

FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

DHARMA WORLD

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in the Contemporary World

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Cover: In this conceptual design, the stars of the galaxy have rearranged themselves and are starting to take on the form of a buddha. The hands can be seen in the form of the mudras representing the Buddha's boundless compassion in granting fearlessness, and the Earth has taken the shape of the Buddha's loving heart. Cover design by Abinitio Design.

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DHARMA WORLD

For Living Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue

Itsukushima Shrine

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What “Giving” Really Means

by Yuji Numata

*One aspect of the true nature of giving is renunciation of the ego
that is at the root of suffering. Giving is necessary, however,
for more than just freedom from attachments.*

Giving is one of the most important practices of Buddhism. Although Shakyamuni Buddha was born some 2,500 years ago into a royal family in ancient India, he abandoned his privileged position and family to seek enlightenment. Later followers of Buddhism have called this “the Great Renunciation.” This “Great Renunciation” is the very reason that Buddhists today are able to study and practice the great teachings that were revealed by the Buddha.

“Giving” is a word that has many underlying aspects, but I think that the most important is “renunciation.” This is because renouncing those things to which one has a deep attachment is the starting point for attaining wisdom, which is the final goal of the Six Perfections.

Money and possessions probably are among the things to which people in any era have been most deeply attached. Although money and some possessions may be necessary for daily life, the root of suffering is having more than what is needed for that purpose. This is why Buddhism teaches that “material donations,” together with “donations of the Dharma” and “donations of the body (removing the anxieties or sufferings of others through one’s own effort),” are important forms of giving.

In the same way, we humans also have egos to which we cling. Day after day, most people cause friction and conflict with others because of their self-assertion and their selfish pursuits, which then brings about suffering. One meaning of giving is the renunciation of the ego that is at the root of such suffering.

Giving is necessary, however, for more than just freedom from attachments. It is a fact that all people have an innate desire in their hearts to be helpful to others and to make others happy. When we do something that makes others

happy, the smiles that spontaneously appear on our faces occur because somewhere within us there is already the seed that blossoms and causes us to feel happiness when giving.

In Buddhist terms, this could be called the workings of the buddha-nature. But in reality it is difficult for the buddha-nature to manifest itself on the surface, because our implicit egoism, that is, the thought that “I am all right and that is enough,” masks the buddha-nature. That is why in Rissho Kosei-kai the practice of giving is our number one objective, for which “putting others first” is our slogan. By putting the happiness of others above our own interests, we polish the surface and bring out our true buddha-nature.

Today, the nations of the world, riding the wave of globalization, are connecting economically and politically as never before. As a result, the poor everywhere are suffering because of competition for food and natural resources and the pursuit of financial returns driven by a kind of “money game” that is completely disconnected from economic reality. The true situation is that nations pursue profits only for themselves, ignoring the poverty in other lands in favor of rampant exploitation. This may differ from egoism at the individual level, but the origins are the same. It would not be wrong even to say that it represents a globalization of the type of egoism that says, “I am all right and that is enough.”

It is absolutely essential that nations cooperate in such areas as redistributing wealth and providing humanitarian aid for those suffering from hunger. Rissho Kosei-kai, in its humble way, has been aiding those suffering from hunger by conducting such activities as its Donate-a-Meal Movement. This is certainly putting giving into practice.

We must not forget, however, that the basic premises of such aid activities are expressions of the spirit of Mahayana Buddhism and bodhisattva thought such as, “We cannot be saved if others cannot be saved,” or “If there can be no saving of the entire world, there can be no saving of individuals.”

It may be that the spirit of giving that Buddhism offers is but a ripple compared with the huge waves of globalization and the principle of economic supremacy. But there is no way to transform those small ripples into larger waves without a steady increase in the number of people who understand and practice Buddhism. In that sense, Buddhism is now being called upon to teach the spirit of giving within the global perspective of “If there can be no saving of the entire world, there can be no saving of individuals.” □

Yuji Numata is director of the Dharma Missions of Rissho Kosei-kai at its headquarters in Tokyo.

The Enigma of Giving

by Brook Ziporyn

Do we really possess anything in the way we assume? Basic Buddhism says we do not. The act of giving turns our sense of control against itself.

There is something mysterious about the activity known as “giving.” It seems at first glance simple and commonplace: you possess some object, you transfer it to the possession of someone else. But a closer look reveals a number of riddles concealed in this everyday deed.

To possess something is to claim some sort of power over it. It means that you and no one else can control this thing, that it must obey your commands. You can tell this thing what to do and how to be. You can use it any way you like. You can consume it and enjoy it. And by the same token, so it seems, you can give it away.

But do we really possess anything in the way we assume? Basic Buddhism says that we do not. The central Buddhist teaching of “nonself” is founded on a critique of the very possibility of possession in any literal sense—possession of anything at all. Possession, according to the Buddha, should mean total control. But we have total control of nothing, not even our own bodies, our feelings, our perceptions, our volitions, or our own consciousness. In the *Anattalakkhana-sutta*, *Samyutta-nikaya* XXII, 59, an early Buddhist text from the Pali canon, the Buddha tells us:

“The body, monks, is not self. If the body were the self, this body would not lend itself to dis-ease. It would be

possible (to say) with regard to the body, ‘Let my body be thus. Let my body not be thus.’ But precisely because the body is not self, the body lends itself to dis-ease. And it is not possible (to say) with regard to the body, ‘Let my body be thus. Let my body not be thus.’ Feeling is not self. . . . Perception is not self. . . . Mental processes are not self. . . . Consciousness is not self. If consciousness were the self, this consciousness would not lend itself to dis-ease. It would be possible (to say) with regard to consciousness, ‘Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.’ But precisely because consciousness is not self, consciousness lends itself to dis-ease. And it is not possible (to say) with regard to consciousness, ‘Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.’”

The Buddha goes on to indicate the lesson to be drawn from these obvious but often unnoticed facts:

“How do you construe thus, monks—Is the body constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, Lord.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, Lord.”

“And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am?’”

“No, Lord.”

“. . . Is feeling constant or inconstant? . . . Is perception constant or inconstant? . . . Are mental processes constant or inconstant? . . . Is consciousness constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, Lord.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, Lord.”

“And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am?’”

“No, Lord.”

“Thus, monks, any body whatsoever—past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common

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or sublime; far or near: every body—is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.’

“Any feeling whatsoever . . . Any perception whatsoever . . . Any mental processes whatsoever . . . Any consciousness whatsoever—past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every consciousness—is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.’”

The threefold negation that concludes this passage—“This is not mine, this is not my self, this is not what I am”—provides a very simple and very powerful form of elementary Buddhist practice. Whatever you see, whatever you feel, whatever you become aware of in any way, simply remark to yourself: “This is not mine.” That is to say, “I do not own this. This is not my possession. For it is not possible for me—or any other single agent—to control how this thing will be or will not be.” Therefore it is not my self. Therefore, when conjoined with our customary desire to be the sole proprietor of it, to be the sole agent controlling it, it is necessarily suffering.

In this sense, it is from a Buddhist perspective literally impossible to “give.” One cannot give what one does not possess. And we do not possess anything. Therefore we cannot give anything.

And yet Buddhist scriptures put extraordinary stress on the virtue of “giving.” It is the first and in many cases the sole virtue enjoined to lay Buddhists. In Mahayana Buddhism, it is given pride of place as the first of the Perfections of Practice characteristic of a bodhisattva, upon which are built the practices of precept-keeping, endurance, assiduity, meditation, and wisdom. Giving is placed at the foundation of the structure that leads to liberation.

There are several obvious explanations for this. The first and most obvious is the cynical sociological explanation. The early Buddhist institution depended on donations for its very existence. Monks and nuns did no work; they lived by receiving alms from pious householders. Is it any wonder then that they extolled the virtue of giving above all others? It is a good thing for Buddhists to think about this, to face up to it, to acknowledge it. A healthy mistrust can be a good safeguard against abuses of the extraordinary power exercised by anyone who claims the religious authority to determine what is good and what is bad. If this were all there were to giving, and if having were both possible and unambiguously better than not having, we would be entirely within our rights to regard this as a complete explanation of the Buddhist stress on giving and to reject it as a bit of unscrupulous priestly manipulation. But this is not quite the whole story.

The second, in some sense opposite, explanation, is a more generous interpretation of the structure of the early Buddhist community. In this view, the insistence on the virtue of giving was part of a clever and very compassionate design showing

the Buddha’s organizational genius. For by stipulating that monastics must own no resources of their own and must depend on the generosity of laypeople, the Buddha ensured constant and close contact between these two groups. Monastics could not seclude themselves away from the world, could not hoard the Dharma, could not behave in ways that would discredit them in the eyes of the laity; they had to be both available and accountable in some sense and had to make good on the obligation incurred by accepting these alms. To take a layperson’s alms without seriously practicing would bring dire karmic consequences, under the same moral code that called for these alms.

Giving is thus the nodal point of the intersubjective network existing between the lay and monastic communities, ensuring their intimacy and interaction. It is for this reason that the “material giving” enjoined to laypeople is always matched to an equal and opposite obligation on the part of the monastic community, which is also conceived as a form of giving: “the gift of the Dharma.” “Giving” is here part of a relationship of exchange, but one that is not to be strictly construed as direct payment for services rendered. The laypeople give the gift of material support. The members of the monastic community are thereby enabled to become “experts” in Buddhist teaching and practice and are obligated to share their expertise with the lay community to whatever degree they are receptive to it.

These two sociological explanations, representing the extremes of malevolent suspicion and blind faith, each have their legitimate point to make, and both are worth heeding. But neither one, nor both together, can fully plumb the enigma of giving in its own right and the way it fits into the Buddhist conception of human welfare and liberation more generally. There are further implications embedded in this simple act of “giving something to someone else.”

First, it might be suggested that although it is not possible to give in the literal sense, the very fact of “giving” in the conventional sense—taking whatever we *erroneously regard* as our own, what we think is in our power, and suddenly transferring it to the state of *not being in our power any longer*—is a way of experiencing for ourselves the impermanence of our alleged control. It is a pragmatic concomitant to the intellectual practice of nonself. It demonstrates, actualizes, realizes the teaching of nonpossession, which in turn reveals our nonself.

In this sense, the act of giving something away is actually a revelation of its true nature, and of our own true nature. It is a direct, concrete manifestation of its reality, a dispelling of illusion not merely intellectually, as in the study of doctrines, but physically and pragmatically, in a way that affects our habits and will. By giving something to someone else, I break through the shroud of illusion that had been covering it and reveal its ultimate reality. It had appeared to be something belonging to some particular being, in the power of one particular person. By letting go of it, I show that it is not really mine, has never been mine.

But the way “giving” works to realize the experience of nonself is actually a bit more complicated. For it is the exercise of our control, in this case, that relinquishes our erroneous sense of control. We exercise our power over the object in the very act of claiming that we can relinquish our power. For we could not give it if we did not own it; giving is a lordly demonstration of our own mastery of the object at the very moment of giving it up. The act of giving turns our sense of control against itself. In this sense it is the most total reversal of habitual action, but at the same time the most complete exemplification of habitual action. It brings together total power and total powerlessness, as it were, converging into a single deed.

For in a certain sense, every deed, just by being an action, is a kind of giving. We cannot act without “giving” something to the world—contributing a quantum of force, a rearrangement of things, at least giving to reality this new event. To act is to give.

But in another sense, no action undertaken by a living being can be an act of true giving. For all of our actions are motivated by a desire for gain. When we are told that it is a good thing to give, our first question is, “Why? What will I get if I do?” And this is not only our first question: this is the very *structure* of every possible motivation. It is embedded in the very form of the imperative. For to say that it is “good” to do something or other already implies an appeal to our desire to gain something—even if it is something abstract and impalpable like merit, virtue, enlightenment, guiltlessness, or happiness.

“Goodness” implies a “good,” a commodity to be gained—as in the phrase “goods and services.” For living beings as ordinarily construed, as creatures with a definite and particular self embracing definite and particular interests, needs, and desires, it is impossible to be “motivated” to do anything without hoping to gain something in some sense, however abstract or indirect. To act, to do anything deliberately, is by definition to attempt to gain something. Any “giving” done in this way is thus not giving at all. It is a complicated backhanded way of getting something, of nongiving.

There is another reason, besides the implicit desire for gain and the implicit assertion of true prior ownership and control, that undermines the possibility of giving. I said that giving reveals the “unowned” nature of any thing. But this is only partially true. For, taken superficially, giving does not remove ownership in general. It simply transfers it from one place to another, from one owner to another. In this sense, it merely reinforces the underlying sense of ownership in general. If I think that by giving something to someone else, I make him or her the owner of that thing, I have merely changed the form of the basic illusion of ownership, I have not really dispelled it. This is true even if the gift I make is to a god or a buddha, if these beings are thought of as “selves,” that is, as single-handed controllers of anything at all. For in reality, the truth of nonself means not only that I myself don’t own or control anything single-handedly but that no

one and nothing—not God, not the Buddha, not Natural Law—can single-handedly control anything, that no one owns anything, that “ownership,” “control,” and their outgrowth, “selfhood,” are erroneous concepts.

For this reason, the Buddhist tradition has viewed ordinary “giving” as a kind of steppingstone toward the true Perfection of Giving, as practiced by a bodhisattva who has genuine insight into emptiness and nonself. This consists in seeing the emptiness, the voidness of self that pertains to all three of the putative beings involved in any act of giving: the emptiness of the giver, of the recipient, and of the gift itself. I, the giver, am empty: I cannot really own or control this object, I have never owned it, so I cannot relinquish my ownership of it; the act of giving is not due to myself alone, for there is no “myself” for it to be done by. The receiver, likewise, is empty: this object cannot be transferred into his ownership, for there is no one there to own it, no single-handed controller and possessor. And this object itself is empty: it has no unambiguous self-nature, no intrinsic value or characteristics for which it is single-handedly responsible. What has been transferred is no particular thing. In the ordinary sense, no giving has taken place. And yet there remains this act, this pure deed of “giving” itself, divested of these three imaginary sedimentations. It is “giving” in this sense that is of true significance for Buddhist life.

I said before that a gift to a god or a buddha would in principle be of no more value than any other gift, if these recipients—or indeed the givers or the gifts themselves—were thought of as “selves” who were single-handedly in control of anything at all. Whether a god is believed to be such a being in any given tradition I will for the moment leave aside. Yet it is a striking fact that many Buddhist scriptures praise the act of making offerings to the Buddha in very emphatic terms. There is perhaps no more striking example than that found in chapter 12 of Kumarajiva’s rendering of the Mahayana text known as the Lotus Sutra.

There the great Bodhisattva of the Wisdom of Emptiness, Manjusri, announces that he has seen, deep under the ocean, an eight-year-old dragon girl who, in spite of her youth, gender, and nonhuman species, can attain buddhahood “very quickly.” This claim is met with some skepticism by representatives of the older Buddhist institutional order, who point out that according to their understanding the achievement of buddhahood has many preconditions that this dragon girl has not met: long eons of practice and study and self-sacrifice, maturity, and a male human body. The dragon girl then appears before the assembly. In her possession is “a precious jewel equal in value to the entire three thousand-fold myriadfold world.” She gives this jewel to the Buddha. She asks about this transfer of the world-equalling jewel to the Buddha: “Was this quickly done?” All agree that it was indeed a most rapid event, this transfer of an object from one being’s hands to another’s. She says, “Watch me now attain buddhahood even more quickly.” She then in an instant transforms into a human male, and further, in the space of

The Dragon Princess offering a precious jewel to the Buddha. The frontispiece for chapter 12, "Devadatta," of the Lotus Sutra, bound as one of the thirty-three ornamental scrolls popularly called the Heike Nokyo (Heike Family Votive Sutra), enshrined at the Itsukushima Shrine, Hiroshima Prefecture. National Treasure.

that moment, carries out all the long and arduous practices of a bodhisattva, and just as quickly takes on the form of a buddha surrounded by the Pure Land he has created.

The jewel, let us say, is the world. Each of us, whoever we are, possesses nothing, but in another sense each of us, whoever we are, possesses a world, the world, our own version of this entire world. This is the world as we see it. It includes all that exists, but seen in our own particular way. We view this world through the lens of our concept of selfhood, our notion that we are owners, possessors, single-handedly determining the identity and value of all things. To give this jewel, this world that we possess by virtue of being the particular being we happen to be, of seeing the world from precisely this perspective, as a possession of just this being that is ourselves, to the Buddha—that would mean to let go of the world as we see it and place it instead in the hands of a buddha.

But what is a buddha? According to Buddhist belief, this epithet is meant to denote someone for whom there is no longer any conception of "self," either his own or that of

any other creature or entity. To give the world over to the Buddha is to see the world through the eyes of a buddha. This means to see even oneself, and even one's sense of possession, through the eyes of one for whom there no longer exists any conception of possession. This means, in short, to let go completely of all preconceptions of the world and allow it to disclose itself in its ownerless, unownable state.

To be unownable means to be unrestricted to any particular possessor, any particular master, any particular determiner. It means that each identity is not determinable in any one way. This includes our own identity—we are neither dragons nor humans, men nor women, children nor adults. The Buddha sees us as buddhas—that is, as beings freed from owning or being owned, who can, out of compassion, assume the form of any of these things but are not ultimately restricted to any single identity. In the single instant of giving the world over to the Buddha, then, we become buddhas.

