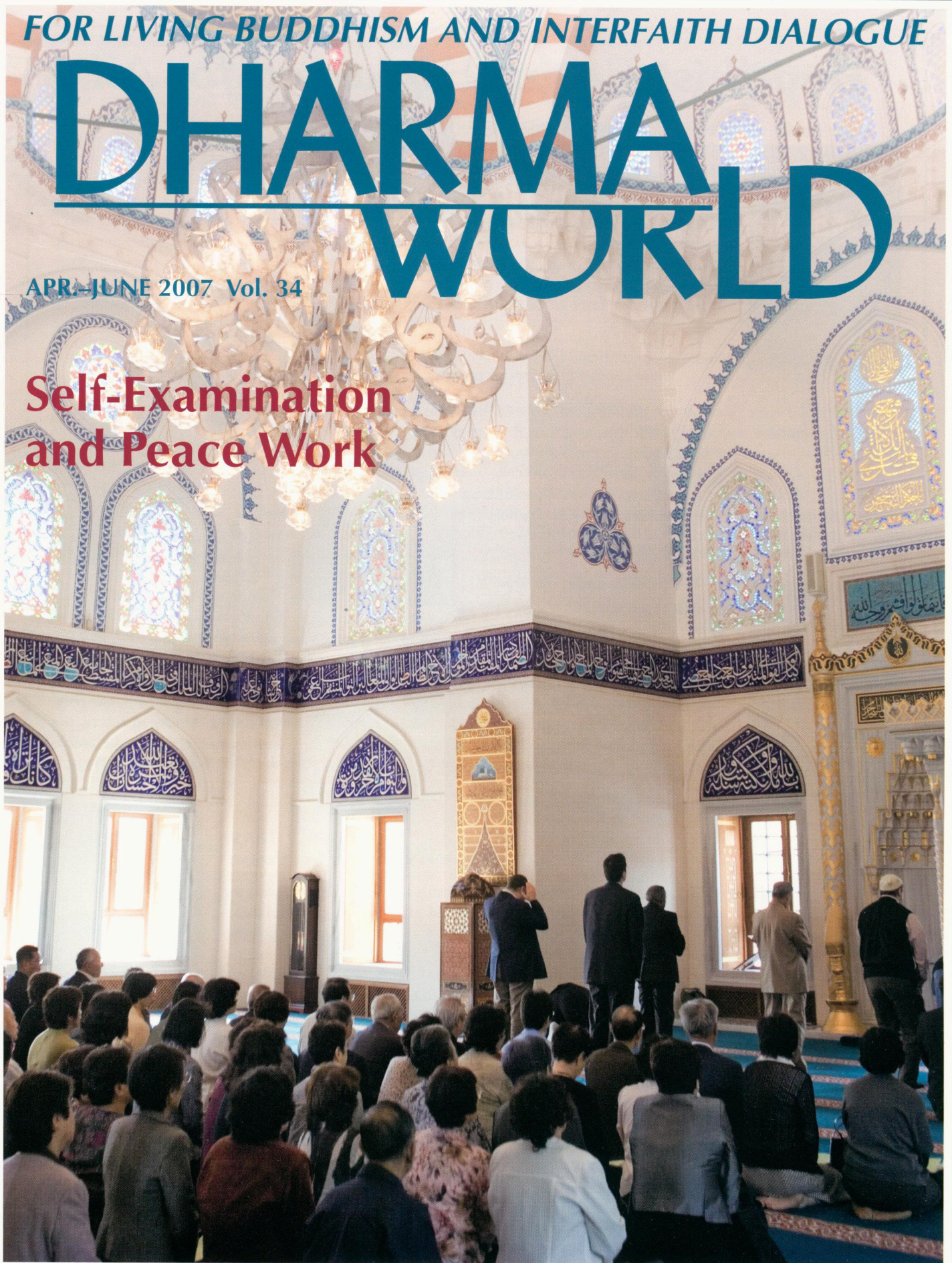


FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

DHARMA WORLD

APR. - JUNE 2007 Vol. 34

**Self-Examination
and Peace Work**



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Cover photo: Rissho Kosei-kai members join a prayer service at the Tokyo Camii and Turkish Culture Center, as one of the multireligious events that Rissho Kosei-kai took part in during the annual Week of Prayer for World Peace, which was observed last year from October 22 through 29. Photo by Tomoko Nemoto.

April–June 2007

Vol. 34

DHARMA WORLD

For Living Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue

CONTENTS

Self-Examination and Peace Work

The Road to Peace through Self-Examination
by Keiji Kunitomi 3

Self-Examination and Peace Work by Gunnar Stålsett 4

Shinto, Self-Examination, and Religion
as Tools for Political Control by Caitlin Stronell 8

Partners in Prayer and Peacemaking
An Interview with Rev. William G. Sinkford 11

Sino-Japanese Ties Must Be Deepened
An Interview with Master Jue Xing 14

Learning from My Family by Robert Traer 16

Religions Are Crucial to Attaining Peace by Christina Lee 19

World Peace Begins in Your Mind
by Tulku Thondup Rinpoche 22

Essays 28

Reflections
Grasping the Heart of Buddhism by Nichiko Niwano 26

Essays
Avoiding Religious Temptations
in the Global Neighborhood by Robert F. Smylie 28

Zen: Meditation and Simplicity as a “Sacrament”
by Notto R. Thelle 38

Symposium 32
Symposium in New York Commemorates
Centennial of Founder Nikkyo Niwano’s Birth 32

An Engaged Buddhist View of Shared Security
by Sallie B. King 34

Reflections on “Shared Security” by Christopher S. Queen 36

Japanese Buddhist Folktales 41

The Threefold Lotus Sutra: A Modern Commentary (90)

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law
Chapter 12: Devadatta (2) by Nikkyo Niwano 42

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

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The Threefold Lotus Sutra 42

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The Road to Peace through Self-Examination

by Keiji Kunitomi

Self-examination can perhaps be called a practice that is common to all religions. In some religions, it might take the form of offering a prayer to the deity; in others, it might take the form of meditation. Indeed, the forms of self-examination can vary from person to person. In Buddhism, too, self-examination takes different forms depending upon the sect and the individual performing it.

Self-examination is a fundamental condition for human beings who seek a higher level of existence. The reason for this is that in essence, human beings are creatures whose lives are filled with contradictions. For example, human beings unite in themselves two contradictory sides: one that desires to realize personal goals regardless of the cost to others, and one that seeks to cooperate with others in the belief that one cannot live without their help. The point of departure on the road of self-examination arrives when we understand that all humans lead their lives embroiled in this dilemma.

To what degree can we control and overcome egoism, and come to value others? In order to answer that question, and to move on to greater personal growth, religion is a necessity, and daily self-examination is indispensable.

However, the importance of self-examination does not stop at the personal level. On the regional, national, and international levels, when peace is being considered the most essential element is the attitude held in each person's heart. The preamble to the UNESCO Constitution states: ". . . since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." This clearly means that unless we create a state of peace within our own minds and hearts, we will never be able to attain lasting world peace.

As Rev. Nichiko Niwano, the president of Rissho Koseikai, often reminds us: "It may be that we ourselves turn our backs on the great cause of peace—thus thoroughgoing self-examination by people of religion is essential in the effort to achieve world peace." In other words, we must all become aware that the spirit that engenders war and various other conflicts exists within ourselves. Greed, anger, hatred, envy, and jealousy—all of these emotions reside within the human heart. In particular, it is because people of religion *are* people of religion that they must look within their own minds and hearts by careful and comprehensive self-examination.

Of course, there are many other causes of war and regional conflict in addition to problems of the heart and spirit. Dis-

similarities in ideology and economic systems, and misunderstandings and prejudices arising from differences in ethnic background or religious beliefs, as well as disputes over territory or natural resources, are among the factors that cannot be overlooked. Yet, as long as governmental and financial structures are run by human beings, even such political and economic factors all fundamentally arise within the human heart.

Most of the time when we engage in conflicts with others we have a strong sense that we are not in the wrong, and it is the other party who is at fault. And yet, if we take the time for true self-examination, the thought will arise that perhaps we cannot state unequivocally that we are in the right, that perhaps the other party is somewhat justified, and that we too might be partly to blame. If we even begin to suspect such a thing, then without a doubt a feeling of forgiveness toward the other will arise in our hearts.

In every religion, believers confess and atone for their sins before their deity or the Buddha in the hope of forgiveness. To the extent that people become aware of their own foolish and ugly deeds, they can gain a spirit of humility through which they can then forgive others. Further, if they delve deeper into themselves by self-examination, I believe that the deeper they go, the stronger the power of love and compassion that will grow within them.

The road to peace sought by people of religion is one that we must all tread together, even with people of different creeds and those with no faith in anything at all, acknowledging our common humanity and common spirit, and through the power of love and compassion move forward in one spirit to establish real peace within the human heart. □

Keiji Kunitomi is director of the General Secretariat of Rissho Koseikai and a member of the organization's Board of Directors.

Self-Examination and Peace Work

by Gunnar Stålsett

*To be a peacemaker, you need to understand the deeper dimensions
of the conflict or struggle, and you need to see with your heart.
There is a role for empathy, not only for intellect.*

Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself,” said the Russian author Leo Tolstoy. He also said: “Everything that I understand, I understand only because I love.” These words suggest a relationship between change and love. To be a peacemaker, you need to understand the deeper dimensions of the conflict or struggle, and you need to see with your heart. There is a role for empathy, not only for intellect.

The title of this article also suggests that if you want to be engaged in peace work, you have to be conscious of your own qualities as a human being. It is easily understood that such characteristics as peace of mind and a good conscience are positive attributes for one who wants to bring peace to others. If you want to be an instrument of reconciliation, it helps to be reconciled to yourself. It may also suggest that peace work may lead to self-examination, a deeper awareness of one’s own motives.

Sometimes this realization of responsibility may come

from an unexpected source. Former U.S. president Dwight Eisenhower expressed this profound wisdom: “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.” I believe these were words of deep spiritual and moral insight gathered in times of war and transformed through the office of being president. Was this not the fruit of a self-examination on the basis of the experience of a warrior?

For twenty-seven years, Nelson Mandela had ample time in his prison cell for reflection and meditation. Does this explain how the resistance fighter in the struggle to free South Africa from the curse of apartheid became a global icon of reconciliation? You may win the war without winning peace—but Mandela did both. He changed his country and he was himself changed. And he has continued to change people in his commitment to peace, justice, and reconciliation, and in his clear stance for openness and compassion on HIV/AIDS.

For many years, I have been involved in peace work in such different places as Namibia, Guatemala, Kosovo, and presently, East Timor. My own inspiration comes from several sources, but especially from my faith and my experience. Encounters with people who suffer under war and oppression always bring back the question of what more should have been done by the world community and all of us individually to help in the healing of their wounds and the creating of a new world.

One special source of inspiration and challenge for my own peace work has been my association with the Niwano Peace Prize. This prestigious prize has for almost a quarter of a century had a special focus on persons who from a spiritual motivation have contributed to the well-being of others. Its foundation on Buddhist ethics and principles has made it a global voice for peace and justice. Its committee members represent all major faiths and all continents.

The Most Reverend Gunnar Stålsett, bishop emeritus of Oslo of the Church of Norway, was formerly a member of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee. He now serves as the chair of the Niwano Peace Prize Committee. Bishop Stålsett has been actively involved in efforts for reconciliation and peace building as a president of Religions for Peace and the moderator of the European Council of Religious Leaders.

The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded in Oslo every year on the 10th of December. Like most Norwegians, I have been formatted to be peace-oriented through this annual exposure to heroes of peace and human rights. Their lives and achievements have instilled in me a sense of urgency in peace building as a religious and humanitarian duty with political implications.

It became my fortune in life to be elected as one of the five members of the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize Committee, on which I have served for fourteen years. This brought me into close encounters with a number of the most prominent peacemakers around the world over the last decades.

I am impressed by an anecdote about Alfred Nobel himself that points to the need for self-examination and the far-reaching effect it may have. When opening the newspaper one morning, he received a great shock. He read his own obituary. Confusing him with a brother who had in fact died, the newspaper described Alfred Nobel only as the man who had invented dynamite and amassed a great fortune from the sale of weapons. Jolted by the awareness that he would be remembered only as a man who had invented a means of mass destruction, in that very instant he decided to devote the rest of his life and all of his fortune to the pursuit of peace and fraternity among nations.

This anecdote also shows that even in this honorable decision, which has brought so many blessings to humanity for more than a hundred years, the deeper motivation was self-interest, that is, concern about his own legacy.

Perhaps it is only when we have faced the ultimate boundary of death, and come up against the sobering details of our own obituary, that we begin to discover something about the true nature of our motives. It is against the ultimate horizon of our existence that the need for change becomes imperative. But then it may be too late.

If I look back upon my encounters with many Nobel laureates, what has impressed me the most is the diversity of globally heralded peace personalities. Laureates like Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin, Mother Teresa and Aung San Suu Kyi, just to mention a few, were worlds apart in more than one sense.

Many of the Nobel laureates have spoken about their faith as a source of inspiration and strength in the struggle. The Nobel Peace Prize given to the fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet, which was the first time the prize was given to a Buddhist, may be seen as a special affirmation of spiritual values in the struggle for peace, and the consciousness of one's source of inspiration. The Dalai Lama has been consistent in his adherence to a strategy for change marked by nonviolence, based on the principle of reverence for all living things. This decision by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee was seen by many as a correction to a preponderance of laureates from the Judeo-Christian tradition and from the West. It also underscored the profound relationship between faith and freedom. In that sense, it might be seen as an expres-

sion of self-examination by members of the committee who may have been less open to the importance religion plays for peace and less than global in their worldview.

Through my years on peace prize committees and in active peace work, I have become more conscious that peacemaking is not only for saints. Some of the laureates have been rather average, a few of them rather obnoxious, with their demonstrated air of self-importance and arrogance. In the course of time, some of them have been exposed as having a rather ambiguous legend, raising the call in some circles that their award be recalled. Needless to say, not everyone has emanated a need for changing himself or herself. This does not, however, detract from the value of their efforts and achievements for peace. Peacemaking is not totally dependent on the character of the individual. Even if this comes as a comforting recognition for all of us in the business of peacemaking, it does not invalidate the need for a willingness to undergo self-examination for would-be agents of peace.

Let me elaborate briefly my impression of a few personalities in whom I have recognized a deep moral motivation combined with a sense of humility and an openness to self-examination and change.

My first meeting with a Nobel laureate was with the medical doctor, organist, and theologian Albert Schweitzer, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952. For his Nobel lecture, Schweitzer (in 1954) chose the theme "The Problem of Peace." It had a tremendous impact on all of us who heard him speak about "reverence for life" as the guiding principle for humanity's future. He called for an ethical mentality as the basis for peace. For me this was a call to self-examination and indeed for conversion of mind and spirit. But not only for me.

One newspaper editorialized: "What Schweitzer has taught us is that we all can be men and women of goodwill. During his visit we felt that in us there is a desire to be just that."

In his laudatory address, Dr. Johan B. Hygen, professor of theology at the University of Oslo, stated: "Schweitzer is a wise counselor in a time when good counsel is scarce." Alluding to a debate among conservative Christians in Norway who were critical of Schweitzer's somewhat liberal theological profile, he said: "If his activity is humanism, then I would gladly be a humanist. If his activity is Christendom, then I would like to be a Christian."

"Reverence for life is carried by clear thinking," Schweitzer said. Two years later this led to his appeal to all scientists of the world to unite against nuclear weapons. "The modern weapons of mass destruction are a cause for great pain and anxiety," he said. Schweitzer was a man who in his spiritual voyage so far had not been known for linking personal morality to active engagement in the political life. Now he had come to realize that this separation is untenable if we are to take the future of humanity seriously. He also said, "I am life which wants to live among life which also wants to live."

When Willy Brandt, who received the prize in 1971, as the

Albert Schweitzer speaking to a patient at his hospital in Lambarene, Gabon, in December 1963.

Chancellor of West Germany silently knelt at the memorial to the Holocaust victims in the Warsaw ghetto, he assumed a guilt that was not his personal guilt. He made this act of repentance on behalf of his nation and his generation. Brandt had personally fought Nazism and had become a refugee from Nazi Germany. He nevertheless acknowledged collective guilt as a reality for which self-criticism is due and for which confession must be made, personally, existentially, and collectively.

Self-examination is also about motivation. What is it that drives us to do good work? There is a shared wisdom among all religions that we should do unto others what we want others to do to ourselves. Or, in the negative version, we should not do unto others what we do not want others to do to us. Paradoxically, this could be interpreted as a selfish motive rather than an altruistic one.

Also, the spirit of the “great commandment” in the traditions of the three Abrahamic faiths is to be found in other religions, even if not in the same wording: It is a call to love God with all your heart and mind and soul, and your neighbor as yourself.

This three-dimensional expression of love is a moral imperative. It also positions us as human beings in a universe of interdependency between the immanent and the transcendent, a universe wherein mystery is as real as reality.

Even if the concept and understanding of the code word “God” varies among the faiths, the sense of “an Ultimate Being,” “a Mysterious Beyond” is a common dimension of religions. All religions have a dimension of transcendence.

The term “religion” itself is related to relationships. It connotes the interdependence among human beings, nature, and the Divine. A fundamental religious urge is to search for harmony in this essential relationship. To attain to this experience of harmony, one indispensable element is awareness about one’s self. This is a self-examination in a religious sense.

Another way to achieve self-examination is reflection, the throwing back of a light that lets us see ourselves as an object, not only as a subject. In this context, we might explain reflection as the return or throwing back of light from others that we had originally cast upon them. The metaphor of light and its symbolic importance is recognized across religions. In the words of Jesus: “You are the light of the world; . . . let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

In no other area is self-examination and reflection as important as in the search for peace and justice and the affirmation of human dignity.

In one of the most quoted texts of the Christian tradition, Jesus is quoted as saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

(Mt 5:3–10)

This text, which is known as the Beatitudes, is part of the Sermon on the Mount. The words are open to many interpretations. But no one can be unmoved by their spiritual depths. The emphasis on the experience and self-understanding of the individual is cause for deep spiritual soul-searching. Am I meek, am I hungering for righteousness, am I merciful, am I indeed a peacemaker?

It is commonly understood that Jesus announces a new age for humanity, and a new rule of life in discipleship. Not war, nor hatred, nor envy or personal prestige is to be the characteristic of his disciples, but rather humility, steadfast-

ness, mercy, and righteousness. Peacemakers are those who earnestly strive to make peace with other humans, with nature, and with God. Peacemakers are at peace with themselves. They are not proud and boasting about their achievements but poor in spirit and humble about their mission. The greatest prize for peacemaking is the promise to be called children of God. God will call them his sons and daughters.

No doubt the teachings of Jesus echo the words of the prophets of old of a promise for a time when "righteousness and peace will kiss each other" (Ps 85:10). And it hails a messenger of peace with the words, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger, who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation" (Is 52:7).

Peacemaking is practical and it is political. This means that peace is not only a conveyance of peace of mind and heart for the individual; it is also an indispensable feature of daily life in all its manifestations.

In the Christian tradition, Saint Francis of Assisi has become an icon for a kind of piety that transcends the individual and embraces the social, that which is a broad interpretation of neighborly love.

As Saint Francis of Assisi discovered that sun and moon, wind and flowers, birds and beasts need the loving care of God, he transcended the Judeo-Christian tradition, as he may be said to have expressed a central tenet of the teachings of the Buddha. He expressed a new spirituality for his time. As he gave up a life in luxury to share his wealth with

the sick and the poor, he embodied that spirituality that sees love of God as love of humanity and creation.

We live at a time when planet Earth is suffering the dramatic effects of acid rain, global warming, ozone depletion, and widespread desertification. The present environmental trends are seen to alter the planet dramatically, eradicating many species upon it, and in its ultimate consequence endangering the human species.

On the wall of a plaza next to the United Nations building in New York, there is an inscription from the prophet Isaiah about the coming Messiah, the Prince of Peace:

"He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Is 2:4). For those who pass by without time to read these words, let alone ponder the impact of this text, the message is repeated in the huge cast-iron sculpture of a twisted gun at the visitors' entrance to this center of peace in the world today.

