

FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

DHARMA WORLD

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Buddhism in Dialogue

From Disagreements to Dialogue and Understanding

Buddhism in Dialogue: Without Suspicion and Fear

We're All Together on the Alluvial Plain

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Cover photo: Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, in dialogue with Ven. Ryokei Onishi, former chief priest of the temple known as Kiyomizudera and founder of the Kita Hosso sect, on May 30, 1974, at Kiyomizudera in Kyoto.

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For Living Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue

Courtesy of the Institute for Zen Studies

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The Obligations of Religions in the Twenty-first Century

by Yasutaka Watanabe

The world's religions differ from one another in many respects, not only in doctrine and practice, but also in rites and prayers, and it is clear that the reason for this is that different climates, peoples, and cultures have given birth to the world's various religions.

I think that religions have been caught up in their differences for too long. Religions have too long ignored the fact that beyond their superficial differences they share many essentials. As a result of this focus on differences, we all know, and history shows, that conflicts attributed to religion have occurred repeatedly.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, many religions came to add introspection to their own histories. It dawned on them that, rather than directing attention to their differences, they should be directing their attention to the points they have in common.

One person who focused on these common points and opened the way to dialogue among religions was Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the late founder of Rissho Kosei-kai. He firmly believed that "all religions are one" and "all religions spring from the same source." He was propelled toward working for religious cooperation by his further conviction that since the happiness of all people and peace in the world were the common goals of all religions, religions should endeavor to have dialogue with one another.

These convictions were derived from the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, which Rev. Niwano came to believe in deeply.

It is well known that the Lotus Sutra recognizes not just a variety of divinities, but also a variety of doctrines and beliefs. In the Lotus Sutra, they are all described as pathways toward the "One Vehicle."

At Rissho Kosei-kai, there was a divine revelation that the truth and spirit of the Lotus Sutra will spread throughout the world through Rissho Kosei-kai's efforts. This does not mean that the Lotus Sutra's teachings will take the place of other religions, but rather that the spirit of the Lotus Sutra, which recognizes all other religions, will spread throughout the world.

Buddhism is called "the religion of tolerance," and, among the numerous Buddhist sutras, it is the Lotus Sutra that most advocates tolerance. Without such tolerance it would surely be difficult to continue or expand dialogue among religions.

Due to the population explosion, technological innovation, economic growth, and the like, intractable issues are piling up in the world of the twenty-first century, such as issues concerning natural resources, the environment, energy, poverty, and even finance (such as huge national debts). These are issues that must be solved through dialogue by all nations if the human race is to continue to survive and if we are to continue living together on this earth.

It is understandable that we must entrust these issues to politicians and economists as well as to scholars and specialists in various fields. But for issues of the human spirit, it is the religions that must work together through dialogue for the betterment of humanity. This is because no matter how much science and technology develop, if this is not accompanied by the betterment of humanity, the global crises will only keep increasing.

The chapter entitled "The Divine Power of the Tathagata" in the Lotus Sutra describes the ideal and goal for a society in the distant future, wherein all teachings will be integrated into one teaching, meeting the wishes of the gods and buddhas, and the earthly society will become like a buddha land. Working toward such an ideal and goal, I believe it is the responsibility of people of religion living in the twenty-first century to further continue and develop the tradition of dialogue among religions that began in the latter half of the twentieth century. □

Yasutaka Watanabe is the chief executive for dissemination affairs at Rissho Kosei-kai.

From Disagreements to Dialogue and Understanding

by Yasuaki Nara

From his own wide range of experience, the author has become convinced that meaningful dialogue can help to bring about mutual understanding, compassion, and self-reform.

It seems that there is conflict between the followers of different religions all over the world and sometimes it appears that the conflict will never end. The world is now an unsafe place, with strife between Catholics and Protestants, discord among the followers of various sects of Islam, acts of war between followers of Judeo-Christianity and Islam, troubled relations between Hindus and Muslims (in India) and Hindus and Buddhists (in Sri Lanka), bad blood between Buddhists and Christians in South Korea, and more.

Even though I have referred to “conflict” between the followers of religions, few of the current conflicts actually stem directly from religious dogma or observances or lifestyles. Rather, they have much more to do with disharmony involving the interests of the cultural, racial, or national groups of the followers of the various religions; however, the sense of belonging that followers have toward their own religions is

intense. There is no doubt whatsoever that it is their religious worldviews that are the ultimate cause of the strife.

It seems obvious that the desire to end such conflicts everywhere and to bring about lasting peace should be shared by all, and should also be all that is necessary for us to strive toward a spirit of better mutual understanding and a deeper sense of tolerance among the followers of different religions. The recent dialogues among religions have become increasingly more concerned with a sense of crisis regarding the situation and with an even stronger longing for peace; thus, these dialogues have assumed still greater importance.

Mutual Understanding and Self-Reform

Various dialogues have been taking place in Japan in recent years. Among the first was the Zen-Christian Colloquiums that began in 1967, which is scheduled to hold its forty-third regular meeting this year. In the Conference on Religion and Modern Society, which was inaugurated in 1971, religious scholars and leaders of different faiths in Japan get together once or twice a year, in order to “explore the possibility, value, and methods for dialogue and cooperation among diverse religions” as the primary objective. The East-West Spiritual Exchange program, started in 1979 by the Rinzai denomination of Zen Buddhism, brings Japanese Zen clerics and Catholic monks and nuns mainly from Europe together to experience each other’s monastic life; these programs have taken place several times, the tenth being held last year. Also, the Japan Society of Buddhist-Christian Studies, established in 1982, conducts dialogues that strive to achieve deeper mutual understanding and self-reform from an academic standpoint. Its twenty-fifth general meeting is planned for this year.

In 1991, shortly after the twenty-fifth anniversary of the ending of the Second Vatican Council, the Vatican designated four types of dialogue to pursue—dialogue concerning life, deeds and collaboration, theological exchange, and religious experience. The projects described above, how-

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ever, are principally meetings for dialogue of an academic nature and programs for spiritual exchange.

It has been my good fortune to have been involved with almost all of them, and I have participated in particular in the Zen-Christian Colloquiums from the very beginning, learning many things from the dialogue.

The colloquiums were started with the participation of people in Zen and Christian leadership positions. Some of them are now deceased, and today the colloquiums include people from outside Zen, such as those connected with other Buddhist groups or with Shinto. The themes for the first colloquium were "Inward Journey" and "The Social Responsibilities of People of Religion." We lived together for four days, during which time we took turns expressing our thoughts; there were some disagreements, but we developed a generalized mutual understanding. For many of the participants, it was the first time to take part in a dialogue format, so the process began on a sort of trial-and-error basis. As experience grew, doctrine and ideology came to be discussed as well, but I believe that one fortunate aspect of the colloquium is that all the participants knew of the futility of indulging in doctrinal disputes and were also aware of the value of spiritual exchange. At no time was there a struggle for superiority or an attitude of teaching the other person a lesson. Rather, in the spirit of acknowledging each individual's personal beliefs, there was a great deal of discussion of contemporary issues, agreement, and shared compassion. Such is the type of mutual understanding that comes about through true dialogue.

At the same time, we were all able to strengthen our own faiths by learning about the faiths and practices of other religions, which encouraged us to look at things from new perspectives. Furthermore, encountering a marvelous state of mind, spirituality, or action in followers of other faiths, it was not rare for that to lead to reflection upon our own religious beliefs. It is through these things that I have become convinced that dialogue helps to bring about better mutual understanding and self-reform.

From Disagreement to Dialogue

Other types of dialogue have also been held in Japan, such as the World Conference of Religions for Peace or the Religious Summit Meeting on Mount Hiei, first advocated in 1987 by the Venerable Etai Yamada, the late chief priest of the Tendai sect of Japanese Buddhism. Religions for Peace began in 1970 with the Kyoto World Assembly. Its Eighth World Assembly was held this year in August, once again in Kyoto. In the meantime, a network of the leaders of many religions has been created, resulting in continuous interaction between various faiths, deeper mutual understanding, and movements for peace. Leaders of the world's religions have on several occasions assembled there to pray for peace and to hold symposiums.

It is significant that such large-scale meetings for dialogue

are continuing and that their activities have developed. One reason is that the leaders of many world religions have met under one roof, have prayed together for peace, and have deepened mutual understanding and compassion to the point of jointly undertaking efforts toward peace.

It is good to look back at world history. When different religions and cultures encountered each other in the past, we do not find from the very beginning any broadmindedness of mutual understanding or tolerance of other religions. When Christianity arrived in Japan in the sixteenth century, debates between Catholic priests and Buddhist monks occurred, but these could not be called "dialogues" so much as verbal exchanges in which each side did nothing more than strongly criticize the other. The famous "Panadura Controversy," which took place in Sri Lanka in 1873, was one of a series of public debates between Protestant clergymen and Buddhist priests. The debates were conducted in an extremely systematic manner, but from the start each side pointed to what it called the other's "falsehoods" and "deceptions." The debates became fiercely competitive doctrinal arguments and cannot be considered "dialogue" of any kind. There was similar friction when Christianity entered China; even in Korea today, relations between Christianity and Buddhism are not conducive to dialogue.

When one looks back over this history, the fact that gatherings such as the World Conference of Religions for Peace and the Religious Summit Meeting on Mount Hiei have led the leaders of the world's religions to a posture of dialogue is extremely meaningful. We must place the highest value on these efforts, which have resulted in religious leaders from all over the world gathering in one place to acknowledge the meaning and value of one another's faiths and thus achieving the strengthening of an attitude of commitment to working for peace.

Dialogue at the Regional Level

We have now reached a stage in which the leaders of the world's religions are meeting in the same place to work together to solve mutual problems. The various groups have shown tolerance for other religions, have continued their dialogue, and have adopted an attitude of peaceful coexistence. I believe, however, that the issue for the future is the need for these activities to permeate down to the level of the ordinary citizen.

Mutual understanding among religions is not an issue for the select leadership alone; if the general public is not involved, the dialogue's effectiveness will be low. Ultimately, the religious dialogue of Religions for Peace is a means of seeking and achieving peace, and a peace movement must be a mass movement in order to be effective. At the same time, the efforts of people of religion in working for peace can also be seen as a kind of validation of their faith.

Looking over the trends in the dialogue meetings that have taken place over the past few years, I can say that they

Japanese Zen clerics attending a mass with Catholic monks at St. Ottilien Archabbey, a Benedictine monastery in Germany, during the third East-West Spiritual Exchange program held in August and September 1987.

have dealt in various ways with how Buddhism is succeeding as a religion of peace, and as a religion that can coexist with other faiths. Subjects that have been explored include “the compassionate spirit,” “the idea of harmony,” “the Four Immeasurables: loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity,” “becoming one with others,” “benefiting others,” “tolerance,” “knowing satisfaction with little,” and “taking on the pain of others.” Although these are important as an ideological basis while the peace movement is growing, theories are still only theories, and I believe that how they are actually put into practice is much more important. The peace movement from here on must grow systematically, from theory to practice, and from dialogue among a small elite to dialogue among the peoples of the world.

If such dialogues were to be based on the Buddhist idea of dependent origination, the relationship between the overall organization (the whole; the global community as the largest such entity) and the individual members (separate elements) could be described as follows. First, (1) individual elements exist because there is a whole. Conversely, the whole is made up of individual elements. However, (2) a mere assemblage of individual elements does not constitute a whole; the whole is the aggregate of complex individual relationships. (3) Individual elements are always individual to the end and will not accept being lost in the whole. The dictatorial approach is not the correct one for organization. At the same time, (4) individuals must collaborate toward achieving major ideals, such as peace. In that sense, the

whole is the venue for cooperative action along with enabling the individual to exist.

Concerning future religious dialogue, people must be encouraged to undertake small-scale dialogues among themselves. It would be good if small dialogue groups could themselves serve as venues for people working together for peace as a major objective while respecting the different ways of thinking and lifestyles of the individual participants. These small dialogue groups could then go on to form the individual units in ever larger venues for collaboration.

It is my sincere hope that the many Buddhist-related non-profit organizations in Japan will provide a starting point for specific movements in this direction. They are the groups that are already working together through volunteer activities to overcome the differences between the many religious denominations and faiths. In that sense, they are putting into practice the Vatican’s “dialogue of deeds and collaboration.” A Buddhist NGO network already put together by the various organizations is at this time working out a collaborative posture.

At the same time that they are individually developing movements on their own, the small dialogue groups are also responding to the demands of the times. They will serve as models for the regional dialogues that will grow in the future, and at the same time they are already putting their beliefs into practice. I also believe strongly that mutual understanding and self-reform are vital principles for such movements. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, “You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” □

Buddhism in Dialogue: Without Suspicion and Fear

by Gerhard Köberlin

Recent examples of dialogue in action in Germany have involved Muslims and Buddhists there acting on their common environmental responsibility, especially involving climatic change.

When Whalen Lai at the University of California, Berkeley, and Michael von Brück at the University of Munich published their *Buddhism and Christianity: History, Confrontation, Dialogue* in 1997, they set a clear framework of understanding for dialogue: it must be contextual, because religions have their own historical dynamics of social and religious communication. My context is German and European.

Stephen Batchelor, in his account of Buddhism in the West (*The Awakening of the West*, 1994), informs us that the first Buddhist monastery in a European capital was the temple in St. Petersburg, founded in 1909 by Agvan Dorzhiev, a member of the Buryat people of Mongolia and well-known as an advisor to the thirteenth Dalai Lama. Buddhism, though, had arrived in Europe at the beginning of the Romantic Movement in the early nineteenth century. The first

German engagement with Buddhism, by people such as Arthur Schopenhauer, was concerned with the study of texts, not the meeting of people. The later story of encounter began with the Theravada tradition (early twentieth century) and then with Zen (the middle of that century) and Tibetan Buddhism (the Dalai Lama as a refugee, 1959).

Growth of Dialogue

The growth of dialogue only began after Buddhists, Buddhist monasteries, meditation centers, and teachers were living side by side with people of other faiths in Europe in the 1980s. In a growing pluralist context, dialogue with Buddhism received further impetus from the arrival of more Buddhist refugees (Mahayana after the Vietnam War, including Thich Nhat Hanh), by Third-World tourism (Theravada in Sri Lanka and Thailand), by Burmese masters of Vipassana (Mahasi Sayadaw and U Ba Khin), and by the blend of Californian Zen and the hippie culture. The most important lesson to be learned through the development of encounter was the identification of levels of dialogue. Levels related to meditation, daily life, common action, and doctrinal dialogue were distinguished. These levels should not be projected onto each other. They reflect the legacy of insights from the first great ecumenical conference in Kandy, in what was then still Ceylon, in 1967, where it was emphasized that dialogue is the encounter of people, not of dogmas or of "religions."

In the German context I observe a special interest in dialogue in the area of meditation, rather than doctrine or social action. It is this spiritual practice that is most open to the development of understanding between Christians and Buddhists, including the process of "interreligious learning." The Christian ecumenical movement coined the word "ecumenical learning"—the process of seeing oneself through

Gerhard Köberlin, now retired, is the former director of studies at the Academy of Mission at the University of Hamburg. A minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, he is a founding member of the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies 1996 and chairperson of the German Asia Foundation in Essen.

the eyes of the other. Although meditation does not directly lead to sharing on the level of words and concepts, it seems to help with dialogue. Many Christians are grateful to their Buddhist meditation teachers. Many Buddhists begin to reapproach their former Christian upbringing by friendship with their Christian students. I do not think that this level of dialogue will lead deep into each other's doctrinal tradition. This would need a serious intercultural hermeneutics and a process of study. The interest in meditation is, however, not directed at this difficult and lengthy task of intercultural, interreligious communication.

Engaged Buddhism

An issue-oriented approach was started by the Protestant Academy of Bad Boll in 1983, when a Thai-German dialogue was initiated. It was felt that the "religious dimension" should be part and parcel of intercultural dialogue. So members of groups of farmers, workers, women's organizations, journalists, students, environmental activists, and religious representatives from both countries were invited to meet in Bad Boll. They explored together common economic, political, and human issues. They also listened to the well-known Buddhist Ajahn [Master] Sulak Sivaraksa, Theravada, and Rev. Prasit Saetang of the Church of Christ in Thailand speak about their religious motivation and engagement in human rights work.

The inauguration of the International Network of Engaged Buddhism (INEB) in 1989 helped Christian friends to join in the common task of addressing such issues as the plight of Burmese refugees, deforestation, and the basic question of spiritual practice in relation to globalized consumerism. INEB was an Asian initiative by Sulak Sivaraksa along with Rev. Teruo Maruyama, a priest of the Nichiren sect of Japanese Buddhism. Another Buddhist platform has proved to be important for dialogue: the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, founded by U.S. Buddhists in 1978 (much influenced by Thich Nhat Hanh). Today it represents an inculturated form of Buddhism in the West, having much experience in the practice of cooperation with other groups in society, often in coalition with Christians.

On the level of dialogue in action, more experience will develop. In Germany, a recent initiative of the Protestant Ernst Lange Institute for Ecumenical Studies has led to the Göttingen dialogue (2002) and the Loccum dialogue (2003). These have involved German Muslims and Buddhists acting on their common environmental responsibility, especially concerning climatic change. They recognized that they have different religious teachings and practices. However, their religious experience convinced them to work together in a common political engagement in relation to ecology and to climatic change in German society. They also agreed to confront the dominant culture of consumerism in society. Their dialogue will continue to focus on promoting a culture of sharing, and on the contribution of their religious traditions to bring about positive change in society.

The Hard Work of Thinking

When it comes to the hard work of thinking—Christian study of Buddhism, Buddhist studies of Christianity—again Buddhism in the U.S. and Asia is ahead of Europe. The Society for Buddhist Christian Studies was started in 1980 under the late David Chappell at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Their detailed work in the areas of concepts and traditions is well documented, including the famous dialogues of John Cobb and Masao Abe. In Europe it took a little longer. The European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies (ENBCS) was founded in 1996 at the Academy of Mission of the University of Hamburg. The academy is the national theological institute of the Protestant churches in Germany, organizing exchange programs with people involved in the contextual theologies of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The senior-most monk in Europe, Ven. Dr. Rewata Dhamma, originally from Burma then later from Birmingham, England, opened the first meeting of the ENBCS in Hamburg. "A Buddhist expects from a Christian . . . freedom from suspicion and fear," he said, because "feelings of suspicion and fear are a real hindrance to our understanding." He spoke of his experience with "many Christian monks, priests and nuns, and lay people practicing Buddhist meditation in their daily lives," saying that "some of them have said that because of meditation their understanding of their Christian faith and its teachings had grown deeper and stronger."

Understanding requires the hard work of thinking. This level of dialogue has already produced important Christian theologians (Catholic: Enomiya Lassalle, Heinrich Dumoulin, Protestant: Werner Kohler, Masatoshi Doi). Benedictine monasteries have contributed to this work by sharing in monastic practice. After *Nostra Aetate* (Vatican II, 1965), the first exchange between Japanese Buddhist monks and nuns and Roman Catholic Benedictine monasteries in Europe began in 1979. The Inter-Monastic Dialogue (abbreviated as DIM in French) was established, with Brother Thomas Josef Götz of St. Ottilien in Germany a key person in its development. The ENBCS was able to draw on these experiences, with Brother Götz becoming its secretary (see www.buddhist-christian-studies.org).

The ENBCS also drew on Buddhist contributions to understanding Jesus. The German Buddhist Ayya Khema (Theravada) had published her study of the Sermon on the Mount in 1995 (*Jesus Meets the Buddha*), and the Vietnamese Thich Nhat Hanh had published his *Living Buddha, Living Christ* in the same year.