This takes no more than an instant: we simply let go of the world, hand it over to the Buddha. In this instant, all beings are transformed. And this is, perhaps, the true meaning we can discern in each simple, rapid, everyday act of "giving": each time we give—and indeed, since each action is a type of giving, in every action we take—we have an obscure revelation of this true form of giving, bodied forth in the very

failure and impossibility of giving in the sense ordinarily conceived. We must see this "giving" as a manifestation of ownerlessness, a letting go, a relinquishing of control, a handing over of our deed to the world and to a viewpoint that sees this world and ourselves as an infinity of unowned and undeterminable ambiguities, empty of any single-handedly determined identities.

This takes only a moment and is going on every moment. When we feel ourselves releasing control even for a second, even in handing a pencil to someone else, we are handing the world over to the Buddha—that is, to the no one in particular who everywhere sees us as no one in particular and thus sees us present everywhere in everyone. To hand something to someone else is to hand it to the Buddha. To hand something to the Buddha is to hand it to *all* living beings. Every moment is then a gift—both a gift received from all beings and a gift offered to all beings, a gift from which nothing at all is gained. And this is a gift than which there is none greater. □

The “Economics of Giving”: An Interface of Varying Perspectives

by Lilian J. Sison and Jaime M. Jimenez

“Giving” is perhaps the expression that exemplifies social accountability and responsibility to other people regardless of their political, social, economic, and cultural background. The act of giving, however, is governed by varying motives, driven by myriad factors, and shaped by different realities.

A number of dualities could be observed if giving is analyzed through sociopolitical and political-economic lenses. First, giving to charity could be explained by the “nature of benefits individuals receive when they give to charity.” On the one hand, “donors may focus on the well-being of charity recipients. In this case, the benefits from giving have a public nature.” On the other hand, “donors may focus on the enjoyment they receive from the act of giving itself—that is the internal feeling they derive from ‘doing their share’ or ‘giving back to society.’ In this case, the benefits from giving have a private nature.”¹

The duality between the public benefits view and the private benefits view raises the political-economic issue of “crowding out—that government grants to charities will completely crowd out private contributions.” However, “empirical studies have found only limited crowding out, suggesting that most donors are not solely concerned with the charities’ accomplishments, regardless of the source of contributions; instead, private motivations, such as the joy of giving or recognition, play an important role in their giving decisions.”²

Second, giving could be examined using the gift paradigm and exchange paradigm of Genevieve Vaughan.³ As we live in a commoditized world, the exchange paradigm dominates the act of giving, relegating it as a “profit-oriented” and “ego-oriented” activity. As critically analyzed by Vaughan:

Exchange is self-reflecting. . . . In exchange, the satisfaction of the need of the other is only a means of the satisfaction of one’s own need. When everyone is doing this, the communication that occurs is altered and only succeeds in creating a group of isolated, unbounded, independent egos, not a community.⁴

What Vaughan proposes is a gift paradigm that views gift-giving as need oriented and other oriented.

Giving for the World

Another interesting angle on giving is giving for world development. According to A. B. Atkinson, “while giving for development is modest in total amount, it is one of the few direct ways in which individuals reveal information relevant to the properties of the social welfare function to be applied to global redistribution.” Again a duality exists in this political-economic analysis where individual givers could be termed as welfarist or nonwelfarist. He concludes that “the motives for giving for development are better seen in terms of the impact on a group of representative recipients. The concept of a ‘representative’ recipient for the individual donor has a parallel at the level of the national social welfare function, suggesting how we can derive a formulation that lies between the extremes of national egoism and global cosmopolitanism.”⁵

Atkinson proceeded to work on an alternative model to explain the economics of giving for overseas development. In place of the public-good (utility derived from the achieved results of the gift) and warm-glow (utility derived directly from the act of giving) models, he proposes the “identification model,” in which the individual donor “is assumed

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to be concerned with the impact on the living standards of the recipients.”⁶

Advocates of cosmopolitanism, however, assume a stronger stance. For instance, the Light Omega Organization, a center for spiritual teaching and healing in Massachusetts, in 2005 asserted that “a true ‘global community’ means that there cannot be people who are so distant from us that we are indifferent to their needs. Their needs must become *our* needs, and to be of help, we must go beyond good intentions into understanding something about the ‘economics of giving’ and, as a nation, make different decisions about how much we give, to whom, and for what reasons.”⁷

The organization, however, recognizes the reality that “at present, the ‘economics of giving’ cannot be isolated from national self-interest, from political motives, or from a culture’s wish to maintain its own comfort, even at the expense of others.”⁸ This perspective exposes two critical considerations that spell out both the certainties and uncertainties of global giving.

First, giving at the international level necessitates various channels and mechanisms. In the case of national and international crises due to natural disasters and social eventualities, the graphic coverage provided by the media quickly lures the public toward giving.⁹ Institutional extensions and linkages of the media serve as the concrete channels for donations. A host of local, national, and international organizations that are private, governmental, nongovernmental, and/or sectoral and multisectoral in nature also participate in varying degrees.

The Internet is another channel that provides faster and easier means of soliciting donations through electronic philanthropy sites. Further, tax incentives provided by governments encourage charitable giving to international relief and development organizations.¹⁰ These instrumentalities, however, are not disinterested entities and possess respective biases on who should give, what to give, how to give, where and when to give, and who to give with. Some philanthropic and nongovernmental organizations even serve as mere tax shelters as a means for big business to avoid and/or evade income taxes.

Second, the economics of giving is further convoluted by the amount of military expenditure that the world annually makes. In 2006, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimated that world military expenditures had reached \$1.204 trillion in then-current U.S. dollars.¹¹ In plain economics, the allotment of such an amount to sound development programs and unconditional aid that are oriented toward the poor could simply accomplish the following:¹²

- (a) Improve the lives of 3 billion people living on less than \$2 per day¹³
- (b) Send 110 million primary school age children to school, of which 60 percent are girls¹⁴
- (c) Fund rural development to improve the lives of three

out of every four people living on less than \$1 per day¹⁵

- (d) Provide lighting in the homes of 1.6 billion people living without electricity¹⁶
- (e) Provide food for approximately 790 million people in the developing world who are undernourished (almost two-thirds of whom reside in Asia and the Pacific¹⁷
- (f) Forgive the debts of numerous countries

Mind-boggling as the data are, the rule is that the needs of a particular country or people are not necessarily the concern of another country or people. Still, hope is not lost, as there are thriving events, issues, conditions, processes, and structures that could shape giving for a global cause.

Motivations for Global Giving

The Philanthropic Initiative, a Massachusetts-based organization, has identified seven motivations for global giving.¹⁸ The first refers to the existence of a global community. In the past, charitable giving has been largely confined to local and domestic issues and organizations with which donors have personal connections or of which they have personal knowledge. Today the media and the Internet, and the globalization process, have changed donors’ perspective of “community,” as they now consider international communities in their humanitarian investments.

Second, global crises, in the form of natural disasters and civil conflicts, have triggered high levels of humanitarian assistance. The 1984 famine in Ethiopia, the 2004 tsunami in South Asia, and the conflicts in Afghanistan and Kosovo are good examples.

Third, the issue of global inequality, where disparities in the distribution of wealth among nations represent unacceptable levels of inequity, constitutes for donors a “moral imperative that drives their philanthropy.”

Fourth, the realization of a global community, that peoples and nations without exception have become vulnerable to the world’s problems, which threaten their security, leads members to understand that “global problems require global solutions and resources.” This motivation emanates from the acknowledgment of global threats.

Together with the recognition of a global community, the next three motivations characterize an evolving global social capital that revolves around global interdependence, global opportunity, and global leverage. Global interdependence in the form of global commerce and trade has created social imbalances producing enormous wealth in some nations while adversely affecting a vast majority of the world’s population. More than ever, an increasing number of concerned people perceive that globalization should be backed by a “social imperative to invest internationally.”

Global opportunity, in turn, represents the emergence of global social infrastructures in the form of funding and “um-

brella” intermediaries, foundations, and NGOs to support and effectively use international resources is making global giving easier and more cost effective.

Finally, donors from wealthy nations who seek maximum benefit from their charitable work find in developing countries excellent opportunities to practice their philanthropy. Their charitable offerings, no matter how modest, can have a tremendous impact on a small village ravished by poverty. In addition, the personal friendships and goodwill developed with peoples and other cultures can be very gratifying indeed. Global leverage best defines this condition.

From the aforesaid accounts, what seems to be the defining factor in giving is the orientation that motivates people to give—the altruistic outlook that appreciates the existence and needs of others and does not merely seek public recognition and glorification. It is in this juncture of analysis that the sociocultural dimension warrants consideration.

Faith in Giving

Notwithstanding the exclusivist tendencies of religions and social philosophies, giving to and helping others critically constitute their core values, beliefs, and practices—none-theless in varying degrees of activity and passivity. Confucianism considers “self-realization” as a process of establishing oneself by helping others establish themselves and that the ability to comprehend the existence of another person is crucial to establishing the self. It is therefore instructive in that individuals should be conquered by the “great self” that “goes beyond self-centeredness. It relates to the family, the society, the state, and beyond to the world at large. It establishes these relationships as part of its own sensitivity and concern.”¹⁹

In the Buddhist economic ethic, the act of giving is expressed through the ideas of karma, religious giving (*dāna*), and compassion (*karuṇā*). It is more concerned with “cultivating the proper ethical attitudes toward wealth and giving” than with “changing the overall existing distribution of wealth.” However, the use of Maitreya by revolutionary and other protest movements spawned “the development of a more socially activist and transformative economic ethic focusing on ideas about economic and political justice.”²⁰

Helping others, according to the Hindu belief, is one of the Fifteen Laws of Life. The seventh law states: “If money helps a man to do good to others, it is of some value; but if not, it is simply a mass of evil, and the sooner it is got rid of, the better.”²¹ As for the Jewish philosophy, core value no. 6 (under the Values and Convictions of Hashivenu) states: “Because all people are created in the image of God, how we treat them is a reflection of our respect and love for Him. Therefore, true piety cannot exist apart from human decency.” The concern for others further becomes explicit in the story of the Good Samaritan, where “the issue is not WHO is our neighbor, but that we are to BE a neighbor, rendering assistance to anyone in need.”²²

For the Islamic faith, the third Pillar explicitly delegates

humans as mere stewards of earthly wealth. In particular, giving *zakat* (support for the needy) suggests:

All things belong to God, and wealth is therefore held by human beings in trust. The original meaning of the word *zakat* is both “purification” and “growth.” Giving *zakat* means “giving a specified percentage on certain properties to certain classes of needy people.” The percentage which is due on gold, silver, and cash funds that have reached the amount of about 85 grams of gold and held in possession for one lunar year is two and a half percent. Our possessions are purified by setting aside a small portion for those in need, and, like the pruning of plants, this cutting back balances and encourages new growth.

A person may also give as much as he or she pleases as voluntary alms or charity.²³

And from the perspective of the Roman Catholic Church, the most encompassing teaching is perhaps the *Populorum Progressio* (The Development of Peoples).²⁴ This encyclical from Pope Paul VI envisions and promotes holistic human development and the people-centeredness of development per se. Based on an international prognosis of social problems and maladies, the encyclical states:

Everyone must lend a ready hand to this task, particularly those who can do most by reason of their education, their office, or their authority. They should set a good example by contributing part of their own goods, as several of Our brother bishops have done. . . .

It is not just a question of eliminating hunger and reducing poverty. It is not just a question of fighting wretched conditions, though this is an urgent and necessary task. It involves building a human community where men can live truly human lives, free from discrimination on account of race, religion or nationality, free from servitude to other men or to natural forces which they cannot yet control satisfactorily.²⁵

The encyclical further provides for development at the international level and specifies the role of better-off nations:

This duty concerns first and foremost the wealthier nations. Their obligations stem from the human and supernatural brotherhood of man, and present a three-fold obligation: (1) mutual solidarity—the aid that the richer nations must give to developing nations; (2) social justice—the rectification of trade relations between strong and weak nations; (3) universal charity—the effort to build a more humane world community, where all can give and receive, and where the progress of some is not bought at the expense of others. The matter is urgent, for on it depends the future of world civilization. . . .

The duty of promoting human solidarity also falls upon the shoulders of nations: “It is a very important duty of

the advanced nations to help the developing nations. . . .”

Finally, “the superfluous goods of wealthier nations ought to be placed at the disposal of poorer nations. The rule, by virtue of which in times past those nearest us were to be helped in time of need, applies today to all the needy throughout the world.”²⁶

Further, the teaching of the Catholic Church about the distribution of wealth states that the goods of the earth are gifts from God and they are intended by God for the benefit of everyone. There is a social mortgage that guides our use of the world’s goods as stewards and trustees of creation and not as mere consumers and users.²⁷ Peoples and nations should therefore avoid the risk of increasing still more the wealth of the rich and the domination of the strong while leaving the poor in their misery and adding to the servitude of the oppressed.²⁸

Conclusion

The sociopolitical and political-economic analyses of the “economics of giving” flesh out the manifold mitigating factors of why people give. On the one hand, these help us understand the complex nature of giving; on the other hand, the analyses likewise reveal the challenges and uncertainties that giving for a global cause faces. Inseparable, however, is the sociocultural perspective, for it discloses the metaphysical dimension that stimulates giving.

Major religions and social philosophies have their respective values and means of promoting selflessness and world development. To advocate global giving and universal solidarity, therefore, is to advance the agenda of an interfaith dialogue that would harness and solidify the efforts for global giving—a dialogue that would function as an instrumentality to confront the uncertainties and obstacles of giving for a global cause. □

Notes

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The Meaning of Giving in the Contemporary World

by Kenichi Otsu

Important changes have taken place in churches' thinking about giving and receiving, with new emphasis on the causes of poverty in Asian and African nations.

The Christian churches in Japan have taken much from the churches of Europe and the United States as they have grown. In 2009 Japan's Protestant churches plan to jointly observe the 150th anniversary of the Protestant presence in Japan, commemorating the start of missionary work in the country in 1859 by the American Episcopal missionary John Liggins and the American Presbyterian missionary James Curtis Hepburn, and others. Christianity was transmitted to Japan through the work of European and American missionaries; in large part, the traditions and theology passed down from those missionaries live on today. From the early days until the present the Christian churches in Japan have received a lot of assistance, both financial and personal, from the churches of Europe and America, while their members have continued to exist as a minority in Japanese society. With Japan's post-World War II economic renaissance, the churches became more self-sufficient, and the Japanese churches of today have changed from churches that receive to churches that give.

Historical Background

Most of the world's Christian churches, including those in Japan, support their clergy, conduct their evangelical missionary work, and maintain and manage themselves by

collecting monetary offerings from their parishioners. Sometimes they will take up special collections for social service activities and for emergency relief for victims of disasters.

There are several places in the New Testament that record Jesus talking about contributions, or "offerings." It goes without saying that these words of Jesus were spoken in the context of the Judaism of his day. Jesus, witnessing the hypocrisy of the ostentatious almsgiving practiced by some believers, taught his disciples, and others who listened to him, that when giving to charity one should do it without seeking the recognition of others. He taught that charity represents an expression of thanks to God, not a means of demonstrating one's good deeds.

On one occasion Jesus, seeing a poor widow put two copper lepton coins (a minuscule amount of money) into the offertory box, said to his disciples, "Of all the persons putting money into the offertory box, this poor widow has put in the most . . . because she, though destitute, has put in all that she has, all her living" (Mark 12:43). Jesus emphasized that how sincerely an offering was made was of more importance than the amount. Jesus also taught his twelve disciples that they must "love one another" (John 13:34-35), saying that the most important of the commandments were to "love God" and to "love your neighbor as you love yourself." This signaled a new direction beyond the usual understanding of the nationalistic "loving of one's neighbors" of the Judaism of the time.

After Jesus's death and resurrection the churches, such as the Jerusalem church established around the disciple Peter and Jesus's brother James and the Gentile church established around Paul and Barnabas, formed a fellowship of believers based on love (*agape*) as taught by Jesus. Actually, in the early churches, Christian believers sold their homes and land, shared their personal possessions, and helped the poor. Furthermore, there is a record that the followers of the Gentile church in Macedonia came to the aid of the poor of the Jerusalem church. And Paul relates that the Macedonian faithful received a gift of the spirit from the Jerusalem faithful. This suggests a new relationship that goes beyond that between the givers and the receivers of aid.

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When Christianity spread throughout the world of the Roman Empire, followers who suffered persecution formed communities based on Jesus's concept of love. In 313 CE Christianity was officially recognized as an approved religion by the Roman Emperor Constantine I. Although Julian ("the Apostate"), who became emperor in 361 CE, rejected Christianity as a state religion, reviving instead the worship of Greek deities, it bears stressing that he recognized giving aid to the poor as one of the activities of the Christians of that time. From its early days, in addition to caring for its own maintenance and operations, Christian churches have paid special attention to the poor among their congregations and to those members of society who have no one to care for them. Today's education, medical care, social welfare, development aid, and emergency services and the like are directly descended from this.

What This Means Today

I recall a time more than twenty years ago when I worked on the Development and Service Program Committee of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). On that committee the creation of a system that would enable the sharing of support and cooperation among the various churches was being debated. The then-chairman of the committee, Rev. M. Azariah, general secretary of the Church of South India, asked, "Are you trying to create among the churches of Asia relationships of the donors of aid and the recipients of aid? If so, we do not need such relationships in Asia." The Asian churches were always recipients of aid from European and U.S. churches, which were always the donors of such aid. Another opposing view heard at the time was that the donors would say, "This aid money is our money, so we will decide how it is to be spent," to which the recipients would counter, "The money results from our exploitation, so it is only to be expected that it would be returned to us." It was in the context of such debates that the World Consultation on Resource Sharing, held in El Escorial, Spain, in 1987 by the World Council of Churches (WCC), brought about a major shift in how to think about giving and receiving.

