

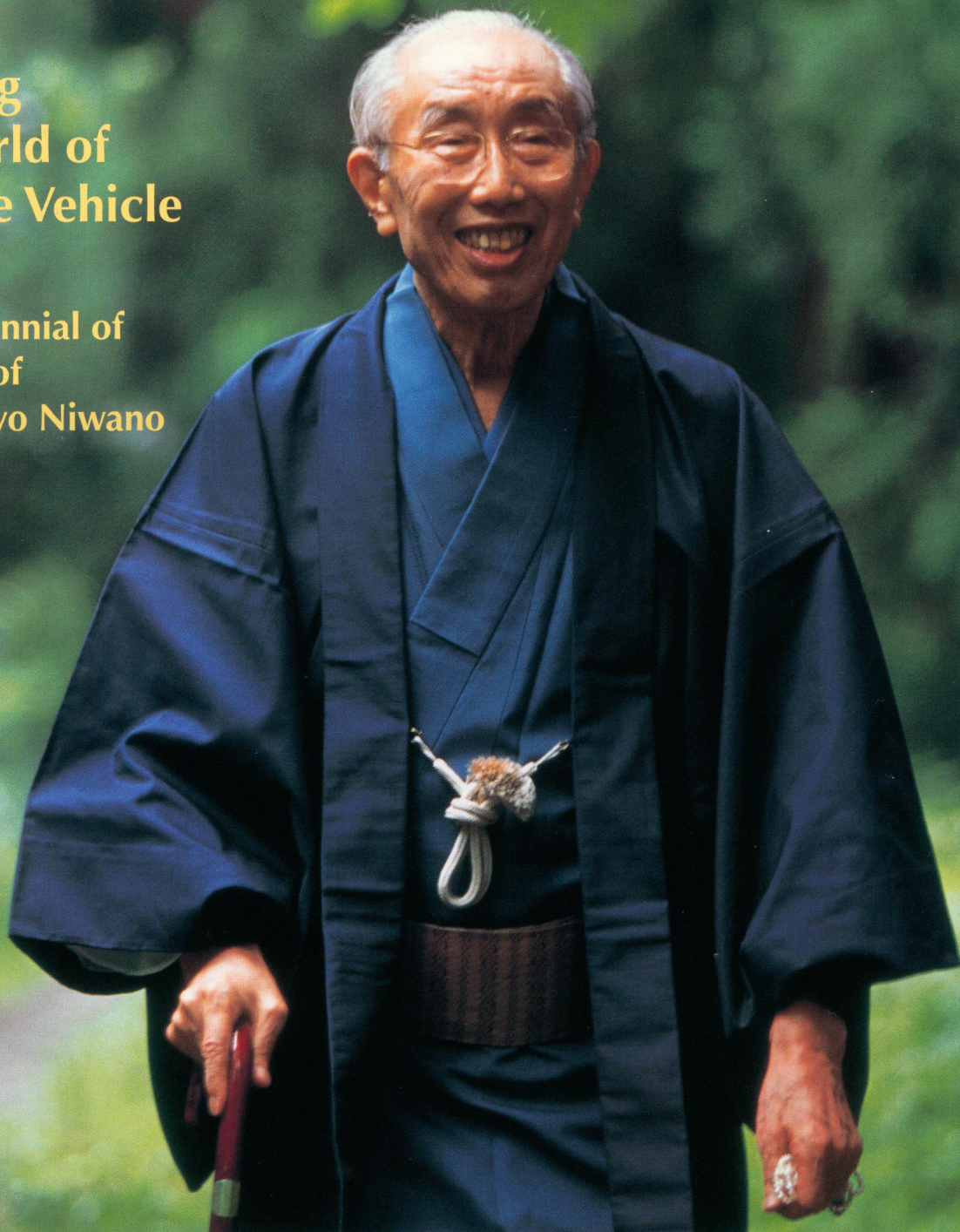
FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

DHARMA WORLD

APR.-JUNE 2006 Vol. 33

**Creating
the World of
the One Vehicle**

**The Centennial of
the Birth of
Rev. Nikkyo Niwano**



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The author of these readable, enlightening guides is KOGEN MIZUNO (1901–2006), Litt.D., a renowned authority on early Buddhism and Pali texts. He was president of Komazawa University, where he also taught Buddhology.

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Cover photo: Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the late founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, at his native village of Suganuma, Niigata Prefecture. Photographed in 1995. This year, Rissho Kosei-kai will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Founder, who was born on November 15, 1906.

April–June 2006

DHARMA WORLD

For Living Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue

Vol. 33

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DHARMA WORLD presents Buddhism as a practical living religion and promotes interreligious dialogue for world peace. It espouses views that emphasize the dignity of life, seeks to rediscover our inner nature and bring our lives more in accord with it, and investigates causes of human suffering. It tries to show how religious principles help solve problems in daily life and how the least application of such principles has wholesome effects on the world around us. It seeks to demonstrate truths that are fundamental to all religions, truths on which all people can act.

Isamu Maruyama

Kajusenji

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As I look back on my life, I am deeply aware that I must be one of the most fortunate men alive. Through the wonderful workings of karma, though born deep in the mountains of Niigata Prefecture, I have come into contact with many people whose help has been invaluable to me. And today I am able to walk, hand in hand, with millions of fellow believers as we move forward together.

Once, taking a large number of his followers with him, the Buddha went to the top of a mountain near Gaya and there pronounced the following teachings, which can be applied to my own life.

Freedom from illness is the supreme advantage.

Knowing what is sufficient and being satisfied with it are supreme wealth.

Good friends are supreme favor.

Immutable naturalness is the supreme tranquillity.

I am very blessed to enjoy good health. The man of great wealth who is never satisfied and always driven by a desire for more is actually impoverished, whereas the man who wants little and is satisfied with whatever modicum he obtains is truly wealthy. In this connection, too, I have been fortunate. Faith has enabled me to enjoy the supreme wealth of satisfaction with what is sufficient. Insofar as friends are concerned, I fully appreciate the great favor I have found in the five million and three hundred thousand members of Rissho Kosei-kai and in the many highly respected people of religion at home and abroad that I am able to count among my good friends.

The final teaching is most difficult to understand and indicates a state that is most difficult to attain. The Sanskrit term here translated as immutable naturalness, *asamskrita*, means that which is not created and is free of the influence of causal relations. In Buddhist terms this condition is called truth or nirvana; but, in ordinary language it may be interpreted as the state in which all things are done in a natural, unforced fashion.

In my youth, when I had no idea whatsoever of becoming a religious leader, I exerted my best day by day in working for several neighborhood stores, serving in the navy, and later running my own business. In all these instances, I was merely following the counsel of my parents, my grand-

father, and the principal of the school I attended. Later, after coming into contact with the Lotus Sutra and realizing that its teaching is the one way to save humanity and the world, I devoted myself to it entirely thereafter. But in this too, instead of setting out to achieve a deliberately established goal, I was pliantly following the teachings set forth in the sutra.

Living in accordance with what I have called immutable naturalness means discarding the smaller self and obeying the rationale of heaven and earth: the Universal Law.

Merely following the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, in which that Law is most lucidly explained, leads to the state of immutable naturalness and supreme tranquillity.

Throughout my lifetime I have come into contact with many bodhisattvas who helped me bring out the good in me with their own virtues. My grandfather, who carried me on his back and constantly advised me to strive to do good for others, was such a bodhisattva. So was my father, who gave moxa treatment to the many villagers who flocked to our house morning and evening for his therapy, and my mother, who raised us lovingly and, in spite of pain caused by stomach trouble, cultivated silkworms and wove cloth in addition to carrying out her many other domestic chores. Chief Warrant Officer Nakano, who watched over me like an elder brother when I was in the navy, and Mr. Ishihara, the owner of a pickles shop, who first introduced me to the world of the mystical and imponderable—all were bodhisattvas leading me in the right direction. So was Sukenobu Arai, who first explained the Lotus Sutra to me and who said it would be enough even if I were the only person who attended his lectures, and Myoko Naganuma, who shared with me the hardships of the formative period of our organization. In more recent times, Dr. Dana McLean Greeley and other people I have met in work connected with the World Conference of Religions for Peace and the International Association for Religious Freedom have been my mentors and guides. I can only bring my hands together in prayerful gratitude to the gods and buddhas who brought me in contact with all these bodhisattvas, without whose help I could have achieved nothing. □

(Excerpts from Rev. Nikkyo Niwano's "In Gratitude for Their Guidance," in DHARMA WORLD, February 1983.)

As We Approach the Centennial of the Founder's Birth

by Katsunori Yamanoi

This year, as the centennial year of the Founder's birth, is a memorable one for Rissho Kosei-kai. But I believe that, as we plan and undertake the various public memorial celebrations, there is something else that must not be forgotten.

It is that we, the members of Rissho Kosei-kai, must now look back over what Founder Nikkyo Niwano did during his life, discover what his aims and ambitions were, and then ponder their meaning and significance.

I believe that one of the most deeply significant things that he did was to promote interreligious cooperation. Founder Niwano had the belief, since his youth, that "all religions should work together hand-in-hand for peace." He became attached to this firm conviction when, in 1965, he attended the Second Vatican Council and had an audience with Pope Paul VI.

From that point on, Founder Niwano was inspired to action, and with like-minded people who shared his ardent belief, he began to work toward the major goal of convening a World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP). Key thinkers inside and out and the religious officials themselves were quite skeptical at the time, wondering if it was

even possible to bring together representatives of different religions for a conference, let alone get them to contribute to peace.

But in the spirit of the expression "all religions spring from the same source," meaning all religions aspire after the same goal, Founder Niwano continued his dedicated efforts to give concrete expression to the idea of the One Vehicle as taught in the Lotus Sutra, and in 1970 the World Conference of Religions for Peace was finally held.

This year will see the Eighth World Assembly of the WCRP; coincidentally, it will be held in Kyoto, the same city in which the first conference was held. The conference theme is "Religions for Peace: Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security."

We still cannot know when the world will see an end to its many ethnic conflicts and religious conflicts, or to the development of nuclear weapons and to arms build-ups. Against the background of such a world situation, that this World Conference of Religions for Peace is being held in Kyoto, where the first such conference was held, has deep significance, in the sense that it reaffirms the starting point of interreligious cooperation.

Furthermore, for a religion to fulfill its original role, it is said that it must satisfy three requirements. First, the religion must actually offer relief to people who are suffering. Second, it must enhance the spirituality and character of the people. Third, it must contribute to society. For representatives of the religions fulfilling these three requirements to be able to get together once every few years to discuss what they can do to cooperate with one another and to help bring about peace is, I believe, of great benefit to those religions. I am certain that they can double or even triple the results of their activities by doing so.

In the sense also of spreading the spirit of the One Vehicle, it is my fervent wish to make this centennial year of the birth of the Founder one in which Founder Niwano himself would have been truly delighted were he alive. □

Katsunori Yamanoi is the chairman of the board of directors of Rissho Kosei-kai.

Living with a Generous Heart

Greeting the Centennial of the Founder's Birth

by Nichiko Niwano

It is important that through this year's programs and ceremonies we make the heart of the Buddha, the heart of the Founder, our own.

This year we reach a major turning point with the centennial of the birth of the Reverend Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai. Let us make this year more than just a time of celebration, using it as an opportunity to reflect on and deepen our faith.

The Great Vow to Save All Sentient Beings

Last year, in anticipation of the centennial, I had the opportunity to meet with local leaders and other members of Rissho Kosei-kai a total of forty-two times to talk and learn together, in the name of "nationwide dissemination." In the course of these activities, there were certain things I invariably said.

One was "Seek not to follow in the footsteps of the masters; seek what the masters sought." This sentence, from the pamphlet *Awakening in Faith*, was used by the director of Rissho Kosei-kai's Faith Dissemination Department in a question to me. He expressed his own understanding of the Buddha's teaching as follows: "What the Buddha really wanted to convey to us was the importance of properly accepting what is here and now rather than pursuing mere

forms. That, it seems to me, is the mainstay of 'awakening in faith.'" This says it all. Even if we seek to "follow in the footsteps of the masters," no one can live the same life as the Buddha. The same can be said of the life of the Founder. Each one of us has to live our own individual life, in keeping with our own causes and conditions. Therefore, the most important thing is to ask ourselves constantly what the masters sought to convey and strive to strengthen the aspiration for enlightenment.

What the Buddha wished to convey to us above all, I believe, was the truth of heaven and earth, embodied in the Great Vow to save all sentient beings generated by grasping that truth. This world is permeated by that truth. In brief, it is the law of impermanence, the truth that all things are constantly changing. We who are linked by having come into contact with the teachings of the Buddha can face life with great peace of mind by awakening to the truth. In other words, no matter what suffering we may encounter, we can accept all things in the light of the truth and live with thanksgiving and purpose.

In this way members of Rissho Kosei-kai have been saved by living out the Buddha's teachings in their daily lives. Those saved feel impelled to pass on the joy of salvation to others. The Rissho Kosei-kai of today is built on the stock of those who, not content with personal salvation, wish for the happiness of others and sincerely transmit the teachings. Those who have gone before us have taught us by their example that salvation and dissemination of the teachings are truly one and the same.

A Life Permeated by the One Vehicle Spirit

In this centennial year, I hope that in addition to giving thanks for having encountered the Buddha and his teachings through the Founder, we will renew the vow to disseminate the teachings to as many others as possible. The Buddha told us to strive to improve ourselves in the wish to save all sentient beings. In modern terms, this means striving to improve ourselves with the aspiration to save the world.

The Buddha's teachings, the aim of which is the salvation

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).

of all people, are said to be the most broad-minded, peaceable teachings to be found in any religion. There can be no more peaceable mission for us than to make those teachings known to the world.

In reality, of course, the low-key practice of transmitting the teachings to those closest to us is important. But striving earnestly where we live and work leads to dissemination of the teachings to the world. Surely what would make the Founder happiest is for each and every one of us always to possess the aspiration to save the world, the spirit to make the teachings known to the world. Through “nationwide dissemination,” we have learned from one another how to strive to improve ourselves. Building on this, in my meetings with leaders last year I announced the policy direction for 2006.

Here is the gist of what I said: Finally, we greet the pivotal year of the centennial of the Founder’s birth. Let us pledge to strive this year to emulate the Founder, who, ever since the establishment of Rissho Kosei-kai, dedicated his life to world peace and the salvation of humanity, taking as his personal vow the One Vehicle spirit: Since we are all passengers in the same vehicle, let us recognize and cooperate with one another with a generous heart. Realizing that we all live together on Spaceship Earth, let us regard the problems of the world as our own problems, engraving firmly on our hearts the Founder’s vow, “I have been born into this world so that all living beings may be saved and attain happiness”—the Lotus Sutra’s teaching of the “birth by aspiration.” And through “regulation of the family,” putting one’s own home in order, this year let us firmly address the problems of young people.

As indicated by his posthumous title, Great Teacher of the One Vehicle, the Founder preached the Law and guided us with an expansive heart, seeing all people as the children of the Buddha. His establishment of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) and other organizations, not to mention his day-to-day dissemination activities, was made possible because all that he thought and did was grounded in his personal vow to live according to the One Vehicle spirit. In emulation of the Founder, who possessed the aspiration to save all sentient beings, not just himself, I hope each one of us will be able to strive for self-improvement with an expansive heart.

Turning our gaze toward the world, we see that conflict and terrorism, poverty and hunger, persist. Domestically, too, we face diverse problems. The Buddha taught that all beings in the world are part of one great life infused with the truth of impermanence. When we realize this truth, self and others are as one, and we share the suffering and sorrow of others. Every individual, every people, every nation is an integral part of Spaceship Earth. The poet Kenji Miyazawa (1896–1933) wrote, “There can be no individual hap-

piness until the world as a whole is happy.” In the same way, the world’s problems are our own problems.

Are people satisfied if they themselves are happy, ignoring the suffering and sorrow of others? Certainly not. The “birth by aspiration” taught in the Lotus Sutra means that lodged in the innermost recess of everyone’s heart is the wish that all sentient beings may be saved and attain happiness. This is the vow of the Buddha and the Founder. We are taught that the heartfelt vow of all people is one and the same: to save all sentient beings. I hope we will engrave this on our hearts, clarifying the mission for which we have been born into this world.

Sharing the Heart of the Buddha and the Founder

This is the third year that I have announced “regulation of the family” as the guiding principle for the year. The family is the fundamental place of character formation, and putting the home in order is always a major issue for us. To achieve “regulation of the family” I have frequently talked about the importance of “the three practices” and “a life centered on the Buddhist altar” as daily aspirations. The three practices are saying good morning to one another, responding clearly and crisply when called, and lining up one’s shoes neatly after taking them off when entering the house. A life centered on the Buddhist altar means making the Buddha’s teachings one’s focus and measuring things against the yardstick of the Buddha. Through carrying out these practices at home and creating a family that has warmth, I hope that this year, too, we will firmly address the problems of youth.

Young people are said to symbolize the fresh springtime of life and the sacred springtime of the homeland. This image comes from one of the favorite books of my own youth. Spring evokes hope and expectation. It expresses beautifully the value, the preciousness, of youth. Youth is so valuable that it is said that when we look at young people, we see the future of the nation. Not only at home but also in Rissho Kosei-kai local branches and chapters, we must do all that we can to develop young people.

This centennial year will feature a variety of programs and ceremonies, including ceremonies to celebrate completion of the renovation of the Great Sacred Hall, and commemorative pilgrimages. And in late August the Eighth World Assembly of the WCRP will meet in Kyoto for the first time since the inaugural assembly in 1970.

What is important is that through these programs and ceremonies we make the heart of the Buddha, the heart of the Founder, our own. On the occasion of this centennial, I hope that each and every one of us will strive for self-improvement with the generosity of the Founder, so that we can further deepen our faith and make progress, possessing the aspiration and the spirit to save all sentient beings. □

In Memory of the Reverend Nikkyo Niwano

by Chiara Lubich

When the history of the dialogue among religions is written, one of the eminent figures to emerge will be the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai.

I cannot think of our friendship, which began more than twenty years ago, without a deep sense of warmth and gratitude, nor can I forget the honor Rev. Nikkyo Niwano bestowed on me through sharing the great ideals of peace and harmony among people that animated his heart.

It is thanks to him that our two movements began to work together and have seen the fruits of this collaboration.

But here I would like to recall something regarding his personality, the way he lived out his faith, and his doctrine, which was rooted in the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and which opened new paths to the understanding and practice of the Buddha's message.

In 1987 he wrote to me: "We should not read the scriptures mechanically or interpret them as mere metaphysics.

Buddhism has a vast canon, said to total some 84,000 works; yet in the end, even they are of no use to our salvation unless we read them in conjunction with religious practice in our daily lives. We should not play with the words of God and the Buddha, but should incorporate them within our lives."

Here, I believe, lies the secret of all his work: being anchored in the spirit of sacred scriptures and making them a perennial spiritual resource for concrete actions, rich in fruits.

This is one of the teachings I discerned in the life of Rev. Niwano, and in this I felt a deep union with him. The Focolare Movement is also based on Sacred Scriptures, not just meditated upon and studied, but also put into practice, and we are convinced that the Words of God are Words of Life that, through our witness, bring to others the Life that comes from God.

Rev. Niwano's thoughts on the three treasures of Buddhism—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha—were also very illuminating for me. He wrote: "Of the three, the Sangha is the greatest treasure, as far as Buddhists are concerned. Just as members of the Focolare Movement stress the importance of communal life, so do we in Rissho Kosei-kai value the Sangha, for it is virtually impossible for a person to fathom the truth alone. Within the community of the Sangha, we can encourage one another, support one another, enlighten one another. Even those who are weak, to begin with, can arrive at the right way of living."

In his beautiful biography of Shakyamuni Buddha he quotes the Lotus Sutra: "Only a buddha together with a buddha can fathom the Reality of all Existence." It is an affirmation that struck me because there is great affinity

Chiara Lubich is founder and president of the Focolare Movement, the worldwide Catholic movement that has members and friends in over 180 countries. She received the Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion in 1977.

Founder Niwano greets Ms. Lubich at his eightieth birthday celebration, which was held at Rissho Kosei-kai's Tokyo headquarters in November 1986.

with the experience of our movement. We say that unity among those who try to reflect Christ in their lives (to be, as much as possible, another Christ) can give us the Wisdom and Strength we need to stand up to the entire world, for as Jesus said in the Gospel: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, am I there in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20). It is the presence of God in the community that gives Christians the strength to bear all the difficulties and to bring—with a smile—joy, peace, pardon, consolation, and the flame of love that binds people together in communion and that enlightens the path of their existence.

