

FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

DHARMA WORLD

July–Sept. 2007 Vol. 34



Respect for Ancestors

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Cover photo: Children joyfully participating in public *bon* dancing in a western suburb of Tokyo. The *bon* dance takes place in local communities in July or in August, on and around the period of *o-bon* (the rites for the repose of the dead). During that time, Japanese families welcome their ancestral spirits to their homes and venerate them with offerings of food and other items. Photo by Hideo Haga / Haga Library.

Connie Akamine

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

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Why Respect for Ancestors Is Important

by Kotaro Suzuki

As head of a Rissho Kosei-kai branch for ten years, until 2006, I interacted with many members and dealt with various people's life problems. Speaking on the basis of that experience, I can say that all those who overcame their problems and achieved happiness, without exception, valued their parents and diligently practiced daily devotions for the benefit of ancestors (*senzo kuyō*), placing offerings of flowers, food, and drink on the home Buddhist altar and reciting sutra passages. Interestingly, even people who had resented their parents found happiness when they repented of their resentment and began practicing daily devotions.

Traditionally, the Japanese have valued home Buddhist altars and Shinto shrines. These may have functioned directly as a tool for enshrining the spirits of departed parents and ancestors and offering them thanks. But they were also an extremely important device for confirming people's connection with the gods and buddhas, in other words, the great invisible life force.

After World War II, however, Japanese homes rapidly lost that device. Due to the concentration of population in urban areas that began with postwar reconstruction and the accompanying change in housing patterns, Buddhist altars and Shinto shrines disappeared from more and more homes.

This process was accelerated by the shift in family structure from the extended family to the nuclear family. The spread of the nuclear family weakened awareness of ancestors, and with the loss of home Buddhist altars and Shinto

shrines went the opportunity for home-based rites. As a result, many Japanese lost the sense of family cohesion and eventually confronted the grave problem of family breakdown.

Nor did it end there. With the diversification of values many people lost their spiritual moorings, which exacerbated egoism. Today, appalling cases of children killing parents and parents killing children are no longer unusual. The rise in such crimes, I believe, is not unconnected with the loss of home-based rites.

Rissho Kosei-kai President Nichiko Niwano, aware of the state of Japanese society, is calling on members to practice "regulation of the family" and a lifestyle centered on the home Buddhist altar. "Regulation of the family" means improving attitudes at home, ordering the home by, for example, instilling the habit of family members exchanging greetings and expressing thanks to one another. A lifestyle centered on the home Buddhist altar means the practice of gratitude toward ancestors and of sutra recitation for their benefit.

As a lay Buddhist organization, though, Rissho Kosei-kai aims for more than just the revival of home-based rites. Even without invoking the truth that all things are devoid of self, the bedrock of Buddhism, human beings owe their lives to the benefits of nature, the blessings of the sun, air, water, and so on. They are also beneficiaries of many other people. If we posit this fact as the warp, we can define our parents and ancestors, who have given us life, as the weft. In other words, people's lives are sustained by this warp and weft. The bodhisattva way advocated by Mahayana Buddhism is the way of life drawn from this immutable truth, and expressing gratitude to our ancestors and practicing sutra recitation for their benefit can be called the matrix of the bodhisattva way.

Going further, to the source of this warp and weft, we owe the very fact of our existence today to the great life force, the Eternal Original Buddha. In other words, respect for ancestors goes beyond the expression of gratitude; it is a "skillful means" guiding us to awaken to the great life force, the Original Buddha, that sustains all life. This being so, I believe there is a need to reconfirm the significance of daily devotions in society today. □

Kotaro Suzuki is director of Kosei-kai International. He has formerly served as the director of the Secretaries' Office of Rissho Kosei-kai and the head of the organization's Nerima Branch in Tokyo.

Japanese Ancestor Veneration in Comparative Perspective

by Michael Pye

The practice of caring for one's ancestors is, of course, not unique to Japan. On the contrary, it is a basic element of "primal religion" in all cultures.

It is well known that the idea of "caring for the ancestors," used here as an approximate rendering of the Japanese phrase *senzo-kuyō*, is one of the key features of contemporary Japanese religion. It includes not only the management of death itself, or even of funeral and cemetery matters, but also a much wider range of religious activity. Caring for the ancestors involves fundamental concepts of family life understood as a *succession of generations*.¹ In particular, the important ideas of affinity (*en*) and obligation (*on*) are brought into play. The rites involved include, therefore, not only "rites of transition" or "rites of passage," to use the phrase of the well-known anthropologist of earlier times Arnold van Gennep,² but also *rites of transaction*.³ That is to say, necessary dealings are carried out between the generations, which fulfill obligations and secure well-being.

Some care must be taken over English terminology. One phrase widely used in this connection is "ancestor worship," found for example in the title of Robert J. Smith's well-known *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan*, a valuable work in many respects.⁴ Unfortunately, the word "worship," which is used not only in the title but also quite freely in the

text, commonly implies the ritual celebration of a being or beings with divine qualities, and in its strongest sense the praising of God by his creatures. Although this may be relevant in special cases, for example, with respect to the veneration of religious founders and political heroes (*see below*), it is surely not the right way to understand the general cult relating to ancestors in Japan. While *senzo* means the ancestors, the word *kuyō* means to offer respectfully (*ku-*) and to nurture or care for (*-yō*). The point is that the ancestors are still considered to have their needs, and indeed they themselves probably made provision for these while they were still alive, doing their best to ensure that they would have descendants who would be able to look after them on the home Buddhist altar in due course.

Consequently they need to be treated properly and cared for. Simple food and drink are respectfully offered to them. Moreover, one should report any important matters to them, and in so doing their presumed wishes or expectations should be taken into account in the future conduct of life. All of this can be summed up in the expression "caring for the ancestors," which was also used by Smith. When respect, admiration, and gratitude are being emphasized, phrases such as "reverence for the ancestors" or "ancestor veneration" may also be used.

Let us now take a look at this from a comparative point of view. The practice of caring for one's ancestors is, of course, not unique to Japan. On the contrary, it is a basic element of "primal religion" in all cultures. The simpler the society, the more fundamental is the care for the dead. It is not just that the bodies have to be safely disposed of. It is also important for the social group to recover its structural balance in a new constellation. This is achieved not merely through the assumption of responsibility by those who replace the dead in their roles but also by rites that recognize the positions of those who have died. It is therefore an obvious case of "rites of transition." This is true not only of small-scale societies. The same pattern is written large in the funeral cultures of ancient Egypt, ancient China, and

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elsewhere. Both in Egypt and in China, we can also see a gradual transfer of the practices and values that were first visible in the funeral arrangements for political rulers, the pharaohs and emperors, to the wider population. This process may be referred to as “the democratization of death.” It is notable that the famous, though no longer contemporary, work by J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China*,⁵ is in very large part devoted to the treatment of the deceased ancestors, which had become one of the dominant themes in all Chinese religions. It may also be presumed that the dramatically lavish arrangements for rulers in ancient times themselves *post*-dated even earlier, simpler procedures for the burial of ordinary persons, which are one of the oldest features of religion worldwide.

One of the starting points for the emergence of religious systems in prehistoric times was the careful, and indeed the caring, disposal of the dead. The point was that the deceased, who are the ancestors, were somehow cared for and not just thrown away. In many cultures they are regarded to this day as continuing members of the family. In Japan the home Buddhist altar is not just a place in front of which sutras are recited now and then. It is also a place where the family members can report on significant events in their lives, joyful or sorrowful, and even ask for guidance before making major decisions. In the well-known case of traditional Malagasy society, the bodies of deceased persons are exhumed after a certain time, wrapped up well and entertained as if present among the living, and then returned to the ground. This provides an evident parallel in structure, if not in the detail, to the Japanese rite or “festival” of *o-bon*, during which the ancestors (though not dug up, because they have been cremated) are invited back into the neighborhood for a cheerful party with dancing in the warm summer air, before being returned to the world of the buddhas.

A word might be added here about the practice of placing objects in graves or at tombs. Such a procedure has been documented worldwide by prehistoric archaeology. However, the motivation is not always obvious. One evident, but not universally demonstrable, reason is that such objects are thought to be needed by the departed in a future existence. The same idea can be observed today in the Chinese-style veneration of ancestors, which includes the provision of huge quantities of imitation paper money, usually offered by being ceremonially burned. On Japanese tombs it is common to see grains of rice, fruit, drinks such as beer or rice wine, or even a packet of cigarettes, placed there on anniversaries or at the important seasons of *o-higan* (the spring and autumn equinoxes) and *o-bon* (in summer), when many people pay a call on the ancestors in the cemetery. This is meant, symbolically, for their *use*. A rather different motive is that some items closely identified with a particular individual are thought to partake of his or her life and therefore cannot simply be taken over by others. Common examples from older periods are personal weapons or ornaments. A clear example in modern Japan would be the special shirt of a lay

Buddhist pilgrim, marked with the seals and calligraphies of the temples visited. This is usually placed in the coffin before cremation. By extension, particular body parts such as umbilical cords or hair, or things used as some kind of extension of the body such as glasses, combs, wigs, needles, or rice bowls can all be disposed of through ritualized burning or burial. This ritual disposal is referred to as *kuyō*, the same term that is used for the paying of reverence to the ancestors themselves.

While there are important points of similarity among cultures in the care of ancestors, the leading *founded* religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam have built on earlier practices in their own particular ways, leading to considerable variation. Just as soon as distinctive religious teachings appear, the question of how ancestors are regarded depends in part on what is thought to happen to the individual after death, according to the new teaching. Both early Christianity and Islam shared the notion that the individual would be bodily resurrected at the end of the world in order to stand before God’s judgment. This idea was inherited from late pre-Christian Judaism. In Christianity, the idea of bodily resurrection was overlaid, quite early, with the concept of the immortality of the soul, understood in Platonic terms as the essence of the human being. This shift occurred even though “the resurrection of the body” continued to be asserted in the historic creeds. The pressure to take a more Greek, philosophical view was intense, but how could these two be combined?

One of the more remarkable books of the early patristic age is a work by Athenagoras called *De Resurrectione*, in which he argued that it was necessary for the right bodies to be restored to the right souls. He therefore tried to defend the concept of bodily resurrection by describing in detail just how God, being almighty, would be able to completely reverse the process of the decay of the human corpse and even its consumption by worms and other beings. However, this-worldly realism also proved to be quite strong, and the words “ashes to ashes and dust to dust,” spoken at Christian funerals over the centuries, seem rather to emphasize the finality of the physical death of the body.

This is the background for the steady shift toward cremation that has taken place in modern times in many parts of Europe, especially in those countries where Protestantism is strong, or where a secularized, post-Christian culture has become dominant. The question about what happens next is then left open. Some believe that the immortal soul continues to exist, in paradise or in heaven, or even in some kind of rebirth. Others conclude that death is final in all respects as far as the individual being is concerned. These later developments have not been paralleled in the Islamic world, where cremation is not permitted and bodies are still buried under stone or wooden markers at the head and the feet, to show where the body lies awaiting the resurrection.

But reverence for ancestors is not precisely the same subject as beliefs concerning the postmortem status of the indi-

vidual. As long as the straightforward traditional picture has been maintained, it has been normal for departed family members in the Christian world to be held “in loving memory,” as the saying goes, this being complemented by the comforting thought, as in Islam, that they are probably in heaven, in the presence of God. With the weakening of this picture, on the other hand, the retrospective veneration of ancestors has become, if anything, somewhat more important. It is not uncommon for an atheist or agnostic to argue that one “lives on” in the memory of those who follow after. This means that any future that can be considered in any sense as satisfactory is based, not on the reception of a deceased person by God in heaven, but on the memory, and goodwill, of later persons. Since this can only be based on a kind of social contract, a renewed motivation for ancestor veneration may arise.

This can be encouraged by specific bequests of fortune or property, and in some countries this has led to a considerable tradition of benefaction, often to the exclusion of natural heirs. Thus, there sometimes seems to be a certain amount of freedom in the selection of one’s preferred descendants, or followers, that is, of those from whom one might expect a certain degree of “filial piety.” In most cases, however, the natural family unit remains the dominant channel both of the transmission of expectations and of respectful memory. Even those with a poor reputation

during their lifetime can come to be regarded with a kind of forgiving affection later on, if only as “the black sheep of the family,” who is nevertheless still a member of the retrospectively revered family as a whole.

This is all a little different from the idea of caring for the deceased who have no one to care for them, or more precisely, for “buddhas without affinity” (*muenbotoke*). This idea, current in Japan, may be regarded by some as a wise precaution, for it might happen that the spirits of untended ancestors could become unruly, it is thought. However, it can also be a warmhearted, generous idea. This is because people ordinarily care only about their own personal ancestors, whereas it is an act of special compassion to care about neglected ancestors who happen to have no more descendants to care for them.

The cultures seem to meet again when we consider the reverence paid to extraordinary individuals after their death. This covers a very wide range. First, we may include in our perspective the establishment of ritualized cults around figures such as Augustus Caesar or Sugawara Michizane, who are presumed to have become divinities, that is, to have gone through the full process of *apotheosis*. In such cases, the usual term for a divinity in the particular culture is used, for example, *deus* or *kami*. Second, in many religious traditions, including both Christianity and Islam, profound reverence is paid to saints and martyrs. There is a certain

New Year’s celebrants at Dazaifu Tenmangu, a Shinto shrine in Fukuoka Prefecture dedicated to the spirit of Sugawara Michizane (845–903), a Heian-period court minister and a prominent scholar of Chinese literature. His elevation to prominence brought him into opposition with the powerful Fujiwara clan and he was sent into exile to Dazaifu and died there in disgrace. Various calamities followed his death, which were attributed to the angry spirit of Michizane. He was posthumously promoted to the highest court rank and was deified as patron of scholarship.

Women in kimono offer a candle to one of the stone buddhas in the precincts of Adashino Nenbutsuji, Kyoto, during o-bon. The stone images were dedicated to the spirits of the deceased who had died leaving no one to attend their graves. Every summer the temple holds a Thousand-candle Offering Service, during which many people visit the temple to venerate the untended spirits of the deceased.

difference, in that in the case of Catholic Christianity, the saints are themselves directly addressed in prayer, so that they are in effect regarded as supernatural agents. Thus, for many believers, they are what in other contexts would be regarded as “gods,” although, of course, trained theologians would quickly deny this.

In some Buddhist countries very holy monks may be venerated in various ways and considered by faithful believers to be able to assist them in their need. In Mahayana Buddhism, Buddhist leaders are sometimes retrospectively designated as bodhisattvas, thus linking them with the world of supernatural beings believed to provide assistance in suffering, such as the mythical bodhisattvas Kannon or Jizō in Japan. Third, the founders of new religions are usually the focus of deep reverence that sometimes borders on worship. This is typical of Indian religious orientations, in which a guru is often regarded as a gateway to the divine realm. In some Japanese new religions the male or female founder is regarded as no less than a *kami*, and even in Buddhist cases such as Rissho Kosei-kai or Shinnyo-en, the reverence paid to them is hardly less, though differently understood. The common feature may be seen in the terms *kyōso* (which is made up of the elements *kyō*, meaning teaching, and *so*, meaning ancestor, the *so* being the same character as the *zo* of *senzo-kuyō*) and *soshi*, which means “ancestral teacher.” In other words, the male or female founder is regarded retrospectively as the “ancestor” of the new teaching and hence deserving of veneration.

In fact, this is a very old idea. Confucius is the “ancestor” of the Confucian tradition, Kōbō Daishi is the “ancestor” of Shingon Buddhism, and so on. This explains why there are temples in honor of Confucius, though he is not a “god.” This leads to the fourth type. While the veneration or care of ancestors in East Asia is often regarded as being a matter for Buddhism, in many Chinese temples overseas there is a place for veneration of the founding figure or the authoritative ancestors of the particular place or community. In the context of Shinto, this applies to the *kami* from whom living people such as the Japanese imperial family and many priestly families are thought to be descended. In addition, the process of enshrining prominent individuals as *kami* has continued right up to recent times. Fifth, we should not overlook the secular forms of respect that are more widespread in modern times, for example, naming buildings, streets, or cities after famous people, erecting statues in their honor, or providing them with particularly fine tombs or mausoleums. In this sense the mausoleum for Chairman Mao in Beijing is a clear example of “civil religion,” for he is regarded as the common ancestor of the modern Chinese state. This is why he continues to be revered, even though social and economic policies have turned somersaults since his time. The cult surrounding such special figures, who also include the founders of successful industrial companies such as Matsushita Electric, may therefore be regarded as embedded in the more general practice of caring for ancestors.

We may conclude as follows: It is notable that in Japan the ancestors are not only revered but also taken into consideration or “cared for” as continuing members of the family. At the same time, the veneration of ancestors is a widespread phenomenon that, for all the many differences, displays common threads over the whole world. □

Notes

1. I was able to explore this theme in 1990 with the help of a grant from the Niwano Peace Foundation, for which I would like to express my gratitude.

2. Arnold van Gennep, *Les rites de passage: Etude systématique des rites de la porte et du seuil, de l'hospitalité, de l'adoption (etc.)* (Paris 1909). It is often overlooked that van Gennep proposed an analysis of rites in general, not just life-cycle rites.

3. The concept of “rites of transaction” was initially proposed by the present writer, for example, in a section entitled “Rites of Transaction as an Analytical Key” (pp. 16–22) in Michael Pye, *The Structure of Religious Systems in Contemporary Japan: Shinto Variations on Buddhist Pilgrimage*, Occasional Papers No. 30 (Marburg, Germany: Centre for Japanese Studies, 2004). See also Katja Triplett and Michael Pye, “Religiöse Transaktion—Rational oder Irrational?” in *Workshop Organisation und Ordnung der Japanischen Wirtschaft IV*, ed. W. Pascha and C. Storz (Duisburg, Germany: Institut für Ostasienwissenschaften, 2004), pp. 27–38.

4. Robert J. Smith, *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974).

5. J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, 6 vols. (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1892–1910).

The Place of Ancestors in Buddhism and Christianity

by Mark R. Mullins

Over the previous century, many Christian churches and movements have instituted a wide range of post-funerary rites that resemble Buddhist practices in many ways.

Although one may rarely encounter an expression of concern for the “ancestors” in cultural contexts shaped by Protestant Christianity (Western Europe and North America, for example), ancestors have long held a place of central importance in multiple religious traditions and in many Asian and African societies. It is difficult to make generalizations regarding the place of ancestors in Buddhism and Christianity given the variety of interpretations and practices that have emerged in different time periods, cultural contexts, and traditions. Even though we often refer to Buddhism or Christianity as if they are “singular” traditions, in reality we find that there are multiple “Christianities” and “Buddhisms” that have developed over centuries of cross-cultural diffusion. While we can recognize “continuity” among these diverse forms—core symbols and rituals that we can easily identify as “Buddhist” or “Christian,” for example—each religious tradition has also been changed through its spread and encounter with diverse human cultures. A concrete topic such as the “ancestors” provides one window from which we can view this transformation and variety within religious traditions.

With only a little reading and orientation to this field of research, one quickly becomes aware that the place of ancestors in Buddhism and Christianity has evolved and changed many times since their beginnings in India and Palestine over two thousand years ago. Early forms of Buddhism in India, which emphasized celibate and monastic practice, for example, often involved a rejection of family ties and ancestral concerns. However, as Buddhism spread to other Asian societies—particularly those shaped by Confucian teachings regarding filial piety and folk or shamanistic beliefs related to the spirits of the dead—Buddhism was adapted and mobilized to address questions about the ultimate fate and appropriate ritual care of the ancestors. This is especially apparent in the development of Buddhism in China, Korea, and Japan.