In a world marked by conflicts between religions and of tragic sectarian divisions, fueling wars and terror, these words convey a message of hope for diplomats and heads of state who have lost direction or become cynical about their mission. It is a divine and thereby a deeply human call to self-examination in order to return to the path of peace. Every human being is called to be a messenger of peace and a servant of the common good for all humanity and all creation. □

AP Images

A cast-iron sculpture of a hand gun with a knotted barrel beside the United Nations headquarters in New York.

Shinto, Self-Examination, and Religion as Tools for Political Control

by Caitlin Stronell

*As a love machine lumbers through desolation rows
Ploughing down man, woman, listening to its command,
But not hearing anymore
Not hearing anymore*

*.
And I Want to Believe
In the madness that calls 'Now'
And I Want to Believe
That a light's shining through
Somehow
And I Want to Believe
And You Want to Believe
And We Want to Believe*

—David Bowie, “Cygnet Committee”

I was born in a strictly atheist household and, even though I attended a Christian secondary school, I spent most of the time asking difficult questions about why Mother Mary had to be a virgin and railing against what I felt to be the inherent conservatism of the Christian establishment and values. I was very much involved in the environmental

movement at the time, and I had come to the conclusion that the Christian concept, set out in the first chapter of Genesis, of man (not even woman) being at the apex of a hierarchy of creation and indeed created to “control” the other animals, was largely responsible for the attitude that underlay all the environmental destruction that human beings were wreaking. I assumed, in my limited exposure and understanding, that all religions were basically similar to Christianity; thus, they were all condemned in my mind to, at best, a crutch for weak-minded people and, at worst, a mindset that was causing the destruction of the planet.

I first came to Japan as a high-school exchange student, and during that year I came into contact with Shinto for the first time. However, perhaps due to the fact that even Japanese seemed a little embarrassed about it, a little wary and unable or at least reluctant to talk about it in detail, I came away with the idea that Shinto, like other religions throughout history, had been a convenient way of controlling the masses in Japan, whipping up nationalism and eventually giving the militaristic government a tool to drive the population into cruel, disastrous wars, the scars of which still fester.

From these unlikely beginnings, I became a Shinto priest—the culmination of a journey fraught with self-examination. It's never easy to question your own strongly held beliefs, but neither is it comfortable, in the end, to live a lie. I believe that critical thinking and self-examination are essential to keep all of us honest to ourselves, no matter where our journey takes us, but for those on a religious path, they

Caitlin Stronell moved to Japan from Australia in 1990 and received her master's degree in law from Keio University in 1997. She has worked for the labor movement and NGOs in Japan in a wide variety of fields, including environmental issues and HIV/AIDS. She started training to become a Shinto priest at the Asakawa Konpira shrine in western Tokyo in 2000 and received official qualification from the head Konpira shrine in 2002.

are particularly important because of the tendency for religion to be used by those with political power in order to control or at least influence the masses. When the human desire not only to believe but also to belong overrides individual powers of expression and self-reflection, that's when we find ourselves, like the "love machine" quoted above, simply listening to commands but not hearing anymore.

From Atheism to Shinto Priest

I first went to Asakawa Konpira, a small shrine on top of Mount Konpira, next to the more famous Mount Takao in western Tokyo, in 1994, hoping to meet with environmental activists who had managed to stop a development project that was going to flatten the mountain. That was no mean feat in Japan, where "Construction" and "Development" seem to have many more believers, or perhaps just more powerful believers, than "Natural Environment."

One of the first people I met at Asakawa Konpira was the head priest (*kannushi*). He was quite an elderly man and had been a pilot in World War II. But he didn't seem at all like the type that would be lining up with little flags at Yasukuni Shrine every August; in fact, his whole body shook with long-standing anger when he talked about his friends who shouted "*Tenno-Heika Banzai*" (Long live the Emperor) and climbed into their planes to die for their country. It was at this point that the first of my ideas about Shinto—that it was simply a method of control and manipulation—began to change. Here was a man who was deeply and personally opposed to what had happened during the war, yet he had since chosen to become a Shinto priest. There must be more to Shinto than I had imagined.

The original name of Asakawa Konpira was not *jinja*, or shrine, but *daigongen*, a term more associated with Buddhism. Indeed, the shrine managed to escape the Meiji-era laws separating the two religions, and to this day there is still a statue of a thousand-armed Kannon alongside the Shinto deities. Soldiers who were being sent away to war used to come there to pray that they would be able to return home alive, which, at the time went very much against the prevailing official line of dying for their country and reassembling as spirits at Yasukuni Shrine. It seemed that Asakawa Konpira had a bit of a history of dissent. Basically, most of the people

who gathered at Asakawa Konpira for the ceremonies and the monthly picnic were involved in the movement to save Mount Konpira from the developers. Most were also involved in other environmental movements in the area, most notably the campaign to stop a tunnel being drilled through Mount Takao as part of a road project. I felt very much at home with these activists, who were of very diverse nationalities, ages, and occupations. I became a Konpira regular and got to know the people in this community very well. It was discussions with these activists, whose environmental movement had become joined with the shrine, that led to

The flags standing along the path leading to Asakawa Konpira declare the shrine's key concept of protecting nature from developers.

the second turning point in my ideas, not just about Shinto, but about environmentalism and my part in it.

The key concept at Asakawa Konpira, which is written on the flags that line the path up to the shrine, is *Jinen goji mirai eigo*, which loosely translates as "Maintaining nature is the path to the future." The first two characters are usually read *shizen* (nature), but Asakawa Konpira has adopted the more ancient reading of *jinen*. In fact, the word *shizen* was introduced during the Meiji era. It was created, as were many other words at that time, to reflect Western concepts that were supposed to facilitate Japan's modernization. The Western meaning of "nature," as in "natural science" and "natural resource," includes a much stronger concept of something that human beings measure and control, even exploit, than the concept of *jinen*, which is more cosmic. *Jinen* expresses the whole universe, the way it exists, as it is, with humans as a mere part of this whole. We often talk about "protecting nature" (*shizen hogo* in Japanese) but *jinen goji*

expresses an acknowledgment that human beings are the ones protected by nature, not the other way around; that, in the entirety of the universe, human beings are not the only form of life that is going to make or break nature, we are simply a part of this entirety. This sounds very obvious, but it was a revelation to me. I realized that all this time I thought I'd been saving the world when really the world was simply allowing me to live in it.

Shinto and Self-Examination

This particular journey, from convinced atheist to born-again Shintoist, obviously involved a lot of questioning, re-considering, and eventually discarding of closely held beliefs (that is, beliefs that there is no god and that all religions are basically harmful)—in other words, self-examination. Perhaps arriving at religious beliefs through a process of self-examination makes one less likely to surrender one's critical powers to the judgments of religious (or political) leaders than if one had always been religious. In any case, becoming a Shinto priest did not, for me, entail blanket acceptance of the views of all my teachers. There are still things that I am uncomfortable about regarding policies of some Shinto institutions. There are also many things regarding which I am still trying to work out where I stand, including the Shinto attitude toward women.

But for me, Shinto has been conducive to self-examination rather than obstructive. In order to reflect on self, first, one needs a space. In the busy life of an activist, this was often hard to find. Going from one meeting to the next, working out strategies, organizing conferences, as well as the day-to-day grind of earning a living often meant that I didn't even have time to spend in the mountains and forests I was trying to save! I always knew that time was something that we don't just have, but something that we must make. Shinto ceremonies ensure that this time, away from everyday life, is made regularly. Separating self from the rush and bustle of everyday life to create a space where one can just be is an essential part of any meditation or self-examination and Shinto of course provides this space in both profound and simple ways. My Shinto training at the head shrine in Kagawa Prefecture is perhaps an example of a more profound separated space. It is held every spring over a five-day period, during which the thirty or so participants, priests from Konpira shrines all over Japan, eat, sleep, bathe, and study together. Morning and evening ceremonies are held every day and various special ceremonies are also practiced. By the first or second day, I always find that the things I would usually spend my time thinking about in my "normal life" all gradually melt away until what is left is my body, as the training is in many ways quite physical, and the main players in the ceremonies that we are conducting—the gods. How I communicate with them is really about how I communicate with a much deeper part of myself and this for me is the opening to self-examination.

On a more simple level, creating a space in which to contemplate can be as easy as remembering it's not me who's protecting nature—if I let it, nature can give me the energy I need. Shinto has made me more conscious of just taking time out to watch the fireflies or listen to the river or feel the breeze.

After a separated space, the second thing that is not necessarily essential, but that can be conducive to self-examination, is a format, a shape, an expression, a guide as to what to do in that space. The Shinto ceremony expresses some very basic concepts. To me, it is first and foremost about gratitude, expressing thanks to the gods, to nature, and to one's community for life, happiness, and support. Offerings of food and saké are made to the gods to express thanks and to ask for protection. It is usually celebrated as a community and the priest must lead the community in its expression, but for me, this ceremony gives me concrete pointers in order to think about myself in relation to nature as well as myself in relation to my community. Thinking about these relationships is, to me, the bricks and mortar of self-examination—a kind of environmental spiritualism.

Environmental Spiritualism and Self-Examination as a Counter to State Shinto

There is another relationship that is also a vital part of self-examination, especially in the context of religion, and that is the relationship between self and state. As mentioned previously, religion is easily used by political leaders as a tool to control large populations, and Shinto is no exception. Many of the Shinto practices and philosophies described above can, with a slight change in nuance, be used for this purpose. For example, both training and ceremonies could be used for indoctrination instead of providing a space and assistance for individuals to develop their own relationships with the gods (nature) and their communities. It is sometimes a thin line indeed between "assistance" or "facilitation" and "indoctrination."

In order to prevent the use of Shinto to promote Japanese nationalism and xenophobia, I also feel that having non-Japanese priests and that the work of international Shinto scholars and international participation in Shinto are very important, so that we might show the world not only that Shinto is a uniquely Japanese religion, but also that it has universal principles that all human beings can appreciate.

Politically, Japan is in very interesting times. With recent changes to the Basic Education Law incorporating "patriotism" into the school curriculum, for example, it is important to be aware of the ways in which something like Shinto could once again be abused. If, on an individual level, we can use the philosophies of Shinto to examine our own selves, our relationships with our communities and with nature, and not allow this self-examination to be taken over by central state authorities, I believe Shinto can be a positive force. Let us remain vigilant. □

Partners in Prayer and Peacemaking

An Interview with Rev. William G. Sinkford,
President of the Unitarian Universalist Association

Rev. William G. Sinkford was in Tokyo in November 2006 to attend the ceremonies celebrating the centennial of the birth of Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the late founder of Rissho Kosei-kai. During his stay, DHARMA WORLD interviewed him on the significance of self-examination by people of religion in today's troubled world and the approach of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) to the religious diversity in American society.

We have learned from several websites of member congregations of the UUA that self-examination is an important element in their religious activities—in their ministries, education, peacemaking, and so on. Could you describe the role that self-examination plays in the UUA, as a measure of actions by people of faith?

The stereotype of Americans is that we are very action-oriented, and as we are always busy it is hard for us to move into a space of reflection and self-examination. Indeed, that stereotype is true to a certain extent. I think it can be said that this characteristic accounts for some of the success that the United States has had. But it is also one of our great challenges. Like so many strengths, there is a downside to it. Unitarian Universalists share that characteristic—we are deeply American, and therefore self-examination is not the easiest discipline for us. If anything, we err on the side of self-congratulation, rather than honest self-examination. Changing this is one of our greatest challenges. But Unitarian Universalist congregations always try to include a space for self-examination and personal reflection in worship. Some congregations call it meditation, and many congregations call it prayer. For me, personally, it is in my prayer life that I do my self-examination; that is the space in which I can be most honest with myself and take the time to allow the best truth I can find to enter my spirit. More and more Unitarian Universalist congregations are taking advantage of that discipline. I think we have much to learn from our international partners about what that space can mean, and about the role that self-examination and prayer can have in our lives.

These days, I am thinking much about the truth and reconciliation process that was used first in South Africa and now in Latin America and other places. This process calls one into that space of truth, and forces one to avoid self-

Rev. Sinkford during his recent interview in Tokyo.

congratulation and to accept the reality of our history. So, for example, the oldest Unitarian Universalist congregations in the United States are on the East Coast, in New England. Many of our congregations have members whose families in previous generations were very important in the slave trade, the bringing of Africans to the United States as slaves. It would be easy for those individuals and congregations to forget that past, to bury the memory, but more and more of our congregations are actually taking the time to remember their past and they are coming to learn that the money that built some of our churches came from profits in the slave

trade. Thus, our congregations are using that truth to move into a space of reconciliation, and they are asking themselves what they are called to do as a result of their history. So it is a healthy development for us, even though it is very hard to acknowledge the reality of evil done in one's past.

Was there any visible resistance from among members?

Some. It takes the form mostly of fear, because some of the families that are in our congregations today are families that, hundreds of years ago, were involved in the slave trade. And for those families, it is most difficult for them to look back, and they fear it. But most of them are able to do it.

We believe that humility based on a keen awareness of the vulnerability of human beings is at the root of all religions. How can we emphasize that concept again in today's troubled world in which confrontations prevail?

That's a wonderful question. I wish that I had a simple answer. Speaking from the Unitarian Universalist perspective, it seems to me that if we are able to move beyond self-congratulation, then this can allow us to enter the space where failure can be acknowledged. And if we are not able to acknowledge failure, then we are caught in a trap in which we believe that we should be perfect, and therefore we think that everything we do is perfect. It is much healthier religiously to be able to acknowledge failure. It seems to me that one of our central purposes, and something that is very important to the religious community, is to be able to offer forgiveness. Rissho Kosei-kai does this as well as any religious group I've ever seen. We need to be able to say that we are not perfect, that we fail. The religious community can forgive us for that, and help us to forgive ourselves. Then we can move forward. There is so much that the human community has to ask forgiveness for.

When I was last in Japan in 2003, I had the opportunity of going to Hiroshima and of beginning to ask the question of how the Japanese people could ever forgive the Americans for having dropped atomic weapons on their country. I think that is still an important question. Right now, in the United States, we have an enormous amount to be forgiven for. The invasion of Iraq is a tragedy, and it would be a very healthy thing for the American people to acknowledge that it was a mistake and to ask the world community for forgiveness. That's the direction in which we should be moving.

With an increase in the number of immigrants of various religious backgrounds other than Christian, America is now becoming a multireligious country. What does religious pluralism bring to American society?

Another excellent question. America has become, we believe, the most religiously pluralistic or diverse society the earth has ever known, or at least one of the most diverse. There

are not just Methodists—there are Mormons and Muslims; not just Baptists, but Buddhists and Baha'is, atheists and agnostics. Twenty-five percent of the American people consider themselves “un-churched.” So there is tremendous diversity, both in belief and in lack of belief, within American society. And it is a strain.

Unitarian Universalist congregations have learned some things about pluralism, because in our congregations it is absolutely ordinary for a liberal Christian to be sitting next to someone who follows a Buddhist meditative practice, sitting next to an atheist, sitting next to a pagan. That is normal for us, and we believe that we have learned some important things. The first is that such diversity is not easy to live in. It is much easier to live in a homogeneous religious community. But we have also learned that enormous benefits can be gained from regularly dealing with diversity—with pluralism—and this has to do with how we approach the “other.” It is easy to view the other as a threat and a danger, and if we are able to move beyond that, it begins to be possible to see the other as a blessing.

In the language of my tradition, to meet another person is an opportunity to meet God, to meet the divine spirit. And so the benefits are enormous. Getting from here to there is not easy at all. And in the wider culture of the United States,

we are finding that more, rather than fewer, disagreements are popping up.

There is a serious conversation that is being led by the fundamentalist Christian community that claims that the United States is a Christian nation and that it was the intention of those who founded our country that it always remain Christian. Now, of course, that doesn't leave any space for Buddhists or Baha'is or Taoists, or any of the many other religious traditions that are part of our society.

Did you know that Unitarian Universalists believe that we actually invented American democracy? Some of the founding fathers of our country were Unitarian, including Thomas Jefferson, who framed the language of the separation of church and state. So, we believe deeply that no single religious point of view should become required in our political life. We also believe, however, that it is very important that religious faith, religious belief, inform how we behave as citizens.

And one of the great values of the long-standing friendship between Rissho Kosei-kai and the Unitarian Universalist Association is that we believe all religious people of goodwill will bring to the public square the same qualities of openness and respect that we try to model in our relationship. This is a difficult time in the United States religiously; we have not yet made peace with this. But I believe that we must move into a space where we can understand our differences to be blessings and not curses. If we are not able to do that, then I fear that the future is quite bleak.

What are some of the focal points in the present activities of the UUA? And what are some of the specific activities in which the UUA and Rissho Kosei-kai can cooperate?

The friendship that Founder Niwano and Dana Greeley [1908–86, the first president of the UUA] were able to form was very important, I know, for Unitarian Universalists, and I believe for Rissho Kosei-kai members, as well. That friendship and the coming together of those two religious organizations made possible the World Conference of Religions for Peace, which our two religious faiths were instrumental in founding. Today that organization is carrying out brilliant work in bringing together Inter-Religious Councils and identifying areas in which religion can be a voice for peace, rather than a voice for violence. So I would point to that first.

I can also think of other areas of cooperation that are very hopeful. We have been cooperating for decades in support of the International Association for Religious Freedom [IARF]. One of the things this organization has done best is develop a young adult network. This means that we are actually training a group of young adults who have experienced the blessings of interfaith and justice-making work. Recently, Rissho Kosei-kai's peace foundation, the Niwano Peace Foundation, has been helping the UUA by supporting some of our work in India, particularly the Self-Employed

Women's Association, which is doing groundbreaking work for the poorest of the poor. That's a cooperation that I would love to see expanded. "Justice" is a concept that is very important in the United States, and I know that it is less important in the Japanese culture, but whether we call it the making of justice or the movement toward harmony, there is work to be done out in the world that I think we can partner in.

The other thing that I would point to, because it has been so important to me, is the opportunity to continue to educate each other; it has been such a blessing for me to spend time with the Rissho Kosei-kai leaders and the leaders of the Japanese Liaison Committee [JLC] of the IARF. I hope that I have begun to gain an understanding of how they have given meaning to their lives and what their traditions mean to them. And I hope that I have been able to communicate a bit of who I am, and how Unitarian Universalists find meaning and how our tradition informs our lives. It has been a huge gift. And I hope there will be opportunities for more Unitarian Universalists, to engage with members of Rissho Kosei-kai and the JLC abroad. It's a blessing when we can travel overseas to meet one another, but now that there is a significant Rissho Kosei-kai presence in the United States, I hope that we will be able to create a relationship between our congregations there. I think there are many opportunities for us to continue to cooperate.

The priorities for the Unitarian Universalist Association now are many, but let me point to a few. You may know that we have been very active in the Save Darfur Coalition, working to end the genocide in the Sudan. That partnership will continue, and there is much more yet to do, because the killing goes on. Our work on marriage equality, equal rights for gay and lesbian persons, is an ongoing priority for us, but there are two additional new priorities that I would name: one is that our General Assembly, which is our annual decision-making body, last year approved what we call a "Statement of Conscience" on global warming. So we as congregations will be working to find ways to address the issues of environmental sustainability, and much of that work needs to begin at home. Our congregations need to look at their own practices, but we also need to be working at the policy level nationally. I think our congregations see that the way we are living is ultimately not sustainable, and we need to find ways to reduce our impact on the earth.

The other priority, which I believe offers another opportunity for us to collaborate, is the study action issue that our congregations will be working on for the next three years: peacemaking. Our congregations will be called to think about, reflect on, and pray for peacemaking in their own lives, and ultimately in the world. And I believe that there is nothing closer to the center of the Rissho Kosei-kai way of being religious than peacemaking. It certainly was a central focus of Founder Niwano's work. So I hope that there will be ways that we can collaborate as that process moves forward. □

Sino-Japanese Ties Must Be Deepened

An Interview with Master Jue Xing,
Abbot of the Jade Buddha Temple, Shanghai, and
Vice-Chairman of the Buddhist Association of China

Master Jue Xing was among the guests at a centennial celebration of Founder Nikkyo Niwano's birth in Tokyo last November. DHARMA WORLD met with Master Jue Xing at his hotel, and he spoke to us about the importance of friendly exchanges between Chinese and Japanese Buddhists and of self-examination by people of faith.