Representatives of the churches in Africa and Asia were saying that donations targeting only poverty and hunger should be stopped. They wanted consideration given to the root causes that are responsible for the poverty. On the other hand, representatives of the European and U.S. churches felt that they were right to demand accountability from the recipients regarding the aid that was donated, saying that they had an obligation to their donors. Furthermore, the resource-sharing consultation meeting discussed sharing not only material and financial resources but also the issues confronting the churches of the Southern Hemisphere, sharing their struggles for justice and fairness and their personal and spiritual resources. The El Escorial consultation meeting was the starting point for a change in the way of thinking about both donors and recipients.

Today, one can see that the staffs of practically all the

decision-making bodies of European and U.S. churches and Christian church-related development aid organizations include Asian and African members. This can be understood as an indication not just of accountability to their own constituents, but also of accountability to the members on the other side. Rather than simply making donations that only target the needs of poor people in Asian and African nations, the churches of Northern Hemisphere countries, including Japan, are providing information and educating their own people to think about why such poverty exists in Asia and Africa. As to the experience of the National Christian Council (NCC) in Japan, it has created the International Sharing Committee and is undertaking joint efforts on issues related to material and personnel sharing. In this case the material assistance is not simply "giving," but rather "sharing."

Alamy/PPS

Slums sprawl in Manila, the Philippines, in the neighborhood of commercial areas, where high-rise buildings stand as a symbol of industrialization.

I will use as an example the recent rash of political killings in the Philippines under the administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. At the request of the NCC in the Philippines, the NCC in Japan participated in a joint inquiry by the WCC and the CCA and later succeeded in pressuring the Japanese government to ask the Philippine government to open an investigation into the situation. Moreover, relief donations such as those following the cyclone in Myanmar and the great earthquake in Sichuan, China, both of which occurred in May 2008, are being channeled to the affected areas through Action by Churches Together (ACT). This is an alliance of Protestant and Orthodox churches and related organizations, all members of the WCC or the Lutheran World Federation. Its coordinating office is in Geneva. This is proof that the tradition of the early churches, wherein Christians turned over their own belongings so that their church might do its work of assisting the poor and less fortunate, has been energetically passed on to the churches of today. □

Generosity in Christianity and Pāli Buddhism

by Elizabeth J. Harris

In whatsoever village or district there is a woman or a man who has taken refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and the Order . . . who dwells at home with heart free from the taint of stinginess, who is open-handed, pure-handed, delighting in giving up, one to ask a favour of, one who delights in sharing gifts with others,—of such an one recluses and hermits sing the praises in all quarters.¹

—Anguttara Nikāya

By contrast the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. . . . If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not be conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.²

—Galatians 5:22–26

In this article I will explore what Christianity and Buddhism, particularly Theravāda Buddhism, say about generosity and self-giving. I will do this in the light of our current global crisis, which is worsening because of our inability to share resources equitably.

Christianity and Generosity

The two quotations above suggest that the ability to give is praised in both Christianity and Theravāda Buddhism. Christianity grew from Judaism and shares with Judaism the Hebrew Bible, which Christians usually call the Old Testament. One theme that runs throughout the entire Hebrew Bible is concern that each person in society should

have the means to live. This is often linked with generosity, particularly to the stranger and to the poor. So one of the commandments of God in the early history of the Jewish people is, “You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”³ To ease the plight of widows, orphans, and foreigners resident in the land, the Jewish people were also commanded, every third year, to make available a tenth of their agricultural produce for people in need, and, every seventh year, to grant remission of debts. The text goes on:

Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land.”

Prophets arose in the history of the Jewish people to call them back to these commandments, when they were in danger of forgetting them. The prophet Amos, for instance, speaking in the eighth century BCE, accused the people of Israel of “trampling the head of the poor into the dust of the earth” and of pushing the “afflicted out of the way.”⁴ In other words, the people were guilty of a lack of generosity, a lack of the ability to give.

Christians look not only to the Hebrew Bible, but also to what they call the New Testament, which concentrates on the life and meaning of Jesus. Jesus’s teaching diverged little from traditional Jewish teaching on the question of giving,

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but there were differences in emphasis. A very radical message is given, for instance, to one idealistic, rich young man, who comes to him asking what he should do to gain eternal life. The young man is unsatisfied when Jesus mentions the usual commandments—not committing murder, adultery, or theft, and loving one's neighbor as oneself. Jesus then goes further and says, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell all your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."⁵ The

tongue. But he is told, in short, that there is a great chasm between heaven and hell and that, if he had listened to the prophets and their message about giving, he would not be in hell.⁶ One message of the New Testament is that we will be judged on whether we are able to give to those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, or in need of a welcome and on whether we can see the holy in every person.⁷

Giving forgiveness is also an important aspect of giving in the New Testament. "How many times shall I forgive if a member of the church sins against me—seven times?" one of the disciples asks Jesus at one point. The reply is, "Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy seven times."⁸

The New Testament also speaks of what could be called the ultimate in giving—the giving of one's very self. Jesus was killed by the Roman authorities in one of the most barbaric forms of torture that existed at the time—crucifixion. Christian theology sees this not as a random punishment but as an act of voluntary self-giving for the good of humanity by Jesus, a person who was both human and divine. So, Paul, one of the leaders of the early Christian communities, could say that Jesus "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross."⁹ This example was, for the early Christians, an invitation to imitate Jesus's humility and not to regard others as better than themselves.

Buddhism and Generosity

Buddhism does not speak of God or of punishment, but it certainly speaks of the consequences, for self and others, of deeds that lack compassion and the ability to give. The touching points between the two religions here are remarkable.

In Theravāda Buddhism, *dāna*, or giving things away to others, is crucially important, for it is the very first step on the Buddhist path toward having respect and care for all life. It is the first of the ten perfections (*pāramitā*) that an aspiring buddha must master and the first of two traditional lists of practices that would be known by many Buddhists in Asia. The first is a threefold practice linked with the gaining of merit: giving, the practice of virtue, meditation (*dāna*, *sīla*, *bhāvanā*). The second is a non-canonical list of ten wholesome actions, which begins with the three practices just mentioned and then continues with actions such as rejoicing in another's merit, paying homage, and listening to preaching.

Lying behind the practice of *dāna* in Buddhism is empathy for "the other" rooted in an appreciation that we all yearn for happiness and recoil from pain. To give to others is to increase their happiness and reduce their pain.

Lazarus and the Rich Man, a wood engraving made in 1865 after the drawing by Gustave Doré (1832–1883).

young man, according to the story, went away, grieving, because he had many possessions, which he was not willing to give away.

At another point in the records of Jesus's life, he tells the story of a rich man, who lives in luxury, ignoring a poor man, Lazarus, who lies at his gate and longs to satisfy his hunger with what falls from the rich man's table. "Even the dogs would come and lick his sores," we are told. The poor man dies and is taken to heaven. When the rich man dies, he is taken to hell, from where he sees Lazarus and pleads for Lazarus to come and give him some water to cool his

In traditional Buddhist contexts, *dāna* is often interpreted as giving to the monastic community. The midday meal given to the monastic community by lay people is popularly called *dāna*. Yet, the Pāli texts are adamant that *dāna* as generosity is not restricted to this. Generosity has to be for all, including the animal world. The Buddha is recorded as saying:

If one should throw away pot-scurings or the rinsings of cups into a pool or cesspit, even with the idea of feeding the creatures that live therein, I declare it would be a source of merit for him.¹⁰

The fifth-century CE scholar, Buddhaghosa, in his remarkable commentary on the Pāli canon, the *Visuddhimagga*, when explaining the meditative practice of recollecting generosity, wrote:

One who wants to develop the recollection of generosity should be naturally devoted to generosity and the constant practice of giving and sharing. Or alternatively, if he is one who is starting the development of it, he should make the resolution: "From now on, when there is anyone present to receive, I shall not eat a mouthful without having given a gift."¹¹

In Theravāda Buddhism as in Christianity, there are examples of radical self-giving. The Buddha in his previous lives, according to the traditional narratives, gave of himself time and time again in order to master the perfection of *dāna*. One story shows the Buddha-to-be as an elephant who jumps to his death to feed a hungry tigress. In other stories, he sacrifices his hands, his feet, or other parts of his body. One of the early British converts to Buddhism, Allan Bennett, who became Venerable Ananda Metteyya in Myanmar in 1901, wrote that this self-sacrifice was, "so great, so utterly beyond our ken, that we can only try to dimly represent it in terms of human life and thought and action."¹² For Bennett, it was the ability to give up his life or his organs for the good of others that ultimately equipped the Buddha-to-be to become a buddha.

The Other Side of Generosity: Refraining

In both Christianity and Buddhism, the emphasis on giving or generosity is intricately linked to other, equally important, qualities. Supreme among them are renunciation and refraining—refraining from selfish reactions, refraining from greed, and refraining from worry about personal security. Unless our own desires and wants are curbed, generosity is impossible. For me, this is exceptionally important in our global crisis. Among the most significant inhibitors of the generosity that could help the world today are fear for self and personal greed.

What has come to be known as the Sermon on the Mount

in Christianity—probably an amalgam of teachings given by Jesus at different times—addresses both fear for self and consumerism, with a message that places trust and faith first. Jesus is recorded as saying these words:

If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.¹³

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.¹⁴

Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? . . . But strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.¹⁵

The Kingdom of God, in Christianity, is a state of society in which no one lives in deprivation. Right relationships prevail. There is both justice and compassion. The sick are healed and the despairing are made whole. No one is involved in activities that hurt others. People are able to give healing, forgiveness, and freedom from fear to one another. It is to this ideal that Jesus called people. His message was—if you work for these things, then you will receive all that you need, in this life and in the next. Within this, the forgetting of self was most important, as this recorded saying of Jesus shows:

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life.¹⁶

In Theravāda Buddhism, the practice of *dāna* is intimately linked with the eradication of greed and hatred from the mind, non-retaliation and the overcoming of any clinging to the self. The links between this and what I have just said about Christian giving and non-consumerism is plain. In Buddhism, however, there is a greater emphasis on training the mind so that a point is reached where fear for self is absent and compassion for the "other" takes over, a compassion that is willing to give all. There is a story in the Pāli Canon of a monk called Punnovāda who comes to the Buddha saying that he is to travel to a place where the people are known to be hostile. The Buddha asks him what he would do if the people of that place attack him. The possible violence

The bodhisattva, or the Buddha in one of his previous lives, lies before a famished tigress to feed her and her cubs. Details of a mural in the Thousand Buddha Cave in Kizil, Xinjiang Uygur, China (4th–6th centuries).

he might receive is listed, from verbal abuse to physical harm. After each one, Punnovāda responds by saying that he would be thankful that the abuse was not even more serious. When the Buddha eventually mentions murder, Punnovāda says:

If the people of Sunaparanta deprive me of life with a sharp knife, revered sir, it will be thus for me there; I will say, “There are disciples of the Lord, who, disgusted by the body and the life-principle and ashamed of them, look about for a knife. I have come to this knife without having looked for it.”¹⁷

Venerable Punnovāda in his wish to give the teachings to a new community is willing to give his own life as well.

Concluding Thoughts

In our current global crisis, how do we interpret this? Can Buddhism and Christianity help the world take a new course? What now needs to be given? And what now needs to be given up? There are no easy answers here.

Certainly, the world must take seriously the message of both Buddhism and Christianity that accumulation of material goods will never bring the world happiness. If I went further and said that we should emulate the fearlessness spoken about in the Buddhist and Christian texts, I might be told that there are very real reasons for fear in the world because the threats coming to us from terrorism and political destabilization are too great for us to ignore. Yet, courage and fearlessness born of trust in the teachings of Jesus or the Buddha are most important, I believe, in our age. We who are followers of these two great figures must be willing to speak out against the consumerism and greed that is tearing our world apart, even if this goes against current economic and political theory. We also must be willing to declare that

affluent nations have a duty of generosity to help the poor meet their needs for food, shelter, health care, and education, and that this must come before expenditure on arms or space exploration, and before producing ever more sophisticated methods of communication. In short, our message should be that generosity and renunciation must go hand in hand. □

Notes

1. *Anguttara Nikāya*, i 225 (all translations of the Pāli texts are taken from the versions published by the Pāli Text Society).
2. *The Bible with Apocrypha*, New Revised Standard Version (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), Galatians 5:22–26. All subsequent quotations from the Bible will be taken from this version.
3. *The Bible*, Deuteronomy 10:19.
4. *The Bible*, Amos 2:6–7.
5. *The Bible*, Matthew 19:21.
6. *The Bible*, Luke 16:19–31.
7. See also *The Bible*, Matthew 25:31–46, which carries another parable on this subject.
8. *The Bible*, Matthew 18:21–22.
9. *The Bible*, Philippians 2:7–8.
10. *Anguttara Nikāya*, i 161.
11. *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, Bhikkhu Nanamoli, trans. (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1979), 220; *Visuddhimagga* VII. 115.
12. Allan Bennett, *The Wisdom of the Aryas* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1923), 111, quoted in Elizabeth J. Harris, *Ananda Metteyya: The First British Emissary of Buddhism* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1998), 27.
13. *The Bible*, Luke 6:29–31.
14. *The Bible*, Matthew 6:19–21.
15. *The Bible*, Matthew 6:25–33.
16. *The Bible*, Matthew 16:24–26.
17. *Punnovādasutta, Majjhima Nikāya*, III 269.

The Concept of Giving in a Multireligious Perspective

by Jacqueline Rougé

*All religions stress the need to effectively attend to the needs of others.
Giving is not advocated for its own sake but as a way of showing
selfless love and sincere compassion to one's neighbor.*

Giving is putting one's time, money, or other assets at the disposal of someone else while not asking for or expecting anything in return. It is not like selling or lending, when the buyer or borrower must, in exchange, give money or a promise for the future.

Gratuitousness is customary within a family or other small community. The father and mother freely bring in what they have or can provide. Children and other weaker members freely receive what they require. In larger groups, however, trading is the normal practice. Trying to do away with this customary system of economic relations and abolish the use of money as an instrument of exchange always ends in disastrous failure. This was the fate, for example, of a utopian attempt of this sort by the Khmer Rouge in "Democratic Kampuchea" (Cambodia).

Religions are not opposed to normal trading relations provided that the stronger party does not take advantage of the weaker's inferiority to set an unfair price. But they also greatly value selfless giving. In Buddhism, *dana paramita* is the first of the Six Perfections. Mosaic law demands that Jews give out one-tenth of their resources. In Islam, almsgiving is

one of the five obligations Muslims must fulfill. Christians see charity as the greatest virtue, meaning by that both divine love and "works of charity," helping the needy in every possible way. "For the Church," Pope Benedict XVI says, "charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being."

Religions thus can help steer the world away from the present global situation in which the right of unlimited profit-taking and maximum possession seems to be given priority as a matter of course.

Giving in the Modern World

In today's world, where commercialization seems to prevail everywhere, giving plays a surprisingly large part. That presents be given to friends and loved ones for their weddings and birthdays, at Christmastime and on similar festive occasions, is a universal custom. Many people give money to neighbors or relatives in need or help them in other ways. Some nuns give up everything to devote their entire lives to the care of the needy. Large donations by private citizens or companies often significantly augment the amount of tax money spent by governments on culture, education, and social services. Foundations established with grants from rich people or legacies from them after they die fund medical research, finance the restoration of historic monuments and works of art, subsidize museums and institutions of higher learning, set up scholarships, and perform many other useful tasks. Major fund-raising campaigns appeal to the public's generosity for similar goals, often with great success.

Private individuals who give money in this way often enjoy tax benefits. In France, for example, half the amounts contributed to a large number of organizations with a cultural or social object is deducted from the giver's income tax. This demonstrates to what extent governments value such contributions.

From 1984 to 1994, Jacqueline Rougé was an active president of the International Committee of the World Conference of Religions for Peace and is now one of its honorary presidents. She is also now official Religions for Peace representative with UNESCO.

Some initiatives of this sort are explicitly motivated by religious considerations. Others are not. But in all cases, they break with the current global culture of selfish individualism in a way that reflects the lasting influence of religion on many people's behavior. Religious leaders play their role by inciting believers to give generously not only to charitable institutions established within their denomination but to secular ones as well.

Religion also emphasizes that giving money is not the only thing required. Signing a check does not, after all, demand much effort. Dedicating some of one's free time in support of a worthwhile cause is perhaps even more meritorious. Wherever mere survival does not absorb the total time and energy of adult men and women, volunteer workers are found who help take care of various social needs that public institutions do not meet. They visit the sick and comfort the dying. They help the homeless, jobless poor maintain a minimum of human dignity while searching for better circumstances. They provide free tutoring to schoolchildren from impoverished backgrounds. They guide visitors in landmarks and museums. All of this, of course, is done without pay.

Some volunteers are moved by feelings of simple humanity, natural compassion, and a desire to be helpful to others. But religion is a strong motive. A reporter once followed Mother Teresa near the sick and the dying in the most destitute slums of Kolkata (Calcutta). At the end of the day, he told her: "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars." She is reported to have replied: "Neither would I, but for Jesus Christ, I do it willingly." The importance of a religious motivation is confirmed by the fact that in societies where materialism is growing and the influence of religion seems to be on the wane, volunteers are more difficult to find among young, able retired men and women who often seem to prefer more gratifying activities.