With his youthful spirit, Rev. Niwano was able to interpret the expectations of young people in the areas of interest closest to their hearts, such as care for the environment, responsibility for the world of the future, love for life in any form, and solidarity. One of the actions I most appreciated was fasting in order to set up a fund to help people in need. And it is wonderful to see how the youth of Rissho Kosei-kai responded to this appeal, which flowed from the heart and wisdom of their leader.

I would also like to highlight my esteem and gratitude toward Rev. Niwano for having brought into existence the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), together

with other farsighted persons. When he first spoke to me about this, I admired the way he had intuited the role of religions in creating conditions for peace in the world. From that time on, the Focolare Movement, in answer to his invitation, has collaborated with the WCRP in various initiatives. This collaboration has continued for more than twenty years.

To conclude these words, all too brief, in memory of Rev. Niwano, I would like to once again express a conviction of mine.

When the history of the dialogue among religions will be written, I believe that one of the eminent figures to emerge, one who contributed efficaciously as a pioneer, will be Rev. Nikkyo Niwano. His farsightedness, his sensitivity, his personal contact with another great personality of the world of religion, Pope Paul VI, who was a source of inspiration and encouragement for him, make Rev. Niwano a great protagonist not only in dialogue between Christians and Buddhists, but in the encounter of all the great world religions.

His wisdom, his smile, which so deeply impressed me, are always with me, in my thoughts and in my prayers.

I perceive our friendship as something that has not been interrupted by his departure. □

Founder Niwano: A Pioneer for Peace

by Jimmy Carter

A former president of the United States recalls his first meeting with Rissho Kosei-kai's founder in 1979, and how over time they enjoyed a great friendship stimulated by their personal differences.

N ikkyo Niwano, a singular religious genius, had a rare grasp of the value of collaboration among religious groups striving to create a better world. Others have recounted his distinctive leadership in founding Rissho Kosei-kai, the dynamic community of socially engaged Buddhists. I remember him best for his skill at building partnerships among the world's religious communities, and for our personal collaboration—his support for the peace-building work of The Carter Center and my participation in events of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP).

I first met Founder Niwano in 1979 during my presidency, when senior leaders from many of the world's religions visited me at the White House. Against the stark backdrop of

the cold war, this extraordinary group of individuals from the Soviet Union, China, Western Europe, Japan, the United States, and nonaligned countries in the South were united by a moral commitment to world peace. They embraced my own dedication to overcoming the dangers of the cold war, promoting human rights, and achieving sustainable development.

Founder Niwano and I were introduced by my sister Ruth Carter Stapleton, a woman of great religious faith who was engaged in the work of the WCRP. Over time, through private conversations and shared commitments, Founder Niwano and I experienced the great joy of a friendship that was stimulated and enhanced by our contrasting cultures and religions. We shared a common bond—our mutual interests in faith and public service and the intersection between them. Just as Founder Niwano recognized in me a public servant who drew strength and inspiration from my faith, I was stimulated by his dedication to public service. Our roles were different and demanded distinctive modes of action, but our interests both converged and complemented each other.

The Founder was a natural leader, brilliant and far-reaching in thought, yet practical and radically committed to action. He shared with me once, with great modesty and simplicity, that he was prepared to go anywhere and do anything to advance the cause of peace. In later years, his promise bore fruit as he cooperated with The Carter Center to address some of the most difficult issues facing humanity—resolving conflict, strengthening human rights, and eradicating terrible diseases.

Founder Niwano had an acute awareness that religions express their truth and genius when they face squarely the

Rick Diamond

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter (1977–81) chairs The Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia, a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing peace and health worldwide.

President Carter welcomes Founder Niwano to the White House when he visited him in 1979 with other officers of the WCRP during the Third World Assembly of the WCRP, which was held in Princeton, New Jersey.

challenges of their day. He realized that poverty, conflict, and disease know no religious boundaries and are not the dilemmas of any one community. His great genius was in establishing a pure vision of multireligious cooperation that respected differences between religions, while guiding disparate faith groups toward a unified approach to solving common problems. This influence is still evident in vigorous WCRP chapters worldwide.

In Uganda recently, I met with leaders of religious communities there who had formed a WCRP national interreligious council concerned with the well-being of orphans with HIV/AIDS. I was overcome with fond remembrance when I saw these good men and women, who had not met the Founder, fully accepting the responsibility of carrying out his vision. Perhaps history offers no higher form of compliment. □

President Carter and Founder Niwano at the Kyoto International Conference Hall when they attended the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the WCRP in 1990.

The Venerable Nikkyo Niwano and Interreligious Dialogue

by Michael L. Fitzgerald

The presence of Pope John Paul II at the opening ceremony of the Sixth World Assembly of the WCRP in the Vatican was the fulfillment of a dream for Rissho Kosei-kai's founder.

In his autobiography *Lifetime Beginner*,¹ Ven. Nikkyo Niwano tells how he was invited to attend the last period of the Second Vatican Council. The invitation was conveyed to him through the apostolic nuncio, the representative of the Holy See, in Tokyo. The fact was quite remarkable, for it was the first time in the history of the Catholic Church that a member of another religion was invited to attend a meeting of its leaders. Intrigued as to why he should be singled out, Ven. Nikkyo Niwano later discovered that it was a form of recognition for the work that the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai and its members had carried out in the field of interreligious cooperation.

Participation in the Council was in fact limited: attendance at the liturgy for the opening of the final period, and an audience with His Holiness Pope Paul VI. Yet these brief moments were to have a deep impact on Ven. Nikkyo Niwano. It is good to quote his own words:

The pope . . . rose upon seeing me enter the room and welcomed me by name. I raised my hands and the prayer beads I was holding in a Buddhist greeting. Then the pope extended his hand, shook mine, and finally took it between his, where it remained throughout the audience. "I know what you are doing for interreligious cooperation. It is very wonderful. Please continue to promote this wonderful movement," the pope said. As he spoke he looked into my eyes. His voice was low, calm, and grave. Continuing he said: "In the Vatican, too, the attitude toward non-Christian religions is changing. It is important for people of religion not to cling to factions or denominations but to recognize one another and pray for one another." My heart was warm as I realized that the true meaning of religious cooperation can be seen in mutual prayers among all people of faith. The Buddhist must pray for the Christian, and the Christian for the Buddhist.

"I shall exert my best efforts for the sake of world

peace," I said to the pope, who replied: "God will surely bless you in the noble work you have undertaken." I was refreshed and encouraged by the sincerity and truth of what he said. . . .

As I left the room, I could still feel the warmth of the pope's handshake. That had been no ordinary handshake. It was a flesh-and-blood representation of mutual understanding between the religions of the East and the West, between a Buddhist and the head of a church that had long been known for exclusivism. I believe that our handshake proved to be the starting point of the creation of a new kind of religious relationship.²

It is worth pointing out that this event took place a little more than a year after Pope Paul VI had instituted the Secretariat for Non-Christians, later to become the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, precisely to put into application the new vision of the Vatican Council

Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald, newly appointed as the apostolic nuncio in Egypt and the Holy See's delegate to the League of Arab States, had served as president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. He was also the director of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome for many years.

regarding relations among people of different religions. It preceded Ven. Niwano's involvement in the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), which was to bear fruition in the first conference, held in Kyoto in 1970. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has always given its support to this movement, and since the Fourth World Assembly, held in Nairobi, the president of the Council has taken part in these gatherings.

In 1990, I myself had the privilege of representing the Council at the celebration in Kyoto of the twentieth anniversary of the WCRP. Two years later I was again in Japan and was invited to take part in a meeting of the Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan. Ven. Nikkyo Niwano was at that time chairman of this association. I noted the dignified way in which he carried out his duties and the esteem in which he was held by all. On the same occasion it was my good fortune to be able to spend a short time with a Rissho Kosei-kai family. I was struck by the practice of family prayer, something that Ven. Nikkyo Niwano strongly encouraged, and this experience reinforced my appreciation for the movement.

In the account given of the meeting with Pope Paul VI there is a noteworthy insistence on prayer, a conviction shared by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai and the pope. In October 1986, Pope John Paul II invited religious leaders from around the world to Assisi in order to pray for peace. President Niwano was not able to attend in person, but he sent his son, Nichiko Niwano, the current president of Rissho Kosei-kai, to represent him.

Ven. Niwano's commitment to understanding among people of different religions received international recognition. He was awarded the Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion. This brought him into contact with a former recipient of the prize, Chiara Lubich, the founder of the Focolare Movement in the Catholic Church. The two founders discovered that they were animated by a similar spirit, and friendship grew between them and the two movements which has proved to be extremely fruitful in the field of interreligious cooperation.

In 1994 Ven. Nikkyo Niwano was in the Vatican once again for the opening ceremony of the Sixth World Assembly of the WCRP. The assembly itself was held in Riva del Garda, in the north of Italy. The organizers wished to invite the pope to address the Assembly, but since it was impossible for him to make the journey at that time, it was arranged to have the opening ceremony in the Vatican. The Pontifical Council was happy to work with the representatives

of the WCRP, including members of Rissho Kosei-kai, to facilitate this event. It was held in the Synod Hall, a place usually reserved for meetings of bishops of the Catholic Church.

The presence of Pope John Paul II was welcomed with joy. He took his seat at the center of the presidential table, flanked on either side by religious leaders. Cardinal Arinze, president of the Pontifical Council, was on the pope's right, and Ven. Nikkyo Niwano, on his left. After opening remarks by Dr. Aram, at that time a president of the WCRP, Founder Niwano traced briefly the history of the movement and welcomed the Holy Father in the name of all. In his discourse to the assembly, Pope John Paul II drew attention to the

During the opening ceremony of WCRP VI held in the Vatican's Synod Hall, Founder Niwano was seated to the left of Pope John Paul II. In his address Founder Niwano welcomed the pope in the name of all participants.

role of the family in educating for peace, and reiterated his conviction that all efforts toward peace must be accompanied by prayer. These are certainly points that had the full agreement of Ven. Niwano, seeing the important place given to both the family and to prayer in Rissho Kosei-kai. The pope's address was in fact followed by a moment of prayer, with invocations being offered according to different religious traditions. Before departing, the pope was asked to bless the assembly, which he did. He then greeted personally many of the participants, including Ven. Nikkyo Niwano.

I think it can be said without hesitation that this event was the fulfillment of a dream for Founder Niwano. It sustained him in his continuing work for interreligious understanding, cooperation, and peace, right to the end of his long life. □

Notes

1. Kosei Publishing Company, Tokyo, 1978.
2. *Lifetime Beginner*, pp. 224–25.

The Lotus Sutra and Religious Cooperation

by Gijun Sugitani

The world can no longer ignore the religious conflict underlying the current ethnic clashes. People of faith have been compelled to reexamine what religion is and ought to be.

The very first World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) was held in Kyoto in 1970. Religious leaders representing different faiths overcame the differences of their beliefs, gathering together in one place to pray together and converse about peace and human rights. The event was considered a religious miracle. Since then the conference has gone around the world, and in August 2006, it will make its way back to Kyoto for the Eighth World Assembly. The fact that 2006 also marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai and a central figure in the establishment of the WCRP and its development thereafter, makes this a very special year of commemoration in the history of religious cooperation.

Since 1970, dialogue among the world's religious leaders has gained pace, as a result of a shared sense of responsibility to relieve the suffering of oppressed peoples. Once focused

on the threat of nuclear war, which was so very real in the decades of the cold war, people are now concerned about the ethnic clashes that have erupted with the breakdown of the bipolar power structure. The world can no longer ignore the religious conflict underlying these ethnic clashes, and we have been compelled to reexamine what religion is and ought to be. No longer is it possible to ignore those of other faiths.

It was in the midst of this kind of world turmoil that the Vatican took the initiative to push forward the ecumenical movement and promote dialogue with religions other than Christianity. In 1986, Pope John Paul II called for a meeting of the world's religious leaders at Assisi, Italy, for a World Day of Prayer for Peace. The twentieth anniversary of this event will also be commemorated this year.

When the Sixth World Assembly of the WCRP took place in 1994, the opening ceremony was held at the Vatican and Pope John Paul II opened the Synod Hall to non-Christians for the first time. The pope had only words of praise for the work of the WCRP in his speech at the opening ceremony and expressed his high expectations for the conference. This marked the establishment of a strong bond between the pope and Rev. Niwano, then honorary president of the WCRP, who had at last seen his long-held dream to have the pope participate in the WCRP come true.

The Venerable Etai Yamada, the 253rd head priest of the Tendai denomination of Japanese Buddhism, was one of the non-Christian attendees at the Assisi gathering for the World Day of Prayer for Peace. He attended the event without hesitation, making his first trip to Europe at the age of 91 in the true spirit of the Lotus Sutra's teaching of *fushaku shinmyo*, devotion that spares neither body nor life. At the end of the World Day of Prayer, Ven. Yamada and the pope shook hands, and in an expression of his affinity for the Assisi spirit, Ven. Yamada announced his plans to hold a religious summit meeting on Mount Hiei near Kyoto. True to his word, a summit meeting of the world's religious leaders

Rev. Gijun Sugitani, chief priest of the temple Enjuin, Tokyo, was formerly secretary-general of the Tendai denomination of Japanese Buddhism. He serves now as an advisor to the Tendai denomination. He had also served as secretary-general of the Japanese Committee of the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

During the Fifth World Assembly of the WCRP, which was held in Australia in 1989, Founder Niwano met with Ven. Yamada (center) and Rev. Zao Puchu (left), president of the Buddhist Association of China.

was held the following year, in August 1987, and Founder Niwano was among the Japanese religious leaders who cooperated to bring it about. Plans are now underway to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of this religious summit in 2007.

The Vatican and Japan's religious leaders have been at the forefront of the global movement for religious dialogue and cooperation. And prominent among the Japanese religious leaders of this endeavor have been Rev. Nikkyo Niwano and Ven. Etai Yamada. These two shared a deep faith grounded in the Lotus Sutra, a faith so profound that even the pope was moved.

In his writings, Ven. Etai Yamada asserted that "there are two ways to the Lotus Sutra: the way of refutation and the way of integration. I believe the Lotus Sutra is a sutra of integration. In other words, it is good for us to walk together as we aim for the top. Getting to the top by knocking down one's rivals is questionable."

For his part, Founder Niwano has said: "The Lotus Sutra teaches us of the One Buddha Vehicle and that all religions spring from the same root. It is a sutra of reconciliation that also instills in us the conviction that we are the ones who must act. At the same time, the Lotus Sutra warns us that it is wrong if, in our zeal, we try to force others into submission."

Clearly, Ven. Etai Yamada and Rev. Nikkyo Niwano shared the exact same perception of the Lotus Sutra. Many believers in the Lotus Sutra are activists for peace, but not a few of these people are prone to be dogmatic and pushy in their approach to others. Friction is inevitable when the Lotus Sutra is interpreted as a way of refutation to force others into the same belief. Where Ven. Yamada and Rev.

Niwano stand out is in their shared perception of the Lotus Sutra as a sutra of integration rather than of conflict, a perception that is founded in the interpretation of the Lotus Sutra as put forth by the Chinese Buddhist scholar and founder of the T'ien-t'ai sect (the Chinese predecessor of the Japanese Tendai denomination), Chih-i (538–97). Chih-i is often referred to as the Shakyamuni of China. In his *Mo-ho chih-kuan* (The Great Cessation and Contemplation), a treatise describing how the teachings of the Lotus Sutra should be put into practice, Chih-i says that a net of only one mesh is of no use in capturing a bird; yet a bird is captured with only one mesh. What does this mean?

Chih-i is saying that not only do humans have diverse individuality, but also that no one person is exactly the same from one moment to another. That is why you need many different kinds of teachings to capture the hearts and minds of different individuals. But when the bird is finally "caught," you will see that it is caught by only one mesh, in other words, by only one truth.

In contemporary terms, this means that the various religions of the world, including Christianity and Islam, must work together to weave the net of human happiness. And each religion should do its utmost for the salvation of those who happen to choose that particular faith. This is a view of religious cooperation that in no way demands that one religion should merge with another.

The Japanese Buddhist monk Saicho (767–822) introduced the teachings of Chih-i to Japan and established the Tendai denomination on Mount Hiei. Saicho taught that there was no single sutra other than the "Flower of the Wonderful Dharma," another name for the Lotus Sutra. In the *Shugo Kokkai-sho* (Essays on Protecting the Nation), he presents a threefold classification of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. He does not deny the validity of other sutras, but says that all other sutras culminate in the Lotus Sutra. He classifies the teachings of the Lotus Sutra into three types: fundamental, hidden, and revealed. The fundamental teachings are those of Shakyamuni's enlightenment. The hidden teachings are those to be found in the numerous other Buddhist scriptures, for though they may not bear reference to the Lotus Sutra in their titles, these teachings are still essential to understanding the fundamental teachings. Finally, the revealed teachings are those that teach the One Buddha Vehicle, which is Shakyamuni's cherished essence. Viewed solely as a book of revelation, the Lotus Sutra appears to deny the validity of all other teachings, but viewed from the perspective of all three classifications, the Lotus Sutra can be seen to be a scripture of reconciliation.

Using these same classifications, it is possible to view Christianity, Islam, and the other religions of the world as reflections of the hidden teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Thus, for the true follower of the Lotus Sutra, religious cooperation for peace is nothing less than a practical application of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. I pray that 2006 will add a new page to the history of religious cooperation. □

Contemporary Religion and Social Crisis in Japan

by Robert Kisala

The emergence of new religious movements in Japan can at least in part be attributed to the great social change, even social crisis, associated with the process of modernization.

In addressing the issue of contemporary religion and social crisis in Japan, I would first like to give my own personal view of how new religious movements have been especially associated with social crisis in Japan, and then address what I see as some of the “crises” that need to be addressed in contemporary society. As a foreigner “looking in,” and participating in, Japanese society, the view I present might seem somewhat strange, and, indeed, it might be off the mark, but perhaps it will nevertheless offer some new insights that might be of some value.

The emergence of new religious movements can at least in part be attributed to the great social change, even social crisis, associated with the process of modernization. This is perhaps particularly true in Japan, where a relatively large number of these new movements has emerged in the last two centuries. Although there are several different ways to classify these movements according to the period of their emergence or growth, I like to describe them as comprising three waves of movements, according to the religious tradition that they predominately draw upon, and the unique “crises” that accompanied the various periods of Japan’s modernization. For example, some of the new religions trace their roots to the end of the early modern period in the first half of the nineteenth century through the first half of the Meiji era (1868–1912). Groups from this period are often based on folk religious practices and the experiences of a charismatic founder, and they can be described as attempts to revitalize traditional cultural elements in the face of the influx of Western influences during that century. Another wave of new religious movements emerged in the immediate post-war period, attracting much media attention in Japan as well as abroad. These movements were often Buddhist-based lay movements, and some of them have been successful in attracting followers numbering in the millions. Part of the reason for their success lies in the fact that they offered the increasingly urban population a means to per-

form the traditional ancestor rites in the home, independent of the Buddhist clergy and temples that they left behind in the move to the cities, while also offering an alternative means to form relatively strong community bonds in the often cold and anonymous urban environment. Finally, a third wave of new religions has emerged since the 1970s, mirroring religious developments predominantly seen in the West. These movements emphasize personal spiritual development, and encourage the adoption of ideas and practices from a wide range of religions in order to contribute to that development—these are individualistic types of religion that seem to respond to the crisis of trust in social institutions that characterizes this period.

The continued emergence of these movements makes it difficult to maintain that Japan is a secular society. However, many Japanese would prefer to see themselves as secular or unconcerned with religion. In a recent survey, for

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example, only 26 percent of the respondents in Japan described themselves as religious. In part this is due to the controversy surrounding some religious groups, particularly these new religions that I have identified with Japan's modernization. The already poor image of these groups was further damaged by the terrorist activities of Aum Shinrikyo in the mid-1990s, contributing to the rise of an anticult movement in Japan. However, the attitude toward religion in Japan is also a function of fundamental differences in the understanding of "religion" as compared to the West, differences that arise from the history of religion in Japan, a point I will come back to in talking about contemporary problems at the end of this essay.