Chinese and Japanese Buddhism are joined together by a long history and strong bonds, the source of which is the fact that they share the same teachings of the Buddha. Although an unfortunate history of war also exists between our countries, our Buddhist ties are the ground on which the friendship of our two peoples can grow, and the evil roots of past war should not damage them. It is of the utmost importance that neither side forgets this history as such, and that great importance be placed on it as history. But we must look to the future as Buddhists without distancing ourselves from each other, and we must each deepen our friendship. I believe that we must continue to train ourselves assiduously, in the spirit of the "benefiting both oneself and others" which both of us share in the Mahayana tradition.

In the Interest of Chinese-Japanese Friendship

China and Japan are very close to each other geographically, and have a long history of interchange. Moreover, China and Japan are the two most influential nations in Asia, and friendship between our two countries can have a very large influence on the realization of peace not only in Asia but the entire world.

There was a strong bond of friendship between the late Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, and the late Rev. Zhao Puchu, former president of the Buddhist Association of China. Both men also always valued Chinese-Japanese friendship. Rev. Niwano devoted his energies to fostering friendly exchange between Japan and China, and

he also worked tirelessly toward the participation of religious leaders from China in the World Conference of Religions for Peace and in the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace. Rev. Niwano made six visits to China after 1974, during which he met with Zhou Jianren, Liao Chengzhi, and many other Chinese leaders.

In May 1993, Rev. Zhao Puchu invited three religious leaders from Japan to Shanghai to celebrate their long lives. The three were Ven. Etai Yamada, head priest of the Tendai Buddhist denomination, who was ninety-nine years old; Rev. Niwano, who was eighty-eight years old; and Rev. Yasusaburo Tazawa, patriarch of Shoroku Shinto Yamatoyama, who was eighty years old. Around that time, Rev. Zhao had been appealing for deeper bonds between Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Buddhists, and when he spoke to Ven. Yamada and Rev. Niwano about this they were both delighted and offered to help. This led to the creation of the "Golden Bond" of East Asian Buddhists, exchanges of Japanese, Chinese, and Korean Buddhism and culture.

Although both Rev. Zhao and Rev. Niwano have regrettably passed away, the new leaders of the Buddhist Association of China and Rev. Nichiko Niwano, who succeeded to the presidency of Rissho Kosei-kai, are working together to further strengthen the ties, and this gives me great pleasure. Even more than previously, we of the Buddhist Association of China are concentrating on promoting friendly relations between Japan and China. China's national leaders have also been interested in friendly exchange between Chinese and Japanese Buddhists. When Rev. Nichiko Niwano vis-

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano and Rev. Zhao Puchu exchange banners of Rissho Kosei-kai and the Buddhist Association of China at the Great Sacred Hall on the occasion of Rev. Zhao's visit to Rissho Kosei-kai as the recipient of the third Niwano Peace Prize in April 1985.

ited China in 1995, he had an audience with then-President Jiang Zemin.

The Importance of Self-Reflection for People of Faith

Hans Küng, the eminent Swiss theologian, has famously written, "There will be no peace among religions without dialogue among religions." For the faiths to respect each other, it is first essential that mutual misunderstandings be removed, that they understand each other, and that exchanges between them are deepened. There are five major religious traditions in China—Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, and Taoism. By conducting meaningful discussions about the features they have in common and matters of common concern and interest while stressing the importance of advancing communication and cooperation between them, we are currently promoting the realization of a harmonious world through the joint efforts of the religions.

During my visit to the headquarters of Rissho Kosei-kai in April of 2005, I saw Rev. Nikkyo Niwano's calligraphy of a T'ien-t'ai teaching, "*Ichinen sanzen*" (Three Thousand Realms in a Single Thought). The depth of his knowledge of calligraphy struck me, and I gave some thought to the meaning of what he wrote.

At the time, a phrase that came to my mind was "*Yiri san-sheng*" (Three Self-Reflections a Day). The basis of this phrase is "Three Daily Self-Examinations," from a passage in the *Analects* of Confucius: "I examine myself daily, many times, to determine if I have been sincere in dealings with others, if I have spoken my words while taking responsibility for

them, and if I have understood a thing well before imparting it to others." It is very important to observe yourself intently every day and to reflect on whether there are any mistakes in your actions or speech; in that way, one can be made aware of unethical or immoral actions and correct them.

Before this, I had also seen calligraphy by Rev. Zhao Puchu in which he had written the phrase meaning "Three Questions Each Day." In this calligraphy Rev. Zhao is saying that you must ask yourself if your morals are improving, if your knowledge is deepening, and if your practice is progressing.

In Confucianism, self-examination and introspection have been highly valued, as was the admonition expressed in the aphorism *Shendu*, meaning correcting one's mind and being careful in one's words and deeds even when one is alone. This has had a large effect over a period of several thousands of years as people have purified themselves and undergone ascetic training in pursuit of a high morality. Even for those of us who now work at acquiring morality and setting out to perfect our characters, this remains one of the most important paths.

The religious leaders are charged with the role of saving people. In order to do that they must be very strict with themselves, and must have a sense of responsibility toward all living things. This requires thorough reflection, which at the same time is a practice that raises the self. I believe that we must lead the people so as to show them by example the path to improvement, and that this is the solemn duty of those who have entered the priesthood. □

Learning from My Family

by Robert Traer

Invaluable lessons can be taught by the members of every generation. Most important is the essential role of forgiveness in all relationships.

As a young man, I took to heart a Confucian teaching: “If you want peace in the world, seek peace in your nation. If you want peace in your nation, seek peace in your city. If you want peace in your city, seek peace in your family. If you want peace in your family, seek peace in yourself.”

I thought that if I could find peace within myself, I would be a better peacemaker in my family, my city, my nation, and the world. I did not understand, however, how much I am who I am because of my family. I thought I could achieve peace in myself as an individual, and then help everyone else. After many years, however, I have learned from my family that peacemaking is more complicated than that.

As a Husband

After I married, I found that my wife, Nancy, sees the world very differently than I do. When I would place the two candles on the mantle in order to make them symmetrical, she would move them so they were asymmetrical. Similarly, as we hung pictures on the walls of our new apartment, she

wanted two pictures hanging side by side to be at different heights, whereas I would have hung them at the same height.

Two years after we were married, Nancy and I taught for a year at the Canadian Academy in Kobe, Japan. She had studied at Doshisha University in Kyoto before our marriage and had learned flower arranging as well as Japanese history and language. Being in Japan with Nancy helped me to understand how she sees the world, for I saw in the way flowers are arranged in Japan that asymmetry was preferred to symmetry.

I also discovered early in our marriage that Nancy and I have different ways of orienting as we travel. I navigate by street names and numbers, whereas she remembers interesting features of the landscape and the colors and aesthetic characteristics of buildings. The directions I give seem logical to me, but I have to admit that the directions she gives are more interesting.

I slowly realized as well that when I asked Nancy a question which she didn't want to answer, she would change the subject or respond in a vague way. After many years I saw that her indirect response was a subtle way of trying to help me understand an important lesson. Often I was posing choices that she felt would not really help us resolve a problem. By not responding clearly to my questions, Nancy gave me a way of learning on my own to accept our differences.

In a new book entitled *Doing Ethics in a Diverse World*, I suggest that efforts to resolve public moral controversies will likely be more effective if we try harder to understand how others view the world. Seeking greater peace and justice requires understanding one another and learning to appreciate the different ways that individuals and cultures make sense of human experience. By reflecting on these differences, we will learn more about ourselves as well.

As a Father

My children have also been my teachers, but often I didn't learn my lessons until they were grown. My youngest son,

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James, who is now twenty-three years old, recently told me that as a small child he had dreaded going swimming with our family. He explained that when his mother and I threw him back and forth between us in the pool, he choked and swallowed a lot of water. "I couldn't figure out why you were trying to drown me," he said.

At first I thought he was joking, but as I asked him questions, I realized that he was sharing with me a feeling he had had since he was a small boy. His mother and I had simply been trying to help him learn to swim. Moreover, I had always assumed that all our children enjoyed our trips to the local swimming pool. Clearly, however, this was not the case.

Not long ago my youngest daughter, Emily, who is now twenty-eight years old, told me that she was devastated as a young girl when I said she "wasn't any good at playing soccer." I didn't remember making any such comment, and I wanted to believe that she had misunderstood me. She insisted, however, that I had said this. Even now, as I think about my conversation with her, I am upset with myself for having given her such a negative impression of her athletic ability. How could I have been so insensitive?

These conversations with my grown children have taught me two lessons. First, when people have very different memories of the same event, debating whose memory is "correct" is not helpful. A person's memory combines the facts remembered with the feelings the person had about what happened. Each memory is important, for memories like these remain in us and shape our self-understanding as we have new experiences in life. This has been a hard lesson for me to learn. It means accepting that I am not simply the person I remember myself to be and think I am, but am also the person others remember and know. To know myself, I have to learn how others have experienced me and think of me. To do that, I have to talk with them and listen to them.

It is, of course, impossible to know completely what others think of me, as there are too many people and too many experiences. So, the second lesson I have learned from my children is that my life is not merely *my* life, but instead *it is what it is* amid the changing nature of all my relationships. As the Buddhist teaching of *pratitya-samutpada* [dependent origination] suggests, this awareness is liberating for those who realize it.

The critical comments of my grown children have shaken my self-image as a caring father. Yet, I am grateful for their honesty, as they have taught me not to rely on my perception of myself. My family members and friends know me better than I know myself, so to know who I am I need to listen to them. The lessons I have learned from my children give new meaning to the Confucian teaching about seeking peace in the world. I have come to realize that I should not expect by myself to find peace within myself. Instead, seeking peace must begin with deepening our relationships by becoming more accepting and humble.

As a Grandfather

I am staying now with my older son, Elie, and his wife, Jenn, in order to help care for my four-year-old grandson, Noah. Elie and Jenn work long hours at the hospital where they are physicians, so I care for Noah in the morning before taking him to preschool and then in the afternoon after picking him up. Happily, I am learning a great deal from being with my grandson.

First, being with Noah has reminded me how hard it is to predict what someone else will want. Sometimes when I offer to read him a story, Noah is delighted. On other occasions, he isn't interested at all. My offers seem to me to be always the same, but nonetheless they have very different consequences.

Our inability to predict what others will do is expressed in the Hindu tradition by a story from the Bhagavad Gita. A warrior named Arjuna concludes that war is futile and refuses to fight, but Krishna, a Hindu god, persuades him that he should do his duty as a soldier and go forward into battle. Krishna also tells Arjuna that he cannot know whether the consequences of not fighting will be better than what may come by doing his duty. We are, the tale reminds us, mere mortals.

If we take this story to heart as we make ethical decisions, we should not expect to decide what is right simply because we think that the consequences of an action will be largely beneficial. We need to identify and then do our duty, and not merely presume that we can predict the future.

Being with my grandson has also reminded me that stories may have different levels of meaning. Recently, I read him a Native American tale about a "man" from the "bear people," who out of love for a woman allows her people to kill him so that her people can have food to eat. In return for his sacrifice, the "man/bear" asks only that her people give thanks for taking the life of any bear.

With concern in his voice, Noah asked me if the man (depicted in an illustration as wearing a bearskin) was actually being killed. I replied that the story was "make-believe" but nevertheless expressed an important truth. We live in and depend on the natural world. Therefore, we should be grateful for the wild animals that share and help to maintain our natural habitat, and we should also be thankful for the lives of the animals that we kill for our food.

At times we need to look for new levels of meaning in old stories. Gandhi interpreted the ancient story of Arjuna and Krishna in a way that transformed its meaning. He suggested that the story calls all of us to do our duty to live truthfully and that this means "fighting" nonviolently for what is right.

His experiments in applying this ethical presumption to resist the oppression of British colonial rule over India influenced Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement that struggled against segregation in the United States.

Moreover, the examples of Gandhi and King gave hope to Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela in South Africa, and thus helped to sustain a largely nonviolent movement there against apartheid.

No one could have predicted that a new interpretation of this ancient Indian tale would have such far-reaching consequences in the twentieth century. We cannot know before acting what all the consequences of an action will be. Therefore, Gandhi argued, we should do our moral duty instead of simply trying to calculate what action we think will yield the best results.

Gandhi also offered us another important lesson by finding in a traditional tale of violence a moral imperative for nonviolence. His creative interpretation of the story from the Bhagavad Gita should inspire us to look for new meanings in the stories of our religious traditions—new meanings that express higher standards of ethical living.

Finally, being with my grandson continues to help me understand how important it is to listen to others. The other day, as we walked hand-in-hand, he said I was walking too fast. My immediate response was, “You are walking too slowly.” Looking down at him, however, reminded me that his legs are much shorter than mine.

“You need to walk *with* me, grandpa,” he said, emphasizing the word “with.” He is right. If I expect him to walk with me, I need to walk *with* him. I need to appreciate his experience. If I want him to listen and learn from me, I need to listen and learn from him.

With Gratitude

Members of my family have taught me many lessons, and I am grateful for their patience with me, as I have often been a slow learner.

The most important lesson of all—which I have learned from all the members of my family—is that forgiveness heals much of the harm that we do to one another in our relationships.

My wife has forgiven me for trying to change her, rather than appreciating her different way of seeing the world. My children have forgiven me for the times I have made life harder for them. My grandson continues to reach for my hand as we walk together, and he is patient when I forget and walk a little too fast.

Being forgiven is the greatest lesson in life, because it enables us to continue learning how to be more loving by being more forgiving. □

Religions Are Crucial to Attaining Peace

by Christina Lee

Dedicating one's life to the cause of peace is a commitment not to be taken lightly. It calls for courage, for knowing how to suffer.

In today's world, scenes of terrorism and violence show no sign of abating. Ongoing armed conflicts in various regions, known or forgotten by public opinion, give the impression that not only cultural diversity but also religious differences are causes of instability to the prospect of peace. The danger of a clash between cultures and religions is incumbent on our horizon.

The appalling scenes of conflict, however, should not distract our attention from discerning signs of hope, characteristic of our era of globalization. Numerous are the initiatives of people and institutions aiming at building common foundations for harmonious coexistence. Interfaith and intercultural dialogues are emerging as important roads to this end.

The peace to which we are committed is not merely the silence of arms. It cannot be attained only from the outside with structures. The attempt to restore it with violence leads to new violence and creates fear among populations. It must be approached from a global and far-sighted perspective. Pope Benedict XVI, in his message on the occasion of

the twentieth anniversary of the Interreligious Meeting of Prayer for Peace in Assisi, affirms: "To build it, the paths of cultural, political, and economic order are, of course, important, but first of all *peace must be built in hearts*. It is here, in fact, that sentiments develop that can nurture it or, on the contrary, threaten, weaken, and stifle it."

What is needed to nourish peace, then, is the conversion of the heart. The motto that President Nichiko Niwano launched among the members of Rissho Kosei-kai, "Cultivating the field of the heart and mind," could be grasped, I think, in this context. Peace cannot exist if hatred and selfishness are not overcome from within. To meet this fundamental challenge, the role of religions is crucial. Religions should draw, out of their depths, all the spiritual strength so as to lead humanity toward solidarity and peace. By whom, if not by leaders within the great religious traditions, could a strategy be initiated that is capable of renewing relationships not only on an individual level, but also between people of different races, nations, and cultures?

But there can be no peace without treating each other as brothers and sisters. This vision of fraternity is not a new idea that has emerged today. It has been often present in the minds of great spiritual figures of the world.

Mahatma Gandhi was a great advocate of "one humanity in one world." He wrote: "Through the realization of the freedom of India, I hope to realize and carry on the mission of the brotherhood of man."

Martin Luther King Jr., in his "I Have a Dream" speech, cried out his hope that one day "the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood."

And the Dalai Lama says that we need "to achieve a true sense of brotherhood, a good heart, respect for others. If we can develop these qualities from within our heart, then . . . we can actually achieve true peace."

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano was deeply convinced that all reli-

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gions should work together hand-in-hand for peace and spared no effort to create the “world of the One Vehicle” according to the Buddhist concept taken from the Lotus Sutra.

The Focolare Movement is committed to building the unity of the human family, enriched by diversity. Chiara Lubich, its founder, reminds us that Jesus brought this truth as an essential gift to humanity. Before he died, he prayed for unity, which was his testament: “Father, may they all be one” (Jn 17:21). He revealed to us that God is our Father and, consequently, that we are all brothers and sisters.

But what is the bond of fraternity?

We need to remember that there is something stronger than death and violence. There is a potential that is waiting to be reawakened. It is a love that abides deep in the heart of everyone.

For Christians, this love can be a participation in the very love that is the life of God. For those who follow other religions, this love is often called benevolence or compassion. For people who do not have a religious faith, love can mean philanthropy, solidarity, nonviolence.

It is an art that is sorely needed in our modern time. The Focolare Movement has sixty years of experience practicing it. Chiara Lubich summed up the “art of loving” in four points, which can be fully shared with followers of different religions.

First of all, it requires that we love everyone, making no distinction between people who are pleasant or unpleasant, attractive or unattractive, European or Asian, Christian or Muslim. Love knows no form of discrimination.

For a Christian, moreover, everyone must be loved because it is Christ whom we love in each person. He himself will one day say to us: “You did it to me” (Mt 25:40).

And what should we say of the boundless compassion for every living being taught by the Buddha to his first disciples: “O Monks, you should work for the well-being of many, for the happiness of many, moved by compassion for the world, for the well-being . . . of humanity” (Mahavagga, 19).

This love has another characteristic that is affirmed in the sacred books of world religions. It is the Golden Rule. Christians have it in this way: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Mt 7:12), and Buddhists teach: “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful” (Udanavarga, 5.1).

If this point alone were practiced, it would be enough to make the whole world one family. Just think what the world would be like if not only individuals, but also ethnic groups and nation-states were to practice it—for example, “Love the other country as your own.”

The third step in the art of loving is perhaps the most demanding of all. It tests the authenticity and purity of love, and, therefore, its real capacity to generate peace. It is to be first in loving, that is, not waiting for the other person to take the first step, to take the initiative.

There is one last point that teaches us how to put into practice true love toward others. It consists of making ourselves one with others, which is emptying ourselves. It means making their worries, their thoughts, their joys, our own. All this is not just kindness and understanding; it is not just a method to promote interpersonal relationships, or a strategy for consensus building or for selling one’s agenda. Love has only one goal: to give of itself completely and selflessly.

When two or more people are ready to make the first move toward the other, then, love becomes mutual. It will be our strength because even when we are far from one another, we will be certain to be united. And what we accomplish will be not so much the result of individual efforts as the expression of a bond that will be a source of light for us even at a distance, helping us to understand what we need to do and giving us new strength to fulfill it. Only our mutual love will be able to unleash this wisdom and the power needed to change the world and win the battle for peace.

This is because unity is not the sum of a number of people, nor is it just solidarity, collaboration, and dialogue. No, to build unity means to come together, in mutual love, and to allow the presence of Someone who transcends us to shine forth. In the Christian liturgy we sing: “Where there is charity and love, there God abides.” The Gospel announces that if two or more are united in genuine love, Christ himself, who is Peace, is present among them and therefore in each one of them (cf. Mt 18:20). In the history of the Focolare Movement, maintaining this presence has become the apex of its spirituality and life.

Pope John Paul II, meeting non-Christian representatives in Madras, India, in 1986, said that when we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, that is, when our dialogue is substantiated by kindness, mutual esteem and respect, we also open ourselves up to God. And “we let God be present in our midst.”

A great Japanese Buddhist personality, now deceased, Ven. Etai Yamada, loved to say to us: “If we are one in heart, then God is with us and guides us in doing his will.”

This is a new presence of God that encourages tolerance, understanding, and forgiveness. It penetrates into the hearts of everyone and enkindles those flames of love that join men and women in communion.

Mutual love and unity thus give great joy to those who practice it. However, it calls for commitment, daily training, and sacrifice. And this is where a particular word in the language of Christians appears striking and luminous. It is one that the world wants to avoid, a word it considers foolish and useless. This word is “Cross.”

Nothing good and fruitful can be achieved without facing weariness and suffering. Dedicating one’s life to the cause of peace is a commitment not to be taken lightly. It calls for courage, for knowing how to suffer.

In this regard, there is an important aspect to keep in mind if we want to be instruments of peace, and that is self-

examination. We should constantly, every moment, check our attitude toward others and see if everything has been done out of love. If not, we should have the courage to start over and over again, and ask forgiveness when necessary.

