassion, and become aggressive. If this were all there were to us, achieving peace and harmonious coexistence would be impossible. Not only that; we would simply cause ourselves suffering and deny the value of our own existence.

Therefore, becoming fully aware that we, and all human beings, are enveloped in ignorance and defilements and cannot avoid doing harm to others, precisely elucidating the nature of that ignorance and those defilements and doing our best to live in a spirit of humility and learning from others, is the first step toward peace.

Realization of the Essential Relationship between Self and Others

It is, then, important to remove ignorance and defilements. As I have said, it is not just because they harm oneself. Defilements caused by ignorance continue to harm both oneself and others, and stand in the way of the essential nature of human relations. That is why we should remove

them. To begin with, we should become deeply aware of the essential form of human existence and of relations between oneself and others.

Buddhism teaches that no abiding, unified, independent, and self-governing self exists; there is no lasting, firm self. Today interfaith dialogue is advancing in various ways. Whether this truth of nonself will come to be shared by Christianity and other religions will, I believe, become a major issue in regard to human understanding. Be that as it may, to say that there is no self is not to say that the irreplaceable individual as a living, breathing phenomenon does not exist. Vijnanavada holds that each and every person embodies the eight consciousnesses, and thus recognizes that many distinct individuals exist. Each of us is a succession of mind and associated mental functions, which we in our ignorance identify as an abiding self. Self-attachment exists on the level of both consciousness and *manas* (mind) consciousness. The latter in particular is innate and is basic to our delusions.

When, thanks to spiritual practice, *manas* consciousness is transformed into wisdom, it becomes *samata-jnana*, the wisdom of regarding all things equally and universally, without distinction between self and other. In short, it is the wisdom that realizes that one's own true nature and those of all others are one and the same. Others are living the same life as oneself. When this realization emerges, compassion and love for others flow forth naturally. The attainment of *samata-jnana* should be basic to peace and harmonious coexistence. Although its attainment may be difficult, it is important to discern it through faith and understanding.

Moreover, when one realizes this equality (nondiscriminating wisdom), wondrously, the nature of interdependence and interaction becomes clear (specific wisdom develops). In other words, the relationship of dependent origination between self and others becomes clearly visible. It is true that none of us can live in isolation. We live through supporting and connecting with one another. Our awareness of this interconnection may extend no further than close relationships. In reality, however, we are part of a limitless web of relationships. The doctrine of dependent origination expounded in the Hua-yen philosophy established in T'ang-period China provides a detailed analysis of the structure of these relationships. Briefly, it can be expressed as "one is contained in all, all is contained in one; one is all, all is one." Actually, we are connected not only to people in our own country but also to people in other countries, including those on the other side of the world. This is not just an abstraction; in today's globalized world it is very much a reality.

If so, each and every one of us is fundamentally one with everyone else; we exist only through interconnection.

The irreplaceable self exists in the context of the equality and interconnection of self and others. Each self is sustained by that “basic structure” of human existence. If we deeply understood and awakened to this “basic structure,” we would live in accordance with that relationship and would rectify its distortions. That is the starting point of the path to harmonious coexistence.

Surely, if we deeply understood the “basic structure” of our own lives, we would lift the veil of our ignorance and defilements to some extent and would strive to work toward realization of the essential lives of self and others. According to Vijnanavada, therein lies good. The reason is that, as I have said, good is that which benefits self and others for two lives. Awakening of the aspiration for enlightenment, which Mahayana Buddhism emphasizes, occurs when one who has been concerned simply with one’s own benefit is taught the essential nature of human existence and seeks to live in accordance with it. Awakening of the aspiration for enlightenment is essential to the spiritual practice of Mahayana Buddhism. It is so important that the Flower Garland Sutra and other scriptures declare that the initial awakening of the aspiration for enlightenment leads instantly to perfect enlightenment. Actually, this means not wishing to become some kind of superhuman buddha but aspiring to the ideal realization of the essential communal relationship of human beings.

We should also think about the fact that it is not only individuals who exist in the context of equality and interaction between self and others; essentially, groups on various levels—region, ethnic group, state, and so on—also exist in the context of the “basic structure” of the relationship between self and others that subsumes all individuals. In other words, we should not take an absolute view of the state and so on as closed communities but should regard them as relative forms derived from the universal human community that is the “basic structure” of human existence and should open them to other groups. We can learn this from the principle of the Buddhist sangha, or community. The sangha was thought of in terms of the “present sangha,” existing within the confines of a specific locality, and the “sangha of the four quarters,” or “universal sangha,” subsuming all present sanghas throughout time and space. The sangha of the four quarters was considered to own the land, buildings, and other assets of the present sangha. Christianity teaches of the visible church and the invisible church. Buddhism has the same principle of community. What might be called the fundamental community was clearly recognized, and actual sanghas were regarded as relative forms. Today, when the globe is actually one and humanity is linked by close relationships, we should become aware of

that fundamental starting point of human existence, that “basic structure” of the human community, and should consider issues of the state and so on in its light.

Practice of the Path to a Symbiotic Self

If one understood that one cannot see the reality of the self, that is, the truth of the self and the world, and that one’s essential nature actually exists and sustains one, practice toward realization of that essential nature would be expected. In Buddhism this has always been taught in the form of spiritual practice. There may be a strong sense that Buddhist spiritual practice means individual cultivation. But that is not the case in Mahayana Buddhism. The first requisite is the awakening of the aspiration for enlightenment, but that itself springs from self-awakening in the context of relations with others. From the start, it is resolution directed toward the realm of interaction. Thus, what one aims to achieve through spiritual practice is not merely self-perfection. Of course internal purification is one theme, but at the same time spiritual practice is linked to, for example, purification of the land where one lives. Purifying the land means adorning the land one lives in and ultimately, when one has become a buddha, perfecting the land’s purification so that it is a buddha land, and contributing to the self-realization of those who live there. Activities that benefit others nurture the people of the land one lives in. The aim of the spiritual practice of Mahayana Buddhists, that is, bodhisattvas, is simply to build the ideal land—in other words, to establish a world that has achieved peace and harmonious coexistence. Bodhisattvas should devote themselves to idealizing (purifying) the lands in which they live here and now.

This is done through spiritual practices to acquire specific virtues. Buddhism considers that to be the only way purification of the land is possible. Let us, then, survey the basic spiritual practices of Mahayana Buddhism. The fundamental practices are the six perfections (*paramita*), the thirty-seven practices conducive to enlightenment, the four means, the four immeasurable contemplations, and so on. They include the twofold practice of accumulating merit and acquiring wisdom, as well as the practice of immeasurable benefit to both self and others.

The thirty-seven practices conducive to enlightenment are especially important, since they lead to attainment of the wisdom of *bodhi*, or enlightenment. They include a variety of virtues. The thirty-seven practices consist of the four fields of mindfulness (contemplation of the body’s impurity, the suffering of feeling, the impermanence of the mind, and the nonself of phenomena), the four right efforts (eradicating evil that has arisen, preventing the rise

Monks in training at Eiheiiji temple, Fukui Prefecture. In this Zen temple, even the act of taking a meal is conducted according to strict monastic rules. The meals are an occasion for the monks to pay respect to all those beings involved in making their meal possible, examine themselves to see if they are worthy of receiving them, and renew their aspiration for awakening.

of evil, causing the rise of good, and improving and augmenting the good that has arisen), the four psychic powers (the will, endeavor, mind, and thought essential to achieve the profound meditation [*dhyana*] necessary for the attainment of supernormal powers), the five roots of emancipation (faith, endeavor, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom), the five excellent powers (augmentation of the five roots), the seven factors of enlightenment (mindfulness, investigation of the Dharma, endeavor, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity), and the Eightfold Path (right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration).

Other virtues typifying Mayahana Buddhism are the four means and the four immeasurable contemplations. The four means are the four practices by which bodhisattvas receive, protect, and guide people: donation, kind words, conduct benefiting others, and compassionately assuming the form of those to be benefited. The four immeasurable contemplations divide immeasurable compassion for people into four components: kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and disinterestedness. Both sets of virtues represent the thorough practice of compassion for others. Their practice promotes realization of the essential life of self and others, and through their practice we should undo attachment to self. Surely it is precisely this kind of steady

effort that leads to world peace and harmonious coexistence.

Above all, the foundation of Mahayana Buddhist spiritual practice is the six perfections: donation, morality, forbearance, effort, meditation, and wisdom. I believe it is there that we should look for the path to peace and harmonious coexistence. Let us consider the six perfections from this viewpoint.

Donation includes giving money, goods, and property, but also sharing teachings and knowledge. And the most important form of donation is giving people a fearless heart. In other words, donation includes the effort to remove others' anxiety and dread. The practice of this perfection is the foundation of peace and harmonious coexistence.

Morality means doing no evil, doing good, and striving to benefit others. Here too the practice of compassion is required. We should clearly recognize the difference between this imperative and the Hinayana Buddhist idea of the precepts. The evil that we should not do is that which is prohibited by the precepts, while the good that we should do is "all kinds of spiritual practices." Evil is also thought of as the defilements discussed above, while good is regarded as more or less its opposite, "all kinds of good mental functions." I would note that these include *ahimsa*, sometimes translated as "nonkilling" or "nonviolence." Because keeping the precepts also means leading a moderate life and behaving so as to be able to apply oneself to the Way of the

Buddha, it entails a frugal lifestyle. If we thought about the goal of human life in this context, it seems to me, we would be bound to take a critical view of today's overheated economic competition.

Forbearance means, first and foremost, continuing quietly and willingly with spiritual practice in a harsh environment, but another important aspect is enduring criticism and vilification. When Mahayana Buddhism emerged, it was greatly defamed and oppressed by some traditional Buddhists; we should apply the experience of overcoming that in the pluralistic society of the future. The practice of forbearance will surely sustain strong links among people of differing cultures and ideologies and even bring about reconciliation.

Effort means persevering to the very end, not giving up on things before they are firmly underway and also not being satisfied with a slight achievement. This quality is extremely important in following various difficult paths, not just that of Buddhism, and is something we cannot forget in daily life. And it is crucial in the pursuit of the elusive goal of world peace, that is, the purification of this world.

Meditation, focusing the mind, is achieved through the practice of zazen and other forms of *samadhi* (concentration). To be sure, focusing the usually scattered mind through contemplation is the source of wisdom. While meditation is the practice of zazen and so on, I believe single-pointed prayer is fine, too. It seems to me that wholeheartedly praying for peace and harmonious coexistence focuses and clears the mind. Someday, through single-minded prayer, we will see the realization of peace in the actual world.

Wisdom is the wisdom of what Buddhism calls enlightenment. It is achieved through meditation. In general, we talk about nondiscriminating wisdom and specific wisdom. But when we wish wholeheartedly for peace and approach everything in that spirit, many specific wisdoms are generated, and we discover effective ways of addressing things.

As we can see from the above, the virtues of the six perfections, the very foundation of Mahayana Buddhist spiritual practice, include excellent practices for bringing about peace and harmonious coexistence. Followers of Mahayana Buddhism should realize anew that the path to peace and harmonious coexistence is found in that teaching and should strive to practice it. In doing so, they should pursue not only their own internal purification but also the purification of the land in which they live—in other words, the construction of the ideal society, including the solution of environmental problems. The Vimalakirti-nirdesha-sutra (Vimalakirti Sutra) contains the famous teaching that to purify the mind is to purify the land. This would appear to mean that if only we purify the mind, the land will also be

purified as a matter of course. In reality, however, according to Mahayana Buddhism one should purify the mind in the context of concrete relations with others or of the endeavor to reshape social relationships. Buddhism means inquiring deeply into the proper relationship among individuals, among groups, and among individuals, groups, and the environment, pondering concrete means of addressing actual issues on the basis of the ideal relationship, and tirelessly making the case for this to people. That process, surely, will open up the path to peace and harmonious coexistence.

Toward Realization of the Essential Self

The objective of Mahayana Buddhism is not to escape the wheel of birth and death and enter nirvana. Its basic position is that there can be no nirvana outside birth and death. The famous verse from the Prajnaparamita-hridaya-sutra (Heart of Wisdom Sutra) "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form" means that birth and death are nirvana and nirvana is birth and death. There is no truth, no reality, outside this actual world. The Way of the Buddha consists of idealizing and purifying this actual world.

Of course we are full of defilements. Still, with all our defilements we are sustained by the essential life. When we think of this, we find ourselves naturally wishing, inadequate though we are, to work to the best of our ability for realization of that essential realm. The thirteenth-century Japanese Zen master Dogen wrote, "When the True Law is not totally attained, both physically and mentally, there is a tendency to think that we possess the complete Law and our work is finished. If the Dharma is completely present, there is a realization of one's insufficiencies."² And the Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida (1870–1945) wrote, "From this fact that we are embraced by God's absolute love, conversely, our moral life wells forth from the depths of our own souls. . . . I think it is consistent with the Buddhist view to see the moral life of the self as grounded in the world of the Buddha's compassionate vow."³ Thus, striving with all our might for the realization of peace and harmonious coexistence is the joy of the follower of Mahayana Buddhism, that is, the bodhisattva. □

Notes

1. W. G. Aston, trans., *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697*, 2 vols. in 1 (London: Kegan, 1924; reprint, Rutland, VT, and Tokyo: Tuttle, 1972), vol. 2, p. 131.