Modernity and the emergence of these new religious movements in Japan is closely associated with the country's contact with the West. What is commonly referred to as the early modern period followed the arrival of Portuguese and Spanish explorers in the sixteenth century, and was marked by the attempt to limit contact with the West during the two-and-a-half centuries of Tokugawa rule (1603–1868). The modern period was ushered in by the collapse of the Tokugawa regime in the face of the forced opening of the country by American and other Western powers, leading to a mad rush to catch up with the West economically, technologically, and militarily. The desire to build a nation strong enough to avoid Western colonization contributed greatly to the emergence of Japanese nationalism and Japanese colonialism, and impacted on religious developments during this period. Government attempts to separate Buddhism from Shinto and to establish Shinto as the moral and spiritual basis for Japanese nationalism provided the background against which religion as a concept was debated and understood. In addition, the effects of industrialization, urbanization, and the affluence of the postwar period are especially apparent in the emergence of new religious movements, where the changing face of Japanese society is reflected in the development of the first rural movements that emphasized an egalitarian solidarity, then urban mass movements, and finally a turn to the self in post-1970 movements.

The government attempt to separate Buddhism from Shinto and identify Shinto with the Japanese national identity—in effect an effort to create a national religious ideology as a vehicle to promote cultural identity—could only be maintained by the use of increasingly oppressive force, and ultimately failed when that force could not be sustained following the defeat of the nation in 1945. Other religious movements that emerged at the same time that State Shinto was being created ultimately proved to be more effective and long-lasting means to preserve cultural identity in the face of the massive importation of foreign cultural items. These movements can be identified as the first of three major waves of new religious movements that largely define the contemporary Japanese religious scene.

Tenrikyo, Konkokyo, Oomoto-kyo, and other new religions that emerged at this time in Japanese history served

two social functions. Their emphasis on solidarity within an essentially rural society—through the preaching of a universal equality, mutual help activities (such as *hinokishin* in Tenrikyo), and emphasis on individual moral reform—helped to cushion the impact on the agricultural sector of the economic changes that had already begun to occur in the latter part of the early modern period. Secondly, they helped to preserve a sense of cultural identity in a rapidly changing society, as seen for example in Tenrikyo's belief that the center of the universe lies precisely in the cradle of Japanese civilization. Indeed, many of the new religions emerging at this time were located in the area around Nara and Kyoto, the ancient capitals of the country. This sense of cultural identity was sometimes exaggerated to something approaching xenophobia. This is perhaps most pronounced in Oomoto-kyo, where the founder, Nao Deguchi, is said to have proclaimed in a trance that, "Japan is the way of the gods, but foreign countries are the lands of the wild beasts, ruled by devils, where only the strong survive."

While it is difficult to give an accurate count, there are at least several hundred new religious movements active in Japan. The vast majority are small, local groups; national, or international, movements like Tenrikyo, which has over one million believers, are relatively few. Nearly all of the mass movements, such as Soka Gakkai, with perhaps 9 million members, or Rissho Kosei-kai with over 6 million, are postwar, urban forms of Buddhism, and they comprise the second wave of new religious movements in Japan.

Like its predecessor Reiyukai, Rissho Kosei-kai offers its believers a means to venerate the ancestors in the home, without the assistance of a Buddhist priest—an important religious development in reaction to the urbanization of Japanese society. Early in the twentieth century more than 80 percent of the Japanese population was engaged in agriculture. By 1935 the urban population stood at 30 percent, a figure that rose to 50 percent by the end of World War II. By 1977, however, more than 80 percent of the population lived in cities, reversing the situation of only sixty years before. For many people this meant that their ties with the local Buddhist temple were completely severed by the move to the city. Interestingly enough, the observation can be made that Japanese urbanization has led to a considerable religious revival. Whereas in the past the main tie to the local Buddhist temple centered on annual memorial rites, for which a Buddhist monk was summoned and paid, the lay Buddhism that emerged in postwar urban Japan not only encouraged daily practice at home, but also resulted in more active and sustained participation in communal religious functions. A central practice here is the *hoza*, often described as a combination of group counseling and faith-witnessing carried out by the believers on a weekly or monthly basis.

The postwar new religions serve a function in enhancing social cohesion comparable to that of the first-wave new religious groups. The postwar groups act as a bridge, both

religiously and socially, between rural and urban Japanese society, providing an entirely new way to perform the requisite memorial rites for the ancestors, as well as becoming the focus of community for many people in the impersonal urban milieu. Groups from these first two waves of new religions often share a common worldview and ethic, offering an essentially optimistic view of the world and of humanity, and emphasizing values that comprise a common ethic of everyday life—the attempt to live honestly and sincerely, in harmony with one’s family, neighbors, and coworkers. The worldview and values offered by the third-wave groups, however, is in many ways a break with these traditional views.

As in much of Europe and North America, in the last twenty years in Japan one can see a new interest in mysticism and the occult that is normally summed up under the term New Age. This new religious ferment is often characterized as eclectic, individualistic, and result-oriented. Through the use of certain techniques, either meditation or body-work, or some combination of the two, it is believed that one can achieve a personal transformation, resulting perhaps in a higher level of consciousness or the attainment of psychic powers. While often one participates in this movement by purchasing books that amount to training manuals at the local bookstore, or at best through a loose association or “network” of fellow practitioners, in Japan a number of organized religious groups incorporating these characteristics have become popular since the 1970s.

Movements from this period are at least in part a result of contemporary cynicism and ennui. In the 1970s and 1980s, Japan achieved a level of economic development that would have been unthinkable a generation before. The “oil shock” in 1973, however, introduced a period of relatively low growth, which made future advancement, both for the individual and society, less certain. This trend was further exacerbated by the collapse of the “bubble economy,” based largely on stock and land speculation, and the decade-long recession in the 1990s. With economic or social advancement thus stymied, individual spiritual development has perhaps become more attractive. In addition, the failure of the 1960s student protest movement encouraged a turning inward; what could not be achieved through social protest was now sought through personal transformation, the reformation of society one person at a time.

What I see as the major issues for religion in Japan today are interrelated, and center on the issue of the crisis of faith in religion as an institution. I mentioned briefly above some of the difficulties with the term “religion”—how it has historically had a different connotation in Japan than it has in the West, and how historical events have contributed to a widespread distrust in religion. Let me briefly expand on this point first.

In a recent survey, when asked about their confidence in seventeen social institutions, only 13 percent of the respondents in Japan indicated some level of trust in religious groups, putting religious institutions at the bottom of the

list. This reflects a high level of distrust toward religious groups across the board. Indeed, in popular discourse, Buddhism is usually identified with the lucrative funeral industry, and its priests are criticized for their married state and meat-eating habits; Shinto suffers for its identification with the militaristic state; and new religions are seen as often dangerous frauds. In such an environment, those affiliated with a religious group often feel that they have to hide their religious beliefs in order to be accepted by friends and society.

However, despite this low level of religious affiliation and considerable distrust of religious organizations, three-fourths of the population profess some kind of belief in a higher power, whether that be described as God, Spirit, or Life-force. A similar number feel that it is important to have a religious funeral service, and 80 to 90 percent participate in annual rites such as the New Year’s visit to a temple or shrine or memorial services for the ancestors. We see that religion is a difficult concept in modern Japan, because it is identified with religious organizations and is often divorced from what would normally be identified as religious sentiments and activities—often seen as mere social customs in contemporary Japan.

If religion as an institution is to regain some level of trust, I believe that it must be seen as contributing positively to contemporary society, especially in terms of offering a moral voice to public discourse on current problems—the collapse of the family, ethnic and gender discrimination, individual rights and public ethics, and war and peace, for example. Once again, survey results seem to indicate that people look to religion for some kind of guidance regarding these issues, with less than one-third of the population saying that they are satisfied with religion’s response to social problems.

The second problem is related, in that it both arises from

University students in Tokyo participating in a spiritual purification session held by a new religious movement.

Sensoji temple in Asakusa, Tokyo, on January 2, 1999. On New Year's Day, millions of Japanese visit temples or shrines to pray for good fortune throughout the year.

the widespread distrust of religion and contributes to furthering this distrust; it is the problem of the privatization of religion, sometimes called "spirituality" to distinguish it from previous religious forms. The distrust in religious institutions has led some to explore on their own how to fill the spiritual needs that religion used to provide, particularly needs for comfort in trial and the challenge to further personal growth. Rather than turning to religious communities, people choose to explore on their own, sometimes drawing on the resources supplied under the name of "New Age" or the "Spiritual World." To the extent that this leads to further human maturity, there is much that can be positively evaluated in this development. However, there are also dangers, for the individual and community. Individually, without proper supervision and instruction, it can lead to a reckless use of religious and spiritual resources that is ultimately psychologically damaging. And with its emphasis on the individual, it increasingly makes family, community, and social life untenable.

The final problem is much broader and more complex, and contributes to distrust of religion in general by enhancing the development of closed, militant religious movements. The problem here is globalization. While, on the one hand, globalization can also be seen positively as contributing to greater awareness and understanding of the other,

contributing to a feeling of unity for the whole human race by enhancing participation in global trends and events, it is also often seen rightly as a threat to unique individual and cultural identities. Certainly one contributing factor to the rise of fundamentalist movements is the perceived need to maintain these unique identities in the face of the globalizing, or colonizing, onslaught. The preservation of diversity within an overarching unity is perhaps the most important issue for our day.

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano's example can serve well as a guide in meeting these challenges. Rev. Niwano was well aware of the public and social role, and responsibility, of religious institutions, and sought to address these needs through his own personal pronouncements as well as enhancing a social commitment institutionally within Rissho Kosei-kai through such things as social welfare education. He was aware of the need to emphasize community as a means to individual spiritual growth, working to strengthen the ties among his followers as well as with other religious and social groups. And his interreligious activities, especially his role in founding and fostering the World Conference of Religions for Peace, remains as an example of the preservation of diversity while trying to promote unity. Contemporary religious leaders can still learn much from the example of Rev. Niwano. □

The One Vehicle and Bodhisattva Never Despise

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano's Understanding of Peace and the Lotus Sutra

by Michio T. Shinozaki

The Founder's worldview was that the self and others are one and interrelated, so acting out in violence toward others is also acting out against oneself.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "My life is my message," and we can certainly say about Rev. Nikkyo Niwano that his life was his message. For a religious person, how one lives one's life is exceedingly more important than one may assume.

A True Follower of the Lotus Sutra as a Peace Maker

Rev. Niwano followed the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, and he lived his life based on the spiritual path implied in the Lotus Sutra. His activities in interreligious cooperation were derived from his self-identity as a true follower of the Lotus Sutra. Rev. Niwano believed that with the concept of the One Vehicle, inspired by the sutra, the mission of Rissho Koseikai is to promote interreligious cooperation for the sake of world peace. His approach to peace in his activities of interreligious cooperation was nothing more than the practice of the One Vehicle. For him, the One Vehicle is more than just the One Lotus Vehicle (*hokke ichijo*) that Nichiren preached; he saw it as one open possible integration in the sense of

"the true meaning of religion," derived from the idea of the integration of the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren understood the sutra as a book of prophecy in a rather literal sense in what he saw as *mappo* (the Age of the Decay of the Dharma), while Rev. Niwano understood it in a rather symbolic way.

For Nichiren, persecution in his life was evidence, as predicted in the Lotus Sutra, that he had been sent by the Buddha as an apostle to embody truth in this evil world. Nichiren resolved his own doubts over persecution and overcame them with an apostle's martyr-consciousness. Indeed, the expression "true follower of the Lotus Sutra" came out of Nichiren's experience of his persecution. Thus, the acceptance of persecution was an expression of joy (gratitude) in the sense of having been chosen to serve as an apostle whose task was to establish the true Dharma in order to reform society.

I am convinced that Rev. Niwano's approach can be easily understood in comparison with Nichiren's idea of "securing the peace of the nation through establishing the true Dharma." For Rev. Niwano, world peace can be achieved by seeking the true meaning of religion through interreligious cooperation and dialogue. Whereas Nichiren seeks to "establish the true Dharma" in the sense of a faith based on the One Lotus Vehicle, Rev. Niwano broadly interpreted it in the sense of "the true meaning of religion." In the context of world peace, inspired by Nichiren's famous phrase, "Many in body, but one in spirit," he believed that if religious workers in the world could be attuned to the Will of God or the true intention of the Buddha, world peace could be achieved.

T'ien-t'ai Chih-i (538–97), the third patriarch in the lineage of the Chinese T'ien-t'ai school of Buddhism, taught that "Three-thousand realms [exist] within a single thought." Rev. Niwano interpreted it to mean that if we change our way of thinking, we can also change our environment. It means that simply by changing our attitude, "we can change our environment in any way. . . . True world peace is based

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upon this truth" (Nikkyo Niwano, *A Buddhist Approach to Peace*, p. 40). This approach to peace can be called an approach of "amending heart and mind." Rev. Niwano criticized the subjective idealism that is based upon the premise that once inner peace or self-enlightenment is achieved, everything is fine. Praying for peace is significant, but it is not enough. For the followers of the Lotus Sutra, purifying the Buddha-land means to establish a truly peaceful state by means of working together, seeking and affirming the true meaning of religion.

The Concept of the One Vehicle

Rev. Niwano's involvement in interreligious cooperation is derived from his conviction in the teaching of the One Vehicle. His successor, Rev. Nichiko Niwano, gave him the Dharma title "Great Teacher of the One Vehicle." I think that the One Vehicle symbolizes and represents his whole life. Rev. Niwano followed the Lotus Sutra's teaching that there is only one truth in the universe, and that we humans are all on the same vehicle trying to reach salvation; I am certain that he also believed that we could achieve world peace by paying reverence to one another, by collaborating with one another, and by breaking down our own sense of exclusivity.

What is the meaning of the One Vehicle in the Lotus Sutra?

First, for Rev. Niwano, the One Vehicle (Skt. *ekayana*) is the one vehicle that leads to the Buddha's enlightenment. Excerpts from chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra state, "[Only] by my powers of tactfulness / Do I manifest the three-vehicle Law. / [For] all the world-honored ones / Expound the One-vehicle Way." "There is One only and no second vehicle" (*The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, p. 66). For Rev. Niwano, the three vehicles (shravaka, pratyekabuddha, bodhisattva) are skillful means, but there is only One Vehicle by means of which one can attain enlightenment through the bodhisattva way.

The idea of the One Vehicle can be explained in "the doctrine of the Teaching of Opening Up the Three Vehicles and Revealing the One Vehicle" by Chih-i. This doctrine can be understood as a teaching of integration or unification. Just as opening up the three vehicles reveals the One Vehicle, innumerable meanings emerge from the One Dharma. That is to say, the One Vehicle and the One Dharma signify the integration of the many. The three vehicles and the innumerable meanings signify diversity or the many. The One Dharma has several implications. First, this One Dharma functions as the force of integration among various factors. Second, various teachings preached by the Buddha originated from this One Dharma. In other words, all laws and phenomena are integrated into One Dharma. Thus, the One Dharma and the idea of the One Vehicle signify integration.

Rev. Niwano's understanding of the One Vehicle is not an exclusivistic understanding; rather, it is inclusivistic, or at times pluralistic. It could almost be called "open oneness," because it is an open possibility of integration or one-

ness. As the One Dharma is emptiness, it cannot be fixed or absolute; thus it is not possible to teach that one faith is the only absolute faith and others are inferior, or that the Lotus Sutra is the only absolute scripture and others are inferior. For Rev. Niwano, the One Vehicle in the field of interreligious cooperation signifies the true meaning of religion.

One Dharma, the ultimate reality of all things as nirvana: Peace as harmony

The central message in the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, which is regarded as the opening sutra in the Threefold Lotus Sutra, is: "The Innumerable Meanings originate from one [Dharma]. This one [Dharma] is, namely, nonform. Such nonform is formless, and not form. Being not form and formless, it is called the real aspect [of things]" (*The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, pp.12–13).^{*} The Buddha replied: "Good sons, this unique approach is called innumerable meanings. A bodhisattva who wants to practice and study the approach of innumerable meanings should observe that all things were originally, will be, and are in themselves empty and tranquil in nature and character. Not large or small, subject to birth or death, fixed or movable, and neither advancing nor retreating. Like empty space, they are non-dualistic" (The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, 2, Dharma Preaching, unpublished translation by Gene Reeves).

Rev. Niwano interpreted the idea of emptiness in the context of peace. The ultimate reality is emptiness, which makes it possible for all things in the universe to exist. It is the only reality in modern language, the fundamental energy that exists in all things. It is nirvana, or the constantly harmonious state of existence. From this perspective, all things are ultimately only one reality, so they are essentially equal, and the ultimate reality of the universe is a great harmonious state (cf. Nikkyo Niwano, *Heiwa e no michi* [The Way to Peace], pp. 27–29).

Peace is Rev. Niwano's interpretation of nirvana. The word "peace" also has the meaning of harmony (*chowa* or *wa*, *wahei*, *heiwa*) in Japanese. Like many Japanese Buddhists, Rev. Niwano saw the value of harmony as one of the highest, and interpreted the Buddhist ideal state, nirvana, as dynamism of creation and harmony. In order to explain nirvana, they understand it to be not merely a state of mental peace and quiet, but the dynamic interplay of creation and harmony. It is like the music that results from a dynamic performance created by a symphony orchestra.

Rev. Niwano's notion of harmony can be categorized in terms of four different levels: first, on a personal level, harmony as the ideal state of mind through self-cultivation;

^{*} "The innumerable meanings emerge from one Dharma. This one Dharma is characterless. Accordingly, this characterlessness is without character. It has no character. Being without character and characterless is called true character (*jisso*)" (Reeves's translation, The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, 2, Dharma Preaching).

second, social reality as a relational and an institutional harmony; third, global reality as an international and an institutional harmony; and fourth, cosmic harmony between humans and nature.

One Dharma, the reality of all things signifies that all humans are equal

Rev. Niwano's concept of interreligious activities for peace is based upon his understanding of the teaching of the One Vehicle in the sense that all humans are equal.

"The One-vehicle means: All people can become buddhas" (Nikkyo Niwano, *Buddhism for Today*, p. 48). Human beings vary according to desires, capacities for understanding, races, etc., but they are incorporated into One Dharma, and this means that all humans are integrated into one potentiality that all will become buddhas without exception. This is what "One Vehicle" means. Here, we can see universal salvation for all living beings. The Lotus Sutra begins by saying that all living beings are the Buddha's children and that each one can be like him. The Lotus Sutra says, "The buddhas appear in this world to cause all living beings to comprehend the truth [of the Buddha]."

There is only one teaching (One Dharma) where the Buddha's compassion causes all human beings to become buddhas. Thus, there is a close relationship between the One Dharma and the One Vehicle. As there is the One Dharma in reality, this One Dharma dwells not only in teachings, but also in all human beings. So, the One Dharma can lead all human beings without exception to becoming buddhas. All teachings taught by the Buddha aim at guiding all people to becoming buddhas. In this way, the truth expounded by the Lotus Sutra is the ultimate reality of all things.

I also want to add another core concept that is intimately related to these three factors. It is the idea that all humans are essentially the same, and equal to the life of the Eternal Buddha. The truth of integration is present in those four ideas. We can see this truth as underlying and unifying other major themes in the Lotus Sutra.

"All religious teachings are coming from the same root" and "the true meaning of religions is one"

Rev. Niwano's understanding of interreligious cooperation is based on his conviction that "the teachings of all religions are originally the same." It can also be expressed as "the true meaning of religions is one." "If the believers of every religion were to study very deeply the true meanings of their respective religions, they might all discover behind the various differences of expression the truths that man is one and that to live on good terms with others is the way of living that coincides with the truth" (*Buddhist Approach*, p. 79). If they do so, if they can "reorient their minds away from discrimination and toward a sense of oneness, true peace and real happiness will come to this world for the first time." Therefore Rev. Niwano firmly believed that interreligious cooperation aims at reaching the stage where, by studying in depth the

true meaning of various religions, "one can fathom the truth common to each religion and, by grasping this common truth, perceive oneness spontaneously" (*Buddhist Approach*, p. 79). His ideal goal for interreligious cooperation toward peace is that cooperation includes studying together seriously the true meaning of religion in depth, and if we do so, the true meaning of religions may be one, ultimately. In this sense, he says, "Please reflect deeply on the meaning behind such truths as God Almighty, creator of the universe; the Sovereign Ancestral *Kami* who divinely remain in the high Heavenly Plain; the root of the universe is the Eternal, Original Buddha; the three-thousand-great-thousandfold world is the body of the *Tathagata Maha-vairocana*; and *Amitabha*, *Amitayus*. It may be understood that all these truths are rooted in the same Truth.