Religious Norms for True Selfless Giving

All religions stress the need to effectively attend to the needs of other human beings. Giving is not advocated for its own sake but as a way of showing actual selfless love and sincere compassion to one's neighbor. Giving must be done with kindness and, one might say, an intelligent perception of what will do the most good for the recipient.

Giving is hardly worth the name when it is, in fact, selfish, if, for example, givers hope to profit by advertising their generosity. Jesus warned against that when he said: "Let your left hand be ignorant of what your right hand is doing."

When asked "to spare a dime" by a beggar on the street, it is not enough just to fish out a coin and drop it into his extended cap without a word, without a smile, without even eye contact. True giving is not merely a way to get rid of an annoying presence while pretending to comply with the commands of one's religion. In fact, this beggar may not want money only. He may perhaps be in need even more of respect and a minimum of sympathy.

Giving a child a piece of candy just to keep the child quiet for a while and go on with one's business undisturbed has, similarly, little to do with selfless love. Children need attention, not indulgence. Besides, refusing to give them something that may be harmful to them can in no way be considered a violation of religious commands.

The need to respect the person whom one would wish to help may require a high degree of tactfulness. He or she is, for the moment, in a position of inferiority. He or she might want to show an ability to quickly get back to self-sufficiency.

Mother Teresa caring for a patient at the Home for the Dying Destitute in Kolkata (Calcutta), India.

A loan rather than a gift may be what will take into account this important consideration.

For the same reason, there was a time when foreign aid to poorer countries took the form of loans rather than outright grants. Later developments showed this to have been a mistake. These loans and the massive indebtedness they caused made the situation of these countries worse, not better. Foreign grants, however, raise the problem of "conditionality." Donor agencies usually insist on deciding what use will be made of the funds they provide. They often prescribe also what policies should be followed by the recipient government in other areas. This is not an outright gift when the benefi-

ciary country cannot do what it wants with the money received.

This is a difficult issue, even in relations among individuals. I do well if I give money to an inveterate gambler or drinker who asks me to help pay for a cure to get rid of addiction. A religious person must, a priori, be prepared to trust any human being. If, however, I have strong reasons to fear that the person will use my gift for indulging his or her vice, I would do better by giving nothing directly and paying the unpaid rent to the person's landlord, so that the person concerned and his or her family can avoid the risk of being thrown out of their home.

Developing countries would often wish to spend the proceeds of foreign grants for other purposes than those prescribed by the donors. In some cases, indeed, local authorities know what their people require better than foreign aid institutions. In other cases, unfortunately, donors are right to suspect the honesty of their local partners. One possible solution to this dilemma is an open and public negotiation between donor agencies and a regional group of developing countries. Such a discussion may result in a common understanding of what is really needed and can form the basis of an agreement satisfactory to both parties.

Giving aid to poorer developing countries is, in any case, something that religions must ceaselessly urge, reminding governments in richer countries of the commitments they announce and too often ignore later.

A recent example is the declaration issued in Sapporo on July 3, 2008, by one hundred high-level religious leaders representing all major religions and all regions in the world on the eve of the summit meeting of the eight major economic powers. They said: "We request the G8 Summit to take leadership to ensure the achievement of the MDGs [Millennium Development Goals], including delivery on the Gleneagles aid quantity and quality promises, particularly reaching the goal of 0.7 percent of Gross National Income for Official Development Assistance."

Opportunity for Multireligious Cooperation

A group of senior religious leaders representing the World Conference of Religions for Peace delivered this text to the Japanese prime minister in his capacity as host and chairman of the G8 Summit in Hokkaido. Many readers of DHARMA WORLD know about this important multireligious organization, of which Rev. Nikkyo Niwano was one of the founders. Religions for Peace, on this occasion, made a strong appeal to rich countries for increasing their giving to people in need in poorer countries.

This appeal is based not on political considerations but on a set of moral values that all religions share and are willing to proclaim together. This is how the Sapporo declaration puts it: "We are united in our commitment to peace, which includes our concern for the inviolable dignity of all people the dire suffering of so many, and the well-being of our shared Earth. . . . Action by all governments, civil society, private

sector, religious communities, and—in the final analysis—every member of the human family is required to advance the common good. . . . We are united in the conviction that all religions obligate their followers to work for justice among all peoples and to care for one another and our common home, the earth."

This is clearly an appeal for giving, as described above, in the broadest sense of the word. Giving is presented as a major contribution to world peace. It is a way to overcome some of the intolerable situations that feed rebellion. It helps people to get used to cooperation rather than resorting to the desperate choice of fighting.

This appeal is remarkable also for describing the duty to

A leader of a local nongovernmental organization explains a self-help project to villagers in Bangladesh in 2005.

give as universal in two different ways. Everyone is called to give and to give to everyone. One's generosity must not be reserved to members of one's particular community. Giving must transcend all borders, national, cultural, ethnic, or religious. What senior leaders of all major religions in the world had in mind is the entire human race. They emphasized its unity and the brotherly love that must prevail over all divisions by referring to it as "the human family."

Multireligious cooperation is capable also of making giving more effective. In the Sapporo declaration, representative figures of all religions noted that "collectively, our religious communities are the world's largest social networks, which reach into the farthest corners of the earth and include countless institutions dedicated to caring for people." Pooling these facilities in mixed towns or villages can be most useful. It helps reduce the tensions between communities. It is welcomed by potential donors who would hesitate to subsidize competing establishments.

The spirit of giving is needed today more than ever before. Religions can help to keep it alive and fortify it. Spreading it to the coming generations should be a major concern of anyone concerned with education. □

Words of Encouragement

by Nichiko Niwano

Being careful in the words we use toward each other teaches consideration for the importance and value of each and every life.

Words are said to be the messenger of the heart. When our words show that we regard another person's problem as if it were our own, they touch that person deeply and give encouragement and strength. Wishing for the happiness of others and showing an attitude of consideration for them causes us to offer words that move other people. At the root of this is our sense of oneness with others, the feeling that we and others are caused to live as one life.

Opening our eyes to the truth that "the heavens and the earth spring from the same source. All living beings are one body," we become as others and others become as ourselves. Then the suffering and sadness of another is no longer only that person's problem and we can naturally speak to other people with kindness. The Zen master Dogen (1200–1253) expressed the sense of one's self as "the self of others," teaching that we and others are the same self, because the source of all life is one.

The Japanese philosopher Masahiro Yasuoka (1898–1983) said, "Keeping in good health is the beginning of virtue." Staying well and full of vitality is a demonstration of the creative life force that is forever unchanging. Every day when we get up in the morning we should say to ourselves, "Today I feel in top shape!" and begin the day full of energy.

Saying "I'm Sorry"

A Japanese elementary school is reported to have started a "kind words" program because "children who use words carefully can learn the value of life." The aim of the program is to prevent serious incidents from arising caused by bullying or verbal abuse, and to have the pupils consider the importance and value of each life by being careful in the words they use toward each other.

On the classroom walls are displayed thoughtful, kind words and phrases on strips of papers, which the pupils prepared: "Thank you," "Nice day," "Good work," "That's fine," and the like.

The poet Hiroshi Osada, who writes the "Children's Po-

On July 20, Rev. Nichiko Niwano calls on the new president of the Focolare Movement, Ms. Maria Voce, successor to the late founder of the movement, Ms. Chiara Lubich, at the movement's headquarters at Rocca di Papa near Rome.

etry" newspaper column, reports that "what lingered at the very bottom of my heart was children's use of words when they had to say 'I'm sorry.' It is not always easy to bring ourselves to say 'I'm sorry' when we ought to do so. When we can sincerely say 'I'm sorry,' however, we regain something important. 'I'm sorry' are words that can restore the relationship between oneself and another person."

When our saying the words "I'm sorry" reaches the heart of the person to whom we are speaking, a feeling of relief comes over us. We are then able to consider whether the words we used to that person were appropriate and can give more thought to the feelings our words can cause. Speaking with kindness and consideration not only benefits ourselves, of course, it also lifts the spirits and brings out the best in others. □

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Giving: Basis for a Culture of Solidarity and Foundation Stone for a Global Ethic

by Günther Gebhardt

*Giving can serve merely to pacify one's conscience
when actually it is necessary to do more.*

Over the last few years donor conferences have become quite common in international politics, whether for rebuilding Afghanistan, disaster relief following the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean, or aid for the stabilization of Kosovo in the former Yugoslavia. During such gatherings of politicians and diplomats, countries and governments commit to allocate certain amounts as relief aid. In spite of all the pragmatic and strategic interests involved, donor conferences can also express the solidarity of the international community with some of its individual members that, for example, have been affected by a natural catastrophe or the consequences of war: "We will not leave you alone. We share a common responsibility for the weakest among us. We are donating some of our wealth to those that need it most to help them bounce back."

Giving: A Basic Human Activity

Here we can basically feel a certain solidarity on a global scale, even if the actual success of such conferences differs from case to case. Especially surprising is the enormous amount of money that the populations of different countries contribute to relief organizations (religious as well as secu-

lar) so that they can—even in faraway countries—alleviate the suffering that follows major catastrophes. Even people of modest financial means participate in such charitable campaigns, as was seen to the surprise of many, for example, in China after the calamitous earthquake in the spring of 2008.

A worldwide global solidarity is indeed a development of recent times, since it has now become possible to learn instantaneously about the situation of people even in distant lands by means of the Internet and the mass media. In recent times people have also been able to visit such countries themselves and get to know the people there. However, a commitment to assist the poor and the weak, which finds its practical expression in charitable donations, can be found quite early in human history. At first such support was limited to one's family and clan, or to one's own ethnic group. Later this expanded beyond geographic boundaries to one's own religious denomination or to the social class with which one was associated by common problems, as in the labor movement, for example. Today we speak of the international community as a global family or the human family.

Of course, the act of giving does not necessarily have anything to do with helping the poor and the weak. A birthday present is simply an expression of affection or friendship for another human being. Giving can also honor a person's achievements, as in the presentation of awards. Moreover, giving can play a basic role in the economy, not only in the old system of barter. Giving can also represent sacrifice, in a religious as well as a secular context: to give something of yourself for a higher purpose or a greater goal. However, I will limit my considerations here to giving as an expression of compassion and support for the weak and disadvantaged.

One can be ambivalent about the reasons for giving to the poor, however. It can serve merely to pacify one's conscience, when actually it should be necessary to do more. It can cement the balance between power and dependence; the donor can feel superior to the receiver and may take advantage of this presumed superiority. Thus, particularly in the

Günther Gebhardt, a Christian theologian, was secretary-general of the World Conference of Religions for Peace Europe in Geneva from 1984 to 1997. Since 1998 Dr. Gebhardt has been the senior advisor at the Global Ethic Foundation in Tübingen, Germany.

area of aid to developing countries, a change has occurred during the last decades, from a neocolonial attitude of purely charitable donations, which did not really improve the situation of the developing countries, to helping people to help themselves. Often this proverb is quoted: "It is more important to teach a hungry person how to fish than to give him or her a fish." Aid to developing countries has turned into cooperation, ideally into a form of partnership. People in the "rich" countries have thus learned that even a "poor" partner in the South has a lot to give in return, especially in a social or spiritual sense.

Therefore the attitude and the motivation behind the act of giving matter as well. An attitude of sympathy, empathy, or compassion is necessary so that the act of giving can become an expression of true solidarity with others. These are basic human sentiments and thus elements of a fundamental ethics of humanity as well. These attitudes do not

temple or other religious practices. One who gives to the needy is blessed by God. In the Middle Ages the great scholar Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) emphasized that better than almsgiving was helping the poor get back on their feet by lending them money or giving them work. Thus the self-esteem of the poor would not be damaged.

In the Christian New Testament, Jesus is depicted as the one who preaches "the Gospel to the poor," who turns toward the outcasts of society and restores their human dignity. The equality of love of God and love of one's fellow human being, based on the Jewish Bible, which should express itself in practical deeds, is a central element of the message of the New Testament. However, Jesus warns against making a show of almsgiving. The donor should demonstrate an attitude of humility: "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Matt. 6:3). In the sermon about the final judgment in the Gospel of Matthew (chapter 25), the service to one of "the least brothers" is identified with service to Christ himself. In the early Christian church, mutual solidarity and support of the needy play an important role. In this context the apostle Paul recalls the words of Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). The Christian churches have established a tight network of relief organizations, and collections for social purposes are being held regularly, even in church services. Some Christians during the forty days of fasting before Easter renounce a certain kind of comfort and donate the corresponding amount to an aid project—a practice that is very similar to the Donate-a-Meal Movement of Risho Kosei-kai.

In Islam, the obligatory social contribution (*zakat*) is one of the five pillars of religion and thus is equal to the creed, the daily prayer, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. This lends extraordinary importance to giving to the poor. At countless places in the Qur'an and in the traditional records of the prophet Muhammad (Hadith), one is called upon to help the needy, orphans, and travelers. In one Hadith collection it is emphasized that the practice of *zakat* causes givers to be less attached to their possessions and thus to develop in themselves an attitude of sympathy for their needy fellow human beings.

In Buddhism, especially in Theravada Buddhism, it is considered a meritorious deed for lay followers to give monks their daily meals. But beyond this traditional activity there are also more recent forms of social commitment. Some groups,

Workers at an electric manufacturing company at Chongqing, China, lining up on their company's grounds to make a donation on May 15 to help victims of the massive earthquake that hit China's Sichuan Province.

necessarily have to be based on spirituality or religion. But giving, to give something of one's own to the less fortunate, is indeed a central aspect of the ethics of all religions. In the history of religion this activity is referred to as almsgiving and charity. All religions have created institutions to help the needy. A few brief examples from the various world religions help to illustrate this.

Giving: A Common Ethical Concern

In the Hebrew Bible, practical support for the poor, widows, orphans, and strangers is virtually considered the criterion for a person's relationship with God. Prophets such as Amos and Isaiah demonstrate this pointedly as service to God in the truest sense. Thus they consider this form of giving, of social activity, as superior to making an offering in the

Young Rissho Kosei-kai members taking part in a UNICEF fund-raising campaign during the Buddhist organization's annual Youth Day, which was held this year on May 18.

which call themselves “engaged Buddhists,” understand the Buddhist truth of liberation from suffering explicitly as beyond the individual level and as a call for a change in the social and economic structures that cause such suffering. This leads to direct support for the poor and disadvantaged. Especially in more recent movements in Mahayana Buddhism, such as Rissho Kosei-kai, social activities and the attitude of giving play a particularly important role.

In the Sikh religion, social responsibility finds its most evident expression in a unique institution: the free kitchen (*langar*). In the *gurdwaras* (temples), a meal in which everyone can partake for free is regularly prepared. This is an act of generous giving, expressing an ethos of equality and sharing. At the Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona in 2004, the Sikhs organized a *langar* at every lunch period for hundreds of guests from all religions.

These are just a few examples of the role that the practice of giving plays in certain religions. I apologize for all the reductions and oversimplifications, which unfortunately I could not avoid in this rather short account. However, the decisive result of this reflection is: Giving is considered a central ethical activity in all religions. This has two consequences.

First, giving as an expression of solidarity and as a step toward greater social justice is an element of a common ethic of humanity, of a global ethic.

Second, because in all religions an ethical consensus regarding the importance of giving exists, all religions could and should increasingly stand up for the disadvantaged and work at eliminating poverty and injustice. Interreligious organizations such as Religions for Peace realized this long ago and practice such cooperation on social projects, for

example, in Africa. The participants in the World Religious Leaders Summit for Peace: On the Occasion of the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit rightly emphasized in their “Call from Sapporo” (July 3, 2008):

“Collectively, our religious communities are the world’s largest social networks, which reach into the farthest corners of the earth and include countless institutions dedicated to caring for people. Religions share many moral traditions that can provide basic principles essential for just and harmonious relations among persons and communities. Moreover, religious traditions—each in its own way—cultivate the spiritualities of compassion and love essential for genuine reconciliation and peace. Mobilizing these great social, moral, and spiritual dimensions of the world’s religions in service of the common good is essential for the well-being of the human family. We are united in the conviction that all religions obligate their followers to work for justice among all peoples and to care for one another and our common home, the earth. We commit to doing so.”

A Global Ethic Based on Giving

The conviction expressed in this “Call from Sapporo” especially conveys the idea of a global ethic. It takes as a starting point that the necessary global ethical values and standards are found in the ancient religious and philosophical traditions of humanity. In the Declaration toward a Global Ethic at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1993, more than two hundred representatives of the world's religions expressed a consensus regarding such common ethical values, standards, and attitudes (the declaration can be accessed at www.global-ethic.org/dat-english/index.htm). On the basis of the principle of humanity, “Every human being must be treated humanely,” and the Golden Rule of reciprocity, “What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others,” concrete directives for four central areas of living are developed in the form of self-commitment:

- Commitment to a culture of nonviolence and respect for life.
- Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order.
- Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness.
- Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women.

The ethical call for building a culture of solidarity and a just economic order in the declaration of Chicago starts from a clear description of the present situation, in which the individual as well as structural dimensions are addressed. The declaration then recalls the ancient commandment, found in all religions and civilizations, “You shall not steal,” and addresses some concrete areas of action:

“If the plight of the poorest billions of humans on this

planet, particularly women and children, is to be improved, the world economy must be structured more justly. Individual good deeds, and assistance projects, indispensable though they be, are insufficient. The participation of all states and the authority of international organizations are needed to build just economic institutions.