2. Dogen, *Shobogenzo: The Eye and Treasury of the True Law*, trans. Kosen Nishiyama (Tokyo: Nakayama Shobo, 1988), p. 2.

3. Kitaro Nishida, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, translated with an introduction by David A. Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), pp. 100–101.

No Clash, but Dialogue among Religions and Nations

by Hans Küng

This article is the text of the keynote address delivered in May at the Niwano Peace Foundation Symposium in Kyoto by the recipient of the 22nd Niwano Peace Prize.

I. Clashes of Nations: The Bad Example of the West

There are three symbolic dates that signal the new paradigm in international relations that is slowly and laboriously establishing itself: its announcement (1918), its realization (1945), and finally its breakthrough (1989). Humanity had three great opportunities.

First opportunity: 1918 The First World War ended with a net result of around ten million people dead, as well as the collapse of the German Empire, the Habsburg Empire, the Czarist Empire, and the Ottoman Empire. The Chinese Empire had collapsed shortly earlier. Now there were for the first time American troops on European soil and, on the other side, the Soviet Empire was in the making. This marked the beginning of the end of the Eurocentric-imperialistic paradigm of modernity and the dawning of a new paradigm. That new paradigm had been foreseen by farsighted and enlightened thinkers, and was first set forth in the arena of international relations by the United States of America. With his "Fourteen Points," President Woodrow Wilson wanted to achieve a "just peace" and the "self-determination of the nations," without the annexations and demands for reparations which some in Congress wanted.

But the Versailles Treaty of Clemenceau of France and Lloyd-George of Britain prevented the immediate realization of the new paradigm. That was the "Realpolitik" of the old paradigm, a word used first by Bismarck, but its ideology had been developed by Machiavelli. Instead of a just peace, there emerged a dictated peace in which the defeated nations took no part. The consequences of this approach are well

known to you: Fascism and Nazism (backed up in the Far East by Japanese militarism) are the catastrophic reactionary errors that two decades later led to the Second World War, which was far worse than any previous war in world history.

Second opportunity: 1945 The year 1945 saw the end of the Second World War with a net result of around fifty million people dead and many more millions thrown into

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exile. Fascism and Nazism had been defeated, but Soviet Communism appeared stronger and more formidable than ever to the international community, even though internally it was already experiencing a political, economic, and social crisis because of Stalin's policies.

Again, the initiative for a new paradigm came from the U.S.A. In 1945 the United Nations was founded in San Francisco and the Bretton Woods Agreement on the re-ordering of the global economy was signed (foundation of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank). In 1948 came the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, along with American economic aid (Marshall Plan) for the rebuilding of Europe and its incorporation into a free-trade system. But Stalinism blocked this paradigm for its sphere of influence, which led to the division of the world into East and West.

Third opportunity: 1989 This year saw the successful peaceful revolution in Eastern Europe and the collapse of Soviet Communism. After the Gulf War it was again an American president who announced a new paradigm, a "New World Order," and found enthusiastic acceptance all over the world with this slogan. But in contrast to his predecessor, Woodrow Wilson, President George Bush senior felt embarrassed when he had to explain what this "vision thing" for the international order should look like. No change in Iraq, no democracy in Kuwait, no solution for the Israel-Palestine conflict, not enough democratic change in the Arab World. Instead of reforms we got Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda. And at the present moment also doubts in the United States increase that the so-called "war against terrorism" will be our vision for the future. So today the question arises: over the last fifteen years, have we again forfeited the opportunity for a "new world order," a new paradigm?

We should not give up hope—and especially committed members of all religions should work for the new paradigm. After all, despite the wars, massacres, and streams of refugees in the twentieth century, despite the Gulag archipelago; the Holocaust, the most inhuman crime in the history of humanity; and the atomic bomb, we must not overlook some major changes for the better. After 1945, not only has humanity seen numerous grandiose scientific and technological achievements; many ideas set forth in 1918 that had been pressing for a new, postmodern, and overall global constellation were also able to better establish themselves. The peace movement, the women's rights movement, the environmental movement, and the ecumenical and interreligious movement all began to make considerable progress. There emerged a new attitude toward war and

Dr. Küng with former German President Richard von Weizsäcker and former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt in Berlin 2002.

disarmament, to the partnership of men and women, to the relationship between economy and ecology.

Despite the terrors of the twentieth century there is "still perhaps something like a hesitant historical progress." Over the last century, the formerly dominant political orientations have been banished for good. For one, imperialism has no scope in global politics after decolonialization. Moreover, since the end of the South African apartheid regime, racism, a consistent policy of racial privilege and racial discrimination, is no longer the explicit political strategy in any state. Likewise nationalism has become a non-word in the lands of Western Europe where it originated, and for many people it is being replaced by dialogue, cooperation, and integration.

II. Dialogue among Nations and Religions: A Challenge to the World

The movement is now tending toward a novel political model of regional cooperation and integration, and it is attempting to peacefully overcome centuries of confrontation. The result—not only between Germany and France first, not only in the European Union, but in the whole area of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, founded in 1948 and developed in 1960), including all of the Western industrialized countries (the European countries, the U.S.A., Canada, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan)—is half a century of democratic peace. That truly is a successful paradigm change! There were and are still wars in Asia, Africa, South America, and in the Islamic world (e.g., Colombia, Israel-Palestine, Sudan, Congo, Iraq), but nobody could imagine a war between Germany and France or the United States and Japan anymore.

After this all too brief historical tour, I would like to move

on to the fundamental definition of the new paradigm of international relations. I have received much stimulation and support in a discussion within the small international “group of eminent persons” that was convened by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan for the UN Year of “Dialogue Among Civilizations” 2001, an endeavor that produced a report for the UN General Assembly, “Crossing the Divide: Dialogue Among Civilizations” (Seton Hall University, 2001).

On the basis of the experiences in the EU and the OECD, the new overall political constellation can be sketched briefly as follows. Here, ethical categories cannot be avoided. In principle, the new paradigm means policies of regional reconciliation, and understanding and cooperation instead of the modern national politics of self-interest, power, and prestige. Specifically, the exercise of political action now calls for reciprocal cooperation, compromise, and integration instead of the former confrontation, aggression, and revenge. This new overall political constellation manifestly presupposes a change of mentality, which goes far beyond the politics of the present day. For this new overall political constellation to hold, new approaches to international politics are needed.

For one, new international organizations are not enough here; what is needed is a new mind-set. National, ethnic, and religious differences must no longer be understood, in principle, as a threat, but rather as possible sources of enrichment. Whereas the old paradigm always presupposed an enemy, indeed a traditional enemy, the new paradigm no longer envisions or needs such an enemy. Rather, it seeks partners, rivals, and economic opponents for competition instead of military confrontation, and uses “soft” power (diplomatic influence and political persuasion, cultural influence and prestige) instead of “hard” military power (Joseph Nye).

This is so because it has been proven that in the long run national prosperity is not furthered by war, but only by peace; not by opposition or confrontation, but by cooperation. And because the different interests that exist are satisfied in collaboration, a policy is possible that is no longer a zero-sum game in which one wins at the expense of the other, but a positive-sum game in which all win.

Of course this does not mean that politics has become easier in the new paradigm. It remains the “art of the possible,” though it has now become nonviolent. If it is to be able to function, it cannot be based on a random “post-modernist” pluralism, in which anything goes and anything is allowed. Rather, it presupposes a social consensus on particular basic values, basic rights, and basic responsibilities. All social groups and all nations must contribute to this basic social consensus, especially religious believers, but

Dr. Küng in dialogue with Rev. Seiko Hirata, head priest of Tenryūji, a major Rinzai Zen temple in Kyoto.

also nonbelievers and adherents to the different philosophies or ideologies. In other words, this social consensus, which cannot be imposed by a democratic system but has to be presupposed, does not mean a specific ethical system, but a common minimum of ethical standards, a common ethic, an ethic of humankind. This global ethic is not a new ideology or “superstructure,” imposed by the West upon the “rest,” but brings together the common religious and philosophical resources of all of humankind.

The globalization of the economy, technology, and communication needs also a global ethic in coping with global problems. The two fundamental demands of the 1993 Chicago Declaration, confirmed by the Third Parliament of the World’s Religions in Cape Town 1999 and taken up in the manifesto “Crossing the Divide” for the UN Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations, are the most elementary ones that can be made in this regard, yet it is by no means a matter of course.

The first is the principle of humanity: the demand for true humanity. Now, as before, women and men are treated inhumanly all over the world. They are robbed of their opportunities and their freedom; their human rights are trampled underfoot; their dignity is disregarded. But might does not make right! In the face of all inhumanity, our religious and ethical convictions demand that “every human being must be treated humanly.” This means that every human being—man or woman, white or colored, young or old, American or Iraqi—has to be treated not in an inhuman, even bestial way, but in a truly human, a truly humane, way.

The second fundamental demand is the golden rule: “There is a principle that was found and that has persisted in many religious and ethical traditions of humankind for thousands of years: What you do not wish done to yourself,

do not do to others. . . . This should be the irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations, and religions.”

On the basis of these two fundamental principles, four ethical directives, found in all the great traditions of humanity, have to be remembered:

- You shall not murder, torture, torment, wound; in positive terms: have reverence for life; a commitment to a culture of nonviolence and reverence for life.
- You shall not lie, deceive, forge, manipulate; in positive terms: speak and act truthfully; a commitment to a culture of truthfulness and tolerance.
- You shall not steal, exploit, bribe, corrupt; in positive terms: deal honestly and fairly; a commitment to a culture of fairness and a just economic order.
- You shall not abuse sexuality, cheat, humiliate, dishonor; in positive terms: respect and love one another; a commitment to a culture of partnership and equal dignity of men and women.

A global ethic should not be imposed by law but be brought to public awareness. A global ethic is simultaneously applicable to persons, institutions, and results. To this degree, a global ethic does not just focus on the collective responsibility to the relief of any responsibility the individual may hold (as if only the social “conditions,” “history,” and the “system” were to blame for specific abuses and crimes). Instead, it is focused in a particular way on the responsibility of each individual in his or her place in society and specifically on the individual responsibility of political leaders.

Free commitment to a common ethic does not, of course, exclude the support of law, but rather includes it, and can in some circumstances appeal to law. Such circumstances include cases of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and aggression contrary to international law, as in the former Yugoslavia. Meanwhile, following its ratification by more than sixty nations, the International Criminal Court (ICC) is now established, and it is to this court that such violations can be brought, specifically when a signatory state is unable or unwilling to inflict legal penalties on atrocities committed in its territory.

III. A Realistic Vision of Peace: No Relapse into the Paradigm of Confrontation

After the war in Afghanistan and the illegal and immoral war in Iraq—two wars that have not brought peace to either country—the decisive question is more than ever: what international commitment are we to make?

My concern is not the alternatives of the past, but the

alternatives of the future. I believe that we do have alternatives, as long as foreign policy is no longer above all military policy and if the billions that are being spent on sinfully expensive new weapons systems and transport planes were being spent on kindergartens and schools, health care, and public services at home and on fighting against poverty, hunger, and misery in the world.

After the Second World War and marked by the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan’s new constitution pledged in Article 9 that “land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained.” Let us hope that the hysteria of the “war against terrorism” will not lead Japan to renounce this peaceful attitude, which is highly appreciated in the world, and to fall back into the old paradigm.

To promote peace, particular demands will be put on all religions, not to support uncritically the official politics of their respective governments but to fulfill their prophetic role.

Let me conclude now: I started with the lack of vision after 1989. I hope it became clear what this vision could really be. It is not a vision of war, but a vision of peace. Let me summarize it in the following four propositions:

- There will be no peace among nations without peace among religions.
- There will be no peace among religions without dialogue among religions.
- There will be no dialogue among religions without global ethical standards.
- There will therefore be no survival of this globe without a global ethic. □

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The Divine Powers of a Buddha

by Gene Reeves

The divine powers of a Buddha are said to be ten in all, five having to do with the past, and five with the future, the latter being understood as consequences of the former being widely implemented.

Since the time of its early interpretations in China, the Lotus Sutra has been taken to have two halves. The early fifth-century Chinese commentator Tao-sheng, for example, drew a line between the present chapters 14 and 15, regarding chapters 1 through 14 as the first section of the sutra, revealing that the cause of the three vehicles is the one vehicle. He regarded chapters 15 through 22 as the second section, revealing that the effect of the three vehicles is the same as that of the one vehicle. The remaining chapters, now numbered 23 through 28, were taken to be a kind of appendix.

In the sixth century, T'ien-t'ai Chih-i, the most influen-

tial interpreter of the Lotus Sutra, basically followed this same division, understanding the two "halves" to be like gateways or entrances to the Dharma, the first being the gate of evidence, or mark (also called "trace"), and the second, the gate of origin, or source. Subsequently the first half was sometimes associated with the teaching of one vehicle, which is found especially in chapter 2; sometimes with Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha. The second half was associated with the Eternal, or Original, Buddha.