In the case of Japan, it is widely recognized that “folk religion”—the constellation of beliefs and practices associated with ancestors and the world of the dead—represents the undercurrent of Japanese consciousness that continually reappears and reshapes other religious traditions. Hitoshi Miyake has explained: “It is within the frame of reference provided by folk religion that the organized religions have made their way into Japanese society. Only as they accommodated themselves to folk religion and its implicit norms did the institutional religions find acceptance and begin to exercise influence on people in their daily life.”¹ It has long been recognized that the ancestral cult is a central feature of Japanese folk religion. Ancestors were originally understood as the founder of a household (*ie*) and successive household heads. Thus, ancestor veneration was essentially a patrilineal phenomenon.

Over many centuries, the indigenization of Buddhism in Japan led to the development of a rather detailed system of ritual care to address these ancestral concerns. The influence of the extended household, combined with Confucian teachings regarding filial piety, eventually transformed the monastic forms of Buddhism that had initially been trans-

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planted to Japan.² The development of Buddhist-related memorial rites, however, was not limited simply to the care of household ancestors, but sought to address much broader concerns related to the “spirit world” or “world of the dead,” which includes animal spirits, dangerous spirits, various *kami*, and protective spirits. According to this cluster of beliefs, one’s situation in this life is causally influenced by the spirit world. Problems in this life are frequently attributed to the failure of descendants to properly care for their ancestors. If appropriate rituals are not performed, the ancestor suffers and cannot achieve lasting peace. Individuals suffering misfortune in this life often see the cause in the *urami* (rancor) of some unpacified spirit. In order to pacify such spirits, individuals must perform memorial services and make special offerings. Until the needs of the ancestors are met through these rituals, the ancestor will more than likely function as a malevolent spirit and bring a curse (*tatari*) upon, and cause problems for, the descendants. In order to pacify such spirits, individuals must perform memorial services and make special offerings, which transform these potentially malevolent spirits into beings that protect and bring blessings to the descendants.

While not based on “official” doctrines or sacred texts, these popular and widespread beliefs regarding the spirit world clearly shaped the development of Buddhist practices.³ Today, proper care and respect for the dead in Japanese Buddhism involves much more than participation in rituals surrounding the funeral. In fact, family members usually sense an obligation to participate in annual festivals focused on care of the ancestors and perform a series of memorial rites on death anniversaries (*meinichi*) over the course of many years. These annual or *cyclical rites* are usually observed several times each year. On the spring and fall equinoxes (*higan*), families usually visit the household grave to clean the site and offer prayers and incense. In July or August (depending on the region of Japan), it is believed that the spirits of the dead return to the home place for the several-day period referred to as *o-bon*. This is a time of family celebration, which surrounds the welcoming and sending off of the ancestral spirits, and often involves visiting the household grave. Linear rites or memorial services (*hōji*) are normally conducted over a thirty-three year period and include services on the seventh day and forty-ninth day following a death, and on the first-year anniversary. Death anniversaries in subsequent years are often occasions for ritual observances before the family altar.

Given the pervasiveness of beliefs and practices related to the ancestors and the spirit world, it is not surprising that transplanted Western forms of Christianity have similarly been transformed over the past century. It is well known that most mission churches regarded the Japanese ancestral cult as something incompatible with the Christian faith. Most churches initially instructed their members to avoid participation in traditional ancestral rites. Protestant mis-

sionary theology and practice—at least from the late-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries—was particularly strict and tended to emphasize a total discontinuity between the Christian faith and Japanese beliefs and practices related to the dead. The early history of Protestant Christianity in Japan abounds with stories of individuals being cut off from their families because of their refusal to participate in household ancestor rites. It was not uncommon for zealous new Christians, following the instructions of their missionary teachers, to burn their family Buddhist altars and ancestral tablets. When the stark and simple Protestant funeral and burial service was compared with the traditional post-funeral rites extending over a period of many years, it is not surprising that many Japanese regarded Christianity as an “anti-family” religion that did not show proper respect to and concern for the ancestors.

Japanese perceptions of Christianity over the years seem to have been deeply influenced by these stories of tension and conflict, but we should not generalize about the relationship of Christianity and the ancestors on this basis alone. Although the ancestors and concern for the dead appear to be largely “missing” in European and American Protestant Christianity, they have not been ignored by other Christian traditions. For example, scholars have discovered that in the early history of Christianity—at least by the third or fourth century—there was already a large cult of the dead in Christian communities in Rome. Special Eucharistic celebrations were held at cemeteries on behalf of the ancestors and the special dead (martyrs), which included eating meals with the family dead, anointing the gravestone, singing and dancing, and prayers for the dead.⁴ Over the centuries, the Greek or Eastern Orthodox Church also developed memorial rites for the dead, which are often held on the third, ninth, and fortieth days following the death, as well as on death anniversaries, and in other special services dedicated to the souls of the deceased. All of this sounds very similar to the care of the dead in the Japanese context. The notion of purgatory—an intermediate place of the dead—became central to the Roman Catholic tradition in the Middle Ages and motivated a great deal of ritual activity on behalf of the dead in connection with the sale of indulgences, particularly in the period that preceded the Protestant Reformation. In short, the extreme religious individualism and neglect of the ancestors that has characterized Protestant Christianity is hardly true of the larger Christian tradition.

In spite of their early critical stance toward Japanese ancestral traditions, over the previous century many Christian churches and movements—Protestant, Catholic, and indigenous—have made accommodations for the Japanese concern for the dead and instituted a wide range of post-funeral rites that resemble Buddhist practices in many ways. Here we can only consider one example from the Roman Catholic Church, which has a more natural affinity with the ancestral cult than Protestant forms of Christianity

because of its long practice of “offering liturgical prayers and Holy Mass for the dead.”⁵

In 1985, the Catholic Church published a remarkable document entitled *Sosen to Shisha ni tsuite no Katorikku Shinja no Tebiki* [Guidelines for Catholics with regard to the Ancestors and the Dead]. This short pamphlet gave official endorsement to many of the adaptations and accommodations that had occurred and been taken for granted in many Catholic households and parishes for decades. It is a very practical handbook that uses a question-and-answer format to provide concrete guidance to the faithful.⁶ In the earlier periods of Catholic mission, the faithful were often instructed to dispose of household altars or at least avoid participation in family rituals connected to the Buddhist tradition. This strict teaching has been relaxed considerably, as may be seen in the following Question and Answer:

Question 1: What should we do with the *butsudan* (Buddhist home altar)?

Answer: When the whole family has become Catholic, it is preferable to have only a (Christian) home altar. When it is not possible to remove the *butsudan* because of intercourse with relatives, the *butsudan* might be preserved. The home altar is the “place of prayer” for the family. When a *butsudan* is used as a home altar, Buddha images and scrolls should be removed to another place and a cross, a statue of Our Lady, and other Christian symbols placed in it. If there are ancestor tablets (*ihai*), they can be placed there together with these.⁷

The *Guidelines* also inform Catholics that they are also permitted to make offerings of fruit, liquor, or other items, as signs of love and respect for the deceased. They may also ring the bell and offer rice in Buddhist ritual contexts, but should pray in their hearts as Christians: “Lord, give rest to the deceased.” The practical instructions for various situations are quite extensive, but the overall impact has clearly been to reduce the tension and potential conflict for Catholic minorities in familial and social contexts where participation in non-Christian rituals is expected. Space does not allow a consideration of similar adaptations and accommodations that have been made by various Protestant churches and indigenous Christian movements in Japan.⁸

This brief and selective review has revealed the power of indigenous traditions to reshape transplanted world religions over the course of their indigenization. In spite of these developments, many observers predicted that beliefs and practices related to ancestors would decline and disappear in modern Japan. While modernization and urbanization have modified the family structure and conception of ancestors in significant ways, concern with ancestors and appropriate ritual care of those in the spirit world remains a dominant feature of contemporary Japanese religion and culture. Sur-

vey research reveals that the majority of Japanese still feel a deep spiritual connection with the ancestors and that both “old” and “new” religious institutions and movements continue to address concerns related to ancestors and the spirit world through various rituals and services. Studies of many new religious movements have revealed an ongoing concern for spirits and ancestors and an emphasis on rituals enabling their members to deal appropriately with the dead. Some of these movements have also contributed to the transformation of the ancestor cult from a focus on a family’s patrilineal forebears to a broader concern with the ancestors of both sides of the family and often encourage daily ritual care of the ancestors before the *butsudan* as an expression of gratitude.

While ancestors may still be a prominent aspect of Japanese religious culture, it must be recognized that there is today a great deal of skepticism and disillusionment regarding the commercialization of these practices, which often are cynically expressed as “funeral Buddhism” (*sōshiki bukkyō*). Echoing the widespread denigration of the Catholic Church centuries ago in connection with the sale of indulgences, many Japanese today complain about the high cost of the ritual care of ancestors provided by established Buddhist institutions. Criticisms usually focus on the fees

Young Catholic women praying before the tomb of their ancestors in a cemetery on Madara island, Saga Prefecture. Photographed in June 1955. Catholicism is the faith held by half of the population of the island, to which first adherents were recorded to have fled from Nagasaki to escape persecution at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

charged for sutra reading at funerals and memorial services and for the purchase of *kaimyō* or posthumous precept names for the deceased.⁹ These criticisms suggest that many religious institutions have not adequately or persuasively addressed the issue of “why” these rituals should be continued on behalf of the ancestors. While many individuals may participate in these rituals out of a sense of gratitude and indebtedness, others may be primarily motivated by fear of *tatari*, or be deeply concerned about the posthumous salvation of the family dead. Is the ultimate salvation of the deceased—conceived variously in terms of eternal life, *gedatsu*, or *jōbutsu*—actually influenced by ritual acts conducted on their behalf by the living? How do Buddhist and Christian institutions explain these ritual practices and reconcile them with central affirmations of their scriptural and doctrinal traditions? To what extent do the rituals “required” for the appropriate care of the dead exploit the faithful both emotionally and financially? These are difficult questions, but they cannot be avoided if religious institutions expect to have a significant role in the future.

Few would deny that it is appropriate to express gratitude to the ancestors, but rituals of remembrance should not focus exclusively on the other world. Religious communities must find a way to assist individuals and families in honoring those who made their own life possible, but at the same time assist the living in learning from their predecessors the wisdom needed for a meaningful life in this world. The question we must ask ourselves is whether the way we remember and honor our ancestors inspires us to live and work in a way that will contribute to the creation of a viable world to pass on to our children and future generations. □

Notes

1. Hitoshi Miyake, “Folk Religion,” in Noriyoshi Tamaru and David Reid, eds., *Religion in Japanese Culture: Where Living Traditions Meet a Changing World* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1996), p. 80.

2. In a fascinating study of the transformation of Sōtō Zen from a monastic and meditative tradition into a religion of the household, Ian Reader remarks: “This orientation, focusing on the souls of the dead as fixed entities, appears to be somewhat antithetical to traditional Buddhist thought, which holds that everything is impermanent and that there are no such things as ‘souls.’ Certainly this is a case of Buddhism being modified to fit into a more generally Japanese religious environment. However, there is little in Japanese Buddhist literature that deals with this apparent conflict or seeks to account for the seeming contradiction.” “Buddhism as a Religion of the Family: Contemporary Images in Sōtō Zen,” in Mark R. Mullins, Susumu Shimazono, and Paul Swanson, eds., *Religion and Society in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1993), note 5, p. 155.

3. For a detailed treatment and comparative study of these concerns for the dead and spirit world beliefs, see Yoshimasa Ikegami, *Shisha no Kyūsaiishi* (History of the Salvation of the Dead), Kado-kawa Sensho 354 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 2003).

A funeral seminar held recently in Tokyo. Participants learn funerary manners as well as the cost involved in holding a funeral.

4. On the concern and care for the dead and ancestors in early Christianity, see Graydon F. Synder, *AntePacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1985) and Jeffrey A. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

5. J. M. Berentsen, *Grave and Gospel* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 196–98.

6. *Sosen to Shisha ni tsuite no Katorikku Shinja no Tebiki* [Guidelines for Catholics with regard to the Ancestors and the Dead], edited by the Episcopal Commission for Non-Christian Religions (Tokyo: Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan, 1985). For a helpful explanation and translation of portions of this guide by an individual who served on the Episcopal Commission for Non-Christian Religions that prepared this document, see Jan Swyngedouw, CICM, “The Japanese Church and Ancestor Veneration Practices: The Mahayanization of Japanese Catholicism?” *Japan Mission Journal*. See also his essay, Jan Swyngedouw, “Japan’s Roman Catholic Church and Ancestor Veneration—A Reappraisal,” *Japanese Religions*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1984.

7. This translation is drawn from the introduction by Swyngedouw, “The Japanese Church and Ancestor Veneration Practices: The Mahayanization of Japanese Catholicism?” *Japan Mission Journal*, 59.

8. I have examined these developments in considerable detail in chapter 7 of *Christianity Made in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998). For a very helpful analysis of adaptations in one Protestant denomination, see Mark D. Luttio, “The Passage of Death in the Japanese Context: In Pursuit of an Inculturated Lutheran Funeral Rite,” *The Japan Christian Review*, 1996, 62: 18–29.

9. See Stephen Covell’s discussion entitled “The Price of Naming the Dead,” chapter 8 in *Japanese Temple Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005).

The Japanese and Ancestor Veneration

by Kokan Sasaki

Buddhism in Japan features a unique relationship between the Buddha and deceased kindred and ancestors. Long efforts by sects and denominations to steer followers away from ancestors to the Buddha have had little success.

The morning television serial dramas presented by the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) have become an established institution in Japan. Each of the serials by and large focuses on family problems and is characterized by the usual presence of female characters in the leading role. The plots typically chronicle a period in the life of a woman who perseveres through difficult times brought about by circumstances beyond her control. One of the most recent (its final episode was aired in March of this year) was no exception. *Imo Tako Nankin* (Sweet Potato, Octopus, Pumpkin), adapted from an essay by award-winning writer Seiko Tanabe and set in Osaka in the late 1960s, tells the story of Machiko, a middle-aged single woman who aspires to be a writer. Falling ill from fatigue, she subsequently falls in love with her doctor, Kenjiro, and upon their marriage goes to live with his extended family. Both comical and heartwarming, the drama depicts the complications of the everyday lives of ordinary Japanese people.

Toward the end of the serial, Kenjiro is hospitalized with a serious illness. When his condition worsens, Machiko is shown holding his hand tightly and enunciating the names of deceased family members, desperately imploring each to

“save my husband, please, save my husband.” Meanwhile, her own mother is seen opening the doors of the household Buddhist altar in the back room of their home and lighting candles and burning incense before the image of the Buddha. Then, rubbing prayer beads between her hands, she too evokes the names of their late relatives, frantically begging each to “please, oh please, save my daughter’s husband.” Inside the elegant altar on the top shelf is the main image, a statue that appears to be Shakyamuni, or perhaps Amida (Amitabha), and beneath it stand the memorial tablets of a number of ancestors.

It is obvious that this family is Buddhist. Surely then, when a family member is in a situation of great peril we would expect that person to seek the help of Shakyamuni or Amida, who after all are enshrined in the altar. Yet the characters in this drama do not address the main image, but rather seek the help of their ancestors. Generally speaking, the Buddhist faith centers on devotion to the Three Treasures: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha (community of believers), and the phrase chanted by Japanese Buddhists, “*Namu Kie Butsu*” (I take refuge in the Buddha) denotes devotion to the first of these Treasures. Nevertheless, in this drama, the words the characters voice in their desperation are not addressed to the Buddha but to their deceased kindred and ancestors. How are we to explain this? Did the television series present an exceptional example of religious practice? The answer is to the contrary.

In their religious consciousness, most Japanese “Buddhists” affiliated with the sects and denominations of traditional Buddhism, with only a few special exceptions, hold the idea that deceased kindred and ancestors are closer to them than the Buddha of their sect. This is because to many of his followers the reason for the Buddha’s importance to them lies in the fact that they believe his power would protect and comfort their ancestors. In other words, their devotion to the Buddha is based on principle, while their devotion to deceased kindred and ancestors indicates their true underlying affection. Buddhism in Japan features a

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(*Teihon Yanagita Kunio Shu* [Authorized Collection of Writings by Kunio Yanagita], vol. 10, Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1962).

In other words, as far as most Japanese are concerned, the dead are never very far from the world of the living but rather maintain close communication between the realms of the living and the dead, and continue a certain intimacy with the living. What is more, in addition to watching over the well-being of the family line, the ancestors return eventually to be reborn in the bodies of their own descendants. For Yanagita there could be no reconciliation between the concept of the “ever-present dead” and the Buddhist (especially Pure Land Buddhist) idea of rebirth in Amida’s Pure Land after traversing the “ten thousand billion lands” in the west.

[People] wished that even after their physical bodies disintegrated they would remain in this land, . . . visiting the homes of their progeny, and looking on as they grew up and went out to work in the world. The perspective of the Buddhist priests as suggested by the final attainment of buddhahood upon death . . . and their intention to send the spirits of the ancestors to a far distant realm went completely against the sensitivities of the people.

(Kunio Yanagita, 1962)

A family visiting the grave of their ancestors during the o-bon festival. During that time, many Japanese visit their family graves and, after cleaning them, offer flowers and incense to their ancestors.

unique relationship between the Buddha and deceased kindred and ancestors. This can be regarded as something very particular, even in the broad context of all the varying Buddhist practices in Asia. Buddhist sects and denominations have actually long tried to steer their followers’ devotion away from the ancestors to the Buddha, but in spite of all their efforts at education the Buddha-ancestors power balance has not, in my opinion, undergone significant changes to this day. Why is this?

One key to answering this complicated question can be found in the writings of Kunio Yanagita, the founding father of Japanese folklore studies, in a work concerning the distinctive view about life and death held by most Japanese.

First, [the Japanese people] believed that even after death people’s spirits remained in this land and did not move far away. Second, they believed that spirits traveled freely between their concealed world and our apparent world, not only on the occasion of the regular spring and autumn festivals, but also whenever they wished to do so, as well as when they were called upon to do so. Third, they believed that the last wishes of a living person would certainly be realized after their death. And fourth, they thus made various posthumous plans to ensure the welfare of their descendants. People could be reborn again and again to continue their undertakings.

Yanagita grieves over the fact that with the spread of Buddhist doctrine in Japan people came to believe that those who were once close to us pass away to a distant place (the Pure Land), but I wonder whether indeed this is their belief?

Judging from the religious practices and observances of Buddhists, it would seem that the deceased kindred and ancestors are neither far away nor by our side, but rather that they occupy both places simultaneously. That is to say, they live at the same time both in the yonder Pure Land, as maintained in Pure Land Buddhism, and also in the local cemetery as well as in the household altar.