"Although ways of expression and nuances in the way of thinking differ according to the land, time, and race into which a religion was born, the fundamental teaching is, in its essence, the same" (*Buddhist Approach*, pp. 78–79). Rev. Niwano applied this thinking to his own faith, especially, to the holy scripture, the Lotus Sutra, and to the Tathagata Shakyamuni Buddha. "Therefore," he maintains "the Great-vehicle Sutra called the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful [Dharma], . . . indicates neither that the Lotus Sutra is a proper noun nor that the object of worship and veneration, the *Tathagata* Sakyamuni, is a proper noun." He also says, "The Lotus Sutra, in its deepest meaning, is not a proper noun but a common noun meaning the highest and most real teaching, which teaches the truth of the universe to all human beings and leads them to the true way of living.

"But the real and the highest teaching can never be two. Though it can be expressed in various ways, in its fundamental meaning it is one" (*Buddhist Approach*, p. 68).

He believes that one true meaning of religion behind the diversity of religious faiths exists. With this conviction, he unceasingly promoted interreligious cooperation.

Peace Activities in the Sense of the Practice of Revealing the Buddha-nature

The relationship between the concept of the One Vehicle and the practice of revealing one's buddha-nature

When Rev. Niwano studied the sentence "The innumerable meanings emerge from One Dharma" for the first time, he was impressed by it and realized that all things he had learned in the Japanese folk faiths could be means of revealing the buddha-nature of all. The number of ways of revealing the buddha-nature of people are innumerable, so approaches to peace or skillful means to save all people are innumerable. All of his life, Rev. Niwano dedicated himself to saving people with Rissho Kosei-kai's activities. In the latter half of his life, he particularly served in activities of interreligious cooperation toward peace. He said that there was no discrepancy between the dissemination of the Dharma and the activities of interreligious cooperation in terms of the practice of revealing the buddha-nature of others.

Who and what is Bodhisattva Never Despise?

Rev. Niwano admired Gandhi's nonviolent action and often quoted the pundit. He saw the figure of Bodhisattva Never Despise in the Indian nationalist and spiritual leader. This bodhisattva is a very important figure for followers of the Lotus Sutra.

In chapter 20 there is a story about one of the Buddha's former existences. There was a monk known as Never Despise (or Never-Disrespecting) and whenever he encountered anyone, he paid respect and said, "I deeply revere you, because you are to become a buddha." He continued this practice even under hostile conditions, and even when evil actions were directed at him by those people. When he was nearing death, he heard the entire Lotus Sutra from the sky. He kept these verses within and his six organs were purified. He prolonged his life for countless years, met countless buddhas, and finally became a buddha himself.

The spirit of Bodhisattva Never Despise and the interreligious cooperation movement

Rev. Niwano says that the practice of Bodhisattva Never Despise is the core spirit needed to promote interreligious cooperation. "I am convinced that the spirit of Bodhisattva Never Despise really can make it possible to eliminate every conflict in the world. No system or regime can make peace without the spirit of revealing the buddha-nature of others. Bodhisattva Never Despise's practice of revealing the buddha-nature is really my fundamental attitude while promoting the activities of the World Conference of Religions for Peace" (Nikkyo Niwano, *Kono Michi* [The Path That We Have Walked], p. 319). The bodhisattva practice of making any encounter meaningful is the practice of revering the buddha-nature in others. Making oneself open to others and encountering people of different faiths and ideas turns out to be good and meaningful. For Rev. Niwano, the truth of dependent origination is nothing more than making encounters with others meaningful and significant. The model Bodhisattva Never Despise gives us, in concrete encounters with people of other faiths and cultures, urges us toward self-transformation in activities of peace. Such a model produces an ethic of tolerance and an altruistic spirit through activities for peace.

Truth and nonviolence

Rev. Niwano was impressed by Bodhisattva Never Despise and "his steadfast practice of respectful commendation toward everyone he met, without losing patience." He continues, "Then I was impressed by his courage in following his convictions and by the fact that even though he was abused by others he did not return the abuse. Bodhisattva Never Despise's way of life was one that was tender in personal relations but firm in defending the truth." This is the model of nonviolence. The basic attitude of Never Despise was in the same spirit of the armor of perseverance as expressed in chapter 13, "Exhortation to Hold Firm." Nichi-

ren's thinking is that the spirit of chapter 20 and that of chapter 13 are the two sides of the same coin.

Rev. Niwano saw that the apostles of peace who are devoted to nonviolence must have the kind of attitude that is expressed in the story of Bodhisattva Never Despise as well as in chapter 13, promoting an attitude of enduring hardship and having the courage to express the truth for the sake of the Dharma (the Truth). This spirit is expressed in the words, "We will not love body and life, / But only care for the supreme Way." Rev. Niwano praised this attitude as "one who lives in truth and dies in peace." He saw Mahatma Gandhi as one who exemplified this spirit of the gentle and forbearing heart for the sake of realizing truth.

The vision for overcoming hatred and violence and repentance of sins as expiation of sins

Nonviolent attitudes include reverence for the buddha-nature of those who are wicked or who are our enemies. Rev. Niwano found the spirit of *ahimsa* in chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra. It contains a story of how Shakyamuni Buddha dealt with the violence and abuse of Devadatta with compassion. Compassion and nonviolence have been illustrated as being far more powerful than the combination of hatred and violence. Quoting verses from the Dhammapada, Rev. Niwano maintained that hatred will only cease when the chain of hatred is cut off. He mentions this example by referring to a speech delivered at the plenary session of the San Francisco Peace Conference in 1951 by the Ceylonese finance minister, who declared that Ceylon had renounced its demand for reparations from Japan. When J. R. Jayewardene, chief Ceylonese delegate, declared the renouncement of reparations, he cited the phrases of the Dhammapada quoted above. He said, "Hatred is never appeased through hatred in this world; by love alone is it appeased. This is an ancient law" (*Buddhism for Today*, pp. 157–58). A way to cut the chain of hatred between individuals, races, and nations is needed now in this troubled world. This is the most important vision and hope that Buddhism can possibly contribute to this modern world (cf. *Buddhist Approach*, p. 18).

One way to cut the vicious circle of hatred is a path of forgiveness and reconciliation, which is truly the most difficult to take, but the most needed in this world. In this sense, Rev. Niwano's understanding of nonviolent action was not simply a political means to gain political results; rather, it was a bodhisattva practice to awaken the buddha-nature in oneself and others. It "provides a center of life, an 'orientation' to the world, by means of which one gains a sense of direction" to peace (cf. *Some Thoughts on Peace*, pp. 7–13).

Rev. Niwano's worldview was that the self and others are one and interrelated, so acting out in violence toward others is also acting out against oneself. Accepting violence or persecution is a way of repenting, or wiping away, the bad karma of the past. It could be construed as an action of repentance to the Buddha. In the story of Bodhisattva Never Despise,

when he approached death, his past sins were expiated and his six organs were purified. This story suggests that the practice of revealing one's buddha-nature is the practice of repentance as expiation of past sin. His activities of peace are in one sense the practice of repentance as expiation of past sin.

While Rev. Niwano promoted the WCRP and the ACRP (Asian Conference on Religion and Peace), he repented as a Japanese and a religious worker during World War II, otherwise, it is likely such conferences would never have come into reality. For example, when Rev. Niwano visited China, and met Rev. Zao Puchu, president of the Buddhist Association of China, he repented that Japan had severely harmed China. When Rev. Niwano visited war memorials in Asian countries and Hawaii, he repented as a Japanese religious worker and prayed for peace. He said, "Whether or not the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace can be meaningful and truly significant depends on how deeply and wholeheartedly Japanese people of religion can repent Japan's war atrocities" (*Ajia o sukuu daijo no kodo* [Mahayana Actions That Save Asia], pp. 6–11). One example of such repentance went into the issue of the reconciliation process. Rissho Kosei-kai youth members visited Bataan, the Philippines, and learned of the acts of inhumanity by the Japanese army that were represented by the Bataan Death March in 1942. Through the process of constructing the Friendship Tower in Bataan, the people of Bataan and Rissho Kosei-kai youth members were reconciled. Its completion was celebrated on April 8 (the Buddha's birthday), 1975, with the attendance of one thousand Filipinos and about five hundred Rissho Kosei-kai youth members. The ceremony itself was performed jointly in the Christian and Buddhist traditions (The Bataan Christian Youth Foundation, Inc., *Sharing Horizons*, 1982).

In Conclusion

Rev. Niwano's thought of interreligious cooperation and peace was based upon his understanding of the Lotus Sutra, especially the concept of the One Vehicle and the practice of Bodhisattva Never Despise, and the ways of being a true follower of the Lotus Sutra. I have shown that these three concepts are interwoven in his interreligious activities toward peace.

One of the most important ideas for Rev. Niwano when he promoted interreligious activities was the idea of harmony shared generally by Japanese Buddhists. It is his understanding of emptiness, or nirvana. This ideal of harmony can work well within a family or a small community, in which face-to-face relationships or primary relationships are efficient, solid, and reliable among the members, where everyone understands the rules and customs. It is extremely good as long as all goes well, and there is no crisis. This type of implementation of harmony can work in a homogeneous culture to the benefit of minority groups that might otherwise sense alienation.

Rev. Niwano's idea of altruism and tolerance, found in the Buddhist idea of harmony, however, can work even in heterogeneous societies and the various cultures of the world, where uniqueness is prized. Here, his understanding of oneness, One Vehicle, is quite important. It is not something fixed; it has no exclusive absoluteness. In order to keep oneness, all that is required is that the members inside open their eyes to the interests of the people outside. Whether his optimistic ideal of interreligious cooperation can work or not is surely questioned. The ideal of harmony will be tested more than ever in this borderless world and global age.

Yoshiro Tamura talks about one of the three types of Nichiren-sect or Lotus Sutra faith in modern Japan, from the beginning of the Meiji era on. He says, it "was nationalistic and accompanied the rise of contemporary nationalism, or Nipponism. It tried to make Nichiren a pillar of Japanese nationalism" (Yoshiro Tamura, *Hoke-kyo* [The Lotus Sutra]). A theology identifying the Lotus Sutra faith with nationalism must be avoided, especially when Japan faces a national identity crisis.

The theological foundation of interreligious cooperation, which contains an inclusive interpretation of the One Vehicle, is important, because it may successfully guide and actually prevent some followers of the Lotus Sutra from falling into the narrow-minded world of exclusivistic nationalism. □

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The Founder and the Second Vatican Council

by Kinzo Takemura

In 1965, Rissho Kosei-kai was not yet on special terms with the Catholic Church. The invitation to Founder Niwano to attend could only have been because it was the will of God and the Buddha.

Recently, I was asked by the archivist at the Kosei Library: “Do you have the Founder’s invitation to the Second Vatican Council?”

I was asked the same thing at a headquarters committee meeting the other day. Well, this is not surprising. After all, this year we’ll be celebrating the centennial of Founder Niwano’s birth. As everyone prepares, it’s only natural that questions about the Vatican Council should be directed to me, since I was there.

The Vatican Council was a tremendous affair, years in the making. Just to give you an idea: the first session of the Council was held in 1962, and the second, in 1963. The third session was then convened in 1964. The fourth session, which commenced on September 14, 1965, and which the Founder attended, marked the closing and was designated the Holy Church Council.

Many different people were invited to the Second Vatican Council: cardinals and bishops, observers, diplomats, theologians, and members of the media. Interestingly enough, the Founder did not belong to any of these groups. In fact, I personally have no memory of his ever having received a written invitation. Simply put, the Founder wasn’t invited so much as he was encouraged to attend the opening ceremony. Now, the question is: By what process did the Founder end up at the Second Vatican Council?

The Founder attended the opening ceremony of the fourth session of the Second Vatican Council in September 1965. One intermediary who made this possible was Father Joseph Spae, the first director of the Oriens Institute for Religious Studies in Tokyo. I can still recall how moved I was by Father Spae’s words during our talk on an early summer day. “If President Niwano were to attend the Vatican Council, an event held only once every hundred years, he would probably be the only Buddhist in the entire world to be there.” Father Spae continued, explaining that the Founder would be

allowed to attend a number of sessions as a special guest of the Vatican’s Secretariat for Non-Christians (now the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue). Now, it is particularly noteworthy that this special—or perhaps I should say remarkable—proposal was the brainchild of Paolo Cardinal Marella, then president of the Secretariat for Non-Christians. So you see, the Founder was, as it were, encouraged, rather than invited, to attend the Second Vatican Council.

It was the dawn of ecumenism, a movement begun by the Protestants that called for all Christians to unite, transcending the boundaries of the various churches. At the root of this movement was apprehension over the spread of Communism and a desire to refute Christianity’s history of exclusion, and there is no denying that the Vatican had come to a critical juncture in its policies. Still, it was also a time when

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

Founder Niwano shakes hands with Pope Paul VI during a private audience on September 15, 1965. Father Spae stands at the Founder's left, serving as an interpreter.

the Vatican encountered strong resistance to its new stance from many of its cardinals and bishops. In the midst of these circumstances, Father Spae and Cardinal Marella showed incredible courage and foresight in urging the Founder, a representative of an alien faith, to attend the Second Vatican Council.

Looking back, it is clear that the very unconventional invitation was only made possible by the magnanimous goodwill of Cardinal Marella. And to top it off, Father Spae gave the following three reasons why the Founder was chosen over anyone else: Rissho Kosei-kai is a moderate and trustworthy Buddhist organization; it is still guided by its founder; and it has shown remarkable growth. Well, there was no denying that all of this was true, and so it was decided to accept the gracious invitation.

Although much credit goes to the considerable efforts of Father Spae and Cardinal Marella in making the Founder's attendance possible, I also believe that at the base of all this was the will of God and the Buddha. At that time, Rissho Kosei-kai was not yet on special terms with the Catholic Church. Neither did we have any deep understanding of the Vatican Council or its significance. Finally, we had not made any overtures to the Catholic Church to be included in this event. I am convinced that for the Founder to have been chosen in the way that he was could only have been because it was the will of God and the Buddha.

At the opening ceremony to the fourth session of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI expressed the Vatican's regret for its role in creating a schism in the Christian world of the day. He asked for God's forgiveness and apolo-

gized for any wounds that may have been inflicted on others. The Founder nodded repeatedly as he listened intently to the Japanese Catholic priest interpreting at his ear. That night at the hotel, the Founder repeated over and over: "I was certainly moved by the pope's words today. It's important for those who lead to be able to express their regrets with such frankness."

Equally significant was the pope's assertion that the Catholic Church had only respect and love for those of other faiths, for this could only have reaffirmed the Founder's deep faith in the spirit of Bodhisattva Never Despise and the teaching of the One Vehicle of the Lotus Sutra.

The morning after the day of the opening ceremony, or September 15, the Founder was preparing to recite the sutras when he remarked, "Well, today is the monthly memorial day of Shakyamuni's entrance into nirvana." Having said that, he began his chanting. Just as he finished the last line, the telephone rang.

"His Holiness would like to meet Rev. Niwano today at five o'clock." I remember standing there with the receiver still in my hand, thrilled right down to my toes. Never had I felt so strongly that the Founder was one who did what was most fitting and lived in the grace of God and the Buddha.

In his audience with Pope Paul VI, the Founder carried a string of white Buddhist prayer beads. The pope enveloped the Founder's hands in his own and said with eyes aglow with prayer, "May God bless your work."

The World Conference of Religions for Peace was founded just five years after this meeting. Once during those years, a heartless article appeared in some newspaper or other stating that there was no record of Rev. Niwano's having been invited to the Second Vatican Council. But one cannot attend a Vatican Council without an invitation from someone in the Holy See. Cardinal Marella's gracious gesture was, to my mind, nothing less than an invitation.

When I spoke of this to a Christian cleric who is a close friend, he responded: "The Bible says, 'The tree is known by its fruit.' [Matt. 12:33]. Similar words can be found in the Gospel according to Luke. Rev. Niwano's few days at the Vatican Council came to bear wonderful fruit. There is much to be learned from this."

A hundred years ago, when the Founder was born into this world, there was no path before him. As he was growing up, there was only his faith in the Lotus Sutra and his deep desire to be of service to others. He had neither money nor fame. At its founding, Rissho Kosei-kai had less than thirty members. Yet with quiet dedication, he pioneered his own path, and walked that path throughout his life. We must work hard to emulate his unwavering devotion and conduct. The significance of any celebration of the Founder's centennial will be lessened if we do not do so.

Perhaps my fear is groundless, but I believe that if we should forget our memories of the Founder, we will lose strength as we go forward. Let us renew our pledge to live together by making the Founder's wish our own. □

Our Encounters with the Founder

On these pages appear comments by members of Rissho Kosei-kai overseas that describe how their encounters, either direct or indirect, with Founder Nikkyo Niwano have influenced their lives and have enabled them to understand Buddhism, especially the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. The place names below the respective writers' names represent the Rissho Kosei-kai branches to which they belong.

Kris Ladusau
Oklahoma

*"Now that my house has burned down,
I have a much better view of the rising
moon." —Masahide*

I became a member of Rissho Kosei-kai after the passing of Cofounder Naganuma. In fact, I was three years old and just beginning this lifetime as she was finishing hers. I obviously never had the opportunity to meet her or to see how she lived her life.

But I was fortunate enough to meet Founder Niwano and experience his smile and warm handshake. He had a way of connecting with you that transcended barriers of culture or language.

When Founder Niwano's lifetime ended, I sensed a tremendous loss from all who had known him. I knew that he had well considered how to transfer the work of Rissho Kosei-kai to the next generation, and one of my favorite writings on this subject comes from the final page of President Nichiko Niwano's book, *My Father, My Teacher*.

In it, Founder Niwano says, "Myoko Sensei and I and the others who worked to get Kosei-kai started had our own experiences, but nothing says you must undergo the same kind of

discipline we knew. If you did, you would be able to save only people of our generations who would share the views such discipline presupposes.

"Times change. Life styles change. Value criteria alter and diversify. People in positions of leadership must keep up with all these changes. Of course, the essentials of Buddhism are eternal and immutable, but the ways they are put to use and applied must suit the needs of the times and the audience. This is what we mean by limitless experience.

"We older members are the roots of Kosei-kai. The trunk is now standing, and you younger people must become the branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit. You don't have to train yourselves to be roots and trunks. These parts of the tree are already there, and all you have to do is accept them and go on with your own jobs. You will have to suffer too. But your kind of suffering will differ from ours. You will have to face new, complicated problems and will have to put your lives on the line in solving them.

"Basically, the issues will be similar, but the problems will manifest themselves in new ways. This means that though fundamentally it will be the same, your discipline will have novel nuances. Don't be foolish enough to lack confidence because you have not trained yourselves as we trained ourselves. . . . You have the duties of putting forth branches that culminate in fruit. Have the confidence required for

your task and train yourselves to be able to fulfill it."

When Cofounder Naganuma passed away, Founder Niwano worked day and night to continue the dream that they shared. President Niwano accepted the responsibilities of leading Rissho Kosei-kai and his daughter will follow in his path. I have great respect for both of them. I can only imagine shouldering the responsibility of a worldwide organization. May the Buddha give them strength and may they feel the love and support from the members worldwide.

But what do you do when someone as vital and compassionate as Founder Niwano dies? What can the people who loved him do to get past the loss and continue his work? And what can we share with the new American members who did not know either the Founder or the Cofounder.

Someone very important is gone now. Do we look at this as a bad thing? Is it an example of the Buddha's tactful method? Can we turn to a parable in the Lotus Sutra and see ourselves? Will we remember to take the medicine and heal ourselves when our "father figure" is gone? Did he need to leave, for us to "step up to the plate" and take responsibility for ourselves and helping others? His trust in us is the "backbone" of our journey on the Bodhisattva Path. It gives us the freedom to truly own the teachings. We support each other along the way—because it's not about preserving

something, it's about helping it grow. And we must "own it" to make that happen.

It was not the Founder and Cofounder's job to develop Rissho Kosei-kai in America. They simply planted the seeds. Now it is up to us—we have bodhisattva work to do.

From the altars of the past, take the fire, not the ashes.

Allan Carpenter
New York

We've all heard the familiar Zen proverb, "When the student is ready, the teacher (or teaching) will appear." While there may be truth in that idea, it is also important to remember that the process of accepting the teaching is not always instant; the seeds of wisdom we receive now may take years to blossom in our hearts and minds.