"A solution which can be supported by all sides must be sought for the debt crisis and the poverty of the dissolving second world, and even more the third world. . . . In the developed countries, a distinction must be made between necessary and limitless consumption, between socially beneficial and non-beneficial uses of property, between justified and unjustified uses of natural resources, and between a profit-only and a socially beneficial and ecologically oriented market economy. Even the developing nations must search their national consciences. . . .

"To be authentically human in the spirit of our great religious and ethical traditions means the following:

- We must utilize economic and political power for *service to humanity* instead of misusing it in ruthless battles for domination. We must develop a spirit of compassion with those who suffer, with special care for the children, the aged, the poor, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely.
- We must cultivate *mutual respect* and consideration, so as to reach a reasonable balance of interests, instead of think-

ing only of unlimited power and unavoidable competitive struggles.

- We must value a *sense of moderation and modesty* instead of an unquenchable greed for money, prestige, and consumption. In greed humans lose their 'souls,' their freedom, their composure, their inner peace, and thus that which makes them human."

A global ethic is not meant as a sort of "hyperreligion" or as a substitute for various individual traditions, whether based on religion or not. The declaration of Chicago is no substitute for the Sermon on the Mount, the Torah, the Qur'an, or the Buddhist didactic scriptures. It concerns the question of a basic ethic. The declaration of Chicago and the texts regarding the project of a global ethic thus do not contain concrete instructions for individual complex questions of business ethics or social policy. This is a matter for economists and special ethicists. However, justice in the distribution of goods, solidarity with the weak and the poor, and the demand to improve their material condition—these are, as we have seen, ethical directives in all religions. Thus, people from various religious and philosophical traditions can each with their individual ethics contribute to a global ethic that aims at the development of a culture of solidarity and the promotion of a just economic system. Here the attitude of giving plays an important role. □

Call from Sapporo: World Religious Leaders Summit for Peace

On July 2–3, the Japanese Committee of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (Religions for Peace Japan) convened the World Religious Leaders Summit for Peace in Sapporo, Hokkaido, with the cooperation of its international body of Religions for Peace. The conference was held shortly before the summit of the Group of Eight leading industrialized nations (G8) held July 7–9 by Lake Toya near Sapporo. The religious summit was attended by about three hundred religious leaders, including one hundred delegates, from twenty-three countries and regions. The participants discussed pressing global issues and worked out a statement to the G8 leaders, which lists areas of concern that they requested the G8 Summit to discuss or tackle in its action plans. Following is the text of the statement, which is entitled “Call from Sapporo: World Religious Leaders Summit for Peace.”

Introduction

We, senior leaders of the world’s religions, have convened in a World Religious Leaders Summit for Peace in Sapporo, Japan, just prior to the Group of Eight (G8) Hokkaido Toyako Summit. We are united in our commitment to peace, which includes our concern for the inviolable dignity of all people, the dire suffering of so many, and the well-being of our shared Earth.

We carry forward important work begun in multireligious meetings held just prior to the G8 summits in Moscow (2006) and Cologne (2007). We have been convened by Religions for Peace Japan in partnership with the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

We are united in our call to the G8 to take bold action to address the threats that confront humanity, including the destruction of the environment and climate change, extreme global poverty and deteriorating food security, nuclear arms, terrorism, and violent conflict. Addressing these threats requires urgent action by the G8.

Action by all governments, civil society, private sector, religious communities, and—in the final analysis—every member of the human family is required to advance the common good. We urge the G8 to respond in ways designed to engage these stakeholders in building our common future.

Religious communities have roles in building peace. Before outlining these roles, we acknowledge with genuine sorrow that all religions have at times been misused in fomenting violence.*

We reject this misuse of religions and commit ourselves to engaging our communities for the common good. Collectively, our religious communities are the world’s largest social networks, which reach into the farthest corners of

the earth and include countless institutions dedicated to caring for people. Religions share many moral traditions that can provide basic principles essential for just and harmonious relations among persons and communities. Moreover, religious traditions—each in its own way—cultivate spiritualities of compassion and love essential for genuine reconciliation and peace. Mobilizing these great social, moral, and spiritual dimensions of the world’s religions in service of the common good is essential for the well-being of the human family. We are united in the conviction that all religions obligate their followers to work for justice among all peoples and to care for one another and our common home, the earth. We commit to doing so.

Our Commitment

As religious leaders, we are committed to the path of multi-religious cooperation for peace. Religious traditions—each in its own way—summon their followers to the path of multi-religious cooperation for the common good. This path

- leads to senior religious leaders from all faith traditions and billions of believers working together for a positive and holistic state of peace;
- enjoins the world’s believers to engage their moral heritages and spiritual traditions in taking individual responsibility for protecting our earth; and
- brings politicians, civil society, and religious communities together to forge needed consensus on values that can serve as the basis of just and creative policies.

Shared Security

An overarching notion that we believe can help express the comprehensive character of our moral and religious con-

cerns is “Shared Security.” Shared Security builds on the concept of Human Security by focusing on the fundamental interrelatedness of all persons and the environment.

Shared Security includes a comprehensive respect for the interconnectedness and dignity of all life. It is based upon our mutual interdependence and the most universal and fundamental fact that all humans live in one world. It recognizes that the well-being of one is related to the well-being of others and ultimately to the earth that we all share. It calls us to recognize that past, present, and future are linked. Together, we must acknowledge past failings, face present challenges, and accept our responsibilities to future generations.

Shared Security is concerned with the full continuum of human relations—from relationships among individuals to the ways that peoples are organized in nations or international organizations. It respects state sovereignty but also supports democratic and transparent cooperation among states and peoples.

It follows that the security of one actor of international relations must not be detrimental to others. International actors who are responsible for global decision making must act transparently and be open to the contributions of all stakeholders, including religious communities, which represent a major part of civil society. A similar concern for a just world order, respecting different national and religious traditions, was made at the Moscow World Summit of Religious Leaders (2006).

As religious leaders, we recognize that there is a foundational moral imperative for advancing Shared Security: We are all responsible for one another’s well-being.

Calls to Action

We call upon the G8 to include in their discussions and plans of action the following areas of concern:

1. The Destruction of the Environment and Climate Change
Japan, the host of this year’s G8 Summit, possesses a spiritual term, *mottainai*, meaning “do not waste, use everything in a fashion commensurate with its true value.” This concept recognizes the mysterious “giftedness” of all existence and urges that natural resources must be used appropriately, while simultaneously encouraging responsible and sustainable consumption. The concept also provides a base for recognizing that it is unethical to burden future generations with excessive pollution or other gross environmental imbalances. Development must be environmentally sustainable.

We must also draw attention to the link between the health of the environment and war. In addition to killing people, disrupting the lives of entire societies, and thwarting development, war destroys the ecosystem. Massive defense expenditures, a global total of US\$1.34 trillion in 2007 according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, both directly assault the ecosystem and squander monies that urgently need to be directed to sustainable development. It is a grave contradiction to advocate for a

The Closing Ceremony on July 3.

reduction of global warming gas emissions while simultaneously maintaining or even expanding military expenditures.

We urge the G8 Summit to:

- Commit to a reduction of total national defense and military expenditures and utilize the saved funds to establish an Earth Fund dedicated to environmental protection
- Establish a new binding framework to follow up the Kyoto Protocols that limits global average temperature rise to avert catastrophic climate change
- Provide leadership to expand energy efficiency and conservation efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emission rates
- Advance policies and practices that increase forestation and other forms of carbon dioxide sequestration
- Recognize that trading “global warming gas emission rights” has at best limited value and could disproportionately penalize the least developed
- Facilitate major investments in the development of new sources of energy and technology essential to sustainable development, specifically without jeopardizing food security
- Implement the recommendations contained in the Kobe 3R Action Plan (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle)

2. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The massive scale of extreme poverty at a time of unprecedented wealth is a moral scandal. Poverty is exacerbated by structural injustices in the global economy, which must be

addressed. At the midpoint of the Millennium Development Campaign, religious leaders gathered at the Cologne World Summit of Religious Leaders (2007). They recognized an urgent need not only to fulfill the pledges but, in some instances, to exceed the commitments made. Meeting these challenges is even more urgent, not least due to the growing food crisis. Here again, we call for the funds achieved from the reduction of defense budgets to be allocated in support of sustainable development and poverty reduction.

We request the G8 Summit to:

- Take leadership to ensure the achievement of the MDGs, including delivery on the Gleneagles aid quantity and quality promises, particularly reaching the goal of 0.7 percent of Gross National Income for Official Development Assistance
- Provide urgently needed global leadership to address the growing crisis of food shortages, including needed emergency responses
- Meet its pledges of increased resources to scale up the response to HIV and AIDS, malaria, and other infectious diseases, and to ensure universal access to HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment, and care services by 2010
- Dedicate resources to empower women and girls as key agents in overcoming poverty
- Make the legal empowerment of the poor a key objective in its development-assistance strategies
- Fulfill its commitment to ensure a development-friendly outcome of the Doha Round of trade negotiations

3. Nuclear Disarmament

Mindful that the 2008 G8 Summit is taking place in Japan, the only country that has suffered the horror of a nuclear attack, we religious leaders stand in solidarity with our Japanese hosts to call for the elimination of all nuclear weapons. We believe that the attempt to militarily dominate the sea, space, neutral territories, or states creates obstacles on the way to nuclear and conventional disarmament. We also believe that conventional disarmament and efforts to ban military technologies and initiatives that could provoke a new arms race should go hand in hand with efforts to advance nuclear disarmament.

We request the G8 Summit to:

- Pursue rigorous implementation of nuclear reduction and nonproliferation policies leading to the goal of total nuclear disarmament. As stipulated in article 6 of the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the five acknowledged nuclear-weapon states must act on their commitments to work toward eliminating existing nuclear weapons as rapidly as possible. States with nuclear weapons that have not acknowledged them must acknowledge their possession, make similar commitments to their elimination, and enter into the NPT.
- Push for prompt ratifications and entry into force of the

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and commit to take no action leading toward the reintroduction of any form of nuclear weapons testing.

- Continue to demonstrate positive leadership for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and other global initiatives to control the transfer of nuclear materials and stop further proliferation.

4. Terrorism and Violent Conflict

Terrorism—the intentional killing of innocent people as a way of achieving a political objective—is never morally justified, whether it is perpetrated by individuals, groups, or states. Moreover, military responses to terrorism injure innocent persons, provide additional motivation for terrorist groups, and endanger basic freedoms in the societies attempting to protect themselves from terrorism.

Violent military conflict—the attempt to settle serious disputes by military force—typically results in the loss of innocent lives, disruption of society, thwarting of development, and destruction of the environment.

Every effort must be made to utilize nonviolent means to thwart terrorism and resolve disputes to advance peace.

We call upon the G8 to:

- Provide global leadership designed to combat the victimization of groups based on culture or creed
- Work to end occupation and establish just, honorable, and comprehensive peace in all countries or territories that are occupied
- Reaffirm and strengthen its commitment to standards of international law in its efforts to counteract terrorism and promote international security

- Acknowledge and support the importance of multireligious partnerships to help address the problems of terrorism and violent conflict
- Work to limit the production and export of arms into areas of violent conflict
- Promote a culture of peace by advancing nonviolent conflict resolution and peace education

Conclusion

The G8 has the responsibility to use boldness and wisdom to advance the common good in partnership with the religious communities and all other stakeholders.

We—leaders of diverse religious communities—recommit ourselves to working together and with other partners of goodwill to address the threats that confront us all. While we labor to meet the challenges of our day, we are deeply mindful of religious traditions that have taught—each in its own way—compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation and that these are essential for genuine peace.

We respectfully urge the G8 to recognize, facilitate, and effectively support the importance of multireligious cooperation, as it takes needed steps to advance the common good. □

* We recall and embrace as our own a historic multireligious acknowledgment on the misuse of religion: “As men and women of religions, we confess in humility and penitence that we have very often betrayed our religious ideals and our commitment to peace. It is not religion that has failed the cause of peace, but religious people. This betrayal of religion can and must be corrected” (from the global multireligious declaration adopted at the Religions for Peace First World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan, 1970).

Fourteen world religious leaders representing the World Conference of Religions for Peace called on the Japanese prime minister, Mr. Yasuo Fukuda, at his office in Tokyo, on July 4 to deliver the statement, “Call from Sapporo,” and asked him to carry it to the G8 Summit.

Health, Disease, and Healing: The Buddhist Contribution

by Pinit Ratanakul

Understanding health only in relation to particular parts of the human organism is unacceptable to Buddhism. In the Buddhist holistic perspective, disease is the expression of the disturbed harmony in our life as a whole.

Health and disease are among the common experiences of human life, and as such they are the special concern of religion. Religion, in every society, in every stage of history, upholds the value of well-being and health as necessary for a meaningful life and provides its adherents with ways and means to enhance their health and to enable them to deal creatively with human vulnerability to disease, pain, and suffering.

There is a consensus that health and well-being do not mean only or simply the absence of pain and suffering or the lack of disease, disability, defects, and death but also have a positive meaning. There is much debate today over what this positive meaning is and what its implications are in matters of life and death in the role and function of health care professionals who serve as promoters of health and healers of disease. Those involved in the discussions are from the disciplines of medicine, psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and religion. Each has an insight that sheds

light on the questions of human health and the healing process. Religion provides frameworks of belief and pictures of reality that contextualize health, interpret it, and suggest how it should be understood and what kind of behavior promotes it.

The Buddha has been known as the Peerless Healer because of his deep concern with mental health, his discovery of the root causes of illness, and the *dhamma* he prescribed for its cure, comparable to medicine in its protective, preventive, and restorative powers. This paper is a discussion of the Buddhist contribution to the concept of health, disease, and healing and the difference it makes to our approaches to the questions of what constitutes health and what actions are needed to promote genuine healing. The discussion is confined to the teaching and practices of Theravada Buddhism prevalent in many countries of Southeast Asia, such as Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar.

Buddhist Worldview, Dependent Origination, and *Kamma*

The Buddhist worldview is holistic and is primarily based on a belief in the interdependence of all phenomena and a correlation between mutually conditioning causes and effects. This belief is formulated by the principle of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), also referred to as the law of conditionality, the causal nexus that operates in all phenomena—physical, psychological, and moral. Accordingly, whether in the universe, the natural world, or human society, or within oneself, nothing exists as a separate unit but only as an interdependent part of the whole. The Buddhist worldview also comprises a belief in the law of *kamma*, stressing the correlation between a deed and its subsequent consequences (*vipāka*). The correlation is understood in terms of the relation of the earlier to the latter phase of a single process. This implies that the Buddhist law of *kamma* does not entail complete determinism or fatalism, as it is

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often wrongly understood to do. If such a concept of determinism were accepted, there would be no possibility of the eradication of suffering. A person would always be bad, for it is his or her *kamma* to be bad. The law of *kamma* only stresses the conditionality of the relation between cause and effect and does not rule with an iron hand. The effect of *kamma* can be mitigated not only in one life but even beyond, since, according to Buddhism, life is not limited to a single, individual existence.

The present life is only a part of the round of existence (*samsāra*) that stretches out across space and time. A single existence is conditioned by others preceding it and in turn conditions one or a series of successive existences. Existence is thus at the same time an *effect* in one respect and a *cause* in another. This imprisonment in the round of existence is the result of one's own deeds (*kamma*), good or bad. One reaps what one sowed in the past. Conditioned by deeds, the present form of existence can be changed or dissolved by deeds. This is possible because the present is not the *total* effect of the past. It is simultaneously cause and effect. As an *effect*, we are conditioned by the causal matrix made up of the social and biological continuities of past lives themselves and thus are the effect of our past deeds. What we are now is the result of what we have been before. But as a *cause*, we are the absolute master of our destiny. The present, though elusive, is the building block of the future. What we shall be depends on what we are and shall do with our own choice.

Dependent Origination, Health, and *Kamma*

Within this worldview, health and disease involve the overall state of a human being and are interwoven with many nonmedical factors, such as economics, education, social and cultural milieu, and ethics or morality. All of these conditional factors need to be seriously taken into account in the understanding of health and disease. Health is therefore to be understood in its wholeness. It is the expression of harmony—within oneself, in one's social relationships, and in relation to the natural environment. To be concerned about a person's health means to be concerned with the whole person: his or her physical, mental, and moral dimensions; social, familial, and work relationships; as well as the environment in which the person lives and which acts on him or her.

Therefore, the tendency to understand health only in relation to particular parts of the human organism, such as the defects, is unacceptable to Buddhism. In the Buddhist holistic perspective, disease is the expression of the disturbed harmony in our life as a whole. By its physical symptoms, disease draws our attention to this disturbed harmony. Hence, healing in Buddhism is not the mere treatment of these measurable symptoms. It is more an expression of the combined efforts of the mind and the body to overcome disease than a fight between medicine and disease. Its real

aim is to enable one who is ill to bring back harmony within oneself and in one's relationships with others and the natural environment. In this context, healing is not an end in itself; rather, it is a means by which medicine helps to serve the value of human health and well-being.

The Buddhist holistic approach to health and disease also involves *kamma* as an important contributing factor. In the Buddhist perspective, good health is the correlated effect of good *kamma* in the past and vice versa. This is to emphasize that there is a relationship between morality and health. Health depends on our lifestyle, that is, the way we think, the way we feel, and the way we live. Illness is the consequence of an unhealthy lifestyle, such as one characterized by sensual indulgence, for example. This moral component of the Buddhist perspective on health gives important roles to spiritual activities and religious practices in the promotion of health and healing.