As I stated at the beginning of this essay, however, the Japanese probably feel closer to their deceased kindred as represented by the memorial tablets on the household altar than to them as “buddhas” reborn in the Pure Land. For this reason it is difficult for them to choose a single object of devotion from between the Buddha (as the enshrined main image in temples and on altars) and the deceased kindred and ancestors. This difficulty is shown in the following passage in a book by Tetsuo Watanabe, a famous psychopathologist:

I am aware that in my heart I hold the conviction that the nature of existence for the dead is dualistic. As far as I am concerned, however, the abstract aspect of existence of the dead (as inhabitants of the Pure Land) is something of a superficial state, while deep down in my heart the dead continue to exert their power in their bodily state. For me, the dead become “buddhas” (*hotoke*), remaining here

in this realm, and become *kami* (deities), to sustain me.
(*Shi to Kyoki: Shisha no Hakken* [Death and Madness: The
Discovery of the Dead], Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1991.)

In view of this, how should we understand the “superficial”
and the “archetypal” in terms of religious consciousness?

In Japan, the months of July and August carry special significance, especially for Buddhists, as it is in this period that *o-bon* (*urabon*, the rites for the repose of the dead) takes place. Although it is a custom less commonly seen these days, households traditionally kindle a welcome-fire (*mukaebi*) in front of their home to welcome the spirits of their deceased kindred and ancestors on the evening of July (or in some areas August) 13. Between the 14th and the 15th they venerate the dead, putting out offerings of food and other items for the visiting spirits on a shelf known as the *bon* shelf. Finally, the spirits are told farewell with a send-off fire (*okuribi*) lit on the evening of the 16th. During this time Buddhist priests from the family temple visit the homes of their parishioners and recite sutras in front of the *bon* shelf. It is also during this period that many people visit their family graves. It is at this time too that those who have left their birthplace to work in the large cities have time off to return to their hometowns and pay their respects to their forebears. For this reason the nation experiences huge traffic congestion at this time, as well as over the New Year holidays, and it is not without reason that the period is called a “great exodus.”

Many people head back to their hometowns at this time because they believe that it is then that their deceased kindred and ancestors do the same. They are drawn by a strong religious instinct that tells them they owe their current existence in happiness and health to the many generations of ancestors that have watched over them. Through spending the period of *o-bon* in their birthplaces and feasting in honor of their deceased kindred and ancestors, they rejuvenate their own spirits and return to work refreshed. I like to believe also that those who participate in the public *bon* dancing that takes place during this period come to appreciate that this world we see with our eyes receives constant support and protection from that other world we do not see. *O-bon* testifies to the fact that, as Yanagita postulated, the dead remain in this world and maintain an intimate relationship with the living.

O-bon is a Buddhist celebration and the busiest time of year for priests. Many use the occasion to expound the principles and ideals of Buddhist doctrine to their followers. In reality, however, people are somewhat reluctant about bracketing “the Buddha” with “the dead,” since the importance of the Buddha as far as followers are concerned lies in his power to comfort the spirits of the ancestors. In this sense I believe that Tetsuo Watanabe’s perspective that the

The country-bound lanes of this expressway are heavily congested at the beginning of the o-bon period, while in the opposite lanes cars are scarce.

Buddha corresponds to the “superficial state” and the ancestors to “the archetypal state” is exactly right.

Some intellectuals use terms like “funerary Buddhism” and “ancestor worship” in a semicritical way to describe traditional Japanese Buddhism and tend to look down on the devotion of ordinary people to their deceased kindred and ancestors. However, if they studied the innate religious inclinations of ordinary Japanese more closely, I am sure that it would soon become clear to them how superficial such an outlook is. To speak plainly, beliefs surrounding deceased kindred and ancestors are the motivating force behind Buddhism, and steer the course of that faith. I have used the term “practical Buddhism” to describe this intricate relationship between the buddhas and ancestors in my book *Hotoke to Chikara: Nihon Bukkyo Bunka no Jitsuzo* (The Buddhas and Power: The Real Aspect of Buddhist Culture in Japan, Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2002). That relationship constitutes the very nature of much religious life in Japan. The symbiosis of the Buddha and the ancestors is a fundamental aspect of “practical Buddhism,” and we must, I believe, first and foremost embrace this basic fact as we strive to revitalize Buddhist culture. □

Ancestor Veneration among Japanese-Americans in Hawaii

by Joshin Washimi

Over one hundred and twenty years have passed since Japanese people first came to Hawaii. It seems only natural that the religious activities of their descendants should adopt a style that fits into the American cultural landscape.

Japanese Buddhist temples and churches in Hawaii are now starting to serve third-generation Japanese-Americans. For religious congregations of Japanese origin, the generational progress from the second to the third generation began to be an issue in the 1970s and 1980s; at least, this was when the average age of the members of Hawaii's Jodo Buddhist Mission began to creep upward. To clarify this trend, a survey of the Jodo Mission congregation was conducted in 1980 with the cooperation of 864 members. This survey revealed that 90.8 percent of Mission members were over 50 years old and 56 percent were over 65. One surprise that bordered on the ridiculous was that the members of the Youth Group were over 50 years old. New members were simply not joining.

The aging of the membership made it appear that third-generation Japanese-Americans next in line to carry on temple traditions were so adapted to American society, culture, and religion that they were distancing themselves from Japanese Buddhism and other religious groups of Japanese origin. It was a critical moment for Buddhist temples. Although leaders of the Jodo Mission experienced considerable insecurity, some held the opinion that measures could be devised to rejuvenate Japanese religions. This hope, however, was mainly for public consumption, and all leaders agreed in private that third-generation Japanese-Americans would not be joining the temple. Members of the congregation more frankly admitted, "It is most likely that the [third-generation] children will join Christian churches and the Buddhist temples will fade away with our generation." In this way, both mission leaders and members somewhat simplistically believed that they had reached the limits of folk-Buddhist type Buddhism—a religious system centered on reverence for one's ancestors.

Mission leaders tried to focus on the establishment of an "American Buddhism" appropriate to Hawaiian culture and society, but most members were imbued with the comfortable rhythm of temple activities dedicated to showing reverence for their ancestors. Their strong desire to main-

tain this status quo also functioned as an obstacle to reforms envisioned by mission leaders. Most of the many proposals suggested by leaders were rejected by boards of directors, primarily made up of members. This was the story as told mainly by mission leaders, but in interviews of members, a majority did reply that they "preferred the status quo." When painted in bold strokes, we can see a situation in which most of the second-generation members preferred to maintain the temple for ancestor veneration, while the leaders looked forward to establishing an American-style Buddhism. Although opinions differed as to the appropriate reaction, both groups agreed that a religion centered in ancestor veneration would not be carried on by the third generation. However, now that the aging trend of the second generation has peaked, an unforeseen development has occurred—an increasing number of third-generation Japanese-Americans are exhibiting faith in a type of Japanese Buddhism formed out of the folk-Buddhist/ancestor-veneration tradition.

Hawaiian-style Respect for the Dead

Several years ago around Christmas time, I heard the leaders of the Honolulu Jodo Mission Betsuin say that "More

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and more people are visiting the temple's repository for the ashes of the dead at Christmas." I went over to see for myself, and although some of the niches were empty, most were gaily decorated with brightly colored flower offerings. Although I did not check any other Japanese-American or public cemeteries and therefore cannot confirm this, I was left with the impression that a new practice had developed out of the custom of visiting family graves. Japanese people and Japanese-Americans generally visit family graves on the anniversary of the death of their loved ones, or during temple holidays such as the summer *o-bon* or Ten-Night Chanting, a Jodo ceremony in autumn that honors Amida Buddha. The only exception of which I was aware was that people had begun to visit their family graves on the American holiday of Memorial Day, when those who died in wars are remembered. But it was a fresh surprise to learn that visiting the family grave at Christmas time was also becoming customary.

I was also told that more people were visiting graves on the birthdays of the deceased, rather than on the anniversary of their death. Over one hundred and twenty years have passed since Japanese people first came to Hawaii as government-contracted immigrants. It seemed to me only natural that the religious activities of Japanese-Americans should adopt a style that fits into the American cultural landscape. This was the experience of the Jodo Mission of Hawaii Be-

tsuin, but there are other religious groups of Japanese origin that are actively striving to secure a position in the American cultural landscape for paying respect to the deceased. One example is the lantern floating event held by Shinnyo-en at Ala Moana Beach Park on Oahu island. Lantern floating events have taken root as part of Hawaii's summer *o-bon* festival. Another well-known lantern floating, sponsored by the Tendai sect, takes place on the Ala Wai Canal, which divides Oahu's main urban centers of Honolulu and Waikiki Beach. Floating lantern ceremonies have been added to *bon-odori* dances at Jodo temples in Haleiwa, Oahu, and Lahaina, Maui, and provide a lyrical accompaniment to the summer festivities.

It is interesting to note, however, that Shinnyo-en holds its floating lantern ceremony on Memorial Day in May, that is, on the day that American society honors its ancestors, meaning that Japanese-Americans have moved the floating lantern ceremony associated with the summer *o-bon* festival to the day when Americans show respect for their dead. This started about seven or eight years ago and is now a well-known Ala Moana Beach event. This kind of missionary policy, aimed at naturalizing Buddhism in Hawaii, is already apparent in the activities of Rissho Kosei-kai, which holds a ceremony to honor those killed in battle on Memorial Day and a memorial service for the repose of departed spirits at Pearl Harbor on the first Sunday of December. All

Japanese-Americans gathering for a ceremony celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Japanese immigration to Hawaii. The event took place in February 1935 in Honolulu, to commemorate the arrival of the first Japanese government-contracted immigrants to the then Kingdom of Hawaii in 1885.

these activities are motivated by the common desire to give ceremonies of respect for ancestors a place in the framework of Hawaiian society and culture.

From a Survey of Third-generation Japanese-Americans

In addition to these examples, we also have a report from Rev. Yubara Narashiba of the Jodo Mission of Hawaii Betsuin saying that an increasing number of funerals is being held there. This increase is due to funeral services being requested by people other than active members, either former parishioners whose membership was dormant or Japanese-Americans who had never been members. The important thing is that these funerals act as an occasion for the third generation to enter the faith. Thus, in 2004, we attempted to get an overview of the third generation's views by carrying out a survey under the title "Customs and Faith in the Daily Life of Japanese-Americans in Hawaii." We received a total of over 400 responses to our questionnaire, of which

200 were from members of the third generation. There were 46 replies from those between 35 and 49 years old (23 percent), 97 from those between 50 and 64 (48.5 percent) and 44 from those over 65 (22 percent)—these age brackets represent those likely to be taking part in funeral services for parents or grandparents. In answer to a question (No. 26) about the most recently attended family funeral, 163 respondents replied that it was a Buddhist funeral, while only 17 replied Christian and 5 Shinto. Out of these 163 respondents, 97 (48.7 percent) noted that they had a household Buddhist altar, and 68 (34 percent) said their altar contained a Buddhist mortuary tablet, roughly indicating that about 30 percent to 50 percent of respondents belong to a family that fulfills the role of principal mourner in Buddhist funeral rites [in which a mortuary tablet commemorating a deceased family member is retained on the home Buddhist altar and given daily offerings].

Among all motives noted for joining the temple (Question No. 9, multiple answers allowed), the main ones were: (1) "reverence for ancestors," 42 respondents (21 percent); (2) "because [Buddhism] is a Japanese religion," 38 (19 percent); (3) "at the urging of my family," 35 (17 percent); (4) "at the invitation of friends or family," 17 (8.5 percent). We can say that these match the traditional motives of Japanese people for belonging to the Buddhist faith and joining a temple. Motives given for a personal faith were: (1) inner resonance with the teaching, 24 respondents (12 percent); (2) inner resonance with temple services, 14 (7 percent); (3)

Rissho Kosei-kai members in Hawaii participating in a lantern floating event sponsored by the Tendai sect, which takes place on the Ala Wai Canal in Honolulu.

for help in solving problems and overcoming worries, 7 (3.5 percent), revealing a remarkable lack of interest in a purely personal faith. In addition, reasons given for visiting the temple and its cemetery (Question No. 16) were: "to visit the family grave or take part in memorial services," 149 respondents; "to take part in religious services offered by the temple," 74 respondents; and "to seek solutions to personal problems," 3 respondents. From these answers we can see the strength of a very dominant interest in visiting family graves and taking part in memorial services.

Moreover, in answer to a question (No. 23) about types of religious activities practiced, in comparison to 41 respondents who answered, "prayer and meditation," 147 noted "visiting family graves" as an important religious activity. In answer to a question about the basic meaning of a funeral (No. 27), 138 respondents answered "a religious ceremony for seeing the deceased off to the next world," while 44 answered "a socially customary ceremony of parting with the deceased." Hasn't a religious sensibility or outlook that places importance on seeing deceased loved ones off to the other world and holding services for their spirits been accepted as a part of life by third-generation Japanese-Americans? If it has, I think that if such religious practices expressing reverence for one's ancestors can be fitted into the framework of Hawaiian culture and society, they will be able to serve the religious needs, not only of third-generation Japanese-Americans, but of other Asian-Americans as well. □

Honoring One's Ancestors under Islam

by Jiro Arimi

*Followers of Islam live in an everlasting struggle to accomplish
the obligatory deeds demanded of them, and while ancestors
are being commemorated, succeeding generations
become more conscious of their obligations.*

Before I discuss the commemoration of ancestors in Islam, I should first touch upon the foundation of the beliefs of its adherents. To a believer, the proof of one's belief is total obedience and devotion to Allah the Absolute. Accordingly, believers look upon the messages (*Ayah*) from Allah the Absolute as the legal standards for their daily lives, and conforming to those standards is the basis for their actions. This is because they are convinced that some time after one's death, although when is yet to be determined, there will come a day (the Day of Judgment) when there will be a deliberation at the entrance to the next world, and the extent to which a believer's accumulated deeds were in line with the messages of Allah will be determined.

While believers may conform to the revelations of the Qur'an, it is their following the example of the practices of the prophet Muhammad (*Sunnah*) with respect to the events that occur in daily life that serves as a more practical moral indicator throughout a believer's life. It is from this standpoint that I will look into matters related to our theme.

The funeral prayer *Salāt al-Janāzah* is recited at services

for the deceased. The body is bathed according to the prescribed method and wrapped in a seamless shroud, and it is then transported to a mosque. After the services have ended, the congregation, in a standing bow, offer memorial prayers (*Duā*) led by the *imam*, and the body is interred. The Prophet has said with regard to attending funerals, "A person who follows a funeral procession and offers the prayer for the deceased shall have a reward of one *Qīrāt*, and if he also attends the burial he shall have a reward of two *Qīrāts*. A *Qīrāt* is as great as Mount Uhud [a mountain in the northern part of Al Madina Province, Saudi Arabia]."

Furthermore, if one hundred of his brethren say prayers of intercession for the deceased, the prayers will be answered. The prayers of intercession of even forty of his brethren will be answered. In other words, according to the tradition Allah's intercession will be granted to the deceased if many believers participate in the funeral.

The following is written regarding grieving and wailing for the deceased:

"O Believers, protect yourselves and your families against a fire whose fuel is people and stones" (66.6), and "A person who bears a burden (sin) may not bear another's burden. If a person who is burdened calls upon another to bear that burden, not even a portion of it can be borne by the other, not even by a near relative" (35.18).

The meaning of these passages from the Qur'an becomes clear when one considers the following *hadith*, which counsels that one must use self-control in coping:

"The deceased is punished because of the weeping and lamentations of his family."

As to services at the grave after interment, it is written that the Messenger of Allah would say prayers at the grave of the deceased after burial. It is said that he would repeat "*Allahu Akbar* [Allah is great]" four times for the deceased.

As to visiting graves, it is said that in the early period of his mission the prophet Muhammad taught that visits to graves should be avoided. Later, the Prophet counseled vis-

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iting graves as a means of confirming that a believer's full life has been lived in this world without regret, so that one can be prepared for the next world. According to tradition, the Prophet said, "I beseeched my Lord for forgiveness for my mother, but he did not grant it. I then asked my Lord if I could visit the grave of my mother. He granted that wish. So all of you should visit graves as well. Truly they will remind you of the dead."

Not only at the burial of the deceased, but also when at a cemetery to visit graves, the following prayers are recited for those in eternal slumber: "May peace be upon you, O you of the house of believers and Muslims" and "May Allah show his mercy upon our ancestors and also upon those in the generations that follow. Allah willing, we will join you."

Depending on the sect or faction of Islam, practices for visiting graves will differ, but I believe that in essence it is the relationship between Allah and his believers that takes precedence over all else. Consequently, although public grieving over the deaths of others or following certain customs that have become general practice may make the everyday world more colorful, this will not assure one's entrance into the next world.

Be that as it may, when the Prophet was asked about the fact that he had wept copious tears when his grandson became critically ill, his response was, "This is because of the compassion that Allah has given to the human heart. Allah is compassionate with those men who have merciful hearts."

As to a forty-day period of mourning in Islam, in many parts of the world this is the established practice. According to one theory, the time that will elapse between the first sounding of the horn, as mentioned in the Qur'an, announcing the hour of the next world when all living things will die, and the second sounding of the horn that will greet their resurrection, will be *forty*. But the *hadith* narrator Abu Huraira, when asked about this oral tradition and whether it would be days, months, or years between the two soundings of the horn, replied, "I can say nothing."

Consideration must be given not just to one's relationship to God, but also to one's immediate family, which is the main pillar of human relationships, and moreover to one's relatives and friends, as well. Although Islam, which entrusts everything to Allah both in this world and after death, does not consider the visiting of graves to be a form of worship, there are certain sects within Islam that observe anniversaries of deaths and hold memorial services the way other religions do; these can better be said to be following local customs.

While observing the usual practice as taught by the Prophet, one must focus one's attention on parents and family as far as possible. The Qur'an says the following about the relationship between parents and children:

"Your Lord has decreed this. You shall worship no one but him. Furthermore, be dutiful to your parents. If both or either of your parents reach old age while they are with you,

you must not chide them or use harsh language with them. You must also show love and affection to your parents and lower to them the wing of humility, and you should say, 'Lord, please show your mercy to these two who have nurtured me from infancy'" (17.23–24).

That is the teaching in the Qur'an regarding the treatment of one's parents. A *hadith* further instructs on filial duty after the death of one's parents:

"O Messenger of Allah! I have been dutiful toward my parents. Are there any duties I owe them after their deaths?' 'Yes, to pray for them, to ask forgiveness for them, to accomplish for them those things that they were not able to accomplish in their lives. Also, deepen your friendship with those persons to whom your parents had blood ties, and honor the friends of your parents.'"

In addition to visiting graves, it is recommended that one carry out obligations to perform meritorious acts on behalf of one's parents that they had left undone. Let us look at one or two examples of performing unfulfilled obligations on behalf of one's parents.

The *hadith* speaks about taking someone's place for the duty of fasting and purification, the third obligatory act of the Five Pillars of Islam, in this way: "A woman came to the Messenger of Allah and said, 'My mother has died, but she still had a month's fasting to complete.' And the Prophet said, 'Surely you know that if she had a debt then you must pay it off.' And she said, 'Yes, I know.' 'Carrying out obligatory acts that are owed to Allah takes precedence over performing other obligatory acts.'"

Because the fasting and purification during the period of Ramadan lasts for an entire month, if a blood relative dies during that time, in addition to a parent's debt being paid off any obligatory acts they have left undone must be carried out.

If one or both of one's parents depart this world before being able to make a pilgrimage to Makkah [Mecca], which is the fifth duty of the Five Pillars of Islam, even though it was their intention to do so, a substitute may make the pilgrimage on their behalf. The substitute may carry out this obligation if he or she has completed even one pilgrimage to Makkah.