An experience at the beginning of the Focolare Movement can still be useful for us in order to help us keep reciprocal love alive. It was not easy for the first group of young women to always follow this new style of life in a radical way. They were ordinary people just like others. Dust could settle on their relationship and weaken their unity. This happened when one saw the shortcomings and imperfections of others, cooling down the current of mutual love. In order to react to this situation, Chiara Lubich and her companions made a “pact of mercy.” They decided to get up in the morning and approach each person—in the family, at school, at work—with completely new eyes, without remembering any faults of the past, as though he or she had never made any mistakes, but covering everything with love: to approach each person with full “amnesty” in their hearts. Later she commented that without this pact of daily forgiveness, the movement would not have even come out of the city of Trent, from where it started and then spread all over the world.

The commitment to love opens the way to forgiveness and reconciliation. In the course of history, differing convictions have caused violent clashes, social and political conflicts, and even religious wars. Where the Catholic Church herself is concerned, she asked for forgiveness insofar as serious mistakes were made in the past by some of her members and by her institutions. We remember Pope John Paul II offering an apology for the sins committed in the name of the church through the ages. He declared at a Mass in Saint Peter’s Basilica on March 12, 2000: “In this year of mercy, the Church . . . should kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters. . . . Let us forgive and ask forgiveness!”

Asking for forgiveness and granting forgiveness are indispensable elements for peace. In this way, our memory is purified and our hearts are made serene. In order to establish bonds of fraternity the tensions of the past must be purified promoting reconciliation at all levels, individual as well as collective.

In the words of Chiara Lubich, “the world needs an invasion of love and this depends on each one of us. The human being is the reservoir of this precious element.” In the end, love will win. □

Founder Nikkyo Niwano explains the interior of the Horin-kaku Guest Hall to Ms. Chiara Lubich and other leaders of the Focolare Movement when they visited Rissho Kosei-kai in December 1981.

World Peace Begins in Your Mind

by Tulku Thondup Rinpoche

*The mind is the main factor. It moves quickly and is the forerunner of all acts. Whatever you say or do with a pure mind, happiness is sure to follow.*¹

—The Buddha

If we are serious about fostering world peace, we must first understand, generate, and experience real peace in our own mental stream. Awareness of peace is the foundation and goal of healing ourselves and the world. If our mind, or consciousness, is enjoying the awareness of peace, our everyday life will turn into a life of peace. Whatever we say will resound as the words of peace. Whatever we do will manifest as the expression of peace. Our mere presence will make the hearts of many blossom with happiness and harmony. Then we become one of the true peaceful members of society and a source inspiring others to true peace, too. Our every word and smile will send a genuine message of peace to others, and a true cycle of world peace and joy can be set in motion. So the inspiration of true world peace must take root in our own hearts.

According to Buddhism, peace is our birthright. It is inherent in our mind. You see, the mind has two aspects. At the level of absolute truth, or in its true nature, mind is most peaceful, open, joyful, and enlightened. It sees all simul-

taneously and as one, through its omniscience. Every being possesses such a nature. That is our ultimate nature, the fundamental basis. Through meditation, we can uncover and perfect this fully enlightened nature, as the Buddha proclaimed when he realized it:

I have realized the ambrosia-like Dharma.

It is luminous, profound, peaceful, uncreated and unstained.²

The reason we may not always be aware of this peace is that we dwell in the conceptual aspect of our mind, not in its true nature. At the level of relative truth or appearance, mind is conceptual, dualistic, and emotional. It perceives mental objects by grasping at them as if they have “self-hood,” as if they were truly existing entities. That dualistic concept triggers emotional afflictions such as hatred and attachment and fuels feelings such as suffering, fear, and excitement. They become chains of concepts and emotions that tighten mental grasping and set the wheel of samsaric existence in an endless cycle and cover up our fundamental nature. So, in order to regain our own utmost peaceful nature, we must get rid of the mentality of grasping at the “self.” Shantideva (8th century) writes:³

All the violence, fear, and suffering
That exists in the world
Comes from grasping at “self.”
What use is this great evil monster to you?
If you do not let go of the “self,”
There will never be an end to your suffering.
Just as, unless you cast away the fire (that you hold),
You cannot avoid being burnt.

The first step to bringing peace is not to try to eliminate all external hostile forces, which is impossible anyway, but rather, to work with our own minds. If we tame our minds,

Martha Stewart

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we will enjoy true peace, as if we have pacified the whole world. Shantideva writes:⁴

Untamed beings are as unlimited as space.
You will never be able to overcome them all.
Yet, if you could simply overcome the hatred in your mind,
You will find that it is as if you have overcome them all.

How can you possibly find enough leather
To cover the earth?
But if you could just wear leather sandals,
You will find it to be as if you have covered the earth.

In the same way, you will never be able to change
All external objects.
But if you change your own mind,
There is no need to change anything else.

If we let our minds indulge in three poisonous emotions—hatred, greed, and ignorance rooted in grasping at “self”—then we will have no opportunity to foster true inner peace or joy. Shantideva says:⁵

If you entertain hatred in your mind
You will never experience peace.
You will never have joy or happiness.
You will never be able to anchor your mind or sleep.

Any action engendered by negative concepts and emotions creates unvirtuous deeds (karma), which cause suffering in this life and others to come. Virtuous deeds cause happiness. Nagarjuna (2nd century) writes:⁶

Unvirtuous deeds cause all the sufferings and rebirths in inferior realms.
Virtuous deeds cause all the happiness of the higher realms and all the joys in all successive lives.

Peace is not merely the absence of conflict or war. Relative peace is a concept generated by the mind and an experience enjoyed by the mind. Absolute peace is the union of mind and peace, as one, realized through meditation.

Meditation is the key to generating peace. It focuses the totality of our mind from its depth. There are many methods of meditation to suit different seekers' needs. But all belong to either analytical or contemplative meditation.

In analytical meditation, you think, analyze, and feel any positive (virtuous) mental object in detail, again and again, in a prescribed and systematic way in order to transform your mind from a negative (unvirtuous) state into a positive state and, in time, to perfection.

In contemplative meditation, you focus on one mental object, feeling, or idea—one-pointedly—and remain there without wandering. You could also remain in a non-dual state of awareness without grasping at it.

Tibetan Buddhists usually start meditation with the analytical approach, meditating on positive images, words, faith, devotion, and compassion. This accumulates merits, or good karma. They then perfect their meditation with contemplative meditation and realization of non-dual awareness. This accumulates wisdom. Nagarjuna writes:⁷

With faith you remain in Dharma.
With wisdom you fully realize (the true nature).
Wisdom is the main one of these, and
Faith is the preliminary to it.

Peace underlies all the virtues and positive states of mind, such as joy, devotion, and loving-kindness. By cultivating peace, you automatically cultivate compassion instead of hatred, generosity instead of greed, and wisdom instead of ignorance. When peace truly arises in your heart, you can reliably undertake the heartfelt journey to bring peace to all living beings and you thereby become a bodhisattva. Shantideva praises thus:⁸

If the enlightened attitude is developed, in that very moment,
The exhausted beings of the prison of samsara,
Will become known as the offspring of the buddhas.
Gods and men will bow to honor them.

The following meditation is to cultivate peace and heal ourselves and the world.

Four Positive Perceptions: These are the four healing tools essential for this meditation.

Positive Images: If we train ourselves in seeing positive images such as beautiful flowers, luminous lights, the boundless sky, or a sacred Buddha image, or in visualizing such images, our mind becomes inspired by and immersed in positive qualities. Then our mind's innate positive qualities can be awakened. Since we use mental images as part of our everyday thinking, this tool is relatively easy to use, while offering an amazing way to heal and arouse peace.

Positive Words: If we train ourselves in repeatedly saying prayers and positive words, or designating images as positive—our mind magnifies and enjoys the positive qualities of objects, and the positive qualities that are inherent in our mental stream awaken. We can hardly complete a thought without using words, so, converting those treasures into healing words is a great transformation.

Positive Feelings: If we train ourselves to feel the positive feelings generated by positive or blessed images and words, then the healing benefits will not be limited to the surface of the mind. Rather, they will bring about a unity with the true healing qualities at the feeling level in the heart—totally and deeply.

Positive Beliefs: If we totally trust in the healing power of

the positive or blessed images, words, and feelings, then we will be fully open to healing totally and deeply. At the beginning we must analyze the teachings. But if we decide they make sense, we must pursue them without doubts, if we are to reach the goal. This is not blind faith, as we use our common sense—seeking benefits from positive sources in everyday life.

Meditation on the Medicine Buddha: Applying the four healing tools, you can use your body both as the object to be healed and as the means of healing. When you enjoy healing energies in your body, your mind will be healed and peaceful, as the mind is experiencing it. Then, once you gain some healing experience, you can share your healing energies, peace, with the world. Here is a meditation in brief:

1. Develop an Enlightened Attitude: Start your meditation by thinking, “I am going to meditate on the Medicine (or Healing) Buddha for the sake of healing the suffering of all living beings.”

2. Visualization: Imagine that you are sitting on the top of a very high, firm, solid mountain of rock and earth. Imagine that you are looking into the open sky. See, contemplate, and feel the qualities of the sky one by one: experience its purity, clarity, depth, vastness, and boundlessness. Open your heart to allow the qualities that you are seeing come into you. Empty all your mental and emotional impurities and awaken boundless peace and joy within yourself.

In the middle of this sky, visualize a totally blossoming huge flower with billions of petals. It is fresh with dewdrops, radiant with light, resplendent with color, and filled with sweet fragrance. Again, immerse your mind in the qualities of the flower. On the top of the giant flower, visualize a shining moon cushion made of white light. Immerse yourself in its qualities.

Visualize the Medicine Buddha, like a mountain, sitting above the giant throne of the flower and moon cushion. His majestic body is made of rainbow-like light. His complexion is deep blue, projecting rays of wisdom lights in all directions. He is youthful, as if he were sixteen. He is beautiful, luminous, and radiant. Wearing simple monk’s robes, he sits in meditation posture. His right hand holds a medicinal plant (arura, or myrobalan); his left, a bowl filled with healing ambrosia. His face blossoms in a smile of joy. His compassionate wisdom eyes look at you without blinking. The whole sky is filled with the presence of his luminous light-body.

The Buddha’s omniscient wisdom sees the details of every particle of your body, every reflection of your mind, every happening of your past, present, and future and of the whole world simultaneously.

His unconditioned love cares for each being as a loving mother does for her only child all the time without a break. Buddha’s love is always with us—whether we pray to him or not, whether we are virtuous or not. However, if we pray,

our mind’s door opens to welcome his blessings. As Shakyamuni Buddha said in the Lotus Sutra:⁹

Remember the Buddha of Compassion,
Who pacifies all fear and sorrow.

The Buddha is the embodiment of all the Enlightened Ones and is the manifestation of the universal pure nature. He is not someone else, but the reflection of your own mind’s buddha-nature—it is like seeing your face in a mirror.

3. Prayer: Imagine and feel that your mind and heart are filled with the energy of devotion, joy, trust, faith, and confidence in the Buddha. Infinite beings on the earth are looking at him. Their hearts are also filled with devotion. Their faces are blossoming with smiles, their eyes wide open with joy. All are joining you in the prayer, the vibration of devotional energies. The whole universe is filled with the sound of prayer, like a vast symphony hall. Every sound in the world turns into the sound of prayer. Prayers open your mind and body with the energy of devotion, making you an open vessel to receive blessings. Prayers invoke the Buddha’s compassion for healing and peace. Thinking thus, repeatedly sing the prayer-mantra of the Medicine Buddha (given here in Sanskrit pronunciation):

*Tadyathā: Om Bhaishajye, Bhaishajye, Mahā-Bhaishajye
Rāja samudgate svāhā.*

Thus: Hail to the body, speech, and mind of the Buddha:
the King of
Healing, of Healing, of Great Healing, the Fully Exalted One.

4. Receive Blessings: According to the sutra, the Medicine Buddha vowed, “May the lights of my body fill an infinite number of worlds fully and vividly. . . . May every being become (healthy and enlightened) like me.”¹⁰

So, imagine that, as the result of your prayers, the Buddha’s omniscient wisdom, unconditioned love, and boundless power come to you in the form of numerous beams of blessing lights in multiple colors (mainly blue) with blessing energies and blissful heat.

Blessing lights flood into you through every pore of your body. Every particle of your body fills up with light. Feel the Buddha’s wisdom and love, the intimacy of the Buddha. All negative states of mind and emotions, all karma and all ills are purified—see them as areas of darkness that are dissolved by the touch of the bright blessing lights without leaving a trace. Finally your body becomes a bright and radiant body of blessing light.

5. Sharing with Others: Imagine that the Buddha’s blessing lights fill every being and the whole universe. All are healed, purified, and transformed into beings and worlds of Buddha lights of wisdom, compassion, and power.

6. Contemplation: Finally, recognize and enjoy the posi-

tive experiences generated by the meditation. Then recognize the feeling of peace that pervades your awareness as the foundation of any other healing experiences you might have. Then rest in that “awareness of peace” without grasping at it or conceptualizing it. Rest in it again and again.

7. Dedication and Aspiration: Dedicate all the merits and wisdom that you accumulated in the meditation to all living beings as the cause of their peace, healing, and enlightenment. Pray, “By the power of the Medicine Buddha and this meditation, may all beings and I be healed from all suffering and attain ultimate peace and enlightenment.”

Sarva mangalam! May all beings find happiness! □

Notes

1. *Ched du brjod pa'i tshoms*, Dode, Vol. Sa, in: *Kangyur*, Dege edition, Vol. Sa, f244a/1. This work is known as the Udanavarga (Special Utterances). It consists of a collection of verses from the Buddhist Canon, compiled by Dharmatrata, being the northern version of the Dhammapada.

2. *rGya cher rol pa*, Dode, in: *Kangyur*, Dege edition, Vol. Kha, f187b/5; also known as the Lalitavistara sutra, it is called the Sutra of Extensive Sport in English; it is a Mahayana Vaipulya sutra.

3. *Byang chub sems dpa'i sPyod pa la 'jug pa* (BP), bDu Ma, in: *Tengyur*, Dege edition, Vol. La, f28b/6. This is the famous *Bodhi-charyavatara*, or “Engaging in Bodhisattva Conduct,” by Shantideva; it is an 8th-century verse treatise on the outlook and practice of Mahayana Buddhism.

4. BP, f10b/4.

5. BP, f14b/4.

6. *Rin chen phreng ba* (RP), sPing yig, in: *Tengyur*, Dege edition, Vol. Ge, f107b/5. This is the *Ratnavali*, or “Precious Garland of Jewels,” by Nagarjuna. Dating from the 1st–2nd century, it focuses on *bodhichitta* and is one of the six logical works (*rigs tshogs drug*) of the Madhyamika by Nagarjuna.

7. RP f107a/4.

8. BP, f2a/5.

9. *Dam pa'i chos Padma dkar po*, Dode, in: *Kangyur*, Dege edition, Vol. Ja f168b/7. This is the celebrated Mahayana scripture known as Saddharmapundarika sutra, or Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law.

10. *De bZhin gshegs pa bdun gyi sNgon gyi sMon lam gyi khyad par rGyas pa*, Gyudbum, in: *Kangyur*, Dege edition, Vol. Da, f261b/1. This is the Sapta-Tathagata Purvapranidhana Visesa-vistara sutra, or the Sutra of the Aspirations of the Seven Tathagatas. It is a text that was taught by Shakyamuni Buddha about the Medicine Buddha, the seven tathagatas being the seven medicine buddhas.

Mahamayuri (Kujaku-myoo), a protector of Buddhism depicted as being seated in the lotus posture on a peacock, is the central image in an esoteric ritual performed for the cessation of natural disasters. Mahamayuri is worshiped for his power to remove all calamities and the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance, just as the peacock is thought to eat even venomous worms. Colors on silk. 147.9 x 98.9 cm. Twelfth century. A National Treasure presently in the possession of the Tokyo National Museum.

Grasping the Heart of Buddhism

by Nichiko Niwano

Buddhism is the teaching of awakening. It is something we achieve, and savor the joy of, for ourselves. When we can convey that joy to others, we can say we have a self-reliant faith.

Last year, marking the centennial of Founder Nikkyo Niwano's birth, was a major turning point for Rissho Kosei-kai. This year can be said to represent a new start. Let us ensure that this year is a year in which we focus on what is most important and strive toward it.

The year 2006, the centennial of the founder's birth, was punctuated by various activities and ceremonies, including ceremonies to mark the completion of renovation of the Great Sacred Hall and the opening of the Nikkyo Niwano Memorial Museum in the Horin-kaku Guest Hall, and commemorative group pilgrimages. I understand that branches around the country also held a variety of events and workshops. I am sure all this made all members profoundly aware of having been saved through the founder.

I myself regard this year as a time in which to transmit the joy of being saved by the founder to ever more people. Let us vow to one another to endeavor to unite our hearts to save others, in the spirit of the Buddha's dictum to "make the self your light, make the Law your light."

Last year, too, the Eighth World Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace was held in Kyoto. I wish to express my deep gratitude for all the cooperation provided by members. Taking part in the assembly, I felt anew that true peace will be brought about on the basis of religion. As I listened to the discussions and debates, I was struck by the importance of what Buddhism calls "right view" (recognition of truth). My belief that transmitting Buddhism as a world religion to more countries is essential to peace was reconfirmed.

In view of this, Rissho Kosei-kai decided to establish a new office, Kosei-kai International, this year. This will be a long-term initiative, but I believe that if we propagate the teachings with a firm grasp of the heart of Buddhism, in the course of time we will see a great ripple effect.

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The heart of Buddhism, in brief, is compassion, which is to say the transmission of truth to others. Also essential is mindfulness. Without mindfulness we are left simply with clashing opinions; that is not religion. It is mindfulness that illuminates our commonalities, binds us together, and leads to peace in the true sense. It is important that we proceed with international propagation with a firm grasp of this core element.

Awakening to and Transmitting the Law

In meetings with Rissho Kosei-kai leaders last year, I presented the guiding principle for 2007. Here, in essence, is what I said: This year [2007] is an "ordinary year." In such a time I would like to see us address the important proposition of "cultivating the field of the heart and mind" and engage in endeavor while studying the essence of Buddhism as a teaching and a religion of awakening. The first step is found in the Dhammapada: "Difficult is the attainment of the human state. / Difficult the life of mortals."* Let us begin by understanding the meaning of this verse, which leads to realizing the truth of the law of impermanence, the fact that everything in the world undergoes constant change. That leads in turn to awakening to the wonder, preciousness, and rarity of the lives of ourselves and others. For us, living here and now, this means the all-important discovery of the worth of life, and of joy. Conveying that joy to others is the important mission of those who have received the Mahayana teaching. In order to fulfill this mission, this year too let us all impress upon our hearts the Lotus Sutra's teaching of "birth by aspiration" and walk the Way of the Buddha together in a big-hearted, forthright manner.

All this is what I am always saying to members; it is nothing new. But I reemphasized it in the wish that, having passed the major milestone of the centennial of the founder's birth and greeted a year that signals a new start, we will concentrate on that which is most important.

Buddhism is the teaching of awakening. This is not something others do to us; it is something we achieve, and savor the joy of, for ourselves. Only when we can convey that joy

Rev. Nichiko Niwano delivers his sermon on January 7 of this year, explaining the two key words he had written on hanging scrolls in traditional Japanese calligraphy for the New Year: Gassho (joining one's hands in prayer) and Jikaku (awakening).

to others can we say that we have a self-reliant faith. If we simply savor joy ourselves, we have not truly become self-reliant as believers in the Mahayana principle of benefiting both oneself and others.

In 1998, the sixtieth anniversary of the foundation of Rissho Kosei-kai, we made “cultivating the field of the heart and mind” our objective. That year I also published a book with the same title. There is a saying, “The peach and chestnut take three years to bear fruit, the persimmon eight years.” Over the past several years members nationwide have understood the meaning of “cultivating the field of the heart and mind.” Members’ personal testimonies reveal that many have interpreted these words in truly magnificent ways. I hope that we will elucidate that direction still more and engage in further endeavor together.