Thus the Lotus Sutra proper was understood to come to a kind of end and logical conclusion with the "Entrustment" of chapter 22. The brief chapter 21, "Divine Powers of the Tathagata," particularly the symbolism of its story, has traditionally been taken to signify the unity of the Lotus Sutra. Despite the seeming duality of the two gates, the symbolism of the story is taken to express the unity in principle of the two. Analyzing the sutra into two halves, in a sense, divides it. In this chapter we are encouraged to remember that the two halves are two halves of a whole, of a unity.

The Story

All of the billions of bodhisattvas who had sprung up from below the earth in chapter 15 promise the Buddha that they will continue to preach the Lotus Sutra everywhere, both in the worlds where the Buddha is embodied in other buddhas and in this world in which the Buddha has died. "Why? Because we, too, want to gain this true and pure, great Dharma, to embrace, read and recite, explain, copy, and make offerings to it."

The Buddha then displayed his divine powers by extending his long and broad tongue up to the heaven of Brahma and emitting from the pores of his body a magnificent,

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many-colored light that illuminated all the worlds in all directions. Similarly, the other assembled buddhas seated on lion seats under jewel trees stretched out their tongues and emitted rays of light from their bodies.

After a hundred thousand years, all these buddhas withdrew their tongues, cleared their throats, and snapped their fingers in unison, causing the earth in all the lands to quake in the six ways.

Through this display of divine powers, all of the living beings of all the other worlds were able to see all of the buddhas and bodhisattvas and others assembled in this world, making them full of great joy as a consequence of obtaining something they had never had before. Then the heavenly beings, gods, and others, proclaimed in song in loud voices that Shakyamuni Buddha was now preaching the Lotus Sutra in this world and that all should rejoice and make suitable offerings to him.

Then all the living beings praised the Buddha, saying "Praise to Shakyamuni Buddha," "Praise to Shakyamuni Buddha." Then they took flowers, incense, necklaces, banners, ornaments, jewels, all sorts of decorations, and tossed them in the direction of this world, where they came together like clouds and formed a canopy over the place where the buddhas had assembled. Then the way between all the worlds opened up, as though there were a single world.

The Buddha then told Superior Practice and the other bodhisattvas that all of the Buddha's teachings, divine powers, secrets, and profound matters are revealed and taught in this sutra. For this reason, bodhisattvas should embrace, read and recite, explain and copy, and cultivate and practice it as they had been taught. Wherever this is done a stupa should be erected, as such a place is a place of turning the wheel of the Dharma and of supreme awakening.

In the verses that conclude the chapter, the Buddha promises again that anyone who keeps the sutra and teaches according to its true meaning will illuminate gloom just as the sun and the moon eliminate darkness. Causing others to enter the Mahayana way, they will be able to attain the awakening of a buddha.

Ten Divine Powers

The Chinese/Japanese term which is translated here as "divine powers" is *jin-riki* in Japanese pronunciation, literally god-power, where both "god" and "power" can be understood as either singular or plural. Often the term is translated as "supernatural powers." But in Buddhism there is not as sharp a distinction as there is in the West between what is natural and what is supernatural. In the midst of everyday life, marvelous things happen. They are extraordinary, even supernatural in some sense, but they are not a

consequence of external powers or of divine intervention in the workings of nature.

The divine powers displayed in this story are said to be ten in all, five having to do with the past, and five with the future. The second five can be understood as consequences of the first five being widely implemented.

(1) *The Buddha's long, broad tongue reaching to the Brahma heaven*

The long and broad tongue testifies to the truth of what had been taught. It is a way of affirming that what the Buddha teaches is true, especially true in the sense that it is effective in relieving suffering. It is true not only in a theoretical sense, but also because it is like a powerful medicine. This tongue symbolizes the length and breadth of the Dharma, the teachings of the Buddha. That is, it symbolizes the idea that the Dharma-rain can reach everyone. As a teaching, though it takes many forms, the Dharma goes everywhere and is one, that is, it is neither divided nor fragmented.

Thus this image of the long and broad tongue reaching to the heavens is called a symbol of *nimon-shin'itsu*, "two gates, one in faith." That is, in faith the two halves of the sutra are one, and Shakyamuni Buddha and the Original Buddha are one. This is why in Rissho Kosei-kai, the central object of religious devotion is said to be the "Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha."

This unity of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Original Buddha is related to the Lotus Sutra's repeated affirmation of the reality and importance of this concrete, actual world. The original, universal Buddha is always an embodied Buddha; for us, principally in Shakyamuni Buddha, who is uniquely the Buddha of this world, the one declared in the Lotus Sutra to be the "father of this world." The abstract universal and original Buddha requires embodiment in order to have effect in this world. Without Shakyamuni Buddha, for us at least, there might be no buddha at all. Even the three so-called "Pure Land Sutras," which are the textual basis for devotion to Amida Buddha, are preached by Shakyamuni Buddha. The whole Buddhist tradition has its historical origin in Shakyamuni Buddha.

(2) *Emitting light from every pore*

The light of truth dispels the darkness both of delusion and of despair. For the Lotus Sutra, it is important not only that delusion be dispelled at every opportunity, overcoming despair is equally, or more, important.

This points to the truth that it is better to illuminate the darkness than to complain about it, that is, to the importance of being positive. With its emphasis on the potential

of all living beings to become buddhas, its affirmation of the reality and importance of actual life, its insistence on making the best of even bad situations, and its general neglect of basically negative ideas such as emptiness, the Lotus Sutra is an affirmative book, affirming not only life and the world, but especially the life and world of the reader.

Light is something positive; darkness, merely the absence of light. Similarly, ignorance can be understood as the absence of truth, and delusion as the absence of reality. The Lotus Sutra encourages us to focus not on the negativities of darkness, ignorance, and delusion, but on ways to limit and overcome them by spreading light and truth and compassion.

That all of the other buddhas also stretch out their tongues and emit light from their pores should be taken to mean that all buddhas have realized and teach the same truth. It is a symbol of *nimon-ri'itsu*, "two gates, one in principle." Even though there are two apparently different gates, in principle they are united as one.

(3) *Clearing throats or coughing simultaneously*

This strange event, not easily interpreted, may signify the oral preaching of the Dharma, as one often has to clear one's throat before speaking before an audience. That this throat clearing is done simultaneously has been taken to signify that all buddhas preach the same thing.

Traditionally it has been taken as signifying that the teachings are united as one and is known as *nimon-kyo'itsu*, "two gates, one teaching." This means that despite the Mahayana tendency to depreciate earlier, so-called "Hinayana," teachings, the Lotus Sutra affirms that in principle the shravaka-yana and the bodhisattva-yana, are united as one teaching. Both are needed.

(4) *Snapping fingers in unison*

This equally strange event is said to represent the giving of assurance to someone, or the making of a pledge or a promise. Traditionally, it is called *nimon-nin'itsu*, "two gates, one humanity." It is taken to symbolize the important activity of identifying with others, an essential and vital part of bodhisattva practice. One might even say that fundamental to the practice of the bodhisattva way is sympathy for others, a sense of being united with someone else in a profound way. Founder Niwano even wrote, "the entire teaching of the Lotus Sutra is ultimately resolved into the spirit of union between oneself and others."*

With the dramatic acts of throat-clearing and finger-snapping, the text invites us not only to see something marvelous with the eyes of imagination but also to imagine hearing the marvelous sounds of zillions of buddhas clear-

ing their throats simultaneously and snapping their fingers in unison. That these sounds are extremely powerful is signified by their going out to all of the worlds throughout the universe.

(5) *Causing the lands in all buddha-lands to shake in six ways*

The shaking, or quaking, of all the lands in all the worlds expresses the idea that the entire universe and everything in it is moved by the divine powers of the Buddha. The influence of Buddha-dharma over nature is affirmed here. Unlike some forms of Buddhism, the Lotus Sutra insists over and over that the Dharma is not only a human thing but a cosmic reality. But also recognized here is the sense that when we hear the sutra preached we should be moved, even shaken from our normal pursuits, to the point of actually practicing the teachings.

The traditional expression for this is *nimon-gyo'itsu*, "two gates, one practice." This does not mean that the same practice is suitable for everyone, but that there is a profound unity among authentic practices. As is said so clearly in chapter 2, skillful means are many, but they serve one common purpose.

(6) *All of the living beings of all the worlds being able to see the buddhas and bodhisattvas, monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen in this world, giving them great joy*

In the first chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha emits a light by which people in this world can see everything in all the other worlds, but in this case it is the opposite. By emitting light from this world, all of the living beings in other worlds can see Shakyamuni Buddha and Abundant Treasures Buddha and all of the buddhas, bodhisattvas, monastics, and lay-people in this world. That all kinds of living beings can see by the buddhas' light means that all can fulfill the Dharma—that all living beings, human and non-human, even those in other worlds, are living in the Buddha's light.

Traditionally this has been called *mirai-ki'itsu*, "in the future, unity of opportunity." It has been taken to mean that there is no essential difference in the capacity to receive the Dharma among living beings—all can become awakened in the future.

(7) *Heavenly beings in the sky singing in loud voices that Shakyamuni Buddha is teaching the Lotus Sutra in this world and that all should rejoice, worship him, and make offering to him*

What is expressed here is the importance of the Buddha-dharma not only for beings in this world, but also for gods

and other heavenly beings, another expression of the cosmic reality and importance of the Buddha-dharma. But the hearing of heavenly beings singing in loud voices in the sky also suggests the idea that living beings can be inspired by what they hear from the sky.

This is a dramatic way of affirming the human imagination as a source of inspiration. With the imagination, human beings can soar above the ordinary world, gaining inspiration to return to it with renewed dedication to transforming it into the ideal pure land.

Traditionally this has been called *mirai-kyo'itsu*, “in the future, unity in teaching.” It means that while in reality there are now conflicts among teachings, often with various ones claiming that only their teachings are correct, in the future this will no longer be so. As people realize and practice *nimon-kyo'itsu*, they will come to realize that apparently conflicting teachings can be brought into a unity by the divine power of the Lotus Sutra.

(8) *Hearing these heavenly voices, all the living beings in other worlds then put their hands together, faced this world and praised the Buddha, saying: “Praise to Shakyamuni Buddha! Praise to Shakyamuni Buddha!”*

This has been understood as a prediction that all living beings will eventually take refuge in the Buddha—*mirai-nin'itsu*, “in the future, a unity of humanity.” Now there are terrible conflicts among people—frequent wars, competition for scarce resources, ethnic feuds, high levels of crime, family quarrels, and so on. But if, the Lotus Sutra teaches, people learn to practice *nimon-nin'itsu*, that is, learn to respect other people, listen to them, and have sympathy for them, the world will become a more peaceful place.

(9) *All the living beings in the other worlds taking flowers, incense, necklaces, banners, ornaments, jewels, all sorts of decorations, and tossed them in the direction of this world, where they come together like clouds, forming a canopy over the place where the buddhas had assembled*

The coming together of a variety of offerings to form a single canopy represents the variety of practices coming together to form one harmonious practice. It is called *mirai-gyo'itsu*, “in the future, unity in practice.” This does not mean that everyone will practice in the same way, but that the variety of practices can be unified by the Lotus Sutra into a coherent unity.

(10) *The way between all the worlds opening up as though there were a single world*

By following the Buddha Way—basically recognizing the potential in others to become a buddha, their ability to be a buddha for someone, and by practicing appropriately, that

is, helpfully—all sorts of differences can be overcome—ethnic, national, religious, gender, language, educational, economic, and so on. All sorts of people—who are equal in the Buddha's light—become united in purpose. This is termed *mirai-ri'itsu*, “in the future, unity in principle.” Here, unity in principle does not mean “in principle” in contrast with actuality, but more like unity in truth. It points to the potential to transform this world into a pure land of beauty, harmony, and peace.

Bodhisattva Practice

Though not the heart of the story or message of this chapter, we should make note of the fact that these great bodhisattvas, said in chapter 15 to have golden colored bodies and the thirty-two features of a buddha, want to teach the Dharma because they want to continue to improve themselves in embodying it by embracing, reading and reciting, explaining, copying, and making offerings to the sutra. In other words, even great bodhisattvas need to continue to hear and embrace the Dharma.

Then, we are told, the Buddha revealed his great divine powers. It would be easy to assume that nothing important is being taught here. This is because in this story we are being challenged to go beyond doctrine. Understanding can be very important. Surely no one will want to follow the Dharma if they think it is stupid or without good sense. But here dramatic imagery is used primarily for another purpose, namely, to have us feel the importance of the teachings and want to follow them ourselves. From the perspective of the Lotus Sutra, knowledge and theoretical understanding of the Dharma is not enough: the teachings should be embodied in our everyday lives in order for the Buddha and the Buddha-dharma to continue to live in this world. For this, a powerful emotion has to arise, a desire not only to learn from the teachings but also to follow them by taking them into our lives.

This is what makes someone a bodhisattva, this ability to incorporate the Dharma in one's life. It is a great mistake, I think, to understand the Buddhist tradition that we inherit as being nothing but a history of great thinkers and leaders. Saints such as Tao-sheng and Chih-i, Saicho and Nichiren are extremely important for what they have contributed to the tradition, but we should never forget that the Buddhism we inherit with gratitude is a product as well of countless less well-known and unknown people who have emerged from this earth to become bodhisattvas by doing good, by contributing to the welfare of others. Unlike well-known monks and their royal supporters, the vast majority of such bodhisattvas have been ordinary lay-people.