As described above, followers of Islam live in an everlasting struggle to accomplish the obligatory deeds demanded of them (the true meaning of *jihad*) in an environment that encompasses individuals—parents, family, and close relatives—and furthermore, while ancestors are being commemorated, succeeding generations become more conscious of their obligations. □

"Every soul shall taste death." (Qur'an 3.185)

(All quotations from the Qur'an and the *hadith* are English-language versions of Japanese translations made directly from the Arabic.)

Ancestor Appreciation

by Kris Ladusau and the Oklahoma Sangha

This we know: All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life. He is merely a strand on it. Whatever he does to the web he does to himself.

—Chief Seattle

When I first decided to write an article about our practice of “ancestor appreciation,” I thought about comments that I have heard through the years from American members. Some will tell you that they have had positive, even cathartic experiences from this practice, while others display honest aversion. Whether it stems from difficulty in addressing significant issues within their own family or concern that we are alienating newcomers to Rissho Kosei-kai by requiring the continuance (as they see it) of a specifically “Asian practice,” there has been some resistance. It has given us the opportunity to look deeply, work with it, and find out if it is a good practice for those living in the United States.

As practitioners, we see the Lotus Sutra as a guide for daily living. In chapter 17 (*The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, p. 262), it says, “As meritorious gifts to the Buddha-way.” This line is interpreted by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano in *Buddhism for Today* (pp. 272–73). He explains it this way: “‘Meritorious gifts’ means ‘merit transference’ (*eko*), the idea of transferring one’s own merit to others for their attainment of buddha-

hood. For instance, by reading and reciting the sutras, the Buddha’s teachings become deeply rooted in one’s mind, which in this way is purified. From this standpoint, sutra reciting is originally a religious practice for one’s own attainment of buddhahood. When we recite the sutras in a memorial service for the spirits of our ancestors, we transfer the merits that we should receive to our ancestors so that they may attain enlightenment in the spiritual world. For this reason, sutra reciting in the memorial service for the spirits of the dead is called ‘merit transference.’ . . . This is a much more self-sacrificing and sacred deed than to give monetary or other material offerings to others. Merit transference is the supreme act of donation.”

With the full intention of transferring merit to our ancestors, merit is returned to us, and we are further purified. This is part of our spiritual growth. Since we are all interconnected, it is beneficial to all beings. These are the workings of universal law.

The Native Americans have a great understanding of this connection. LaDonna BlueEye invited us to be a part of her family’s drumming circle on several occasions. There was a warm comfort and a deep respect present at these traditional ceremonies. With three generations of the family represented, the ceremony began with offerings to the four directions. Ceremonial tobacco was placed on the four corners of the family drum, with additional offerings up to the sky and down to Mother Earth. The steady beat of the drum was matched by singing the prayers. After a while, I looked over at the grandmother, who had closed her eyes but was not asleep. I gradually noticed that the room felt very crowded energetically. Later, when I asked her if she felt it, she nodded and said, “Yes, all the ancestors were here with us. They love the sound of the drum.”

During this time, my uncle was terminally ill, slowly slipping away. As we began the last song, my pager began to buzz. Instinctively I knew that he had just passed away, and they were calling to tell me that he had died. So, in my mind

Kris Ladusau is a member of the Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Oklahoma in Oklahoma City. She is one of the core members who started an English-speaking group there. On being asked by DHARMA WORLD to write on how paying respect to ancestors has been adopted and is being practiced by the Oklahoma members, she collected their ideas and included them in the present essay.

I said, "This song is for Uncle Lou." It felt right—a prayer for his journey home.

I have asked several members of the Oklahoma sangha to share their thoughts. This is part of Helen Ogilvie's Dharma journey:

"My family lived in the rural northwest corner of Missouri on a two-lane blacktop road. We had to drive up a very steep hill to go to a small town. In the 1950s, the road was gravel, deeply rutted, and difficult to climb. My grandfather would travel six miles one direction in a wagon pulled by

in our farmhouse. It was very scary to watch. I was relieved to see her make it safely. My father was out of sight. When my mother got to the small town, she called to tell me everything was okay, and she added laughingly, 'Don't tell your father that I went off the road.'

"This seemed to be my parents' life: steep hills, Father out of sight—paving the way and expecting that everyone would just follow without any problems. We were to follow him with blind faith. My mother was silent; she did not use her wonderful voice to tell him that she needed him to slow down or to ask him for guidance. As I began to understand ancestor veneration services (life appreciation services), I began to chant for my father to slow down, turn around, look behind him, help guide us through our problems, and wait for the family that is hurrying to catch up with him. For my mother, I began to chant that she use her beautiful voice and not be afraid to tell him if she had made a mistake, to stop appearing so strong and courageous. I chant that they climb the steep hills together. I chant that they have compassion for each other.

"From this practice, I am able to understand and appreciate my parent's hard work and efforts. I am able to know that my dad is close. He is holding my mom's hand. They are connected and they support each other. They have compassion for each other. With this awareness, I am able to change. I am connected to them. I am confident in asking them for guidance

to help solve problems. I am happy for their support to improve my relationships. These days, my life is easier; the hills don't seem so steep."

Here are Kim Miller's thoughts:

"On February 20, 2006, my mother, Mil Pumroy, died. She had joined Rissho Kosei-kai in January 1998 as a way of showing her support for our plans to build the Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Oklahoma. Her favorite job at the Dharma Center was greeting people as they came in and directing them to the kitchen for coffee or to a chair in the sanctuary. She became interested in the teachings, and at the age of eighty-two she began to study the Dharma. She was eighty-seven when she died.

"Since I joined Rissho Kosei-kai in 1994, I have participated in several memorial services, but this was the time my sister Ann (also a member) and I had the opportunity to

LaDonna BlueEye from the Choctaw Indian tribe (center), who is a member of Rissho Kosei-kai of Oklahoma, leading a drumming circle at the Oklahoma Dharma Center. Participants are Kim Miller (right) and Kris Ladusau.

two large, white horses to come to our farm. One day on his return home, one of the horses fell and died going up the hill. About two years later, the road was reconstructed into a two-lane blacktop road. In 1970, my parents and my younger brother moved to Oklahoma on a very snowy day in January. My father had his truck loaded. He left expecting my mother to follow without any problems. He would pave the way in the snow. He was up and over the steep hill without any problems. My mother and brother were following him in a big 1969 Oldsmobile we called 'the Tank.' My mother crossed the bridge without difficulty, but then she stepped on the gas too much, which caused her to slide off the road to one side. She maintained control by staying on the wide shoulder of the road, only to overcorrect, cross the road, and go off on the shoulder on the other side. She persevered. Somehow she managed to get 'the Tank' back to the middle of the road, finally easing her way safely up and over the steep hill. I could see everything from the doorway

honor our mother in the traditional Buddhist way. We held a service every evening for the first seven days; the fourteenth, twenty-first, twenty-eighth through forty-ninth days; the one hundredth day; and the first-year anniversary, in addition to the monthly service on the twentieth. We put flowers on our altars and things she liked to eat and drink. On the one hundredth day and first-year anniversary we had friends from our sangha come and chant with us. On those occasions several people remarked that they felt like she was in the room with us.

"I often think that without any of us knowing it, my mother was the first Buddhist in my life. She taught me to see things through the other person's point of view, and she taught me cause and effect. I cannot find the words to say how much I miss my mom. Sometimes when I chant for her I can hardly see the words through my tears. Often on Sundays I can hear her greeting people. The way in which I am dealing with this tremendously difficult time in my life is through the practice of ancestor appreciation, and I am so grateful for it. It is the reason that it seems I can still hear her or we might feel her in a room with us. It keeps us connected."

Kim's sister, Ann Rinehard, feels a special connection to her grandfather:

"My biological grandfather died before I was born. So I grew up knowing my grandmother's second husband as my grandfather. He was an artistic, creative, and passionate man. As a child, I never wondered why my grandfather began each day with a shot of whiskey or why we often stopped in the bars around his neighborhood. He and my grandmother would dance and drink, and I would play games. I never realized he had a second love. Besides painting, my grandfather loved whiskey.

"For a while, he sold enough paintings to make a living. But gradually, the work ethic became less and the love of alcohol grew to the point that there were fewer paintings. He went back to work, as a sign painter. My grandmother died when I was nineteen. I noticed that my grandfather began to move often. His paintings were disappearing. I learned that he was trading art for food and whiskey.

"Finally, there was a time when I couldn't find my grandfather for a few months. Then one morning I got up to find his car, which had obviously been in a wreck, in my driveway. In court, the judge had told him he could join Alcoholics Anonymous or go to jail. He'd been living on the streets and had come to ask for a place to stay. I was married by then, and my husband, daughter, and I were on our way out of town for the weekend. I told him he could stay the weekend, but then he would have to go to the mission, since I could not trust him to stay sober around my daughter. I think my heart broke as I said those words. We got rid of all the alcohol in the house and left him with food and enough money for a pack of cigarettes. When we came back, he was

gone. My grandfather went to the mission, and he joined Alcoholics Anonymous. He kept his sobriety for several years, until he died.

"When I think of my ancestors, I'm grateful to my unknown biological grandfather, since without him I would not be here. And I'm grateful to the grandfather I knew, for the beauty I learned to see through his art. I am also grateful for the lessons he taught me through his struggles with alcohol and his strength in overcoming that Devadatta part of him. One of his paintings hangs on the wall next to my altar, and these days when I chant I can see the beauty and the strength of his spirit in that picture."

Another member, Carol Ewer, expresses it this way:

"One of the most important lessons I have learned since joining Rissho Kosei-kai is how much my family did for me. In the past, I could not see it because I was so busy thinking about what they didn't do for me. Now, I appreciate them more. I think about their suffering and chant to heal it. I say "good morning" with love in my heart as I finish my morning recitation. As they are healing, I am healing, my children and their children are healing, and there is so much less suffering."

Kara Morrow added these reflections:

"For me, the ancestor appreciation services have made forgiveness much easier. When I chant on a memorial day, it helps me to be more mindful of the positive aspects of my relationship with the person who has passed. This has been especially true in regard to my mother. We had a difficult relationship, and I have done a lot of work on forgiving her for the ways in which I felt hurt. The life appreciation services, along with my Buddhist practice in general, has helped me to be mindful of the fact that she did the best she could. The services also help me to understand that whatever happened, I am the primary cause, even in childhood. Nothing could have happened to me without my participation, regardless of the fact that it happened when I was a child.

"The practice in general has helped me to understand that even as a child I was a willing participant, because reincarnation and karma have in some way made the issues of this lifetime a choice. So now I am able, more often than not, to see that my mother loved me enough to help me balance karma and see the illusions or delusions that I hold in this lifetime or carried over from other lifetimes. The practice is, in fact, an opportunity to roll the wheel of the Dharma. Now when I chant on my mother's memorial day, I have the opportunity to thank her and to appreciate what she did for me, knowing that the merit will transfer to her and help her on her path."

When Jeanell Jordan became a practicing Buddhist, she was not comfortable putting her hands in *gassho*. As a child,

Oklahoma Sangha members participating in a service held in the Dharma Center.

her parents would make her put her hands together and pray every night, and she felt that if she forgot her prayers, people she loved would die. I recommended that she find an alternative expression that was meaningful for her. She made an adaptation and has continued on her spiritual path. These are her conclusions:

"I'm very blessed that I have always been thankful for the family members that have come before me. Without them there would be no 'Jeanell.' I may not always agree with the things that they said and did, but they got me here. As a thinking person, I don't have to accept the things that I was taught. Wasn't it the Buddha who said, 'Believe nothing, no matter where you read it or who has said it, not even if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense'? There are so many people who spend their lives living someone else's expectations instead of living a joyful life. You don't have to agree with your ancestors or even like them, but you can be grateful for their having brought you here.

"Being alive is so awesome. . . . There have been many things in my life that were painful and that could have made me a bitter, resentful person. But it's all those things, good and bad, that have made me the person that I am today. Every day I am thankful for being here. I think being ill as a kid helped me to be more compassionate toward other people. I'm grateful to wake up every morning. Through Buddhism, I know that nothing is permanent. On the days

that things aren't so good, I know that that too shall change, so I'm grateful for every day."

I would describe my own personal experience with life appreciation services in this way:

My mother died when I was twenty-nine, and my father, when I was thirty-nine (he had been ill with silent strokes and Alzheimer's for twenty years). It was on the occasion of my mother's death that I was first introduced to Rissho Koseikai by a friend. By the time my father died ten years later, I had been practicing and chanting for a while. The night before he died, my mind continually heard, "*Mizukara Hotoke ni kie shi tatematsuru!* [I take refuge in the Buddha!]" I couldn't tell you if I was saying it, hearing it, or both. (This was before we started the English-language meetings and my body knew the vibration of the Japanese chant.) In a very interesting way, this sustained and strengthened me—almost like "bridging" me into the next phase of my life—the adjustment to life without my father.

I had always felt close to both of my parents; in life, and after they were physically gone. So when I learned about life appreciation services and transferring merit to my family and close friends that had died, it was an easy process for me. I always feel connected to them—not just while chanting. The memorial book on my home altar gives me the opportunity to connect every month with those who now live in my heart. (It is a different experience from when I was growing up and making an annual trip to the cemetery on Memorial Day.) Because of my continued study and practice, I see changes in myself and the world around me every day. The longer I practice this Path, the deeper and more expansive it becomes.

Although my parents raised me in the Methodist Church, I know that when I pray and transfer merit to them, they are joyfully receiving my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation, with a clear vision of "Oneness." I am eternally grateful.

Whether ancestor appreciation services are an integral part, an auxiliary part, or not a part of your personal faith and practice, it is important that we continue to maintain a broad respect and appreciation for life in general. From the Universal Aspect to nature to our families to farmers and those who produce the foods that keep us alive, we can acknowledge on a daily basis that we live in the Universal Truth of interconnectedness shown to us in the Lotus Sutra. □

Humanity is one living body. What touches one part of this body touches all. Touch one strand and the entire web vibrates. Humanity shares a single destiny. This network of interdependence is as infinite in scope as the reflections from a jewel. My life and yours are completely autonomous. Yet, we each exist only in total resonance with all other beings.

—The Buddha

A Theological Interpretation of the Veneration of Ancestors in Rissho Kosei-kai

by Michio T. Shinozaki

Ancestor veneration is a skillful means for the practice of Buddhist teachings. In our organization, it is truly a Buddhist practice, though it involves a new interpretation of the traditional practice.

In Japanese, *senzo kuyō* literally means “giving offerings to the ancestors” or “service to the ancestors.” The term is a compound of characters meaning “offering” or “service” and “ancestor.” It does not mean worship in the sense of worshipping God. It is rather a custom of making offerings to the ancestors with respect, asking them to rest in peace if they died unhappy with ongoing resentment. In this article, the practice of making such prayers and offerings to the ancestors is called “veneration.” The practice is said to be originally from ancient shamanic and animistic folk religions in East Asia. In Japan this practice has been assimilated into Buddhism and has become popular and widely accepted among the people.

Japanese Buddhism is a kind of sectarian Buddhism, as each sect has its own doctrine and its own founder as the most honored ancestor, sometimes as the main object of worship. A large majority of Buddhist groups are closely associated with what is called “funeral Buddhism.” The family of the deceased asks monks to recite sutras to appease the dead. People believe that the recitation of a sutra contains

the mysterious power of the Dharma and can calm the spirits of the dead and send them to the paradise of the Buddha.

When someone dies, he or she becomes one with the Buddha, also understood to be “great nature.” When people die, they become *hotoke*, “the deceased,” but the term also means “buddhas,” as it is a homonym for the word meaning “the Buddha.” Under the influence of the Shinto animistic ethos, it might be thought that when people die they eventually become the equivalent of *kami* (deities or gods).

Japanese Tendai thought facilitated the assimilation of ancestor veneration by Japanese Buddhism. In animistic thinking, mountains, rivers, plants, and trees have sacred lives. Each is thought to be precious, like a god. Further, in Tendai thought, every being possesses the buddha-nature. These two ideas easily came together. People vaguely imagine, as in animistic folk religion, that when any living being dies, none fails to achieve godhood. But in the case of human beings, the spirits of the dead who are still attached to this world with dissatisfaction and resentment cannot become buddhas, at least not immediately. The performance of Buddhist rituals for those spirits can help them.

In folk belief, the spirits or souls of the dead are thought to live after death beyond the nearest mountain or the sea. This means that the spirits or souls of the dead and their descendants are vaguely thought to be connected spatially, not completely separated by great distances. Paradoxically, among Buddhists the paradise of Amida Buddha is also vaguely believed to be in such places or in a westerly direction relatively far from this world. It is in this context that the veneration of ancestors in Japan should be understood.

Some may say that ancestor veneration has nothing to do with Buddhism, but I claim that such veneration is a great skillful means for the practice of Buddhist teachings. In Rissho Kosei-kai, ancestor veneration is truly a Buddhist practice, though it involves a new interpretation of the traditional practice.

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1. The Relationship between the Three Treasures of Buddhism and Ancestor Veneration

Rissho Kosei-kai takes the veneration of ancestors to be an entrance to the Buddha Dharma. First, let us examine the relationship between the Three Treasures of Buddhism and ancestor veneration in Rissho Kosei-kai. The Buddhist profession of faith involves taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The main object of worship or focus of devotion in Rissho Kosei-kai is “the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Great Benevolent Teacher, the World-honored One.” This characterization of the Buddha is thought to be faithful to the intention of the Lotus Sutra. In short, according to the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha (the historical Buddha born in India) is really the Eternal (or Everlasting) Buddha. In what sense is this so? Shakyamuni Buddha is awakened to the Dharma (the universal truth) and the Eternal Buddha is the symbolic form of this universal truth.

1.1. The Dharma is understood as the great life of the universe

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano understood the Dharma (Law) as the great life of the universe.

We understand that what we depend on, the Law [Dharma], exists both within and outside us. It is the truth that permeates the entire universe, not establishing a distinction between inside and outside. . . . All things, including society, heaven, earth, plants, birds, and beasts, are produced by this truth and are caused to live by it.

A person who feels the word “truth” to be somewhat cold and abstract can replace it with the term “the great life,” which makes everything in this world exist and live. When we are firmly aware in the depths of our minds that we are given life by this great life that permeates the universe, we can obtain the true mental peace that is not disturbed by anything.

(Nikkyo Niwano, *Buddhism for Today*, p. 205)

Thus, the Dharma is understood as the great life of the universe. It is the source of our lives.

1.2. Ancestor veneration as a skillful means to experience the great life of the universe

One of the most important religious experiences in Rissho Kosei-kai is the “feeling” of “being enabled to live by the great life of the universe” or “being sustained by the Buddha.” This is the experience of being released from the self-centered ego. All beings share the same great life of the universe, an everlastingly changing energy, within and without.

We are inseparably bound up with one another, and we all exist through being permeated by the same life-energy. In spite of this, opposition, dispute, struggle, and killing

cause each of us to be swayed by his own ego and to live selfishly for his personal profit alone.

(Nikkyo Niwano, *Buddhism for Today*, p. 31)

This is an important reason why we must realize the truth that we are enabled to live by the great life of the universe.

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano thought that ancestor veneration is a natural act for human beings. This is because we are sustained or caused to live by the great life of the universe, which is the source of our existence, and of that of our ancestors. Therefore, ancestor veneration is a great skillful means to the realization of the great life of the universe that sustains our lives. He wrote:

In short, the teaching of Buddhism is to teach us the reality that we are given life by all things under heaven and on earth, the reality that we are given existence by the invisible. To sum it up, the teachings of dependent origination, of interrelatedness, the reality of all things in chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra, and the eternal life in chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, to name all these, are all talking about the same thing.