I first encountered Founder Niwano's teachings back in 1989; I was a small-town kid, fresh out of college, and eager to know about all the world's religions. I had, of course, read about Buddhism in general; but when I picked up a copy of *Buddhism for Today*, I could tell that it was a special book from a special teacher. Founder Niwano managed to bring the loftiest concepts, and the most complex symbolism, down to earth, showing me how the difficult concepts of the Lotus Sutra could be transformed into practical, useful wisdom that applied to daily life. Despite the Founder's wide-ranging knowledge, I knew this man wrote from his own realization, not merely from dry study and research. Through the book, Founder Niwano became a friend to me; I sold or gave away many, many books over time, but I always held on to *Buddhism for Today* and the Founder's other books.

I naturally wanted to know more about Rissho Kosei-kai, and in 1990 I wrote to headquarters in Tokyo; I received some introductory information, but I assumed I couldn't be a member because I lived far from any branch. I practiced with several different types of Buddhist groups over the years, learning a little—or often a lot—from each. At the same time, I was also exploring many other kinds of spiritual practice. I really didn't consider myself a seeker; I was simply trying to be open to truth wherever I could find it. Still, I knew inside that I hadn't found my spiritual home. I held on to the information I received from Tokyo, and wondered if I'd ever find a teaching as profound and accessible as Founder Niwano's.

Sixteen years later, the seeds of that first encounter with Founder Niwano's teachings finally began to bloom. By an apparently chance encounter (but the laws of karma were, I think, in operation here), I found the Rissho Kosei-kai Internet group on Yahoo. Through the group, I came to know several other members in the U.S. who live in areas far from a branch. I was more than ready to join. Within weeks, Rev. Saito from the New York branch had enshrined the symbol of faith in my home, and I had finally completed the process that had begun many years earlier.

Getting to know Rev. Saito and the other members of the New York branch, as well as members from all over the eastern U.S., has only made me more convinced of how special an organization Rissho Kosei-kai is, and how unique Founder Niwano's vision was. He took the essence of the Buddha's ultimate teaching—the Lotus Sutra—and put it directly into the hands of ordinary people, challenging us to gradually manifest the buddha-nature in our lives, and, by doing so, uplift the lives of those we encounter. I'm glad to say that I have helped Rev. Saito in guiding others to the faith over the Internet, and that through answering their questions and concerns, my own understanding of

Founder Niwano's teachings has deepened. In fact, I helped a new member receive his symbol of faith in late January—only five months after I myself had joined! We do not need to be perfect beings in order to begin, nor should we be shy about our faith; even a little understanding of the Dharma, shared with other people, may eventually transform their lives.

Dr. Constance Hilliard
Dallas

As I now look back on it, I would have to admit that I have spent much of my adult life in waiting. This was not a conscious character trait. It was rather one that had burrowed into the deepest recesses of my psyche. But what exactly was I waiting for? It was for the day when a knight in shining armor or perhaps a samurai waving a *katana* of exquisitely polished steel would gallop into view, slaughter my demons, and whisk me away from all my worldly troubles. But precious years passed and that savior never arrived.

And then several years ago, something remarkable happened. A Japanese friend introduced me to Rissho Kosei-kai. This was a gift more precious than diamonds, for it showed me how I could become my own savior. The frustration of waiting was finally over.

Under the spiritual guidance of Founder Nikkyo Niwano, I learned to chant and seek insight in the Lotus Sutra. I also found inspiration in reading *Buddhism for Today*, Rev. Niwano's in-depth commentary on this sacred scripture. As the Founder's teachings became a more intimate part of my daily life, something wholly unexpected happened—I began to see more clearly. I don't actually mean

that my visual acuity improved or that I tossed my eyeglasses in the trash. No, it was something far stranger. I began to catch fleeting glimpses of my own buddha-nature, the ultimate fount of joy, unconditional love, and spiritual discernment.

In the last several years, I have found many occasions on which I was called upon to put these newly acquired life skills to the test. In terms of family life, I have become calmer and more patient with my preschool son. My relationship with my husband has benefited from a newfound capacity to read his heart rather than respond defensively to criticism. Even in my professional life, the spiritual practice that I have learned from the Founder's teachings has reduced my daily stress, allowing me to think and work more effectively. And most important of all, I have learned from Founder Niwano's spiritual wisdom how to become my own salvation.

**Swarna Delgoda
Colombo, Sri Lanka**

Ayubowan! (May you live long!)

I consider it a signal honor for Risshō Kōsei-kai Sri Lanka and for me personally, to have been invited by the publishers of DHARMA WORLD to make a brief contribution of a few comments to share with the readership in this special centennial issue dedicated to our Founder.

Buddhism in Sri Lanka occupies a unique place in the Buddhist world, in that it is here that the Theravada form of Buddhism has been preserved in its purest and most pristine form for close upon 2,500 years. Our clergy, our benevolent rulers, and our concerned people have protected, nurtured, and passed on the teachings from one gen-

eration to the next. This eternal truth and refuge is what I call a philosophy of life.

In the shelter and the warmth of this philosophy, I found peace within myself and learned how to live in peace with my fellow beings. Then a few years ago I was introduced to the Lotus Sutra and its teachings.

The meaning of family and community, the meaning of communicating with others, the meaning of being helpful and useful to my society, the meaning of togetherness in good times and bad, and the concept of sharing—these new meanings in life, together with the precepts of Buddhism, gave a totally new dimension to my outlook on life. This was the icing on the cake. This was the practical aspect of the philosophy. The Lotus Sutra is not dogmatic; one can question it, debate upon it, argue its points, and finally believe in it or not, or accept its teachings or not. The Lotus Sutra with its practical aspects offers to the depth and breadth of the Buddha's philosophy a human angle and brings out the humanity of the philosophy, easily understood and easily assimilated, and further, equally easily adaptable to my daily activities. I find that the teachings of the Lotus Sutra slip into my life as easily as drinking a glass of water.

I am happy to know that the Buddhist practices I engage in blend very well with the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. There is no confrontation between the two; there is only harmony. A friend once asked a senior reverend what role meditation plays in the Lotus Sutra. The reverend replied that while meditation by itself is not practiced, the very act of reciting the sutra with single-minded dedication and right mindfulness is in fact an ingredient of meditation and its practice.

I wish to share with the readership two experiences that have made a lasting impression upon me. As my nature has been to be useful and helpful to others, with the understanding of a small section of the Lotus Sutra I have been able to make a more concerted

effort toward being helpful to others. The wide and varied natures of the members of the Sri Lanka branch have shown me that besides my usual circle of friends and associates, there is a larger society out there. With these members, I have been able to discuss and share their anxieties, their sorrows, and their joys. Having shared thus, my own problems appear like just nothing, and I am able to confront any obstacle or disagreement with a smile and a positive outlook.

Second, a friend whom I introduced to Risshō Kōsei-kai spoke of the death of a close relative who, together with his family, had been exceptionally nasty toward her, and she mentioned to me that she was determined not to attend the funeral service. As her friend and as a member of Risshō Kōsei-kai, I prevailed upon her to attend the service as she was duty bound, notwithstanding what the family would say to her or how they would treat her. Heeding my advice, she did attend the service and later thanked me because this family had accepted her gracefully, thereby opening the door to reconciliation. This I consider a win-win situation for my friend, for me, and for the teachings of Risshō Kōsei-kai, however minor this incident may appear.

May the blessings of the Eternal Buddha be yours.

**Dr. James R. Hodgkin
Los Angeles**

I am honored to have this opportunity to relate my impressions of Founder Niwano and the effect his teachings have had on my life.

I first encountered the Founder's teachings directly when my wife joined Risshō Kōsei-kai in 1964. For the previous several years I had been a

workaholic and an alcoholic, and had had little or no consideration for my wife. I would come home from work late each night after drinking with my fellow workers.

On our return to Japan in November 1964, unknown to me, she was planning to obtain a divorce. Her mother, an inactive member of Rissho Kosei-kai, had sent her to the local branch. At the Nishi-Tama branch, she was advised that she had the power to relieve her own suffering and she was told that if she would change herself, then her husband would change. One night when I came home late she was waiting up for me. She apologized for being the kind of wife that made me act in such away. At first I was relieved by this unexpected attitude, but I began to consider my own conduct and soon changed my bad habits. The Founder's teachings of the direct application of Buddhism in daily family life saved my marriage.

I became active in branch activities, and after our return to the United States in 1974, we transferred to the Los Angeles branch. I served on the Board of Directors there for some 26 years, and I continue to serve as the man in charge of External Affairs and as an English Leader.

For the past 40 years, I have lived the life of a Rissho Kosei-kai member under the continued benevolence of the Founder's teachings. During our years as members of the Setagaya branch, we attended services at the Great Sacred Hall and listened to his sermons on an almost weekly basis. Later, I personally experienced his warmth and compassion during visits to Japan to receive my commissioning to undergo English Leader training, and to give a testimonial at the Great Sacred Hall. From all of this, I came away with an understanding of some of the unique qualities and characteristics of his teachings. First, he envisioned and developed a way to connect the abstract principles of fundamental Buddhism to practical applications in daily life that empowered members to relieve their own suffering and achieve

peaceful and harmonious lives. That empowerment enabled members to not only resolve their own problems, but also to find a way to help others, their family members and neighbors.

As he himself continued to expand his own vision of the world family, he extended his sphere of influence to encompass the wider religious community, first throughout Japan, and then to a truly global level. His legacy will continue to grow and empower our lives.

Rev. Ken Nagata
San Francisco

I am still a rookie minister here in the San Francisco branch, having been assigned here in 2003. My family lives in Los Angeles, where I was a member of Rissho Kosei-kai of Los Angeles since about 1975. I am a third-generation Rissho Kosei-kai member and my grandmother was active in the 1950s in Tokyo.

Founder Niwano came to Los Angeles a couple of times, and on one occasion I was the driver who picked him up at the downtown hotel and drove him to our branch. I was far too young and green to even think of conversing with him. The Founder was a tall and gentle looking teacher to me.

In one of the Founder's sermons, he mentioned that in the eyes of the Buddha, the value of wisdom and knowledge was the same or similar to the value of the compassion one has. Specifically he was comparing Miroku Bosatsu (Bodhisattva Maitreya) to Monju Bosatsu (Bodhisattva Manjushri). Today, knowledge and education are regarded as important assets, and any who are not very knowledgeable or slow to learn are often regarded as in a lower class. Because Manjushri was top in wisdom,

whereas Maitreya would repeatedly, and very humbly, ask the Buddha to explain the Dharma again, it would seem that Manjushri would be regarded higher and held in esteem, while Maitreya would be classified as not too smart. But the Founder told us in his sermon that Maitreya and Manjushri are both on the same level. Humility and compassion are just as valuable virtues as wisdom in the realm of the Buddha's teachings.

When my son, Hiroshi, was three years old, back in 1983, he suddenly had a seizure and was diagnosed with viral meningitis, a virus infection in the brain fluid. Fortunately, through immediate medical care, he was saved and physically unharmed. However, during the seizure, his brain did not get enough oxygen in one section and his mental capacity was diminished. He was diagnosed as mildly retarded when he entered kindergarten. My immediate reaction was anger and frustration, since I had been helping out at Rissho Kosei-kai of Los Angeles for many years and thought that this was some kind of negative reward for me. But in reality, up until then—and slightly so even now—I was always a temperamental, impatient man. Maybe genes have some influence, since my dad was also short-tempered.

After the seizure, as I began taking care of Hiroshi, I realized that it was a blessing for me to have the opportunity to practice humility and compassion through Hiroshi. In helping Hiroshi, I needed to give him the same instructions or repeat the same words many times for them to sink in. Slowly I began to realize that the Buddha was training me in the practice of compassion and humility through my interaction with Hiroshi. Though he was slow and sometimes clumsy, my wife and I worked hard to practice patience with Hiroshi.

The kind smile, the always positive and optimistic views, and the warmth of the Founder has been an important part of our lives as we have coped with Hiroshi. When I realized that my son was really my teacher, I realized that

the Dharma teaching and practice are similar to what Maitreya was practicing. Hiroshi successfully completed special education through the high-school level. Having gone to an adult training center, he is now twenty-five years old and working part time as a box boy at the local supermarket.

Through Hiroshi, I am glad to have the continued opportunity to practice compassion and humility. And without the Founder's help in creating Rissho Kosei-kai, and my grandmother's and mother's connection with Rissho Kosei-kai, I would never have had this opportunity.

Thank you, Founder Niwano.

Franklin Anderson
Sacramento

In 1991, my partner, Douglas, and I moved to Sacramento to buy a house. In the course of our house hunting, we moved next door to a family of three: husband, wife, and son. They were very friendly and we often spoke across the fence we shared. One day we heard a bell that had a familiar sound. Upon further investigation, I learned that the lady of the family was a member of Rissho Kosei-kai. Her name was Donna Ozawa.

I went to a Japanese-language meeting in her home. She gave me some books written in English. I wanted to know more about this form of Buddhism. Every evening after work, I would go to Donna's house to ask more questions. Donna encouraged me to read the 2nd and 16th chapters from the *Kyoden* [Sutra Readings] for myself. I attended other Rissho Kosei-kai services and before long, my friends and I were attending meetings regularly.

I kept visiting with our neighbor, Donna, every evening. Douglas and I

were now practicing both the Nichiren Shoshu teachings and those of Rissho Kosei-kai. This went on for approximately a year. The more I practiced with Rissho Kosei-kai, the more I wanted to know about this practice. Then Douglas and I chose to become book members of Rissho Kosei-kai. Right away, I started to have problems with the practice. Even though I had become a member, I began to feel like a guest when I visited our branch. When I mentioned this to Donna, she told me that I should read chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra. This was the chapter about the Bodhisattva Never Despise. When I started reading chapter 20, my relationships with other members seemed to get worse. I thought of myself as this lone person against people who do not practice what they preach.

I was struggling with organized religion.

Over the next few years, I practiced the teachings of Founder Niwano and went to many meetings and training sessions. Because of studying the Founder's teachings and my association with other members, I began to take responsibility for my own happiness.

I became a member of the International Association for Religious Freedom and went on two pilgrimages to the Great Sacred Hall in Japan. I read several books by Founder Niwano and one by President Niwano, *My Father, My Teacher*. In the course of my studies, one phrase that struck me particularly strongly was when Founder Niwano said, "The Bodhisattva Never Despise is characterized by his practice of paying respect to others and disclosing their buddha-nature." He said that the bodhisattva should not be the object of our prayers. Rather, he serves as a model for how to practice. According to the Founder, the Buddha declares the supernatural power of the bodhisattva in order to awaken our own desire to be as splendid as this bodhisattva and to try all the harder to practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

Using this passage from Founder Niwano's teachings as a point of faith in my daily life, I, like the Bodhisattva Never Despise, will continue to develop myself through the practice of paying respect to others and helping to disclose their buddha-nature.

We have meetings in our home, a minimum of four times a month. My goal is to introduce others to the basic teaching of the Lotus Sutra and to develop a chapter of the International Association for Religious Freedom in Sacramento.

Marvin W. Cole
Seattle

In 1963–64, I had observed with interest that an unusual looking building was being built in an area shortly before I reached Shinjuku Station as I was commuting from Camp Zama to see a friend at the *Stars and Stripes* U.S. military newspaper in Tokyo. One day I convinced a friend to help me find the building for a closer look. We soon found that it was the Great Sacred Hall that was under construction. As an American in the military, I was very interested in all the various temples in Japan. However, the Great Sacred Hall was a very different looking building, and I wanted to take pictures of it.

Everything went well while I was taking pictures outside. However, when I attempted to take pictures inside, I met with resistance immediately. Then a group of people passing us to one side seemed to stop everyone, who bowed to the people in the group. A few words were spoken and several minutes later, a man who spoke English approached me with a red armband and said that he would show me around the building and that I could take as many photos as I would

like. We were taken to the roof where we were required to wear yellow helmets because there was construction going on with what appeared to be towers around the outside portion of the roof.

As we were being guided to another section of the building by way of a large hall with murals on the wall, I observed what appeared to be the same group of people that had I seen coming into the building earlier. One of them was apparently giving what appeared to be a lecture to the remainder of the group.

Although I only understood a small amount of Japanese, it was very obvious that the man giving the lecture was very enthusiastic about what he was saying. There was a certain glow about this man that prompted me to ask our guide about the group. He motioned for us to be quiet and he hustled us on our way to another area. Later, I specifically asked about the gentleman giving the lecture in the large hall with the murals. I was informed that he was the founder and leader of their religious group. As we entered the main auditorium of the Great Sacred Hall, there were a number of people that were working with the lighting system as they adjusted the lights focused on a large curtain that was gold in color with a depiction of Mount Fuji with a sun that was either rising or setting. As they adjusted the lights, it seemed to change the appearance in such a fashion as to appear to be either rising and setting depending on the lighting.

I was informed that the curtain had been made by the members. This impressed me very much. I asked if there was any material in English. I was informed that he didn't think there was anything available at that time.

Months later, I returned to the Great Sacred Hall with my girlfriend, who later become my wife. I discovered that her mother and family were members of this religion and I again wanted to obtain something in English. I was informed that something was available, but that it would have to be searched for and provided

at a later date. Meanwhile, my girlfriend took me to a branch where I again attempted to obtain something in English or to have someone explain more to me about the religion. My girlfriend admitted that she did not attend very often and said that she would attempt to find something in English for me.

The first thing she provided, as I learned later, was a draft of the first *Kyoden* that appeared to have been produced on a mimeograph machine, with a hole punched through one corner and tied with a ribbon. Later I received a leatherette bound *Kyoden* that had only a few pages. I was unable to find anyone who was willing to talk to me in English to explain anything.

U.S. members participating in a group pilgrimage to Rissho Kosei-kai's Tokyo headquarters welcome the Founder at their bazaar booth.

It wasn't until I returned to Japan a few years later that I was able to obtain more information, but with little or no explanations. I was told this is the way we do this or that, but little else.

It wasn't until I returned to the United States and met Rev. Maruta from the San Francisco branch that I was finally able to learn about the Founder's teachings. I also was able to meet him in person when he visited San Francisco, returning from Los Angeles en route to Japan.

The journey to learn about Buddhism and the fire that was stirred in me by the Founder, started many years ago, and the thirst to learn is still growing, 40 years later.

Kim Miller
Oklahoma

I first saw Founder Niwano when I participated in the Group Pilgrimage in 1995 and then again in 1998. Founder Niwano's demeanor was that of a humble man who was generous of spirit and heart. He had a wonderful smile. It was easy to see his buddha-nature because it radiated everywhere.

One of the ways in which I have been influenced by Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra is in my understanding of and compassion toward people. Through the Three Seals of the Law, the Ten Suchnesses, and the Twelve Causes, I have a much different perception than I did ten years ago.

In the past I looked at situations as being good or bad, right or wrong.

Not only did I look at situations that way, but people as well, including myself. Looking back on that time I realize how limiting that perception was. It confined me in my experiences—of myself and of other people.

In trying to understand the law that “nothing has an ego” means that we are all connected, I became aware of and grateful to the people in my life that I took for granted—the mail deliverer, the garbage collector, and the person I talked to on the telephone when I had computer problems. That truth has also given me a more global view, especially after having been to Japan and other parts of the world, where I saw that people are essentially the same and want the same things from life that I want—food, clothing, shelter, to love and to be loved.

In chapter 2, “Tactfulness,” we find the doctrine of the Ten Suchnesses. From this I learned that I am the primary cause of my own suffering. This was a huge lesson for me. Prior to studying these teachings, I was a blamer. Everything that was wrong

with me and my life was someone else's fault.

The Twelve Causes are found in chapter 7, "The Parable of the Magic City." Through this teaching I understood that the essential stages of life are the same for everyone.

As I have studied, contemplated, and experienced these teachings over the past ten years, I feel like I have been able to be in a space of compassion toward myself, my family, my friends, and even strangers, rather than in a place of judgment. It doesn't always happen automatically, and often I have to work at it, especially with someone I have just met or with a group of people I don't yet know. It is my habit to be critical and to judge them negatively. I can make up a story about someone I don't know based on my prejudices in, as it is said, a "New York second." But last weekend, when I was co-teaching a seminar, I realized that instead of thinking critically about the participants as they arrived, I felt appreciative for all they had done to come to our seminar. This seminar was at the Phoenix convention center, in a downtown area under construction. Many people had flown in, didn't know the city, and were frustrated because it was difficult just to get to the venue. Two discouraged women from Pittsburgh abandoned their rental car and hired a modern-day rickshaw driver (he used a bicycle rather than his feet) to take them to the convention center!