If we can understand this, with our hearts as well as with our minds, we can understand that we too can be among

the bodhisattvas who emerge from the earth, that is, from engagement in the actual world.

Unity and Diversity

It is important to recognize that here again, as in earlier stories, the Lotus Sutra reveals a consistent affirmation of unity and diversity. The unity found and affirmed is not a unity in which difference disappears. Here, unity requires diversity, that is, something to unify. Diversity of faith, teachings, practices, humanity, and the like are not going to disappear; nor would it be good if they did. Precisely because different beings have different backgrounds and experiences, and different levels of ability in various undertakings, variety is needed. Without depth of diversity, the Dharma would never flourish. But such diversity requires coherence, some unity, if it is to be effective. Unity and diversity require each other.

As said earlier, chapter 21 is taken to express the unity of the sutra. But it goes beyond that. The unity is taken to be a bringing together of all the Buddha's teachings, divine powers, secrets and profound matters. "In brief," it says toward the end of the prose section, "all the teachings of the Tathagata, all the unhindered, divine powers of the Tathagata, the hidden core of the whole storehouse of the Tathagata, and all the profound matters of the Tathagata, are proclaimed, demonstrated, revealed, and preached in this sutra."

The Lotus Sutra, therefore, should never be used as a way of disrespecting or rejecting other sutras. Rather, its aim is to integrate them into a unity of opportunity, teaching, humanity, practice, and truth.

Building Stupas

At the end of the story is a very interesting passage, a part of which is often used in Buddhist liturgical services. Let's look at the entire paragraph:

"After the extinction of the Tathagata, you should all wholeheartedly embrace, read and recite, explain and copy, and practice it as you have been taught. In any land, wherever anyone accepts and embraces, reads and recites, explains and copies, and practices it as taught, or wherever a volume of the sutra is kept, whether in a garden, or a woods, or under a tree, or in a monk's cell, or a layman's house, or a palace, or in a mountain valley or an open field, in all these places you should put up a stupa and make offerings. Why? You should understand that all such places are places of the Way. They are where the buddhas attain supreme awakening; they are where the buddhas turn the Dharma-wheel; they are where the buddhas reach complete nirvana."

Should we understand from this that we should literally build stupas wherever the sutra is taught or wherever a

volume of it is kept? I think not. Here, putting up a stupa is a dramatic way of indicating that all places where the Dharma is embodied in actual life are sacred places, as holy as any stupa. In a sense, it is a rejection of the idea that only temples and stupas and such are holy places. For the Lotus Sutra, any place at all can be a holy place, a place of awakening, a place of the Way, simply by being a place in which the Dharma is embodied by being put into practice. Wherever you are, whether at home or at work or at play, you can make the Dharma live by putting it into practice. And it is precisely in such places, wherever you are, that "the buddhas attain supreme awakening, . . . the buddhas turn the Dharma-wheel, . . . the buddhas reach complete nirvana." This is a fantastically powerful affirmation of the reality and importance, even of the holy ground on which we all stand.

If you take refuge in the Buddha, the Buddha has refuge in you—your practice is what enables the Buddha to be alive in this world. Not yours alone, of course, but your practice of the bodhisattva way, along with the practice of others, is what can dispel the darkness and the gloom of living beings.

Dispelling Gloom

The final verses of the chapter have sometimes been taken to be the final teaching of the sutra and therefore to be especially important. They express, quite simply, the power and possibility that each of us has to make a positive difference wherever we are.

After the extinction of the Tathagata,
Anyone who knows the sutras preached by the Buddha,
Their causes and conditions and proper order,
Will teach the truth according to its true meaning.

Just as the light of the sun and the moon
Can dispel darkness,
Such a person, working in the world,
Can dispel the gloom of living beings,
Leading innumerable bodhisattvas
Finally to dwell in the One Vehicle.

Therefore, one who has wisdom,
Hearing of the blessings to be gained,
After my extinction should embrace this sutra.
Such a person will be determined to follow,
Without doubts, the Buddha Way. □

* Niwano, Nikkyo. *Buddhism for Today* (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Company, 1976), p. 331.

The Lotus Sutra and Tendai

The Tenth International Lotus Sutra Conference, Beijing

by Stephen Covell

Just over twelve hundred years ago, following his decade-long retreat on Mount Hiei, Saicho journeyed to China to deepen his understanding of Tendai and the Lotus Sutra. Perhaps taking their cue from Saicho, Gene Reeves, Rissho Kosei-kai, and the Chuo Academic Research Institute chose to hold the tenth International Lotus Sutra Conference in Beijing. The choice was an excellent one and, though the hot springs of Japan and the warm welcome of local Rissho Kosei-kai branch members were missed, the rewards were great. Participants were able to further their knowledge of the

Lotus Sutra while at the same time observe and experience firsthand the changing face of contemporary China, the great strides Buddhism has made in China in the last decade, and the kindness and warmth of the Chinese people.

Scholars from the U.S., Japan, and China gathered on May 22 at the Jingshi Hotel for an extended three-day conversation on the Lotus Sutra and Tendai. The papers shared several themes, including the use of creative interpretation by Tendai masters and others, the importance of practice to the Tendai tradition's understanding of the Lotus Sutra, the focus of Tendai on this life (or the secular, lived world), and the question of insentient buddha-nature.

Leo Lefebure (Georgetown University, Washington, DC) compared the Lotus Sutra and Saint Augustine, and brought up important questions about how to read a sacred text. In his comments on the paper, Ruben Habito remarked that scholars often lose sight of the sacred nature of the text, seeing it as an object for objective study. Lefebure's paper acted as a corrective to this approach, calling on scholars to see the text as sacred—as opening a gateway to the unknown. Paul Groner reminded participants that when reading the text as sacred one must refrain from then reading one's own interpretation back over those of oth-

ers. Reading the text in its historical context is equally as important as remembering its sacred nature.

Another issue raised by Lefebure's paper was that of how to view repentance and sin within Buddhism. Brook Ziporyn noted that in Buddhism the focus is on seeing past behavior differently. Thus, for example, repentance of the sense organs is repenting having let attachments derived from each organ block right seeing.

Mariko Walters' (Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA) paper described the spread of Lotus Sutra Buddhism in Central Asia. As Jacqueline Stone noted in her comments, this paper complicated the standard narrative of the transmission of Buddhism. No longer could we see Buddhism as having been transmitted in linear fashion from India, to China, to Japan, and to the West. We now had to understand it as transmitted to China, then back to Central Asia, and then back again. This vision of a migrating Buddhism adds new and provocative layers to our understanding of Buddhist history.

Dan Stevenson's (University of Kansas, Lawrence) paper on sudden enlightenment and the six faculties rounded out the first day's talks. The discussion that ensued centered on the importance of practice in the Tendai tradition. Tendai masters display a great self-confidence born of meditative experience and interpret

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Participants in the tenth International Lotus Sutra Conference.

texts selectively to support that experience. This, however, does not amount to a denial of textual authority or the authority of one's teacher. It only means that, in the end, enlightenment must be found within oneself; it does not come from a teacher, though a teacher and textual study are important means to discovering this about oneself.

The following morning began with a paper by Zhang Fenglei (Renmin University of China, Beijing). The key point of his paper was to demonstrate that Shakyamuni paid attention to human lives and that the Tendai school inherited this earthly-needs orientation. Among the many interesting points made during discussion was that the famed idea of *ichinen sanzen* (three thousand realms in one moment of thought) was, for Chih-i, just the logical conclusion, derived from meditation, of the idea that all things are inherently inclusive. Scholarly debate mistakenly elevated this to an ontological claim, where for Chih-i it was simply meant as a part of practice. Also of note was the discussion that arose regarding the threefold truth. Zhang showed how Chih-i transcended Nagarjuna's two-truth position by means of the middle truth. For Nagar-

juna, the conventional truth came first and led to emptiness, whereas for Chih-i the middle reintegrates the conventional. This is where the secular orientation of Chih-i can be found. Chih-i puts the spotlight on the expressed and expressible, rather than on the inexpressible, which is where Nagarjuna's emphasis lies.

Following the conversion on the threefold truth, Hiroshi Kanno (Soka University, Tokyo) treated participants to an investigation of the concepts of relative subtlety and absolute subtlety and the development of commentaries on the titles of sutras. The discussion from Kanno's paper hardly had a moment to cool before a third weighty exploration of Tendai philosophy began. Brook Ziporyn's (Northwestern University, Evanston, IL) paper brought together the day's discussions by seeking to understand Chan-jan's (711–782) and Chih-li's (960–1028) use of the term *xing* (nature) in light of the meditative practices known as mind-observation (*guanxin*) and inherence-observation (*guanju*).

Ziporyn's paper made use of meditation texts to get at the meaning of these terms. Along the way, important points were raised, such as the idea that anything designated as nature

must be everywhere and “everywhen,” unconditioned, ineradicable from any time or place. However, Ziporyn was careful to note that that did not imply a single fixed nature, but, rather, many natures (3,000 by Tendai counting). The mind, he stated, is characterized as that which divides, calculates, and separates. This act of parsing gives identity, and in that sense the mind is creator. The above discussion leads to the concept of “in-ness.” This is the idea that nothing can be in something without being inherent to it. Nothing exists totally separate from everything else. All of this is not, in Tendai, merely philosophical speculation, but is integral to practice. Meditation, Ziporyn asserted, is about exploring the gray areas, the borderlines between individual identity and “in-ness.” It is about seeing distinctions and their co-existence.

The discussion picked up on these ideas and led Ziporyn to comment on the idea of inherent evil. One cannot single out or create something separate, including evil. To seek to change part of the world but not all is to manifest desire, and desire leads to suffering. Evil is not overcome by eradicating it but by fully realizing it, which means to see it in all things. This then removes the motivation for doing the act in the first place, since it exists everywhere and “everywhen.” In this sense, Buddhist practice is itself inherently evil because it requires differentiation. Nevertheless, Ziporyn remarked, here one can make a distinction between which evils are more conducive to eliminating motivation. Buddhism, thus, becomes a good evil, because it is conducive to eliminating motivation.

The conversation continued with Linda Penkower's (University of Pittsburgh) paper on Chan-jan's insentient buddha-nature theory. Penkower's paper gave an overview of the history of the early debate over whether or not

insentient beings possess the buddha-nature. Additionally, she demonstrated that the early debate was as much about sectarian positioning as it was about the nature of insentient life. Penkower showed how those involved in the debate used it to identify themselves against other rival interpreters of Buddhism. Importantly to contemporary discussions of Buddhism and ecology, she also made clear that at the time the focus on insentient beings was not really about the insentient beings (i.e., people were not terribly interested whether a rock had enlightenment or not); rather, it was a means to talk about human nature. Chan-jan, she maintained, was trying to eliminate false notions about the buddha-nature, especially the idea that the buddha-nature somehow implied possession of a soul. For plants and the like to have the buddha-nature only meant that they show the qualities of buddhahood. This can be seen in the view that offenses occur when one creates suffering but, since plants and the like were understood not to suffer, causing them harm is not an offense (or is a minor one depending on the time period and tradition). As a side note, during the discussion Groner raised an important point regarding the practice of debate. Scholars, he stated, tend to separate debate and practice (understood as meditation or ritual performance) but this distinction did not exist until comparatively recently.

The topic of insentient buddha-nature came to the forefront again with Wei Dedong's (Renmin University of China) paper on the same topic. Much as with Penkower's paper, Wei elucidated the history of the earlier debate. However, his real interest lay in learning what lessons could be applied to contemporary ecological issues. In particular, Wei sought to apply Tendai ideas on insentient buddha-nature to ecological problems arising from

Discussion session at Jingshi Hotel in Beijing.

China's booming economy. However, as Penkower's paper demonstrated, the early debate had little to do with concern for what we now call the environment, nature, or ecology. Ziporyn responded by noting that Buddhism does offer a powerful system for aiding the environment. He drew the participants' attention to the idea that the goal of Buddhism is to overcome desire through eliminating motivation. Given this, he stated, the focus should not be clinging to the environment but working to eliminate the motivational desires that bring about the destruction of the environment. When asked how Buddhists in China generally view the issue of the environment, Wei informed participants that there is a high level of interest in protecting the environment among Chinese Buddhists, especially, he noted, since most represent younger, more engaged generations.

The third day of papers began with an exploration of the images within the Lotus Sutra by Sandra Wawrytko (San Diego State University). Wawrytko's explanation of the five flavors of the Buddha's teaching as developed by Chih-i in terms of fresh milk, cream, curd, butter, and ghee

(clarified butter) was especially enlightening. Of particular interest during the discussion was her explanation of why she undertook this project. According to her, she was motivated to study the imagery of the Lotus Sutra because of her students' response to that imagery. She noted that her philosophy students, in particular, had a difficult time approaching the Lotus Sutra as a serious text because of the fantastic imagery that fills every chapter. The Lotus Sutra, as it turns out, is a fantastic text for teaching about how imagery is used to express very difficult philosophical ideas and how some cultures use such imagery rather than seemingly more direct forms of writing to communicate significant ideas.