(Nikkyo Niwano, *Yakushin*, April 1979)

Thus, ancestor veneration is a beginning of the acquisition of the Buddha’s wisdom.

1.3. Thanks to our ancestors and the source of life we are alive

Rev. Nichiko Niwano believes that veneration of our ancestors is an expression of gratitude to parents, ancestors, and others, and to the source of life. He writes:

We are not born and raised under our own power. That we exist in the here and now is thanks to our parents, our ancestors, and many other people, and when we search for the source of life we come to understand that we are given life by eternal life—the Dharma of impermanence that has no beginning and no end. When we realize this and become aware of the origin of gratitude, we can all open our eyes to the preciousness of our own lives and the lives of others.

(Nichiko Niwano, *Kōsei*, July 2005)

Because ancestor veneration includes the source of life, we come to appreciate that “we are given life by eternal life—the Dharma of impermanence that has no beginning and no end.” Ancestor veneration is a skillful means to help us be aware of the Dharma of impermanence, which leads us to opening our eyes to the preciousness of our lives.

We are born as humans in this world. We know that we will certainly die some day. The truth of “everything is impermanent” is, at first glance, taken to be gloomy, and cold. However, if we observe this truth correctly, then a completely different world appears to us. That is to say, since “everything is impermanent” we become aware of the

fact that we live now. We are thankful for today, and for our lives. It can be an occasion to awaken to the fact that the lives of all other beings are equally precious.

1.4. In Buddhism, to be born a human here and now is mysterious and precious

The Dhammapada says “It is a rare thing to be born a human.” As a result of the accumulation of an infinite number of causes and conditions, we happen to have been given life in this world as human beings. When we consider what a rare event this has to be, we cannot help but feel what a mysterious, marvelous, and precious thing it is, for which we should be grateful. Ancestor veneration is a way to awaken to the mystery, joy, and preciousness of the fact that we are alive here and now.

1.5. Ancestor veneration is nothing but an extended notion of filial piety

There is a flow of life from the origin of life, our ancestors, our parents, to ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren. “When we awaken to the mystery, joy, and preciousness of being bestowed with life here and now, we naturally come to feel gratitude to our ancestors by faithfully showing affection and respect to our parents. In that sense, our parents serve as representatives of all our ancestors. . . . Filial devotion also means to treat ourselves, and our children and grandchildren when they come, with warm affection as those who are at the forefront of the stream of life” (Nichiko Niwano, *Yakushin*, June 2001). Filial devotion or ancestor veneration is also an act expressing concern for descendants or children who have the mysterious and rare gift of life.

In order to understand the Buddha’s compassion in a concrete way, it is best to understand human love or compassion. Normally, the closest compassion for anyone comes from his or her parents. The parent-child relationship is a basic model for understanding the human relationship with the Buddha in the Lotus Sutra. The parent-child relationship can be a type of skillful means to appreciate the Buddha’s compassion through feeling human affection (or appreciation) for parents and ancestors.

2. The Concrete Practice of Ancestor Veneration in Rissho Kosei-kai

2.1. The family altar and the symbol of faith (*sōkaimyō*)

Reciting the Lotus Sutra is one of the most important daily practices for every member of Rissho Kosei-kai.

First of all, let me explain the *sōkaimyō*. When you join Rissho Kosei-kai, you are given a *sōkaimyō*, the symbol of faith, to enshrine in your Buddhist family altar. The *sōkaimyō* is a rectangular piece of paper on which the names of the maternal and paternal sides of the family and a way of living the Dharma are written. It expresses the posthumous names of all the ancestors on both sides of the family. At the

A Buddhist altar in the home of a local leader of Rissho Kosei-kai.

same time, the inscription on the *sōkaimyō* describes the ideal of Buddhist life.

The word *sōkaimyō* is a compound of *sō* (“comprehensive”) and *kaimyō* (“posthumous precept name”). Traditionally, a Buddhist priest, by giving *kaimyō* to the dead, prays for them to become buddhas. As the word *sō* suggests “all,” the *sōkaimyō* implies a prayer that all the spirits of one’s ancestors become buddhas. The fact that the names of both families are written down is unique. It is a departure from the traditional paternal system.

This paper tablet was derived from the practice of Reiyu-kai, to which Founder Nikkyo Niwano and Cofounder Myoko Naganuma belonged before they established Rissho Kosei-kai. Advocating lay Buddhism, Mugaku Nishida (1850–1918) gave Reiyu-kai a new form of *kaimyō* which always included the three kanji characters *sei* (life), *in* (place), and *toku* (virtue). Calling himself Jofukyo Mugaku, which means Never-Disrespectful Mugaku, he devoted him-

self to the veneration of all dead spirits, including those unrelated to him biologically. He gave the dead—both human and nonhuman, related and unrelated—posthumous names, praying that they could become buddhas through the power of reciting the Lotus Sutra.

The kanji characters on the *sōkaimyō* exhibit “clearly the goal of human life based on Shakyamuni’s teachings.” Translated, they say:

To try to live a true (*tai*) life (*sei*), in the places (*in*) where we undertake religious practice, we must believe in and practice (*dō*) the teachings (*hō*) expounded by Shakyamuni Buddha and taught by [Founder] Nikkyo Niwano. We must guide people to the faith with compassion (*ji*) and do only good (*zen*). The merit or virtue we accumulate thus is transferred (*se*) to our ancestors (*senzo*). The virtue (*toku*) of the paternal and maternal families (*ke*) arises (*ki*) out of our awakened mind (*shin*) aspiring to enlightenment (*bodai*).”

(Baba, DHARMA WORLD, April 1984, p. 13)

The first three characters, *tai*, *sei*, and *in*, signify the purpose of Buddhist life. What is the purpose of Buddhist life? The final aim is the perfection of self, or becoming a buddha. The next four characters show the teachings and the ideal practice of Rissho Kosei-kai. It is to do good deeds and to guide people to the faith with compassion. The rest of the characters show the two basic points of ancestor veneration: one is merit transference and the other is the development of virtue out of aspiration for awakening. This means that, on the one hand, our practice of the Buddha Dharma produces merit and such merit helps our ancestors to become buddhas. On the other hand, our aspiration for awakening includes an aspiration that our ancestors become buddhas, as our practice of Buddhism has become possible because of the merits and virtues of our ancestors. In other words, the fact that we are able to engage in such Buddhist practice is due to the merits and virtues of our ancestors. It is important to notice that the starting point of Buddhist practice is really the aspiration for awakening. Every day and evening, members recite from chapter 3 of the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings: “First, this sutra leads an unawakened bodhisattva to aspire to awakening.”

2.2. Ancestor veneration is the ritual of revering the buddha-nature of ancestor spirits

The *sōkaimyō* is consecrated with recitation of the twentieth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, “The Bodhisattva Never Disrespectful,” by a Dharma teacher. This chapter teaches the practice of revering the buddha-nature of people, praying for them to become buddhas by practicing the bodhisattva way. Just as the Bodhisattva Never Disrespectful shows respect for people, people revere their ancestors by transferring merits and virtues produced through bodhisattva practice. The Bodhisattva Never Disrespectful says to people: “I may

not despise you; / You are followers of the Way / And will all become buddhas” (*The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, p. 293). This bodhisattva believes that all beings can become buddhas. His practice is the practice of revering the buddha-nature in others. We can practice revering the buddha-nature of our ancestors by leading them to aspire to become buddhas.

3. The Problems of Karma and Transmigration in the Context of Ancestor Veneration

When we talk about ancestor veneration, we cannot avoid touching on problems of karma and transmigration. Dependent origination is understood as Buddhist causality. All things occur in the relation of causes, conditions, effects, and continuing influences. All things have causes. When causes come into contact with conditions or opportunities, the result appears as effects. These effects leave behind traces or residue or influences (see Nikkyo Niwano, *Buddhism for Today*, p. 188).

Let us look at the understanding of karma in Rissho Kosei-kai. Even though the Buddhist concept of causality is accepted, it is not a deterministic understanding of karma. Basically, the term karma means “deed.” Buddhist karma is the causality of deeds. “Any deed is invariably accompanied by a result. All that we are at the present moment is the result of the karma that we have produced in the past. . . . The phenomenon that the results of deeds leave behind as a residue, as it were, is called “recompense” (Nikkyo Niwano, *Buddhism for Today*, p. 104). This is the Buddhist view of the causality of deeds.

3.1. Transmigrating until becoming buddhas

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano shared the common Japanese Buddhist concept that there is transmigration after death. Those who are not awakened “remain for some time in the state of intermediate existence (*chū-u*) in this world after death, and when this time is over, in accordance with the karma that we have accumulated in our previous life, we are reborn in another appropriate world” (*Buddhism for Today*, p. 102). In Buddhism, until we become buddhas, we are born again and again in this world according to the desires from our previous life, to which we are still attached. “If we die in an unenlightened state, our souls will return to the former state of ignorance, will be reborn in the six worlds (*rokudō*) of illusion. . . . And we will repeat this round to the end of time. Purifying our spirits by hearing the Buddha’s teachings and practicing the bodhisattva-way can cut off this perpetual return of birth and death” (Nikkyo Niwano, *Buddhism for Today*, p. 104).

This means that as long as we are not awakened (or enlightened), our spirits or souls transmigrate in the eternal return of birth and death in the six worlds. I do not know whether, within the Buddhist framework, the individual soul or spirit continues to live after death. Yet, at least in Rissho

Kosei-kai, a large majority of members have the vague concept that there is somewhere in which the dead stay and from which they will come back again to this world.

3.2. Karma remains in the subconscious and emerges as the power of karma

Karma is complex and serious. Our deeds, however trifling, leave traces physically, mentally, and environmentally. . . . Part of the traces of our deeds that are left on our minds remains on the surface of our minds; this includes memory, knowledge, habit, intelligence, and character. Another portion of the traces remains in the subconscious, in the hidden depths of our minds. Moreover, all the influences of the outer world by which we have been unconsciously affected, which include the experiences that we have had before our birth (indeed, since

the beginning of mankind), are sunk in the subconscious mind. Karma includes all this. Though it was simply defined as deeds, in reality karma implies the accumulation of all our experiences and deeds since the birth of mankind, since even before that time. This is called the “karma of a previous existence” (*shuku-gō*). The action of this karma is called the “power of karma” (*gō-riki*).

(*Buddhism for Today*, p. 104–5)

Thus, our karma is not simply understood as our deeds, but also the karma accumulated from the beginning of our life itself, which is the power of karma in the hidden depths of our subconsciousness.

According to Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the karma that we have now is complex and deep-rooted, yet its three basic aspects are seen: the former karma of the human race, the

Offerings of lighted candles and flowers during the ullambana (o-bon) ceremony observed in the Great Sacred Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai's Tokyo headquarters. The annual event is an opportunity for members to renew their vows to pay respect to their ancestors and offer prayers for the repose of their spirits.

former karma of our ancestors and the deeds accumulated in our previous existences, and the present karma that we have produced in this life.

The karma that we have now is very deep-rooted and complex, and includes the “former karma” (*shuku-gō*) that human beings have accumulated since their beginning. We also possess the “former karma” that we have produced ourselves in previous existences and to some extent the “former karma” that our ancestors have produced. And of course we possess the “present karma” (*gen-gō*) that we have produced ourselves in this life.

(*Buddhism for Today*, p. 198)

3.3. This theory of karma is not deterministic

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano said, “The idea of karma teaches us clearly that one will reap the fruits of what he has sown” (*Buddhism for Today*, p. 105). This means that everyone must accept responsibility for the results of one’s own actions. To some extent, we accept this truth. Yet some results are unexpected, and beyond our imagination. Still, the important point is that we can start accepting a given situation and the fact that our present existence is an important factor in determining our future through our own actions. The karma produced by our own deeds exerts an influence upon our descendants; we will naturally come to feel responsible for our deeds.

3.4. Interdependent origination as endless mutual influence of all things

Is it true that those who suffer and die in natural disasters had bad karma from previous lives? Karma is complex and mysterious. We should not understand causality as linear. Kogen Mizuno wrote about the complexity of interdependent origination:

Buddhism expresses this network of interrelationships in the phrase “one is all, all is one.” As individuals we act in the totality of the world, just as the whole world is closely connected with each of us as an individual. Both actively and passively, human and physical phenomena are intimately related, like the warp and weft of cloth. Hua-yen philosophy calls this relationship interdependent origination, the endless mutual influence of all things.

(*Essentials of Buddhism*, p. 139)

Thus, it is impossible to identify which cause leads to which result. Rather, we share the same karma in the sense that we are sharing with one another the same time and space, culture, and history. It means that we are sharing the same karma in this world, on which individual karma depends. Within the framework of shared karma, individual karma differs from one person to another. Therefore, it is wrong to blame the suffering situations of people on their past karma. Victims are bodhisattvas who have taken the burden of human karma from us and reduced our shared karma.

In Rissho Kosei-kai ancestor veneration is not limited to our biological ancestors, but extended to the spirits of the unrelated dead. The boundary of solidarity depends on who the extended ancestors are. This signifies a partial realization of the solidarity or bond of all humanity as being in the same boat of shared karma.

3.5. Ancestor veneration is sharing the same sorrow and suffering

Ancestor veneration involves sharing the same joys and sorrows with our ancestors. It is not worshipping them as heroes, but rather sharing in the sorrows and suffering that they endured. In order to live, we must eat, which always involves taking the lives of other beings. We owe our lives to the sacrifices of others. This is a solemn fact. Through practicing veneration of the ancestors, we not only appreciate our ancestors’ efforts but also repent for what our ancestors did for their survival and prosperity. In this sense we sincerely repent not only for our own past deeds but also for those of our ancestors, which have made it possible for us to live. This is a kind of purification of the past karma of our family. In this ritual, one is in touch with one’s own ancestors’ experiences and forming a community of memories embedded from the beginning of the human race.

3.6. Ancestor veneration involves hearing the Buddha’s messages

Through practicing ancestor veneration, members receive messages from the Buddha. The Buddha always gives us messages appropriate for our spiritual level and our situation. This comes from the following passage from chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, which Rissho Kosei-kai members chant every morning and evening:

I, ever knowing all beings, / Those who walk or walk not
in the Way, / According to the right principles of salvation
/ Expound their every Law, / Ever making this my
thought: / “How shall I cause all the living / To enter the
Way supreme / And speedily accomplish their buddha-
hood?”

(*The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, p. 256)

Here the Buddha’s deep compassion is expressed through the bodhisattva way as performed by the Buddha. The eternal life of the Buddha is revealed in the concrete and practical activities of saving living beings through teaching the Dharma. The bodhisattva way is teaching the Dharma according to the needs and the level of understanding of living beings. The Eternal Buddha keeps this in mind, and watches over all the living, understands them, and leads all living beings to become buddhas. This also means that everything happening to us can be meaningful messages sent by the Eternal Buddha. This is because the Eternal Buddha is teaching us the Dharma of becoming buddhas.

According to chapter 16, the Buddha preaches six differ-

ent ways for the deliverance of all living beings. Two of them are explained by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano. He wrote that the Buddha's message appears "in two different ways: 'direct appearance' and the 'negative appearance.'" His message can appear in a direct and straightforward manner, but it sometimes comes as a "negative phenomenon." Such events always pave the way for one's future salvation (see *Buddhism for Today*, pp. 227–28). The Buddha teaches us in a direct helping way or in a negative way. Usually, it is easy to accept a direct and helping way for which we are immediately grateful. Seemingly happy and fortunate events happen to us. In the case of a negative way, seemingly unhappy and unfortunate events happen to us. They can cause us to reflect on ourselves and on our past deeds.

In the "Devadatta" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni says that all was "due to the good friendship of Devadatta." This means that "all things, whether good or evil, are means to enlightenment." In this case salvation comes from a negative phenomenon (see Nikkyo Niwano, *A Guide to the Threefold Lotus Sutra*, p. 89).

I think that seeing whatever happens as having a lesson to be learned is a matter of faith, based on the Buddhist idea of causality. On the one hand, if we make such a condition (*en*) a moment of awakening to faith, then any condition turns into a good condition, and good results. Suppose I am a cause in a certain condition. If I take this condition as good, then the result will be a good result. As a cause, the effect I may have differs depending on whether I take a condition as a gain or a loss, as good or bad, or as a cause of suffering or of an opportunity for self-reflection. One of the most important ideas in Rissho Kosei-kai is expressed in the motto "Everything depends on the way you understand and accept a situation. If you change your heart and mind, the world will change." Rev. Nikkyo Niwano says that this idea is the gist of the Three Thousand Realms in One Thought (*ichinen sanzen*) concept found in Tendai thought.

Suppose an unfortunate thing unexpectedly happens to us. We usually ask ourselves, "Why me?" Is it because previous karma made it so? How far can the individual take responsibility either for one's present or previous lives? Events can provide an occasion for reflecting on ourselves and receiving a message from the Buddha. If we can accept an unfortunate thing as our responsibility, then we can repent for our actions in our present life. And even if we cannot accept it in such a way, we can try to find some message being given to us by the Buddha.

According to Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, there are two types of birth: birth through karma and birth by aspiration (*ganshō*). In chapter 10 of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha says: "[You should] know, Medicine King, these people have already paid homage to ten myriad *kotis* of buddhas and under the buddhas performed their great vows; therefore, out of compassion for all living beings they are born here among men" (DHARMA WORLD, May/June 2005, p. 46). Birth through karma is when humans are born in the six realms of exist-

Members chanting the Kyōden, extracts from the Threefold Lotus Sutra, during a seminar for Rissho Kosei-kai leaders in the United States held in the Los Angeles Branch.

ence according to their own karma. This type of birth is on the unawakened level of clinging to delusions. On the other hand, "birth by aspiration" is when humans take rebirth because of a vow to help all others out of sympathy for living beings suffering in this world. People born in this way have worked under the buddhas to fulfill their great vow to be born here among people (see DHARMA WORLD, May/June 2005, p. 48). In this sense, a person born handicapped has a "birth by aspiration." They are bodhisattvas fulfilling their great vow to be born in this world out of sympathy for suffering people. It seems that when the Buddha's message comes from "a negative phenomenon," it always paves the way for future salvation.

Robert Kisala gives an example of how a member understands the fact that his own daughter was born handicapped.

So, why was my child born like this? . . . Not to gloss over all the problems they face, but it is the mentally handicapped who are really gentle, genuine, and innocent. As other children grow older they gain in wisdom and knowledge, but they also become capable of doing wrong. When I realized this for the first time, rather than thinking about the cause of her handicap, I thought that instead I have much to learn from her genuineness and purity. The more I learn about the *Lotus Sūtra* the more I realize that the idea that there is a cause in the past for what occurs in the present is different from the teaching of the sutra. So what should we do now? We have accepted that there is a handicap, but what should we do about it? Give up and try to live in some safe place. Or rather accept that you have a handicap, but even given that, choose to do your best to make the most of it. That's what I think the issue is, and in that regard, in the *Lotus Sūtra* it says that you choose the place where you are to be born, where you might best be able to proclaim the teaching of the sutra, where you might best be able to fulfill your own role.