The ENBCS's hermeneutical starting point was not actually the concept of "dialogue." Dialogue is an ancient concept developed within the context of European culture, but an equivalent in the Pali terminology cannot be found. Sulak Sivaraksa suggested using the word *kalyanamitta* instead. This opens an interesting avenue of interreligious

learning after the change of view brought about by the Kandy conference, away from “religion” to “people” and “encounter”: Buddhism and Christianity cannot be translated one into the other, but they can be friends in the same way. They can come together by sharing in the same moment, the same openness of space, the sharing of life. This approach has to deal with the miracle of human encounter. Its starting point is hermeneutical. Its context is the plurality of religions, and within a religious tradition it starts with the “otherness” of the other.

Buddhist-Christian Studies

From this starting point the European study conferences organized by ENBCS—under the chairmanship of the Norwegian Lutheran, Professor Aasulv Lande of the University of Lund—in Germany (St. Ottilien 1999) and in Sweden (Höör/Lund 2001) cleared the ground for Buddhist and Christian perceptions of each other. The leading European theologian in this hermeneutical field, Perry Schmidt-Leukel, volunteered to draw up the method and process of these conferences. He had published a basic hermeneutical study, *Den Löwen brüllen hören*, in 1992. Both Buddhists and Christians, he said, read the thinking of the other from within their own context. Buddhists emphasized the harm caused by Christianity through its association with colonial imperialism, and Christians pointed to Buddhism as an atheistic and quietist philosophy. The ENBCS conferences ended with the happy insight that, on both sides, there is a fresh beginning of study and encounter—reading the thinking of the other as friends, without suspicion and fear.

The conference in 1999 looked at Buddhist perceptions of Jesus and in 2001 turned to study the Christian perception of the Buddha. The negative perception of Jesus by Ceylonese Buddhists in the nineteenth century had for a long time shaped the apologetics of later modernist Buddhists, such as K. N. Jayatilleke. However, this perception has become obsolete for Buddhists like Ayya Khema, who no longer feel hurt by their own biographical story in a Jewish and Christian context. The research of Klaus Bitter (1988) and of Martin Baumann (1995) had shown that, in general, Buddhists in Germany experienced a break in their Christian tradition. Their rootedness in Christianity and their knowledge of it was very weak. Any “dialogue with Christianity” was thus not meaningful. Their perception of Christianity was shaped by their personal story.

Similarly, the perception of Buddhism by Christian theologians was long dominated by the suspicion that it is atheistic, thus false and an inferior religion. They were unable to understand Buddhism on its own ground, but could only perceive the other from within their own framework of experience—the historic experience of the nineteenth century criticism of religion.

The follow-up conferences in Scotland (Samye Ling/Glasgow, 2003) and Germany (St. Ottilien, 2005) then discussed some hard issues of difference: the doctrine of cre-

ation (karmic or divine), and religious identity (conversion or dual identity). With great joy, the ENBCS has worked together with its elder brother in North America, the Society for Buddhist Christian Studies. Their first joint conference is being planned for 2009 in St. Ottilien. The North American and Asian dialogue now has a European partner!

Theology of Religions

Under the new chairmanship of John D’Arcy May, the Roman Catholic professor from Australia at the Irish School of Ecumenics in Dublin, the ENBCS is preparing for its seventh study conference in Salzburg, Austria, in 2007. Christian theology needs to reflect on its “theology of religions” when it formulates its relationship with Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, from within its own understanding of religion. Does it relate from an exclusive point of view, or does it relate inclusively—making Buddhists “anonymous Christians”? Or is there a Christian acknowledgment of religious pluralism, a “pluralist” theology of religion? People like Paul Knitter, John Hick, and Perry Schmidt-Leukel are leading this theological debate. The ENBCS does not take a stand on these basic concepts of dialogue, but provides the platform for serious work on the appropriate theological approach to the growing reality of religious pluralism in Europe, pluralism in Christianity, and European-minded Buddhism. The working principle of the ENBCS, however, is to do this work together—with the “other.” It believes that both Buddhists and Christians can no longer address these questions individually. The era of “a common religious history” (Wilfred Cantwell Smith) has come.

At last year’s planning meeting, the ENBCS decided to provide a platform for Buddhists to reflect on their “theology of religions.” The theme of the Salzburg conference planned for June 8–11, 2007, will therefore be “Buddhist Attitudes toward Other Religions.” It will deal with such topics as “Buddhist Inclusivism: Is Buddhism the Superior Way?” “Buddhist Pluralism: Can Buddhism Accept Other Religions as Equal Ways?” and “Intrareligious Relationships in Buddhism: Controversy and Ecumenism.” In this conference, interfaith contexts will be studied, such as Buddhist-Hindu relationships, Buddhist-Muslim relationships, Buddhist-Christian relationships, and Buddhist-Jewish relationships. The conference will close with summing up the Buddhist and Christian attitudes toward other religions.

It is important to note that in most cases the Christian side is over-represented in meetings on “dialogue.” The membership of the ENBCS also reflects this asymmetric relationship. In realistic terms, the German context relates to some 50 million Christians and 200,000 Buddhists. However, both sides face a similar task in encountering each other as friends: which place does the other have in my own tradition, the Buddha in Christianity, Jesus in Buddhism? What is the place of the other—as a Christian, as a Buddhist? We have decided to do our homework on this by exchanging our studies. Welcome to old Europe! □

We're All Together on the Alluvial Plain

Anecdotal Accounts of the Necessity for, and Challenges to, Interreligious Dialogue

by Kenneth K. Tanaka

Our world seems to have become closer and smaller with technological advancements in communication and transportation, a state aptly described by the well-known phrase “global village.” The Internet, for example, enables us to be in touch with people everywhere, exchanging large amounts of information quickly and inexpensively. More people around the globe are traveling greater distances more frequently.

In the countries of Europe and North America, we are witnessing an unprecedented level of diversity among peoples and religions. For example, Islam and Asian religions, including Buddhism, now have a much greater presence in the metropolitan areas of the United States, so much so that the U.S. can no longer be considered a “Judeo-Christian country.” Even in Japan, the number of foreigners is estimated to increase in the future because of shortages in labor.

This situation is aptly captured by the metaphor of the

“Alluvial Plain,” which was coined by Professor John Hick, a well-known Christian theologian and religious philosopher. According to Professor Hick, each of the religious traditions has been like a company of people marching down a long valley, singing their own songs and telling their stories for centuries. However, they have been unaware that over the hill there is another valley with another great company of people marching in the same direction with their own language, songs, stories, and ideas. And over yet another hill, another group is marching. They are all unaware of one another.

But one day they all emerge onto the same plain, the plain created by modern global communications, and for the first time in history they all see one another and wonder what to make of one another.¹

We are now in full sight of one another and are living together in one global community. The need for mutual understanding and cooperation has never been greater. This is especially the case as these religious groups constitute nations that now possess nuclear weapons, which if used are capable of bringing an end to human civilization and causing irreparable damage to the natural world.

The Pope and the Day of Prayer

Though not a nuclear holocaust, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were nearly as horrific, undermining our collective sense of security. Viewing the televised images of the World Trade Center towers in New York collapsing into rubble, the whole of humanity realized concretely what hatred and ignorance can produce. Several months later, in January 2002, Pope John Paul II called upon the religious leaders of the world to gather at Assisi, Italy, the home of Saint Francis, “the man of peace,” for a Day of Prayer for Peace in the World.

I was fortunate to attend the gathering as academic advisor to Rev. Chiko Iwagami, then president of the Japan Buddhist Federation. The gathering lasted several days and

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included a conclave for the delegates to share their views on peace. Rev. Iwagami articulated the Buddhist teachings of: (1) interdependence, (2) nonself-centered wisdom, and (3) nonviolence, concluding with the well-known Dhammapada passage from the teachings of the Buddha:

"Hatred is not overcome by hatred. Only by non-hatred can it be overcome."

I sensed that the power of that passage filled the hall and captured the undivided attention of the representatives in attendance, including Francis Cardinal Arinze, the person in charge of interreligious dialogue for the Roman Catholic Church.

On the final day, the two hundred delegates were invited to meet with the pope. As I approached him, I shook his hand and blurted out something to this effect: "By coming to this gathering I feel I want to work even harder for peace." The pope, afflicted by Parkinson's disease, tried to reply to me as he jerked our clasped hands up and then down onto his lap. His few words were not intelligible, but his firm grip and gesture conveyed his affirmation and encouragement.

This positive encounter was a reconciliation of sorts for me, as several years earlier I had joined thousands of Buddhists around the world in expressing our displeasure with the pope's misrepresentation of Buddhism in his book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. I felt that what seemed to us to be a caricaturing of Buddhism (for example, "nirvana" was defined as "a state of perfect *indifference* with regard to the world") was deeply troubling, especially since it came from someone who was positioned to help lead the world in cultivating mutual understanding among the peoples of different religions. The pope, to his credit, had made efforts to reconcile differences by holding a series of meetings with Buddhists in Asia.

I criticized the pope's book in an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, saying that in my judgment the pope had not "done his homework" and instead had merely spouted off stereotypes of Buddhism. Some were aghast that I would openly criticize the pope, but I felt strongly that his portrayal of Buddhism was not only wrong, but harmful. Stereotypes may seem innocuous, but they can foster sinister views about "the other" and erupt into violent actions when conditions become ripe. This can be seen in the case of the perpetrators of 9/11, as well as in the harmful utterances of some Americans who later wanted revenge on *all* Muslims.

That brief encounter with the pope put my mind at ease, as I realized that, despite some of his past divisive words regarding Buddhists, he was now making greater efforts to bring people together and to foster interreligious dialogue.

Religious Dialogue Needed for Peace

No one has made the case for religious dialogue more forcefully on the international stage than Professor Hans Küng. The recipient of the 2005 Niwano Peace Prize reiterated his fundamental outlook at the symposium honoring his award:

"There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among religions."²

I believe this assumption is generally correct. It is heartening, therefore, to see that such groups as the World Conference of Religions for Peace are actively working toward that aim.

Personally speaking, I have been involved in interreligious dialogue groups over the years, notably the Society for Buddhist Christian Studies and the International Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter (IBCTE), both of which are centered in the United States. One of my initial motives for taking part was to learn more firsthand about what Christians thought about various issues. I reasoned that it would help my work as an American Buddhist scholar and priest if I learned more about the dominant religion of the United States. Well, it did help and yielded some surprising results, as will be discussed below.

Buddhist, Christian, and Jewish Trialogue

Dialogue among religions is truly needed, much more than most Buddhists realize. This was made apparent to me through a course called "Buddhist, Christian, and Jewish Trialogue," which I team-taught at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, with two women faculty members, one a Christian and the other Jewish. I learned about the depth of mistrust and antagonism that defined some Jewish-Christian relationships.

The Jewish faculty member spoke often of the fear that she still felt as a Jew, even though the U.S. was a far more tolerant country than parts of Europe, where her ancestors had lived. The effects of persecution and isolation experienced by Jews for centuries in Europe had been deeply ingrained in her psyche, even though she had been born and raised in the U.S.

I was astounded to hear her share with the class that she still does not leave her Jewish books in her car when parking it on the street. She would either hide them in the trunk or turn the books face down so that people would not be able to see the titles from the outside! And this act was prompted by her fear that someone might damage the car or harm her if they found that the car belonged to a Jew.

She admitted that this could be considered a paranoid over-reaction, but the class felt that her feelings and actions were understandable, and revealed for us the depth of the psychological wound that she as a member of a religiously persecuted minority had experienced. It also symbolized the division and antagonism that many members of these two religions had experienced for centuries. Our Christian colleague then said that while the vitriolic rhetoric has, by and large, been eliminated, there are still many Christian congregations in the U.S. that continue to perpetuate negative stereotypes about Jews, including the one about the Jews being responsible for Jesus' death.

It turned out that we Buddhists in the class served more as therapists for the Jews and the Christians, who had a lot to work out between them. This “trialogue” certainly helped me to realize that there does exist a dire need for greater mutual understanding and reconciliation among the peoples of different religions, thus confirming the need for interreligious dialogue described earlier in Professor Küng’s statement.

During the trialogue, I also found myself feeling a tinge of superiority, because Buddhists have not had the same kind of conflicts with other religions. For example, I found myself thinking that we “peaceful” Buddhists have not perpetrated wars, and our “tolerant” nature has not condemned people of other faiths to hell. But upon deeper reflection and study,

to have very little interaction with other groups and sects within Buddhism. We are isolated in our separate religious communities.

Many years ago, during my Ph.D. comprehensive exam, I was asked what percentage of the members of the Nishi-Honganji temple in Kyoto had visited the Higashi-Honganji temple located just one block away, and vice versa. These two branches of the same Jodo Shinshu denomination had been one institution only four hundred years earlier. I had to reply, “Extremely low.” And I believe I was right, and that most people associated with these groups would agree. In Japan, this is not an isolated case among Buddhist groups.

In contrast, relatively unencumbered by the historical

The author meeting with Pope John Paul II on the final day of the Day of Prayer for Peace at Assisi, in January 2002.

I realized that my impressions were not always correct, and my initial thoughts reflected my ignorance and religious hubris.

For example, many Japanese Buddhist denominations continue to struggle with the issue of facing up to their responsibility for supporting the military regime during World War II, as well as past discriminatory practices against the members of the *buraku* community.³ In Cambodia, though the Buddhist institutions were not direct perpetrators, a strong “Buddhist country” permitted hatred to run rampant, allowing the killing of 2 million of her own people. Thus, our Buddhist front yard may be picturesque, but the backyard has not been fully cleaned up.

A Need for Dialogue among Buddhists

As just seen, Buddhists in Japan may not outright condemn and exclude others, including other Buddhists, but we tend

baggage carried by Buddhists in Asia, the Buddhist councils in the U.S. are very active. Having been a member of one such council in California for a number of years, I had the opportunity to meet and interact with Buddhists from the whole spectrum of traditions, from Thailand to Korea. Through these interactions, I had to change some of my preconceptions about other Buddhist schools. Consciously or not, many of us have been “indoctrinated” to some extent in our religious education to think in terms of a hierarchy (based, for example, on the “classifying of teachings” called *banjiao* or *hankyo*), in which one’s own tradition is invariably ranked at the top as the most complete, superior, and appropriate Buddhist teaching.

I found it ironic that the “small vehicle” Theravadins were actually the most fervent supporters of the council activities compared to many of the “great vehicle” Mahayanists, some of whom were very reluctant to participate, especially those

of the Japanese and Tibetan schools. As a member of the Mahayana tradition, I had to revise another of my stereotypes.

Limitations of Dialogue

While interreligious dialogue is sorely needed for mutual understanding and world peace, dialogue *by itself* is far from adequate. Religious leaders certainly have influence in the world, but decisions concerning war and peace among nations are decided by politicians. Numerous pleas by the Dalai Lama, the pope, and other world religious leaders could not prevent President George W. Bush from going to war in Iraq. And who controls the use of nuclear weapons? The secular leaders do. Consequently, religious leaders must make unrelenting efforts to direct their message of peace and reconciliation to secular world leaders.

Another area of concern is that support for and interest in interfaith dialogue is generally weak, especially among the leaders of religious *institutions*, who generally serve as “defenders” of their tradition and who represent a generally conservative mindset. It seems that an attitude of “superiority” *vis-à-vis* other religious traditions is so prevalent that a genuine dialogue among *institutional leaders* is difficult to realize.

Consequently, many of the rank and file members of religious institutions feel that their path is exceptional and superior, contributing to an attitude of what I call “exceptionalism.” This attitude, then, gives them little motivation to engage in dialogue with those of other religions or even other branches of the same religion.

A Call to Dialogue

Among Christian theologians, it is generally thought that there are three modes of relationship among religions: (1) “exclusivism,” (2) “inclusivism,” and (3) “pluralism.” The exclusivist position is best represented by Karl Barth, who asserted that people can be saved only through the teachings of Christ, which are unique and ultimate. Hence, others are excluded. The inclusivist position affirms other religions but regards them to be essentially the same as Christianity. This, then, implies that non-Christians, though they may not be aware of it, are in effect “anonymous Christians.” Both positions rest on the belief that Christianity is the *only* true religion.

On the other hand, the pluralist position advocated, for example, by John Hick, assumes that religions (limited to “great world faiths”) are expressions of a common truth. Those subscribing to this position tend to seek commonality among the religions and are generally attracted to interfaith dialogue. I see myself among them, but would not go so far as to insist, as Professor Hick does, that all valid paths reflect and lead to the *same* truth.⁴ I believe that many of the religions constitute *similarly* valid paths to truth.

I, therefore, have a great deal of difficulty with those who adhere to the exclusivist or inclusivist positions. From my

Buddhist perspective there is no *universal* criterion by which people of one faith can make judgments about others. If others find salvation or liberation through their paths, that does not undermine my faith. Unfortunately, however, there are plenty of people who cannot accept other religions as being similarly valid to their own.

I personally encountered such a person at an interfaith dialogue session. At this particular session, the discussion moved to the topic of the nature of “the ultimate path,” which, as it turned out, began to raise some extremely sensitive issues. An unusually tense atmosphere hung over the discussion table, a rare turn of events for the usually jovial dialogue group comprising mostly liberal-minded members.

One of the Christian members gave voice to her fundamental view that Jesus was the sole path through which one can be saved. It was clearly what anyone would regard as an exclusivist position, taking all of us in the group—both Buddhist and Christian—by surprise. As I asked for clarification, she reiterated her view that her Christian faith necessitated that she take that position, and that I as a Buddhist was, therefore, *not* included in that soteriological scheme. I responded to her that I understood that I would not be in *her* scheme since I was not Christian, and asked her if I would nevertheless be saved. After some hesitation, in so many words she replied that I would *not* be!

Successes and Hope for Greater Dialogue

In this era of the “global village,” interreligious dialogue is needed more than ever. Dialogues can take place on three levels: (1) teachings and practices, (2) religious experience, and (3) actions taken together for a common goal. It is inevitable that we find the greatest areas of disagreement on level one, for they reflect the historical and cultural conditions of the traditions.

Religious experiences, on the other hand, tend to have greater commonality. For example, William James’s classic, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, showed a remarkably high level of similarity in spiritual experiences across numerous traditions.

On the third level, we probably will find the greatest degree of commonality, for we are working toward the *same* goals. At the international level, a group such as the World Conference of Religions for Peace brings together religious leaders in common action, but I believe that there needs to be more effort made at the *local* level, where the positive effect of interfaith cooperation can have an impact upon a far greater number of people.

When I served for a few years as a priest at a Buddhist temple in California, I participated in a local interfaith group composed of religious professionals from the Christian, Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhist faiths. The relationships fostered through the group gave my temple members a greater sense of belonging to a wider community located on the same Alluvial Plain where we all made our living regardless of our religious differences.

A similar local interfaith group in New York City made an invaluable contribution in the aftermath of 9/11, when the city was in dire need of spiritual leadership. They worked together to lead vigils and memorial services, comforted a community suffering from grief and shock, and helped to prevent divisions among religious groups in an area that included a large Muslim population.

Another exemplary event worth mentioning took place over one hundred years ago. It was the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, considered to be a precursor to Religions for Peace.⁵ There, East met West on an equal footing. Representatives of Buddhism such as Anagarika Dharmapala of Ceylon and Soyen Shaku of Japan showed Buddhism in a positive light not only as a religious tradition of great antiquity but also as one with the capacity to meet the needs of contemporary society. In fact, the many in attendance who had little knowledge or only a stereotypical understanding of Buddhism came away with new respect and interest.

In Conclusion

Thus, interreligious efforts on both local and international levels have made a positive difference in the past, but as this essay tries to show, the need for more communication and understanding is palpable among the peoples now occupying our globally connected Alluvial Plain. As dialogues are opened, they will offer participants an opportunity to reflect on: (1) the resistance of religious institutions to participate in dialogue, (2) the need to take responsibility for their past misdeeds, and (3) their mistaken sense of exceptionalism and stereotypes about others.