The really important part of this is that if Founder Niwano had not written *Buddhism for Today*, I would probably not have ever read the Lotus Sutra. That he took the time to write this book touches me in ways I find hard to express. For a while, even after joining Rissho Kosei-kai, I was hesitant to call myself a Buddhist.

At the Oklahoma Dharma Center, we have pictures of Founder Niwano and Cofounder Naganuma on the wall next to the altar, just as they do in other branches. I like to sit where I can see the picture of Founder Niwano and I tell him that I will do my best when I

pound the *mokusho* (a wooden block). I had a profound experience one Sunday in realizing that if Shakyamuni Buddha devoted his life to finding a way to end suffering for all of mankind, and if Founder Nikkyo Niwano devoted his life to interpreting the teachings in a way I could understand, I would be proud to call myself a Buddhist.

With greatest appreciation to
Founder Niwano.

Trina Ozuna
San Antonio, Texas

As the centennial anniversary of Founder Niwano's birth approaches, I am reminded of the beauty of his words and how they have inspired and empowered me to continue my spiritual path based on the wisdom of the Lotus Sutra.

His compassionate guidance often focused on facing and overcoming the struggles of domestic affairs, the workplace, and relationships, such aspects of human life that are closest to us, by cultivating our minds and hearts through bodhisattva practice.

He was a teacher in the truest sense, and he continues to teach us through his multitude of articles and reflections, but mostly through the model he set with his own peace-inspired endeavors. By our faithful commitment to emulate such actions, we enable his life to go on.

From this great role model of wholesome living, I have absorbed the profound respect and concern for others that is woven into the fabric of the bodhisattva way. These ideals are a source of inspiration, not only for myself, but also for my family, especially my son, who will soon be graduating from Rissho Kosei-kai's Gakurin seminary in Japan. Through Founder

Niwano's example, he was inspired to devote his life's energy to spreading the precious Dharma, enthusiastically serving as an emissary of the Buddha, just as the Founder did.

Founder Niwano's teachings and life further showed me the importance of seeing the value of every person's life. Because he could see the buddha-nature in others so clearly, he never gave up hope in mankind, and instead urged harmonious living through cooperation and appreciation.

How fortunate the Buddhist world in San Antonio, Texas, is to have such a strong connection to this rare and extraordinary man—a man whose bright smile and powerful teachings have changed the lives of millions around the world.

Jenny A. Uemura-Sano
Maui, Hawaii

Buddhism arrived in Hawaii in the 1800s by way of the Japanese immigrants who worked on the sugar-cane plantations. My grandparents were *issei*, or the first generation of Japanese in Hawaii. They settled in Kona, where coffee was grown. Coffee farming offered an independent lifestyle compared to the harsh conditions of the sugar plantations. This is my background and it was in Kona that Rissho Kosei-kai was first planted in Hawaii by the Reverend Tomoko Ozaki. The Hawaii branch was established in 1959. My mother was one of the founding members when I was still a toddler.

English was the primary language in our home. My parents, who belong to the *nisei*, or second generation, were encouraged to speak English and demonstrate their American loyalty, especially during World War II. However, Buddhist teachings and

practices were still conducted in Japanese. Although they knew both English and Japanese, my parents were not proficient in either, therefore making the transmission of Buddhist teachings to their English-speaking children difficult. For my generation, the third or *sansei*, this was a language barrier that I had no desire to overcome.

Although my mother shared with me the practices of Rissho Kosei-kai throughout my life, I did not embrace them as my own. I explored Christianity, but I was in a spiritual limbo for many years.

My true spiritual awakening occurred in 2001. My mother had been a Rissho Kosei-kai member for over 40 years when she died in November 2001. Due to illness, she had moved into a studio unit next to our main house a few years earlier. On the day she died, I went into her living room to clean the family altar. I was feeling very mournful and lonely, as I had now lost both of my parents. (My father had died 24 years earlier.) Yet as I sat in front of the altar, a peaceful feeling filled me with warmth. I felt that my mother would always be near. I realized how the Sangha had always provided prayer, guidance, and comfort to our family during times of hardship. Always helpful to others, my mother was a very trusted child-care provider to many families in Kona. She was very accepting of my own misguided choices in life. She was the kindest, humblest, and most honest person that I have ever known.

My mother's example as a practicing lay Buddhist of Rissho Kosei-kai is what Buddhism means to me. Founder Niwano says in his book *Invisible Eyelashes*, "To manifest our true merit, it is important that we begin by fixing our gaze on whatever is nearest at hand." For years, my gaze was beyond my everyday life to find spiritual growth, when all the time it was right in front of me. Unfortunately, it took my mother's death to make me realize this. Shortly thereafter, I became a member of Rissho Kosei-kai. I received

the *go-honzon* (focus of devotion) last July. From 2006, I was appointed the new leader of the Maui Dharma Center, on Maui, Hawaii, where I have resided since 2002. I am very grateful and honored by the Buddha's arrangement of these events in my life.

As a branch leader, I will encourage the third and succeeding generations in Hawaii to overcome their own stereotypical image of Buddhism as a Japanese-only religion, incomprehensible to our American ways. We can no longer use the language barrier as an excuse to remain uninvolved. If we do so, we will become a product of our own ignorance. I look forward to sharing the teachings with my English-speaking peers.

On the occasion of celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Founder's birth, I am grateful to be a part of this exciting time in realizing his dream of spreading the teachings around the world. Thank you for this opportunity to share my experiences and realizations.

**Deshapriya Barua
Chowdhury
Chittagong,
Bangladesh**

Rissho Kosei-kai, founded by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, continuously works toward propagating Buddhism according to the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Lotus Sutra. A human being can be modified by following the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. Realizing these teachings in our lives and helping to alleviate the pain stalking mankind is the teaching of the Founder. We are working toward propagating this teaching to relieve the sufferings, sorrows, and problems of our fellow human beings. I always consider the sufferings of others as my own, and I visit several families and tell them of the

teachings of the Founder and urge them to practice reciting portions of the Lotus Sutra twice a day. I always try to lead them to righteousness and to support them through my welfare activities. In this way, I believe that we can establish peace and tranquillity in the families as well as in the world.

In Bangladesh, we think that "religion" is something to help others, but Rissho Kosei-kai teaches us to awaken the Dharma in the minds of the people; thus, following the bodhisattva path is the religion. Through Right Action, anyone can enjoy eternal bliss, and by establishing Shakyamuni Buddha as the guide, one can achieve proper salvation. The Lotus Sutra has influenced my life greatly. The importance of this sutra can easily be understood by reading it with concentration. It is true that the late Founder has interpreted the Lotus Sutra in lucid language for us. We can easily enjoy eternal bliss in our everyday lives by realizing the inner meaning of the Lotus Sutra. I believe that the teachings of the Lotus Sutra may help us to bring happiness in our everyday lives.

Of all the chapters of the Lotus Sutra, chapter 20, about the Bodhisattva Never Despise, has especially helped me and given me new hope and enthusiasm. In this chapter, a bodhisattva called Never Despise is described as paying respect to everyone he meets, saying that they will all become buddhas. Although many people criticized him and abused him, he did not give way to anger. He possessed great virtue and he showed us the way to become a buddha. If we follow such an example in our lives and propagate the teachings, it will be easier for us to understand Buddhist philosophy, and we may be able to achieve buddhahood. It is our sacred duty to pass on the teachings of the Founder on the auspicious occasion of the 100th anniversary of his birth. We should also encourage people to put into practice the ideals of the Founder in their lives, and we should also come forward with a view to establishing a peaceful world with the help of the Founder's teachings.

A Lifetime Devoted to the Dharma and World Peace

The Founder's Life: A Chronological Record

Founder Nikkyo Niwano was born on November 15, 1906, in Suganuma, a small mountain village in Niigata Prefecture, northern Japan. At the time of his birth there were forty-two households in the village. He was born into a farming family that owned mountain forests and enough fields to feed the large and extended family of fourteen people, but they were far from wealthy. He was the second son of six siblings—five boys and one girl—born to his father, Jukichi, and his mother, Mii. His family was respected by the other villagers for their integrity and service to the community. His father and grandfather, who were both known for their kindness and generosity, were influential in shaping his character. Both his grandfather and his parents, who were

very pious, prayed both morning and evening. Though his family belonged to a Buddhist sect, they also had a small Shinto shrine in the house—as did a great many Japanese families.

At the age of seven, Niwano entered elementary school. He was the tallest boy in his grade and was the leader in many activities. “Be kind to people; worship the gods and buddhas”—these were two of the admonitions given to the children by the principal of the school. The pupils followed his words for a while, but Niwano was the only child who continued to bow before the Shinto shrine and Buddhist statues on the roadside.

Even as a young child, he was expected to fulfill many responsibilities at home. Following the local custom of the time, he completed his formal edu-

Founder Niwano at the age of sixteen (on the right in the front row) with some friends, soon before his first trip to Tokyo.

cation at the age of twelve and took his place among his family members as an adult. He worked as a farmer from spring to autumn and in the winter he worked at a spinning plant and on a construction project to bring in cash income for his family.

As a young man, his desire to go out into the wide, unknown world and to test himself grew stronger. In 1923, when he was sixteen, he received permission from his father to go to Tokyo to find employment. His first job was with a rice shop. On his fifth day in Tokyo, however, the Great Kanto Earthquake struck and Tokyo suffered major damage and the rice shop burned down, which caused Niwano to return to Suganuma. In his home village, he worked in the fields until he again could go back to Tokyo the following year. While he was in Suganuma, however, his mother, who

The 2005 restoration of the house in which the Founder was born in 1906.

had been suffering from poor health, died at the young age of forty-three. Five months after his mother's death, he made his second trip to Tokyo and was employed by a charcoal dealer in the Nakano area.

After serving for three years in the Japanese navy, from 1926 through 1929, he returned to his previous employment. A year later he married. After the birth of his first daughter in 1931 he went into business on his own, setting up a shop dealing in Japanese pickles.

In August 1934, the Niwanos' second daughter, only nine months old, fell ill with Japanese sleeping sickness. At that time, the Niwanos could not afford hospital treatment for her. After exhausting every other possibility, the young father decided to accept the advice of a neighbor and consult Sukenobu Arai, a leader in a religious organization called Reiyukai. Niwano soon joined Reiyukai and began to follow its practice of offering reverence to the spirits of one's ancestors. Very quickly his daughter's physical condition improved. To Niwano, this proved the merit of Reiyukai, but what impressed him even more was the organization's emphasis on the Lotus Sutra, one of the most important scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism.

Revered by Buddhists as the core and culmination of the Buddha's

Mr. Sukenobu Arai

teachings, the Lotus Sutra appealed to him as the perfect net in which to save all the world's people. It could help individuals as well as society as a whole, both physically and spiritually. He was deeply affected by what he learned. The more he read the text of the sutra, the more he was moved by its subtlety, profundity, and power. Two of its teachings suited his innermost feelings exactly: the way of compassion of the bodhisattva—helping others and serving all people in the world—and the ability of the lay believer both to save and be saved. The spirit of conviction he felt welling up inside him would not allow him to continue the halfway measure of spending most of his time at his job, devoting only his spare time to religious activities.

He then decided to change his occu-

pation to one that would give him ample free time while it provided the opportunity to meet a great many people. He decided to open a neighborhood milk dealer's shop. In the milk business, home deliveries in the early mornings and evenings were the most pressing duties, leaving much of the rest of the day available for religious undertakings. One of his good customers was a woman who ran a small shop that sold ice in the summer and baked sweet potatoes in the winter. She was pale and sickly, frail from many years of pain and hardship caused by her former husband's infidelity and the death of their only child. She suffered from a variety of illnesses, and her doctors believed she did not have long to live.

Soon after she began receiving religious guidance from Niwano, however, her persistent ailments seemed to miraculously disappear. Once she felt certain of the efficacy of the Reiyukai teachings, she began enthusiastically taking part in its services. Even more surprising to the many who knew her was the vigorous way in which she went about conveying the teachings to others. On a single day she and Niwano, working together, brought nearly fifty people into the organization. This woman was the late Mrs. Myoko Naganuma, later to become known to many thousands of people as "Myoko Sensei."

Although Reiyukai's rapid growth at that time caused considerable excitement among its members, there were frequent disagreements among its top echelon of leaders. Although Niwano also felt excited, shadows of doubt were developing in the back of his mind. During a national meeting on January 7, 1938, its president made the statement that lectures on the Lotus Sutra were an out-of-date concept and that anyone who delivered them must be inspired by the devil. On the very next day, Niwano and Mrs. Naganuma agreed that because Reiyukai's position now was totally counter to their profound respect for the Lotus Sutra, they would have to resign as members.

Founder Niwano (third from the left in the front row) and Cofounder Naganuma (fifth from the left in the front row) with other founding members of Rissho Kosei-kai. Photographed in April 1940.

More than 500 people gather at a farmer's house in Nagano Prefecture to hear lectures by the Founder and Cofounder, who visited the place in 1952 for dissemination.

After further discussion they decided to form a new group, which originally consisted of about thirty members, people whom Arai, Niwano, and Mrs. Naganuma had taught in guidance sessions.

Ceremonies were held at Mrs. Naganuma's residence to solemnize the founding of the new organization, and a room in Niwano's home was made its headquarters. This was the birth of Rissho Kosei-kai, on March 5, 1938. Founder Niwano was then thirty-one years old and Cofounder Naganuma, forty-eight.

Spiritual contacts and divine revelations were an important aspect of the practices and beliefs of Reiyukai in which Founder Niwano and Cofounder Naganuma had been trained by Arai. Several revelations directed Founder Niwano to devote himself fully to the Lotus Sutra. One of the earliest of these had to do with his reading: "You have the duty to spread the teachings of the Lotus Sutra throughout the world. Abandon all other reading and dedicate yourself to it alone." In abiding by this revelation, the Founder developed an understanding for the subtlest aspects of the text.

By 1941, membership in Rissho Kosei-kai had reached one thousand, and the construction of a separate headquarters building became an absolute necessity. It was completed in May 1942. In the meantime, Founder Niwano and Cofounder Naganuma gave up their businesses to devote themselves full-time to their religious activities. Not long after the new headquarters was completed, however, it was already proving to be too small to hold all the people who came to re-

At a local branch, during his dissemination tour in 1958, Founder Niwano explains the importance of studying the Lotus Sutra.

ceive guidance or attend religious services. The meetings of the groups that gathered for counseling guidance came to be known as *hoza* sessions. These have remained among Rissho Kosei-kai's basic practices since its inception.

After Cofounder Naganuma received a renewed lease on life as a result of her religious faith, she resolved to devote all her remaining years to disseminating the Lotus Sutra. Despite her advancing years, she worked tirelessly at this as well as at providing guidance to Rissho Kosei-kai members. Her labors ultimately took a severe toll on her health. She gradually lost her appetite, yet as her illness progressed her mood seemed to brighten. She passed away peacefully on the evening of September 10, 1957, at the age of sixty-seven.

In 1958, Founder Niwano declared his intention to move actively into a new phase in which the true purpose of Rissho Kosei-kai would become clearer. The first step was the affirmation that the main focus of devotion for all members is the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Great Benevolent Teacher, the World-honored One.

Other important steps were undertaken at the same time. First, because the Founder considered education so vital, he realized that the way to make the truth apparent to others was for each member to study the Lotus Sutra thoroughly and to apply its teachings in practical ways in all phases of their daily lives. To create a nationwide pool of energy for the application of the teachings in society at large, Founder Niwano revised the organizational structure of the branches to make them responsible to a local dissemination center.

In 1960 it was announced that Founder Niwano's eldest son, Nichiko, would succeed him as president. The decision to follow Japanese tradition and make the presidency hereditary was made by the Board of Trustees in accordance with Rissho Kosei-kai regulations.

In 1964, following eight years of construction, the Great Sacred Hall

The Great Sacred Hall, completed in 1964 as the main hall of worship.

was completed as part of the headquarters complex in Tokyo and was formally opened as the main center for religious activities. A special image of the Eternal Buddha, as he is described in the Lotus Sutra, was enshrined there. The occasion was one that the Founder and all members had long anticipated.

From Founder Niwano's first encounter with the Lotus Sutra, he had held that all religions spring from the same root. He felt that interreligious cooperation is possible if believers are enlightened to the universal truths of their own faith while respecting the beliefs and rituals of other religions.

As a first step toward promoting in-

terreligious cooperation, the Founder helped to establish Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan) in 1957. The following year Shinshuren became affiliated with the Japan Religions League. This was a landmark event in the early days of the ecumenical movement, when many established religions were less than friendly to new ones.

In 1965 Founder Niwano was the only non-Christian invited to attend the Second Vatican Council as a special guest.

When Founder Niwano had earlier taken part in the Peace Delegation of Religious Leaders for Banning Nuclear Weapons in 1963, he became acquainted with North American Unitarians. Ties between that group and Rissho Kosei-kai were strengthened when the late Dr. Dana McLean Greeley, then president of the Unitarian Universalist Association of America, visited Rissho Kosei-kai after attending the Japanese-American Inter-Religious Consultation on Peace in Kyoto in 1968. Dr. Greeley and Founder Niwano saw eye to eye in their strong desire to further interfaith dialogue. Unitarians have long cherished the goal of interfaith cooperation, and it was they who had organ-

Founder Niwano received the Templeton Prize from the Duke of Edinburgh.

ized the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) in 1900. The meeting of Dr. Greeley and Founder Niwano led to the latter's being invited to the 1969 IARF Congress in Boston, which voted unanimously to welcome Rissho Kosei-kai as a member.

Liberal American religious leaders first conceived of a world religionists' conference for peace in the early 1960s. After several preparatory interreligious meetings, in which Founder Niwano was actively involved, the project came closer to fruition with the founding of the World Conference on Religions and Peace (presently the World Conference of Religions for Peace, WCRP) that eventually was to draw the participation of all of the world's major religious organizations. In 1969 Founder Niwano became chairman of the Japan Religions League's Committee for International Affairs, which in 1970 sponsored the first General Assembly of the WCRP, held in Kyoto. Some three hundred representatives of the world's leading religions from 39 nations discussed three major issues—disarmament, development, and human rights—and called for an end to the war then raging in Vietnam. Since that time, the WCRP has held general assemblies in Belgium, the United States, Kenya, Australia, Italy, and Jordan.

In 1978, as a WCRP representative, Founder Niwano addressed the first Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly Devoted to

Founder Niwano was elected as the 25th president of the IARF during its 24th triennial congress held in the Netherlands in 1981.

Disarmament (SSD I). He urged the leaders of the superpowers to work for general and complete disarmament. In April 1979, the Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion was awarded to Founder Niwano at Windsor Castle for his achievement in interreligious cooperation and mutual understanding. In December of that year, Founder Niwano was asked by national senators and religious leaders of the United States to meet Iranian political and religious leaders to persuade them to release the Americans being held hostage by Iranian students in the U.S. Embassy in Teheran. He met with the Iranian ambassador in Tokyo and explained his understanding of the issue, expressing the WCRP's hope for a peaceful solution. The following year he received an invitation from the Islamic Republic of Iran to join the International Conference on U.S. Intervention in Iran at Teheran. He met with Iranian Foreign Minister Qotbzadeh, requesting him to affect the prompt release of the hostages.

In July 1981, during the 24th Congress of the IARF, Founder Niwano was elected the 25th president of the IARF and it was decided that the organization would hold its triennial congress in Japan in 1984, meeting for the first time in Asia. In June 1982, he addressed SSD II on behalf of the IARF. Rissho Kosei-kai had already mounted a nationwide campaign in Japan to collect signatures on a petition calling for disarmament and the abolition of nuclear weapons. The campaign amassed 27 million signatures that were submitted to the UN at SSD II. In September the Founder traveled to the Soviet Union at the invitation of the Russian Orthodox Church. He visited the Kremlin, where he met with high-ranking Soviet officials to call for the prohibition of first use of nuclear weapons. In 1988 he addressed SSD III at the UN headquarters as the president of Rissho Kosei-kai.