Before the Buddha, you choose and then are born. That's how I think about my daughter's birth. In the future I would like for her to be able to accept this teaching, and at that time rather than being caught up in questioning why she was born this way I hope she will be forward-looking. That's possible because one has faith, because one believes that the gods and buddhas are protecting you, and that way you can give hope to others in similar straits.

(Kisala, "Contemporary Karma," p. 88)

In Rissho Kosei-kai, veneration of ancestors gives the members hope to live for the future through study of the Lotus Sutra, rather than reflecting on the karmic causality of past deeds, in which we cannot know the mysterious complexities of karma. The important point is that we are able to change the situation by understanding and accepting such a condition.

3.7. Our inevitable existence and mission

Through practicing ancestor veneration, we are led to realize that we are not just contingent accidents, but that we were inevitably born into a particular family. This is the reality of the continuity of our lives with the lives of our ancestors and parents. We are not mere products of chance. We are destined to be born in this particular family on the one hand, and on the other hand, we choose to be born in this particular family with such parents and such brothers and sisters. We cannot escape from this. We tend to say, "I wish I could have been born in a rich family," or "I wish I could have been much smarter and good-looking." But according to this principle, we needed to be born, or we wanted to be born, in this way. In other words, we have to start from this given situation and have to be aware of this situation and deal with this situation. Thus, ancestor veneration is the ritual by which each member of the family is led to be aware of being situated in a given circumstance. That is to say, it is an orientation of searching for one's own identity and given mission. It is also one of the quickest ways to be aware of this inevitable and unavoidable situation of our own causal story from previous lives. Everyone has a mission given by the Eternal Buddha, called his or her causal story from previous lives. Our life is one of developing this causal story from the past and finally becoming buddhas. As long as we are in this world, we are given some mission to realize, some reason to exist. In the depth of our hearts something is waiting for us or is needed to be realized by us in our lifetimes. Thus, ancestor veneration is a skillful means to realize one's own unavoidable mission given by the Eternal Buddha.

4. Liberation from Karma through Meditation and Ancestor Veneration

How do we become free from karma and become buddhas? How do we purify our subconscious minds of the residues

of past karma? Even if we try to take shared karma positively, or take unfortunate happenings as messages from the Buddha, sometimes we can think about such things only superficially. This raises the issue of meditation or recitation.

According to Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, one solution is meditation, which leads us to awaken to the oneness of our lives with the life of the universe.

We must keep firmly in mind the realization that our lives [the buddha-nature] should be unified with the universal life (the Buddha). This indeed is meditation from the religious point of view. Through this kind of meditation, we can purify even the mind of which we cannot be conscious ourselves, that is, our subconscious mind. . . . Our consciousness of being enlivened by this great universal life gives us great hope and courage.

(*Buddhism for Today*, pp. 205–6)

We have already discussed the idea that the veneration of ancestors fits into meditation through appreciating the continuity of life from the great life of the universe, ancestors, and parents to ourselves. Chanting the *o-daimoku* (*Namu Myōhō Renge-kyō*) and performing ancestor veneration are ways of keeping firmly in mind that our lives are ultimately united with the great life of the universe. In the daily practice of reciting passages from the Lotus Sutra in front of a family altar, we chant the *o-daimoku*, which means, "I take refuge in the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma." It is a kind of mantra by which we express acceptance of the great life of the universe.

4.1. The *o-daimoku* and recitation of the Lotus Sutra with body, mouth, and heart/mind

In Rissho Kosei-kai practice, the sutra should be read with the mouth, with the body, and with the heart and mind. It is not enough only to chant the *o-daimoku*. Chanting the *o-daimoku* is a matter of using the mouth to read the compacted sutra. When we recite the sutra by mouth, then the mysterious power of the sutra comes into us. But this is not enough; we also have to read it with our bodies. Reading with the body means doing what the sutra teaches. And it is not enough just to do what it says. We have to read it with the heart and mind also. Our hearts/minds become filled with the sutra. We are shaped by the spirit of the sutra. This threefold way of reading is the essence of Rissho Kosei-kai's practice of the faith. In this way, the spirit of the sutra and our hearts can become one.

4.2 The *o-daimoku* and sutra recitation are methods of repentance for purifying bodies and minds

Chanting the *o-daimoku* and the sutra wholeheartedly comprises the main practice in everyday ancestor veneration before the family altar. It is a practice of repentance for purifying our bodies and minds. The notion of repentance in Rissho Kosei-kai means to reflect upon oneself and take corrective action in the light of the sutra. The *o-daimoku*

represents the entire Lotus Sutra. In “The Meditation on the Dharma Practice of Universal Sage Bodhisattva” in the Threefold Lotus Sutra, the following words occur:

Anyone who recites and reads the sutras of the Great Vehicle, the Expansive Teaching, should know that these sutras convey the blessings of a Buddha and that they, having extinguished their long-standing evils, are born of Buddha-wisdom.

(Reeves, p. 424)

This shows that chanting the *o-daimoku* and the sutra wholeheartedly is a practice of repentance.

The Sutra of Meditation on the Dharma Practice of Universal Sage Bodhisattva teaches us the true meaning and method of repentance so thoroughly that it is commonly called the “Sutra of Repentance.” The essence of repentance in Buddhism is summed up in the following lines, which the members usually chant morning and night:

Should [one] wish to repent of [it],
[One] should sit upright and meditate on the true aspect
[of all things].
All sins are just as frost and dew,
[So] wisdom’s sun can disperse [them].

(*Kyōden: Sutra Readings*, pp. 73–75)

These lines are so sacred and important that we think we should learn them by heart and constantly keep them in mind.

According to Tendai thought, the teachings of the Buddha bear fruit instantly, regardless of time or place. If we chant the *o-daimoku*, we can be sure that the result of such action (becoming a buddha) is instantaneous. It means that we become buddhas while chanting. By repenting of our sins through chanting, the dispersing of sins is already realized. This is the meaning of the simultaneity of flower and fruit. In Rissho Kosei-kai, the ideas of instantaneity and simultaneity, on the one hand, and the idea of gradual process, in terms of becoming buddhas, are both paradoxically held to pertain to reciting the sutra, chanting the *o-daimoku*, and performing other bodhisattva practices. This involves a paradoxical experience of being already a buddha and at the same time of becoming a buddha by repenting for actions in everyday life. In order to become aware of becoming buddhas, we chant the sutra and practice the bodhisattva way.

Conclusion

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano spoke of ancestor veneration in this way: “Living a life of true repentance and gratitude for the perfection of character is nothing other than transferring merits to ancestors” (Baba, *DHARMA WORLD*, April 1984, p. 14). People are grateful to their parents and ancestors who have passed precious life on to them. They repent daily of all wrongdoing, and make vows to strive for meaningful lives and to become buddhas, and to transfer the merits of these

good deeds to their parents, ancestors, and the Buddha. Ancestor veneration through reciting the sutra is a way of perfecting our character or becoming a buddha. Practicing the veneration of ancestors, members recite the sutra and purify themselves or their karma, shaping themselves by the words of the Buddha in order to become buddhas themselves.

The members close the recitation of the sutra with a Vow of Universal Transfer of Merit: “May we all together with all living beings / Accomplish the Way of the Buddha / Through this merit [of reciting this sutra] / To be extended universally to all living beings” (*Kyōden: Sutra Readings*, p. 77). Our wish is to spread the virtue and merit of reciting the sutra and practicing the bodhisattva way to everyone in the universe, so that all can become buddhas together. □

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Restoring Warmth in the Family

by Nichiko Niwano

*As we continue striving to perfect our character, the family home
can be considered the best place for training ourselves to do so.*

The recent rash of serious crimes by juveniles and incidents of sudden outbursts of temper by pupils in the classroom have led to a growing sense of anxiety among parents. It is reported that an increasing number of fathers are becoming more concerned with the rearing of their children and that people are searching for a return to family-oriented home life.

According to a recent survey, Japanese fathers are much more likely to leave the details of child rearing to the mother compared with their counterparts in a number of other countries. The same survey tells us that as a reflection of the growing concern among Japanese fathers, many of them in every part of the country are beginning to try to share more of the time that mothers spend with their children.

Interacting more closely with their children is especially important for parents today as urbanization rapidly progresses nationwide and our cities become more and more densely populated.

Even in well-to-do households, just as in those less well-off, the result of children spending much time alone with a television set, a computer, or a game console as their sole companion is more serious than just their losing the innocence of youth too soon. They are also likely to become self-

centered individuals who are unable to concentrate on things in the real world or get along harmoniously with others.

As we continue striving to perfect our character, the family home can be considered the best place for training ourselves to do so. In busy cities and towns, where we may feel cut off from society as a whole, what should parents and individual family members do to foster the natural development of a feeling of family warmth in children? The time devoted to the happy family circle is important, and so is a firm resolve to be inventive in this regard.

Education for Death

Sophia University professor emeritus Alfons Deeken, a pioneer in teaching preparation for death, or death education, describes its purpose by saying, "Since everyone must die, thinking about death leads us to think about life." In an article in a leading Japanese newspaper he suggested that schools devote one day a year as "A Day to Think about Life and Death" in sessions where teachers, pupils, and parents can discuss issues related to death, including their own experiences of being separated from loved ones by death.

It is important to teach preparation for death in childhood not only in the school but also in the home. Because our lifetimes are limited, since all of us must die, we must be grateful for the life we have received, and we can begin to lead our lives to the fullest when we face up to the reality of our own death.

In our daily lives, our morning and evening sutra chanting before the family Buddhist altar can be considered an important life lesson for our children. Showing ourselves devoutly praying before the symbol of our precious faith offers a wordless learning experience for the children, helping them to understand that if their parents do this with evident gratefulness, it must indeed be a great and wonderful thing.

The realization that parents and children mature side by side, and deep sympathetic consideration for each family member, will certainly help to create true warmth in the home and to strengthen the bonds between parents and children in the family circle. □

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Religion as an Element of Mutual Recognition

by Hans Ucko

In every religious tradition there are texts that in different ways speak of respect for and recognition of other religious traditions. But . . .

Cardinal Newman is reported to have said: "Oh, how we hate one another 'for the love of God.'" This is the way things are in the world of religions. There is not much space for other religions on the horizon of any specific religion. Religion is basically chauvinistic. Our tribe matters. And in relation to God, we prefer to think of ourselves as the chosen ones of God. God loves us. Yes, God loves everyone, but he loves us a little bit more. When it comes right down to it, it is my religion that is closest to the heart of God.

Every religion expresses in one way or another why it is superior, best, the only way, etc. The verses in the New Testament that are more quoted than anything else by Christians wanting to look for a scriptural weapon against any appreciation of religious plurality and interreligious dialogue are Acts 4:12, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved," and John 14:6, "Jesus said to him, 'I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.'" For a very long time the dictum of Cyprian, "*Nulla salus extra ecclesiam*," or "No sal-

vation outside the church," summarized how the Catholic Church looked upon those who sought salvation outside the church.

Judaism, certainly more tolerant than Christianity when it comes to religious plurality, looks upon other religions with the attitude "Don't bother us and we won't bother you," but it nurtures nevertheless the conviction that, as the prophet says, "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts: In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'" (Zechariah 8:23). In the end, the Jews are the only ones who have the truth.

Islam also thinks of itself as the final revelation and God's original intention with humankind. Thus, every child is born with a natural belief in Allah and an inborn inclination to worship him alone, which is called, in Arabic, *fitrah*. If the child were left alone, he would worship Allah in his own way, but all children are affected by those things around them, seen or unseen. The Prophet reported that Allah said, "I created my servants in the right religion, but devils made them go astray." The Prophet also said, "Each child is born in a state of *fitrah*, then his parents make him a Jew, Christian, or a Zoroastrian, the way an animal gives birth to normal offspring."

Buddhists will claim that their way exceeds religion. Buddhism is a way of life, a philosophy, a psychology, a way of thinking, through which we may take upon ourselves the responsibility of determining how our life-bearing karma will work out for us.

Hindus have no problem welcoming Jesus into the Hindu pantheon. There is no difference. All the different rivers flow out into one ocean.

I have highlighted one aspect of the various religious traditions, seemingly unable or unwilling to provide much space for other religions in their own right. There is in this reading not very much space for any kind of mutual recognition. This being said, there are, of course, in every religious tradition, texts that in different ways speak of respect

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for one another, recognition of other religious traditions. But on the whole, the “others” remain in the margin of our religious traditions.

A multifaith think tank coordinated by the World Council of Churches called “Thinking Together” has been working on the whole concept of the “other.” The very word has an ambiguous ring about it. Who is the other? And who says who is an other? The very notion of the “other” is in itself something problematic. The other is not in him- or herself an “other.” The other is a construction. Others make the other. Someone says that I am an “other,” but I am not an “other.” The “other” is created. Creating otherness opens up the possibility of marginalization, denigration, and exclusion. Isn’t one of the elements of the violence in our world that of “other making”? And our religious traditions have contributed to labeling particular groups as “others.” Xenophobia is familiar in the world of religion and coexists in a strange way with the exhortations, commandments, reflections, and words of wisdom calling upon us to respect, to love, to see the other as a significant other, to xenophilia, or love of the other, the very opposite of xenophobia.

What would it take for religions to engage in a sincere process of mutual recognition, either recognizing one another or together working toward a society in which the other is a significant other and not an other as a problem to be overcome?

Although it is true that religious plurality is as old as religion itself, it is equally true that vital parts of the world have only recently experienced religious plurality. Although there have been areas in which Hindus, Muslims, and Christians have lived together side by side, it was not a given that there was more of an interaction than if they had just been living in neighboring communities; even though such integrated living was already an achievement in itself, it did not mean that all groups interacted with or mutually recognized one another. Our part of the world has until quite recently at best lived with minorities of other faiths. In some places, there were rather significant minorities, in others, one faith completely dominated the landscape.

Today the situation is very different and we ask ourselves questions about the creation of a religiously and culturally plural Europe, about mutual recognition, and about the parameters for living together in mutual respect. How do we build a new Europe of Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, agnostics, people of no religion, and people recomposing their own religion? How should a constitution be designed for the European Union? We are now between two alternatives. The situation is either a *fait accompli* or a *tabula rasa*. If it is a *fait accompli*, then the table is set and the menu printed and the others have to take it or leave it. If it is a *tabula rasa*, then we must begin from scratch and construct a new Europe together, tapping the resources of the many traditions and cultures present here in the construction work. But is a *tabula rasa* possible?

Can religions recognize one another and can they be

instrumental in furthering a mutual recognition of people of various religions? First of all, religions are not agents. The agents of religion are the people.

A religion cannot be streamlined in order to fit like a glove. But religions are not static monoliths; they are alive and therefore have to adapt to suit life.

Religion used to condone and even encourage slavery until one day people began to campaign for an end to an inhuman and undignified way of treating other humans. It took some time before religions followed suit and became a beacon in the fight against slavery.

The last one hundred years have witnessed a movement that could no longer tolerate women being looked upon as the spare rib of men, as second-class citizens who were not even allowed to vote. The struggle for women’s rights was perhaps not born within religion, and religion is here and there still struggling against the full emancipation of women. But the door is now opened to full equality of men and women, and it has been given religious sanction.

Today, communities and religions themselves are faced with religious plurality in a way that we have never experienced before. Religion did not evaporate into nothingness as many had thought some forty years ago. It is back in the public square, and it is a problematic intensifier of political conflicts. No religion is an island, and the question of religious plurality can no longer be responded to with exclusivism and “other making.” To be religious today is to be interreligious. We see it already—the people in Europe, perhaps not so keen to believe in the set menus of the established churches, still have not given up on religion altogether. They are recomposing religion and making it relevant for their needs. They believe, but in their own way, and they do not understand why they need to belong to a church or subscribe to what some church is saying. They prefer to talk about spirituality and do not want to be co-opted by traditional religion.

Anyone who has a realistic assessment of the world we live in today will see the urgency of a wider ecumenism of religious traditions. Historically, religious traditions have contributed to the fragmentation of the world. Often their history with one another has been marked by rivalry, mutual exclusion, conflict, and outright wars. Although the complexity of what is called “religion” and the constant abuse of religious sentiment and fervor by political forces should sober our judgment, many feel that even today religions play a role in violence and conflicts in the world. Religions do continue to make exclusive claims that, in effect, invalidate other ways of believing and being. We are more and more aware that the problems we face in the world cannot be resolved by any one religious tradition. Most of the problems of the world are not Christian problems needing Christian answers but human problems requiring the collaboration of many. We are also increasingly aware that in their diversity, religious traditions have much to contribute to the enrichment of one another. More and more people

are looking for a spirituality that is not sectarian but holistic, a spirituality that opens their hearts and minds to others rather than separates them from others.

In other words, we are longing for a world in which all religious communities will contribute to the well-being of all, a world in which religions will become not yet another force of fragmentation but a source of healing, a world in which religions, in all their diversity, will work toward creating a human family that has at last learned to live in peace and harmony.

What will it take? We need to realize that all sacred religious texts display the same “ambivalence” about war and peace, self and other, etc. Arguing within the context of the Muslim sacred scripture, the Qur’an, Khaled Abou El-Fadl has provided a cogent response to this question. “The meaning of the text,” he contends, “is often as moral as its reader. If the reader is intolerant, hateful, or oppressive, so will be the interpretation of the text.” The point is that all sacred texts are open to intolerant as well as tolerant interpretations. The challenge for religious and spiritual leaders is first to acknowledge this, no matter how distressing it may be, and then to find authentic ways of dealing constructively with these texts, symbols, and rituals that denigrate the “others” and make violence legitimate and sacred.

There is in every religion an expression of respect for strangers, a commandment to be hospitable, since hospitality in many cultures and religions is a holy duty, closely linked to the right to asylum and respect for strangers. It is a sacred duty, not just a matter of courtesy, to welcome strangers. Hospitality is a universal archetype, where the openness of the heart to the other matters much more than what we actually are able to offer. Etymologically, the root of the words “host” and “hospitality” goes back to the Latin *hospes*, which meant both guest and stranger. In other words, our language reflects the oneness of the provider and the recipient of hospitality.

Isn’t it strange that hospitality and hostility are so similar to each other, at least in terms of letters and sounds? Our history is full of examples when people of other faiths were not received with hospitality but with hostility. Our times can also witness how people of one religion are being pitted against other people and their religion. Our times can witness religion acting as an intensifier of conflict. In such situations, hostility and not hospitality proliferates.

The biblical tradition can refer to many passages and stories, such as Exodus 12:49, “The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you,” or Hebrews 13:2, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” The quintessential story of hospitality from the Hebrew scriptures is the story of Abraham sitting in the opening of his tent in the heat of the day when he saw three strangers approaching. He did not wonder what they were doing there or wait for them to approach—he got up and ran to them, saying, “My lords, if I find favor with you, do

Abraham greets three angels disguised as strangers. A wood-cut print from the fifteenth-century Cologne Bible.

not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant” (Gen. 18:3–5).

Hospitality not only possesses a strong component of recognition and respect; it is in the deepest sense of the word welcoming outsiders into one’s personal space, where a sacramental relationship is established between the host and the guest. There is the insight that all people, known and unknown, could be messengers of God and even God in disguise.

Our context is meeting people of other faiths in an attitude of hospitality. There are many similarities between hospitality and dialogue, but hospitality is more than dialogue. While it is true that dialogue signifies openness to listen and to talk, historical and cultural constraints are limiting factors. Hospitality is more; it is allowing the other to enter our home or being allowed to enter the home of the other. Hospitality is offering strangers food and a place to rest. Hospitality has therefore to do with ethos. It goes beyond communication in words.