From a broad exploration of the imagery in the Lotus Sutra, the next paper, by Paul Groner (University of Virginia, Charlottesville), drew us back into a close reading of history, embedding the text in a debate over precepts that occurred in Japan during the twelfth through fourteenth centuries. Of note was the fact that precepts, which are often viewed as rules governing every detail of monastic life, were not used as rules governing

monastic life per se. There were other codes and rules that performed that function. This fascinating conversation about precepts led to questions about how Rissho Kosei-kai approaches precepts. One participant from Rissho Kosei-kai explained that the focus of Rissho Kosei-kai is on leading a bodhisattva life, so rules are not emphasized as much as seen as byproducts of leading a proper life. When asked about the situation in contemporary China, Zhang responded that there are usually three basic requirements: dress, celibacy, and vegetarianism.

Following Paul Groner's paper, Jacqueline Stone (Princeton University) presented her paper on the medieval Japanese Tendai monk Sonshun's (1451–1541) commentary on the Lotus Sutra. This paper engendered an interesting discussion about *kanjin*, literally “mind-contemplation” or “mind-discernment,” the perspective of meditative practice and insight. *Kanjin* is often misinterpreted as the subjective reading of a text, drawing meaning out of thin air. But this paper makes it clear that *kanjin* was a serious practice aimed at drawing out of a text the meaning buried beneath the surface. *Kanjin*, Stone noted, “was about realizing physically the meaning of the text—realizing that ‘this text is talking about me.’” A *kanjin* reading of the Lotus Sutra, for example, would determine that the text is about everyday worldly beings, whereas a surface reading would see it as about Shakyamuni.

The fourth and final day of the conference had two papers and a series of talks by Rissho Kosei-kai representatives scheduled. The first paper presented was that by Ruben Habito (Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX). Habito's paper traced the continuities and discontinuities in interpretation of the Lotus Sutra over time. In his comments on the paper,

The conference participants in front of a temple on Mount Wutai.

Ziporyn focused on ethical practice. In Buddhism, he stated, ethical practice is not supposed to be based on metaphysical views. Discipline exists because it causes the cessation of suffering, leads to wisdom, and leads to meditation. Stone remarked that how different people act changes overtime. She gave the example of Nichiren Buddhism, which went from being a practice that defied secular authority to one that eventually gained power and began to discriminate against others. The conversation about ethics led to a discussion of the manner in which Buddhist groups (such as Rissho Kosei-kai) absorb and practice conventional ethics (primarily Confucian-based).

The final paper of the conference was presented by Michio Shinozaki (Rissho Kosei-kai Gakurin Seminary) and concerned the original vow of the Buddha as expressed in the form of the Lotus Sutra, which he described as something like the “primordial will of the Universe to save all living beings.” During discussion he stated that Rissho Kosei-kai emphasized bodhisattva practice and, therefore, was very content oriented (i.e., this parable can be used for that problem); but he

added that he wanted to search for a deeper meaning—the core meaning of being a Lotus Sutra practitioner. Since Rissho Kosei-kai claims to be the school of Shakyamuni, he said, what is it that defines the continuity between Shakyamuni and contemporary Rissho Kosei-kai practitioners?

After four days of continuous analysis of the Lotus Sutra and Tendai, participants came away with a deeper understanding of both. Subsequent to the conclusion of the conference proper, participants were invited to travel to Mount Wutai, one of the most sacred sites of Buddhism in China, where they enjoyed a wonderful adventure and learning experience. While at Mount Wutai, participants visited numerous temples, enjoyed the sites, and sampled tasty dishes at area restaurants. Among the most impressive of the sites visited was a new temple complex for nuns. Said to have been founded in 1994 by a handful of nuns, this complex now claims six hundred renunciates. It can only be hoped that sometime in the future another Lotus Sutra conference will be held in China and that at that time participants will see an even greater expansion of Buddhist activity. □

Exploring the Methods of Socially Engaged Buddhism

Think Sangha Meeting 2005

by Jonathan Watts

Are Buddhist teachings (like non-self or emptiness) concepts to be understood or practices and methods in which to engage? How are the answers to those questions different?

Issue vs. Method

Most of our life activities focus on a single issue, such as environmental problems, etc. However, we tend to become more rooted in the ideology surrounding the issue, rather than in the human relationships from which the issue evolves. In the overemphasis on ideology, we become blind to the importance of *how* to confront the issue. In a typical situation, an organization espouses a progressive agenda but does not recognize the unprogressive methods it uses to confront the issue (e.g., its own authoritarian structure).

Because the focus is on ideology, we cannot comprehend the importance of method. In the end, divisions occur between groups, because individuals cling to their own ideologies and methods. We might understand this from the Buddhist teaching of the four types of clinging (*upadana*), which include both ideologies (*ditthi*) and rules (*sila*).

A central theme of all Think Sangha work has been to develop creative ways to apply Buddhist ideas to modern problems. Over the last three years, we discovered a method by which social theorists and social activists could understand each other more clearly and collaborate more directly. This method is a three-part process of story telling—structural analysis—ethical praxis.

In this way, the fourth International

Think Sangha Meeting held early this year (February 20–25) focused on exploring the different methods of the participants in their work. Seventeen came together from Australia, Burma, Cambodia, India, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tibet, and the United States; a mix of teachers, academics, community organizers, NGO workers, monks, nuns, and socially engaged Buddhist activists. The focus was on *how* we do our work. The ultimate goal was to learn from one another a wide repertory of skills that we might apply to our own activities.

We did our best to keep the agenda flexible. Though this may sound easy, practically it was a very difficult task, given that: (1) the meeting was organized by the author and five other core sangha members, (2) there were new participants who had no direct experience in the sangha or in this type of workshop, (3) these new participants were invited by different core members and tended to gravitate closely to that core member. Our goal was to create a group-oriented process, but there were already dynamics from the beginning between core and new, and directly related and indirectly related participants.

Deep Listening and Right Speech

In order to confront this natural imbalance, we knew that we needed to build up trust, friendship, and community through story telling, which we have found to be a powerful tool for making sure that everyone is heard. It helps to empower the speaker and to

encourage compassion through deep listening and is an essential group dynamic tool that highlights the varieties of relationships and exposes the nature of power in these relationships.

As we also wanted a uniquely Buddhist process, we organized this storytelling session into three parts. Based on the Triple Gem of Buddha-Dharma-Sangha and shared our personal experiences based on the following questions: (1) How were you “awakened,” both to your spirituality and to your concern for society? (2) How do you sustain yourself spiritually? (3) How are you sustained by others?

A relatively deep group intimacy was established by the end of the day. These small groups allowed for an intimate setting in which everyone could be easily heard. However, the very qualities that made the small groups successful became diluted in the large group—those with better English and more assertive personalities spoke more, and deep listening became more of a challenge. When empowered speaking and deep listening become lost, the problems of our social conditioning and of power hierarchies (patriarchy, class, ethnicity, nationality, education, etc.) begin to manifest. After a day mostly dominated by an intimate process, however, these problems could not be seen yet, and the day ended with a deeply connected feeling.

On the second day, we introduced structural analysis. We examined our approaches to and methods of activism. We broke up into three groups of concern: (1) education and aware-

ness raising; (2) training those with heightened awareness and giving them the tools to actively practice and become leaders; (3) bringing together people into organizations or transforming organizations along Buddhist guidelines.

We spent the morning discussing the following questions: (1) How have you tried to implement Buddhist ideas into your work? (2) What impact has your work had on your students/community and yourself? (3) What caused you to succeed or to fail? In this session, we examined as deeply as possible the reasons for failure or success in our work. These groups went very well, especially the group on training, the largest of the three, which asked for additional time in the afternoon to continue its discussions.

Practicing the First Noble Truth

In the second half of the afternoon, the group came together as a whole again—and the problems began to appear. We had spent parts of the last three days together as a complete group, but sitting together to discuss issues presented a challenging process. By the end of the session, the group found itself out of balance. The intimacy we had developed was still very new and fragile.

Issues cropped up about right speech (truthful speech vs. kind speech), about the full participation of all, and about decision-making authority within the group. Concerning the last point, the authority of the core organizing group had to be merged with that of the other participants to create a fully consensual process.

In this way, we attempted to be open to change in harmony with the group's developing needs. On the morning of the third day, we engaged in an exercise in deep listening and right speech. Deep listening meant holding onto our feelings and being mindful, while right speech meant be-

ing true to ourselves by saying how we really felt and speaking in a way that would benefit others and ourselves.

We struggled to find a group discussion process that honored deep listening and right speech in the way that the small groups had. We realized that time imposed a significant limit in bringing together seventeen people from widely different backgrounds and creating a consensual group process. Just the day before, this realization had been articulated by the people who worked on training. They had commented that in their experience, meaningful training workshops require up to three months, and that many of them no longer had an interest in doing five-day workshops.

Expanding Our Methods

In the afternoon of the third day, everyone took about an hour to draft a large chart about themselves showing: (1) the Dharma tool they use in their work and life; (2) their resources; (3) their areas for growth and learning; (4) their needs, and (5) their plans and projects for 2005. We spent the rest of the afternoon sharing our charts with one another.

We felt that sharing these five areas would help everyone develop an awareness of some important aspects of their work. The first aspect is identifying both needs and resources that can be shared with others. We all spent time deeply listening about each person's work and gained some new awareness and ideas for our work. The Dharma tools section developed a rich pool of Buddhist resources in teachings and methods that everyone could draw on. The section on plans and projects for 2005 helped everyone to think in an integrative way. So instead of creating new projects and adding new agendas into our already busy schedules, we saw how we could fit into one another's already planned agendas, which relieved work stress

through direct mutual support and aid.

On the final day, participants reviewed one another's posters and then made lists of what they could offer others and also receive from them. Then in the morning, participants networked on an individual basis and began developing connections that included three or more people working as a group.

One notable agreement developed out of the very active session on training held on the second day. A group of participants who have been active in running training courses on socially engaged Buddhism decided to hold a small international meeting next year to develop a manual on training people as socially engaged Buddhists. This manual will not only include a basic approach to developing people as socially engaged Buddhists but also contain specific sections on Buddhist approaches to important issues.

This initiative is especially significant because it represents much of the aim of Think Sangha. This past meeting really did not develop much "intellectual" content, but it certainly marked another step in how we all understand our work and how we need to go about realizing its fullest potential.

I think we have learned much from exploring the concept of method. While we still need to engage in issues, we must be very mindful of the method of our engagement. If we want to develop a group process, we must commit greater time to the task.

I hope that Think Sangha will continue to engage with issues by creating projects on Buddhist approaches to various issues as it has done in the past. □

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WCRP Contributes to Interfaith Understanding in Europe

Multireligious contributions by the representatives of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) made the 30th Evangelical "Kirchentag" (Church Day) celebrations a great success in Hanover, Germany, May 26–29. Held annually under a shifting sponsorship of the Christian Evangelical and Roman Catholic churches, the meeting's theme this year was "How Can We Reply to Our Children's Questions Tomorrow, Offering Them Hope and a Future?"

H.R.H. Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, moderator of the WCRP International Governing Board, and Dr. William Vendley, secretary-general of the WCRP, spoke to a very interested multitude about the WCRP's work and prospects for the future.

The German chapter of the WCRP (Dr. Franz Brendle, president), in cooperation with the Hanover chapter, organized a beautiful and well-attended session of multireligious prayers and reflections accompanied by the appealing musical compositions of Neda Mohagheghi, who performed them using a native Persian string instrument. There were Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Roman Catholic, Islamic, Greek Orthodox, Baha'i, and Christian Evangelical participants, each offering reflections and meditations on specially chosen texts from their sacred literature.

The entire event was organized in the form of a big fair, with many booths and exhibits, including stands of a large number of religious organizations.

Lisa Palmieri-Billig, vice moderator of WCRP/Europe, was invited by Dr. Marita Estor of the Grail Movement—an international movement of Christian women—to speak on the role of religions in the dialogue for peace, in memory of Maria Lucker, one of the

main founders of WCRP/Europe in the 1960s. Many participants were moved in reflecting on Dr. Lucker's great vision of religions working for peace at a time when such thoughts were nurtured by very few religious leaders. She was part of the original prophetic group that created the WCRP.

The Church Day celebrations were concluded on Sunday, May 29, with what appeared to be nearly one million people filling the streets and squares of Hanover, listening to and watching the televised speeches of the highest religious and political authorities of Germany.

Prior to the Hanover celebrations, the Focolare Movement sponsored its first International Christian-Jewish Symposium (May 23–26), which was held in the village of Castelgandolfo, on the outskirts of Rome. Rabbi David Rosen, an international president of the WCRP, was invited to participate. The theme of the meeting was "Love of God and of Our Fellow Neighbor in the Hebrew and Catholic Traditions." The meeting was truly international, with guests from Latin America, Europe, Israel, and the U.S. The atmosphere, as always with the Focolare members, who live in the belief that love must be given first and freely, was warm and receptive.

Rabbi Rosen captured the audience's attention with his lecture titled, "The Divine Image: the Source and Inspiration of Love of God and Man." He delved into the rabbinical debate on the great biblical principle "you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18), since, he said, the famous rabbinical discussion between Rabbi Akiva and Ben Azzai focused on the possibility of a negative interpretation of the Hebrew word "as

yourself," especially if the way one has experienced the behavior of others has been negative. According to this interpretation, one might legitimize one's subjective experiences as the criteria for moral conduct. According to Ben Azzai, Rabbi Rosen said, we might come to the conclusion that since "no one cared about me/us, why should I/we care about the other"; "we were persecuted and no one delivered us, so why should we care about what happens to others." Ben Azzai thus affirms that regardless of any possible negative experience, "our behavior toward others must be predicated on our recognition that every person is created in the Divine image."