Kneeling before and Taking Refuge in the Buddha

At meetings with leaders last year Rissho Kosei-kai’s objectives for the new year were also set forth. I find it extremely important that priority was given to “faith in saving and

being saved centered on *hoza*” and “enhanced youth development.”

I believe that transmission of the Law in the course of everyday conversation and dialogue is the ideal. Rissho Kosei-kai’s *hoza* represents one structure for doing so. In *hoza*, people convey faith in ordinary language by honestly relating personal experiences and frankly confessing shortcomings. That is where salvation is found. It is a wonderful thing.

What is important for people is to know. This process is the most salient human characteristic and action. Through knowing, faith in the Buddha is born. And faith and only faith leads to spontaneous practice. The Buddha taught the Law using a variety of parables so that his hearers could know the truth. It is said that those listening experienced immediate conversion, bowed their heads in thanksgiving, and were filled with joy. Those occasions were the prototype of the *hoza*, where people are saved on the spot.

By knowing the truth the heart is converted. Innumerable people who have been worrying over their children have had the experience of being able to think from the bottom of the heart, “It is thanks to this child that I have been led to the teaching of the Buddha; I am truly grateful.” Even if the phenomena do not change, suffering ceases to be suffering. Instead, people are able to give thanks for what they had felt to be suffering and to see the working of the Buddha in suffering. It is a case of “if it weren’t for this child” or “thanks to this child.” *Hoza* attempts to bring about that conversion. Let us further develop *hoza*, where warm hearts commune and where the experience of saving and being saved is to be found.

Meanwhile, youth development is always an important issue. Recently, in Japan, there has been a succession of suicides by children as a result of bullying. This is an extremely grave issue, and one that we must all address earnestly. To do so, it is important to interact directly with young people in various ways. But approaching parents is also essential. Most important is the attitude of mothers, who give birth to and rear children, since swelling the ranks of mothers who are resolved to protect their children at all costs and bring them up properly leads to youth development in the true sense. Of course the role of fathers is also important. It is vital that the entire family tackle youth development.

In Buddhist terms, the ultimate aim of education is to foster people who kneel before and take refuge in the Buddha. As indicated by the guiding principle for 2007, this is achieved through realization of the essence of Buddhism. Transmitting the joy of having been saved through the founder to others, international propagation, *hoza*, and youth development—in the end, all result in increasing the number of people who kneel before and take refuge in the Buddha. Focusing on this, let us engage in endeavor together this year. □

* John Ross Carter and Mahinda Palihawadana, trans., *The Dhammapadam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 34.

Avoiding Religious Temptations in the Global Neighborhood

by Robert F. Smylie

When fundamental religions and political realities are distorted, the impact in the public arena is profound.

The United Nations, created in 1945, following the most devastating war in history, was an international effort to deal with seemingly insoluble world problems too frequently leading to war. The problems often reflected religious interests and values. In the Preamble to the UN Charter, “We, the peoples” identified four mandates for the world community, as valid in the twenty-first century as when first adopted. These included *ending* the scourge of war and the use of violence to solve political problems; *protecting and honoring* the human rights and dignity of all peoples; *building* the international rule of law; and *promoting* social progress for all. The Preamble promised a commitment for these ends “to practice tolerance and *live together in peace with one another as good neighbors*.” The UN Charter gave universal significance to a profoundly simple question asked of Jesus centuries ago, “Who is my neighbor?” In the twenty-first century, amid ethnic wars and clashes of civilizations, that question still remains, as do the temptations and problems that prevent the actualization of the good neighborhood.

The Report of the Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighborhood*, called for values for “transforming a global neighborhood . . . into a universal moral community in which people are bound together by more than proximity, interest, or identity.” The values “all derive in one way or another from the principle, which is in accord with religious teachings around the world that people should treat others as they would themselves wish to be treated.” They are “respect for life, liberty, justice and equality, mutual respect, caring, and integrity.”

In most countries identity is a blend of religious, political, and ethnic factors. Responsibility and accountability have been bounded by that mix. In the twenty-first century can we transcend those limits and discover a global neighborhood world of incredible multicultural diversity? Can we move beyond our particular nationalisms and discover the meaning and requirements of dual citizenship? Do our par-

ticular religious traditions prevent us from being part of that global neighborhood? Can we share a common security, affirm in common the dignity and worth of individuals, promote the universal rule of law and order, advance the common good, and preserve the common environment—requirements for the new global neighborhood?

We need to recognize that religion and world affairs are constantly interacting. Almost every world problem or conflict involves religious, ethical, and moral dynamics. On one level note the conflicts between Hindus and Muslims in South Asia; Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Israel/Palestine; Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq; and Protestant and Catholic Christians in Northern Ireland. Note the alacrity with which governments claim religious sanction for their policies, including the use of violence. Witness also how sectarian religious values are injected into international discussions on population matters, women’s and children’s rights, stem-cell research, and even methods to prevent HIV/AIDS.

We need further to acknowledge that the lines between religious traditions and institutions and civil and political

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institutions are often blurred: witness the phenomenon of both “state religions” and “civil religions.” Political leaders co-opt religious language and symbolism, develop “rituals” with patriotic meaning, and claim or distort values for political ends. Civil religion almost inevitably denigrates the integrity of authentic religious traditions. At the same time, religious individuals, groups, or coalitions are often aggressive in seeking governmental support for specific religious agendas and special privilege.

Today, as well as throughout world history, major religions fall into temptations distorting fundamental religious and political realities, resulting in profound impact in the public arena. Historically, they had descriptions rarely used by the public: *manicheanism*, *antinomianism*, *apocalypticism*, *messianism*, and *Machiavellianism*. These deviations or temptations appear in many different guises. Three of these concepts will be explored as “temptations,” showing how religious constructs make the achievement of a global neighborhood difficult.

1. The first temptation for a religious tradition, citing its own origins, is to claim that it is exceptional, called to a special destiny or “messianic” role, and thus to have special power, status, and privilege.

Obviously every living religion lays claim to unique insight or spiritual wisdom. Each has contributed to a richly pluralistic world. Problems arise when religious traditions claiming exclusive access to the truth seek to impose their dogma on others, expect special privileges or status, and rely on the power of the state or empire to enforce their practices and offer protection. The early Hebrew scriptures portrayed the Hebrew people as the chosen people of God through whom all would be blessed. The Hebrews faced competing claims in Rome, Greece, Assyria, Egypt, and Babylonia. The Hebrew scriptures reveal a profound debate—whether the Hebrews were chosen by Yahweh because of their inherent merit, or whether they were chosen for a divine purpose despite their unworthiness. When it appeared they had lost their claims on Yahweh, some argued that the new Christian sect replaced the Hebrew people as those chosen for a “messianic” destiny.

Fifteen centuries later, Christians arrived in the Americas. Newly transplanted from Europe, those in the northern colonies concluded they were a chosen people in a chosen land with a special destiny. In the early nineteenth century, the United States asserted its “Manifest Destiny,” a term originally expressing dominance over its southern neighbors. It justified expansion across the continent and beyond, often with little consideration for others affected by that expansion: the indigenous peoples, the Spanish descendants in the Southwest, the Inuits (Alaskans), and the Hawaiians.

While there are numerous variations on the theme of people with chosen or special destiny, some traditions share a “messianic” expectation that “some person or people” will

appear to rescue the world and inaugurate a reign of peace, an ideal state. The British Empire, the most extensive of the European competitors, claimed a civilizing mission. Japanese lore holding that the Japanese were descended from the “Sun Goddess” helped inspire the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. The “Third Reich” was a Nazi idea that the German superrace-religion was destined to have a thousand-year reign. Islam claimed it embodied the “realm of peace” (Dar al-Islam) and that its mission was to expand that realm and create a great civilization. Now it is resurgent. China, long having an ethnocentric view as the “Central Kingdom,” is seeking to reclaim a central place in world history. At least one scholar has China as a major contender in the future clash of civilizations.

The assumptions, claims, and temptations make it clear that “chosenness” is a risky business, particularly when it is combined to justify the foreign policy of a given country. The twentieth century was marked by its tragic results! The victims of religious exceptionalism (cultural imperialism) are strewn throughout history. And the beginning of the twenty-first century is not reassuring.

The concept of exceptionalism has several corollaries. First, exceptionalists claim that all other people will be blessed by the fulfillment of their destiny. Leaders assert it; zealots justify it, manipulating the twins of patriotism and fear; true believers get a passionate thrill from it. Currently, the United States claims all will be blessed by the adoption of its systems and interpretations of “freedom, democracy, and market.” Those who do not accept such self-evident truths risk economic, political, and even military consequences.

Second, exceptionalists further claim that nothing should be allowed to prevent the fulfillment of that destiny: Britain, Germany, Japan, Italy, and the Soviet Union made such claims in the twentieth century. Again, currently, the United States is the leading claimant. For two decades its stated military policy has been to prevent any country or coalition of countries from ever being able to challenge its superior power.

Third, exceptionalists, when in a position of great military and economic power, follow the Machiavellian argument that power should be maximized and used. Power becomes the primary reality, the source of greatness and meaning, the new object of idolatry. Therefore, power is sought as the end that then justifies the means. It is even argued that justifiable ends can require immoral means for the greater good. The “good achieved” confers its own justification. When “civil religions” or religious leaders truly convinced of the exclusive possession of truth confer religious blessings, “holy war” becomes an option. “Untruth” has no right to exist. Conflict resolution is thus more difficult.

Fourth, exceptionalists also often assume that they are above the law, reflecting the ancient religious concept of “antinomianism.” While law and order are necessary for domestic and international stability and security, the

“chosen” may claim to be above the law because of their righteousness and destiny. They may also assert that it is their responsibility to make and enforce the law for others but that they need not be bound by it. In the current “war against terrorism,” some argue that they are not bound by international law because terrorists do not respect it. Such assertions today make it difficult for the UN to build the international rule of law: witness the resistance of some powerful countries to the International Criminal Court.

2. The second temptation is to assume the possession of the truth about the nature of “good and evil,” thus assuming self-identification with the good.

Each religious tradition has grappled with the question of the nature, existence, and causes of suffering and evil. The dualistic thought of the Zoroastrians in the second millennium B.C.E. influenced the religions of Asia and Asia Minor. Oversimplified, dualism suggested that the polarities of good and evil, light and darkness, right and wrong are forces in a constant struggle with each other, with suffering as a consequence. This dualistic concept was picked up in the second century C.E. by Mani, a Babylonian-born religious leader responsible for “Manichaeism,” a heretical Christian movement. Mani’s complicated dualistic mythology drew from and influenced many traditions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Gnosticism, and Zoroastrianism. The Manichaeism temptation often complements the concept of chosenness. The chosen, believing themselves to embody the good, attribute evil to the “other,” “the enemy.” Evil’s destruction becomes the goal.

Good and evil have been described in many ways. One way argues that humanity is imperfect, inherently evil, fallen, or corrupted, and that suffering and evil are natural accompaniments. Sometimes suffering is seen as punishment coming from a god, gods, dharma, or the forces of the universe. This approach has led to elaborate rituals of expiation, purification, sacrifice, and rigid disciplines. Another way suggests that individuals possess both good and evil attributes that are involved in a constant struggle. Yet another method posits a cosmic struggle of the contending forces with human beings as the luckless pawns. Great material for mythology!

But these ways all avoid the havoc caused by the self-serving temptation to attribute all problems involving suffering and evil to others. (Currently, this may be called ethical “outsourcing.”) “They,” the evil scapegoats, are responsible! They are the obstacles to peace, security, stability, and justice. The scapegoats may be selected from within a society, or they may be outsiders. Sometimes their selection is based on social constructions of caste, class, ethnicity, race, religion, or ideology. Divisions are manifest in numerous ways: stereotypes, discriminations, persecution, intolerance, legislative barriers, exclusion; or “cleansing.” In notable instances, actual walls mark the divisions. The “good” are

presumptuous of their own worth, righteousness, and destiny. The more fanatically the others are identified as evil, the easier it becomes to conclude that they must be opposed, contained, or eliminated. When this is “justified” in religious terms, tragedy seems an inevitable result.

Modern dualism provides for simple approaches to complex realities. Shades of gray are unthinkable. By defining a conflict in absolute terms, a careful analysis of the multifaceted dynamics of any issue is precluded. Self-examination is avoided. Self-righteousness is safeguarded.

In recent times, World War II was seen in these terms, the result ending in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The post-World War II division shifted the dynamic to a life-death struggle between the so-called free, democratic world, and the unfree totalitarian world. Each side mirrored the other as the source of all evil. Destruction was preferable to defeat. “Better dead than Red” became a slogan in the West. The religious rhetoric justifying the West’s response to the Soviets was simple. Communism was seldom analyzed merely as a competitive form of political and economic organization. It was usually defined with prejudicial adjectives, “atheistic, godless communism.” It was called “the evil empire.” The religious effort in the West was to assure that God (whoever or whatever) was on “our side.” This approach fueled the costly nuclear arms race that still threatens all humanity. When the Soviet Union collapsed, other polarities emerged, and the “clash of civilizations” was offered in place of the “cold war.”

The post-9/11 declaration of “the war to end evil” is a malignant manifestation of manicheanism. While “evil” is ill-defined, immediate targets were identified as the “axis of evil.” Real war ensued with devastating results. Religious language has been exploited. The “battleground” is indeterminate, therefore indiscriminate. The opponent is dehumanized. Enemy death is simply “collateral damage.” In the process of dehumanizing the other, one dehumanizes the self. The rules of engagement with the enemy are set in win/lose terms, as they were in World War II, calling, if not for total destruction, at least, for total surrender. Terrorism is to be destroyed, though it means different things to different people. Paradoxically, violence is the method of choice.

Dualistic ideology tempts people to “play God,” particularly those emboldened with messianic complexes. Who is to be saved? What is to be destroyed in order to save? Again, when we believe that some group is so irredeemably evil that it can and must be destroyed, then we have the formula for holy war. No formula exists for ending such wars. The result is an arrogation of the right to make ultimate decisions about life itself, forgetting that while we have the capacity to destroy life, we do not have the capacity to restore it.

3. A third temptation is to transform this focus on good and evil and on temporal enemies into action directed toward

the end of time, or the end of history. In the drama of history, the zealot says: "If the promise of the end of history is the destruction of evil and the inauguration of the golden age, why not hasten the process?"

While not necessarily the focal point of every religious tradition or interpretation of the meaning of life, the meaning of history is important in the political realm. Some dualistic traditions suggest a linear view of history that will end in a final battle between the cosmic forces of good and

and converted into public policy, has consequences for the whole world and people of every religious tradition. Driven thus, it would be the temptation to end all temptations. A nuclear Armageddon is realizable. To argue that it is "God's will" is to assume a horrific understanding of God. To assume that a "good God" would not allow it to happen is to deny human accountability. The flip side of "fulfillment" may well be fatalism. Six decades into the nuclear age, religious people as well as secularists are still advocating that

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A U.S. marine aboard a tank standing by near Ad Diwaniyah, Iraq, on March 30, 2003, ten days after the invasion of Iraq began.

evil. Some coupled this with the messianic hope of an ideal kingdom. Believers (the chosen and the good) in such a process, convinced they will be on the side of victory, are thus tempted to hasten the process. For some, the climatic end is "Apocalyptic" and the war is "Armageddon." The intersection of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam provides the center focus for this thinking, but it is not without variations elsewhere—witness the zealotry and violence of Aum Shinrikyo in Tokyo. The most heralded version focuses on a final battle to begin in the Middle East, coupling the return of the Jews to restore Israel with the expected return of Jesus to bring in the "Kingdom." When one adds to the mix a conflict of civilizations, the zealotry of fanatics, the fearful faithful prepared even for the end of the world, and the profit-making that thrives on such conditions, the stakes are raised. The possibility of a nuclear holocaust brings the catastrophic into the realm of a possibility. Armageddon has moved from religious futurology to imminent consideration. Unfortunately, the outcome can only be a matter of tragic speculation. To non-Judeo-Christian stream religions, this may seem bizarre and irrational and could be dismissed, but for the fact that such a worldview, driven by zealotry

the possession of weapons of mass destruction is theirs by religious right. For religious peoples, the anticipation of the battle of Armageddon as the fulfillment of some religiously inspired destiny is an abdication of human responsibility or accountability.

If it is commonplace to claim that all religions are for peace, why is peace so elusive? Is it because we are still bound by the practices, traditions, presumptions, and temptations of our pasts?

In our commitment to a global neighborhood, can we give up the prerogatives of our exceptionalism? Can we avoid the arbitrary divides of people that assume goodness is ours, that the other is evil? Can we champion the values of peace, justice, and mercy, so that fanatics and fatalists are not able to determine the future of history?

A global neighborhood will be possible only when there is security from war; when human rights and dignity are guaranteed for all; when the international rule of law is secured by effective instruments of government; and when all the world's inhabitants benefit from increasing standards of life. May this neighborhood be our vision! □

Symposium in New York Commemorates Centennial of Founder Nikkyo Niwano's Birth

Participants in the first panel session discussed "Buddhist Approaches to Shared Security."

On December 14, 2006, the World Conference of Religions for Peace and Rissho Kosei-kai's New York Branch held a symposium on the theme "A Life of Compassion and Peace" at the Japan Society in New York to commemorate the centennial of the birth of Founder Nikkyo Niwano, who was a cofounder of Religions for Peace. Some 150 people, including United Nations officials, religious leaders, and people working for NGOs, attended the event, which included a Commemorative Ceremony and panel discussions.

During the ceremony, Archbishop Dr. Celestino Migliore, a permanent observer for the Holy See at the United Nations, described Founder Niwano as a pioneer in interfaith dialogue for peace. Explaining that religion has become enormously important in UN activities, he said international opinion is coalescing around the idea that there is a close connection between faith and culture, and therefore between cultural dialogue and interreligious dialogue. Then a message from Ambassador Nobuaki Tanaka, UN under-secretary-general for disarmament affairs, was read out by his special assistant Mr. Ioan Tudor. Referring to Founder Niwano's address at the first Special Session of the UN General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament (SSD I) in 1978, in which he urged the superpowers to work for gen-

eral and complete disarmament, Ambassador Tanaka said, "The vision of Founder Niwano is still alive and continues to inspire people in their work at the United Nations."

The ceremony was followed by two panel discussions, on "Buddhist Approaches to Shared Security" and "Interreligious Cooperation for Peace." Dr. William F. Vendley, secretary-general of Religions for Peace, moderated the first discussion, in which four panelists took part: Dr. Sallie B. King, professor of philosophy and religion at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia; Dr. Christopher S. Queen, lecturer on the study of religion and dean of Students and Alumni Relations for Continuing Education in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Dr. Kenneth Kraft, professor of religious studies at Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; and Rev. Kyoichi Sugino, assistant secretary-general of Religions for Peace.

Dr. King, co-editor with Dr. Queen of *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, described how the Sri Lankan Engaged Buddhist group known as the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement has worked to end the civil war in Sri Lanka by looking for ways to "shared security" in the world today. She said, "The Sarvodaya Movement draws upon the Buddha's Four Noble Truths in an innovative way,

using them not only for their spiritual guidance but also as a template to shape their thinking.” Dr. Queen placed Founder Niwano among the great thinkers and activists who contributed to the rise of Engaged Buddhism in our lifetimes, including the Dalai Lama, Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar of India, and Thich Nhat Hanh of Vietnam. (The texts of the speeches by Dr. King and Dr. Queen are on pages 34–37.) Dr. Kraft, the author of *In the Wheel of Engaged Buddhism: A New Map of the Path*, quoted from some of Founder Niwano’s writings, saying Engaged

participating in one another’s spiritual communities, (3) the “dialogue of theological discussion,” to build bridges of mutual understanding and appreciation, and (4) the “dialogue of collaboration,” through which members work together to foster a more united and peaceful world. Dr. Vendley stated that the vision of Founder Niwano had given birth to Religions for Peace as an instrument of cooperation among religions. He then reported the results of the Eighth World Assembly of Religions for Peace, which was held in Kyoto in August 2006. □

The second panel session was on “Interreligious Cooperation for Peace.”

Buddhism is rooted in classic Mahayana teachings, and that for Founder Niwano there was no difference between the two. Rev. Sugino analyzed Founder Niwano’s interpretation of the Lotus Sutra based on the concept of the One Vehicle and gave an overview of how the founder’s vision of interreligious cooperation has been put into practice in Japan through the Brighter Society Movement and overseas through international interreligious forums, including Religions for Peace.