On November 15, 1991, his eldest son, Rev. Nichiko Niwano, succeeded

Rev. Nichiko Niwano is inaugurated as Rissho Kosei-kai's second president in a ceremony in the Great Sacred Hall in 1991.

him to become the second president of Rissho Kosei-kai, in the ceremony of the Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma. On April 13, 1994, Mrs. Naoko Niwano, who assisted the Founder as his wife of 64 years, always holding a firm faith in the Lotus Sutra, died peacefully, with her husband and family at her bedside. On November 3 of that year, Founder Niwano delivered the opening address at the opening session of WCRP VI, held in the Vatican's Synod Hall, as an honorary president of WCRP International. Pope John Paul II, who sat beside Founder Niwano at the center of the dais, delivered a commemorative address at the opening session. In March 1998, Rissho Kosei-kai celebrated its sixtieth anniversary at the Great Sacred Hall with the attendance of many of the world's leading religious figures, who were in Japan to participate in a WCRP meeting.

In March 1999, his dedication to interreligious cooperation for peace was the source for an autobiographical account published in Japanese under the title of *Kono Michi: Ichibutsujo no Sekai o Mezashite* (The Path That We Have Walked: In Aspiration for the World of the One Buddha Vehicle).

On October 4, after he had been hospitalized due to the debilitations of age, Founder Niwano died at 10:34 A.M. of natural causes in the Kosei General Hospital in Tokyo. He was ninety-two. Death came peacefully in the presence of family members and senior leaders of Rissho Kosei-kai. The

funeral service for the Founder took place in the Great Sacred Hall, at which some 60,000 people, including members and mourners from all walks of life, paid him tribute. Related ceremonies were held at local branches throughout Japan and abroad. President Nichiko Niwano bestowed upon the Founder the posthumous Dharma title, "The Founder Nikkyo, Great Teacher of the One Vehicle," in the belief that the virtue of the Founder will resound eternally.

In October 2000, in commemoration of the first anniversary of the passing of the Founder, the Precious Stupa of the One Vehicle was completed in the garden of the Horin-kaku Guest Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters. The stupa symbolizes for Rissho Kosei-kai members the Founder's preaching of the Dharma of the One Vehicle, which he continued to both teach and practice throughout his lifetime. It was erected in memory of his having devoted his entire life to spreading the spirit of the peace of the Lotus Sutra throughout the world. □

Rev. Nichiko Niwano prays before the Precious Stupa of the One Vehicle during the ceremony to mark the second anniversary of the Founder's entrance into nirvana on October 4, 2001.

A Christian Journey into Buddhism

by Elizabeth J. Harris

Buddhism starts with a question: Why is there something in human existence that is twisted, out-of-shape, violent, and unsatisfactory? This writer says that this is a question that resonated with her immediately.

Anuradhapura, an ancient city in Sri Lanka, boasts one of the oldest trees in existence. It is believed to have grown from a cutting of the very tree under which the Buddha gained enlightenment. It was in the shrine room next to this tree, in 1984, that my journey into Buddhism began. It was my first time in Asia. I was with a mainly Christian group that was visiting Sri Lanka to learn about the country. At Anuradhapura, I separated myself from the group to sit on the floor of the shrine room with other devotees, facing a large image of the Buddha. As I was looking, the image seemed to become surrounded by cosmic light. It was as though the Buddha were speaking to me, inviting me to learn more about Buddhism. I came out of the shrine room rather stunned, but determined to take this further.

The opportunity soon came. In 1985 I learned that there was a Christian institute in Colombo, the Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, which had built accommodation for Westerners who wanted to study Buddhism. After applying for a scholarship from the World Council of Churches, I arrived in Colombo in 1986. I was thirty-six years old. I was already interested in meditation, social justice, and conflict transformation. I had also become convinced that crossing religious barriers was as essential as crossing cultural ones.

I had planned to stay a year. In the end, I remained over seven years, going ever deeper into Buddhism, eventually completing a doctorate in Buddhist Studies. From the beginning, my aim was not simply to study the Theravada Buddhism of Sri Lanka, but to immerse myself in it in order to see the world through Buddhist eyes. I wanted to “pass over” into Buddhism in order to “come back” into Christianity with new perspectives. So, as well as doing academic study, I joined a women’s meditation group and spent time at a meditation center in Sri Lanka’s central hills. I took part in the acts of devotion at my local Buddhist temple and met Buddhists who were involved in conflict transformation within Sri Lanka’s bitter ethnic war. Above all, I made friendships with Buddhists, which led, for instance, to joining a Buddhist pilgrimage group to Kataragama, a place holy to both Hindus and Buddhists. In this way I met some of the many faces of Buddhism in Sri Lanka—the philosophical, the devotional, the contemplative, and the socially engaged.

As I immersed myself in Buddhism, three things happened. First, I discovered teachings and practices that resonated with, or shed new light on, my own religious convictions. My heart leaped in recognition of these. Second, I met differences, which challenged and sometimes disturbed

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me. Third, I found practices that were complementary to the Christianity that had nurtured me, practices that I could draw into my own spirituality.

The Resonances

I came to love reading translations of the Pali texts of Theravada Buddhism. The Pali Canon is at least ten times the size of the Bible and holds a tremendous variety of texts within it. Theravada Buddhists believe that the Canon is the closest we can get to the words the Buddha actually spoke. They believe that after the Buddha's death, his teachings were transmitted orally for a couple of hundred years, before being written down in Sri Lanka in the third century B.C.E. As I read these texts, a down-to-earth, practical, realistic teacher emerged from them—the Buddha.

Buddhism starts with a question: Why is there something in human existence that is twisted, out-of-shape, violent, and unsatisfactory? It was a question that resonated with me immediately. I had long been concerned about such things as the gap between rich and poor in the world, the number of wars and conflicts, environmental degradation, and the rampant consumerism of the rich. Never had I looked at the world through rose-tinted spectacles. And Buddhism's answer also resonated—namely that the *dukkha*, the pain of existence, was caused by egocentric craving, rooted in greed, hatred, and delusion. There is one text in the Pali Canon that speaks of the world as “smothered, enveloped, tangled like a ball of thread, covered as with blight, twisted up like a grass-rope” with craving.*

Buddhism's view of the world simply struck me as true. It gave me tools with which to analyze and understand what I found unsatisfactory about the world. For, as I looked at the world, I could see greed everywhere. There was the structural greed for profit present in many forms of international capitalism. There was the individual greed present in consumerist lifestyles.

The message of the Buddha in this context was: “The way you see the world is wrong. Happiness does not lie where you think it does. Change. Realize that everything you own is impermanent—your wealth, your youth, your relationships. Stop placing yourself at the center. Stop relating everything to ‘I’ and ‘mine.’” The arrow simile in the Shorter Discourse to Malunkyaputta in the Majjhima Nikaya (Sutta 63) particularly appealed to me. In it, one of the Buddha's disciples complains that the Buddha had not answered some of the most important metaphysical questions in life, such as whether the world was eternal or the soul was the same as the body. The Buddha replies with the following story. A man is wounded by a poisoned arrow. Family members bring a surgeon, but the man will not allow the surgeon to touch him. Instead, he demands the answers to a stream of questions such as: What kind of man wounded me? What was his name? Where did he come from? What kind of bow

did he use? It is obvious that the person will die before the questions are answered. The Buddha's message to his disciple, therefore, was that plucking out the poison within us, the poison of greed, hatred, and delusion, was the most important religious task.

This activist message leaped out at me as vital in our world. It also led to the second area of Buddhist teaching and practice that resonated with me: meditation, or mental cultivation. There is one intriguing text from the Canon that goes like this:

Monks, there are to be seen beings who can admit freedom from suffering from bodily disease for one year, for two years, for three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years; who can admit freedom from bodily disease for even a hundred years. But, monks, those beings are hard to find in the world who can admit freedom from mental disease even for one moment, save only those in whom the *asavas* (“corruptions,” such as ignorance) are destroyed. (*The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, Vol. II, Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1992, p.146; Anguttara Nikaya Text ii, 143)

“Was it true?” I asked myself. Do we all suffer from some kind of mental disease? I came to the conclusion that we probably do, although “disease” was not a word I liked. Most of us live in a self-made mental prison because we refer everything to the self and what the self likes and dislikes. The task of meditation, I discovered, was to cut through this by learning more about how our minds and hearts worked.

One of my teachers of meditation was Godwin Samararatne, then director of the Buddhist Meditation Centre, which I visited. One meditation practice he encouraged was “bare attention.” It is a form of *vipassana*, or insight meditation, through which one seeks to be completely aware of everything that is happening in the mind and heart in the present moment. Nothing is repressed and nothing is judged. Everything that arises in the mind, the emotions, or in the physical body is watched and simply allowed to pass.

I found this to be an incredibly powerful practice. Most of us react in an automatic way to what life throws at us, drawing on patterns laid down from our childhood. Bare attention, I discovered, could help me cut through some of this. It could help me discover when and how such things as envy, anger, or pride arise in my mind. And that could open the door to changing what was unwholesome. One phrase that Godwin Samararatne used was that it could help us “make our demons our friends.”

Meditation is not absent from Christianity. The Christian contemplative tradition has flowered in many centuries and places. However, I now believe that Buddhism has much to teach Christians about mind cultivation. Buddhism can complement and enrich Christian practice.

What resonated with me most, though, was what Buddhism had to say about compassion and love. I have written

* Anguttara Nikaya, ii, 213

A novice praying at the feet of the statue of the Aukana Buddha, situated at Polonnaruwa, in north-central Sri Lanka.

before in DHARMA WORLD of my experience at the Sanjusangendo Hall in Kyoto, dedicated to the bodhisattva Kannon. The Hall is filled with row after row of Kannon images. Each has multiple arms, representing Kannon's ability to save multiple worlds. When I stood in that hall, I was awestruck by the vision or message that the images embodied: that at the heart of the world's violence there is a strong, irresistible force of compassion. I was reminded of the Christian emphasis on the overflowing love and grace of God.

Theravada Buddhism does not recognize bodhisattvas such as Kannon. However, loving kindness and compassion are given great emphasis. The liberation from greed and hatred that Theravada Buddhism talks about is a liberation into compassion. Cultivating compassion and loving kindness as an antidote to greed, therefore, is very important. Many Theravada Buddhists practice a meditation on loving kindness daily.

The root of this is an ancient text, which contains this striking verse:

Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let him cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings.

Let his thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole

world: above, below and across, without any obstruction, without any hatred, any enmity.

(From the Metta Sutta, the Sutta on Loving Kindness, from *The Sutta Nipata*, translated by H. Saddhatissa, London: Curzon, 1985)

It is important within this kind of meditation not only to extend loving kindness to those we like but also to those we do not like. This resonated in my mind with the teaching of Jesus that we should love our enemies and do good to those who hurt us. But I discovered that Buddhism went even further than this in its imagery. In one Theravada discourse, the Buddha speaks of the kind of mind that those who have renounced home and family should have and he ends with this illustration:

Bhikkhus (monks), even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handed saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hatred towards them would not be carrying out my teaching. Herein, *bhikkhus*, you should train thus: "our minds will remain unaffected, and we shall utter no evil words; we shall abide compassionate for their welfare, with a mind of loving kindness, without inner hate. We shall abide pervading them with a mind imbued

with loving-kindness; and starting with them, we shall abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.” (From: *The Simile of the Saw, The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*, translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1995, p. 223)

So, I discovered, to my delight, that Buddhism, as Christianity, emphasizes that the forces of compassion and love are stronger than the forces of violence and greed. This is where Christianity and Buddhism are one, where they can speak with one voice and act together for a more just and peaceful world.

The Differences

In addition to the resonances, there were a number of elements within Theravada Buddhism that I found difficult. The worldview they represented and the worldview I had come from were just so different. Rebirth—the belief that we are born again and again, until we gain liberation—was one of these. I found this belief at a popular level and in the texts. The full implications of it amazed me. For instance, in the *Therigatha*, a canonical text of verses and stories from the early Buddhist nuns, there is the story of Ubbiri. Ubbiri, before she became a nun, was made a queen because of the beauty of her daughter. But the daughter dies. Ubbiri repeatedly goes to the cemetery to weep. One day the Buddha reveals himself to her there and the conversation goes something like this:

Why are you crying? (The Buddha)

I cry because of my daughter, Exalted One (Ubbiri)

Cremated in this cemetery are 84,000 of your daughters.

Which one are you weeping for? (The Buddha)

Against this background, working for liberation from rebirth takes on even more urgency, but it was a world that I found difficult to comprehend and still do.

Another area of initial difficulty was *anatta*, non-self. When the nineteenth-century Christian missionary to Sri Lanka, Rev. Daniel Gogerly, discovered *anatta* as he was translating the Pali texts, he was horrified. He had thought Buddhism spoke of the reincarnation of the soul, but here, he believed, was a doctrine that denied continuity across births, by denying that there was a soul. It fed into his view that Buddhism was nihilistic. I was not horrified by *anatta*, but I was, at first, mystified. I couldn't believe that Buddhism denied that there was a self, a person. Soon, however, I realized that the difference was not as great as I thought. Buddhism and Christianity could touch on this as well. For what Buddhism was talking about was a wrong concept of self, a concept of self that causes havoc in our world and leads away from the path of compassion.

Theravada Buddhism says that we are verbs rather than

nouns. Everything inside us changes. Nothing is static. Nothing should be clung to. The original doctrine was diametrically opposed to the emerging brahminical belief that the human soul, as essence, was one with Brahman. The Buddha said that things just did not work that way. The human body and mind were governed by a process of cause and effect. All parts of us were interdependent—Mahayana Buddhists might say that all parts were empty. I realized that the doctrine had a very practical meaning, as well as a philosophical one: to help us see that clinging to self-interest, the “I,” leads to suffering and pain and that getting rid of the “I” releases compassion and joy. “Get rid of the ‘I’ and compassion will flow” was the message.

Christianity also stresses the importance of letting go of “self.” Methodists, at the beginning of each year, make a new Covenant with God in a special service. During the service, they say, “I am no longer my own but thine.” Although Theravada Buddhism is non-theistic, there are touching points here. In fact, Buddhism has made me see just how radical the Christian emphasis on letting go of self is.

Concluding Thoughts

“Passing over” into another religion in order to “come back” should never be undertaken lightly. It is for the few rather than the many. For me, it meant letting go, for a time, of much that had formed my religious identity so that the wisdom of Buddhism could flower within me. Anyone who does this will not “come back” to the same place. I certainly did not. Now, twenty years later, I still define myself as a Christian, but Buddhism has irrevocably changed me. I revere the Buddha as a wonderful teacher and often find myself thinking in Buddhist ways. I also seek, through meditation and the practice of loving kindness, to pluck out the greed in my own mind and heart. And the journey is not finished. My visit to Japan as part of an interfaith group from Britain, on the invitation of Risho Kosei-kai, was a wonderful extension of it.

Some might conclude that I must be a Buddhist-Christian. This is not, however, a term I would use myself, because it does not respect the differences between the two faiths. Buddhism and Christianity overlap in many ways. At the mystical level, differences may disappear altogether. But this is not the level where most Buddhists and Christians meet. In Sri Lanka, for instance, Buddhists are quick to point out the differences between the two religions, particularly in areas of divinity and rebirth. I must respect this. I would, therefore, prefer to say that I am a Christian who also reveres the Buddha and chooses to draw from Buddhist spiritual wells. I am convinced that the commonalities between the two religions are stronger than the differences, and that, where differences exist, these can be opportunities for growth rather than confrontation. For our minds are finite. None of us can grasp the totality of truth. We are all on a pilgrimage and can learn from one another. And I have learned much from Buddhism to help me on my journey. □

Who Can Stop the Wind?

by Notto R. Thelle

"Who can stop the wind?"

—Kobo Daishi

*"The wind blows where it chooses,
and you hear the sound of it,
but you do not know where it comes from
or where it goes."*

—John 3:8

When Kobo Daishi (774–835), one of the great masters of Japanese intellectual history, renounced the power and luxury of the court and its bureaucracy and set out on his wanderings as a homeless monk, his family and friends thought he had gone mad, and they protested loudly. His reply was simple: "Who can shatter my resolve? Who can stop the wind?" These words were more than just an appropriate metaphor for an irrevocable choice—they described a whole way of life. Kobo Daishi was whirled up out of the secure framework of his life, and he let himself be carried along by the wind. He had seen all too clearly the emptiness of the "good life" and he knew that he could find a more authentic life only if he encountered reality without any protective clothing. He could perhaps have drowned out this call and shut out the wind, but he knew that it would just keep on blowing. As a man of the spirit, he had no other choice.

When Jesus talked with Nicodemus late one night about being born anew, he too pointed to the wind: "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). Here, "wind" and "Spirit" are translations of the same Greek word, *pneuma*. The wind blows where it chooses. The Spirit blows where He chooses.

When I was a child, I ran around on a mountain outside Hong Kong, Tao Fong Shan, "The mountain of the Tao-wind." The Tao-wind is the Logos-wind of John's Gospel, the "wind of the Word" or "Spirit of Truth." Buddhist pilgrims came to this mountain, as did others in search of the truth. Buddhist tradition called these people *yün-shui* (*unsui* in Japanese), "cloud-water." They were wanderers who let themselves be driven by wind and water until they met a master who could lead them to the truth, one who spoke to their hearts and opened their eyes.

When Elijah waited on Horeb, the mountain of God, the first thing he encountered was a storm that split the moun-

tains and broke the rocks in pieces, but He was not in the storm. Nor was He in the earthquake or the fire. He came in the sound of a gentle breeze (1 Kings 19:11–13).

It is impossible to halt the Spirit of Truth, the Logos-wind. We can indeed attempt to shut it out, building walls and defense-works. We can drown it out with words—our own excuses and the warnings of our friends. But when our words and the admonitions of our friends fall silent, we still hear it blowing. It breathes life into words of scripture that we had not yet discovered; it flickers through our dreams and takes us by surprise at unguarded moments. Sometimes, it puffs away the mist of our words, and in a moment's frightened clarity we know that we must follow it, even though we do not know where it is going.

We have of course good reasons to shut out the wind. There are so many winds and so many voices that entice us

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with their promises about the spiritual life and about fair spring weather, but most winds are deceitful—they die down as soon as one tries to follow them. Other winds turn into storms, and we are “tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14), until we are left windswept, exhausted, and empty.

But some of this fear is unjustified. We are afraid of what we do not know. Some people are afraid that they may be led into faith—they are modern and secularized, and have become accustomed to looking on the church and Christianity with contempt. Others are afraid that they may lose their faith—they do not want to risk being blown away from a childhood faith in which they no longer really believe, and being led into a more adult faith and insight that they do not yet know.

We know it is the Spirit of Truth who is blowing into our lives, but we resist him. Yet in our heart of hearts we know that no one can stop the wind. It does not let go of us as easily as the false winds—it keeps on blowing. Surely we are not going to let fear of the unknown prevent us from following it on its path? Who can stop the wind?

Faith as Fate and as Choice

Many years ago, in the late 1950s, one of the pioneers of the Norwegian Humanist Association held lectures on the nature of religion in the cathedral high school in Oslo. The sham of Christianity’s claims had been unmasked, and the debate was in full swing. He concluded one of his talks with these strong words: “If you had been born in China, you would not have been a Christian. You would have been a Buddhist or a Taoist or a Confucian!” These words really struck home! Those of us who were members of the school’s Christian union exchanged alarmed glances, as we sat sweating on our chairs.

I was the next to address the public, and I held the shortest—and most successful—speech of my life: “Well, as a matter of fact, I was born in China.” Everyone knew that I was the chairman of the Christian union, and the whole assembly hall burst out laughing. Every subsequent contribution to the debate was completely irrelevant; the evening was a defeat for the humanists. All their arguments faded in view of the irony of fate that had made me the living proof of the error in their thinking.

But although the humanist’s words were drowned out by laughter that evening, this naturally did not mean that his questions had been answered. I do in fact suspect that his question was primarily rhetorical; he wanted to weaken our confidence in *all* religions, rather than to challenge us to be open to the knowledge offered by religions other than our own. Nevertheless, let us put the best construction on his words. He was challenging us not to take our inherited religion for granted. He wanted to sow doubt about faith as a product of “fate.” The historical accident that one was born in a “Christian” country is no guarantee of the truth of Christianity.

My thoughts have often returned to that debate. In the first place, it taught me that “victory” and “defeat” in debates are not always decided by a neutral evaluation of the arguments put forward and of the respective weight of the positions held by the debaters; the outcome is just as much dependent on the speakers’ elegant language and ability to formulate their thoughts, on their wit and irony, on the impact made by their personalities, or on coincidences such as the one I have just described. And secondly, of course, I subsequently had to admit that the speaker was right: if you are born in the East, it is highly improbable, statistically speaking, that you will be a Christian. Religious adherence is largely determined by geography.