On the contrary, Rabbi Rosen explained, following Rabbi Akiva's theology and reading of the text, the phrase "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" is expounded to mean that you must love yourself in order to love your neighbor. "Thus," the rabbi continued, "the ability of an individual to develop a constructive relationship with another depends substantially upon one's self-image. Persons who have been abused one way or another, especially in childhood, suffer from a damaged self-image that prevents them from being able to develop constructive intimate relationships." Rabbi Rosen concluded by saying that therefore if you truly love yourself, you truly love others, and that selfishness and egocentricity are not a reflection of love, but of lack. Loving the Divine image in ourselves, which is the truest essence of what we are, "is both the greatest impetus and the greatest reflection of seeing the Divine in others. This will inspire and guide us in loving conduct toward others." □

Eva Ruth Palmieri

The Beginnings of the Buddha's Deification

(2)

by Hajime Nakamura

In the final installment of his distinguished biography, the author describes in detail the process by which Gotama came to be seen more as a deity with supernatural powers and less as a man.

As Buddhism grew and became virtually the state religion during the Maurya dynasty, Gotama was increasingly regarded less as a human being than as a godlike being with supernatural powers. He was called “transcendent deity” (*atideva*) and “god of gods” (*deva-deva*). In later times we find also the expression “deity who surpasses all others” (*devātideva*). The Buddha was no longer thought of as a man. The Brahmin Doṇa asked the Bhagavant the following questions: “Are you not a god?” “Are you not a *gandhabba* [Sanskrit, *gandharva*]?” “Are you not a *yakkha* [spiritual being]?” “Are you not a human being?” To each question the Buddha replied that he was not. To the final one he said: “I am not a human being” (*na kho ahaṃ manusso bhaviṣāmi*), explaining that he was unstained by the pollutions of the world. “Think of me as the Buddha,” he said. Formerly, the Buddha had been revered, but as an enlightened human being. Now he was worshiped as the nonhuman Buddha.

The deified Buddha exhibited supernormal powers. It was believed that an enlightened being had great power; from the beginning the Buddha was called “powerful” (*balappatta*), and later, after the concept of the ten powers had emerged, “the one having the ten powers” (*dasabala*). These powers were very great. It was believed that when Candimā, the moon deity, was captured by the demon Rāhu (a lunar eclipse), the Buddha brought about his release by means of a verse. Rāhu exclaimed: “I have been overcome by the Buddha’s verse.” In praise, the Buddha’s disciples sang, “He knew my thoughts, and with supernormal powers and a body formed of will (*manomayena kāyena*), he drew near me and taught me the teachings.” He was praised as one who had vast wisdom (*mahāpañña*). “In this world of the ten directions, there is nothing that has not been seen or heard or thought of or perceived by you.” He was considered to be all-knowing (*sabbāññū*).

The deification of the Buddha paralleled that of the founder of Jainism. In the ancient scriptures, the founder of Jainism was called by his personal name, Nāyaputta. However, in later texts (for example, *Uvāsaga-dasāo*) this word does not appear even once; instead he is called by the epithet Mahāvīra (“great hero”). Even this word rarely appears in isolation, but is usually accompanied by a set of honorific expressions.

The Buddha’s body, too, came to be thought of as having physical characteristics different from those of an ordinary person. At first he was depicted simply as a human being who illuminated the world: “[The deity came and asked:] ‘How many things of radiance are there that illuminate the world? We have come to ask you that, for we would know.’ [The Venerable Master said:] ‘There are four

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).

things of radiance in the world. There is no fifth. During the day the sun shines, while at night the moon shines. Fire gives illumination day and night. The Buddha is the greatest of all those things that shine. There is no light more radiant.” Later, however, a physical light was believed to emanate from the Buddha’s body. For example, a verse describes the Buddha as being clothed in a radiant golden light; in the explanatory prose section, the idea is rewritten as the illumination cast by the Buddha’s pure skin. The Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta describes the nobleman Pukkusa’s great joy when he saw Sakyamuni sitting at the root of a tree: “Pukkusa offered a robe of bright gold. Wearing it, the Master’s body shone as gold.” This is an extremely ancient legend. The compilers of the legendary biographies were not content, however, with this degree of deification; the composer of the prose section accompanying this verse explained that “the color of the Tathāgata’s skin was pure and beautiful.” The earlier legend had stated that the Buddha’s robe shone; the more developed form said that the Buddha’s body itself emitted rays of light.

Eventually the idea that the Buddha’s skin was golden in color became commonly accepted, and the special characteristics that distinguished his physical form were compiled into thirty-two. These characteristics gained a fixed form over time and were handed down through the ages; a small number are identical to those of the Hindu deity Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa, and probably originated in an early sun cult. Whenever he had the opportunity, Gotama spoke to members of other religious groups. According to the sutras, however, he employed magical means rather than the persuasive force of teaching to bring them to his ideas.

The process of deification is clearly linked with developments in secular power. Between the Nanda and Maurya dynasties, India became united politically; as a result, the ideal of the universal emperor (the wheel-rolling king) was revered. Like all inhabitants of India, Buddhists subscribed to this ideal, describing the Buddha as the religious version of the universal monarch. Deification is essentially an emphasis on greatness. Why the figure of Gotama lent itself to such magnification stems from his role as people’s savior. He did not seek only his own well-being; he liberated not only himself but others as well. This characteristic has been a part of Buddhism since its inception. The Buddha was the Compassionate One (*kāruṇika*). Because he instructed people, he was the chief of the band (of followers; *saṭṭhavāha*) and their Refuge (*saraṇa*). Buddhism was likened to medicine and the Buddha was regarded as the great physician.

The idea of the Buddha as one who possessed superhuman power was linked with the Indian concept of transmigration; thus his appearance in this world was believed to

be related to his accumulation of merit in past lives. Many legends about those past lives arose. He was said to have been Kappa, a disciple of the Brahma Baka, or Jotipāla, a friend of a potter during the age of the Buddha Kassapa. The connection with the Buddha Kassapa seems to have come through Jainism; it was Kāśyapa who bestowed on Mahāvīra the truth of Jainism. The Buddha recollected that he had lived many human lives in the past; these lives were formalized in various ways; for example:

“See, *bhikkhus*, the fruits of merit, the fruits of good, of those who seek happiness. For seven years I practiced thoughts of compassion. Seven ages of the universe came into being and then dissolved, but I did not return to this world. When the world was being formed, I was born in the Ābhassara heaven. When the world was decaying, I was born in the Brahmā realm that was void [*suñña*]. Seven times I was all-powerful, a great Brahmā deity. Thirty-six times I ruled the gods as the *deva* king [Indra]. I became, too, a wheel-rolling king and was the lord of the whole of India [Jambu-saṇḍa]; anointed, I ruled human beings as a king. Using no violence, no weapons, I subjugated the realm, and without force I ruled all impartially, according to the Law. Governing the realm according to the Law, I caused the clans to gain great wealth and property and have all their wishes met, giving them the wealth of the seven jewels.

“The buddhas are the protectors of the world. The buddhas have taught this well. This is the reason for their greatness. Thus they are called the kings of the realm. I am the brave lord of great wealth, powerful, famous, the lord of all India. Even the baseborn, hearing this, cannot doubt. Thus those who hope for greatness should venerate the True Law, contemplating the teachings of all the buddhas.”

Here we see a tendency to combine stories of the Buddha’s former lives and the legend of the wheel-rolling king; we can also discern in this passage a prototype of the various legends that later took form in literature such as the Jātaka. Legends of past lives also accrued to famous disciples of the Buddha. For example, it was said that Anuruddha had been Indra in a former life, as well as seven times the king of India, and then had had fourteen further incarnations. Tales of former lives like Jātaka were also told of the *bhikkhuni* Sundarī.

Thus the Buddha became further and further removed from human form. Since, according to Buddhism, whoever realizes the Dhamma is a buddha (enlightened one), there had to be other buddhas besides Gotama, ones who shared his transcendental powers. From this idea arose the concept of the buddhas of the three time periods—the past, the present, and the future. This idea, too, originated in Jainism; the Āyārāṅga-sūtra says, “All the Worthy Ones, those buddhas who existed in the past, appear in the present, and

Gods entreating the Buddha to preach the Dharma. Excavated at Lorian Tangai, Pakistan. 2nd–3rd century. Indian Museum.

will come again in the future, the Bhagavats, all . . .” (*je ya aīyā* [= *atītā*, “past”], *je ya paḍuppanna* [= *pratyutpannā*, “present”], *je ya āgamiṣṣā* [“future”], *arahantā bhagavanto* [“all the buddhas”] *savve te . . .*) From the earliest period, Jainism had also maintained that the Truth had been taught by various buddhas. This understanding was probably shared by all the religious groups of the time; Buddhism in turn inherited it. The concept of the seven buddhas of the past existed very early; this nomenclature can be seen already in the *gāthās*. The seven buddhas were, in Pāli, Vipassin, Sikhin, Vessabhu, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, Kassapa, and Sakyamuni himself. The Buddha was often called the “seventh sage.” The idea of the seven buddhas can, as I have mentioned elsewhere, be traced back to the Ṛg Veda. A particularly detailed description of the seven buddhas appears in the Mahāpadāna-suttanta in the Dīgha-Nikāya, of which there are corresponding Sanskrit and Chinese texts. It was usual to identify Dīpaṃkara as the buddha under whom Sakyamuni first began his religious training in his past life; the cult of this buddha, however, occurred relatively late in the period of early Buddhism.

According to Fa-hsien, at least in the fourth century the buddhas of the past were regarded as real people; their birthplaces could even be identified.

“Forty or fifty *li* west of the capital we arrived at a village called Taduā. This is the birthplace of Kāśyapa Buddha, the place where he met his father, and the place where he attained *parinirvāṇa*. There is a stupa at each specific place.

A great stupa was also erected over the relics of the entire body of the tathāgata Kāśyapa.

“Twelve *yojanas* southeast of Śrāvastī, we arrived at a village called Nābhika. This is the birthplace of Krakucchanda Buddha, the place where he met his father, and the place where he attained *parinirvāṇa*. There, a monastery was built and stupas were erected. Less than a *yojana* north of here we arrived at a village. This is the birthplace of Kanakamuni Buddha, the place where he met his father, and the place where he attained *parinirvāṇa*. There is a stupa at each specific place.”

He also wrote of people who venerated the three buddhas of the past but did not venerate Sakyamuni.

Hsüan-tsang recorded the birthplace of Kāśyapa in his travel record: “There is an old town some sixty *li* northwest of the capital. In the Bhadra-kalpa when the human life span was twenty thousand years, Kāśyapa Buddha was born here. There is a stupa south of the town. This is the place where [Kāśyapa Buddha] first met his father after attaining enlightenment. North of the town is another stupa, which contains relics of the whole body of Kāśyapa Buddha. [Both of these stupas] were built by King Aśoka.

“From here, going southeast some five hundred *li* [or eight hundred *li* according to the *Kao-seng Fa-hsien-chuan*], we came to the country of Kapilavastu.”

Faith in the Buddha was emphasized, in proportion to his growing deification:

Whoever takes refuge in the Buddha
Will not proceed to an adverse rebirth.
They will cast off their bodily form,
And fill the hosts of the deities.

Such amplification of the Buddha’s nature seemed to prevail at the time of the Maurya dynasty. An inscription proves that the cult of the buddhas of the past already existed by Aśoka’s time. Aśoka erected a stupa to Buddha Konākamana (Koṇāgamana, or Kanakamuni Buddha), the fifth of the seven buddhas of the past.

Whatever the extent of the Buddha’s deification, however, his historicity was never entirely lost. The four places associated with the great events of his life (Lumbinī, BodhGayā, Deer Park, and Kuśinagarī) became pilgrimage centers that drew large numbers of Buddhists. According to the *Divyāvadāna*, Aśoka himself is said to have visited them. Today many pilgrims from all over Asia make it a custom to travel to these venerable places. Yet even as the praise of the Buddha grew, there is an opposing tendency, minor still, that focuses on the philosophical concept of the buddha body. □

(This is the last installment in this series.)

The Buddhist Community: An Ideal Society

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.

When Shakyamuni first awakened to the truth under the pipal tree, also known as the Bodhi (enlightenment) tree, the joy he felt must have been such as would reach to the heavens, somewhat like that experienced by someone who makes a great scientific discovery or creates an exciting new invention. For the next twenty-one days, as he reviewed the understanding he had reached, he agonized over whether it would be possible for others to comprehend such a difficult Dharma, or whether he should just retire from the world with what he had learned. He realized, however, that if he did that he would be unable to liberate people from their suffering, and so, after carefully considering the best way to explain the Dharma, he traveled all the way to Deer Park, where he delivered his first discourse to the five *bhikkhus* who had been his companions in ascetic practice. For the first time, in other words, he was preaching the Truth, and when what he taught had been understood by others, the religion now known as “Buddhism” came into being, as did the community, or Sangha, of those who practiced it together.