The second panel session was coordinated by Dr. S. Wesley Ariarajah, professor of ecumenical theology at Drew University School of Theology, Madison, New Jersey, who is a former deputy-general-secretary of the World Council of Churches. The panelists included Dr. Donald W. Mitchell, professor of comparative philosophy of religion at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana; Dr. William F. Vendley; and Rev. Kyoichi Sugino.

Dr. Mitchell gave an overview of dialogue and cooperation between the Focolare Movement and Rissho Kosei-kai, which started in 1979 with the encounter of Ms. Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement, and Founder Niwano. Describing the interreligious dialogue between the two movements, Dr. Mitchell said it has consisted of four major types: (1) the “dialogue of life,” together in interfaith friendship, (2) the “dialogue of spirituality,” with members

Founder Nikkyo Niwano with other members of the Interim Advisory Committee meeting for Religions for Peace when they visited Archbishop Athenagoras of the Greek Orthodox Church in Istanbul in February 1969.

Founder Niwano meeting with Iranian officials in Tehran during the International Conference on U.S. Intervention in Iran, to which he was invited to discuss the American hostage crisis.

An Engaged Buddhist View of Shared Security

by Sallie B. King

What might Buddhists have to offer a world longing for security in an age of violence? This is an important but daunting topic for Buddhists! What can Engaged Buddhists, who are either pacifist or pushing as much as possible in the pacifist direction, have to offer to a world so overrun with violence and war? In the Dhammapada, the Buddha taught that hatred cannot be overcome by hatred; hatred can only be overcome by non-hatred. So perhaps Buddhists may have something to offer a violent world, after all. Let us begin by considering the contribution of Rev. Nikkya Niwano.

I would like to express my great esteem and respect for Rev. Niwano's vision and action in pursuing interreligious understanding and cooperation. With all the pressing issues before us, some might think that interreligious understanding should take a low priority. Rev. Niwano, however, had a vision of world peace that put interreligious cooperation right at the top in priority, and I believe that he was right.

My conviction that Rev. Niwano was right in his approach to peace is based upon an event that occurred in 1988: the shooting down of an Iranian airbus by an American naval warship. All aboard the airliner, approximately 290 people, were killed. All but 38 were Iranians; 66 were children. This tragedy was horrific enough, but hard on its heels came another blow: the American response. In a survey of the American people shortly after the shooting, over 90 percent said they thought the American warship was justified in the

shooting. This American response is truly shocking in its implications. The American people could never have said this if the airplane had been full of Christians, or Europeans. The shooting would have been intolerable, no matter what the reason. But to the American people, the people on that airliner were "other." It is a sad fact of human psychology that the more we perceive someone as the "other," the more we accept treating them as less than we expect "our own" people to be treated. In 1988, Americans could not perceive Iranian civilians and children as people like them. This is the bottom line.

Rev. Niwano had his finger on exactly this point. Throughout his life, he taught that all of humankind is one people. He taught that we are all sons and daughters of the same supreme reality. All our religions spring from the same supreme source. Rev. Niwano worked hard to establish and promote organizations that foster interreligious understanding. I honor and esteem him greatly for his promotion of interreligious understanding as one of the critical keys to building world peace. Among all the Engaged Buddhists, he is the one who most deeply understood this point and most actively worked to promote healthier understanding among peoples. This is a great legacy.

Let us turn now to our situation today. In order to think about the challenge of finding a way to "shared security" in the world today, I would like to examine how the Sri Lankan Engaged Buddhist group, Sarvodaya Shramadana, has worked with the civil war in Sri Lanka between the Sinhalese and Tamil peoples.

The Sarvodayans draw upon the Buddha's Four Noble Truths in an innovative way, using them not only for their spiritual guidance but also as a template to shape their thinking. When we apply the Four Noble Truths in this way, they are:

1. state the problem;
2. analyze the cause;
3. envision and believe in complete well-being; and
4. detail the way to cure the problem.

When Sarvodaya applied the Four Noble Truths in this way to the civil war situation in Sri Lanka, they came up with the following results, as posted on their website in 2001:

1. The problem is war and violence in Sri Lanka. ("The problem is not the Tamil Tigers or the Government; the problem is violence.")

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2. The cause is poverty and ethnic hatred.
3. The goal is a sustainable, spiritually balanced island that works for all.

4. The way to cure the problem is the Sarvodaya Peace Program. Some of the features of this program are:

(1) Work for a cease-fire. How might it be possible to obtain a cease-fire? The approach is to eliminate popular support for violence. They list three steps to achieve this:

- Eliminate violence from the people's hearts and actions through participation in large, public peace meditations. Educate the media to support this effort rather than ridicule it. (These meditations gathered up to 100,000 people, meditating on the traditional Buddhist value of *metta*, or loving-kindness, for oneself, for loved ones, for neutral people, and for those with whom one was struggling, the so-called enemies. At the end of the event, participants were asked to meditate in this way daily at home.)
- Ask everyone you know to stop violence and stop supporting violence.
- Speak against violence and for peace at every opportunity.

(2) Work toward healing, reconciliation and inclusivity for all Sri Lankans at the local community level. The "1,000 Village Link-up" program brought volunteers from the more affluent Sinhalese areas to live for a year in the less affluent Tamil areas, sharing their lives and developing understanding and friendship.

(3) Acknowledge your own and others' suffering. Acknowledge the pain you have caused others. Work to heal suffering at the local community level.

(4) Work to meet all parties' economic, social, and spiritual needs. (Sarvodaya has identified ten basic needs and has developed very concrete programs to meet them.)

(5) Have all parties engage in a national conversation on envisioning a future that works for all, including the writing of a new, inclusive constitution.

We may note the following points about Sarvodaya's analysis of the Sri Lankan civil war and their plan for resolving it. First, the way the problem is stated is very important. Note that there is no one-sided blaming in this approach. They simply look for where there is suffering and name it. Second, the third step, envisioning the goal, is an effort to state a win-win solution. Sarvodaya embraces a classic Buddhist way of thinking when they point out that when you remove the fuel, the fire goes out. It is not necessary for one side to "win" at the other's expense. The war will end when its causes are removed. Third, the fourth step assumes the reality of interdependence and points to the necessity of multifaceted programs.

Using this model, how might this approach be applied to the theme of finding a way to "shared security" in our current, violent global situation?

1. We must state the problem neutrally: the problem is violence and the threat of violence against civilians.

2. Cause: here it becomes difficult to avoid politics, but note that the approach implies an emphasis on educated, professional analysis, as opposed to politicized rhetoric. I am not an expert! But to see how the approach works, perhaps we could name the following as some of the causes of our current situation:

- Past wrongs and a history of conflictual relationships.
- Deep poverty and unemployment in developing countries.
- Religious extremism.
- Perceived disrespect for other cultures and religions (here we can see the direct link between healing interfaith relations and achieving peace, and the importance of Rev. Niwano's contribution in this area).
- Western dependence on oil.

3. Vision: a peaceful planet that works for all. This includes:

- Economic sufficiency for all.
- Security for all.
- Cross-cultural and interfaith respect.

4. The way to the goal (of course, there are many possibilities here; the following mentions just a few):

- Acknowledgment of past wrongs. We might name here both the Iranian airbus tragedy—we have never apologized for that—and the Iranian act of holding American Embassy personnel hostage. There are always wrongs on both sides.
- A Marshall Plan for the Middle East: a crash program to help the area develop economically. In the past, this approach has earned the United States lasting friends.
- Intervisitation programs of all kinds.
- A crash program to develop nonpetroleum energy sources.

And finally: What if after 9/11, instead of Americans reacting the way we did, we had had mass peace meditations, chanting *metta*, or loving-kindness, for those who were killed, for those who loved them, for the heroes of the day, for the traumatized, for the country as a whole, and for Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda?* This does not mean wishing the perpetrators happiness from their violent actions! It means wishing them *genuine* well-being, based upon genuine *causes* of well-being: wisdom, inner peace, gentle behavior, compassion, and kindness. This may sound insane. However, consider the likely effect of such a thing on the attitudes of all those involved and of all those watching around the world. The way the United States did react cost Americans the sympathy of the world. Perhaps it's time to try something insane. Take away the fuel and the fire goes out. It's worth reflecting on. □

* This idea was suggested by B. Alan Wallace at a meditation retreat in Charlottesville, Virginia, the weekend of December 9 and 10, 2006.

Reflections on “Shared Security”

by Christopher S. Queen

At its historic Eighth World Assembly in Kyoto last year, Religions for Peace delegates addressed what is perhaps the most urgent challenge of our time: “Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security.” The notion of “shared security,” or “human security,” was defined as “protecting the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment,” and, more succinctly, as the “freedom from fear and freedom from want.” In these remarks, I would like to illustrate these ideas with four examples from the Buddhist tradition: the commitment formula of “taking refuge” in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha; the image of shared community in the opening scene of the Lotus Sutra; the mass conversion of Dalits—formerly the “untouchables”—to Buddhism; and Rev. Nikkyo Niwano’s discourse on the notion of *jihī*—“benevolence, a sense of oneness, the lack of a barrier between oneself and others”—the psychological and spiritual basis of shared security for our time.

In offering these comments, I wish to pay tribute to the enduring legacy of Rev. Niwano, whose founding of Rissho Kosei-kai and the World Conference of Religions for Peace has contributed immeasurably to reconciliation, healing, and the prospects for shared security in our world. And, in offering these reflections, I want to place Rev. Niwano in the context of the great thinkers and activists, both living and deceased, who have contributed to the rise of Engaged Buddhism in our lifetimes.

By now, the world is familiar with many of the preceptors of socially engaged Buddhism in Asia and the West: the Nobel Peace laureates, Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet, and Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma; Dr. B. R. Ambedkar of India and Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne of Sri Lanka, leaders of some of the poorest communities in Asia; Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh of Vietnam and Ven. Maha Ghosananda of Cambodia, humble peacemakers in war-torn countries; the reformer-activists of Thailand, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Sulak Sivaraksa, and Bhikkuni Dhammananda; founders of the Taiwanese global relief organizations, Ven. Cheng Yen (Tzu Chi Foundation) and Ven. Hsing Yun (Fo Guang Shan); and the American engaged Buddhists, Robert Aitken, Bernard Glassman, Joanna Macy, Joan Halifax, Paula Green, and many others.

By directing the attention of devout Buddhists to concrete tasks of social service and global peacemaking, Rev. Niwano has earned a place of honor in this extraordinary company.

For more than 2,500 years, followers of the Buddha’s path have affirmed their commitment by reciting three times the ancient Refuge Formula: “I take refuge in the Buddha; I take refuge in the Dharma; I take refuge in the Sangha.” By so adopting the person, teachings, and community of the Awakened One as their guide, these devotees vow to undertake a path of spiritual practice and service to others. But in using the words *saranam gacchami*, Pali for “I go for refuge,” they also proclaim their aspiration for what we might call a zone of “shared security.” For the word *saranam* is derived from the root *sri*, which means to “lean upon, find support, shelter, protection, and rest.” Thus, by “taking refuge” and by adopting the Five Precepts—to avoid harming, stealing, harsh or false speech, sexual misconduct, and intoxication—and by embracing the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, which identify the universality of suffering and the possibility of its relief, Buddhists experience an immediate sense of support, shelter, protection, and rest.

A dramatic picture of this instant community of shared security is painted in the opening section of the Lotus Sutra. In *A Buddhist Approach to Peace* (1972), Rev. Niwano describes the harmonious audience that the Buddha attracted for the sermon that became the Lotus Sutra: bodhisattvas, monks, nuns, lay men, lay women, kings, princes, ministers, commonfolk, and extraordinary beings—“gods who live in

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heaven (the spiritual world), demons who fly in the sky, dragons who abide in the water”—all abiding in harmony within the Buddha’s words, and all “seated on an equal level.” The inclusivity of this picture is reminiscent of the “peaceable kingdom” the biblical prophets foretold, in which “the lion shall lie down with the lamb,” and the care that Jesus and his disciples took of the 5,000 who showed up for his outdoor sermons, feeding them in body, mind, and spirit.

Rev. Niwano explains that the equality and harmonious coexistence of this audience, consisting of “all the living creatures in the whole universe,” derives from “a single, invisible entity that is embodied in all things, . . . the great life force of the universe,” and that this force is expressed in Buddhist philosophy as “the Void” and “the Eternal, Original Buddha.” “When one can fully realize this,” he continues, “then fraternal love, the feeling that all human beings are brothers and sisters, will spring up in one’s heart. One will be filled with a sense of harmony and cooperation. This sentiment of fraternity is the benevolence or compassion taught in Buddhism.”

In the fall of 2006 I experienced this overwhelming sense of fraternity and benevolence as one of several million pilgrims to the central Indian city of Nagpur. The occasion was the fiftieth anniversary of the Buddhist conversion movement initiated by Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956), leader of the untouchables and the principle author of India’s constitution. On October 14, 1956, Ambedkar, his wife, and nearly 400,000 of his followers repeated the ancient formula *Buddham saranam gacchami, Dhammam saranam gacchami, Sangham saranam gacchami*, vowed to follow the Five Precepts, and took twenty-two additional vows eschewing the practices and beliefs of Hinduism and the caste system.

Growing out of the untouchables’ movement for civil and human rights that Ambedkar launched in the 1920s, the new Buddhism, or *Navayana* (“new vehicle”), as Ambedkar called it, had all the marks of the later engaged Buddhisms that spread throughout Asia and the West. Ambedkar’s favorite slogans, “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,” and “Educate, Agitate, and Organize” were borrowed from the West—Ambedkar earned doctoral degrees in New York and London—but they were articulated in his final work, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, in terms that any Buddhist might understand. The hallmarks of his teachings, and the social objectives of the waves of visitors to Nagpur last fall, were

evident in their chants, their posters, and the seminars and conferences that attracted activists, government officials, and scholars like myself: a world in which people of all backgrounds have access to food and water, shelter and medicine, education and employment, dignity and respect—in a word, a world of shared security.

In *A Buddhist Approach to Peace*, Rev. Niwano returned to the theme of brotherhood and solidarity by focusing on the term *jihi*. “The Japanese word *jihi* is the equivalent of benevolence or compassion. The character *ji* is a Chinese translation of the Sanskrit word *maitreya*, an abstract noun

A parade held in Nagpur in October 2006, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Buddhist conversion movement. Displayed on the truck at left is a large portrait of Dr. Ambedkar.

derived from *maitri*, which means ‘utmost friendship.’ *Hi* is a Chinese translation of the Sanskrit word *karuna*, whose original meaning is said to be ‘moan.’ When one sees others moaning in suffering or agony, one cannot refrain from moaning oneself. This state of being sensitive to the pain of others and feeling it as one’s own is called *hi*. Both *ji* and *hi* are elements of the pure friendship that springs spontaneously from the sense of oneness, the lack of a barrier between oneself and others.

“If all people in the world had this sense of *jihi* (benevolence), how could they hate or have ill feelings toward others? How could they fight wars? A benevolent spirit is the true starting point of peace.” And we might add, of a sense of shared security.

We should thank Rev. Nikkyo Niwano for reminding us of the immense resources of the Buddhist tradition, as we strive together for a world of peace and security. □

Zen

Meditation and Simplicity as a “Sacrament”

by Notto R. Thelle

Zen does not transcend the human consciousness in a search for “higher” value, this author says. On the contrary, one is summoned back to the original awareness, to this world.

A student once visited the Zen master Gasan in Tenryuji, one of the five great Zen monasteries in Kyoto, and asked him: “Have you ever read the Christian Bible?” Gasan replied: “No—read it for me.”

The student opened the Bible and began to read from the Gospel of Matthew: “And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of them. . . . So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own” (6:28ff.).

Gasan said: “I would say that the man who spoke these words is enlightened.”

The student continued his reading: “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you” (7:7).

Gasan then said: “Wonderful! The man who spoke such words is not far from Buddhahood!” A little over one hundred years ago, a Christian theological student called Seitaro Yoshida knocked at the gate of Gasan’s monastery and told him that he was “called by God” to meditate under Gasan’s

guidance. Initially, he did not get beyond the gate, but he did not acquiesce in this harsh rejection—he returned again and again, and was literally thrown out of the monastery each time. This is how Zen tests the seriousness and perseverance in a person’s religious search. At last, the gate opened, and Yoshida shared the strict rhythm of the monastery’s life for three years, before he resumed his theological studies and subsequently became a leading pastor in Japan’s Protestant church.

We are not told the name of the student who read to Gasan from the Sermon on the Mount, but it is not improbable that it was Yoshida himself.

Zen or *zazen*—meditation in a seated posture—is the innermost secret of Buddhism. The Buddha himself attained enlightenment in the course of silent meditation. Indeed, many would say that meditation *is* the very Buddha Way. In the silence of the meditation hall, the body and mind become calm, one breathes more deeply and freely, and thoughts become clearer. The life-transforming insight is sought beyond the artificial boundaries of one’s thought.

This was the context that Pastor Yoshida entered. He meditated with the monks, worked in the monastery garden and kitchen, listened to the master, conversed with him, and looked for answers to his questions. After three years, he went back to serving his church.

Naturally, this is not a normal career for a clergyman in Japan, and it was even more unusual in the nineteenth century, when Buddhists and Christians still regarded each other with suspicion and dislike. Nevertheless, Pastor Yoshida was not unique. He attracted attention because he was a clergyman, but we find the same pattern in many other Christians who were impelled by an inner force to put their faith to the test in the encounter with Zen. They became spiritual pilgrims, setting out on their travels in order to discover the hidden connections in their lives.

What happened to them? And why were they attracted by Zen?

Some who had converted to Christianity now rediscovered

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in Buddhism the landscape of their childhood, and they turned their backs on Christianity for good. Their Christian faith became just one phase of a path which was absorbed into larger contexts. Others found Buddhism to be so severe and cold that they returned with a new eagerness to the warmth and human concern in the Christian church.

But many—perhaps most—discovered that Zen changed them. Their Christian faith became receptive to Buddhist experiences and insights, and this was more than merely an aesthetic varnish on the surface: new ideas and expressions made their faith look more Japanese. Some found new perspectives on their faith, when they recognized in Zen elements of their own faith; others found that Zen helped them to understand the Bible better, and they spoke enthusiastically of a “Zen spirituality” in Jesus and Paul. Some noticed an inner transformation: their faith was not only challenged and inspired, but acquired a new dimension. They held fast to Christ and remained members of the church, but they believed in a new way.

Something like this happened to another Japanese clergyman, the Dominican Shigeto Oshida. After many years of priestly ministry, he received permission to leave the normal structures of religious life, and he founded a little community in a mountain village north of Nagoya. He says of himself: “I am a Buddhist who has met Christ.” He grew up as a Buddhist, and discovered the meaning of life in Christ. Since then, he has lived in the service of the church; but in the course of the years, he has rediscovered a way of life in which Zen is a natural part of the rhythm of faith. Father Oshida does not say very much about Zen, but it is there in the air one breathes, and the visitor notices how Zen inspires everything from worship and meditation and biblical study to the community’s meals and conversations and daily work.

Everywhere in the East, one meets “hyphenated Christians” whose faith is formed in close contact with their inherited religion and culture. It seems that the encounter with Zen creates a particularly large number of hyphenated believers, who become “Zen-Christians” or “Christians inspired by Zen.”

The traffic goes in the other direction too. After Japanese Buddhists overcame their skepticism and grasped that Christianity was not an enemy of the East, there has been a continuous stream of spiritual pilgrims to the Christian landscapes. The Christian faith, and not least the Gospel narratives about Jesus, unsettled them and inspired them. They were touched in the very depths of their life-experience, and the Bible became their favorite reading, shaping their way of thinking. There are many “hyphenated Buddhists” in Japan. Their existential attitudes are formed by Buddhism, but they are also friends and disciples of Jesus.

What is it about Zen Buddhism that permits Christians to recognize themselves in its experiences, and inspires them to see larger contexts, receive new insights, and be affected in the depths of their faith? The interest in Zen often begins as a romantic and aesthetic attraction. Zen has an atmos-

phere all of its own. Even in temples crowded by noisy tourists, one notices the silence behind the external forms; the architecture hints at hidden dimensions, and the miniature gardens in moss and stone and sand point one to a larger cosmos. Zen has penetrated Japanese art through and through, cultivating existential expressions that range from tea drinking and flower arrangements to sport and martial ideals. In the encounter with Zen, a Japanese Christian who has lost contact with his own background is compelled to ask whether God intended that the Christian faith should exclude the richness and simplicity that is at home in the religious world of the East.