In so doing, we shall take steps toward actualizing the ideals espoused by Professor Küng, as well as by the Dalai Lama, the late Nikkyo Niwano, and other Buddhist leaders past and present. I believe that the late Pope John Paul II would have been pleased, for I now think that his unintelligible words to me were something to the effect of, "Wonderful! Now go do it!" □

Notes

1. John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), 41.

2. Hans Küng, "No Clash, but Dialogue among Religions and Nations," *DHARMA WORLD*, September/October 2005 (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Company), 23–26.

3. Members of the "outcaste" social class, who experienced severe discrimination during the feudal period, with vestiges of it still felt into the modern era.

4. I depart from Hick's view on this point since there is no *criterion* or *basis* for determining if the various paths lead to the *same* truth. Thus, it would be more appropriate to say "similar" than "the same."

5. See <http://www.wcrp.org/>

Responding to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the U.S. and the ensuing military action in Afghanistan, more than 150 eminent religious delegates from 30 countries gathered in New York on October 23–24 of the same year for a symposium held by Religions for Peace to renew their commitment to peace by promoting dialogue among the world's religions and cultures.

Buddhist-Islamic Dialogue: Present Status and Future Outlook

by Yoshiaki Sanada

True interreligious dialogue does not mean people of different faiths merely tolerating or coexisting with one another. Even less does it mean simple exchanges of information or simple insistence on one's own point of view.

As is widely known, the Second Vatican Council, which convened from 1962 to 1965, took interreligious dialogue, at that point still only a small trickle, and mobilized it into the major global current that it is today. Since then, representatives of religions from around the world have taken many opportunities to meet under one roof and hold various types of conferences to foster mutual understanding and respect for religious diversity, and to discuss the many issues now confronting humankind.

Religions for Peace Middle East Conference: Japanese Religions Meet Islam

The World Conference of Religions for Peace is part of this global trend toward interreligious dialogue. The religions of Japan, particularly the religious organizations and leaders that make up the Japanese Committee of Religions for Peace, have clearly professed their belief that there can be no peace among nations and no peace in the world without interreligious dialogue and cooperation and have vowed to take on the mission of acting as emissaries of peace.

With respect to relations with the Islamic world, of particular note was the Conference on the Middle East that was convened in Tokyo and Kyoto in 1992. Deeply concerned about the Gulf War occasioned by the Iraqi army's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the Japanese Committee invited religious leaders to Japan from the Middle Eastern Islamic world, as well as from Judaism and Christianity. As a first attempt by Japanese religious leaders to take the initiative to build bridges toward peace between Islam and other religions, it marked a completely new departure.

Religious Summit Meeting on Mount Hiei

Predating this conference was the Religious Summit Meeting on Mount Hiei, convened in August 1987, when the religions of Japan organized the Japan Conference of Religious Representatives in order to mobilize their combined strength to bring together leaders of the world's religions, including Islam, in Japan. Ten years later, in 1997, Japan's

religious organizations again mobilized to cooperatively hold the Interreligious Gathering of Prayer for World Peace.

However, as the world prepared to welcome the twenty-first century—which was supposed to be the “Century of Peace”—the curtain was instead wrenched apart by terrorism and war, crushing the hopes and prayers of a great many people. The simultaneous acts of terrorism unleashed on the United States on September 11, 2001, were an enormous shock to the world.

Reacting to the various developments throughout the world following the September 11 terrorist attacks, religious leaders in Japan invited religious leaders representing Islam to Japan in August 2002, on the fifteenth anniversary of the Religious Summit Meeting on Mount Hiei, for the Interreligious Gathering of Prayer for World Peace: Dialogue between World Religions and Islam. With deep concern for the misunderstanding, prejudice, and hatred regarding Islam that spread throughout the world in the wake of these terrorist attacks, this gathering was held to dispel misunder-

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standing of Islam, and to join hands as religious practitioners desirous of peace in order to deepen mutual understanding through dialogue and promote progress along the path toward peace.

Interreligious Dialogue Starts with “Encounters”

Despite these sincere efforts by religious leaders, it seems that there are still some very steep slopes to climb on the way toward interreligious dialogue with Islam, as evidenced, for example, by the destruction of the Buddhist statues in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, by the Taliban in the name of attacking idolatry, an act that further marred the image of Islam with Buddhists in Japan and people around the world. However, it is true that the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) sent a mission to meet with the Taliban and request them to withdraw the order to destroy the Buddhist statues before it occurred, on the grounds that destroying Buddhist statues is inappropriate according to Islamic law (Shari‘ah), and that Islamic society would not sympathize with such an act. Unfortunately, the discussion ended without agreement, but when I learned of the effort made by the OIC, I was encouraged, and came to feel that the road to interreligious dialogue would not be such a long one after all.

As in relations among people, all dialogue among religions starts with an “encounter.” Encounters lead to conversations, and conversations lead to cooperation (working together), and cooperation leads to more conversations and new encounters. As this process develops, it starts to gradually spiral upward, growing step by step into mature and fruitful interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

Issues Bearing on Buddhist-Islamic Dialogue

I would like to raise just three points for careful consideration

as we think about future prospects for Buddhist-Islamic interreligious dialogue.

First, let us increase both the quantity and the quality of opportunities for Buddhist-Islamic encounters. The geographic and historic relationship of Islam with Buddhism, particularly Japanese Buddhism, and the paucity of Muslims residing in Japan have contributed to the scarcity of opportunities for mutual dialogue. On the other hand, this also means that there is no negative legacy between the two religions, as is seen in the history of Europe and the Islamic world. The religions of Japan, and particularly Japanese Buddhism, can take on the important role and mission of building bridges to peace between Islam and other religions, as symbolized by the 1992 Religions for Peace Conference on the Middle East.

For this very reason, more numerous and higher quality venues for encounters between Islam and Buddhism are needed. In this context, the presence of the Japan Muslim Association as a full member of the Japanese Committee of Religions for Peace will no doubt lend powerful support to realizing more meaningful dialogue and cooperation between these religions.

Second, true interreligious dialogue does not mean people of different faiths merely tolerating or coexisting with one another. Even less does it mean simple exchanges of information, simple insistence on one’s own point of view, or mere declamations in a religious debate. It should be a dialogue in which participants open their hearts to one another in a spirit of mutual respect, lend their ears to others bearing witness to faiths different from their own, and search more deeply for ways to improve their own approach to the will of God and the Buddha.

With respect to this issue, the dialogue between Islam and

Representatives of the world religions praying together for peace during the Interreligious Gathering of Prayer for World Peace: Dialogue between World Religions and Islam, in August 2002 on Mount Hiei.

Buddhism in Japan has not necessarily reached full maturity, due to difficulties posed by the geographic and historical context. In fact, one of the few opportunities so far for such dialogue, the Interreligious Gathering of Prayer for World Peace at Mount Hiei in August 2002, seemed to have been closer to an opportunity to learn about Islam through the medium of declamations in an Islamic religious debate, rather than an interreligious dialogue per se.

To broaden the path toward interreligious dialogue with Islam in the future, it would be a good policy to carry out such dialogues in ways that are as realistic as possible, bearing in mind that interreligious dialogue can take the five following forms:

(1) *Interreligious dialogue based on everyday life*

In this type of dialogue, people of differing religions use their common experiences of faithful devotional practice in their own respective religions as the basis for talking together, working together, performing service together, and living fulfilling lives together, wherever they might be—in their homes, schools, workplaces, or local communities.

(2) *Interreligious dialogue based on socially responsible action*

In this type of dialogue, people of differing religions work together to take social action in pursuit of ideals common to their religions, such as world peace, the happiness of humankind, and the alleviation of suffering.

(3) *Interreligious dialogue based on shared religious activity*

An example of this kind of dialogue is the series of East-West Spiritual Exchange programs between Buddhist and Catholic clerics, in which shared religious activities form the basis for interreligious dialogue.

(4) *Interreligious dialogue based on prayer*

In this kind of exchange, people of different religions pray together, not in any one way but each in their own respective way, for the realization of ideals shared by their reli-

gions, such as world peace, the happiness of humankind, and the alleviation of suffering.

(5) *Interreligious dialogue based on theology*

Theologians of different religions and experts in other fields engage in sincere theological dialogue and discussion as they seek effective ways for religions to fulfill their missions in society. This type of dialogue should function to deepen mutual understanding and cultivate each participant's own comprehension as they consider how to join forces to realize the missions common to their respective religions.

Naturally, the appropriateness of each of these five types of dialogue will depend on the level of learning of the participants, as well as on the personal, social, and local factors bearing on the environment of the exchange. We should also keep in mind that these five types of interreligious dialogue should not be set up and carried out through separate mechanisms; rather, they should be connected so as to be mutually related and complementary.

A profound lack of understanding, and sometimes misunderstanding and prejudice, about Islam itself can be seen in Japanese society. However, are Buddhism and Islam really completely alien religions? Both emphasize unifying relationships. Very interesting in this context is dialogue in the field of comparative religion about *tawhid* in Islam and the law of dependent origination in Buddhism, (which defines the interdependence of all phenomena). Another major theme is the similarity between the concept of the one God as defined in Islam and the *dharma-kaya* (the Law-body of a buddha) in Buddhism. Both religions emphasize equality over independence, and dialogue from this perspective of equality (over gender and race, as well as among social classes) should also be fruitful.

In a cultural and religious environment such as Japan's, the most essential type of interreligious dialogue is most likely number five, theological dialogue. This would promote deeper mutual understanding among religious practitioners; by mutually imparting knowledge about each religion's doctrines, ceremonies, practices, activities, and organizations we can learn about one another's patterns of thought and action. We can also expect dialogue participants to communicate the mutual understanding gained and to give appropriate guidance to members of their respective religions, as well as to ordinary people, gradually bringing illumination to their societies.

Third, interreligious dialogue must develop to the level of the respective participants walking together, working together, and serving together by allowing the different religions to cooperate toward addressing the common concerns of religions, such as world peace, the happiness of humankind, and the alleviation of suffering. The humanitarian aid provided to the Iraqi Inter-Religious Council for Peace by the World Conference of Religions for Peace and its Japanese Committee can be seen as evidence of this kind of interreligious dialogue and cooperation. □

“To Forget the Self and to Serve Others”

Ven. Etai Yamada and the 1987 Religious Summit Meeting on Mount Hiei

by Stephen Covell

In the modern period, the priesthood and institutions of Temple Buddhism have been challenged to recreate or reinvigorate Buddhist practice. One avenue pursued has been to engage society through such means as interfaith dialogue. Ven. Etai Yamada (1895–1994), the 253rd head priest (*zasu*) of the Tendai sect, played an instrumental role in addressing this challenge. Yamada strove to define the “proper” role of religion, especially Buddhism, based on his understanding of the Lotus Sutra and the teachings of Saicho (Dengyo Daishi, 767–822), the founder of the Japanese Tendai sect. The Religious Summit Meeting on Mount Hiei, first held in 1987, which was a watershed meeting of religious leaders from around the world, was arranged by Yamada and provides an example of his thoughts on what direction Temple Buddhism should take in the modern period.

Yamada’s interest in interfaith dialogue stems from his faith in the Lotus Sutra, which was confirmed and deepened in a time of war. According to a story related by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano and others that is reminiscent of the miraculous

tales of the Lotus Sutra from times past, toward the end of World War II, Yamada was returning from Okinawa on a ship carrying 1,500 schoolchildren. American submarines were known to be active in the waters around Japan. All on board felt uneasy. At that time, Yamada recalled a verse from chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra saying that those who call upon Kannon (Avalokiteshvara) when facing disaster at sea will be saved. Yamada chanted the sutra ceaselessly during the trip to the mainland. When the ship arrived safely in port, Yamada was firmly convinced of the saving power of the Lotus Sutra.

After the war, Yamada’s faith moved him to promote dialogue among the religions of the world, and in 1987, under his leadership, the Tendai sect organized the Religious Summit Meeting on Mount Hiei. Religious leaders from around the world attended, and every year thereafter the sect has played host to a summit. Yamada’s efforts did not take place in a vacuum. To be sure, globally and within Japan there was already considerable activity in the arena of religious cooperation. On the international level, in 1967, the World Association for World Federation (WAWF) set up a religion committee, and shortly thereafter a Japanese branch was opened. In 1970 the World Conference of Religions for Peace was formed and its first meeting held in Kyoto. In 1976 the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace (ACRP) was formed under the World Conference of Religions for Peace umbrella and its initial conference held in Singapore. Also in 1976 the Japan-Vatican Religions Meeting (Nihon-Bachikan Shukyo Kaigi) occurred. In 1979, Japanese delegates joined religious leaders from around the world on Mount Sinai to pray for a peaceful resolution to hostilities in the Middle East. And, in 1981, the World Religionists Ethics Congress (WOREC) was formed. Its first meeting was held in Japan. Within Japan, religious cooperation was also underway from the late 1940s. In 1946, the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations (Nihon Shukyo Renmei) was formed, consisting of the several smaller associations representing Temple Buddhism, Shinto, and Christianity. In 1951, the Federation of New Religious Organizations of

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During the Religious Summit Meeting on Mount Hiei in 1987, Ven. Etai Yamada, honorary chairman of the meeting, expresses his appreciation before the 164,000 signatures for peace, which young members of the Focolare Movement had collected to submit to the meeting.

Japan (Shinshuren) was founded through the efforts of Rev. Nikkyo Niwano. And in 1952, the Shinshuren joined the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations.

Activity in the field of interfaith dialogue and religious cooperation for peace was related to larger trends within Japanese society and the world. In Japan, the growing interest in social engagement inspired by such things as the Vietnam War influenced many Buddhists to become involved in religious cooperation. New religious organizations also found a need to organize in order to better respond to criticism from the mass media and the established religions such as Temple Buddhism. Members of the Temple Buddhist community, too, were faced with criticism regarding their role in society. One avenue pursued by Temple Buddhist sects to counter criticism was engagement in activities such as religious cooperation.

Although Yamada had long planned to hold a special event to commemorate the 1,200th anniversary of the opening of Mount Hiei by Saicho, he made it clear that it was not until the 1981 visit of Pope John Paul II to Japan that the idea of an international summit extending beyond Asia took root. During his visit to Japan, the pope gave a speech on religion and peace, and borrowed the words of Saicho, stat-

ing, "In the words of your most excellent teacher, Saicho, 'to forget the self and to serve others is the height of compassion.'" The pope's speech, in which he cited the teaching of *moko rita* (forget the self and serve others), which Yamada had long felt was one of Saicho's most important teachings, seemed to reassure Yamada of his own conviction that the Tendai Lotus teachings were of critical importance to the modern world and could serve as a platform for dialogue among the world's religions.

No doubt drawing on the parable recounted in chapter 8 of the Lotus Sutra, which tells of a destitute man who unknowingly carried a priceless jewel sewn in the hem of his garment, Yamada states that the pope's speech made him realize that "It was as though sometime in history we had stumbled for a moment and had swallowed a great diamond. We have always had it right here in our stomachs. So now we have to operate to take it out and use it for the sake of humanity."² To counter sectarian views and defend the move to involve Tendai in international interfaith cooperation, Yamada drew on the teaching of expedient means found in the Lotus Sutra. He stated: "This just isn't the time to seal off the gate to the sect. We should look to the common goals of the world's religions, such as happiness for humanity and world peace, and open the expedient gate (*hoben no mon*) of religious cooperation."³

In order to proceed with his goal of putting on an international conference and his even more basic goal of instituting a shift in Temple Buddhism away from a ritual life based primarily on the temple membership system and toward a life based on service to humanity, Yamada took care to define the primary purpose of religion and, as such, what the basic duties of a religious should be. The sources of his definition were his understanding of the teachings of Saicho and the Lotus Sutra. Within the Lotus Sutra, the teaching of cause and effect was the basis, according to Yamada, for understanding the teaching that one is a buddha by nature.⁴ The Lotus Sutra, thus, taught one to live a life of awareness that one is a buddha and to see all other sentient beings in a similar light. In doing so, one learns to empty the self.⁵ This is the foundation of wisdom. Niwano recalled Yamada saying, "As long as one is self-centered, one cannot make proper judgments."⁶ The teaching of cause and effect and its relationship to the teaching that there is no self leads to a view that all things are interrelated. This is a popular belief shared by Yamada's contemporaries. Ryusho Kobayashi writes: "Buddhism teaches that all creatures live in a relationship with [all] others. . . . When we turn our love of self toward love for others, sublimating it to an equal love for all, self-seeking love becomes compassion."⁷ The basic teaching of cause and effect found in the Lotus Sutra leads to wisdom and compassion. Together, these are the guiding lights by which Yamada expects the priesthood of Tendai to live and act.

In his Dharma talks Yamada stated that the goal of Shaky-

muni was the salvation of all beings. This is a goal shared by Saicho. Yamada paraphrased Saicho's *Ganmon* as follows: "Even if I perfect myself and attain the enlightenment of the Buddha, I will not be satisfied. Until all people have obtained happiness, I will serve the world and the people. No matter what, I wish to create a true and peaceful world."⁸ The view that limiting Buddhist practice to the attainment of enlightenment is incorrect and that Buddhists must instead strive for salvation for all became a central part of Yamada's efforts to shape the identity of Buddhists in the modern period and the driving ideological force behind his decision to organize the Religious Summit Meeting on Mount Hiei.

Yamada noted time and again that "to forget the self and to serve others" is the key to moving away from sectarian, national, or ethnic identities. Regarding religious or group identity, Yamada stated that "Religion and faith originally come from the search for peace of mind and happiness in everyday life."⁹ As such, religion was at first an individual matter. Over time it came to encompass the family, community, and nation. Yamada believed that it must be brought back to its original concern—the happiness of individuals. This is where "to forget the self and to serve others" plays a role according to Yamada—group identities can be overcome, allowing individuals to cooperate to bring about peace and happiness on a global scale.