We receive the stranger because we are both, whether host or stranger, part of humanity. Religion is intrinsic within humanity. We cannot drive a wedge between being human and being a person for whom religion matters. When we invite a stranger to sit down with us, we may have in front of us a person for whom truth and wisdom, love and holiness are nourished by a vision or experience of God, which in one or many ways may be totally different from our beliefs, commitment, and devotion. If we want to be truly hospitable, we cannot keep at a distance the religion of the other. We cannot define the other. Others are defined by their religions. This is the only way we can listen to others, speak to others, be encouraged by others, and give support to others. □

The Values of Freedom of Expression and of Freedom of Religion or Belief as Protected by the United Nations in Postmodern Society

by John B. Taylor

Laws and punishments are not the only ways of ensuring respect for fundamental freedoms. A change of attitude can bring new life to values prescribed by religions and human rights principles.

One of the main features of postmodernism since the 1970s is its deliberate rejection of values. In terms of their critique or abandonment of all claims to absolute truth, whether by religion or reason, postmodernists have merged reality and image, fact and fiction, in a form of meaningless, value-free culture that can, at worst, leave us with little more than materialism and hedonism. In response to such a potential moral and philosophical void, one must reaffirm the values expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948.

There is a profound interconnectedness between the right to freedom of expression, so dear to the postmodernists, and the right to freedom of religion or belief, which many postmodernists usually ignore. These two fundamental freedoms are also among the issues that have provided the most challenging and fruitful agenda items for the dialogue of cultures, which should be engaging adherents of both religious and secular worldviews.

The last twenty years have been a time to take stock of how optimistic expectations of material development and political independence have often been eroded by structural injustices in economics and governance, but also by a moral and ethical vacuum that can be found on every continent. It has been a time for partners in dialogue to be self-critical that they have too often done too little too late, and have been settling for a stale coexistence. Dialogue calls for active cooperation more than for theoretical comparisons.

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This article is written from the perspective of having served since 2001 as the representative of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) at the United Nations, Geneva. The hundred-year-long tradition of the IARF, with its self-critical commitment to practicing and protecting “belief with integrity,” has involved me in making contributions to many difficult issues, ranging from responsible use of freedom of expression to preventive educational measures to overcome intolerance.

1. Freedom of Expression

It may seem strange to start with the example of freedom of expression as a positive value for our times. Abuse and irresponsible use of this fundamental freedom by journalists, novelists, politicians, and religious leaders have created deep tensions, caused great hurt, and even led to violent reactions. All communities of religion or belief have suffered, and those who have caused the pain have themselves come from a wide spectrum of religious and secular traditions.

The publication in 1988 of Salman Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988) is a prime example of postmodernism. While many defended his right to use satire to pose existential questions about the authority of scripture, there was disgust at what seemed his tasteless fantasizing, which ranged from midair passenger plane explosions to the domestic life of the prophet Muhammad. Many criticisms were made by those who had not read the book; I had to overcome great reluctance to read it, only to find my own prejudices confirmed, in that the book titillated rather than stimulated and was calculated to inhibit rather than challenge discussion about perceptions of truth, as some of its defenders claimed for it.

Death threats are more repellent than lack of literary taste or cultural sensitivity, but the controversy has also revealed phobias and prejudices on both sides. This debate has lasted for nearly twenty years and has overshadowed memories of Rushdie’s brilliant earlier work about communal violence,

The author making a speech at a Rissho Kosei-kai branch in Tokyo on November 12, 2006. He was in Tokyo to attend the ceremonies celebrating the centennial of the birth of Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the late founder of Rissho Kosei-kai.

Midnight's Children, as well as deterring many from discovering his charming and subtle later works like *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* or *Shalimar the Clown*.

In September 2006 deep distress was caused, not only to Muslims but to many others, by an insensitive and inept comment from the lips of Pope Benedict XVI. Many moderate Muslims condemned in the same breath the one who caused the offense as well as those Muslims who overreacted with violent threats or actions. However, it was not only the unexplained quotation of harsh medieval polemic that caused offense but also an argumentation that co-opted reason as a peculiarly Christian heritage and ignored the vital contribution of Muslims to stimulating the whole debate about reason in medieval Europe.

These incidents should create a desire to seek to define rather than censor freedom of expression and to see that it is a right that should be enjoyed responsibly without provoking offense and stimulating violent reaction. Moderate individuals, whether secular or religious, may need to acknowledge that they sometimes have double standards and tolerate insults to Muslims that they would, belatedly and rightly, never permit against Jews or others. The defenders of free speech may concentrate on condemning the violent anger of a few Muslim extremists while ignoring the pain carried silently by the majority of moderate Muslims.

There is a vicious circle, often a spiral of violence, whereby fear and insecurity, a sense of humiliation, and loss of dignity, can lead individuals or states to justify the use of violent reaction or repression as revenge or preemptive action against more violence. Even those who consider themselves moderates can be caught up in a wave of outrage and revulsion—not only after terrorist attacks but also after dis-

proportionate state responses. Public outrage and violent reactions have been provoked on both sides, not only by political events and policies, but also by misuse of freedom of expression.

Neither freedom of expression nor freedom of religion or belief is an absolute freedom that overrides other freedoms, rights, and responsibilities. What is perceived as satire or caricature in one culture can appear as scandalous and gratuitously wounding slander or blasphemy in another culture. One of the responsibilities of global citizenship is to consider how modern communications can reach a much wider audience than the author intended, thereby leading the author to respect a wide range of cultural sensitivities.

Many societies rightly legislate against intentional incitement to racial hatred but see apology as a more appropriate response than censorship when unintentional hurt is caused by irresponsible use of freedom of expression. When apology is refused or is insincere, public opinion may be the arbiter and individuals may decide not to read a certain book or newspaper or see a particular film, play, or opera. An author or director may be seeking to transmit a serious message, which could include a criticism or rejection of religious values, but if he or she offends public taste, that message may be lost. If the intention is merely to shock or titillate, then the person must allow others to express their disgust and failure to be amused. Decisions by those responsible for a public order to ban a defamatory book or to shut down an offensive production may be dictated not so much by the fear of violent reprisals as by the desire to demonstrate that rights entail responsibilities.

2. Freedom of Religion or Belief

The second value, which is a central concern of the United Nations and of the IARF, especially in the face of the challenges of postmodernism, is the reaffirmation of the right to freedom of religion or belief, noting that belief may well be secular, agnostic, or atheist. This argues for going beyond confrontation and conflict between religious and secular worldviews and for a recognition that all must exercise their freedom to hold to their religion or belief without denying that right to others.

More than twenty-five years ago, on November 25, 1981, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. However, there has been too often, not least in Europe, inconsistency in affording to all communities the protection offered by the 1981 declaration and by the fundamental rights specified in 1948 in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That article reads: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

One of the special procedures that has been developed by the United Nations for ensuring that such international principles are adhered to is the appointment of experts named "special rapporteurs"; some forty such appointments have been made, including those for the mandates on freedom of expression and also on freedom of religion or belief. The last two special rapporteurs on freedom of religion or belief have been Muslims: Professor Abdelfattah Amor from Tunisia and Ms. Asma Jahangir from Pakistan. Both have been scrupulously fair and impartial in the reports that they have compiled for successive meetings of the Commission on Human Rights and now the newly appointed Human Rights Council.

The work of the IARF with the independent expert ap-

Youth representatives from various religious and national backgrounds exhibit solidarity during the opening ceremony of the 32nd World Congress of the IARF that was held at Fo Guang Shan in Kaohsiung Prefecture, Taiwan, March 26–30, 2006, under the theme "Dignity in Diversity."

pointed as United Nations Special Rapporteur on the freedom of religion or belief started when many governments and NGOs encouraged the deeper analysis of a survey that the rapporteur had commissioned in the early 1990s in order to determine the extent of provision of religious and interreligious education in schools in some eighty countries. This study contributed to the convening of a consultative conference held in Madrid in November 2001 on creating a preventive strategy through school education against all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief.

In the aftermath of 9/11 it was clear that ignorance of other religions and cultures lay behind many violent actions and reactions. A firm consensus was reached that the teaching of tolerance should be promoted, and this consensus was approved by the 2002 sessions of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly. The teaching of tolerance was seen as being no less relevant in those countries that forbade religious teaching as in countries that prescribed such teaching. Tolerance was defined not as passive or grudging toleration but as a dynamic value that must be implemented, in the words of the preamble to the United Nations Charter, signed in 1945, as a determina-

tion "to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors."

As part of the follow-up to the Madrid Conference, some nongovernmental organizations took particular initiatives. As an IARF representative at the United Nations in Geneva, I was able to invite Muslim and Christian educators to meet in Geneva in June 2002 on the theme "Religious Principles and Educational Methods for Muslims and Christians to Protect and Promote Freedom of Religion and Belief." We first reviewed scriptural and traditional bases for religious tolerance and then shared experiences of different approaches to religious education and education in other disciplines. We acknowledged the frequent failings and misuse of religious education but also affirmed that religious edu-

cation in terms of learning about and learning from each other has great potential for preventing intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief.

We agreed on principles of seeking the self-fulfillment of the student, the avoidance of imposing value judgments, and the adoption of openness and critical enquiry combined with respect for people's beliefs and rights. We proposed that in teaching one's own faith, the wider context of religious pluralism be taken seriously; that textbooks be fair and balanced; that teachers be trained adequately; and that various methods including role-playing, visits to places of worship, and the use of audiovisual materials and modern media be developed. We urged that parents and local communities be involved in relevant and sensitive religious education. Similar meetings to follow up Madrid were held by the IARF with Hindus and Buddhists from India and Sri Lanka, with adherents of African religions in South Africa, and with Amerindians in Costa Rica.

Rights imply responsibilities, notably to honor and protect the rights of one's neighbors in the world. This does not imply a conditional attitude, requiring reciprocity, but may rather invite people to active tolerance—not just passive toleration—and lead to the elimination of all forms of intol-

erance and discrimination. There are those who would like to press for a morally and legally binding United Nations Convention on the Freedom of Religion or Belief, but it is not clear whether such a convention would go beyond or fall short of the Universal Declaration or the 1981 declaration.

It is paradoxical that both of those declarations were achieved at a time of determinedly atheistic policies in many parts of the world, whereas, in the present climate of reaffirmed religious and cultural identities, there are strong pressures of religious conservatism that might undermine existing international standards. It may, therefore, be more strategic to concentrate on educational methods and spiritual attitudes that seek to turn back ignorance and arrogance, prejudice and stigmatization, phobias and acts of intolerance, and discrimination.

In order to create conditions in which freedom of religion or belief can be enjoyed and to eliminate all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief, it is necessary to have good religious education: education about one's own tradition, education about the traditions of others, and an openness to learn from religion, both from its positive values and sometimes from the failings of its followers. One of the main obstacles that stand in the way of such learning is the sometimes irrational fear of what is different or unfamiliar.

Islamophobia, Christianophobia, and other such phenomena hurt the objects of the phobia or hostility, but they can also paralyze those who express the phobia. Both victim and perpetrator can be blocked from seeking constructive solutions to the fears, tensions, and suspicions that separate

them. While some forms of antidiscrimination may call for acts of legislation or for international resolutions, it may be counterproductive to press for punitive action when educational energies and dialogical encounters may provide better solutions.

Legislation, whether in Turkey, Tunisia, or France, or political pronouncements, whether in Britain or Australia, that seek to forbid or to restrict the wearing of religious dress, notably head scarves by schoolgirls or full veils by Muslim women, have often had the reverse effect of their intended encouragement of integration or facilitation of professional opportunity for immigrant women; they have instead led to the increased wearing of such head coverings, whether to affirm religious loyalty, cultural identity, class status, or what the wearer may feel to be female dignity and self-respect.

Conversely, repressive or punitive legislation in some Islamic countries, or pressure by parents to require or enforce dress codes, can also infringe fundamental freedoms; nor is it acceptable when a teacher puts her own insistence upon complete veiling ahead of her professional duty to put first the interests of the children who need to see her face.

Laws and punishments are not the only ways of ensuring respect for fundamental freedoms. It is a change of attitudes that can bring new life to values that are prescribed by our religions and by international human rights principles. The change from phobias to dialogue and respect will come through education, through regular meeting and cooperation, and from spiritual renewal. Postmodernism cannot destroy values that compose the very identity of our respective and our common civilizations. □

Japanese Buddhist Folktales

The "Trading Places" Jizo

A long time ago, Marugame Beach in Sanuki was a splendid place of white sand and green pines.

One day, some children were playing in the water by the seashore, as they always did. However, the smallest of the children was caught in the strong current. No matter how good a swimmer a child might be, he was no match for the strong rip tide at this beach. All of the children panicked and were all in a flurry.

From out of nowhere a child came running toward them with great force. He dove into the sea, rescued the child who was drowning, and pulled him back to shore.

The child whose life had been saved and his parents who came quickly to the beach joyfully embraced and said to each other, "Thank heaven, thank heaven!"

The villagers all heaved a sigh of relief. However, they real-

ized all of a sudden that the boy who had saved the child was nowhere to be found.

"Where is the boy who saved him?"

They all searched the area, but could not find him. There was nothing more to do about it, so they all trudged along home, and as they passed by the village's Jizo shrine, it happened.

"Oh, look! Jizo is soaking wet!" one child cried out. And sure enough, when they took a good look inside the shrine, they saw that Jizo was dripping with seawater from head to toe.

"Jizo-sama, thank you for really helping us out. . . ."

The villagers said this over and over, their hands folded in prayer before him. And their faith grew even stronger than before. Since that time, no more children ever drowned at that beach. □

(A story from Kagawa Prefecture)

Creating a Pure Land on Earth

by Cheng Yen

The Niwano Peace Foundation presented the 24th Niwano Peace Prize to the Venerable Dharma Master Cheng Yen, founder of the Taiwan Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation. On behalf of Dharma Master Cheng Yen, who was not able to travel to Japan because of health reasons, three representatives of the Tzu Chi Foundation attended the award ceremony that took place on May 10. Following is the acceptance address of Dharma Master Cheng Yen, which was delivered by Mr. Rei-Sheng Her, spokesman for Dharma Master Cheng Yen and the Tzu Chi Foundation.

Rev. Niwano, president of the Niwano Peace Foundation; Most Reverend Bishop Stålsett, chairman of the Niwano Peace Prize Committee; members of the Niwano Peace Prize Committee; and distinguished guests:

Please allow me to begin by expressing my deepest gratitude to the Niwano Peace Foundation for this great honor, which you have bestowed not on myself alone, but on all the members of the Tzu Chi Foundation. Indeed, what Tzu Chi has been able to accomplish has not been done by myself alone, but by all its devoted members.

The Niwano Peace Prize has made a great contribution to peace in the world and I would like to convey my great esteem and admiration for your efforts and devotion in creating a better world.

Especially, the late Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, provided a visionary perspective on world peace. His legacy has been proven to be the kind of essential wisdom needed to resolve the chaos of the modern world.

The purification of the human spirit and harmony in the world are also the important legacies of the Buddha and have become the mission of all his disciples. This is particularly true during a time of man-made chaos, which makes his disciples even more determined to create a pure land here on earth.

From the beginning of human history, we have lived through the rise and fall of innumerable civilizations and countless cruel and unnecessary wars. Out of greed, we humans have over the millennia destroyed many creatures and ecosystems. All this destruction is accelerating the era of decay. This causes me to worry that it may already be too late to save our planet.

After he attained liberation from existence, the Buddha said that Buddhism would undergo three stages—progress, symbolism, and finally decay. The Buddha indicated that, up to the era of decay, the secular world would be full of catastrophes, with savage wars, immense fires, and terrible flooding. The Buddha's ingenious wisdom passed through

The Venerable Dharma Master Cheng Yen, the recipient of the 24th Niwano Peace Prize.

The award ceremony of the Niwano Peace Prize held on May 10 at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan in Tokyo.

time and foresaw the vicissitudes of mortal afflictions and indicated the way out of these disasters and how we shall reach the state of enlightenment.

If we look at the world today, with its constant wars, ruin of the land, and the countless numbers of human beings who become victims of violence and natural disasters, this decay really worries me.

I have always encouraged Tzu Chi members not to search for enlightenment solely for ourselves, but to apply great love and wisdom in the secular world and to strive to enlighten every mortal human being until they realize the eternal wisdom.

In the world in which we live now, both human and natural disasters are the result of our own greed. How can we maintain a simple and broad-minded heart, bear no hatred against one another, and stop destroying nature and eventually live in harmony with our basic nature?

Together with all the Tzu Chi volunteers, I aim to put into practice the teaching of the Buddha. We deeply believe that it is the predicament of mankind that has given us the opportunity to be bodhisattvas, and that it is the era of chaos that has given us the chance to establish a pure land on this earth.

To transform society, we must first purify ourselves and then cleanse the impurities of the earth. We do not need to wait until we pass away to reach a Buddhist heaven in a future life. That heaven is right here, in the present moment, in our awakening spirit and in our loving mind.

From 1966, when I established the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, up to the present, Tzu Chi volunteers have been going to every corner of the world where catastrophes occur, to help soothe the afflictions of the vic-

tims and give them happiness without asking for anything in return. This is the fulfillment of the Buddha's teachings. By embracing those afflicted people, we can realize the reality of suffering. And that leads us to the point where we are able to cherish our own happiness. By treating the suffering, we will be able to understand that the cause is derived from ignorance.

We all know that we have to learn from the Buddha and then enlighten all life. But I expect Tzu Chi volunteers not to be people who always ask the Buddha for support, but to be people who can always selflessly support others. Tzu Chi volunteers should not only practice selfless giving but should also express gratitude when giving. This is the fulfillment of emptiness and the practice of spiritual freedom. People normally think of themselves exclusively, and, as long as we do this, we are no longer experiencing joyful giving.

If we realize the essential emptiness of life and learn that there is no distinction among all beings, then we can give without worry and grief. But how can we understand the rule of emptiness? The best way is to start from gratitude, and especially to express gratitude through giving. By doing this, we will be able to practice nondiscriminatory love, reach spiritual freedom, and acquire ultimate bliss.

The utmost form of devotion by Tzu Chi volunteers is carried out by those who not only devote their wisdom and energy during their life, but also, even after death, donate their bodies for medical research and experiments to teach both students and doctors. As a silent mentor had said to a medical student shortly before his death: "Someday you are going to practice performing surgery on my body. Remember, you may make a mistake or a hundred or a thousand mistakes on my body. But do not make even one mistake

on your patients.” The statement shows the Tzu Chi volunteers’ ultimate awareness of emptiness. This selfless giving shows their divine personality and leaves a remarkable legacy for future followers.

The giving of these silent mentors presents a perfect finale to their lives. When I think of these Tzu Chi disciples, who devote their lives to suffering people during their lifetime and after death donate their bodies to teach medical students, I always feel touched and full of gratitude. They give all their mortal belongings to others and in return accomplish eternal enlightenment.

Selfless giving is the pivotal path that leads to the transformation of the modern world. When I observe the world chaos, I deeply believe that today’s catastrophes all stem from human greed and illusionary obsessions. I often believe that natural disasters are a result of human misconduct. As an example, the greenhouse effect is indeed the result of spiritual causes.