Gradually, however, the aesthetic attraction becomes less important, as one concentrates on the life that lies behind the forms—the silence, the meditation, the concentration. One quickly sees that Zen makes demands; discipline, will, and perseverance are necessary for meditation. There is nothing romantic about sitting with your face to the wall while your legs ache and your thoughts are unwilling to concentrate. Aestheticism disappears when you are overpowered by sleep, or when you remain dumb because you cannot find an answer to the master’s insoluble questions. How is one to meditate when doubt goes about its corrosive work, and one no longer knows where all this is leading?

And yet, thousands of Christians continue their journey into Zen, because they are nourished by an inner disquiet—which is also an inner certainty. The path into silence does not lead away from their faith, but into deeper dimensions of that faith. All that is superficial is stripped away; one no longer expects dramatic experiences and cosmic breakthroughs, but waits in simple openness. For many Christians, this meditation is a preparation for prayer. Words fall silent, expectations and ambitions disappear, and the mind opens up to perceive a greater presence.

I have helped organize seminars on Zen both for Japanese clergy and for foreign missionaries, and we always met in a Zen monastery. This meant that we not only had lectures and discussions, but could follow the rhythm of the monastery, including the fixed times for Zen meditation. The participants repeatedly confirmed my own observation: Zen can open up paths into silence because it has preserved a unique awareness of the body as an integral part of our spiritual search. Christians speak a great deal about silence and prayer, but they often forget that the body, the breathing, and external circumstances prepare concentration and are themselves a part of the silence. As one participant put it, somewhat paradoxically, “We tend to think that Buddhism despises the body, because it has no place for a Creator. But Zen taught me something about my body that my Christian faith in the Creator ought to have taught me long ago!”

When we hear that Zen is a finger pointing directly to the human heart, and that Zen means discovering one’s true self, we naturally ask whether this means that the search in Zen is self-centered. Self-centeredness does in fact flourish in all religions which take the inward path, including Bud-

dhism; but those who are looking for a comfortable ego-trip should seek methods other than Zen, for part of the point about finding oneself in Zen is not to confirm one's egotistic dreams, but to tear away the mask from the false ego so that the "original face" can emerge. The new world is born when we shatter the artificial world we have built up around ourselves. In Zen, we find our true being only when the ego dies.

This awareness that the true human person is born when the ego dies is a bridge that allows a dialogue between Buddhists and Christians. The conversation reaches a dead end when they formulate their insights in philosophical or theological concepts, but they are speaking the same language when they offer a concrete description of the person who has become what he was meant to be. Here is what one of Japan's leading Zen masters, Dogen Kigen (1200–1253), said to his disciples:

To get to know the Buddha Way is to get to know oneself.
 To get to know oneself is to forget oneself.
 To forget oneself is to be confirmed by all things.
 To be confirmed by all things is to let go of one's body and mind, and to let go of others' bodies and minds.
 All traces of enlightenment vanish; and these vanishing traces of awakening must be left behind forever.

Let us mention one further paradox: despite all its emphasis on achieving redemption by one's own power, Zen is profoundly aware that the individual's life is borne up by a greater presence.

There is no doubt that Zen is a path that the individual himself must take. Zen is hard work, concentration, discipline, and a journey toward insight that takes many years. One can listen, learn, understand with the intellect, and receive inspiration, but one must take responsibility for one's own destiny. No one can wake up in place of another person; the insight which transforms one's life is granted only to the person who opens his own eyes and sees. The traditional vocabulary calls this "self-redemption."

Nevertheless, those who have genuinely familiarized themselves with Zen have a surprising awareness that enlightenment is ultimately something one receives. The hard work and discipline do not create the insight; their function is to prepare the person and to create a space for the insight. Reality opens up for the one who has let go of his or her own self. There is a link between Zen's demand that one let go of the ego and its awareness that enlightenment is a gift of grace.

The most striking expression I know of this coexistence of hard work and gift is a book of sketches of life in a Japanese Zen monastery. One drawing shows a monk who at last has achieved his spiritual breakthrough. He has meditated for many months and years, and has given everything to attain insight. One day, the world opens up for him: he is

awakened! He reacts to the miracle of enlightenment by stretching out his arms in an explosion of joy—and at precisely this moment, he sees something he had never before realized, namely that he is sitting on a huge hand, the hand of the Buddha. It had been there all along, but I imagine that he did not see it until he woke up and received knowledge. Despite all its emphasis on self-redemption, Zen is conscious that life can be received only by the one who has empty hands and an open mind. This idea is familiar to Christians too.

Zen Buddhism begins and ends with the simplest and most difficult questions of all: What does it mean to exist? How does one encounter life? How can one live in harmony with one's innermost nature? Many people come with exaggerated expectations of ecstatic experiences, cosmic breakthroughs, and superhuman abilities. They may indeed have important experiences, and they may be transformed in the course of time; but Zen does not seek extraordinary or superhuman things. With ruthless consistency, it calls the individual back to the ordinary sphere where life unfolds in its "suchness" or "thusness," as Buddhists put it. Enlightenment means opening one's eyes in such a way that reality can be seen, untouched by desires, ambitions, dreams, and expectations. Zen means finding one's place in reality, not groping blindly for an unattainable dream world, but in a spontaneous and playful presence.

The title of this essay speaks of simplicity as a "sacrament." It is perhaps somewhat audacious to employ such a theologically loaded word about something as Buddhist as Zen, but I hope the point is clear enough. In the Christian tradition, a sacrament is a visible sign pointing to the presence of invisible grace. The water of baptism and the bread of the eucharist are fundamental elements of life that become the place of the divine presence in the sacred rites. In Zen, it is precisely the simple and everyday things that have a sacramental character. There is nothing special about drinking tea, meeting people, going about one's daily work, playing with children, or taking delight in nature; but it is in the elements of ordinary life that the mystery of existence opens up. A Zen poem puts it as follows:

How excellent!
 How miraculous! I carry water. I cut wood.

Zen does not transcend the human consciousness in a search for "higher" values. On the contrary, one is summoned back to the original awareness, to *this* world. True life finds expression in everyday things. There are plenty of religions in the East that speak of the divinity of the soul and of superhuman experiences, but Zen speaks of something much simpler and much more demanding, namely of realizing one's own humanity.

Ultimately, it is perhaps this radical simplicity that makes the greatest impact on the Christians who journey into the landscapes of Zen Buddhism. In the course of their search,

they become more open to the traditions of their own culture; silence and concentration give them a deeper understanding of the divine presence. Above all, however, they have learned something about true humanity. They have discovered the sacrament of simplicity.

Their Christian background alienated them from aspects of Zen. At the same time, their Christian faith gave them certain advantages, since they had already learned some elements of Zen from the Master himself. He too called people to return to the life they were meant to lead. He, more than anyone else, knew that the true life begins when the self

dies. His life displayed what the sacrament of simplicity means. All this led these Christians to read the Gospels with a new eagerness, for it was there that they met the true Master who crossed all borders and made the divine presence a reality in people's daily lives.

In very truth, he came from God. But the really miraculous thing about him was his unfailing humanity. □

This essay is a translation from the author's 1991 book in Norwegian whose title translates as "Who Can Stop the Wind? Travels in the Borderland between East and West."

Japanese Buddhist Folktales

The Weasel Priest

Long ago, in Ryusenji, in the land of Dewa, there was a head priest famous as a distinguished cleric. People from far away came and gathered just to listen to the head priest's sermons.

One morning, as the head priest was performing his morning recitation, a weasel stopped beneath the veranda and listened to the sutra. Thereafter, every morning, when it was time for the recitation, that weasel would show itself. The head priest, who was moved by this, turned to the weasel and said, "I am impressed that, although you're only an animal, your piety is no less than that of a human being. Let's pray to the Buddha, so that you will be reborn as a human being. Starting now, for twenty-one days, you should bring an oak leaf every day."

From the next morning, the head priest wrote scripture on the oak leaf that the weasel brought and gave it back to him. After twenty-one days, the weasel suddenly stopped appearing.

Several days later, the weasel was found dead on the oak leaves arranged in the shape of a lotus-seat on the floor of the main hall. The head priest, who pitied the weasel, performed a memorial service with great solemnity.

Well, twenty-one days after that, during the night, the weasel appeared by the side of the head priest's pillow and said: "Thanks to you, I was able to be reborn as the grandson of Kihei in Hiruko Village. Please receive him as your disciple."

The head priest immediately sent a messenger to Hiruko Village to check on Kihei's grandson, and on the baby's chest and stomach were tufts of weasel hair. That child, who was taken to the temple at age five, was very intelligent. He

excelled in scholarship and pursued the Buddha Way. In time, he became the head priest of Kanmanji and served the community. He was called "the weasel priest" and was long adored by many people. □

(A story from Akita Prefecture)

Nio and Gao

Once upon a time, there was a very strong man named Nio living in this land. So great was his strength that his reputation stretched across the sea to the distant land of Cathay.

In those days, there was in Cathay a very strong man named Gao. When Gao heard about Nio, he could not stay put—he had to come to test his strength against Nio's.

"Hey, Nio, I am Gao, the strongest man in Cathay. Let's have a contest to see who is stronger." Nio's wife, who overheard Gao saying this, set out some iron balls to test how strong he was. Then Gao hungrily devoured them. Nio, who was watching him, said,

"All right. I will take you on."

Nio and Gao decided upon a sumo wrestling contest. Both of their faces became red as they pushed each other with thuds and bangs that shook the ground in a match that continued for days with neither side winning. Each was surprised to find that in this world, there was someone else as strong as himself.

And so they ended up becoming great friends. Still today, the two of them stand guard at temple entrances. Since Gao ate the iron balls, his mouth is open, and since Nio did not, his mouth is firmly shut. □

(A story from Niigata Prefecture)

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 12

Devadatta

(2)

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

What kind of person was Devadatta? Because of his rebellion against and attempts to injure the Buddha, later generations have tended to brand him an unalloyed villain and neglect to explore his motives and character. But his evil actions sprang from very human weaknesses. Therefore a close look at his life provides us with much food for thought concerning the failings that we share with him as fellow human beings.

According to some sources, Devadatta was a son of King Amritodana—the younger brother of Shuddhodana, king of the Shakyas and Shakyamuni's father—and the older brother of Ananda. Thus he was Shakyamuni's cousin. As a youth, Devadatta was endowed with physical and mental prowess and with talents second only to those of Prince Siddhartha, as Shakyamuni was known before he renounced secular life. In many ways the two were rivals. But Devadatta could never best the prince. I imagine that Devadatta's tangled feelings of rivalry and inferiority hardened into a lasting resentment that eventually burst forth in the form of rebellion.

The greatest blow to Devadatta's pride as a young man is said to have been his loss of Princess Yashodhara to Siddhartha. When choosing a consort, it was the custom among the Shakyas to have the young men of noble birth vie for her hand in various tests of martial prowess, with the victor winning the right to wed her. Yashodhara was the greatest beauty in the kingdom, and Devadatta, like the other young noblemen, longed for her and was keen to compete for her hand. The contestants also included Ananda and Nanda, Siddhartha's half brother, who thus were the prince's rivals, as well.

The contest began with archery and ended with wrestling. The prince won every test of skill. In the wrestling, it is said, Devadatta hurled himself violently at Siddhartha, who withstood the impact and then, lifting Devadatta above eye level, paraded around the wrestling ring three times holding him high before setting him down gently. When the competition

was over and everyone had left, King Shuddhodana had a beautifully adorned white elephant led forth to welcome the victor. Devadatta, on his way home, came upon the elephant just as it was coming out of the palace gate. In his chagrin at losing and his jealousy of the victor, he grabbed the elephant's trunk with his left hand and with his right fist dealt the beast a great blow on a vital spot on its forehead. The elephant toppled to the ground. As if to say, "Look at my prowess," Devadatta smiled disdainfully at the amazed on-lookers and strutted off.

Ananda, Nanda, and all the other competitors must have felt chagrin at their defeat and envy of the winner, but they did not vent their feelings in this way. In today's parlance, we would say they had sportsmanship. Devadatta, unfortunately, did not. Perhaps the seeds of the many unsportsmanlike deeds he would perpetrate in later life were sown that day. When we think of what a huge difference the small mental act of controlling or not controlling feelings of chagrin and envy made over the course of a lifetime, we are struck anew by the great importance of character formation in youth.

When Shakyamuni was about to return to the kingdom of Magadha after visiting his birthplace for the first time since attaining enlightenment, eight men, including Ananda, Aniruddha, and Upali, begged to be allowed to become his disciples and were accepted. Devadatta, too, was among their number. Shakyamuni taught them the Law in a nearby grove. Six attained the arhat's enlightenment on the spot. Only Ananda and Devadatta were unable to extricate themselves from the toils of illusion, Ananda because of his tendency to let his emotions get the better of him, Devadatta because of his pride.

Subsequently, Devadatta practiced earnestly under Shakyamuni's guidance. He memorized all the teachings he heard, never hesitated to ask about anything that puzzled him, and worked hard at meditation. But although he made considerable spiritual progress, unfortunately he could not

conquer his strong self-attachment. Seeing the Sangha flourish and grow into a community of several thousand bhikshus and watching so many kings and other men of importance flock to the Buddha and become devotees, Devadatta, despite all his spiritual practice to improve his character, was unable to suppress his ambition to be a great leader of men and have multitudes at his beck and call. Cursed by his strong self-attachment, he could not attain the state of religious ecstasy, serenity, and clarity that the other leading disciples enjoyed. He began to feel frustrated, somehow shut out of the inner circle or left behind.

Thirty years passed. Many people think of Devadatta as having done nothing but plot rebellion, but for thirty long years he engaged in religious practice as a member of the Sangha. Clearly, he was no ordinary man. But because of his strong self-attachment, not only did he fail to achieve true enlightenment, he finally backslid grievously from the Way. The Buddhist scriptures explain the motivation behind his downfall in the following way.

Burning with envy of the freedom enjoyed by those bhikshus who had attained supernormal powers, one day Devadatta begged the Buddha to teach him how to acquire such powers. Shakyamuni said, "Supernormal powers come naturally to one who has attained enlightenment. To seek them for their own sake is mistaken. First contemplate the truths of emptiness and impermanence and strive to become truly enlightened to them." But because Devadatta desired the phenomenal manifestation of forms and powers rather than enlightenment, he could not bring himself to obey Shakyamuni's instructions. He had heard about impermanence, nonself, emptiness, and so on, for thirty years, until he was sick of them. What he really craved was supernormal powers.

Determined to have his way, Devadatta went to the bhikshus Gavampati and Kaundinya, who were renowned for their psychic powers, and importuned them to teach him their secret. Both told him, as had Shakyamuni, that such powers were of only secondary importance. Undaunted, he next approached Dashabala-Kashyapa, who, being of a simple and naive disposition, agreed to teach him without a second thought. Needless to say, Devadatta studied single-mindedly. And eventually he did indeed gain the powers he lusted after. Devadatta's success filled him with confidence—or, rather, arrogance. He began to see himself as more than a match for Shakyamuni, let alone such eminent disciples as Shariputra and Maudgalyayana. In the end, his inexorably swelling arrogance led him to backslide. This train of events has great lessons for us today.

Going to Rajagriha, the capital of Magadha and a stronghold of Shakyamuni's Sangha, Devadatta ingratiated himself with Prince Ajatashatru and persuaded the prince to become his patron. Ajatashatru's father, King Bimbisara, was a devout follower of the Buddha and supporter of the Sangha. Devadatta's plan was to destroy the link between the king and the Sangha and set up a new sangha under

Ajatashatru's patronage. First he incited Ajatashatru to kill the king and usurp the throne. The impressionable young prince fell in with Devadatta's plot and cast the king into prison, intending to starve him to death. Moreover, when he discovered that his mother, Queen Vaidehi, had been painting her body with honey and flour and visiting the king in prison to provide him with sustenance, he confined her in the inner apartments of the palace.

In this way Ajatashatru seized the throne, and Devadatta realized his wish to establish his own sangha under the new king's patronage. Having practiced under Shakyamuni for thirty years, he had an extensive knowledge of the Law. He was also a skilled preacher and was endowed with supernormal powers. All in all, he was well equipped to win the adulation of the ignorant. He rapidly built up a large following of bhikshus and lay devotees, until his sangha rivaled that of Shakyamuni in numbers.

Around the time of King Bimbisara's imprisonment, Devadatta presented Shakyamuni with a set of "reforms" of the Sangha, proposing the following five stringent new precepts: (1) Bhikshus are to live in forests throughout their lives; they are not allowed to live in villages. (2) Bhikshus are to live as mendicants throughout their lives; they are not allowed to accept invitations from lay believers. (3) Bhikshus are to wear only tattered robes made of rags throughout their lives; they are not allowed to accept robes offered by lay believers. (4) Bhikshus are to sleep under trees throughout their lives; they are not allowed to enter roofed dwellings. (5) Bhikshus are not to eat the flesh of fish or animals throughout their lives; those who do are to be punished.

Naturally, such extreme precepts violated the Buddha's teaching of enlightenment by means of the Middle Way, which eschews the extremes of asceticism and indulgence. In Shakyamuni's view, the prime object of spiritual practice was to rid oneself of delusions and attain the Buddha's wisdom; preoccupation with details of food, clothing, and shelter would only distract practitioners from this. Even if enlightenment could be attained through the kind of harsh practice Devadatta proposed, it would be possible for only a handful of people. Such extreme asceticism was not the true way to salvation. True salvation had to be accessible to all people, in all walks of life.

If all people are to be saved, prescribing the smallest details of food, clothing, and shelter is counterproductive. When every aspect of daily life is rigidly regulated, with no regard for differences in environment, ethnicity, customs, and individual physique and personality, people tend to become focused on the regulations themselves and to lose sight of the main objective of religious practice, attainment of the Buddha's wisdom. Thus, Shakyamuni held that the important thing was not to covet ease; prescribing every detail of daily life was unnecessary. Still, in a Sangha of thousands, inevitably some members of the community would occasionally behave in ways that hindered practice or disturbed the harmony of communal life. Whenever this happened, Shakra-

muni would admonish the offender individually. But the disciples, in their awe and veneration of the Buddha, made these admonitions into precepts for the Sangha as a whole, which is why eventually there were lists of 250 precepts for bhikshus and 348 precepts for bhikshunis.

Since Shakyamuni taught the Middle Way, naturally he flatly refused to endorse Devadatta's ascetic "reforms." Biographies of the Buddha record the following striking interchange between Shakyamuni and Shariputra. Shakyamuni instructed Shariputra to tell the bhikshus who followed Devadatta that those who obeyed Devadatta's five precepts were violating the Three Treasures—the Buddha, the Buddha's teaching, and the community of believers. Shariputra appeared hesitant. He said, "World-honored One, in the past I have praised Devadatta, so I feel uneasy about criticizing his shortcomings now." Shakyamuni promptly replied, "It is right to praise what is praiseworthy. And it is right to criticize what deserves criticism. What is wrong must be set right."

Acknowledging the truth of Shakyamuni's words, Shariputra immediately went to the bhikshus led by Devadatta and delivered the message, which amounted to a pronouncement of expulsion from the Sangha. Devadatta responded by spreading the word that Shakyamuni was living a life of luxury, thus declaring overt rebellion.

Earlier, when Devadatta had incited Ajatashatru to kill his father, he had promised that he himself would injure Shakyamuni. True to his promise, he sent forth thirty-one skilled archers; but when they approached the Buddha, they were struck with awe at his nobility. Casting aside their bows and arrows, they prostrated themselves before him. They were accepted into the Sangha on the spot.

Devadatta then decided to take matters into his own hands. One day, when Shakyamuni was on Mount Gridhrakuta, Devadatta rolled a huge boulder toward him from above. As the boulder bounced down the slope, it split into two. The smaller part hit Shakyamuni in the foot, causing profuse bleeding. Returning to the monastery in pain, he restrained the bhikshus, who were eager to sally forth there and then to punish Devadatta, before lying down quietly. It is recorded that the wound was slow to heal but that the master physician Jivaka finally healed it by performing surgery.