Yamada's view of Buddhism as a salvation religion faced considerable opposition from those who saw the primary role of the priesthood as the opening of satori (enlightenment) through religious practice. His efforts to redefine Buddhist practice and to shift Temple Buddhism toward an identity as a salvation religion were assailed by critics in part because his activities appeared to move the focus of the sect away from the priesthood and toward the laity. Yamada responded by saying that "Tendai Daishi [Chih-i] taught the truth of the Lotus Sutra to priests, but Dengyo Daishi sought to lead everyday people through the spirit of the Lotus Sutra."¹⁰ Opposition on Mount Hiei was vocal. Yamada recalled, "Ever since I became the head priest of Tendai, people close to me have been telling me that others are saying things like, 'The head priest this time is different from those before. Something's not right.' Looking into this, I found that those who were saying this also said, 'Our religion is one of satori, it is not a religion of salvation. But the head priest says things that ignore satori. What is this all about?' To that I responded, 'There is a difference in where we place our emphasis. What is religion? Didn't it come about for the purpose of saving people? If it is just about satori, you don't have to be a religious person, even philosophers have realized satori. Satori is not religion. It is through salvation that religion finds life. Without it, Buddhism would never have come into being.'"¹¹

Yamada's arguments bring to mind standard Mahayana arguments and, in particular, Lotus Sutra-based arguments that Buddhism must be about salvation for all, not only about the enlightenment of the individual practitioner. Elsewhere, in support of his claims, Yamada called on chapter

25 of the Lotus Sutra, the Kannon-gyo: "The Kannon-gyo states, 'with true vision, pure vision, the vision of broad and great wisdom, the vision of pity and compassion.' This shows the order of things—that the opening of satori is the beginning, and the important point of religion is how to put that to use."¹²

For Yamada, emphasizing the salvation aspects of Buddhism did not signal a shift away from the Tendai sect's identity as a sect of renunciates. The priests were essential. They were the guides on the path to salvation. Yamada drew on Saicho for support: "I explained [the move to focus on salvation] as what Dengyo Daishi meant when he said, 'Do not drink the flavor of liberation alone, do not give witness to the fruit of peace alone.' One should not just obtain satori but should instead use that satori to guide others and bring them happiness. This is what a priest must be."¹³

As is evident, Yamada believed that the Lotus Sutra taught the law of karmic cause and effect. Understood in this light, practice is the repetition of good acts and, through such, the perfection of self. However, in keeping with his focus on salvation over individual perfection, Yamada insisted that for Saicho the self was understood as existing as part of a web of relationships. This means that perfection of self can only be understood within the context of the larger society in which one exists. According to Yamada, here, too, is where the teaching of "to forget the self and to serve others" fits in: it is the negation of self in service to others.¹⁴ Thus, "to forget the self and to serve others" is Saicho's call to live a life of service to society constantly engaged in good works. In his acceptance speech for the Niwano Peace Prize in 1989, Yamada stated, "Buddhism is Shakyamuni's teaching of a way of life and way of living for all people so that everyone can live in peace. Therefore, priests must guide people by practicing this philosophy and its methods so that everyone can lead a life in a stable environment."¹⁵

Yamada directed his words at priests but his views mirror those of the new Buddhist lay movements of Japan such as Rissho Kosei-kai. Robert Kisala describes the worldview of these new religions as follows: "The world is seen as an interconnected whole, and activity on one level will affect other levels. Therefore, a transformation on the most immediate level of the inner self will have repercussions within one's family, the surrounding society, and eventually on the universe as a whole."¹⁶ Yamada's views were not unique; many within the Tendai sect and Temple Buddhism more generally share this basic worldview of interrelatedness. Where Yamada differed from his critics within the Tendai sect is that he believed that the sect must actively pursue the transformation of society. As we have seen, one area in which Yamada thought that the teachings of the Tendai sect were particularly well suited to such endeavors was in the field of interfaith dialogue and world peace. Where he differed from the lay Buddhist movements and new religions was his view, harking back to Saicho's call for a twelve-year retreat, that individuals require time to perfect this worldview and,

therefore, that the priesthood is still necessary. He acknowledged the potential of lay practitioners, for example, through his championing of the Light Up Your Corner Movement, but still believed that the priesthood plays a crucial role in cultivating understanding.

Yamada's teachings, as we have seen, were inspired by Saicho's teaching "to forget the self and to serve others" and helped to lay the foundations not only for the Tendai sect to organize the Religious Summit Meeting but also for a shift in how the priesthood of Temple Buddhism viewed its purpose. Regarding the summit and its overt goal of bringing about interfaith dialogue and world peace, most critics declared the summit a success. Yamada countered critics who complained that merely bringing religious leaders together to pray for peace was an ineffective strategy by stressing that their meeting alone was an important first step. Continuing the process was critical. "In thirty or fifty years, in our children's or our grandchildren's time, war based on religious differences will cease if we keep meeting."¹⁷ Reflecting back on the summit many years later, Gijun Sugitani, advisor to the Tendai sect, stated that the summit was "a great success if only in that it brought together on the same stage leaders from different religions at a time when the typical view was that religions did not get along well."¹⁸ The year 2007 marks the twentieth anniversary of the summit, for which a major event is planned on Mount Hiei.

For Yamada the summit provided the means to emphasize his sincere desire for religious cooperation and world peace, but also the means to reestablish Tendai at the center of Japanese religious life and to reshape the identity of the modern priesthood. He sought to refocus the priesthood of the Tendai sect on salvation for all through engaging society and pivotal social problems such as peace. He clearly hoped that in so doing the priesthood would recast itself and move away from a self-identity overwhelmingly defined by the ritual demands of the temple membership system or modern images of a true priest as one who ardently seeks only enlightenment. Regarding the immediate effect on world peace that the meeting would have, Yamada used the image of a conjured city, which is the topic of chapter 7 of the Lotus Sutra. Yamada wrote: "It is my wish that this meeting will serve as a conjured city on the way to building religious cooperation."¹⁹ Perhaps this is also a fitting way to view his efforts to reshape priestly identity as well. From the time of his tenure as head priest of the Tendai sect, Temple Buddhism has been undergoing a slow but steady change. The summit was a significant benchmark in this process. Since Yamada's passing the process of change has picked up speed significantly. Recent changes in the laws governing non-profit and non-governmental organizations have begun to have an impact on how Temple Buddhism is able to address social ills and even how it can interact with other religions. Moreover, an increasing number of priests raised during Yamada's time identify themselves less with the maintenance of traditional institutions such as the temple membership

system and more with ritual practices that are redefining how people view death, dying, and ancestor veneration, as well as with social engagement efforts in the areas of interfaith dialogue, peace, minority rights, and care for the elderly. Yamada's teachings regarding the Lotus Sutra and Saicho continue to resonate within the Buddhist community in Japan today and remain a pillar of interfaith dialogue. □

Notes

1. Yamada 1993, 209, 213; 1995, 93; and *Tendai Zasu-ki*, 4th ed., 147.
2. Yamada 1993, 213.
3. Yamada 1987, 20–21.
4. Yamada 1973, 2–3.
5. Yamada 1994, 38.
6. *Gyoshi*, 178.
7. Kobayashi 2002.
8. Yamada 1986, 234.
9. Yamada 1993, 206, and Yamada, 1987, 31.
10. Yamada 1980, 130–31.
11. Yamada 1995, 113.
12. Yamada 1995, 113–14.
13. Yamada 1995, 86.
14. Yamada 1987, 16–18.
15. Yamada 1989, 2.
16. Kisala, 3.
17. Yamada 1995, 108.
18. *Koho Tendai-shu*, no. 23 (March 2004), 10.
19. Yamada 1987, 22.

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Notes from Nerima: Putting Interfaith Dialogue into Practice

by Kotaro Suzuki

Members of a local Rissho Kosei-kai branch in Tokyo have become actively involved in meaningful interreligious dialogue with representatives of other faiths who are also their neighbors.

The Nerima Interreligious Forum was founded six years ago in order to deepen mutual understanding through promoting dialogue among the clerics of several faiths who are resident in Tokyo's Nerima ward. Through their participation, those who took part in the forum began to think that even though they were only a small group of local religionists there must be some way in which they could put dialogue into practice.

From the beginning, Nerima was home to the Faculty of Theology of Sophia University as well as to the Jesuit Theologate, so there were many opportunities for Rissho Kosei-kai members to interact in exchange activities with the priests. That kind of exchange laid the groundwork, because friends told friends who all took part, so that it naturally led to the birth of exchange on an interreligious level. Today the participants in the forum are not only from Nerima but from the entire Tokyo region, and it is gradually becoming a venue for dialogue.

In January 2000, I invited some Jesuit priests and Franciscan monks to join me at a hotel in Hakone, where I had the first chance to meet and talk with them as the head of the Nerima branch. I told them that I wanted to create a venue for interreligious discussion in Nerima, and they all agreed with me with glowing eyes. In February, we set up an organizing committee consisting of Catholic priests and

clergy from the Shingon and Nichiren sects, and in May we held the first meeting of the forum in a conference room within the Nerima branch; and from that time, using the Nerima branch as our meeting place, we met about once every two months.

Each time, around ten people attended, mainly Jesuit priests, Franciscan monks, clerics of the Shingon and Nichiren sects, as well as Tenrikyo clergy, Shinto priests, leaders from religions belonging to Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan), and members of the Jodo Shu Research Institute of Buddhism, including the director of the St. Gregory House Institute for Religious Music. Furthermore, many of them taught Buddhism or theology in universities, and served as chancellors of universities and colleges, and among the Shinto priests there was a trained psychiatrist. It was truly a group of talented individuals.

Respectful Attitude and Sincere Prayer

We tend to use the term "religious dialogue" rather loosely, so I wonder what "interreligious dialogue" really means. In fact, I wonder if there has been any real dialogue up until now. If anything, I feel that often it might have been more a debate of religious doctrines under the name of interreligious dialogue. Of course, all people believe that the religion they follow is the most correct. Therefore, there have been several cases in which people reject other religions as of a lower order. In such a situation, there can be no true dialogue.

Fundamentally, religious dialogue must be based upon a respectful attitude toward other religions and their followers, and it must also be built upon a foundation of sincere prayer. Preconceptions and prejudices must be eliminated and participants should pray and work together, for this will allow them to gain a deeper understanding of one another. Together, these "children of God" and "children of the Buddha" should respect one another, for this is an indispensable requisite for religious dialogue. In the case of Nerima, the dialogue is surrounded by a peaceful and harmonious

Kotaro Suzuki, head of the Nerima branch of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo, acts as the secretary of the Nerima Interreligious Forum.

A recent meeting of the Nerima Interreligious Forum held in July this year.

atmosphere, for everyone has the spirit of tolerance needed to listen with open minds to the opinions of others. For that reason, we were all able, as individuals, to have free and open discussions on such themes as: "Prayer," "What Religionists Can Do for Peace," "Science and Religion," "Religion and Violence," "On Life: Life Ethics and Japanese Culture," "The Spirit of the Mandala," and "Hospices in Japan: What Is Expected of Religionists in Medical Care."

Making Life Meaningful through Gratitude

On many occasions I was truly inspired by what the other participants had to say. Through the deep faith and prayers of each and every participant, we were able to enlighten one another. Each time we took part in a dialogue, we always learned something, without fail. In an atmosphere that was always exciting, and that sometimes had laughter, sometimes had tears, and was always filled with emotion, all of us were able to share our faiths with one another, which helped us all as individuals to strengthen our own faith.

Fr. Juan Masiá, S.J. (former director of the Bioethics Department, The Pontifical Comillas University of Madrid; currently professor emeritus of Sophia University) was one of the members of the organizing committee of the forum and is still a very important member, and many times his words taught me about the oneness of spirituality in both Christianity and Buddhism. One morning, while I was on my way to the Nerima branch, I happened to look down, and there sticking out of the asphalt pavement was a single small white flower—I do not even know what it is called—

in bloom. If it had been a field, I never would have noticed that little blossom amid the other plants and grasses. I was very moved by the power that that little flower had that allowed it to grow right through the asphalt, and I was momentarily glued to the spot.

Since ancient times, Japanese have felt the hand of the Divine in the workings of nature. The twelfth-century monk Saigyō, who had been born into a samurai family but took the tonsure after reaching adulthood, traveled throughout the Japanese countryside and left behind numerous excellent *waka* (31-syllable) poems, in which his deep feeling of gratitude toward life is evident. When I spoke about this with Fr. Masiá, he told me that once when St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, was walking in a garden, he turned to the flowers, saying, "Thank you, flowers, for I have understood what you are trying to tell me."

Surely people of every religion experience a sense of awe through becoming aware of the mystery of life in the rustling of the wind, the murmuring of flowing water, or the beauty of a single flower. It might be said that for Buddhists, it is to live with the Tathagata and the Dharma (Truth), just as for Christians, it is to live with Christ and realize the workings of the Holy Spirit. Through my discussion with Fr. Masiá, I was able to reach the point at which the terms "God" and "Buddha" pointed to the same source.

Revering the Dharma

Immediately after his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, Shakyamuni Buddha described it thus:

"I have realized this Truth (Dharma), which is profound, difficult to perceive, difficult to understand, tranquil, sublime, beyond analysis, and intelligible only to the wise. But the people of the world are sunk in attachment, delight in attachment, rejoice in attachment. . . . There is no way for them to understand this Truth. Even if I were to expound it to them, it would only become a source of complete exhaustion to me."

The Truth that was realized by Shakyamuni developed over the course of Buddhism's history into the concepts of the Tathagata, the buddha-nature, and the Original Buddha of the remote past. Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, once said: "Should we look upon all things as manifestations of the Buddha? If we believe this, then that is how the world will be for us. Every person we encounter, however briefly, will be like an enlightened buddha appearing before us." Whether we talk about the Dharma or the Buddha, they are both great manifestations of the workings of life. They pervade the universe; they exist within me. And yet, ordinary people cannot become aware of their existence, because they are sunk in attachment. We cannot understand the Tathagata or the Dharma unless we immerse ourselves in deep prayer or meditation. It is only when we acceptingly face God or the Buddha that the Dharma and the Tathagata become apparent.

Also, the Founder taught all members that it is our mission "to help all people become aware of their own buddha-nature." The buddha-nature equals the Tathagata. That is, it was his hope that all members will take up that mission by revering the Tathagata that exists within all people, so that all beings might become aware of their own buddha-nature and attain enlightenment. For myself, I pray each day that all my encounters with people may be like that—and the field of interreligious dialogue is no exception.

Whenever we talk about religious dialogue, it is based upon the premise of the Founder's spirit of revering the buddha-nature of all beings. Because this premise exists, our dialogue does not end in just formal debates among theologians. If all participants proceed in the dialogue on the basis of sincere prayer, we will be able to hear the words of the other participants as though they were the voice of the Dharma. In actual fact, it is there that a real movement toward salvation begins.

The Results of Dialogue

One thing that I should add about our religious dialogue is that, through assistance from the local community, we were able to develop support activities abroad.

No one can forget September 11, 2001, but it is a fact that numerous Afghan people became victims of the aerial bombings carried out by the Allied forces, due to which many schools and hospitals were destroyed. A voice arose among the religious leaders of Nerima asking whether or not there was anything that we ourselves might be able to do to help

the children of Afghanistan. Among the members of the meeting were the leader of a group of young Buddhist monks studying Buddhist music and *shomyo* chanting, as well as the director of the St. Gregory House Institute for Religious Music. Then, almost spontaneously and naturally, it came about that a plan was devised to give a charity concert consisting of *shomyo*, Gregorian chant, and Gagaku (ancient Japanese court music) and to use the proceeds for aid funds. The Gagaku was performed by Rissho Kosei-kai's own Gagaku troupe. So it came about that three completely unrelated groups specializing in religious music came together in harmony for world peace and gave charity concerts at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space in 2002, 2003, and 2004 under the title, "9/11 A Prayer for Peace: A Charity Concert for Love and Hope," and over 6,000 people attended each time. Thus, while these concerts served as a venue for prayer, they were also an expression of a social movement for peace.

Through the funds thus obtained, we were able to build a school in Afghanistan that was named Hope Elementary School. And furthermore, it was built in the region of Bamiyan, where the Taliban had destroyed the colossal ancient stone buddhas. Living in that area are many people of a Mongoloid minority group of the Shia sect known as the Hazara. Throughout history, the Hazara have suffered discrimination within Afghanistan, to such a degree that no school had ever before been built in the area. So our charity funds were used in the part of Afghanistan that had the greatest need for education. For the first time, some 350 children were able to attend school, and seven teachers were dispatched there by the government.

When I look back, it seems to me that several things took place that can only be thought of as due to the blessings of God and the Buddha. We did not know anyone in Afghanistan, and we did not have even a clue as to how we should go about building a school. But our activities gained the attention and sympathy of a member of Japan's Diet (parliament), who introduced us to the Shuhada Organization, which was experienced in building schools and operating hospitals. The person in charge there was Dr. Sima Samar, the first woman ever to attain appointment to the high position of minister within Afghanistan.

The aid that we gave through the Shuhada Organization was not temporary; indeed, it continues even now. One thing that I decided within my heart is that the light that was lit in the hearts of all those who gave assistance must never be allowed to go out. I do not know how our support will develop from here on, but one of the results of our interreligious dialogue and prayer is that we are continuing to support this school in Afghanistan. Through the warm support of everyone who extended a hand to help us, I very strongly feel the movement of the Tathagata and the Dharma.

From now on, I will revere every person with a feeling of respect for the Buddha within, and will continue the interreligious dialogue in Nerima with a spirit of gratitude and great joy. □

American Muslim Diversity Seen as a Sign of Hope

by Jacqueline Ruyak

An Indian-born artist, now living in the U.S., overcomes a birth defect to achieve success as a producer of multicultural greeting cards.

If I am strong and patient," says artist Salma Arastu, "God will guide me. God has guided me in all things." It sounds like a simple affirmation of faith, but a rather complicated story lies behind it. A converted Muslim transplanted from India to the United States, Arastu shows her work in galleries across the country. She is a painter and spends most of her time painting, but for several months of each year she is also a busy entrepreneur, designing and marketing an unusual line of greeting cards for which she receives orders from around the globe.

Her story started, however, in northwestern India. The youngest of ten siblings, Arastu was born in the northwestern Indian town of Ajmer, a pilgrimage destination popular with Indian Hindus and Muslims alike. Her father, a doctor, died when she was ten. "My family was Hindu," says Arastu, "and I was very spiritual. I got it from my mother, who was herself very spiritual. She always said that as a child I would read the Bhagavad Gita and other spiritual works.

"I think it was because of my hand. I was born without fingers on my left hand, but my mother made sure I was strong before I even understood I had a deformity. She always told me there must be a reason for it and to love God. I was often shy and self-conscious about it, and of course children teased and tormented me about it. But my mother made me know that God had created me for a special reason, and I accepted myself as I am."

Salma Arastu in her studio in Pennsylvania.

Even as a child, Arastu was drawn to the "energy of the flowing line" and loved to doodle. She attended art school and received a graduate degree in fine arts from the prestigious Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda. She also met a handsome Muslim architect named Alamdar Arastu, the oldest of twelve siblings. "I couldn't believe it when he asked me to marry him," she says.

He also asked her to change her religion. "That didn't bother me, because I believed that God was one. And his family was so very loving. They never forced religion on me." Arastu's mother gave her blessings, but her brothers were angered by her acceptance of Islam. With perceptions colored by a history of strife, the relations between Indian Hindus and Muslims are often tense. But in time, says Arastu, all came to love her husband and the families were reconciled.

Her husband's profession took the Arastus for several years to Kuwait and Iran. There, Arastu learned another dimen-

Jacqueline Ruyak lived in Japan, including Kyoto, for many years. She now divides her time between Pennsylvania and Tono in north-eastern Japan. Her essays on religion and Japanese arts, crafts, and social topics appear frequently in Japanese and American magazines.

One of Arastu's "Eid Mubarak" cards. The Arabic reads "Patience, Gratitude, and Remembrance."

sion of Islam. "There was beautiful calligraphy everywhere," she says. "I learned Arabic to read the Qur'an and to study calligraphy." Working as a volunteer at local museums, she immersed herself in the classical calligraphy displayed. But it was the free-flowing lines of the calligraphy, rather than its words, that engaged her. She started studying not classical but freestyle calligraphy, using a paintbrush rather than the traditional bamboo pen. Through calligraphy, her own work became even freer and more fluid.



Another of her "Eid Mubarak" cards.

In 1987, Arastu immigrated to the United States with her husband and their two young children. (Now grown, her daughter has a Ph.D. in biochemistry from Stanford University and her son recently graduated from university with a degree in fine arts.) They settled in the Lehigh Valley, in eastern Pennsylvania, where her husband had found a position.

Arastu, meanwhile, started looking for freelance work, to supplement the family income.

"I went around to local graphic shops and presses," she says. "Someone at a print shop asked me to design a thank-you card. That was successful, so I then did some Christmas cards. Then I realized there were lots of Christmas cards, but Islamic cards were rare. I thought, why not Islamic cards, so I decided I wanted to do something for my religion and my ethnic group."

She started designing "Eid Mubarak" cards. Eid is the day after Ramadan, the month of fasting observed by Muslims, and "Eid Mubarak," a traditional greeting, means "Blessed Festival!"

In 1991 Arastu founded Your True Greetings, now a thriving business that markets the Islamic greeting cards she designs. In her first year, she had four card designs and sold three thousand to four thousand cards; today she has almost eighty designs, sells about twenty-eight thousand cards per year, and grosses about fifty thousand U.S. dollars.