There is a story recounted in the Samyukta-agama (Grouped Discourses) sutra called “Half of the Holy Life.” Ananda, one of Shakyamuni’s ten leading disciples, said to his teacher one day, “World-honored One, I think that good friends and good companions will lead us on at least part of our path toward our accomplishment of the Buddha Way—they are half of the holy life. Isn’t that correct?” The answer Shakyamuni gave was unexpected. “Ananda,

do not say that. Good friends and good companions do not lead us only partly toward our accomplishment of the Buddha Way; they lead us all the way—they are the whole of the holy life.”

It is most important for us in the contemporary world to carefully consider the Buddha’s use of the word “whole.” The Sangha is the manifestation of the virtue of harmony, when the Dharma and the Truth function within human beings. We are all human beings, examples of phenomenal existence, while we are living in the actual world. It is meaningless for us to emphasize the words “Buddha” or “Dharma” if they do not function within our actual existence. From that perspective, it seems to me that the Buddha’s assertion “Good friends and good companions do not lead us only partly toward our accomplishment of the Buddha Way; they lead us all the way” takes on special significance.

Twice a month the Buddha’s disciples would hold a confession ceremony, called *uposatha*. Those who realized they had broken the precepts confessed what they had done, awaiting the judgment and guidance of the Buddha or the elders. These “elders” were not simply persons of venerable age; rather, they were those who had truly mastered the Dharma, who acted according to the Dharma, and who had gained vast experience of the Dharma. They guided the disciples based on the following five points that had been laid down by Shakyamuni:

1. Speak in keeping with the occasion (give guidance appropriate to the specific case and conditions).
2. Always act according to the Truth (base your judgments on your knowledge of the Truth).
3. Respond flexibly (speak quietly and suitably so that your listener will be truly persuaded).

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

4. Speak so as to benefit your listener (think strongly that your purpose is to enable your listener to improve).

5. Speak with compassion (speak with deep affection so as to bring happiness to your listener).

This is what the Buddhist community is. At the same time, it seems to me also to be the essence of what a democratic society should be.

Human beings are said to be just one living creature of many who adjust their characteristics to their environment, and it is certainly true that we are influenced by the conditions that surround us. For Buddhists the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha are naturally at the heart of their faith, and Shakyamuni himself definitely emphasized the importance of the Sangha. In fact, there is nothing more necessary or essential for providing a place for those who seek the way mutually to improve themselves, encourage one another, and support each other when their spirits flag.

Human beings often invoke delusions and have a tendency to become overcome by their passions, or become indolent, or to fall into evil ways. When individuals live as separate existences it can be hard for them to recover when they falter. If a community of believers is formed with members who stretch out a helping hand, however, they can caution, encourage, and teach one another so that they may overcome their faltering and tread the right path toward a better life. When you train alone, it is difficult to ascertain how far you have progressed. How much easier it is to be one of a group of believers, where standards exist and it is possible to understand one's attainment by comparing oneself with others. Sometimes we will realize that we need to train further, and sometimes we will be encouraged by the progress we have made. It is only by repeating this kind of comparison that we will be able to continue to tread the path to human perfection.

It is difficult for us as ordinary people to comprehend or experience either the Buddha, who is eternal as the great life-force, or the Dharma, which pervades the universe and sustains everything in it. The Buddhist Sangha, however, shows us in living form both the Buddha's salvation and the workings of the Dharma. It is through living persons that the Buddha's salvation and the truth of the Dharma are revealed to us, sometimes in the course of righteous instruction and sometimes through its reverse, by adversity. By taking refuge in such a Sangha, we are placing our trust in the three treasures—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

Taking refuge in the Sangha does not mean that a superior will guide a subordinate and that the subordinate will obediently act in accordance with those instructions. All members of the Sangha act as mentors to one another, revering the buddha-nature with which each of us is

endowed. Such a harmonious community is the true form of the Sangha.

In today's world, people tend to think only about their immediate interests and seem to have forgotten the crucial path to human perfection. Modern society is a collection of individual parts that have no intention of seeking perfection but are concerned only with doing what they want to do at a particular moment. Such a society will never be able to achieve true improvement. Though we talk about freedom and democracy, unless they are based on the advancement of society through the perfection of the individual human being, all they can achieve is a society disunited and torn by perpetual conflict between different self-interests.

I believe that the community as founded by Shakyamuni represents the ideal form of democracy. He shattered the caste system, which was then endemic to Indian society and held absolute sway, and welcomed even those from the poorest segments of society into his Sangha. Whatever an individual's caste origin might be, within the Sangha all were equal, and seniority was only a matter of when one had joined. Though authority based on responsibilities within the Sangha was important, there was no recognition of any special authority attributed to a single individual.

How can we compare modern society with this? Any appreciation of the inherent equality of all people has been largely forgotten, and only the equality of rights temporarily granted to individuals seems to hold any sway. Most people think only of their own interests, single-mindedly grasping their rights and asserting them forcefully. Surely there is no hope that conflict among such people will cease. It is here that we have much to learn from Shakyamuni's community.

However strong the faith of individual believers may be, they will never succeed in creating an ideal society as long as they do no more than follow their faith and engage in bodhisattva practice alone by themselves. Combined energy is what is needed. In a world where people can believe whatever they want and lead any kind of life they wish, it is virtually impossible for large numbers of people to be persuaded to embark upon the path of human perfection, however excellent it is, unless a group strongly united by spiritual ties is able to have an effect on society by means of the clear truth.

That is the role of the Buddhist community in today's alienated world. The first essential is to demonstrate the facts, so that everyone can understand unconditionally that all people everywhere are united in mutual bonds of humanity as they seek the same goal for their lives, achieving human perfection, applying themselves to their endeavors, and sharing in both joys and sadness. □

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 10

A Teacher of the Law

(3)

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

TEXT [But] he who praises the bearers of the sutra, / His happiness will be even greater. / During eighty kotis of kalpas, / With the most excellent color, sound, / Scent, flavor, and touch, / If one worships the sutra bearers;

COMMENTARY The merit of making offerings to the bearers of the Lotus Sutra is greater than that of making offerings to the Buddha. The reason for this is the same as outlined earlier.

• *With the most excellent color, sound, scent, flavor, and touch.* “Color” indicates that which has form, that is, the types of offerings outlined in the preceding prose section, such as flowers, garlands, silk canopies, and flags and banners. “Sound” signifies praise of the Buddha by means of sutra chanting, hymns, and music. “Scent” refers to the perfumes, sandal powder, perfumed unguents, and incense mentioned in the prose section. “Flavor” corresponds to the edibles and dainties of the prose section. “Touch” means that which is pleasant to the skin, such as high-quality garments and comfortable bedding.

TEXT If, having thus worshiped, / He hears [it from them but] for a moment, / Then let him joyfully congratulate himself, / [Saying]: ‘I have now obtained a great benefit.’

COMMENTARY It is important that we do not interpret this passage as meaning that we are able to hear the discourse in return for making offerings. A true teacher would never preach the Law in compensation for something. It goes without saying that one who receives offerings is one worthy to receive them (in other words, worthy of respect or veneration). It is also natural that discourses on the

Dharma spring forth from the compelling compassion of buddhas and bodhisattvas, and that there is no connection between preaching the Law and making offerings. Thus the “great benefit” should be regarded as a combination of the benefit obtained by making offerings and accumulating merit and the benefit obtained by listening to discourses and knowing the true Dharma.

TEXT Medicine King! Now I say to you: / “Of the sutras I have preached, / Among [all] these sutras, / The Law Flower is the very foremost.”

COMMENTARY The statement concluding this verse section carries great weight. All sutras are precious, but the Lotus Sutra is the foremost among them because it extracts the essence of them all. This does not mean that we of later times should esteem this sutra alone and deprecate all others. All sutras record precious teachings. Yet it is because the Lotus Sutra is the essence of these teachings that we of later times value it most highly. I hope you will all be careful to interpret the verse in this way.

TEXT Thereupon the Buddha again addressed the Medicine King Bodhisattva-Mahasattva, [saying]: “Infinite thousand myriad kotis are the sutras I preach, whether already preached, now being preached, or to be preached in the future; and, among them all, this Law Flower Sutra is the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand.

COMMENTARY *Already preached, now being preached, or to be preached in the future.* Two interpretations are possible

here. Fa-yün (467–529, a Buddhist master who wrote an eight-volume commentary on the Lotus Sutra called the *Fa-hua-i-chi*) and Chi-ts'ang (549–623, a Buddhist master and scholar who lectured widely and wrote commentaries) say that “already preached” refers to all the teachings of the Buddha predating the Lotus Sutra and “now being preached” refers to the Lotus Sutra itself. “To be preached in the future” refers, they say, to the Maha-parinirvana-sutra (the Mahayana Sutra of the Great Decease). They explain why the Lotus Sutra is “the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand” in the following way: Because the teachings already preached are divided into the Great Vehicle and the small vehicle, and can be studied from those particular perspectives, they are comparatively easy to understand and believe. That “to be preached in the future” is the Maha-parinirvana-sutra. Because the teaching of the Lotus Sutra has already unified the teachings of the Three Vehicles into the One Vehicle, for those who have studied the Lotus Sutra the Maha-parinirvana-sutra is easy to understand and believe. But because the Lotus Sutra is the teaching that first opened the gate of skillful means (tactfulness) and elucidated the meaning of the truth that the teachings of the Three Vehicles are in fact the teaching of the One Vehicle alone, it is very difficult to believe and understand.

A second interpretation was offered by Chih-i (538–597), the T'ien-t'ai patriarch. He said that “now being preached” is the present perfect, meaning “has just been preached,” and refers to the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings. That “to be preached in the future” is the Maha-parinirvana-sutra. He therefore makes an exceptional case of the Lotus Sutra, saying that it is in the process of being preached at the moment, and does not include it in the above three time slots. He says that the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings is easy to believe and understand in comparison to the Lotus Sutra, which is difficult to believe and understand, because the former “teaches that the Innumerable Meanings originate from one law, not that the innumerable results in the one. Therefore it is easy to understand and believe.” On the other hand, “the Lotus Sutra teaches that all differentiated phenomena come down to the real aspect and that Shakyamuni attained enlightenment in the remotest past [that is, Shakyamuni's original buddhhood]. Since this is entirely different from the teachings given so far, the Lotus Sutra is difficult to believe and understand.” Nichiren followed Chih-i's interpretation.

We can leave detailed inquiry to Buddhist scholars, but we can summarize why the Lotus Sutra may be difficult for modern people to understand and believe as follows: (1) the profundity of the concept of the real aspect of all things; (2) the difficulty of grasping the truth that Shakyamuni's

life is eternal; and (3) the feeling of the vast gulf between the proclamation that all living beings can become buddhas and the actualities of human beings. All the same, as I have said several times already, I believe that the Lotus Sutra is a teaching far easier for modern people to understand than their counterparts in ancient and medieval times.

TEXT Medicine King! This sutra is the mystic, essential treasury of all buddhas, which must not be distributed among or recklessly delivered to men. It is watched over by buddhas, world-honored ones, and from of yore it has never been revealed and preached. And this sutra while the Tathagata is still here has [aroused] much enmity and envy; how much more after his extinction!

COMMENTARY *The mystic, essential treasury of all buddhas.* “Mystic” is that which is hidden in the depths of the mind and does not show itself. “Essential” is that which is important in unifying all the teachings, like the pivot of a fan. “Treasury” is the storing within of Thusness, or the real aspect of all things. The phrase means that the Lotus Sutra teaches the real aspect of all things, which is the underlying meaning of all the teachings.

• *Which must not be distributed among or recklessly delivered to men.* The Lotus Sutra is the teaching whose true meaning can be understood if it is studied consistently, from first to last. The whole is like the plot of a play, where to see only one scene would cause bewilderment and dissatisfaction. Thus the sutra warns that it should not be taught in a chopped-up fashion, like presenting isolated scenes of a play. Some people may see a contradiction with the earlier statement that “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.” There is in fact no contradiction at all, because those who hear a single verse or a single word of the Lotus Sutra and delight in it are supposed to learn naturally the whole of the sutra. One who does not go as far as that has not actually felt the kind of joy the sutra speaks of. It is of course right, and indeed usual, that people who preach and spread the Dharma begin by explaining the Lotus Sutra in part, but they must not stop there. They should guide their listeners onward and draw them along until they have learned the whole of the sutra.

• *This sutra while the Tathagata is still here has [aroused] much enmity and envy; how much more after his extinction!* Some people will also think it strange that such an exalted teaching as the Lotus Sutra can arouse resentment and envy. This may not be strange to experienced believers, though, and, when viewed objectively, seems a natural outcome. When a truth previously unknown is announced, people

whose ideas are limited to what they have long known or who cannot change their ideas easily will inevitably react against it. Jesus Christ, the originator of what was then a new religious movement, was arrested and crucified. In Japan, too, people who tried to breathe new life into Japanese Buddhism suffered in various ways. For example, Nichiren had a narrow escape from execution during repeated exiles. Honen was exiled to the island of Shikoku, and Shinran was stripped of his clerical status and exiled to Echigo Province (present Niigata Prefecture).