Perhaps we will understand the role of *kamma* in health and illness as we look at the following cases. For example, there are cases in which, although the treatment given was successful, the patient died, and others in which, in spite of ineffective treatment, the patient lived. There are also cases of remarkable and unexpected recoveries when modern medicine had given up all hope of remission. Such cases strengthen the belief that in addition to the physical cause of disease, illness can also be the result of bad *kamma* in past lives. A disease with a *kammic* cause cannot be cured until that *kammic* effect is exhausted. But the *kamma* of everyone is a mystery both to oneself and to others. Hence, no ordinary person can definitely know which disease is caused by *kamma*. Therefore, one has to be careful in imputing *kamma*, especially for disease, because it may lead to a fatalistic attitude of not seeking any cure at all or giving up treatment out of despair. Buddhism advises us that for practical purposes we have to look upon all diseases as though they are produced by mere physical causes. This is because even if the disease has a *kammic* cause, it should be treated.

As no condition is permanent and as the causal relationship between the deed and its correlated consequence is more conditional than deterministic, there is a possibility for the disease to be cured as long as life continues. On the other hand, we cannot tell at what point the effect of bad *kamma* will be exhausted. Therefore, we need to take advantage of whatever means of curing and treatment are available. Such treatment, even if it cannot produce a cure, is still useful because appropriate physical and psychological conditions are needed for the *kammic* effect to take place. The presence of a predisposition to certain diseases through past *kamma* and the physical condition (*nissaya-paccaya*) to produce the disease will provide the opportunity for the disease to arise. But having a certain treatment will prevent a bad *kammic* result from manifesting fully. This kind of treatment does not interfere with the working of the individual *kamma* but reduces its severity. The advice of Buddhism to a person

with an incurable disease is to be patient with the treatment and to perform good deeds to mitigate the effects of the past bad *kamma*. At least the individual effort to maintain or recover is itself good *kamma*, which will yield good results.

The emphasis on *kamma* in relation to health and disease does not lead to fatalism or to pessimism. The law of *kamma* does not rule with an iron hand or bring a curse. This law only stresses the causal relationship between cause and effect. It does not entail complete determinism. To believe in *kamma* is to take personal responsibility for health. Health is not given. It has to be gained by one's own efforts, and one should not blame others for the suffering one is going through because of the disease. Besides, it may be a comfort to think that our illness is no fault of our present lives but the legacy of a far distant past and that by our own attitudes and efforts toward illness, good *kammic* effects can arise. The belief in *kamma* also enables us to cope with the painful aspects of life, for example, suffering from terminal illnesses such as leukemia or a more malignant form of cancer with tranquillity and without fruitless struggle, without a negative and depressed mental state. Such acceptance will also enable us to overcome despair, endure the condition to our final days, and thus die a peaceful death.

It may be concluded then that the emphasis on the *kammic* cause of health and disease implies individual responsibility for health and illness, as *kamma* (action and its effects) is created by choices we made in past lives. Health is to be gained by continuing personal efforts in this life. Good deeds (e.g., regular exercise, proper nutrition, etc.) lead to good health, whereas bad deeds (e.g., poor living habits, abusing the body and the mind) in this and previous lives bring illness. This sense of personal responsibility is much needed in health care. At present, with the invention of "miracle drugs" and the development of new technologies, many people tend to have the illusion that all pain and suffering in life can be eliminated and that all suffering is bad, whether physical, mental, emotional, moral, or spiritual. And by blaming it on external forces, people seek external means (e.g., pills, injections, therapies, etc.) of alleviating suffering rather than examining themselves and their own lives and seeking to change what it is within themselves that has resulted in illness. The Buddhist *kamma* view of health and disease, on the contrary, recognizes the reality of self-inflicted disease that can be traced to an individual's own lifestyle and habits and encourages one to seek also the cause of one's disease, pain, and suffering within oneself, that is, in relation to one's own lifestyle, decisions, attitudes, and relationships that must be changed. It also recognizes the positive role of disease and suffering in refining our spirit and in strengthening our moral character, courage, self-understanding, and sympathy toward others.

However, the Buddhist emphasis on *individual kamma* or *personal responsibility* for health does not mean that Buddhism assigns personal responsibility for all illness. In

the Buddhist view, *kamma* has both individual and social dimensions. This latter component is what may be termed *social kamma*, which, in health care, refers to the environmental factors that could aggravate or mitigate an individual *kamma*. These factors, such as socioeconomic factors—for example, unhealthy/dangerous and healthy/safe working conditions—can act as a hazardous/supporting environment for the illness/health of an individual. And society could hold employers and businesses responsible if they did not maintain a healthy environment for their workers or provide safety measures. This concept of social *kamma* also implies responsibility on the part of the government to provide adequate health care services for all its citizens in proportion to their health needs and medical conditions.

The Body and Physical Health

In the Buddhist perspective, the unique body of each of us, both in appearance and structure, is the result of our past *kamma*. The human body is at the same time the means by which we contact the world and the physical manifestation of our mind. Being such an important instrument, the body must be duly attended to—that is, one must not abuse it through food, alcohol, or drugs or by taxing it with over-indulgence and deprivation. Even enlightenment, the highest goal of Buddhism, cannot be attained through the mortification of the body, as witnessed in the personal experience of the Buddha. This is because of the interdependency of the mind and the body. Intellectual illumination can be attained only when the body is not deprived of anything necessary for the healthy and efficient functioning of all bodily organs.

According to Buddhism, any life lived solely for self-seeking or self-indulgence is a life not worth living. Buddhism therefore encourages us to make use of the body for higher purposes, particularly for attaining the highest goal, *nibbāna*, liberation from the endless cycle of birth and rebirth (*samsāra*). The constant practice of morality and meditation will enable us to have self-control over the appetites, sensations, and egoistic drives.

Physical health is viewed by Buddhism as constituted by the normal functioning of the body and its interrelated organs. When one of them fails to function, debility and disease set in. The normal function of the bodily organs is the result of the harmony and equilibrium of the four primary elements (*dhātu*) in the body: earth (*paṭhavī*), water (*āpo*), wind (*vāyo*), and fire (*tejo*). If the balance is disturbed, the normal function is disrupted and a state of disease appears.

Curing is the restoration of this balance, that is, the putting of the entire physical being, and not just the pathologically afflicted part, into good condition. Since each part of the human body is organically related to all other parts, for good health the entire body must be in good condition. In view of the fact that the body, like all phenomena, is always in a state of change, decline, and decay, physical health cannot last long. It is impossible for the body to be perfectly

healthy and free from all diseases at all times. Human life is vulnerable to disease at every stage. Disease is a reminder of human fragility. This implies that complete health is not a totally attainable state. Human wholeness or well-being, therefore, does not mean the absence of all pain and suffering in life but entails learning how to deal with pain and suffering and discovering how to use it and transcend it for the sake of personal growth and the sympathetic understanding of others.

The Mind and Mental Health

Physical health is important because Buddhism regards it as the means to intellectual enlightenment. Buddhism does not want people to spend a large part of their lives in poor health, for then they would not be able to devote themselves to the highest purposes. Although Buddhism views the mind and the body as existing in interdependence, its teaching gives special attention to the mind and its power. It is stated in the very first verse of the Dhammapada that what we are is the result of our thoughts. The source of our lives and hence of our happiness or unhappiness lies within us—within our power. No one can harm us but ourselves. It is the kinds of thoughts we entertain that improve or weaken our physical well-being and that also ennoble or degrade us. This is the reason that Buddhism designates thought as the cause of both physical and verbal actions with their *kammic* results, considers mental health as being of the utmost importance, and stresses the training of the mind to attain the highest stage of health as its sole concern. This preoccupation with mental health is also regarded as the true vocation of Buddhist monks. The training is based on the belief that both the body and the mind are prone to sickness. But since the mind is able to detach itself from the body, it is possible to have a healthy mind within a sick body. The advice given by the Buddha to his disciple who was suffering from old age was to keep the mind sound in the sick body.

According to Buddhism, for the mind to be healthy, first of all it is necessary for us to develop a correct view (*sammādiṭṭhi*) of the world and ourselves, that is, a realistic acceptance of *tilakkhana*, the three traits of existence: impermanence (*aniccā*); unsubstantiality, or not-self (*anattā*); and suffering, or unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*). The adoption of the distorted view makes us see the transitory as permanent, the painful as happy, the impure as pure, and what is not-self as self.

Consequently we crave and struggle for something that does not seem to change, that is, the illusory permanent and identical self and the permanent object of desire—and we always suffer disappointment. By accepting things as they really are, the self is seen as nothing more than a name for the complex of psychophysical elements (*nāma-rūpa*), which are *aniccā*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*, as in other beings, and the mind no longer craves the satisfaction of ego desires (*taṇhā*) nor clings to any object, be it wealth or power. Freed from these ego desires and attachments to the material world, the

mind is at rest, and thereby psychological suffering is eliminated, which leads to improved mental health.

Apart from changing our distorted thought (*micchā-diṭṭhi*) by the adoption of this correct view and by developing an attitude of detachment toward the world and ourselves, our mental health is dependent on our power to rein in our appetites and to restrain and/or eradicate negative mental states (*akusala-citta*) such as greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*), as well as possessive and aggressive tendencies. All of these unwholesome states (*akusala-citta*) can act as the cause of mental and physical illness. Such control can be achieved through the practice of morality (*sīla*) and meditation (*bhāvanā*). All Buddhist precepts and all kinds of meditation are aimed at controlling the senses, impulses, and instincts and at easing the tension and eliminating the unwholesomeness of thoughts that tend to make the mind sick.

Meditation and Health

For the realization of the Buddhist vision of health, Buddhism designates meditation and prayer as an important means for the devotees to practice. In addition to Buddhism, the tradition of meditation and prayer exists in many religions, such as Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Adherents of these religions have been practicing it both for religious purposes and for health benefits.

In relation to health, the purpose of Buddhist meditation (*bhāvanā*) is to obtain spiritual health and mental health, which could affect physical health. There are three kinds of meditation commonly practiced in Theravada countries such as Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar, and they are named after the effects they produce. These are calm meditation (*samatha*), insight meditation (*vipassanā*), and loving-kindness meditation (*metta bhāvanā*).

Samatha is intended to develop mindfulness (*sati*) and concentration (*samādhi*), to make the mind one-pointed and calm like a still, clear pond, lucid and unruffled. Mindfulness involves both being conscious of and knowing (*sampajañña*) whatever arises, from moment to moment, without being stuck to it. It is simply observing an object without judging or thinking about it. This bare attention enables us to see an object as it is. Concentrating on a single object to the exclusion of others (*samādhi*) leads the mind to one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*), which is the base of *vipassanā*. *Vipassanā* is a specifically Buddhist type of meditation that cannot be found in other religions. The wisdom gained from *vipassanā* (*paññā-bhāvanā*) is an insight into the nature of reality, that is, impermanence (*aniccā*); suffering, or unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*); and unsubstantiality, or not-self (*anattā*) within oneself and the world around one. This insight has the liberating power to free the mind from distorted thoughts, enabling it to accept things as they are and to act accordingly, without clinging (*upādāna*) and craving (*taṇhā*).

While *samatha* calms the mind by the power of mindful-

ness (*sati*) and concentration (*samādhi*), *metta bhāvanā* neutralizes and replaces unwholesome mental states such as anger, hostility, animosity, and jealousy through the cultivation of loving-kindness (*metta*) and other subtle states known as *brahma-vihāra*, that is, compassion (*karunā*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Loving-kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy are antidotes for anger, hatred, and jealousy, while equanimity is a remedy for suffering caused by attachment. It enables the mind to be detached from the body and other phenomena, physical or mental, and undisturbed by any event either within or outside. With wisdom (*paññā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*), the mind can let go of things when necessary, including incurable illness and even life in its terminal stage.

In practicing *samatha* or *vipassanā* meditation, one may focus the mind on any object and concentrate on it. However, to realize the religious goal of enlightenment (*bodhi-ñāṇa*) and to obtain health benefits, one needs to choose the object of meditation carefully. In the Buddhist scriptures forty objects are offered to be chosen according to one's character (*carita*). In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* the Buddha recommended four basic objects of meditation for all types of character to train the mind anywhere and anytime. Meditation on these objects is collectively called *satipaṭṭhāna four*, which is named according to its objects or bases. *Satipaṭṭhāna* comprises the contemplations of (1) the body (*kāyanupassanā*), observing in-out breathing, the four postures, the thirty-two bodily parts, the four physical elements, the dead body in different loathsome states; (2) feelings (*vedanā-nupassanā*), being aware of feelings, pleasant, unpleasant, neutral, and how they arise from the sense bases (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body) and how they pass away; (3) the mind (*cittānupassanā*), watching thinking process, negative and positive, and being conscious of thoughts, good and evil, their sources, and the ways to nurture or dissolve them; and (4) the mind-objects (*dhammānupassanā*), being mindful of *dhamma* such as the five hindrances to spiritual progress (*nīvaraṇa*), the nature of the five psychophysical elements (*nāma-rūpa*) that constitute the self, the ten fetters (*saṃyojana*) binding beings to the wheel of existence, and the seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*). By practicing these contemplations in *samatha* and *vipassanā*, one can achieve mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) all together and at the same time. This *satipaṭṭhāna four* is a simple and effective method to train the mind to be strong and powerful. The disciplined mind brings calmness and bliss.

In conclusion, spiritual health and mental health are obtained through meditation by the power of mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom, and also by the cultivation of the four sublime states (*brahma-vihāra*). The practice of morality (*sīla*) is another contributing factor. In the Noble Eightfold Path, morality is placed prior to *samādhi* and *paññā* because it provides the ground for the development

of *samādhi* and *paññā*. Morality (*sīla*) is therefore a supporting factor for meditation just as the earth is for the growth of the trees and plants. This is the reason Buddhists usually practice meditation while observing *sīla* (precepts) such as the five or eight precepts (*pañca-sīla* or *uposatha-sīla*) for lay devotees, and the ten precepts (*dasa-sīla*) for novices (*sāmaṇera*) and monks (*bhikkhu*).

Prayer and Healing

Prayer, or in Buddhist terminology, chanting, is usually in Pāli and is intended to pay homage to the Triple Gems—the Buddha (the Enlightened One), the Dhamma (the Teaching), the Saṅgha (the Order)—and to remind one of the Buddha's noble qualities and his teaching, as well as to secure blessings and protection. Buddhist chants are verses composed by learned senior monks based on their reflections on the Buddha's perfections, some episodes in his life, and his teachings in different discourses (*sutta*).

Among the protective and benedictory chants, the one that is widely known for its healing effect is *bojjhaṅga paritta*. *Paritta* means "protection" and *bojjhaṅga* refers to the seven factors of enlightenment (*bodhiṇaṇa*). It is recited particularly to ward off illness and to promote healing. The belief in the restorative power of *bojjhaṅga* goes back to the time of the Buddha when the Buddha and his two great noble disciples, Maha Kassapa and Maha Moggallāna, recovered from serious illness after listening to the chanting of *bojjhaṅga*. It has become a tradition in Theravada countries for monks and lay devotees to recite this chant for the sick. It is believed that the truth of the Dhamma and the Buddha's boundless compassion embodied in the verses chanted have great power to promote healing. The efficacy of the chanting is enhanced especially when *bojjhaṅga* is recited accurately and in proper accents with sincerity and conviction. Attentively listening to the recitation with appreciation of the truth of the Dhamma and of the Buddha's limitless compassion, and with confidence in the Triple Gems, the mind of the listener becomes calm (*passaddhi*) and joyful (*pīti*). Some Buddhists, while listening to the chanting, visualize the blessing Buddha standing before them with the healing Dhamma flowing from his mouth into their entire body to reduce their suffering and to ward off illness.

Visualization is one of the Buddhist meditative practices that can be used for both healing and spiritual development. Even without understanding Pāli words, by listening and/or visualizing in this manner, the vibration of the sound and the vivid image of the Buddha will soothe the mind and calm it. This has excellent effects on the immune system and helps the entire body function better. Listening to the Dhamma and mentally seeing the Buddha are also regarded as virtuous acts (*kusala kamma*) that will yield good *kammic* results in the future. The healing power of *bojjhaṅga* may be ineffective because of (1) the listener's weighty *kamma* (*garuka-kamma*), which suppresses the effects of good

kamma being performed; (2) the presence of defilements in the listener's mind, such as anger, greed, and delusion; and (3) the listener's lack of faith (*saddhā*) in the Triple Gems.

Giving and Healing

Another way of healing practiced by Buddhists in Southeast Asia is the performance of *dāna* (giving). This involves the giving of material gifts (*amisadāna*) to individual monks, to the order as a whole, or to the poor and the marginalized; the giving of spiritual gifts (*dhammadāna*) to those in need; and the sharing of time, energy, knowledge, and experience for the benefit of others. Besides the practice of meditation, the observance of the precepts, and the performance of rituals, the Buddhist spiritual procedures involve the making of *dāna*. Thai Buddhists like to use all or one of these procedures for healing along with modern medicine.