Working from home, Arastu still does all the work herself, from designing the cards and having them printed to marketing them, packing, and shipping them. She fills orders from as far away as Dubai and Japan. Most of the work is done in two or three months, right before and during Ramadan. She still uses Robwin Press in nearby Allentown, whose owners had encouraged her to start the business. Early on, says Arastu with a tinge of nostalgia, she used to barter paintings for printing.

Though some cards are taken from Arastu's paintings, most designs feature her flowing calligraphy. Many are simply the name of Allah written in different configurations. "Arabic calligraphy starts from the field of action (right) and lands in the field of the heart (left)," says Arastu, quoting a favorite expression. Though Islamic classical calligraphy is based on mathematical proportions, liberties are permitted.

"We can write the letters freestyle, in any way we want, collapsing them, drawing them out, making them spiky, and such," Arastu explains. "The same word can look very different. We can put the elements of the word in different order, too, such as up or down. Being allowed such freedom makes it even more enjoyable to do. Some pieces, of course, may take more time to decipher."

Sitting on the porch of her house in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, late one afternoon this May, Arastu showed me some of the many card designs she will be readying for market later this year. She is wearing a *salwar kameez*, a traditional suit of pants and a long tunic, and a long scarf called a *dupatta* over her shoulder. Her husband encouraged her as an artist to wear traditional Indian dress. In the United States,

says Arastu, people accept me as an artist, accept me as I am, but she still prefers that people not look at her hand. The scarf makes a graceful foil.

From the start, Arastu felt at home in the United States. "I was full of energy and I was in a place where everything moves fast. I felt I fit right in and that this was the place for me to do things." In an artistic environment that provided lots of feedback, she was also pushed to examine what she was doing as an artist. In 1992 Arastu made a trip back to India and for the first time realized how much she loved the crowds of people, their voices, smells, textiles, and energy. That in turn recalled the crowds of her time spent in Kuwait and Iran. She started painting crowds.

"The flow of humanity really inspires me," says Arastu. "At

created everyone the same but did not so that we could learn to live in peace with one another."

As a Hindu in India, Arastu was well aware of how Islam could be viewed from outside. Helped by her husband's family, she came to understand that God is indeed love and that we must all live together without hatred and conflict. The Qur'an teaches that it is natural to love and to have faith in God and goodness, she says, but the lesson is often lost in the world.

"After 9/11, I felt I had to learn more about the positive aspects of Islam and relate them to people. The people responsible for 9/11 are not really Muslims. They are Muslims only by birth. Islam is beautiful, but there is a problem with Muslims. Islam has spread all over the world, and each culture in which it is found has influenced it. So it is Islam but not really, because it's been changed."

Arastu finds hope in the diversity among the Muslim community in the United States. "In India, it is only Indian Muslims, but here there are maybe fifty different Muslim cultures, from Indian to Chinese to African-American. I love that. They come together in mosques, pray together, work together, eat together, and this is good. They are trying a bit to forget their own cultures and merge into the melting pot. The basic teaching is to live together."

This June Arastu moved to Oakland, California, where her husband has a new job. The business stays back in Pennsylvania, where her son still lives. Arastu has hopes that in California she will be able to make the break into the mainstream market that has eluded her until now. Your True Greetings has succeeded in the niche market of Islamic cards, but Arastu hopes that someday soon non-Muslim Americans will also buy them. Two years ago she weighed selling the business to a large commercial card maker but told herself to have patience. For now, Your True Greetings gives her a unique platform for getting others to appreciate the beauty of her religion.

Though her paintings have a more universal impact, Arastu feels that everything she does is art. "When I make my graphic designs, I use the same energy as for my paintings. It's all about the line." She repeats an earlier sentiment. "I feel I have been guided by God. I have so much energy and it all gets to come out. I believe that God has plans for me." □

One of Arastu's paintings, titled "World Harmony." Acrylics on canvas.

first, it was the energy of nature, but I am now drawn to the amazing energy found in crowds of people." She settled on painting with acrylics, working on paper, board, and canvas. She breaks her work into four themes: the strength and energy of women in groups, the celebration of life, golden moments from the past, and events, such as the tragedy of 9/11. When painting crowds of people, she uses continuous lines in order to express the flow of humanity. She gives no features to people in her paintings, leaving them featureless to underscore the basic human sameness that all share.

"I believe that God is the same for everyone," says Arastu. "Through my art, I try to bring people together, to celebrate life. The Qur'an teaches compassion for all beings created by God—people, animals, flowers, everything. Islam is about how to live together, to help one another, and to respect one another, about how to live in this world and how to deal with people. It teaches manners and tolerance. God could have

The Death and Resurrection of Our Words

by Notto R. Thelle

*It is said that the Buddha proclaimed his teaching for fifty years
but never said one single word. When words crumble away, we can
find the silence wherein God's mystery is vibrantly alive.*

During my time at high school, I was fascinated by Ibsen's description of the emperor Julian the Apostate in his play *Emperor and Galilean*. The young ruler is portrayed as a zealous witness to the faith who seeks to defeat the old religion by undermining it from within. He wanted to conquer the teachers of pagan wisdom by sitting at their feet, following them into their own world, and wresting the weapons from their grasp.

Wrestling with the lions! . . . It is God's will that I should seek out Libanios [the teacher of wisdom]—worm from him his arts and his learning—strike the unbelievers with their own weapons—strike, strike like Paul—conquer like Paul in the cause of the Lord!

I myself had been interested in Buddhism for many years. The Norwegian missionary Karl Ludvig Reichelt did pioneering work in establishing a new attitude to the religions of the Far East. He saw Buddhists as searchers for the truth and friends on the “path” (Tao). He entered fully into their world, adopted their way of living, and admired their ideals. He was convinced that the deepest ideas and expectations in Buddhism pointed to Christ, and he believed that his vocation was to lead Buddhists “on internal paths” to him who was the Way and the Life.

Reichelt's visions became an integral dimension of my dreams. Like the young prince Julian, I wanted to enter the world of Buddhist wisdom, wrest their skill and learning from the Buddhists, and “strike them down” with their own weapons. In my youthful zeal, I did not reflect all that much on the historical fact that it was Julian himself who was conquered by the pagan wisdom and became “the Apostate.”

It was a shock to discover that I was completely unprepared for my encounter with Buddhism. It is of course true that there is a lot of watered-down piety in Japan, a Buddhism based only on customs and superstition—if you

want to write about “the darkness of paganism,” there are rich materials on which to draw! But if you possess eyes and ears, you gradually also discover depths of faith and religious experience that not only present a *positive* challenge to your faith but also amount to an *onslaught* on it.

When I arrived in Japan, I brought with me much of the best in Norwegian Christian life. I had grown up in the strict tradition of the church's pietism, which was, nevertheless, fairly generous and tolerant. My own home had been permeated by a genuine faith and commitment to missionary work. I went to Sunday school and attended services in the local church. A number of years of intense activity in the Christian union in my school were complemented by perspectives from the Student Christian Federation, which was

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open to a broader cultural inspiration. This was followed by solid theological studies, accompanied by the usual crises—doubt, uncertainty, and finally clarity.

Like most students, however, I was “unfinished” and immature when I left the theological faculty. I was able to expound scripture, I was familiar with the church’s history and teaching, I had a basic theological training, and I was capable of developing all of these resources. I also possessed a number of weapons with which to respond to objections and criticism. But I still had a long way to go.

I quickly discovered that my Norwegian background had not equipped me to encounter Buddhism in a meaningful way. It was not that I lacked theological knowledge; as a matter of fact, I knew quite a lot about Buddhism, and further studies would deepen this knowledge. What was missing was the dimension of *depth* in my faith, something that would be capable of encountering what Rudolf Otto has called the “almost incomprehensible experiential world” of Mahayana Buddhism.

The only way forward was to set out on my travels, seeking to penetrate more deeply into Buddhism, hearing the meaning that lay behind the words, and grasping the life behind the outward forms. I sought closer contact through conversations and studies. I have had overwhelming experiences both in spiritual dialogues with Buddhist friends and in simply being present in silence while they *worshipped*. From time to time, I myself took part in meditation under Buddhist masters.

I shall never forget my first meeting with a Zen master in Kyoto.

“Why have you come here?” he asked. “You Christians, too, have meditation and prayer!”

I answered that we did indeed possess these things, but that I wanted to see Buddhism from within and that Buddhism surely had something to teach us Christians too.

“But why on earth are you so keen to learn about Buddhism—or indeed about Christianity?”

I must admit that I no longer felt quite so self-assured. . . .

“It is raining outside tonight,” continued the master.

We sat in silence and listened. The rain fell gently on the moss and herbs in the monastery garden. Then, suddenly, there came the impossible question:

“Is it Buddhism or Christianity that is raining?”

My thoughts darted around in the silence. But the rain gave me no answer.

“It is quite simply raining,” he observed. “This is a question of *being*. All your theoretical thoughts about Buddhism and Christianity are separating you from the simple and fundamental matter: *to be*.”

This was the first time it dawned upon me that faith could separate me from life, or rather, that speculations and pious explanations could build walls that shut out reality. Perhaps my faith would have to be demolished if I was to become a true Christian? And if the encounter with Christ

did not help me *to be* in a way that was true, had I in fact encountered him?

One day the master told me how I should enter the hall of meditation: “When you go into the hall, you must lay aside all your thoughts and ideas and concepts. Leave your theology behind you. Forget God!”

I pondered these words. Is this possible? And is it right? Eventually, I concluded that this paradoxical action could be profoundly Christian. A Buddhist too must lay aside all of his ideas—about the Buddha, about enlightenment, about the path to salvation. He must (as it were) abandon the Buddha at the entrance to the meditation hall. But the first thing he does on entering is to bow reverently before the statue of the Buddha in the hall: he must forget the Buddha, but the Buddha is there. A Christian must lay aside all his theology and bid God farewell outside the meditation hall. But he is there when one enters—as near to us as our own breathing and heartbeat.

This master had studied the Bible, and one day he put me to the test:

“The Sermon on the Mount says that we are not to worry about tomorrow. What does that really mean?”

Innocently, I began to tell him about God’s loving care for us. He is our father, and we are the children he looks after.

“I know that,” he interrupted. “But what does it mean?”

I attempted to express myself more clearly: “We believe in God’s providence. We have nothing to fear. Jesus compared this to the lilies in the field and the birds of heaven—”

Again he interrupted me: “Yes, I know all that, but what does it mean?”

Gently but ruthlessly, the surface of all of my explanations was peeled back to reveal mere theology, theories and empty words. He was not interested in explanations, but in the reality itself. How could I express without words the Christian’s lack of worry?

Suddenly I recalled the first Christian testimony I had ever made. I was about fourteen years old and assistant leader of a patrol in the boy scouts. My older brother was in high school and had begun to master the pious vocabulary, since he was an active member of the school’s Christian union.

“It isn’t difficult at all,” he said. “Just read a verse of scripture and say a few words.”

I believed him and selected a verse that I liked and read it to the patrol: “Consider the lilies of the field. Look at the birds of the air. Do not worry about tomorrow.” Now I was supposed to say something, but the words would not come. All I managed was a helpless mumbling, to the effect that: “Um . . . the Bible says . . . ah . . . that we are not to get worried . . . that means . . . um . . . ah . . . I think . . .” I had fallen a victim to a pious deception on the part of my brother! I was not much more than a child, but I was expected to be an adult and to represent God. . . . “It’s easy, just say a few words.”

And once again, now in the Zen temple in Japan, I expe-

rienced the collapse of my words. But this time, it was not just the pitiful and embarrassing experience of a fourteen-year-old. What was at stake was nothing less than my Christian faith!

In the course of many years of study, I had learned how to use words and concepts and to combine them to form a theological whole. This house had a beautiful facade, but its furnishings were borrowed from others—from my childhood home, from churches and meetinghouses, from theological libraries and lecture halls, or from books. I had built a house for others, but only a part of me lived in it. How incredibly naive to believe that I could bear witness to this Buddhist master about the Christian's lack of worry and about God's fatherly care! He saw through me. He knew that I was uttering words that were fully alive only in my brain, and to some extent in my heart—but they did not live at all in my kidneys and intestines and heartbeat and respiration! Nevertheless, it was good to experience this, since the master did not intend to expose either me or my Christian faith. All he wanted to do was to scrape away the hollow explanations and pious words in order to get into the very marrow and uncover the naked heart.

In Zen, words must collapse if we are to encounter reality. This is a painful process because it opens the door to fear and despair. Zen speaks of "the great doubt" and "the great death"; it is only after these that "the great faith" comes. Some Buddhists whom I have met believe that this is the same as "the dark night of the soul" in the writings of St. John of the Cross. After you have experienced the crumbling and disintegration of your words, you can no longer frolic in words and figures of speech with the same superficial enthusiasm. And you become attuned to the silent dimension of faith.

Buddhism too is full of words. The collection of its sacred writings in Chinese runs to one hundred enormous volumes, and it is impossible for any one person to get an overview of all of this material. The foundations here are the narratives of the Buddha's life, but there are so many versions and legends and apocryphal stories that it is not easy to identify the historical kernel. In addition, there are philosophical speculations and discussions, commentaries on these texts, and an endless series of commentaries on the commentaries. There are also guidelines for ethical conduct, and guides to meditation and spiritual exercises.

Despite all of these written documents, Buddhism remains unshakably aware that what *really* matters cannot be said in words. "The Buddha proclaimed his teaching for fifty years but never said one single word," it is claimed; we are told of the Buddha's "thunderous silence" when he refused to answer those who were curious about the reality that lies beyond the realm of sense perceptions. The Buddha did not teach a knowledge that is primarily accessible to the intellect. He taught a truth that can be grasped only in an illumination that breaks through all barriers and transforms the

person's life. Taoist wisdom makes the point with exaggerated emphasis: "The one who knows does not speak. The one who speaks does not know." In the words of D. T. Suzuki, the great missionary of Zen Buddhism in the West, "The crux is how to communicate the silence without abandoning it." He himself wrote tens of thousands of pages about Zen, but he never forgot that, on the deepest level, all of this was merely beating about the bush.

The most beautiful expression of this insight is the narrative of how the Buddha found the one who would bring "the light of the teaching" to others. One day the Buddha sat in front of his disciples, lifted up a lotus blossom, and spun it around silently in his fingers. They all waited eagerly for the message he would give them; only Maha-Kashyapa smiled at this revelation, for he had grasped the wordless truth that lies beyond all doctrinal propositions and traditions. And it was he who received the commission to bring the light to others.

As a Christian, I believe in the Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us" (Jn 1). I read God's Word and preach the Word. I believe that, for all their poverty, human words can express divine things that shatter the narrow frameworks of our words. But the Word who was in the beginning, Christ who is the heart and the true meaning of God's love and wisdom, did not come to us as a *word*: the Word became *flesh and blood*. The Word did not come as theories and explanations and abstractions: the Word was a child in a manger, one human being among others. He healed the sick, proclaimed freedom to captives, ate with sinners, gave the poor a new dignity, died on a cross, and rose again from the dead. He told parables and stories. He laughed and cried. He shook his fist against hypocrisy, and he danced with children. His "kingdom of God" was no theory, but a new reality that came into being among the people he encountered.

Jesus' disciples followed the tradition he had begun. They proclaimed God's love by telling about what Jesus had done. In this way, the early church continued a Jewish biblical tradition: just as Israel had borne witness to God's greatness by telling the story of how the Israelites were liberated from the house of slavery in Egypt and entered the promised land, the Christians told about God's love by relating the story of Jesus. The Gospels were not written as texts to be interpreted and expounded by preachers and scholars: they are *themselves* the message about God's deeds. In their utterly simple stories of deeds and events, in symbols and images and parables, the Gospels reveal how God is.

In our Norwegian Lutheran Church, many people have seen that the *Word* has been transformed into *words*—the "church of the Word" became a church that produces huge quantities of words. Sometimes we speak as if we knew everything about God. We describe God's being and his characteristics. Theologians walk a tightrope between vari-

The Buddha lifting up a lotus blossom, spinning it around silently in his fingers. Only Maha-Kashyapa (sixth from right) responds to this revelation with a smile, while the other disciples are waiting for the Buddha to give them a discourse. Painted by Shunso Hishida in 1897. Color on silk. 145.7 x 272.7 cm. Tokyo National Museum.

ous heresies when they seek to define the Trinity or analyze the two natures of Christ. Priests and preachers speak of “God’s will,” though others can discern only a struggle for power, an opinionated insistence on the correctness of one’s own positions, and personal ambitions. Carl Gustav Jung once observed that theologians talk about God in a “shameless” manner, and I believe that there is a similar bashfulness deep in the souls of our own people, when it is a question of the things of God. We theologians employ too many words; we “know” too much.

I am not saying that words are meaningless. Language is a wonderful instrument that can point to a reality beyond the boundaries of words. But it is too easy for us to succumb to a superstition about words and concepts, forgetting that there is indeed an *unutterable* dimension that lies beyond all of our words. The mystery is situated between the *word* and that which is *unsaid*. It cannot be contained within our systems, it can only be praised in stuttering human words. If we are too keen to analyze it and define it, it crumbles away between our fingers.

The true problem for the Christian church is not that our words are crumbling into dust, but that our innumerable words are choking and killing the mystery. Perhaps it is the grace of God that lets our words die, in order that we may seek that which is real.

It is of course true that some people find that their faith

crumbles away when words lose their meaning, but often this indicates that their faith had already disintegrated; it was merely held together by a tight corset of words and formulas. Many people experience the exact opposite, namely, that although the words may die, the mystery itself lives. Indeed, both occur simultaneously: the words crumble away, and the mystery is revealed in a new clarity. And subsequently, there is a profound joy when the words rise up from the dead! This resurrection of our words need not mean that it is easy for us to find the words we seek; our words may perhaps become fewer than before. Now that we are more attuned to the mystery, we know that no words can explain it—all they can do is point to it.

Among the things I found most fascinating in my encounter with Japanese culture were the simple black-and-white brush drawings. A few strokes of the brush created a full picture, lacking nothing—a flower, a reed, or bamboo—simple yet vibrantly alive. The picture is created not only by the strokes of the brush but also by the untouched white surfaces of the paper.

When we describe our faith, we often want to fill out every last detail of the picture. Perhaps we ought to take the risk of simplicity: a few strokes of the pen, a few words and hints, so that the white surfaces can come alive and the words can bear us further out, across the boundary of our words, into that silence wherein God’s mystery is vibrantly alive. □

The Family of King Wonderfully Adorned

by Gene Reeves

Sometimes it is the children who, in a reversal of the usual role, are able to lead a parent to the truth.

For the fifteen centuries or so of its life, Buddhism was almost exclusively a religion of monks, usually supported by lay members and groups. Initially it was exclusively a society of male monks, who separated themselves from ordinary life and responsibilities by leaving home to follow the Buddha. The Buddha himself abandoned his home and family in order to pursue an ascetic life. For the most part, monks do not have a lot of interest in family life; it is what they have abandoned.

So it is very interesting that we find in chapter 27, nearly at the end of the Lotus Sutra, an interesting family drama, the story of a king named Wonderfully Adorned, his wife, Queen Pure Virtue, and their two sons.

The Story

The Buddha tells the assembly that long ago there was a buddha with the very long name of Wisdom Blessed by the King of Constellations Called the Sound of Thunder in the Clouds. (Here, I'll call him "Wisdom Blessed" for short.)

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Like Shakyamuni Buddha, Wisdom Blessed Buddha taught and preached the Lotus Sutra. And it was during the age of his Dharma that there lived a king by the name of Wonderfully Adorned, with his wife, Queen Pure Virtue, and their two sons, Pure Treasury and Pure Eyes.