Such persecution has various causes. First, there is the unwillingness and inability of those with preconceived and inflexible views to understand a truth newly realized and taught. Second, when a new religious movement threatens people's ideas, those sitting comfortably in the seat of established authority fear that they may lose their position and, resorting to sophistry when reason fails, try to smash the new ideas in their anger. Third, those in the upper reaches of society tend to frown upon new movements. Some will deride them, others persecute them. Such people are dominated by established learning, fixed ways of thought, elite consciousness, and forms of display, and feel a reflexive antipathy toward anything new that arises from among the multitude. Their reaction is emotional rather than logical. These are the causes of "enmity and envy."

People as a whole, the common people, are frank and genuine. If something appears that resonates closely with their sense of life, they will absorb it as naturally as dry earth drinks in rain from an evening shower. Of course they are sometimes taken in by something counterfeit, and we have seen such examples in present-day society. But to think that therefore the multitude is stupid is extreme arrogance. The judgment of the people, over the long term, is sound. At some point the counterfeit vanishes, though not necessarily because it has been forced to do so by someone. Evil can prosper for a time, but it will eventually recede. A survey of human history will bear this out. It is impossible that something counterfeit in learning, religion, or cultural phenomena as a whole will survive for a century or more. What forces it to disappear? It is not government action, or a powerful figure, or scholars, or the army, but the power of popular judgment that forces the counterfeit to recede even before the people themselves realize its falsity clearly.

Thus, when I see somewhat peculiar forms of religion or thought generally accepted I do not worry overmuch, for I believe that they will stand trial one day before the good sense of the people, or that the believers in those teachings or ideas will realize their error and return to the right path.

The truth (true Dharma) never dies, but remains alive forever. Even if it is suppressed by the authorities or falls victim to violence for a time, it will eventually revive.

Though Buddhist tradition was apparently destroyed by the oppression of Muslims in medieval India, it prospered in China and Japan. Ever since the latter half of the twentieth century Buddhism has gained the understanding of people throughout the world and is about to give forth its great strength in order to lead humankind along the correct path.

Now that most people have good sense and are abandoning their former stubborn, exclusivistic ideas regarding what is called heathenism, it is unlikely that religious persecution will again reach the proportions it had in the past, but we still have to be prepared for the existence of "enmity and envy." Since those who believe in the teaching of the Lotus Sutra and spread it by preaching it are the bearers of the truth (true Dharma), they will continually be supported by the truth. The Buddha explains in the next section how the true Dharma will protect them.

TEXT Know, Medicine King! After the Tathagata is extinct those who are able to copy, keep, read, recite, worship, and preach it to others will be invested by the Tathagata with his robe, and will be protected and remembered by buddhas abiding in other regions. They shall have great powers of faith and the power of a resolute vow [and] the powers of virtuous character.

COMMENTARY *Will be invested by the Tathagata with his robe.* "Invested . . . with his robe" means "enveloped and protected." This does not mean safeguarding the practitioners' physical safety through "other power." By making their tolerance grow and letting their forbearance deepen, the Tathagata helps and guides them so that they can protect their sacred task themselves.

- *Will be protected and remembered by buddhas abiding in other regions.* They will be protected by "other power." "Remembered" here indicates constant and deep mindfulness. The fortune or safety of one who believes in the Lotus Sutra is continually and deeply in the minds of all the buddhas and is protected by them.

- *The powers of virtuous character.* This phrase refers to the power to cultivate the various good roots, that is, the power to train the mind to become the basis for all good actions.

TEXT Know, those people shall dwell with the Tathagata, and the Tathagata shall place his hand upon their heads.

COMMENTARY *Shall dwell with the Tathagata.* We are always with the Buddha, but we rarely realize that fact. Those who firmly receive, keep, read, and recite the Lotus Sutra and preach it to others come to feel the Buddha's presence vividly. This is a cause of deep gratitude.

- *The Tathagata shall place his hand upon their heads.* The

Indian custom of patting someone on the head signifies deep trust in that person. When Kumarajiva was returning to Kucha after completing his religious practice, his master Suryasoma presented him with the original text of the Lotus Sutra and patted him on the head, saying, "The sun of the Buddha has set in the west; its remaining radiance is about to reach the east. This sutra has a special connection with the northeast. Reverently propagate the sutra there." (See the July/August 1991 issue of DHARMA WORLD.) This episode is an expression of deep trust. We who practice the Lotus Sutra always have the hand of the Buddha upon our head, for the Buddha has great trust in us. This, going beyond anything that we could expect, should be a cause of great gratitude and happiness.

TEXT Medicine King! In every place where [this sutra] is preached or read or recited or copied or its volumes are kept, one should erect a caitya of the precious seven, making it very high, spacious, and splendid. But there is no need to deposit relics. Wherefore? [Because] in it there is the whole body of the Tathagata.

COMMENTARY *There is the whole body of the Tathagata.* This is one of the most important points in this chapter. Do not worship things. Worship the true Dharma. Those things that transmit the true Dharma are its symbols. Revere and worship them.

These two aspects are stated strongly in the above passage. At first glance they may seem contradictory, but they are not. If we think deeply not in terms of logic but in terms of the substance of what religious faith connotes, the apparent contradiction will soon disappear. Wherever the Lotus Sutra is preached or read or recited or copied or its volumes are kept are places where the true Dharma exists. They serve as bases for the further propagation of the true Dharma. Therefore build there a fine stupa, says the sutra, and venerate it with offerings.

A stupa is built to extol and remember the Buddha's virtue; in other words, it is a symbol of the Buddha's virtue. Since the action of receiving, keeping, reading, reciting, and disseminating the true Dharma that the Buddha preached is itself an offering that extols and remembers the Buddha's virtue, it amounts to the same thing as having built the finest stupa and made the most excellent offerings. It is clear therefore that the stupa referred to here is not a physical stupa but a symbolic one. This is why the Buddha says, "There is no need to deposit relics. Wherefore? [Because] in it there is the whole body of the Tathagata."

Worship not things but only the true Dharma. What a rational statement this is, in its esteem for the true Dharma. But it is not enough to end our interpretation of the words

here. Shakyamuni never spoke appealing just to human reason. It is the emotions that move human beings most profoundly. It is hardly possible that Shakyamuni would have ignored emotions, therefore we too should not see the Buddha's words from a rational point of view alone.

Wherever the Buddha's teaching is taught, we feel we must erect a splendid stupa, depositing within it the Buddha's image to venerate. This is a natural emotion for believers. We must be careful, though, that our veneration does not degenerate into idol worship. We must not put our faith in things, worship things, or pray to things. This would be to rely upon that which stands relative to human beings and therefore distant from the true meaning of religion. To rely upon such things is not an expression of true religion.

True religion must be, above all else, that which teaches us to take refuge in the true and correct teaching and to revere a true and proper focus of devotion. That in which we should take refuge is the true Dharma, the teaching of the Buddha. We revere the Buddha's image as a symbol of the true Dharma, and as an expression of deep gratitude to the sacred person who taught the true Dharma to us. We must understand that the Buddha taught us to make this distinction in his words "There is no need to deposit relics. Wherefore? [Because] in it there is the whole body of the Tathagata." Exactly the same thing applies to the Lotus Sutra itself. It is because the Buddha's teaching preached in it is valuable that the Lotus Sutra is precious. Emotionally, however, believers cannot help revering the sutra that conveys the Buddha's teaching. This is a true and correct emotion, for a Buddhist scripture stores within itself the Buddha's teaching, and so is a symbol of the true Dharma too.

The emotions engendered through contact with symbols are a natural component of human psychology. A country has a national flag, and a group has a distinguishing badge. In Christian countries people pledge to speak the truth at trials and weddings by placing a hand on the Bible. Such action purifies the mind and inspires awe, thus encouraging the individual to walk the right path. It is for the same reason that in this chapter people are taught to revere the sutra. Of course we must ultimately take refuge in the true Dharma and revere it, but at the same time we must feel reverence toward symbols of the true Dharma, and by putting ourselves into constant contact with them and looking up to them we must deepen our religious sentiment. Both elements are essential; without both true faith cannot be cultivated. I hope that you will keep these thoughts in mind as you read on.

TEXT This caitya should be served, revered, honored, and extolled with all kinds of flowers, perfumes, garlands, silk canopies, flags, banners, music, and hymns. If any, seeing

that caitya, salute and worship it, know that they all are near to Perfect Enlightenment.

COMMENTARY The sutra says that one who knows the Buddha's teaching, takes refuge in it, and venerates it is a step nearer the Buddha's enlightenment. As I have explained above, the object of such faith and veneration should be understood as both the true Dharma and the symbol of the true Dharma.

TEXT Medicine King! Many people there are, both laymen and monks, who walk in the bodhisattva way, without, as it were, being able to see, hear, read, recite, copy, keep, and worship this Law Flower Sutra. Know that those people are not yet rightly walking in the bodhisattva way; but if any of them hear this sutra, then they shall be able to walk aright in the bodhisattva way.

COMMENTARY The bodhisattva practice is, while living in this polluted world, not removed from actual life, to manifest the buddha-nature with which all people are endowed so that all may attain, by realizing the real aspect of all things, the Buddha's wisdom and strive to make this world an ideal realm. The actions undertaken to fulfill this great purpose are called the bodhisattva practice.

The teachings that were expounded prior to the Lotus Sutra pointed out the ways of skillful means, that is, the ways for individuals who save and are saved according to their various circumstances, but they did not reveal decisively the true human nature, in other words, the ultimate truth that all human beings can become buddhas. It was in the discourse of the Lotus Sutra that this truth was revealed for the first time. It disclosed that the Land of Tranquil Light could be created in this actual world and pointed out the principle by which this could be achieved. Thus those who could hear the Lotus Sutra were enabled to walk the path leading to the highest human ideal with confidence and courage. This is the true meaning of the words "if any of them hear this sutra, then they shall be able to walk aright in the bodhisattva way."

If we believe that we cannot win deliverance until we rid ourselves of all our defilements and illusions, we ordinary beings cannot help thinking that the state of deliverance is infinitely remote from us and we cannot possibly achieve it. When, however, we hear that deliverance lies within us and all we have to do to attain it is become aware of our buddha-nature, we cannot help feeling overwhelming joy at how close deliverance actually is. And when we are told that everyone else is exactly the same and that we should tell them all, we are infused with great courage and deter-

mination. Thus those who read the Lotus Sutra with their mind and body will be able to practice the bodhisattva way perfectly ("aright").

TEXT If any living beings who seek after the Buddha Way either see or hear this Law Flower Sutra, and after hearing it believe and discern, receive and keep it, you may know that they are near Perfect Enlightenment.

COMMENTARY The reason that they can approach the Buddha's enlightenment is as I have detailed above. It is further illustrated below by the Parable of Digging in a Tableland, famous as one of the seven parables of the Lotus Sutra.

TEXT Medicine King! It is like a man, extremely thirsty and in need of water, who searches for it by digging in a tableland. So long as he sees dry earth, he knows that the water is still far off. Continuing his labor unceasingly, he in time sees moist earth and then gradually reaches the mire. Then he makes up his mind, knowing that water is at hand. Bodhisattvas are also like this.

COMMENTARY The waterless tableland symbolizes the actual world filled with suffering and the thirst of the human heart. Digging a well means striving to find deliverance from that suffering. However much the man digs, though, the earth remains dry. Though he has a faint hope that water will appear if he keeps digging, he is apt to be seized by despair. But if he continues his work patiently, he finally reaches earth filled with moisture (the true teaching, that is, the Lotus Sutra). Once the teaching of truth is found, he should know that relief is at hand. With new hope and courage he will forget his pain and fatigue and keep on digging. This is the bodhisattva practice.

If he squirms to escape his suffering, his squirming itself turns into suffering. Religious practice too is suffering. But if he understands the true teaching, realizes that all people have been endowed with the buddha-nature, and affirms that all will find deliverance if the buddha-nature is developed, he will be filled with happiness and be able to discipline himself and instruct others. Herein lies the value of the Lotus Sutra.

To be continued

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

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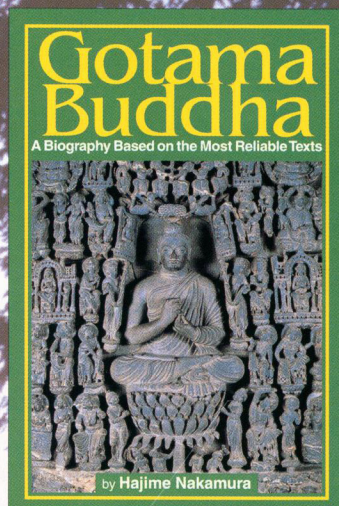
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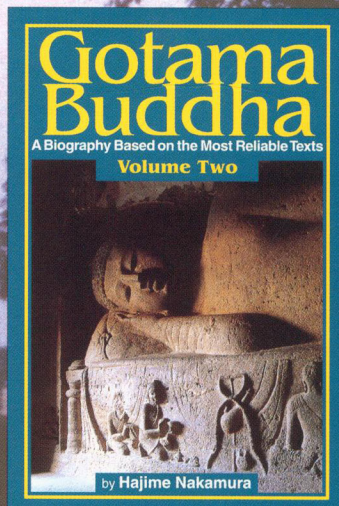
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