Realizing that it was impossible to harm Shakyamuni permanently by means of human powers, Devadatta next intoxicated an elephant with wine and let it loose as Shakyamuni was passing by on a begging round. The animal thundered toward the Buddha. But he entered the *samadhi* of compassion and quietly walked straight toward the beast. The elephant suddenly turned docile and knelt before him, caressing his feet with its trunk, then rose and walked away.

Meanwhile, remorse for his heinous sins began to steal across Ajatashatru's heart. One day, seeing Prince Udayibhadra in great pain from an infected finger, Ajatashatru spontaneously embraced him and sucked the pus from his finger. Queen Vaidehi, who witnessed the encounter, cried out, "Ah,

so did the king do for you when you were small!" These words struck Ajatashatru to the heart, and suddenly his eyes were opened. Going to Shakyamuni, he confessed his sins and became a follower. Devadatta, deprived of his chief patron, fell into a piteous state. His disciples left him. When he went out begging, no one would give him food. Biographies of the Buddha relate that in his desperation Devadatta subsequently perpetrated many other evil deeds and finally fell into a state of living hell.

Reflecting carefully on Devadatta's life, we realize that he was not simply a villain but an extremely able man. If only he had not made a wrong turning, he would probably have been a splendid bhikshu leading an exemplary life. Unfortunately, though, he was the weakest kind of human being. He lacked the courage to rid himself of his self-attachment, to repent of his wrongdoing and correct himself. Being a human being, he must have felt the urge to do so from time to time. Indeed, intelligent as he was, I imagine that he was constantly tormented by that urge. But because his self-attachment was stronger than his remorse, he was unable to undergo a true change of heart and slipped ever deeper into degradation. What a pitiful life his was!

The reason I have devoted so much space to Devadatta's life is that he had many points in common with people today. The present age is full of people who share his weakness, a fact that has brought untold darkness and unhappiness to the world. We need to take a good look at ourselves in the light of Devadatta's life. I hope we will have the courage and resolution to firmly renounce self-attachment when circumstances call for it. I believe this is the greatest challenge facing humankind.

Returning to the sutra text, why did the Buddha speak of "the good friend Devadatta"? I think there are two main reasons. First, the existence of a traitor like Devadatta confirmed the correctness of the Buddha's teaching of the Middle Way and kept the Sangha as a whole from being diverted to an erroneous course. Second, because Devadatta exposed the greatest failing of human beings and demonstrated the most fearsome face of human nature, Shakyamuni's own enlightenment was deepened.

The second reason calls for a word of explanation. Some may wonder how the already supreme enlightenment of the Buddha could be deepened by the likes of Devadatta. Such doubts spring from deifying the Buddha, regarding him as something other than human. The original meaning of *buddha* is "enlightened one." The Buddha was a human being, though an enlightened one (this does not apply to the Eternal Original Buddha, of course).

Shakyamuni attained enlightenment, and thus became the Buddha, beneath the *bodhi* tree at Buddhagaya; but this was basic enlightenment to the law of dependent origination and the real aspect of all things. On the basis of that enlightenment, in the course of his teaching activities he continually deepened his enlightenment and attained further insight into human beings and human relations.

It is highly unrealistic to think that because Shakyamuni achieved Perfect Enlightenment beneath the *bodhi* tree there was nothing that could have been added to it. Is it not highly insulting to believe that he made no progress whatsoever between his enlightenment at the age of thirty or thirty-five and his death at the age of eighty? Such a thing is unthinkable. To repeat: The Buddha's reference, in the context of a story of a former life, to Devadatta as a good friend should be interpreted as acknowledgment that thanks to Devadatta the Sangha had been able to proceed firmly on the correct course of the Middle Way and the Buddha himself had

ditions" means that negative energy brought to bear from without or negative circumstances that we ourselves generate—persecution, slander, misfortune, failure—can, if we assimilate them, nourish our growth as human beings by triggering a religious awakening. The reason I suggest this interpretation is that the traditional one, especially in the case of "reverse conditions," is hard for us today to relate to and thus does not motivate us strongly.

For the sake of personal growth, it is important that we gain a firm understanding of this modern interpretation of normal and reverse conditions. Of course we must actively

Isamu Maruyama

An elephant intoxicated with wine and let loose by Devadatta, who tried to harm Shakyamuni on his begging round, turns docile and kneels before the Buddha. A relief owned by the Government Museum of Chennai, India.

gained the inner experience of deepening his enlightenment.

Since ancient times it has been said that one can be motivated to embark on the Way of the Buddha by two kinds of conditions: "normal conditions" and "reverse conditions." Originally, the former meant that good deeds could provide the conditions for embarking on the Way, and the latter meant that opposition to the Buddha and vilification of the Law could provide the conditions for receiving instruction from the Buddha and bodhisattvas and thus embarking on the Way. We today, however, would do better to interpret them as follows.

"Normal conditions" means that coming into contact with positive energy, such as good teachers, friends, and writings, enables us to proceed in a positive direction. "Reverse con-

seek out normal conditions, but there is no telling when we may be assaulted by reverse conditions. Indeed, in one way or another they are being generated all the time. Those who shrink from reverse conditions are weaklings, and those who are defeated by them backslide. As I have said, we must constantly seek out normal conditions and accumulate them. But when we meet with reverse conditions, we must recall Shakyamuni's attitude toward Devadatta and cope with them valorously through Mahayana enlightenment, using them to nourish our growth by thoroughly assimilating them. This is the way of the truly brave, the true believer.

TEXT I declare to all you four groups: Devadatta, after his departure and innumerable kalpas have passed, will become

a buddha, whose title will be King of the Gods Tathagata, Worshipful, All Wise, Perfectly Enlightened in Conduct, Well Departed, Understander of the World, Peerless Leader, Controller, Teacher of Gods and Men, Buddha, World-honored One, and whose world will be named Divine Way. At that time the Buddha King of Gods shall dwell in the world for twenty intermediate kalpas. He shall widely preach the Wonderful Law for all the living, and living beings [numerous] as the sands of the Ganges will attain arhatship; innumerable beings will devote themselves to pratyekabuddhahood; and living beings [numerous] as the sands of the Ganges, devoting themselves to the supreme Way, will attain to the assurance of nonbirth and reach the [stage] of never falling back [into mortal life].

COMMENTARY *Intermediate kalpas.* This term, which appears only in this chapter of the Lotus Sutra, is equivalent to the small kalpas mentioned in other chapters.

- *Arhatship.* This refers to the stage of practice at which one is pure, having rid oneself of all illusion, and is worthy of others' respect.

- *Pratyekabuddhahood.* Pratyekabuddhas are those who, through such practices as meditation and *samadhi*, have become enlightened to the truths of the universe and of human life through their own efforts, or those who are engaged in such practices.

- *The supreme Way.* This is a reference to the Way of the Buddha and the Buddha's enlightenment.

- *The assurance of nonbirth.* This is the stage at which one has thoroughly realized the truth that all phenomena are inherently empty (*shunya*) and the law of nonbirth, that is, transcendence of life and death (the latter is explained in the commentary on chapter 2 of the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, "Preaching") and is no longer perturbed by any phenomenal changes. "Assurance" means that one is firm in one's attainment of that stage and will never backslide.

TEXT Then after the parinirvana of the Buddha King of Gods, the Righteous Law will dwell in his world during twenty intermediate kalpas. For his complete body relic, a stupa of the precious seven shall be erected, sixty yojanas in height and forty yojanas in length and width. All the gods and people, with various flowers, sandal powder, incense for burning, perfumed unguents, garments, garlands, banners, flags, jeweled canopies, music, and song, shall respectfully salute and pay homage to the wonderful Stupa of the Precious Seven. Innumerable living beings will attain arhatship; incalculable living beings will awaken to pratyekabuddhahood; and inconceivable [numbers of the] living will be aroused to Bodhi and reach the [stage] of never falling back [into mortality]."

COMMENTARY *Parinirvana.* This refers to both mind and body entering complete nirvana, that is, death in the conventional sense.

This marks the end of the prediction of Devadatta's buddhahood. Why did Shakyamuni give his assurance that a villain like Devadatta would eventually become a buddha? We have already seen that Devadatta's evil acted as reverse conditions to deepen the Buddha's enlightenment and strengthen the Sangha's confidence that it was on the correct course. But the Buddha and the members of the Sangha were benefited in this way because of the wisdom, strong courage, and great enlightenment that enabled them to thoroughly assimilate reverse conditions and use them as nourishment rather than succumb to them. Devadatta did not deserve the credit for the good results generated by his evil deeds, however, nor did the good outcome cancel out the evil he had done. It would be a great mistake to think that providing reverse conditions in any way qualifies a person for buddhahood.

Shakyamuni used the example of Devadatta to drive home in a startling and dramatic way the point he had made over and over, that all human beings possess the buddha-nature equally. Simply being told that everyone has the buddha-nature in equal measure and thus has the potential for buddhahood would not be enough to make an ordinary person feel deeply, "That means me, too." Even the knowledge that such eminent disciples as Shariputra, Maudgalyayana, Mahakashyapa, and Mahakatyayana had been assured that they would attain buddhahood would seem to have little relevance to one's own situation, since those disciples had progressed so much further along the Way.

But as the Buddha's sermon continued and the buddhahood of the five hundred bhikshus and countless other people both learned and unlearned was predicted, those assembled would begin to be able to relate to the idea in a personal way. Still, the niggling thought would remain, "Yes, but all these people have practiced a great deal. How can I possibly emulate them?" Suddenly Shakyamuni predicted the buddhahood of Devadatta, that great enemy of the Law. It was like a bolt from the blue. "Shakyamuni doesn't lie, so that must mean that even Devadatta can become a buddha." All the listeners were astounded.

Hard on the heels of amazement would come the thought, "Wait a minute. If even Devadatta can become a buddha, I certainly should be able to, since I haven't done anything so very bad." For the first time the lofty ideal of buddhahood would start to seem like something that might actually apply to oneself. This would prompt one to think back over everything Shakyamuni had taught so far as something directly applicable to oneself, a process that would lead to a deeply personal assimilation and understanding of each teaching.

Let us imagine the train of thought of a bhikshu who heard the prediction of Devadatta's buddhahood. "The Buddha has taught that all phenomena are empty. And he has taught that everyone is essentially equal. That means Shariputra and Devadatta and I are basically equal. [See the November/December 2005 issue of DHARMA WORLD.] We

all receive the Original Buddha's vivifying power equally. If I accept all this, it follows that I too can attain the same totally free state as the Buddha. That's what he means by teaching that all possess the buddha-nature equally.

"The Buddha has also taught that it's because our buddha-nature is obscured by a thick layer of defilements that it's so hard for the compassion of the Original Buddha to penetrate and for us to feel it, and that we have to get rid of our defilements in order to reveal our buddha-nature. This means the only difference between Shariputra and Devadatta and me is how thickly our buddha-nature is covered with defilements. It's just a matter of degree. There's absolutely no difference in our essential nature as human beings. People really are equal, after all.

"The only reason Devadatta did so much evil is that his buddha-nature was heavily encrusted with defilements. Once he eradicates them, he's fully qualified for buddhahood. By the same token, if I just get rid of my defilements, I'm qualified to become a buddha, too. But can I really get rid of all of them? Looking into my heart, I think I've managed to eradicate most of them. But *all*—that's a different matter. I don't think it's possible. And if it's impossible for me, even though I'm practicing the Buddha Way as hard as I can, how can it be expected of all people? Still, the Buddha says that everyone can become a buddha. How can that be?

"Ah, I've just remembered! In the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings the Buddha said that 'defilements, even though existent, will become as if nonexistent.' That's it! He taught that defilements are created merely by the coming together of causes and conditions, so if we change what links causes and conditions to something better, defilements cease to be defilements. It's because we're entangled in our defilements that we can't get rid of them. If we truly realize that essentially they have no substance, they won't harm or bind us anymore even if we still have them.

"It all goes back to the teachings of emptiness and dependent origination, and the realization that defilements, too, arise through dependent origination. Since they are products of dependent origination, if we just apply good causes and conditions, defilements will be instantly transformed into forces for good. That's the meaning of the teaching of the identity of defilements and enlightenment. Little by little, I'm beginning to understand.

"That's why the Buddha has also taught that it's not enough to purify one's heart, that one has to *act* to benefit both oneself and others. If we apply a good direction to our defilements through our actions, that positive energy benefits both other people and ourselves. This enables us to receive the Buddha's compassion without resistance. So ordinary people and buddhas can function in the same way.

"Devadatta translated his defilements directly into action. That's what made his actions evil. If he awakens to the Buddha's teaching and applies a good direction to his delusions, he'll immediately be able to do good. That's the only difference between someone who's evil and someone who's good.

Now I understand that Devadatta can definitely become a buddha—and that I can, too!"

As we see, this hypothetical bhikshu was finally enlightened. It would behoove us all to think through this teaching in the same way. If we do, we too will be sure to achieve the same deep realization of the truth of Shakyamuni's prediction of Devadatta's buddhahood, based as it was on the basic Buddhist teachings of emptiness, dependent origination, and all human beings' equal possession of the buddha-nature.

TEXT The Buddha said to the bhikshus: "If there be in a future world any good son or good daughter to hear this Devadatta chapter of the Wonderful Law Flower Sutra with pure heart and believing reverence, and is free from doubt, such a one shall not fall into the hells or become a hungry spirit or animal, [but shall] be born into the presence of the buddhas of the universe. Wherever he be born he will always hear this sutra;

COMMENTARY This passage, together with the next, can be interpreted in two ways. The first is to take it as describing the fortunate spiritual state of one who receives and believes the teaching in this chapter. The second, based on the concept of transmigration, is to see it as explaining that one who receives and believes the teaching in this chapter will invariably be reborn in favorable circumstances and will be able to hear the teaching of the Buddha.

The first interpretation should be easy to understand if we have carefully read the discussion above of why an evil person can attain buddhahood. The essential nature of all people is the buddha-nature. We are animated by the compassion of the Eternal Original Buddha. Nevertheless, our buddha-nature tends to be obscured by a thick layer of defilements, so that we block ourselves from receiving all of the Buddha's compassion. It follows that if we do our best to rid ourselves of defilements or apply a good direction to them, transforming them into energy for good, any of us can become a buddha. This constitutes the true development of our humanity, and our true happiness as human beings.

If, by means of the teaching in this chapter, we can understand this truth and truly believe it, we will never fall into the evil course of translating our defilements directly into actions as Devadatta did. In other words, we will cease to be subject to the inferior, anguished ways of living known as the realms of the hells (acting in anger and living in constant emotional anguish), hungry spirits (craving one thing after another to satisfy the ego and constantly fretting because we cannot fulfill all our self-centered desires), or animals (lapsing into inhumane or subhuman behavior by giving our instinctual impulses free rein, thereby hurting others and making ourselves unhappy).

The statement that one who hears and believes the teaching of this chapter will "be born into the presence of the buddhas of the universe" means that we will be aware that

wherever we may be we are always in the Buddha's presence. Awareness of being in the Buddha's presence means consciousness that we are enlivened by the Buddha. This gives us great confidence in life, infuses us with courage, and enables us to live in a happy frame of mind.

Naturally, therefore, "wherever he be born he will always hear this sutra." If we are always aware of being in the Buddha's presence, we will never forget his teaching—"this sutra"—whatever our environment. We will constantly contemplate and savor it.

Now let us examine the second interpretation. Under the influence of Western thought, the concept of transmigration has come to be seen as unscientific, as merely a way to encourage ignorant people to do good and to discourage them from doing evil. But the so-called scientific approach is limited to what we can perceive with the five senses. In other words, it can be applied only to what we experience in this world and can prove to others. We often hear about people who claim to have seen the afterworld, but scientifically speaking, what they have experienced is probably syncope or some kind of coma. After all, death is something each of us can experience only once in this life. Therefore, both those who purport to be able to describe the afterworld and those who deny that there is anything after death are unscientific. Shakyamuni answered all questions about existence after death by saying that such matters were "morally neutral," neither helping nor hindering enlightenment—a highly scientific approach.

As explained in the commentary on the significance of the theory of transmigration in chapter 2, "Tactfulness" (see the November/December 1998 issue), Shakyamuni taught about transmigration from quite a different standpoint, addressing the issue on a completely different level. He did not discuss transmigration in order to explain the afterworld. Transmigration is a necessary concept in terms of the law of cause and effect. Since good actions always generate good effects and bad actions invariably give rise to bad effects, it follows quite rationally that the impact of what we do is not limited to this life but is bound to have an effect on our next life, as well.

If we believe that this is the only life we have and that death is the end of everything, we have to conclude that life is nothing but the incessant clash of people's conflicting desires and egos. What a fearful prospect! And if we maintain that this life is only a provisional existence and our efforts are of little meaning, that true significance and happiness are to be found only in the next world, it means abandoning all endeavor. What a dreary world this leaves us inhabiting! Shakyamuni taught the theory of transmigration on the basis of the law of cause and effect to keep people from lapsing into nihilism or passivity.

The Buddha's teaching is not a matter of theory alone; its primary aim is to save living human beings and to create a happy society. His theory of transmigration springs naturally from this. That, too, is why he expounded the doctrine

of "long-term practice," continued practice over the course of many lives.

To hear this chapter of the Lotus Sutra "with pure heart and believing reverence, . . . free from doubt," means to accept the Buddha's teaching without resistance and to persevere in our efforts in this life. If we do so, we will "be born into the presence of the buddhas of the universe," and wherever we are born, we "will always hear this sutra." In other words, we will be able to encounter the teaching of the Lotus Sutra in our next life, as well, and will be able to advance further toward supreme enlightenment, that is, buddhahood.

TEXT and if he be born amongst men or gods, he will enjoy marvelous delight. As to the Buddha into whose presence [he is born], his birth shall be by emanation from a lotus flower."

COMMENTARY *Marvelous delight.* The Sanskrit *pradhana*, translated into English as "marvelous," is rendered in the Chinese text as *sheng-miao*. *Sheng* means excellent, while *miao* means inexpressibly superb, that is, supreme. Thus, "marvelous delight" indicates not the vulgar joy of sensuous pleasures but an extremely elevated spiritual joy. Those who can receive and believe the teaching of this chapter, whether born into the human or the heavenly realm, will not be caught up in pursuit of the pleasures of the five desires (the desires of the five senses) and will have little need to undergo again the painful practice necessary to combat the defilements associated with the five desires, but will be able to live a life filled with spiritual joy.

• *Birth shall be by emanation from a lotus flower.* Lotus flowers are rooted in mud, but the beautiful blossoms that unfold above the muddy water are quite untouched by dirt. Thus, to be born "by emanation from a lotus flower" means that although one lives in this sullied world among ordinary defiled people, one can possess the purity of the Buddha. This is the state of the bodhisattva. In short, anyone who hears this chapter "with pure heart and believing reverence, and is free from doubt," will be able to achieve at least the bodhisattva state. The reason should be clear from the earlier discussion of the process of enlightenment to the truth that even an evil person can attain buddhahood.

Thus ends the first half of the chapter. Now a different cast of characters appears and a new sermon begins—though this one, too, explicates the truth that all human beings possess the buddha-nature equally.

To be continued

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

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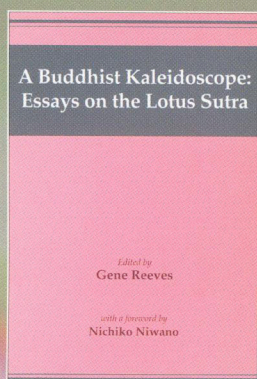
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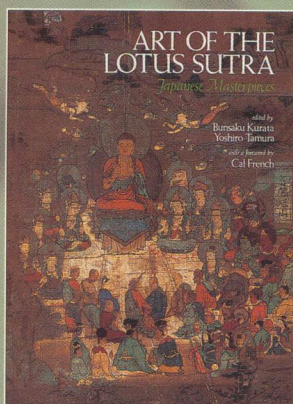
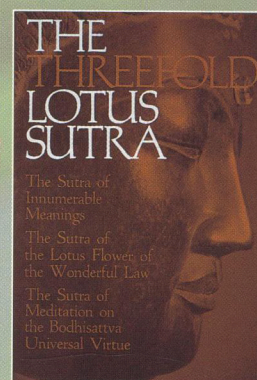
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