The two sons had already acquired great magical powers as a result of doing everything a bodhisattva should do, including perfecting seven bodhisattva practices, having good attitudes toward others, practicing thirty-seven ways to enlightenment, and achieving seven types of contemplation. But their father was a follower of a non-Buddhist way. So the sons went to their mother and pleaded with her to go with them to hear the Buddha preach the Lotus Sutra. The mother agreed, but told them to first get their father's permission, and, with sympathy for him, to use their magic to persuade him.

The sons then went up into the air before their father and performed a variety of wonders—standing, walking, sitting, and lying down in the air, emitting water and fire from their bodies, suddenly becoming giants or dwarfs, diving into the earth as though it were water, walking on water as though it were earth, and so on. In this way they were able to open their father's mind by purifying it, enabling him to understand and have faith in the Dharma.

Of course, the king was filled with joy, and wanted to know who their teacher was. To this they replied that it was Wisdom Blessed Buddha, who teaches the Lotus Sutra everywhere. The father said he wanted to go with them to see the Buddha.

Then the sons went back to their mother and begged her to allow them to leave home so that they could practice the Way under Wisdom Blessed Buddha. As it is extremely difficult to see a buddha, she said, the mother agreed. Then the sons asked both parents to go with them to see the Buddha. Thus, all four approached the Buddha, accompanied by tens of thousands of various ministers and servants.

Wisdom Blessed Buddha taught the king, showing him the Way, and making him very happy. The king and queen

removed the extremely valuable necklaces they were wearing and tossed them over the Buddha, whereupon the necklaces flew up into the sky and were transformed into a jeweled platform on which there was a jeweled couch and billions of heavenly garments. And the Buddha, sitting cross-legged on the couch, emitted great rays of light and announced to everyone that, after much study and practice as a monk, King Wonderfully Adorned would become a buddha.

Following this, the king abdicated his throne, gave up his

ing that anyone who plants roots of goodness will subsequently have good friends. “A good friend,” he said, “is the great cause and condition by which one is transformed and led to see the Buddha.”

After praising the Buddha at length, the former king promised never again to follow his own whims, allow himself a wrong view, or experience pride, arrogance, anger, or other evil states.

Shakyamuni Buddha then explained to the assembly that King Wonderfully Adorned was actually today’s Padmashri Bodhisattva, Queen Pure Virtue was actually Marks of Shining Adornment, who appeared in that other world out of compassion for the king, and the sons were the bodhisattvas Medicine King and Superior Medicine, who had gained such powers by planting roots of goodness under countless buddhas.

A Modern Family?

This story is primarily about the relationship of the father, King Wonderfully Adorned, with his sons. But we may find the role of the mother, Queen Pure Virtue, also of interest. In the India of that time, women were very subordinate to men and therefore wives to their husbands. Of course, this queen does not challenge her husband directly. In fact, she insists that their sons respect their father, even though he is of a different religion. As is often the case with modern mothers, however, this mother seems to be the glue holding the family together, a kind of mediator between the father and the sons. More than anyone else in the story, she displays great skill in means, in effect teaching the sons how to persuade and convert their father to the Buddhist path.

It is also interesting that we find here the Lotus Sutra being sensitive to the possibility of families having members with different religious perspectives. Sometimes the term “heretical” has been used to translate the Chinese/Japanese term *gedo* which literally means “off the path,” where the path is the way of the Buddha. It simply means non-Buddhist. Actually, one could say that Buddhism itself is a Hindu heresy. “Heresy” means departure from something already established, some “orthodoxy,” and is always more or less within some tradition. Thus “Christian heresy” is possible and so is “Buddhist heresy” but that is not what is meant by *gedo*, especially here, where the king is a follower of Brahmin views, that is, of orthodox views.

So, the king’s beliefs are different, perhaps even more “orthodox” than those of the sons, who have decided to follow the buddha of that time. What should the sons do in such a case? Here they are urged by their mother to continue to respect and honor him.

Buddhism does not reject family life. By setting up an alternative, celibate institution, it did have and continues to have a problematic relation to families, especially in traditional Theravada Buddhism. But the Lotus Sutra says little about monastic rules and life as such, emphasizing the

Detail from the Lotus Sutra Mandala, scroll 4, at the temple Honkoji, Shizuoka Prefecture, depicting the story in chapter 27. Important Cultural Property.

home, and with his wife and two sons, practiced the Buddha Way according to the Lotus Sutra for eighty-four thousand years under Wisdom Blessed Buddha. Following contemplation, the former king went to Wisdom Blessed Buddha up in the air to praise his sons for doing the Buddha’s work, enabling him to see the Buddha and inspiring the roots of goodness which were already in him. “These two sons,” he said, “are my good friends.”

And the Buddha agreed, praising such friends and explain-

importance of life in the world being dedicated to the work of the Buddha. Thus, we can understand this story as saying that it is good if a whole family can devote itself to the Buddha Way.

Roots of Goodness

The Buddha in this story says that anyone who plants roots of goodness will have good friends. This idea of “roots of goodness” or “wholesome roots” can be compared to Buddha-nature, but is not exactly the same. Buddha-nature is understood to be given by nature and unavoidable. Roots of goodness, on the other hand, are typically, in Buddhist literature, planted in former lives.

Though the term is not found in the Lotus Sutra itself, most contemporary followers of the sutra make much use of the term “Buddha-nature” to express one of the sutra’s central teachings—the idea that everyone, every living being, has the potential and power to become a Buddha.

Especially in talking with non-Buddhists, who have no knowledge of the Buddhist ideas of causation and “Buddha-nature,” sometimes it is better to use ordinary terms rather than Buddhist jargon. Though we can say that one of its central teachings is the Buddha-nature, the Lotus Sutra itself never uses that term.

The main point in the use of “roots of goodness” here is that acts have consequences. Each of us has resources to draw upon. We don’t start from nothing. Those who have preceded us, even those who have preceded us by many centuries, have laid the foundations for our own lives. But, in the same way, we too can plant roots of goodness, making the world, even into the distant future, a more wholesome place for our descendants.

Leaving Home

In this story, leaving home is the primary indication of personal transformation. The Lotus Sutra frequently uses a phrase that means “teach and transform.” Usually it involves a transformation from ordinary monastic life to the life of a bodhisattva, that is, undergoing a change from one focused on one’s own salvation to one focused on helping others. Here, however, leaving home is used to indicate the transformation from being a householder to being a full-time follower of the Buddha. We are not told whether King Wonderfully Adorned and his family shaved their heads and became monks and nuns, as what is important here is not so much their status as their behavior. “The practice of the Buddha’s teachings,” says the king, “will bring peace and comfort, and good feelings. From this day forward, I will no longer follow my own whims, nor allow myself wrong views, pride or arrogance, anger, or any other evil states.”

What is involved, then, is essentially the forsaking of more purely selfish interests for the good of the whole—that is, doing the work of the Buddha. This is a kind of radical change in life, a kind of conversion. Thus, though not the same, it can be related to and compared with the central

theme of Christianity, expressed there both as conversion and as resurrection—that is, the ever-present possibility of a radically new, transformed life.

Founder Nikkyo Niwano thought that such conversion is symbolized in this story by the magic of the two sons. By performing fantastic stunts, they showed their father that the Buddha Dharma had changed their lives—their bodies and their behavior—and not just their words. Especially with those who are closest to us, teaching by example may be more important than attempting to teach by words alone. Of course, some things can probably only be taught by words, but when it comes to teaching religious faith, how one lives or embodies one’s faith may be much more persuasive than what one says about it.

The Lotus Sutra teaches that we should reflect the Dharma in our own lives, especially in relation to those who are close to us, such as other members of our family. Just thinking we are Buddhist, or saying we are Buddhist, or belonging to a Buddhist organization, or even regularly performing Buddhist practices such as meditation or recitation, is not enough. It doesn’t mean anything unless it affects how we behave in everyday life.

A Platform for Spreading the Buddha’s Light

When the king and queen gave Wisdom Blessed Buddha their extremely valuable necklaces, they were transformed into a jeweled platform with a seat for the Buddha from which he emitted light. The point of this, I think, is that when we devote ourselves to the Buddha, not only can our lives be transformed, but ordinary things as well. The necklaces can symbolize any gift to the Buddha. Here the necklaces are exceptionally valuable because they are from a king and queen. But every gift to the Buddha is valuable in its own way. We might think of the Donate-a-Meal Campaign, as a simple program through which members of Rissho Kosei-kai and others forgo meals in order to contribute to a fund for peace, as a kind of gift to the Buddha—gifts that, though small, may be transformed into something very great.

It is no accident that the first of the six bodhisattva practices is generosity, often understood as giving, or making donations.

The Value of Friends and Teachers

King Wonderfully Adorned praises his sons as his friends or teachers and Wisdom Blessed Buddha responds that good friends or teachers do the work of the Buddha, showing people the Way, causing them to enter it, and bringing them joy.

The Japanese term used here, *zenchishiki*, is not easy to translate. Some use “good friends,” some “good teachers.” Perhaps good “acquaintances” or “associates” would be a good translation, for there is a sense in which our good friends are always also our teachers. The point is that the help or guidance of others can be enormously useful. Entering the Way, becoming more mindful or awakened, is not

something best done in isolation. We all need good friends and teachers.

In the Lotus Sutra, the term *pratyekabuddha* is used to refer to monks who go off into forests by themselves to pursue their own awakening in solitude. But while the term is used frequently in the early chapters and *pratyekabuddhas* are made prominent by being named as one of the four holy states of buddhas, bodhisattvas, *pratyekabuddhas*, and *shravakas*, we never learn anything at all about any particular *pratyekabuddha*. While we hear the names of a great many buddhas, bodhisattvas, and *shravakas* in the Lotus Sutra, we never encounter the name of even a single *pratyekabuddha*. This leads me to think that, at least for the Lotus Sutra, *pratyekabuddhas* are not very important. Though there probably was a historic forest-monk tradition in India, in the Lotus Sutra, the *pratyekabuddha* seems to fill a kind of logical role. That is, there are those who strive for awakening primarily in monastic communities, the *shravakas*, and there are those who strive for awakening in ordinary communities, the bodhisattvas. There needs to be room for those who strive for awakening apart from all communities. But from the bodhisattva perspective of the Lotus Sutra, *pratyekabuddhas* are irrelevant. Since they do not even teach others, they do no harm, but neither do they contribute to the Buddha's work of transforming the whole world into a buddha land.

For the Lotus Sutra, the ideal is the life of the bodhisattva, which is also the life of the Buddha. And that life cannot be led in isolation. It necessarily involves both being informed by and teaching others. Some of those we teach or learn from may be our teachers or students or close friends in a more or less formal sense, but many only become our friends in relation to the Dharma—they become our friends in an important sense because of the Dharma relationship we have with them. Such others, while not our teachers or friends in the formal sense, can nevertheless be true teachers and friends.

Though the amount of time I enjoyed in direct conversation with Founder Niwano was not very great, and we were never close friends in the ordinary sense, I always think of him as being among my most important teachers and closest of friends. He was and is my Dharma teacher. In this story, the formal relationship is father and sons, even king and princes, but the Dharma relationship is one of teachers and student or true friends.

As I wrote this, in Japan it was the beginning of this year's Bon festival season. Many people visited a temple to invite and guide their ancestors' spirits to return home for a brief visit. And they lit small fires with which to welcome them back home. In other words, Bon is a special time for remembering what our ancestors have contributed to our own lives. But it would be inaccurate, I think, to restrict our respect for our ancestors only to those with whom we have a blood or genetic relationship. Those who have had an important influence on our lives include not only such

ancestors in a narrow sense, but all of those who have taught us, including some we've never known personally. That is why it is appropriate that in our ritual "transfer of blessings" we recognize a great host of spirits, both related and unrelated to us in a biological sense. For members of Rissho Kosei-kai, and many other people as well, Founder Niwano is one of our greatest teachers. It is appropriate that we recognize and show appreciation for him in suitable ways, for he is importantly related to us; he is our great ancestor.

Another way of putting the point of this story is that we should care about the social environment in which we live. It's a well-known fact that if people who are "rehabilitated" in prison return to the same social environment, they will soon revert to the kind of behavior that resulted in their being in prison. Many years ago, I had the privilege of working with disturbed adolescent children at a residential treatment center for such children. There, too, we knew that after months and sometimes years of working to restore highly disturbed young men and women to normal lives, if they were returned to the same social environment there was a very great likelihood that they would revert to the kind of depression and ugly behavior that resulted in their being sent to the treatment center. Finding an alternative social environment for those who were ready to leave was often not easy, but those who worked with such young people knew that the kind of social environment in which we placed them would make an enormous difference in what became of them.

The Sons Are Teachers of Their Fathers

It comes as no surprise to parents that the young can teach and lead their elders. But there is more than that involved here. Buddhism sometimes breaks radically with social conventions. The most important symbol and reality of that is the exhortation to children to break with their parents and leave home. In this story, the break with convention is that the sons become teachers of the father, rather than the expected opposite.

In many of the parables in early chapters of the Lotus Sutra, a father teaches his children, but here, toward the end of the sutra, we are reminded that it is not always so, that the opposite can also be the case, and that children can be teachers of their parents. Part of the significance of this is that we should expect the Dharma to come to us from surprising places, including our children. Earlier we have seen that it can come even from our enemies, or from a young dragon princess.

This is part of idea of the Universal Buddha—the Dharma is everywhere for those who have the eyes to see it and the ears with which to hear it. If we are open to the buddha-nature in others, we will see potential buddhas everywhere.

Seven Bodhisattva Practices

As we have seen, the Lotus Sutra sometimes breaks from Buddhist tradition. Almost everywhere they are mentioned,

including in other parts of the Lotus Sutra, there are six bodhisattva practices, which are often called “perfections,” from the Sanskrit term *paramita*, because they are practices through which bodhisattvas should try to perfect themselves.

Though some have been translated in other ways, the normal six are: (1) generosity in giving; (2) morality, sometimes understood as following commandments or precepts; (3) patiently enduring hardship; (4) perseverance or devotion to one’s goals; (5) meditation or meditative concentration; and (6) wisdom. To these six a seventh is added here—the practice of skillful means.

On the one hand, it is very appropriate that the practice of skillful means is added to the normal bodhisattva practices. Among other things, it makes clear that the practice of skillful means is not, as some have said, something that can be done only by a buddha. Here it is made abundantly clear that use of skillful means is a practice of all who follow the bodhisattva path.

But much more important, I think, is the constant ability of the Lotus Sutra to surprise the reader by presenting the unexpected. Buddhism has many formulas, several lists of different numbers of items, which originally were probably aids to memorization. They are useful in that way still. But, while finding such lists useful, we should also be aware that they are themselves convenient devices, utilized to help people to follow the Buddha and do the work of the Buddha. They should not be made into rigid lists that cannot be modified when appropriate. After reading many occurrences of six practices or *paramitas*, to suddenly find the list changed to seven can be to experience the impermanence of all such lists.

As you teach or share the Buddha Dharma, you may want to devise your own list of bodhisattva practices. I once talked about the eleven practices of the Lotus Sutra. If I were doing that talk again today, I would have to make it a list of twelve. The point is that the Lotus Sutra encourages us to adapt the Dharma and our ways of teaching it creatively in accord with what is most likely to be useful in our own place and time.

Following the Truth

The king follows the truth when it is shown to him, even though it is his own sons who lead him to the truth. This probably is the main point intended in the story. The Lotus Sutra wants us to realize that we too must follow the truth, regardless of the source.

Following the truth means not only recognizing it, but also acting in accord with it. The king sees truth in the deeds of his sons and he follows them to see Wisdom Blessed Buddha.

In this sense, Buddhism can be seen as radically anti-authoritarian. You should follow the truth regardless of convention, regardless of from where or from whom it comes. But, at the same time, this final authority of the individual

has to be kept in check by having good associations, good friends, and teachers.

Thus, Buddhism is here again a kind of middle way—saying follow the truth as you yourself see it, but be sure that you are looking in the right places, that you are looking critically, and that your perceptions are shared by good friends.

Children of the Buddha

Especially in early chapters of the Lotus Sutra, the expression “child of the Buddha” is frequently used as equivalent to “bodhisattva.” For some this might signify leaving home in order to enter the Sangha, as in this story King Wonderfully Adorned and his entire family leave home to follow Wisdom Blessed Buddha. “Leaving home” in Chinese and Japanese means becoming a monk or nun, and thus becoming what was often thought of as a true Buddhist.

But one of the truly liberating teachings of the Lotus Sutra and Mahayana Buddhism generally is that one does not have to become a monk or nun in order to follow the bodhisattva way to be, just like the Buddha himself, a Dharma teacher. As we see most explicitly in chapter 10 of the Lotus Sutra, anyone can be a Dharma teacher for others. Such Dharma teachers are all children of the Buddha. But here being a child of the Buddha is not so much an alternative, as it is when one leaves home to follow a buddha, as it is an addition, a kind of fulfillment of being a child of one’s biological parents. This is what is symbolized in this story by the fact that the whole family gives up domestic life in order to follow a buddha. In a sense, their entire home—father, mother, children, and servants—left home together.

Thus, the meaning of this story for us is that we can be children of our parents and parents of our children, or have no children at all, and still be children, true followers, of the Buddha. This potential to be a true child of the Buddha, according to the Lotus Sutra, is not initially something we have to earn or learn, it is given to us, just as our parents and children are given to us. Relationships created by birth can be grossly distorted or even forgotten, but cannot be completely destroyed or abolished. So, from the moment of our birth, our relationship with the Buddha, a relationship that has close affinities to the relationship of a parent with a child, is always being given to us and can never be completely rejected or abolished.

In a way, this is the lesson of the story of Devadatta in chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra. No matter how hard he tried to harm the Buddha, he could not prevent the Buddha from seeing the potential in him for becoming a buddha himself. So, too, with us. No matter how much we may fail to follow the bodhisattva path, no matter how much we may fail to deal adequately with the poisons of greed and anger and stupidity in us, no matter how weak or sick or tired we may become, nothing on heaven or earth, not even a buddha, can remove or destroy our ability to do good by being a bodhisattva for others. □

Helping One Another

by Nichiko Niwano

Although we take our daily lives for granted, we owe a great debt of gratitude to many people and things, and to all of nature.

Our everyday lives are a repetition of getting up in the morning, washing our faces, chanting the sutra before our home Buddhist altar, and then heading to work or school after some breakfast. Although we take our daily lives for granted, we owe a great debt of gratitude to many people and things, and to all of nature. We are caused to live through their innumerable blessings.

When we become aware that we do not lead our lives only through our own efforts, we are able to receive such blessings gratefully, and we develop the wish to help others and can interact kindly with anyone and everyone without prejudice.

When I was in the first grade at elementary school during World War II, I was evacuated to Suganuma in Niigata Prefecture, the founder's birthplace, where I spent ten years. The people there had a humble rural lifestyle, conducting their lives by helping one another and sharing in small joys, and from them I experienced the kindness and simplicity of country people that I had not found in the city.

For example, when visitors arrived they were warmly welcomed with thanks for "taking the trouble to travel so far." In those days, it was usual for everyone to walk to the nearest village or town, so they knew from personal experience that it was not easy to walk a long distance.

As our material wealth has continued to grow since those

Rev. Niwano prays before the altar in the parental home of Founder Nikkyo Niwano in Suganuma, Niigata Prefecture.

days and the means of transportation have vastly improved, traveling on foot to visit a distant friend or relative has all but disappeared. And we may find it difficult to express the same warm appreciation to our visitors.

Destroying Illusions

"The ocean of impediment of all karmas / Is produced from one's illusions," is written in the Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue. This means that human beings' wrong deeds, which are like a wide ocean, as well as the many mental and physical obstructions that arise from them, are all born of faulty imagination or illusions.

Illusions are the result of our thinking in a subjective, self-centered way that causes us to see what is not true as if it were true. In order to destroy such illusions, it is essential that we awaken to the fundamental truth that all living beings share in the same one great life-force.