This is a very simple fact that need not unsettle our faith. On the contrary, it can force us to think through our faith, and it can whittle away ingrained but superficial ideas that take the superiority of Christianity for granted.

When I returned to the Far East, where I had spent my childhood, I felt the magnetic attraction of the local religions. In such a situation, faith could never be just a matter of course. Here in Europe, however, the situation has changed, since it is no longer exclusively the humanists or atheists who issue challenges to our faith. Buddhists and Muslims and adherents of other religions are active in all Western societies, and they are beginning to change the face of Europe.

An English friend told me recently that of the 200,000 citizens in his hometown, 50,000 are now Muslims or Hindus. There are not so many in a country like Norway, but they are certainly a visible presence. We ought perhaps to get accustomed to the idea that a monopoly on *Weltanschauung* (worldview) no longer exists: there is no longer one majority religion. Rather, societal development means that a plurality of worldviews and religions is now normal.

The sociologist Peter Berger has analyzed this transformation in modern Western societies. In the past, religion was determined by one’s “fate” in the sense of one’s historical and geographical circumstances. Today, the world into which we are born obliges us to choose the sphere of faith, and Berger speaks in this context of the “heretical imperative” (from the Greek *hairein*, “to choose”). The plurality of religions and worldviews forces us to set out on our own journey and choose afresh. In modern Western societies, it is just as likely that one will abandon Christianity, as that one will discover a living faith. Indeed, it is possible that an acuter sensitivity is required, if one is to choose faith rather than to drift away from it.

We can therefore take the argument put forward by the humanist in my high school in the 1950s and reformulate it as a challenge to new generations not to take inherited attitudes for granted. For example, we could say: “If you had been born in Africa, you might have been a Christian! The fact you were born in a country that is in the process of forgetting its inherited faith does not permit you to presume that Christianity does not lead to a truer and more integrated life.” □

Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva

by Gene Reeves

This bodhisattva can be understood to be teaching the Lotus Sutra not so much by words as by embodying it by taking on whatever forms are needed to help others.

That the title figure of this chapter is named “Wonderful Voice,” or perhaps “Wonderful Sound,” is another curiosity of the Lotus Sutra. Absolutely nothing is said about his voice or sounds. “Wonderful Body” would be more appropriate, as his wonderful body is described in some detail: some 42,000 leagues tall, radiant and brilliant, powerful, pure gold in color, with eyes the size of lotus leaves, and a face as beautiful as millions of moons together.

The Story

Emitting rays of light both from the knob on the top of his head and from the tuft of hair between his eyebrows, the Buddha illuminated countless worlds to the East with his light. Beyond all these worlds to the East was still another world called Adorned with Pure Light, where lived the

Buddha Wisdom King of the Pure Flower Constellation and the Bodhisattva Wonderful Voice, along with countless other bodhisattvas.

This Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva had already succeeded in many things, including the planting of many good roots, serving many different buddhas in different ages, acquiring great wisdom, and attaining millions of different kinds of concentration. When the light from Shakyamuni Buddha filled his world and shone on him, Wonderful Voice said to the buddha of his land that he wanted to go to Shakyamuni’s world, the world in which suffering has to be endured, to pay tribute to Shakyamuni Buddha and visit various bodhisattvas. The buddha warned him that even though this world is not flat or clean and its buddha and bodhisattvas are small and short, he should not make little of this world or think that its buddha and bodhisattvas are inferior. “Just because our own bodies are fantastically tall and yours is perfect in every way,” he said, “do not make light of the buddha, bodhisattvas, or the land of Shakyamuni Buddha.”

Then, through the power of entering one of his concentrations, Wonderful Voice made eighty-four thousand bunches of gold and silver lotus flowers and other valuables appear not far from where Shakyamuni Buddha was sitting on Sacred Eagle Peak. Seeing them, Manjushri asked Shakyamuni Buddha what they signified. And when the Buddha explained that the flowers meant that Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva was coming to visit, Manjushri wanted to know what he had done to gain such great powers and said he wanted to see him. The Buddha replied that Abundant Treasures Buddha would summon him.

Summoned by Abundant Treasures Buddha to come to see Manjushri, this extremely tall and handsome Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva, accompanied by eighty-four thousand other bodhisattvas, flew to this world on a platform made of the seven treasures, passing through all the worlds to the East, where the grounds quaked in the six ways, lotus flowers

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made of the seven precious materials rained down, and many kinds of musical instruments sounded in the heavens.

Arriving at Sacred Eagle Peak, Wonderful Voice, with his big beautiful eyes, gorgeous face, and powerful golden body adorned with signs of countless blessings, descended from the platform, approached Shakyamuni Buddha, worshiped at his feet, presented him with a magnificent and extremely valuable necklace, delivered various greetings from the Buddha Wisdom King of the Pure Flower Constellation, and expressed the desire to see Abundant Treasures Buddha. Abundant Treasures, in turn, praised him for coming. Then Bodhisattva Excellent Flower wanted to know what Wonderful Voice had done to merit such great powers.

Shakyamuni Buddha explained that once upon a time there was a buddha named King of the Sound of Thunder in whose realm Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva lived. Because he offered many kinds of beautiful music and jeweled bowls to the Buddha King of the Sound of Thunder, he was reborn in the land of Wisdom King of the Pure Flower Constellation Buddha and was able to obtain great, supernatural powers. This bodhisattva is none other than the present Wonderful Voice. In previous lives he had taken many different forms—including those of women and girls, animals, gods and other heavenly beings, buddhas, and so on—in order to preach the Lotus Sutra. He protects all living beings by taking whatever form is appropriate for liberating them by teaching them the Dharma.

When the Buddha taught this chapter, the eighty-four thousand bodhisattvas who had come with Wonderful Voice, together with numerous other bodhisattvas of this world, won the ability to transform themselves into other living beings. Then Wonderful Voice made offerings to Shakyamuni Buddha and to the stupa of Abundant Treasures Buddha, and returned home to the land of Wisdom King of the Pure Flower Constellation Buddha and reported his adventure to him.

The Buddha's Light

This story begins with an event not unlike that in the very first chapter of the Lotus Sutra, in which the Buddha emits light of such power that it illumines very distant worlds. Since light is virtually always a symbol of wisdom, we can assume that here too we have a visual image indicating that the influence of Shakyamuni's wisdom is not limited to his world, our world, but also goes to the far reaches of the universe. He is the light of all the worlds. Though he is the Buddha of this world, he is also, in some way not clearly spelled out, the Buddha of all worlds. This has been indicated many times in the Lotus Sutra, most dramatically perhaps in chapter 11, where Shakyamuni Buddha assembles the buddhas and bodhisattvas from all over the universe.

Here, however, it might be relevant to remember that this display of light by Shakyamuni Buddha has happened before in chapter 1. There we learn that it has happened many times in the past, always signifying that the Buddha was

about to preach the Lotus Sutra. Should we assume that this meaning has simply been forgotten here? Or might it be the case that in the story of Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva the Lotus Sutra is being taught? But here its teaching is seen not so much as oral or written, but as a kind of action. That is, Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva can be understood to be teaching the Lotus Sutra not so much by words as by embodying it by taking on whatever forms are needed to help others. The voice of Wonderful Voice then, is wonderful not by being loud or beautiful but by being absent! His voice, in a sense, is his body, which takes on whatever form is needed.

The Lotus Sutra, as I have written before, is an action-oriented book. At the end of chapter 16 we are invited to perfect our buddha bodies. The sutra, in other words, is as much, perhaps even more, concerned about what we do with our hands and feet as it is with what happens in our minds. This is not to say that what happens in our minds is unimportant. It is exceedingly difficult to imagine a peaceful world without there being peaceful minds. But it would be a great mistake I think to assume that, at least for the Lotus Sutra, the end or goal of Buddhism is some kind of experience of being enlightened or awakened. For the Lotus Sutra, the goal is the way itself, the way of awakened practice—the practice and the way of the bodhisattva, one who is becoming a buddha through taking on whatever forms are needed to help others.

This World

Though hardly unique to this chapter of the Lotus Sutra, one very clear message here is the one given by his buddha to Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva: Don't make light of Shakyamuni's world! Even though its ground is not made of gold or other precious materials but of dirt, even though it is not smooth but includes many high and low places and even rocks and mountains, even though its buddha and bodhisattvas are extremely short and unattractive compared with ours, one should never think that that world is inferior.

We can only guess what is behind the concern contained in this kind of statement. Obviously, the writers believed that someone was not taking this world seriously enough. Does it indicate a time and place where people thought some distant land, some faraway paradise, was to be preferred to this world? Does it indicate a reaction to a worldview that rejected the reality and importance of this world in favor of some ideal world? We cannot be sure. But it is very clear that both here and in many other places the Lotus Sutra emphasizes the value and importance of life in this world, the home of Shakyamuni Buddha, in which the way of the bodhisattva can be taken, and which is our home and place of practice.

Though life here may be very difficult, with suffering of many kinds all around, with many difficulties to face, we should consider ourselves fortunate to have so many oppor-

tunities to be of service, to practice the bodhisattva way of helping others, and, what is part of the same thing, being helped by others. This is a world in which interdependence, the mutual dependence of living beings upon one another, is abundantly realized. We depend upon our ancestors and our descendants depend upon us; we depend upon our neighbors and our neighbors depend upon us; we depend upon the Buddha and the Buddha depends upon us. This world is through and through a world of interdependent relationships.

In a way, the interdependent character of this world is also shown in the greetings that Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva brings to Shakyamuni Buddha. "World-honored one," he says:

Are your ailments and troubles few? Is your daily life and practice going smoothly? Are the four elements in you in harmony? Are the affairs of the world tolerable? Are living beings easy to save? Are they not excessively greedy, angry, foolish, jealous, and arrogant? Are they not lacking in proper regard for their parents and disrespectful to monks? Do they not have wrong views and inadequate goodness? Are their five emotions not out of control?

Here we can clearly see that the same Buddha who can illuminate the entire universe, the same Buddha whose land this is, the same Buddha who provides us with infinite opportunities to experience joy in service to the Dharma, this same Buddha is far from all-powerful and utterly independent in the fashion of both Indian and Western gods. This is a buddha who is supremely interdependent, one who both serves all others and at the same time is dependent upon all others. This buddha needs bodhisattvas, and needs ordinary human beings to be bodhisattvas in order to accomplish the Buddha's work of saving all the living.

That is why Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva can take on the form of a buddha. He can become the Buddha for someone who needs saving grace to be in the form of a buddha.

Taking on Any Form

In the previous chapter, about the previous lives of Medicine King Bodhisattva, it is said that Seen With Joy by All the Living Bodhisattva attained a concentration that enabled him to take on any form. It was gaining the ability to take on any form that led Medicine King Bodhisattva to sacrifice his body to the buddha of his world. But in chapter 23 we are not told what the name of this concentration means. Here, in chapter 24, we can see more clearly what this ability to take on any form is about. It is an extraordinary ability to serve others.

Flower Virtue, you see merely the one body of Wonderful Voice that is here. But this bodhisattva appears in many different bodies, everywhere teaching this sutra for the sake of the living. Sometimes he appears as King

Brahma, sometimes he appears as Indra, sometimes he appears as Ishvara or as Maha-Ishvara, or as a great general of heaven. Sometimes he appears as the king of heaven Vaishravana; or as a holy wheel-rolling king, or as a lesser king; or appears as a rich old man, or as an ordinary citizen, or as a high official, or as a brahman, or as a monk, nun, layman, or laywoman; or he appears as the wife of a rich old man or householder, or appears as the wife of a high official, or as the wife of a brahman, or as a boy or girl; or appears as a god, dragon, satyr, centaur, *ashura*, griffin, chimera, python, human or nonhuman being; and so on, and teaches this sutra. Those who are in the hells, or are hungry spirits or animals, and all who are in difficult circumstances can be saved. And for the sake of those in the king's harem he transforms himself into a woman and teaches this sutra.

For those who need the form of a *shravaka* to be liberated, he appears in the form of a *shravaka* and teaches the Dharma. For those who need the form of a *pratyekabuddha* to be liberated, he appears in the form of a *pratyekabuddha* and teaches the Dharma. For those who need the form of a bodhisattva to be liberated, he appears in the form of a bodhisattva and teaches the Dharma. For those who need the form of a buddha to be liberated, he appears in the form of a buddha and teaches the Dharma. In these various ways, according to what is needed for liberation, he appears in various forms. Even if it is appropriate to enter extinction for the sake of liberation, he shows himself as one who enters extinction.

This variety of forms is remarkably inclusive. While clearly advocating and emphasizing the importance of the bodhisattva way, the Lotus Sutra clearly wants its hearers and readers to understand that appearing in the form of a bodhisattva is only one way among many, any of which can be effective. This variety of forms can be seen as an expression of the emphasis found in the first few chapters of the sutra on the variety of skillful means. But here, in a sense, the message is even more direct. If, it says, you are "the wife of a brahman," or "a boy or girl," or anyone else, you too can be a bodhisattva, you can be Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva!

This ability to serve others by taking on different forms was made most evident in East Asian Buddhism by Kuan-yin Bodhisattva, Kannon in Japanese pronunciation. The textual basis for this is, of course, chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra, where some thirty-three forms of Kuan-yin are listed. These thirty-three "bodies" are very often depicted in Chinese Buddhist art, especially in temples. But the ability to take on different forms or bodies in order to help others is by no means restricted in China to Kuan-yin. Numerous stories are told, for example, of Manjushri Bodhisattva taking on various forms, such as that of an old lady or sick dog, in order to lead someone to Wutai-shan.

Perhaps the most famous case of a bodhisattva taking on

Detail from the Lotus Sutra Mandala owned by Kaijusenji temple, Kyoto Prefecture, in which Shakyamuni is depicted as emitting rays of light. Thirteenth century. Important Cultural Property.

a special form is the incarnation of Maitreya Bodhisattva in the form of a historical tenth-century saintly, heterodox, and enormously overweight monk who was especially kind to children. In Japan he is known as Hotei, one of the Seven Gods of Good Luck, but, sold in souvenir shops all over the world, he is often called “the laughing Buddha,” and in virtually every Chinese Buddhist temple he is known as Milo-fo—Maitreya Buddha. But this form is not the only

historical embodiment of Maitreya. Many Chinese historical figures, some political, others religious, either claimed to be or were widely taken to be incarnations of Maitreya. For example, the sixth-century Buddhist teacher, reformer, and champion of peasants known simply as Fu was widely thought to be Maitreya descended from his Tushita heaven to take on the form of Fu.

While Kuan-yin, Manjushri, and Maitreya are famous,

especially in China but throughout East Asia, for taking on whatever body is needed in order to be helpful to others, Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva is hardly known outside of the Lotus Sutra, or even outside of chapter 24 of the Lotus Sutra. He seems, for example, to have been completely neglected by artists. I do not know why this is so. It certainly cannot be because this story is any less encouraging to women than the Kuan-yin chapter. Here, by indicating numerous ways in which Wonderful Voice takes on female bodies, the text goes to some lengths to assure women that they too can become bodhisattvas, that they themselves can become Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva. Perhaps one reason for this bodhisattva failing to attract artists is that it is difficult to portray a face as beautiful as millions of moons together!

Nor do we know whether the story of Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva is older or younger than the story in the Lotus Sutra of Kuan-yin Bodhisattva. But I think it is no accident that in the Lotus Sutra this story is placed just before the Kuan-yin chapter. Kuan-yin is enormously famous for being able to take on any form in order to save others. One could easily think that this special power to take on different forms belongs to Kuan-yin alone. But in the Lotus Sutra we are clearly shown that almost exactly the same power and list of forms is also attributed to Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva. The point, I believe, is not that there are two bodhisattvas with such power, but that every bodhisattva has such power. We are not talking about magical tricks here. The ability to take on different forms according to what is needed means just that, an ability to adapt to different situations, particularly to the different needs of people. Taking on different forms is no more and no less than the ability to serve others usefully, practically, and effectively. This is a power given not only to the bodhisattvas Kuan-yin and Wonderful Voice, but to each and every one of us.

Thus, one obvious meaning of this story for us is that we too can become bodhisattvas who take on different forms and roles in order to help others. But there is another side to this, even its opposite—anyone can be a bodhisattva for us. If Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva can take on any form, anyone we meet might be Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva in a form designed to help us! But very often at least, someone can be a bodhisattva for us only if we let them, only if we open ourselves in such a way as to enable someone else to be a bodhisattva for us.

In chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra there are two stories, both of which suggest the importance of enabling by seeing. The first is ostensibly a story about Devadatta, someone whom everyone, at least in the Buddhist world, knows is the epitome of evil. He has tried to split the community of monks and even attempted on several occasions to kill or injure the Buddha. But in chapter 12 we find none of this, which everyone knows already. Instead we find the Buddha telling a story about a previous life in which Devadatta was his teacher. We may think this story is mainly about Deva-

datta, but, more importantly, it is a story about the Buddha, especially about the Buddha's ability to see the bodhisattva in Devadatta. The Buddha enables Devadatta by assuring him that he too is to become a buddha.

The second story in chapter 12 is about the dragon princess who becomes a buddha in an instant. Present are two men, Shariputra, who thinks that it is impossible for a woman to become a buddha, and Accumulated Wisdom Bodhisattva, who thinks it is crazy to think that a little girl could become awakened suddenly when it took even Shakyamuni Buddha many lifetimes. What the dragon princess says to them is very interesting. "Just watch," she says, "use your holy powers to see me become a buddha more quickly than it took for Shakyamuni Buddha to take a jewel from my hand?" In a sense, a little girl became a buddha for them, but she could do this only if they used their "holy powers," their vision, to allow it, to open themselves to it.

Normally we think of the Buddha Dharma as coming from the Buddha. This is correct, of course. But it is also essential to see that the Dharma, and therefore the Buddha, can come to us from many sources—if we open ourselves to it.

The title of the English version of the autobiography of Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, is *Lifetime Beginner*. The term "beginner" has connotations of being inexperienced or green. The implication of this, of course, is that one always needs to be learning, always needs to be open to new experience, new stories, new ideas. It is easy to think of this remarkable man as being self-taught, which in a sense he was. But he was self-taught only by learning from others, a great variety of others. He learned, for example, about Buddhist teachings from Buddhist scholars, including some very famous Buddhist scholars, but he also learned about Buddhism, and received the Buddha Dharma from ordinary members of Rissho Kosei-kai. He was a lifetime learner. The importance of being open to others, of learning from them, even of seeing the Buddha in them, is something we might learn from the story of Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva.

In the Christian New Testament, the Gospel According to John, speaks of "the Word." The Word was with God and was God; the Word "became flesh and dwelt among us." Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva is such a living word, the awakening that can come to us, not just as words spoken and written, but embodied in living beings, and not just in the body of one bodhisattva, but in many different bodies—bodies that are female as well as male, bodies that belong to the lowly as well as to the high, bodies that are nonhuman as well as human. Anyone we meet can be our extremely tall and handsome Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva. Truly, this is wonderful! □

Please note that the next installment of "The Threefold Lotus Sutra: A Modern Commentary," by Nikkyo Niwano will appear in the next issue.

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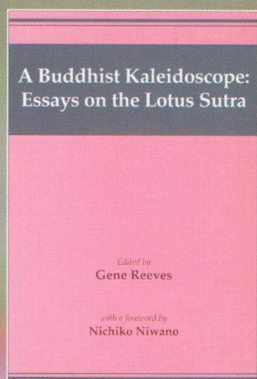
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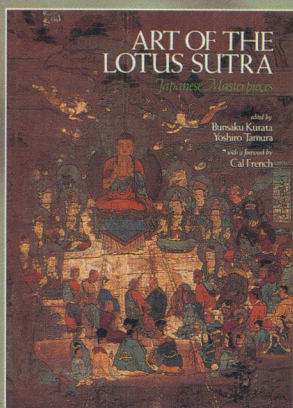
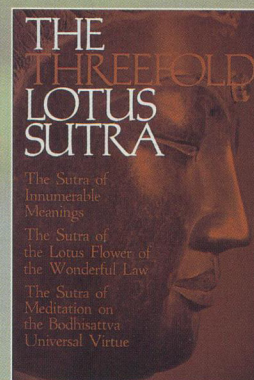
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