The scale of recent hurricanes and earthquakes has been much more severe than ever before and the result has been the sacrifice of millions of people. No matter whether it is the Sumatran tsunami in South Asia, Hurricane Katrina in the United States, or the wars in the Middle East, all are derived from the expansion of human desire, from the endless destruction of nature, and from a never-satisfied selfish egoism.

Facing these terrible disasters, we have to examine ourselves more seriously. The obsessive behavior caused by greed, anger, and obstinacy are the root of ignorance and the cause of turmoil in the world.

To lead this distorted world out of chaos, we first have to awaken people’s minds. So I advocate the principles of great love and selfless giving. If everyone were selfless, then conflict would be diminished. If we love all, then all creatures would prosper.

All earthly beings are different, but I believe that each tiny creature and drop of water contains a spirit. If we compare all earthly beings to water, an ocean is different from a lake and a dewdrop is different from a river, but they are all the same—they are all water.

I am always afraid of harming the land when I walk. Buddhists must use equal love to embrace all mortal beings and these should include every sentient and nonsentient being.

In Tzu Chi there are more than 200,000 environmental volunteers who devote themselves to recycling, to preserving the earth, to cherishing material beings and realizing the endless value of life. They expand their love to cover all people and every earthly creature and, by doing so, raise the value of their own lives.

I believe that the nondiscriminatory principles that the Buddha taught us will in due course enlighten all sentient beings. If we expect to do this, we have to employ infinite ways to educate them, for sentient beings are very divergent. The Tzu Chi Foundation applies the Four Divine Spirits—love, compassion, sympathy, and giving—to establish our

Dharma Master Cheng Yen speaking to members of the Tzu Chi medical team who are leaving for the relief of the victims of the giant tsunami that had brought about massive damage in South Asia in December 2004.

four missions: charity, medicine, education, and culture. These missions have eight major tasks, which are all opportunities to practice Buddha-like wisdom and paths toward awakening.

The realization of the pure land is here in this earthly world. People may say that the Tzu Chi Foundation is a re-

Dharma Master Cheng Yen receiving from a six-year-old Tzu Chi volunteer a bottle containing her donation.

formation of Buddhism, but I believe that we are dedicated to reinstating traditional Buddhism. Tzu Chi volunteers follow the teaching of Mahayana Buddhism, fulfill the divine scriptures, and are dedicated to enlightening the mortal world.

You can see Tzu Chi volunteers in every community in Taiwan. Their blue and white uniforms are found in the poorest villages in rural China. Thousands of Zulu Tzu Chi volunteers in South Africa devote their love to tribal people. Some volunteers in South America have even entered into the Indian tribes in Paraguay to build schools for aboriginal children.

The doctors of the Tzu Chi Medical Association hold free clinics in the vast and empty Australian continent. Indonesian volunteers joined together to clean the garbage out of the Angke River in Jakarta. Turkish Muslim Tzu Chi volunteers showed their love during disasters.

All these volunteers follow the principle of non-discrimi-

to become great medical masters. The doctors will not only cure the patients' diseases, but also comfort their spiritual afflictions. Thousand of Tzu Chi medical volunteers accompany doctors and nurses to take good care of patients. They aim to turn the hell-like hospital into a heaven. I often think that the smiles of the patients are the most beautiful faces in the world.

Modern society is full of greed and temptation, which results in inequality of wealth. However, poverty does not only apply in the material sense—poverty of knowledge is even more serious in our world.

Tzu Chi's educational missions are dedicated to supporting children and building schools in the relatively poor areas of several countries, including Thailand, Mexico, Iran, South Africa, Indonesia, and some portions of China. We hope that, through education, we will be able to eliminate inadequate knowledge and diminish the gap of intelligence between rich and poor. We also teach children to embrace the principle of altruism, so that they come to understand that supporting others will improve their own worth.

A believer in humanity and practitioner of the bodhisattva-way must follow the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, which says [in chapter 1, "Virtues"]: "They become great good leaders or great leaders for living beings everywhere. They serve as eyes for blind beings, and as ears, nose, or tongue for those who are deaf, who have no nose, or who are dumb; make deficient organs complete; turn the deranged to the great right thought."

I expect the Da Ai TV Station and other Tzu Chi media to become a source of pure water that will clean up our chaos-ridden society, formulate a new civilization for the earthly world, and bring people into a state of spiritual freedom.

And this enlightenment stems from an individual's awakening. One awakened seed can generate infinite goodness and enlighten many other seeds.

As the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings preaches [in chapter 3, "Ten Merits"]: "From one seed, a hundred thousand myriad seeds grow, from each of a hundred thousand myriad seeds, another hundred thousand myriad seeds grow, and in such a process seeds increase to an unlimited extent." There is no difference between mortal beings, the Buddha, and the ultimate enlightened mind. As Buddhists, we have to practice by ourselves and become an awakening seed that will enlighten all mortal beings.

We all live in this world, which abounds with many conflicts and much hatred, and in which people fall victim to temptation. Therefore, as human beings, we must be courageous and perpetually enter the afflicted world, both physical and spiritual, to comfort mortal beings and awaken them from their ignorance.

We must strive to ensure that all beings are enlightened by the Buddha's wisdom, that all achieve calmness and ultimate awakening. If we persevere in this thought and work persistently, we will eventually establish a pure land right here in the midst of the secular world. □

A Tzu Chi volunteer comforts an elderly woman who lost her family to the giant tsunami.

nation in loving people of every race, with disregard for their nationality, religion, or social status. We also believe that everyone is entitled to love. We not only aim to inspire the rich to support the poor, but also hope that those who are helped by us will be able in due time to support others. That means that there is no difference between poor and rich in the giving of love.

After developing charitable activities, I began to become aware that there is no pain that can compare to the affliction of disease. But if we perceive disease as a reflection of life and understand that life and death are inevitable, then we will turn a hospital into an important place to contemplate the cycle of life and death.

The Tzu Chi medical mission perceives a hospital as a practicing temple. Treating all patients as their own teachers and learning from their pains, I expect all Tzu Chi doctors

Envisioning Dharmic Societies

by Kenneth Kraft

A good society would recognize the inherent worth of all people and would help its citizens to cultivate inner peace. This essay is based on an address delivered by the author at a symposium held by Religions for Peace and Rissho Kosei-kai of New York at the Japan Society in New York to commemorate the centennial of the birth of the late founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, on December 14, 2006.

In 1990 I had an opportunity to conduct research in Japan on Buddhist responses to contemporary social issues. At the time, there was no accepted term in Japanese for engaged Buddhism. Now a new expression is gaining currency: *shakai-sanka bukkyo*, literally “society-participating Buddhism.” Rev. Nikkyo Niwano may not have been familiar with this particular term or with the modern concept of engaged Buddhism, but he certainly exemplified its meaning. We are just beginning to appreciate his pioneering role in the development of a globally engaged Buddhism.

One of the teachings Rev. Niwano drew from the Lotus Sutra, the text that nourished him throughout his life, is that authentic spiritual liberation is not a solitary affair. He wrote:

The Lotus Sutra asserts that, in order for man to become truly happy, in addition to individual enlightenment and happiness in one’s individual life, it is necessary to purify the nation (society), thus going a step further. It is in the spirit of the Lotus Sutra for a person to make efforts not to escape from actuality but rather to positively wrestle with it and strive to purify it.¹

This passage concisely affirms a core principle of Mahayana Buddhism. Bodhisattvas—and bodhisattvas-in-training—seek “not to escape from actuality but rather to positively wrestle with it.” At the same time, Rev. Niwano’s phrasing nicely captures the expansive thrust of engaged Buddhism. We can run a simple experiment to test this second reading. In the same passage, substitute “engaged Buddhism” in place of “the Lotus Sutra,” and see if it still makes sense:

Engaged Buddhism asserts that, in order for man to become truly happy, in addition to individual enlightenment and happiness in one’s individual life, it is necessary to purify the nation (society), thus going a step further. It is in the spirit of engaged Buddhism for a person to make efforts not to escape from actuality but rather to positively wrestle with it and strive to purify it.

The meaningful flow of the amended version suggests that engaged Buddhism is indeed anchored in classic Mahayana teachings. For Rev. Niwano, they are not two.

As Buddhism evolves in today’s world, new concerns will continue to arise. For the past half century or so, Buddhists of many persuasions—monks, nuns, laypeople, scholars, activists—have turned their attention to current dilemmas such as injustice, war, and environmental degradation. Traditional Buddhism did not or could not address some of these large-scale causes of suffering. Today, engagement also calls for a forward-looking use of the imagination. Can we envision human beings living harmoniously with one another and the earth? Do communities have untapped reservoirs of wisdom and compassion analogous to the buddha-nature of individuals? What might a more enlightened society be like?

Buddhistically speaking (here I am using “Buddhist” in the most inclusive sense possible), a good society would recognize the inherent worth of all people. Such a society would help its citizens to cultivate inner peace. The education system would teach mindfulness as a basic competency. Nonviolence would be a civic virtue and the most valued path in international relations. Poverty would be eradicated, with the once poor becoming full participants in the political system. The environment would be protected. And so on. Our planetary to-do list keeps growing.

A common reaction is to dismiss such aspirations as too

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utopian. Is that response a sign of realism or shortsightedness? Engaged Buddhists and like-minded folks are beginning to expand these small concepts into full visualizations of desirable societies. Some recent coinages evoke the possibilities: an enlightened society; a culture of awakening; a culture of mindfulness; the awakening of all (*sarvodaya*). Two Rishsho Kosei-kai terms also point in this direction: *brighter society* and *dharma world*. Maybe we need a brand-new word that reflects a true synthesis of dharma and democracy, such as “dharmacracy”!

Engaged Buddhism contends that the genuine foundation of world peace is the inner peace of individuals. If a sufficient number of people experience contentment firsthand, swords will be beaten into plowshares as a matter of course. Thus the Dalai Lama emphasizes “inner disarmament,” and Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh advocates “being peace.” Rev. Niwano makes the same point: “There is no other way to establish lasting peace on earth, to change this hellish stage completely, than to reorient our minds, to restore our souls.”² A corollary of this approach is that we cannot really work for peace if we are angry, anxious, or burned out. Means and ends must align.

Buddhism calls this world of dust and sorrow, as ordinarily experienced, *samsara*. Yet that is only a partial view. When *samsara* is perceived correctly, it is seen to be undefiled, complete, and radiant. Engaged Buddhists seek to advance beyond the realization of the world’s inherent wholeness to the implementation of that wholeness. Rev. Niwano exemplifies this turn. Consider the following passage, in which he is commenting on the Lotus Sutra:

That the Buddha entrusted the *sahā*-world [*samsara*] to the bodhisattvas who emerged from the earth teaches us that the world in which we live should be purified and made peaceful through our own efforts. . . . We are responsible for creating the Pure Land where we live.³

“We are responsible for creating the Pure Land where we live” bears repeating. Now there’s a challenge! It even includes a little Zen hook: spiritually speaking, where *do* we live?

In the summer of 2006, religious figures from around the world met in Kyoto to confront violence and promote shared security. They issued a declaration that states in part:

A well-developed concept of shared security articulates security needs, how they are to be met, and the necessary agents, instruments, and relationships to achieve it. Importantly, shared security would highlight the collective responsibility of all people to meet our common need for security.⁴

That is, we’re all in this together, and the sooner we realize it the better. Some permutation of this insight can be found in the wisdom traditions of every culture. Today, our collective responsibility also encompasses the nonhuman beings with whom we share the biosphere.

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano and other participants in the First Assembly of Religions for Peace held in Kyoto in 1970 prepare for commemorative photographs.

Before the modern era, religions depicted better worlds in their own distinctive vocabularies, and that sufficed. Whenever these visions of earthly and heavenly paradises are brought together, they illuminate one another. Participants in interreligious dialogue now seek a common language that resonates anew. Is there a way to integrate the singular speech of sacred texts and the sober prose of joint declarations? I believe that Rev. Niwano was remarkably prescient in this regard. Here is a statement he made more than three decades ago:

Let the countries now at war lay down their arms. Let the soldiers of the countries involved withdraw from the battle front. Let the developed nations come to the aid of the developing nations that are suffering severe shortages of food and medicines. It is absolutely essential that we restore at least a temporary peace by taking these steps. However, the real work begins after this. Each country should be encouraged to achieve its maximum growth according to its unique potential. And when each country has sufficiently developed its own fundamental nature, we will find that all nations can coexist without infringing upon each other’s rights, that international relations are smooth, and that harmony has been achieved. We would then have found, for the first time, the lasting peace we have sought so long.⁵ □

Notes

1. Nikkyo Niwano, *A Buddhist Approach to Peace* (1972, 1977), p. 62.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
3. Nikkyo Niwano, *Buddhism for Today* (1976, 1980), p. 177.
4. “The Kyoto Declaration on Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security” (2006), p. 4.
5. Niwano, *Buddhist Approach to Peace*, p. 58.

Peace from the Viewpoint of Religion

by Nikkyo Niwano

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

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

The conditions in the world today seem to be as chaotic as ever. Scientific advances have made the present what might be called the space age. Certainly things have changed in ways that would have been inconceivable before Japan's rapid economic growth during the 1960s. Life for many of us is becoming easier and richer as time goes by. Why then does it seem as if our hearts are increasingly poverty-stricken? Crimes like murder and theft continue to plague society. The violence of war, with the suffering and death it brings to countless people, continues unabated somewhere in the world. This is because human beings cannot rid themselves of their greed and selfish desires, and cannot put themselves in a position of oneness with others. Together with all beings, we are part of the great life force of the universe. However much we each seem to be separate, at root we are all one. Unless we awaken to this truth, however, discord and violence will continue. Only when all people truly understand this, when they achieve the mental attitude of oneness with all others, will the Pure Land of the Buddha be realized in this world.

I believe that human beings are fundamentally good, for all are endowed with the buddha-nature. The task of religion arises because people are distorted by the "evil" karma of the past. The great mission of religion today, therefore, is to reveal each person's buddha-nature and to allow all of them to recognize the truth and by doing so cause all people everywhere to reach a realization of their oneness with all others. In today's world, the need for religion is vital in many fields—in politics, education, and industry to name only a few. Religious organizations and groups, however, tend to regard only themselves as good, and do not acknowledge the good in others. Thus, no matter how much they talk about peace, it remains impossible to achieve. There is only one fundamental principle of religion, and it should not be possessively considered as belonging to only one religious group but should be openly discussed, studied, and followed by all together. People of different religions should rouse themselves to act for world peace by the tiny first step of acknowledging the oneness of themselves with others and loving others as they love themselves. If each religion

cooperates to achieve this great goal and plants the seeds of the true religious mind in people of a wide variety of viewpoints, it seems certain that the societies in which we live will become more peaceful.

Concepts like class struggle and reformation of the social system set up enemies before us or create the image of them in our minds. Any ideology that teaches us we should fight against them cannot bring salvation to the world. Even though such ideas can have temporary strength and control people through force, any social structure based on such an ideology is doomed to perish from a different power, since it was established through their own power. Human history demonstrates a constant repetition of this pattern. It is certainly not wise for us to keep doing the same thing.

Now is the time to bring true human wisdom into full play. But what is the nature of this wisdom? It is none other than the spirit of Mahayana Buddhism of the oneness of self with others, based on the profound truth that "all are one." Mahayana tells us that all will be liberated together, and all will build an ideal society together.

We now know that the universe stretches for some 14 billion light years, which means that it extends from about the distance that light travels in 14 billion years. We know that light travels 186,000 miles (300,000 km) per second, which is equal to seven and a half times around the earth. In this

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

vast expanse of space, the earth is no more than a single grain of sand.

Those living on the surface of this tiny grain, however, often form small groups with people, such as those who share the common interests or those with whom they are bound by ties of blood or land. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why confrontations and conflicts never cease. It was in light of this that the Buddha taught that "all beings exist interconnected one with the other," that "the self and the other are fundamentally the same," and that "all human beings must respect each other as children of the Buddha," for without such an understanding, it would be impossible

then our world will be a truly beautiful place in which to live.

It is within our own families that we must begin to work to create such a beautiful world. Because religion can change the hearts of people, I believe it is the most direct way to peace. Wars and other conflicts arise out of selfishness and discrimination against others, out of hatred and envy. I can state positively that unless we suppress or strive to diminish such shameful attitudes, wars will always be with us. Religion can give us the strength to do this. True religious faith teaches us perseverance, tolerance, and friendship among peoples, makes our hearts gentler, and increases the spirit of harmony. These attributes are shared by all great religions.

There can be no question about what our task for the future should be. It is essential that we constantly try to eliminate in all our deeds and actions any feelings of discrimination against others in ourselves as well as in others. We can do this as we lead our individual daily lives, striving to act instead in a spirit of compassion by recognizing the oneness of ourselves with others. We should be active in our society, working together to achieve happiness for all people.

People of religion must endeavor to eliminate the chronic human disease of discrimination within themselves, and contribute to the banishment of such feelings in society as a whole. With the deepening of the realization that the world is one, that all human beings are companions in life, the permanent peace that has so long been sought by people everywhere can at last be realized.

Of utmost importance in this is control of one's personal ego and educating ourselves in the means to peace. It is crucial for us to constantly study the various factors that obstruct peace, and to engage in peace activities together with others. Some may say that our true happiness depends on our arriving at the ultimate destination of world peace. I am certain, however, that if we begin by taking one small step at a time, we will be able to see a brighter and happier world before us depending on the portion equal to our endeavor. Peace work is not limited to activities that are called actions for peace. People who are awakened to the truth that they are sustained in their lives by all and realize the truth here and now will, I hope, foster the spirit of world peace through their self-realization and efforts at working for peace. □

Founder Niwano and his family chant the sutra together before their home Buddhist altar. Photographed in October 1982.

for people to get along with one another. And they certainly would not be able to find happiness.

If we were to stand atop the summit of Mount Fuji, we could see the great expanse of nature spread out below us, with the land and mountains and seas stretching into infinity in their beauty. If we achieve true serenity in our hearts, we will be able to regard others in the same calm and tolerant way. Because we know that our lives are being sustained by the Buddha, in the same way that the lives of all those around us are likewise in the hands of the Buddha, we are filled with the natural conviction that all of us are brothers and sisters. Since that is so, we feel the pain of others as keenly as we feel our own, and the sadness of others pierces our hearts as if our own experience were the cause. We also feel compelled to do something for others. That is the meaning of true compassion, or love for others. When people everywhere are able to share this compassion and love,

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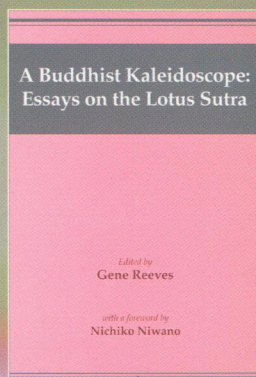
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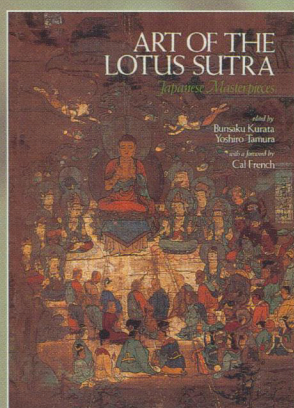
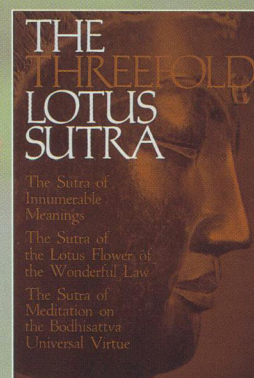
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