When we recognize this fact, the selfish illusion that "I am what I am, other people are themselves" gradually vanishes, and we become aware of the oneness of all of us together.

Then we can develop the spirit of putting others first, and the happiness of others becomes our own joy. We thus are able to build rich human relationships by supporting one another and helping one another. □

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Why Rules Are Important

by Kinzo Takemura

Another meaning for “rule” is good habits. Bad lifestyle habits can have unexpectedly serious results.

You may be familiar with the *varsika* (Jpn. *uango*), a meditation retreat that takes place during the rainy season.

In ancient India, for three months starting in late May or early June, Buddhist monks did not go outside, because they might unwittingly tread on and kill sprouting plants or hatching insects and other small creatures coming to life in the rains. For this reason the monks retreated into their caves or temples and gave their undivided attention to meditation, prayer, and other religious training practices. The need to regulate daily life during those rainy-season meditation retreats originally gave rise to the establishment of precepts and monastic regulations.

For example, rules were made about administering medicine to the sick. Various rules were made about clothing and equipment, such as footwear, as well as rules on how to deal with arguments that ended in an impasse. The number of rules to deal with various situations soon began to multiply.

After the birth of the religious community of followers that gathered around Shakyamuni, the number of monks

and nuns joining the group started to grow, and naturally this brought a need for morality and laws to maintain order in the group. We use the words “precepts and regulations” for these kind of rules. The Japanese word is *kai-ritsu*, which consists of two Chinese characters; *kai* signifies the inner working of the spirit that makes a person want to follow rules, while *ritsu* signifies outwardly existing rules and disciplinary laws. The number of precepts and regulations differs in various sects of Buddhism, but basically there are 250 for monks and 348 for nuns. For ordinary laymen, there are the famous Five Precepts. These Five Precepts are: do not kill living beings, do not steal, do not engage in immoral sexual relations, do not lie, and do not drink alcohol.

If we look in the Christian Bible, we find the story of the Pharisees, who tried to trap Jesus with their questions. The Pharisees were scholars of religious law who are often said to have complicated the original Ten Commandments of Moses by adding on detailed regulations. Compounded with detailed rules saying you cannot do this and must not do that, the number of laws regulating Judaism is said to have reached 613, or even well over a thousand, depending on how they are counted.

The same thing occurred in Buddhism, and the number of precepts and regulations multiplied. According to some Buddhist scholars, some sects became caught in the web of their own precepts and regulations, which rendered them immobile and as outdated as the dinosaurs, leading to their eventual degeneration and demise.

One interesting example was the precept of “no digging.” When we dig in the earth, we encounter worms, insect larvae, and other creatures, and to take the lives of these creatures would be a sin, so monks were not allowed to dig in the earth. However, holes must be dug in order to build monasteries and convents. To solve this problem while obeying the no-digging rule, monks put their lay servants to work. However, the monks were not allowed to tell them directly to “dig here,” but would rather be obliged to tell them, “Take a good look at this spot.” When told to “take a good look,” the lay servants would know that this was where they

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were supposed to dig. And they would carry their tools to the site and dig the hole.

There is also the Buddha's threefold rule governing the consumption of fish and flesh that defined the partaking of fish and meat as blameless under three conditions: if it were unseen, unheard, and unsuspected. A monk cannot eat the flesh of an animal when he has witnessed it being killed. He cannot eat meat or fish if he has been told that the animal was killed for his consumption. And, if the cook says nothing but there is a reasonable doubt that the animal was indeed killed to feed the monk, even then he is not allowed to eat the meat or fish. Monks ate meat and fish even during Shakyamuni's time, but they did have this rule.

To return for a moment to the lay servants, digging holes in place of the monks was not their only job; it is also said that they kept things for the monks that were supposed to

be inappropriate for monks to possess. What kinds of things were thought inappropriate? Money, perhaps, or precious stones? It makes one wonder.

In any event, in the language of India, the word for rule is *sila*. Another meaning for this word is custom or habit. Good habits are called *su-sila* and bad habits are called *daut-silya*. According to the Buddhist scholar Kogen Mizuno, in everyday speech *sila* normally refers to good habits or customs. Professor Fumio Masutani agrees that *sila* indicates good habits.

One result of bad lifestyle habits detrimental to the health is a myocardial infarction, or heart attack; I myself had to undergo bypass surgery as a result of my inability to regulate my actions and stop my habit of smoking more than fifty cigarettes a day. In considering the concept "rules are good habits," all I can do is hang my head in self-reflection. □

Photo: TNM Image Archives

Akashagarbha, or Bodhisattva Space Treasury, painted in the Heian period (794–1185). Color on silk. National Treasure. Tokyo National Museum.

Achieving True Equality and Harmony

by Nikkyo Niwano

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

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

What is the nature of that true peace of mind which all human beings seek? It is the equilibrium that lies within movement—the harmony produced when what one person creates merges with what is created by all those around one. It is like a symphony orchestra in which the various instruments each has its own different timbre, range, and strength, yet when they are played together in consonance, the combined harmony is immensely pleasing to the listener. The pleasure obtained from this kind of harmony is like what is considered true peace of mind. An orchestra that does not perform cannot be said to be a living orchestra, however fine the skills of its individual members. In the same way, human beings who do not fulfill their creative potential cannot be said to be genuinely alive.

If each person is continually creative, in accordance with his or her own personality, ability, and occupation, for the happiness and benefit of society as a whole, of others as well as oneself, this creativity corresponds with a universal prin-

ciple that leads to harmony on a grand scale. It will interact with the unseen creativity of others in an uninterrupted flow of harmony. As long as this occurs, the will to work will be stimulated in our hearts and minds and we will find both our work and daily lives pleasant. This is true peace of mind, and it is fair to say that this harmonious creativity is the ultimate human ideal.

We can see this ideal in operation in a piecemeal way in our contemporary world at certain times, among certain people and groups, and in certain places. However, it seems almost impossible that such ideal harmony can be produced on a global scale, for wherever we look we see disharmony reigning. Nevertheless, from one point of view disharmony itself can be seen as the path to progress and improvement. For example, disharmony arises if one person works hard in a group in which the others are basically lazy. If this one person's example, however, encourages the others to work harder, a new and better harmony will emerge. That is progress.

When a large number of people are walking slowly in one direction, or even in a backward direction, a small group moving in a conspicuously different direction for a time will upset the original harmony. If many people rise to the better way of living that the small group represents so that a new harmony forms, the progress has been achieved.

The human race has advanced through the repetition of this pattern of lower-level harmony being disrupted by the appearance of something different and better, leading in turn to a new harmony where the level of all has been raised. From the standpoint of the highest ideal, harmony is not something that should be broken, and human beings should be on a continuous march of progress. However, this need not be merely an ideal. An orchestra might give a good and balanced performance, but its members may not be satisfied and so with a united spirit study and rehearse untiringly so that an even finer and better balanced performance can be achieved. The same ideal can apply to society in general. In that case, everyone works with creative

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

dedication to their individual task according to their own skill and temperament. Furthermore, all will be bound together in a sense of solidarity, based on the Buddhist belief that all things are devoid of self. And so, motivated with feelings of affection and compassion, they will take by the hand those who are slow and lend their strength to those who need it, so that all can move forward together in harmonious balance. If such an ideal could be realized, the entire human race could live in a vital state of creative progress, and enjoy constant true peace of mind.

In whatever we do, we are inclined to emphasize ourselves, believing that nothing would occur if we were not there to see to it. But what is this "self" on which we place so much stress? Where is the core of being that we might term "self"? The more we seek it, the more we find that no such core exists. Rather, our existence is a matter of give-and-take, supported by the goodwill of all those around us.

The Buddha described this situation in the phrase "all things are devoid of self." "Everyone talks about 'me' all the time, but no one in this world can exist independently of everyone and everything else. In fact, we live only through the help of others," he explained. Since we live in a situation of give-and-take, we must be seriously concerned about the need to stop the fighting among ourselves and to attain a

firm grasp on peaceful harmony. Yet, even in a give-and-take situation, some are strong and others are weak, some have material possessions and others do not. This discrepancy can easily lead to disharmony. We therefore must realize that the way to peace is to work to bring all things into a state of harmony. The state of tranquillity that arises from such harmony among all things is what in Buddhism is called nirvana.

When we foolishly try to bend others to our will, all we do is to affect ourselves. Depriving others of their freedom merely takes away our own. Parents raise their children with love but tend to want them to have the kind of freedom they feel is right—and thus find that their children reject them. It is thus imperative that we understand this tendency and so seek the happiness of others before our own, and strive to achieve it. This may be the greatest task before us in the coming years.

Conflicts and wars continue because we consider even slight differences among us to be important. If we remember that originally we are all equally children of God and the Buddha, the need for wars will disappear. Since we are supported in life by relationships of give-and-take and mutual assistance, there is no reason why we should not be able to cooperate and live in harmony and peace. □

Founder Niwano during a visit in October 1975 to New York, where he participated in the International Committee meeting of the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 11 Beholding the Precious Stupa (3)

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

TEXT Then the great assembly, seeing the two Tathagatas sitting cross-legged on the lion throne in the Stupa of the Precious Seven, each reflected thus: “The Buddhas are sitting aloft and far away. Would that the Tathagatas by their transcendent powers might cause us together to take up our abode in the sky.”

COMMENTARY The assembled believers feel a longing to attain the ideal state. “The Buddha is in a far loftier state than we are. We too wish to reach that lofty state”—this desire wells up spontaneously in their hearts. This is called “awakening the aspiration for enlightenment,” and means taking a step along the path to realization. So, as stated in the following passage, the Tathagata Shakyamuni immediately lifts the multitude into the sky to stand before the Precious Stupa.

TEXT Immediately Shakyamuni Buddha, by his transcendent powers, received all the great assembly up into the sky, and with a great voice universally addressed the four groups, saying: “Who are able to publish abroad the Wonderful Law Flower Sutra in this *saha* world? Now indeed is the time. The Tathagata not long hence must enter nirvana. The Buddha desires to commit this Wonderful Law Flower Sutra so that it may ever exist.”

COMMENTARY Now the multitude ascends into the sky, and the discourse is continued there. Until this point, the assembly has taken place on the summit of Vulture Peak (the Vulture Peak assembly). From this point to the end of chapter 22, “The Final Commission,” it is held in the sky (the assembly in the sky). From chapter 23, “The Story of the Bodhisattva Medicine King,” onward it is held again on the summit of Vulture Peak. Since the assembly of the Lotus Sutra is held three times in two places, it is called “the two places and the three assemblies.”

There is a deep significance in this. When we learn some-

thing new, we must start from what we already know so that it is not too forbidding or hard to understand. If we are shown the ideal state at the very beginning and told to reach it in one leap, we will only be bewildered. The same applies to teachings of human liberation. At first we learn how to attain peace of mind in our daily lives: how to escape suffering, how to part from delusion, and how to gain mental equilibrium. To do this we must cultivate the wisdom of seeing things as they really are and the wisdom of discerning such issues as how the world is formed, what it means to be human, and how we should interact with others. The Lotus Sutra, too, begins in this way, with the teaching that is given on the summit of Vulture Peak.

As we assimilate this wisdom, we are shown that true liberation is to become one with the Eternal Original Buddha. Furthermore, when all human beings have attained this state, the Land of Tranquil Light will manifest itself in this world. That is, we are taught to realize the power of the great compassion of the Eternal Original Buddha and faithfully follow it to become one with the Buddha. Such a state is difficult to attain within the realities of everyday life. Unless we become devoid of self and enter the world of the Buddha, we cannot realize that state. In other words, this is the absolute state to be attained by rising into the sky. This is the meaning of the discourse in the sky.

Once we have realized the great compassionate power of the Buddha, however, we must return to the earth and put our realization into action in daily life and use this realization to influence other people. Unless we do so, nothing will be achieved: The Land of Tranquil Light will not appear in this world, and personal liberation will not be perfected. Enlightenment must be actualized, put into practice in everyday life, and transmitted to all. This is the significance of the assembly’s return to the summit of Vulture Peak.

We should not think of this simply as the sequence applying to the assembly of the Lotus Sutra. We must attempt to do the same in our everyday lives. We must hear the Dharma,

study it, and cultivate wisdom. We must also make it an important daily task to enter concentration (*samadhi*) for a time and experience the mental state of oneness with the great compassion of the Buddha, and then, with the mind enhanced through such religious practice, we must work to enrich our daily lives. In this way, even in the course of everyday life we must repeat “the two places and the three assemblies,” that is, the first assembly on Vulture Peak (acquiring wisdom), the assembly in the sky (becoming one with the Buddha’s compassion), and the second assembly on Vulture Peak (practicing wisdom and compassion).

To return to the main text, on opening the assembly in the sky, Shakyamuni asks, “Who are able to publish abroad the Wonderful Law Flower Sutra in this *saha* world?” By doing so he is encouraging actual practice on earth. He seeks people to whom to commit the Lotus Sutra. The Chinese compound for “commit” is *fu-shu*, meaning “commit” and “entrust.” It goes without saying that Shakyamuni wishes to entrust the sacred task not to a specific person but to all people.

TEXT At that time the World-honored One, desiring to proclaim this meaning over again, spoke thus in verse: “The holy world-honored lord, / Albeit for long extinct / And in his Precious Stupa, / Yet comes [to hear] the Law. / How [then] should anyone not be / Zealous for the Law’s sake?”

COMMENTARY Thusness exists constantly, eternal and undying. Unless there is someone who teaches it, bears witness to it, and makes it live, however, it is as if it were extinct. Such has long been the case in the human world. Thus the sutra says “albeit for long extinct.” Even so, this “extinct Thusness” is due to the fact that people are unable to see Thusness because of their delusions; Thusness is actually eternal. Furthermore, Thusness itself always desires to be taught, witnessed, and put into practice, and so when one who preaches it appears, it immediately reveals itself in living form in that place. If people only realized that, they would be keen to hear the Buddha’s teaching of Thusness and would devote all their efforts to practicing the teaching. This is the meaning of the Tathagata Shakyamuni’s ringing declaration, “How [then] should anyone not be zealous for the Law’s sake?”

TEXT This buddha has been extinct / For countless *kalpas*, / [Yet] in place after place he hears the Law / Because of its rareness. / That buddha made a vow: / ‘After my extinction, / I will go anywhere / Forever to hear this Law.’ / And innumerable buddhas / Emanated from my body, / As the sands of the Ganges, / Have come to hear the Law / And to behold the extinct Tathagata / Abundant Treasures. / Each, leaving his wonderful land / And his host of disciples, / Gods, men, and dragons, / And all their offerings, / Has come here to this place / So that the Law may long abide.

COMMENTARY As already mentioned, the emanated buddhas refer to the sages preaching their own doctrines in all parts of the universe. Some have appeared in Greece, others in China, the Middle East, and Europe, expounding their teachings and instructing people in those countries or cultural spheres (“wonderful land[s]”). These refer not only to places on earth but to all places in the universe where there are living beings. These sages have direct followers as well as the many who receive their teachings indirectly (“host of disciples”). These sages are venerated by countless people (“gods, men, and dragons, and all their offerings”).

Nevertheless, when there is one who preaches the complete aspect of Thusness, these sages have to listen, for their own teachings are a part of Thusness, that is, the “emanated body” of Thusness, which is not separate from the entire body of Thusness itself. Just as blood flows in a stream, not drop by drop, the blood of Thusness is linked. And just as blood flows away from and then back to the heart, no drop missing, so do all teachings flow from Thusness, their source. All the sages, therefore, gladly leave their wonderful lands where they have taught, their followers, and people’s respect and gratitude, to come see the complete aspect of Thusness and listen to the true teaching.

This is the ideal of religion. Differences of religious school, focus of devotion, ritual, and custom seem vast, but in reality they are minute problems. If people can avoid concentrating on these small differences and make a thorough investigation of the true meaning of religion, they should be able to reach Thusness, the one ultimate truth.

Shakyamuni here portrays the ideal aspect of religion. Yet he also points out in graphic form that it is not a mere ideal but something that can be realized. His words are magnificent, and at the same time precise.

TEXT In order to seat these buddhas, / By my transcendent powers / I have removed innumerable beings / And cleared [my] domain. / The buddhas, one by one, / Have arrived under the jewel trees, / As lotus flowers adorn / A clear and cool pool. / Under those jewel trees, / On the lion thrones, / The buddhas are seated, / Brilliant and resplendent, / As, in the darkness of night, / Great torches gleam.

COMMENTARY This is a beautiful verse. In unparalleled splendor, the emanated bodies of Thusness gather together to reveal the complete aspect of Thusness and manifest it in the world.

TEXT From them proceeds a mystic fragrance / Spreading afar over all lands; / All beings perfumed thereby / Are beside themselves with joy; / It is just as when a great wind / Blows over the [fragrant] bushes. / By this expedient / They cause the Law long to abide.

COMMENTARY The “mystic fragrance” proceeding from

the buddhas' bodies signifies of course the true teaching (Thusness). This teaching is not cold and off-putting but joyful and fascinating, like a fine perfume. This is as it should be, for this is the teaching that tells us that originally all human beings are buddhas. Thus, wherever the fragrance of the teaching wafts all living beings tremble with joy, as the branches of trees bend before a great wind. As stated above, to move living beings in the worlds of the ten directions through the great merit and virtue of the Dharma is a means to eternally maintain the Dharma as the true teaching in the worlds of living beings. To intimidate living beings or force the Dharma on them, saying, "Heaven will punish you if you do not believe in the Dharma," is no way to make the Dharma eternal. This is shown quite clearly in this passage.

TEXT To this great assembly I say: / 'After my extinction, / Whoever is able to guard and keep, / Read and recite this sutra, / Let him before the Buddha / Himself declare his vow!' / The Buddha Abundant Treasures, / Albeit extinct for long, / By [reason of] his great vow / [Will sound forth] the lion's roar. / Let the Tathagata Abundant Treasures / And also me myself / And my assembly of emanated buddhas / Know this resolve. / Of all my Buddha sons, / Let him who is able to protect the Law / [Sound] forth a great vow / To make it long abide! / He who is able to protect / The Law of this sutra / Will be deemed to have worshiped / Me and Abundant Treasures,

COMMENTARY *Let the Tathagata Abundant Treasures and also me myself and my assembly of emanated buddhas know this resolve.* The Sanskrit text is quite different here, and goes like this: "The Tathagata Abundant Treasures, I myself, and all the buddhas emanated from me must understand thoroughly the meaning of these three." The Chinese version is probably Kumarajiva's free translation. In other words, he has translated the spirit rather than the words.

• *Let him . . . [sound] forth a great vow.* The Buddha's exhortation to make a great vow appears three times in the verse section. This is the first.

• *He who is able to protect the Law of this sutra will be deemed to have worshiped me and Abundant Treasures.* Here too we find that "worship through deeds" is deemed the highest form of veneration (see the November/December 2003 issue of DHARMA WORLD). Here, "protect" does not mean just implanting the teaching firmly in one's mind. If that were all, the teaching would be lost when one died. Unless we transmit the teaching to others and implant it firmly in their minds, it will not continue to exist eternally. We must realize that protection always connotes the positive, forward-looking action of preaching for the sake of others.

TEXT This Buddha Abundant Treasures, / Who abides in

the Precious Stupa / And ever wanders everywhere / For the sake of this sutra. / He will moreover have worshiped / All my emanated buddhas here, / Who adorn and make resplendent / All the worlds. / If he preaches this sutra, / Then he is deemed to have seen me / And the Tathagata Abundant Treasures, / Also my emanated buddhas.

COMMENTARY To preach this sutra is to see the Tathagata Abundant Treasures (the perfect aspect of Thusness), Shakyamuni Buddha (he who teaches the perfect aspect of Thusness), and the emanated buddhas (those who teach a part of Thusness according to different environments). These three elements are contained in the Lotus Sutra. This will be confirmed for you if you consider the Lotus Sutra as a whole.

• *Emanated buddhas.* This term here refers to the transformed bodies of the Buddha that appear in the world in various forms in order to bring living beings to liberation. They are called "incarnations" or "temporary manifestations."

TEXT All my good sons! / Let each carefully ponder that! / This is a difficult task, / Needing the taking of a great vow.

COMMENTARY This is the second exhortation to make a great vow. The great vow is of course the vow to preach the Lotus Sutra in order to save people. The Buddha says, "This is a difficult task," and goes on to expound how difficult it is below, using various metaphors. Nine apparently impossible things are described, and then are said to be easy in comparison to preaching the Lotus Sutra after the Buddha's extinction. Then the practice of receiving and keeping the Lotus Sutra and preaching it for the sake of others is divided into six aspects, whose practice is said to be truly difficult. This is termed "the doctrine of six difficulties and nine easy practices."

TEXT All the other sutras, / Numerous as the sands of the Ganges, / Though one expounded them, / It still could not be counted hard. / If one took up Sumeru / And hurled it to another region / Of numberless buddha lands, / Neither would that be hard. / If one were with his toes / To move a great-thousandfold world / And hurl it afar to another land, / That also would not be hard. / If one, standing on the Summit of All Beings, / Were to expound to all beings / The countless other sutras, / That also would not be hard. / But if one, after the Buddha's extinction, / In the midst of an evil world / Is able to preach this sutra, / This indeed is hard.

COMMENTARY From an ordinary point of view, all the things described as not hard seem impossible. Thus, preaching the Lotus Sutra perfectly in an evil world is more difficult than anything else. This is called "the difficulty of preaching the sutra." What makes it so difficult? Imagine

you told people of old that their bodies were no more than temporary appearances and they were, in essence, buddhas. Very few would believe you; most would laugh at your “fantasies,” and you would be persecuted by people of lesser teachings. This is because people as a whole had an extremely low capacity.

Today, however, conditions have changed greatly. Modern people have yet to realize true wisdom, but society as a whole has made great progress. It is one of the fruits of progress that most civilized countries recognize freedom of religion and equality of people, valuing life above all things. The advancement of science too has helped in the understanding of religion. Here, we must understand that “the difficulty of preaching the sutra” teaches us the difficulty of preaching it *perfectly to all people*, and we must renew our resolve to try to do so. The following five difficulties should be understood in the same way.

- *Sumeru*. This refers to Mount Sumeru, the highest mountain, believed by people in ancient India to be the center of the world.

- *The Summit of All Beings*. This phrase translates the Sanskrit Akanishtha, the highest heaven in the realm of form according to ancient Indian cosmology.

TEXT Though there be a man who / Grasps the sky in his hand / And wanders about with it, / That is still not hard. / But after my extinction, / Whether himself to copy and keep / Or cause another to copy it, / That indeed is hard.

COMMENTARY This is termed “the difficulty of copying and keeping the sutra.” In modern terms it means the difficulty of thoroughly and correctly explaining the Lotus Sutra and of receiving it in faith.

TEXT If one took the great earth, / Put it on his toenail, / And ascended to the Brahma heaven, / That would still not be hard. / But after the Buddha’s extinction, / In the midst of an evil world / To read aloud this sutra for but a moment, / That indeed will be hard.

COMMENTARY This is termed “the difficulty of reading the sutra for but a moment.” Needless to say, anybody can read the sutra halfheartedly; the difficulty arises when one tries to read it with one’s whole body and mind.

TEXT Though one, in the final conflagration, / Carried a load of dry hay, / And entered it unseared, / That would still not be hard. / But after my extinction, / If anyone keeps this sutra / And proclaims it but to one man, / That indeed will be hard.

COMMENTARY This is termed “the difficulty of preaching the Law.” It is very difficult to get even one person to completely understand this teaching.

- *The final conflagration*. Buddhism divides the process of the formation, continuance, and destruction of a universe and the time until the next formation into four periods: the *kalpa* of formation, the *kalpa* of continuance, the *kalpa* of destruction, and the *kalpa* of emptiness. As explained earlier (see the September/October 2004 issue of DHARMA WORLD), it is said that a great fire arises at the beginning of the *kalpa* of destruction, which burns the world completely. Thus “the final conflagration” is expressed in Chinese as “the *kalpa* fire.”

TEXT If one could keep the eighty-four thousand / Treasuries of the Law / And the twelve divisions of sutras, / Expound them to others, / And cause those who heard / To gain the six transcendent [powers], / Though he had such power as this, / That would still not be hard. / But after my extinction, if anyone / Hears and receives this sutra / And inquires into its meaning, / That indeed will be hard.

COMMENTARY This is termed “the difficulty of hearing and receiving the sutra.” As we saw in chapter 2, “Tactfulness,” “Only a buddha together with a buddha can fathom the true aspect of all things.” Therefore the essence of the Lotus Sutra cannot be fathomed unless one realizes one’s own buddha-nature and through that buddha-nature becomes able to see others’ buddha-nature. Thus the Buddha says that hearing and receiving this sutra are very difficult.

- *The eighty-four thousand treasures of the Law*. This refers to the entirety of the teachings that Shakyamuni expounded. “Eighty-four thousand” was used by people in ancient India to indicate a very large number, and so we have the expressions “eighty-four thousand years of life” and “eighty-four thousand defilements.” In the same way, the Japanese talk about “the eight million deities.”

- *The twelve divisions of sutras*. This refers to the division of the teachings of Shakyamuni into twelve kinds according to differences in literary form and doctrinal content; it is also called “the teachings in twelve divisions.” (See the July/August 1998 issue of DHARMA WORLD on “the teaching in nine divisions.”)

- *The six transcendent [powers]*. See the discussion of “the six divine faculties” in the July/August 1992 issue.

TEXT If one could preach the Law / And cause thousands, myriads, *kotis* of, / Countless, innumerable beings, / As [many as] the sands of the Ganges, / To become arhats / And perfect the six transcendent [powers], / Even to confer such a benefit as this / Would still not be hard. / But after my extinction, / If anyone is able to keep / Such a sutra as this, / That will indeed be hard.

COMMENTARY The sutra says that it is far more difficult to retain the sutra for a long period and have deep faith in it

than to merely understand and believe it. This is termed “the difficulty of reverently keeping the sutra.”

Here the doctrine of six difficulties and nine easy practices finishes. Even though the Buddha says that these things are extremely difficult, we must not lose heart. We must understand his words as a teaching given to harden our resolve and arouse courage within us. Avoiding these things because of their difficulty indicates a weak spirit. Since the Lotus Sutra is a strong teaching, awakening the eyes of humankind to the truth and encouraging people to undertake the great task of building the ideal realm of peace in this world, weak-spirited people cannot possibly receive and keep it. All the same, there should be no misunderstanding of what I mean by a weak-spirited person. A weak-spirited person is one who prays to some image for happiness, thinking that such things can be easily achieved. However strong such people may look, it is only an appearance; they are weak because they have lost their courage to seek the true teaching and have succumbed to idolatry.

A true Buddhist may appear gentle and mild, even weak, but inside he or she cherishes an ardent determination to learn and practice the Buddha Dharma. This has been a characteristic of Buddhists since the time of Shakyamuni. We must not forget this. At present we are studying this sutra, receiving it in faith, practicing it, and preaching it to others as the days go by. We have gained a hold on one end of the difficult things and are maintaining our grip tenaciously. This proves that we can accomplish difficult things. I hope you will encourage one another as you strive in your sacred task.

TEXT I, on account of the Buddha Way, / In innumerable lands / From the beginning till now / Have widely preached many sutras; / But among them all / This sutra is the chief, and / If anyone is able to keep it, / Then he keeps the Buddha body.

COMMENTARY The Buddha’s statement that he has widely expounded the teaching in “innumerable lands” does not sound much like an utterance of the Tathagata Shakyamuni as the manifest-body. By the same token, it can hardly have been the human Tathagata Shakyamuni who purified the world three times and summoned the emanated buddhas before him from the ten directions, these actions being beyond the scope of a human being. A little further on, in chapter 16, “Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata,” it is revealed that the true form of the human-born Tathagata Shakyamuni is one neither arising nor perishing, the Tathagata Shakyamuni as the Eternal Original Buddha. That is already being taught here indirectly. Nichiren interprets the overall structure of the Lotus Sutra as follows: “The matter begins in the ‘Precious Stupa’ chapter, is revealed in the ‘Springing Up’ and ‘Life of the Tathagata’ chapters, and is brought to a close in the ‘Divine

Power’ and ‘Final Commission’ chapters.” That is, the most important teaching of the latter half of the Lotus Sutra shows signs of development in this chapter, “Beholding the Precious Stupa,” is manifested clearly in the chapters “Springing Up out of the Earth” and “Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata,” and is concluded in the chapters “The Divine Power of the Tathagata” and “The Final Commission.” Thus the person who has “in innumerable lands from the beginning till now . . . widely preached many sutras” is the manifest-body Tathagata Shakyamuni and at the same time the Tathagata Shakyamuni of the reward-body and the Law-body. It would be most correct to consider that the three buddha bodies are expressed in one person.

• *If anyone is able to keep it, then he keeps the Buddha body.* Because this teaching embraces the whole body of the Buddha, the practice of those who receive and keep this teaching is that of reverently upholding the Buddha body. More deeply, a person who has realized the buddha-nature through the teaching of the Lotus Sutra attains a buddha body. This is a precious thing, for which we should feel gratitude.

TEXT All my good sons! / Let him who, after my extinction, / Is able to receive and keep, / Read and recite this sutra, / Now in the presence of the Buddha / Announce his own vow! / This sutra [so] difficult to keep, / If anyone keeps it a short time, / I shall be pleased, / And so will all the buddhas.

COMMENTARY Here the Buddha says for the third time that the keeper of the Lotus Sutra announces his own vow. These are precious words of encouragement.

TEXT Such a one as this / Will be praised by all the buddhas; / Such a one is brave; / Such a one is zealous; / Such a one is named precept keeper / And *dhuta* observer; / Speedily shall he attain / The supreme Buddha Way.

COMMENTARY *Such a one is brave.* I spoke above about the truly brave person. Here Shakyamuni testifies that the brave person is one who firmly keeps the Lotus Sutra (the true teaching), so we have only to strengthen our confidence.

• *Such a one is zealous.* “Zealous” here means to strive wholeheartedly along the original, correct path. “Effort” or “diligence” includes a variety of practices. There are those who strive intently to remain physically pure. But such effort is not yet the real practice; it is the so-called Hinayana practice. True religious effort is to devote oneself to, and strive for, the great purpose of saving oneself together with others and bringing true peace to the world. Receiving and keeping and practicing the teaching of the Lotus Sutra are directly related to that great purpose, and so the Buddha says that “such a one is zealous.”

• *Such a one is named precept keeper.* “Precept” here means the morality and regulations given by the Buddha. People of later times have tended to regard the precepts as being only prohibitive and excessively binding, but the original intention was for them to provide a standard for a correct attitude toward life (see the November/December 1991 issue). As the number of disciples practicing under the leadership of the Buddha increased, there were some who made mistakes in their behavior. At such times the Buddha would admonish the offender, reminding him that such an action was not good. The other disciples would memorize each precept as it was spoken and strive to refrain from breaking it. Eventually there grew to be 250 precepts for ordained men and 348 for ordained women. These precepts took on a negative connotation, and though a handful of bhikshus and bhikshunis tried very hard to live a pure life keeping all those precepts, they could not purify the world as a whole and lead it to the correct path. Thus we must return to the original meaning of the precepts, understanding them positively as indications of a correct attitude toward life, keeping them ourselves and encouraging others to do likewise. Only when everybody acts according to the precepts will all become fine people.

Since the 250 and 348 precepts are the regulations governing ordained practitioners, and since lay life and ordained life are fundamentally different, it is impossible for lay followers to keep all of them. The short way, and the highway, to creating a correct attitude toward life is not to be preoccupied with keeping every single precept but to discern and develop the buddha-nature in oneself and in others. The teaching concerning realization and manifestation of the buddha-nature is the Lotus Sutra. Thus the text states that to receive and keep the Lotus Sutra is to follow the precepts.

• *Dhuta observer.* *Dhuta* originally meant to drive away material desires. Since bhikshus and bhikshunis can live by begging food, they may drive away material desires. But the case is very different for lay followers, who have to earn their daily food. For them the idea of *dhuta* has a far deeper spiritual meaning.

If one thinks, “I must drive away all material desires,” the mind is already attached to the idea of those desires. It is impossible to drive away material desires when one is attached to them. If, however, through the teaching of the Lotus Sutra one becomes able to see the real aspect of all things and the buddha-nature and to realize that all is sustained by the Buddha, material desires will vanish of their own accord. What is necessary will be provided through the workings of the Buddha. The feeling of desiring things and greedily seeking them is gone. This is the true practice of *dhuta*.

The faith of lay followers, unlike that of ordained practitioners, is not harmed by a rich life. As long as the mind is rich, life itself is rich. And if life is rich, the mind is rich. The

connection between the two is like the circulation of blood. To live a rich life is a basic human desire, and there is no need to forgo it. It is a mistake, however, to think that a rich life means riches beyond need. To be rich beyond need exerts a negative influence, as does too much fat on the body. As obesity puts stress on the heart and cholesterol prevents the blood flowing freely, too much wealth oppresses the human spirit and deprives a person of freedom.

From the point of view of the individual, the ideal is that wealth should come and go as sufficient, not too much and not too little, and do so smoothly, so that it does not corrupt the spirit. This is what “rich” really means.

TEXT He who, in coming generations, / Can read and keep this sutra / Is truly a Buddha son / Dwelling in the stage of pure goodness. / After the Buddha’s extinction, / He who can understand its meaning / Will be the eye of the world / For gods and men. / He who, in the [final] age of fear, / Can preach it even for a moment / By all gods and men / Will be worshiped.”

COMMENTARY *In coming generations.* Here the expression does not indicate the next life but the future in general.

• *Pure goodness.* “Pure” is used in the sense of unadulterated, genuine, docile, and unsophisticated. The state of goodness attained by study of the Lotus Sutra is not created by human discretion or wit, but is true and pure.

• *Will be the eye of the world for gods and men.* This too is an important phrase. In chapter 7, “The Parable of the Magic City,” we found the verse “Now the buddha has appeared in the world / To become the eye of all living beings.” A person who can truly understand the meaning of this sutra labors, in the same way as the Buddha himself, to cause all living beings to realize the true way of looking at things. Therefore he or she is called “the eye of the world.” The Buddha says that one who preaches the Lotus Sutra in the final fearsome age will receive the gratitude and veneration of all beings in the human and heavenly realms.

It is certainly as the sutra foretold. Today is indeed “the age of fear,” when missiles loaded with nuclear warheads can obliterate most of humankind. It is a time in which billions of people are daily exposed to that danger. There is an urgent need in such an age for the Lotus Sutra to be preached and spread widely. One who preaches and spreads the Lotus Sutra will therefore be a savior of humankind, and as such “by all gods and men will be worshiped.”

To be continued

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

Japanese Buddhist Folktales

Kobo's Well

It happened long, long ago, in a place called Komori in the village of Ryokami. This village was not blessed with plentiful water. With even a little dry weather, the water would evaporate, and all the people there were troubled.

One day, it was blistering hot. An itinerant monk of shabby appearance came and stopped at the house of the poorest woman in the village.

"My throat is parched. Please give me a cup of water," he asked.

There was only a little water left in the bottom of the water jug. The old woman took the dipper and scraped around the bottom of the jug, finally scooping up a cup of water, which she gladly gave to the monk.

"If only a little rain would fall, then I could give you as much water as you like. . .," she muttered to herself.

The itinerant monk, hearing from the old woman how this area suffered from a severe drought, thanked her from the bottom of his heart for sharing with him her precious water.

"Then let me give you a well," he said.

He poked the staff he was carrying into the earth, and from that very spot pure water came gurgling up out of the ground.

Later, the villagers learned that the itinerant monk was, in fact, Kukai, who was later known by his posthumous Dharma title as the Great Teacher Kobo. And so the villagers called it Kobo's Well, and always took very good care of it. □

(A story from Saitama Prefecture)

The Rabbit in the Moon

It happened long, long ago. One day, a sage who was a former incarnation of Shakyamuni Buddha came down from his retreat deep in the mountains. He was thin after undergoing strict ascetic practices, nothing but skin and bones.

A rabbit, a monkey, and a fox that happened to be there saw the glint of virtue in his emaciated form and were deeply moved. They said to him:

"Why don't you wait here for a little while and we will fix you something to eat."

And so the three of them left. Soon, the monkey, who was good at climbing trees, brought some fruit, and the fox, who knew his way around the village, brought some vegetables. However, although the rabbit did his best and searched everywhere in the forest, he found nothing. The monkey and the fox urged him on, saying:

"Hurry and find something to give him to eat." At a loss,

the rabbit asked them to gather some kindling and make a fire.

And then it happened, as a pillar of flames was roaring. The rabbit gave his body a good shake to throw off the fleas, and then he jumped toward the hotly burning flames.

"What extraordinary sincerity, to give his very body as an offering. . ."

So impressed was the sage that he immediately reached into the flames, grabbed the rabbit by his ears, and tossed him high up. The moon in the heavens received the rabbit, which began to live in the realm of the moon. From that time on, the rabbit has lived happily ever after, pounding rice cakes all year round. □

(A story from Okinawa Prefecture)

The Gourd's Revelation

Long ago, in the land of Bingo, there was a poor old couple. When the festival of Bodhisattva Myoken (Excellent Eyesight) came every autumn, they did not have a single copper coin or cup of rice. They wanted to make some offering, but when they talked about what they should do, they had no idea.

One morning, the old man woke up and looked in the garden, and a large gourd happened to be standing there. The old man was so surprised and amazed that he blurted out, "Where did you come from?"

Then the gourd started speaking. "I came from Osaka to make some money. I heard I could find lots of yams around these parts, and I'm going to sell them at the seaside and buy some wine."

As soon as he had said so, he vanished.

"Well, if that gourd said such a thing, then there must be yams on this mountain."

The old man quickly went to the mountain, and there were yams everywhere. He took them to the seashore, and they sold so well they almost flew out of his hands. Happily, the old man and his wife could make an offering to Myoken, thanks to the money he made.

Some time later, the old man went to pray before Myoken, and there was an offering of a gourd that looked just like the gourd from before. The old man looked intently at the gourd, and even though the wind was still, it made a rattling sound.

"Why, that gourd gave me a revelation from Myoken!"

The couple gave deep thanks, and always venerated Bodhisattva Myoken. □

(A story from Hiroshima Prefecture)

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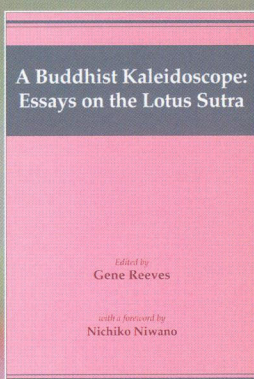
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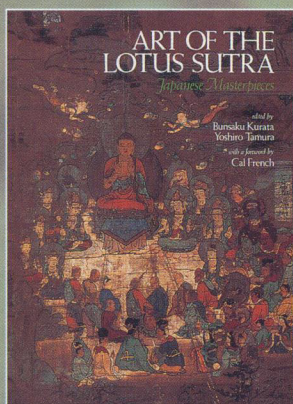
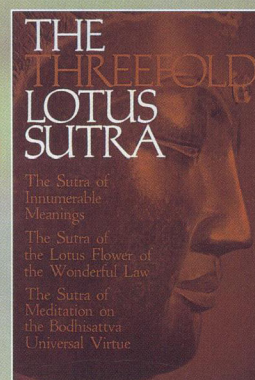
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