There is the case of a woman with lung cancer who, as much as she could, devoted herself to voluntary work in a vegetarian restaurant and in encouraging other cancer sufferers to have hope and to find strength in Buddhist teaching and practices. She helped raise their spirits and remind them how beautiful life can be, despite their fatal illness. She resolved to give this compassionate service after being diagnosed with cancer of the advanced stage and being told

by her doctor that she would soon die. At this time, she has already outlived that prediction by seven years! The most recent X-ray shows that the spread of the cancer is well contained. There is also the case of a man with paralysis in the arms and legs who dedicated his life to helping the disabled, encouraging them not to be resigned to their disability but to find ways and means to make their lives meaningful. He sets himself as an example by painting beautiful pictures with a brush held in his mouth. His exemplary work helps to make other disabled people develop self-confidence and self-esteem. He has now been elected president of the Thai Association of the Disabled. Another case worth mentioning is that of the AIDS sufferers at a Buddhist temple that turns into a hospice for AIDS patients to spend the last days of their lives. They form themselves into a support group for other AIDS patients. Even though they cannot escape death, all of them die in peace and with a sense of fulfillment.

All of these cases show that the practice of *dāna* has healing effects, making the agitated minds of the sick people calm and joyful. Even if *dāna* alone cannot cure the deadly disease, it can heal the mind by ridding it of negative thoughts. This is a way to follow the Buddha's advice to make the mind healthy in spite of physical illness. Since the mind can influence the body, physical health is improved when the

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A care worker and an AIDS patient interlocking hands at a hospice for AIDS patients inside a Buddhist temple in Thailand.

mind is sound. This will happen when such *dāna* is given in true compassion and without any self-interest. *Dāna* in this sense can liberate the mind from egoism and enables it to make full use of its nonpersonal power to benefit others. Through such altruistic work, one can eventually reach *nibbāna*, the ultimate goal of Buddhism.

Concluding Remarks

Every religion upholds health as the highest value and provides its adherents with insights and practical means to promote health and healing and to deal with human vulnerability to disease and suffering. In this matter, the religious understanding of health and healing goes beyond the secular views to the realm of spirituality. This concern with man's spiritual dimension is the unique religious contribution that broadens the secular perspectives. It encourages us to care for spiritual health along with physical and mental health, which are already emphasized in the secular view. This religious approach underlines the importance of the role of spiritual power in healing the mind, making it tranquil, joyful, and detached from emotional and physical sensations.

In this connection, the Buddhist contribution is its *kammic* concept of health, disease, and healing as the base of spiritual involvement, and its imaging and meditative methods to

achieve mental and physical health. The application of these methods in their daily lives by many people of different religions to bring calmness, inner peace, and joy amid life's turmoil is an important Buddhist contribution to human well-being in this restless world. Similarly, in medicine the Buddhist meditative techniques are utilized along with medical treatment, for example, of high blood pressure, heart disease, and chronic illness. In psychotherapy these techniques are used, for example, to enable patients to be aware of the negatives, or unwholesome mental states such as anger, sadness, depression, and anxiety, and to know how to transcend these negatives as well as how to enhance the positives by their own efforts. This is evidence of the modern use of ancient wisdom to help medicine have its full effect and to supplement it where medicine alone cannot achieve its goal. Holistic health as envisioned by Buddhism and acknowledged by health care professionals cannot be provided by these professionals alone because it involves physical, psychological, spiritual, sociocultural, environmental, and, as emphasized by Buddhism, *kammic* factors. This holistic health is more of an ideal. But it should be taken into account and is worthy of striving for. Perhaps through the concerted efforts of medicine and religion, as well as of the individual and the concerned social agencies, this health ideal may one day be achieved. □

Special Seminars on the Lotus Sutra Held in Thailand

In June and August Dr. Michio T. Shinozaki, director of the Chuo Academic Research Institute and president of the Gakurin Seminary of Rissho Kosei-kai, lectured at the College of Religious Studies at Mahidol University's Salaya campus in Nakhorn Prathom, Thailand, on the teachings of the Buddha as set down in the Lotus Sutra. Dr. Shinozaki's special intensive seminars on the Lotus Sutra were planned and sponsored by the university for forty-four undergraduates.

Mahidol University is a public university, and one of the most prestigious universities in Thailand. Its College of Religious Studies was founded in 1999. Its academic programs address new, emerging challenges to religion, such as globalization, women's rights, new sci-

entific discoveries, and the use of modern technology in medicine.

Rissho Kosei-kai and the college have had a close relationship. In May 2001, a group of twenty-three students from the college was welcomed at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters in Tokyo during a visit to Japan and also traveled to Nara, Kyoto, and Osaka to study the practice of Mahayana Buddhism. In November 2003, another group of twenty-one stu-

dents also visited Rissho Kosei-kai for the same purpose.

Dr. Shinozaki said he hoped his lectures on the Lotus Sutra, based on the practical teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai, would promote understanding between Mahayana Buddhists in Japan and Theravada Buddhists in Thailand and that their exchanges would deepen one another's understanding of the concept of the One Buddha Vehicle. □

What a Friend We Have in Jesus . . .

by Notto R. Thelle

Many Japanese Buddhists seem to find in the life of Jesus a radiant model of all they have dreamed of, all they have sought after, because he lived the love that freely gives its life for others.

A learned old Buddhist once told me about his relationship to Jesus. As a young man, he had been sent to university. This period was intended to prepare him to take over his father's responsibilities as priest in the local temple, and he spent his days studying Buddhism and pondering religious questions. One day he came across a Bible and began to read it. Here he found something that both disturbed and attracted him—new ideas, new perspectives. Above all, the encounter with the Gospels shook him to the core of his being.

"After I had read all four Gospels attentively, I was obliged to say to myself: If this is Christianity, then I am a Christian!" He let these words hang in the air for a while, and then continued: "But then I traveled to Europe, and I no longer understood anything. . . ."

In my encounter with Japanese religion, I have seen a lot of this intuitive love for Jesus. He has shown people the path to what the Japanese call *honmono*, that which is unfailingly genuine.

But this love awakens a hope that often proves illusory: when the Japanese seek it in the church that is so proud to bear Jesus's name, they often turn away in disappointment. When my friend traveled to Europe, he could not make sense of what he saw there: where was the Jesus he had met in the Bible? The painful paradox is that many of Jesus's friends in Japan prefer to keep their distance from the Christian church. At best, they can see there a faint shadow of what they have met in the Gospels; at its worst, they see the church as a betrayal of Jesus.

What is it that they have seen in the Gospels? First and foremost, it is the sacrifice made by love. Christians often summarize the good news in well-known phrases such as "God is love," but I have often heard non-Christians point to Jesus's words about the love that lays down its life: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. The one who loves his life, loses it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:24–25).

It is certainly not by sheer chance that precisely these words make such a strong appeal. Behind the facade of our com-

petitive society, people dream and yearn for love and sacrifice—this feeling may be self-contradictory and unclear, vulnerable and fumbling, but it exists. Sometimes I have been privileged to meet people who showed me this sensitivity to the sacrifice love makes. When they came into contact with integrity and genuineness, they reacted spontaneously, like the needle of a compass when it enters a magnetic field.

One evening I sat in the simple rooms of a completely new religious movement and listened to the leader, a twenty-year-old woman. Outwardly she looked no different from other young people in Japan, but she had an inner radiance and extraordinary gifts. She could read people's thoughts, she spoke in tongues, and she had the charisma of healing; last but not least, she was a gifted speaker. I had then—and still have—many objections to the doctrine of this movement and to some of its activities, but I quickly understood that there was something more here than the typical appeal of new religious movements to happiness and success.

She spoke of love and sacrifice. She had no manuscript but spoke simply from heart to heart. Around her sat sixty or seventy leaders of the movement, young and old, most of them men. She knew that many of them were attracted by the

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things that happened around her, and she said: "If you have come here in order to experience strange things—ecstasies, prophecies, miracles, and exorcisms of demons—you can go back home again. It is not you that I need. The real miracle takes place when love creates a person anew. I need people who will give all they have, without expecting anything in return. True love will always involve pain. The one who loves others unreservedly will meet opposition."

She drew the listeners into her own magnetic field, and their faces opened up. She touched their deepest dreams: "Our love must not be like the flowers we use to decorate our lives. Our love must be like dandelions. They get trampled on and weeded out, but they do not complain. They just go on blooming and putting forth new shoots. You can cover them in asphalt, but they break open a path to the light. We cannot love without being trampled on. Love leads to renunciation and sacrifice. But we continue to bloom as if nothing has happened."

I had never heard a sermon like it. Her words were quiet and penetrating, shot through with light, and the listeners sat spellbound. They had been in contact with something they knew to be true.

I met another leader of the same movement, who had likewise been drawn into the magnetic field of love. We spoke about Jesus's love and sacrifice, and he affirmed: "It was impossible for anyone who loved so completely as Jesus to become old. He *had* to die—but then, what a fantastic resurrection he had!" This man had never set foot inside a Christian church.

We went on to speak about the path of faith. I admitted how difficult it was to follow Jesus and to love unreservedly. He looked at me and asked quietly: "But is not that the reason we were born? Did we not receive life in order to give it away?" I almost jumped out of my seat, and looked at him suspiciously. Was he putting on a hypocritical display of piety? Was he trying to impress me? But no, there was no pretense involved. I sat face-to-face with Nathanael, "an Israelite in whom there is no deceit" (cf. John 1:47). I felt that I myself was more like Nicodemus, who asked Jesus about the new birth and received the answer: "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not know these things?" (John 3:10).

The dream of love's sacrifice has many variations. It is chiseled in stone and wood in sensitive lines on the faces of the popular saints and gods and buddhas. It is handed on in legends and fairy tales.

One ancient legend tells of the bodhisattva Kannon (Chinese, Kuan-yin), best known as the goddess of mercy, adored and loved by millions in the East. One woman adored Kannon with such a deep devotion that her husband became jealous. One day as she stood in prayer before the statue of Kannon, he struck her with his sword and left her there bleeding. After a while she came home as if nothing had happened. Her husband ran in perplexity back to the scene of his crime, and there he saw the statue of Kannon bleeding from a wound.

Why has Kannon appealed so strongly to people in the East? The two characters for her name mean "the one who sees the cries of the world." Her gentle features reveal an infinite compassion. Sometimes Kannon is portrayed with eleven faces looking in all directions, or with a thousand arms stretched out to touch the whole world's suffering. Does not the people's devotion to Kannon show their abiding awareness of the mystery of grace and mercy?

A few years ago I was present at the performance of a play in the headquarters of one of the new religions. Five thousand of its adherents were present, and we were fascinated by the simple message of the drama. A princess, fleeing from her enemy, was given shelter by poor peasants in a remote mountain village. It was winter, and they waited in vain for spring—it seemed that it would never come. They shared the food they had, but at last all their stocks were exhausted, and they faced hunger and death. The village was under the curse of the spirit of the lake, who prevented the ice and snow and cold from giving way to spring.

Finally the princess made the great decision: without telling the villagers what she planned to do, she sacrificed herself to the spirit of the lake. All we heard was her voice offstage as she was lost to sight in the frozen landscape. And suddenly, miraculously, the landscape was transformed into green fields and meadows with flowers and trees and birds.

The story was simple, but it evoked strong and deep feelings. And this was popular Buddhism at its best.

Many have the impression that Buddhism is a self-centered religion, a higher form of cultivation of the self, which does not care whether the world goes to ruin, provided only that the self can attain inner peace and enlightenment. It is of course true that a religion that seeks the innermost nature of the human person *can* immure its adherents in an isolated obsession with the self, and Christians too continually yield to the temptation to make the little world of their ego the center of all things: *my* experiences, *my* relationship to God, *my* eternal bliss. But a self-centered Christianity is a denial of the Gospel; in the same way, a self-seeking Buddhism is a distortion of Buddhism.

One of Buddhism's primary concerns is to unmask the illusion of an immutable core in the ego. All suffering is generated by a blinded clinging to the false ego. The true human being is the one who has seen through the false world we build up around ourselves. The world of the ego is smashed to pieces, and one discovers oneself as part of a larger universe.

We can make the point with another metaphor: the ego person is a note that enjoys its own self in isolation from the music, but the true human persons discover themselves and their meaning as single notes in a great symphony that dies as an ego note and rises to new life in the totality of the symphony. It possesses its life only thanks to others and in connection with others.

This is why the highest ideal in Eastern Buddhism is not the ascetic who has attained his goal and then enjoys an

A bodhisattva is such a person, who gives up his or her own salvation in order to help the helpless. In the world of mythology, these are the saints who have achieved perfection after immensely lengthy periods of asceticism and self-discipline but like Kannon then choose to embrace the distress of the world with ears and eyes open. They are worshiped throughout the East as divine helpers. But the same is true in the world of reality, where some of the great masters leave their distant monasteries and turn up on streets and in market squares, sitting among the homeless and poor, playing with children, and sharing their insights with those they meet. There are also nameless popular “saints” who themselves are not aware that they are putting into practice the bodhisattva ideal. They are nuggets of gold in the dirt of the streets, lotuses in a muddy puddle.

Perhaps it is not so surprising, then, that so many intuitively grasp the heart of the Gospel: God’s love, which leads him to offer his life. Many find Jesus’s life a radiant model of all they have dreamed of, all they have sought. He is the grain of wheat that bears fruit because it fell into the earth and died. He lived the love that freely gives its life for others. His work was fulfilled when he died on a cross. The Christian church and everything connected with it—church buildings and dogmas, ecclesiastical structures and rituals—is experienced as an imported religion with a foreign, alien taste and smell, but Jesus walks directly out of the pages of the Gospel, across the boundaries of the church, and into the religious reality of the East.

One of the great Buddhist reformers in the modern period offers a very dramatic expression of this intuitive love for Jesus. Enryō Inoue began his reforming work in the 1880s, in a period when Japan was almost drowning in a wave of Europeanization. The West was the model in every field, from technology and the army and education to cooking, fashions, and social conventions. Christianity was admired as the spiritual basis of the superior West and was acclaimed as the future religion of Japan; people streamed to the churches. It was at this period that the word *ribaibaru* entered the Japanese language, from the English religious term revival. But those who were conscious of their Japanese identity were afraid that Japan would perish and lose its own specific nature if it “sold itself” to the West.

Inoue threw himself into the struggle for the soul of Japan. He proclaimed that Buddhism was the only spiritual force that could save Japan from cultural and religious destruction. He turned his strongest weapons on Christianity, in book after book and pamphlet after pamphlet, claiming that Christianity not only was in conflict with science and sound reason but it had allied itself with the great powers in the West in order to undermine the traditions of the East. Christianity was a wicked religion that must be extirpated if Japan and the East were to survive.

And yet this fanatical anti-Christian rabble-rouser had a strange fondness for Jesus. He fought with tooth and nail to destroy Christianity, but at the same time he confessed that

A bronze statue of the Bodhisattva Kannon in Fumon Hall of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo.

untroubled peace outside the cycle of transmigrating souls. The ideal is the one who has attained enlightenment but is willing to renounce the peace of his own soul and chooses to return to the world, with its desires and its pain. How can one enjoy bliss for oneself when the condemned of the earth are blinded and wander around in suffering and darkness?

he not only respected Jesus but loved him: "Oh, I feel myself one with Jesus! Oh, Jesus is my brother. . . . Oh, Jesus is my faithful friend!"

The words in this brief declaration of love are extraordinarily powerful. It is not a matter of course for a Japanese to admit that he loves anything at all, and it is exceedingly surprising that a Buddhist who wishes to eradicate Christianity should "love" Jesus!

Many Buddhists share Inoue's feelings. The aggressive campaign against Christianity has virtually disappeared by now, but most Buddhists have little appreciation of traditional Christianity and its preaching; they find it incomprehensible that intellectually gifted persons should base their lives on Christianity. These reservations vanish in the case of Jesus, however: he challenges them and disturbs them. He touches something they think they recognize in their own visions. He draws on springs of water from which they themselves have drunk. In Jesus they encounter a master who shows the path to a true and genuine life. Jesus is detached from the Christian church, walks out of the Gospels, and becomes one of their own masters. He becomes a bodhisattva. "We Buddhists are ready to accept Christianity," wrote Masaharu Anezaki, one of the pioneers of the science of religion in Japan. "Indeed, our belief in [the] Buddha is belief in Christ. We see Christ, because we see [the] Buddha!"

Anezaki called Christianity the religion of hope. Even Jesus's last words on the cross—"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"—were borne up by his absolute faith in God. Christ came to lead us away from the desire that makes us cling to ourselves and to set us free to love God.

One of the most prominent Buddhist poets in the twentieth century, Hyakuzo Kurata (1891–1943), was deeply inspired by Christ. His well-known novel *The Priest and His Disciples* tells of Shinran Shonin, the thirteenth-century Buddhist reformer who is sometimes called Buddhism's Luther. Although there can be no doubt that the book has a Buddhist message, it also shows clear traces of the author's love of Christ. This love finds its clearest expression in the letters he wrote in 1915, the year before he published the famous novel. His words about love and sacrifice still retain something of the naked vulnerability that made such a strong appeal when they were written:

"I have understood how senseless it is to speak of love, if one does not know that love necessarily becomes a cross." Most people believe that they can love without renouncing their own selves. But how can one receive the Holy Spirit without sacrificing one's selfish wishes? "If I do not sacrifice all my own wishes on God's altar, all my actions are mere imperfect halves. This is what Christ's cross means. You cannot love others unless you yourself first die."

Kurata's interpretation of love and the cross can be found in many variations in modern Buddhist thinkers who see Jesus's life as the realization of the Buddhist idea that true life arises where the ego dies. They read the hymn in praise of Christ in the letter to the Philippians (2:6–8) as a poetic

description of the path God took when he renounced his own self:

Though he was in the form of God,
he did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness . . .

He humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even to death on a cross.

The Greek word *kenoun*, employed in this text, means literally to "empty out"; from this comes the word *kenosis*, a radical expression for the self-lowering in which Jesus "emptied himself" of his divine status. Modern Buddhists see Christ's "emptying out" as the deepest expression of God's innermost being. This selfless love is the emptying out of his divinity.

Accordingly, Jesus really does have some close friends among Buddhists in Japan. Some think of themselves as travelers who are en route to the Christian faith but can never become Christians. To "become Christians" in the traditional understanding of this term would imprison them in a system where Christ himself is held captive, that is, the Christian church with its foreign forms of worship, organization, and doctrine. They prefer to remain en route. They are Christ's non-Christian friends, who seek him outside the church.

From the church's perspective, one is of course entitled to query their interpretation of Christ. He is their friend and master, one who has attained enlightenment, a bodhisattva, but they have no sympathy with the church's teaching. The incarnation and Jesus's life, his death and resurrection, are not regarded as salvific events but as unique models of the sacrifice love requires. The path that Jesus took becomes meaningful only when one follows him.

If one adheres to the church's doctrine, such a position is doubtless inadequate. And yet we cannot doubt that Jesus's non-Christian friends remind the church of something it has often forgotten, namely the summons to *follow* Jesus. The hymn in praise of Christ is not an isolated block without relation to the rest of the letter to the Philippians: it is quoted precisely in order to call the Christian community to have "the same mind" as Christ himself.

Let us add one further point. By making Jesus their friend and master, Buddhists have taken him out of the church and the context that made him an alien Western import. They have discovered that he also belongs to the East—or rather, that his life and death break through all borders and call to everyone who belongs to the truth. □

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

A View of Eternal Life

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.

Could Shakyamuni have suddenly appeared in the world, not connected in any way whatsoever to the history of the universe and of humankind, and become enlightened to the true Law as it appears in the Lotus Sutra? Such a thing is beyond the realm of the possible. The true Law must have existed since the moment the universe came into being. Those who lived in the distant past, however, did not know the Law; they lived without understanding what they were doing, as their instincts dictated.

Because instinct is based on the fundamental delusion that the physical body is the actual self, as consciousness developed within human beings, instinctual desires gradually increased, and consequently human beings came to experience all kinds of suffering unknown to other living beings. For humanity this is the great contradiction and tragedy. Unless this contradiction can be resolved, human suffering will only worsen. Nevertheless, humans cannot retrogress to being instinctual beings like birds and mammals. Rather, they must, as consciousness develops, look for a means of extinguishing the sufferings that arise from that consciousness.

What is necessary for us to accomplish this? There can be only one means: to learn the true Law and align our way of living along the path of the truth and the Law using the human wisdom that has developed. There is no other way.

If someone had not become aware of this way and shown it to humankind, nothing could have been achieved. Necessity opened the path; responding to this necessity, Shakyamuni appeared in the world and attained enlightenment. It is no accident that he was born into this world; he appeared because it was necessary for humankind that he do so. By means of Shakyamuni's enlightenment, the true Law, which had existed as an established fact from the distant past but which had not been grasped by anyone, was made clear for the first time.

Western thought, to put it simply, derives from a careful division of things one from another and a keen analysis of the component parts. This played an important role in the development of science and technology. The other side of this coin, however, is that somehow or other the human intellect too became highly compartmentalized. If our minds are excessively segmented, no scientific or technological advance, and no material culture, however highly developed, is going to bring people happiness. On the contrary, confrontation and contention can only get worse.

At this juncture, what is more important than anything else is to realize the truth that humankind is fundamentally part of all the things that exist in the universe. This is a way of thought that has existed in Asia from ancient times. "One is all; all is One." In the West, God and humankind are strictly differentiated as separate existences, but Eastern sages understood that they formed a single existence. *Zazen Wasan* (The Song of Enlightenment) by Hakuin (1685–1768) begins with the words:

All living beings are essentially buddhas.

They are like water and ice:

Without water there is no ice,

Without living beings there are no buddhas.

Not knowing how close the truth is,

They seek it in distant places.

They wander in impermanence.

They are like one who cries out in thirst in the midst of water.

Like the son of the rich man who wandered lost among the poor.

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.

According to Buddhism, all things in the universe derive from an all-encompassing “emptiness.” Even the most advanced modern science is of the view that the ultimate source of material existence has not yet been fully explained, but ultimately there could be a kind of single elementary particle that could be sustained to exist in a vacuum of a highly complex structure. *Emptiness, elementary particle, and vacuum* are words that suggest the material, yet actually they describe life itself. It is that very life which causes the existence of all things, including human beings, and allows all of them to function in the universe.

This life that we call the great life force, the great radiance, the great adornment, in other words, the Buddha, fills every corner of the universe. Doesn’t this indisputably mean therefore that human beings, who are one part of this great life force, are fundamentally buddhas?

What we know as the buddha-nature is not something with which only human beings are endowed. Grasses and trees and the very earth itself, together with water and air, all possess the buddha-nature, and thus the possibility of attaining buddhahood. In other words, we are all inhabitants of the Buddha’s world, all are the Buddha’s children who strive together to achieve the realm of happiness and joy. Thus we should think of the buddha-nature as our own true form, existing within the stream of life that flows through the three periods of past, present, and future.

What do we mean by the expression “opening and revealing the buddha-nature”? I have so far been making use of explanations of all descriptions, but here I would like to come directly to the heart of the matter, which is “rebirth.” Of course, I am referring to spiritual rebirth, or a change of heart—that is, becoming aware that we are living within eternal life.

Unless the true self is established, a person lives only heteronomously, just like flowing water, and does not create energy capable of acting freely and unrestrictedly outward. All living beings wish to act freely; this can even be said to be the meaning of life. Human beings in particular have as their essential quality free action and the ability to create what has value. If we do not understand clearly the nature of this essence, this “real self,” and establish it deep in the mind, we cannot experience true human fulfillment and *joie de vivre* or be said to have attained true relief. What Shakyamuni wanted finally to teach is this, for he desired to bring us to the clear realization that though our mind and body are, being phenomena, highly unreliable, we have as our essence the firm and undying buddha-nature.

Many people, though, have no knowledge of their own essence and are either swayed by ever-changing forms of the body and environment and go from one emotional extreme to the other or find satisfaction only by completely denying the defilements.

The way that large numbers of people are capable of following and that can bring society as a whole relief can be narrowed down to knowledge of the human essence (the

buddha-nature). By this means we realize that our essential attitude is to work positively for all people and society, not seeking our own happiness alone, and act freely and unrestrictedly to create the Land of Tranquil Light in this world. To realize this is to become one with the Buddha.

It is important that we always remain aware that we have been given life and are sustained by the Buddha, and we should try to live our lives in that knowledge. By doing so we ensure happiness both for ourselves and for others. When we are imbued with such a positive spirit, it becomes impossible for us to do evil. Just as a carving knife that is in regular use is sharp and free of rust, constant action for good makes evil an impossibility. The defilements themselves are transformed into positive and valuable functions. For example, the defilement that leads a person to want to become rich will function as good by transforming into the effort to excel in one’s work. This is the state that is called “the defilements themselves are indivisible from enlightenment.”

To know our essence, to realize our buddha-nature, is to illuminate the world, to become a person of worth who works for society in a variety of ways. □

A relief of the Buddha at Peshawar Museum, Pakistan. The museum has the largest collection of Gandharan Buddhist art in the world.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 14 A Happy Life

(1)

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

In the previous chapter, “Exhortation to Hold Firm,” the bodhisattvas vowed that they would persist in spreading the teaching of the Lotus Sutra no matter how much they were persecuted. In this chapter the Bodhisattva Manjushri, deeply impressed, and agreeing wholeheartedly with their stand, asks the Buddha on their behalf, “How are these bodhisattva-mahasattvas to be able to preach this sutra in the evil age to come? In reply, the Buddha thoughtfully explains the basic attitudes that a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra should adopt.

What we should note particularly is that in the previous chapter the eager bodhisattvas forecast many trials in “the evil age to come,” while Shakyamuni asserted that those who truly believe and practice the teaching of the Lotus Sutra will be able to overcome all oppression and spend their days in a state of ease and comfort. Thus, while the point of the previous chapter is the demonstration of the vow to endure all persecution from without, the present chapter teaches us how to overcome temptations and delusions from within.

The expression “a happy life” can be taken as having two meanings. The first is an admonition to act of one’s own volition, with a mind that is always at peace. A true practitioner of the Lotus Sutra is not a person who has to face religious persecution with gritted teeth and a defiant attitude but one who, whatever difficulties arise, can remain calm for the sake of the Law and willingly practice religious discipline and also work to spread the teaching.

Attitude is a strange thing. In movies we see mountain climbers straining under rucksacks weighing forty or fifty kilograms, sweat pouring down their faces. To us, they seem to be in a great deal of pain. When the mountain grows steeper, they may take three or four hours to climb twenty or thirty meters. Each step is taken at the risk of life itself. If sundown overtakes them on a cliff, there is nothing to do but spend the night in subzero temperatures suspended by ropes from the cliff. If they had been ordered to do this by an employer, you can imagine what complaints would be

lodged for infringing human rights. Yet mountain climbers are ready to put up with any discomfort or danger because they themselves have decided that this is what they want to do. They are in pain, to be sure, but their minds are at peace. At this level, suffering becomes pleasure.

Practicing the teaching of the Lotus Sutra is the same. Novices will still grit their teeth in the face of persecution and derision, but a master of the Way will be able to face anything at all with a mind that is always composed and at peace. The practice itself is a source of joy. This is the first meaning of “a happy life.” To reach such a stage, however, it is necessary to take the utmost care not to allow one’s mind to be disturbed, discouraged, or tempted by the things of daily life. This chapter teaches us how to do this. We should read the Buddha’s words as admonitions filled with tender affection, like the advice of a parent instructing a child about to set out on a journey. Like a father, the Buddha speaks directly to us, and as we listen to his voice his words penetrate our being.

The second meaning is the literal one: “a happy life.” We can overcome all hardships and attain peace of mind if we truly believe the teaching of the Lotus Sutra and practice it. Our physical and mental states are not separate, so if we are at peace mentally, this will inevitably be reflected in our physical state and our daily life. In the present chapter the Buddha assures us of this.

The Buddha’s words, spoken out of a deep affection for the inexperienced bodhisattvas, embody this truth. We must therefore accept them humbly and with gratitude. This will ensure us “a happy life.” Let us now read the text of the chapter, bearing all this in mind.

TEXT At that time the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva Manjushri, the Law King’s son, spoke to the Buddha, saying: “World-honored One! Rare indeed are such bodhisattvas as these! Reverently according with the Buddha, they have made great vows that in the evil age to come they will protect, keep, read,

recite, and preach this Law Flower Sutra. World-honored One! How are these bodhisattva-mahasattvas to be able to preach this sutra in the evil age to come?”

The Buddha addressed Manjushri: “If any bodhisattva-mahasattva desires to preach this sutra in the evil age to come, he should be steadfast in the four methods: first, steadfast in the bodhisattva’s spheres of action and intimacy, so that he may be able to preach this sutra to living beings.

COMMENTARY *The four methods.* These are the four basic practices of a bodhisattva, the “four pleasant practices” of the body, the mouth, the mind, and the vow.

- *Spheres of action and intimacy.* The first refers to the fundamental attitude as the basis of one’s personal behavior. The second refers to the fundamental attitude regarding one’s personal relations with others (in particular, relations with people in the secular world). These two spheres correspond to the pleasant practice of the body (or of deeds).

TEXT Manjushri! Why is it called a bodhisattva-mahasattva’s sphere of action? If a bodhisattva-mahasattva abides in a state of patience, is gentle and agreeable, is neither hasty nor overbearing, and his mind [is] unperturbed; if, moreover, he has no laws by which to act, but sees all things in their real aspect, nor proceeds along the undivided way—this is termed a bodhisattva-mahasattva’s sphere of action.

COMMENTARY The first part of the description of the bodhisattva’s sphere of action is easy to understand; the second part, however, is far more difficult and is indeed something that it takes a bodhisattva to achieve. It teaches the way of seeing things, the basis of all action.

- *State of patience.* This indicates a serene and tranquil state of mind, without anger and conceit.
- *Gentle and agreeable.* This state signifies not acting against or misunderstanding the truth but following it obediently.
- *Neither hasty nor overbearing.* This expression means not allowing oneself to be flustered or rash.
- *If . . . he has no laws by which to act.* Since “laws” refers to phenomena, this phrase means that bodhisattvas should not be swayed by the fleeting manifestations of phenomena.
- *Sees all things in their real aspect, nor proceeds along the undivided way.* This is an extremely difficult expression. I have already mentioned a number of times that “all things” (phenomena) are empty. Bodhisattvas have to understand clearly what is meant by “empty,” for it is upon this foundation that they must comprehend phenomena. But they must not bind themselves to the idea of emptiness, for to do so would be to isolate themselves from actuality. Perhaps it is all right for hermits, who have withdrawn from the world and are interested only in their own liberation, to devote themselves to the realization of the meaning of everything being empty; bodhisattvas, however, are activists whose task is to save people from their suffering. Therefore they need to discern the realities of the world, too.

The Bodhisattva Manjushri, painted by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.

Let us think about this in human terms. Since all people possess the buddha-nature, they are fundamentally equal. It is vitally important that bodhisattvas discern the buddha-nature that dwells within people and strive to develop it. This is the first principle of the teaching of the real aspect of all things. To be concerned solely with this concept of equality, however, is to be merely an otherworldly theoretician, unable in any practical sense to help people gain liberation. That is because the reality is that people differ in character and ability: Some are clever, others foolish, meek, devious, lazy, or small-minded. Since there must be causes and conditions that allow such a variety of differences to arise, it is necessary for bodhisattvas to discern differences exactly as they are (to

see “all things in their real aspect”) and to devise means of teaching accordingly. Otherwise they will be unable to guide people correctly to true liberation or to change the world for the better. This is the second principle of the teaching of the real aspect of all things.

We call the inability to discern this second principle “lack of discrimination,” that is, not seeing clearly the distinctive characteristics of things. This is what the sutra calls “the undivided way.” Thus, not “proceed[ing] along the undivided way” means not practicing discernment of distinctive characteristics (not acting by discerning the nature of differences). Thus, bodhisattvas should not allow themselves to be swayed by phenomena, so that they see things only in terms of their differences and make judgments and undertake action accordingly (“laws by which to act”), or by the idea of emptiness, so that they cannot discern any phenomenal differences and therefore judge and act on that basis (“proceeds along the undivided way”). To be in thrall to neither is the foundation of a bodhisattva’s conduct.

TEXT Why is [the other] termed a bodhisattva-mahasattva’s sphere of intimacy? A bodhisattva-mahasattva is not intimate with kings, princes, ministers, and rulers;

COMMENTARY The expression “sphere of intimacy” does not imply that a bodhisattva should not draw close to people. The Buddha, who made his great vow to liberate all living beings equally, would never have said that a bodhisattva should not be approachable. Here, “intimacy” refers to courting the favor of people, getting close to them because one wants something from them or because one harbors personal feelings that are overly friendly. It does not matter whether one is in contact with kings, princes, government ministers, or high officials; one should not make allowances for their status when preaching the true Dharma in order to win their favor. If one becomes too familiar with individuals, such relations will be fraught with many pitfalls. Bodhisattvas are therefore warned against such intimacy.

TEXT nor intimate with heretics, the brahmacarins, Nirgranthas, and so on; nor with composers of worldly and outside literature or poetry; nor with Lokayatas and Anti-Lokayatas;

COMMENTARY *Heretics.* See the July–September 2008 issue of DHARMA WORLD.

- *Brahmacarins.* These are people who practice Brahmanism.
- *Nirgranthas.* These are Jain ascetics. Jainism has many points in common with Buddhism, though the Buddhist teaching of the Middle Way marks a fundamental difference between the two. Jainism teaches an extreme form of asceticism and does not allow the taking of any life whatsoever. It also allows caste differences, not being based on the idea of fundamental human equality like Buddhism.

- *Composers of worldly and outside literature or poetry.* This

refers to popular writers, poets, and songwriters and writers of non-Buddhist works. The admonition against close association with such people seems strange to the modern mind. Such people were the intelligentsia, those holding idiosyncratic, independent opinions, and so it was feared that inexperienced practitioners could be inadvertently led to doubt the Buddha Dharma and to regress from the practice of the Way. Thus it was necessary to warn the inexperienced to take care.

- *Lokayatas.* These are followers of an extremely materialistic and hedonistic school whose philosophy was one of the six non-Buddhist teachings current in India at the time of the Buddha. It taught that there is nothing outside matter, and that the purpose of life should therefore be to give oneself entirely to pleasure and profit. Lokayatas denied the effect and retribution of good and evil karma, and therefore regarded the true way of life to be the pursuit of pleasure.

- *Anti-Lokayatas.* Buddhist scholars are not clear to whom this refers, but the expression means the opposite of the Lokayatas, and thus those who are utterly opposed to the ways of the world. My interpretation is that it means extreme idealism as opposed to extreme materialism.

All these people have some kind of strong conviction and passion in that they hold to magnificent theories, and Buddhists coming into contact with them may be in danger of being seduced by the intensity of their ideas and lured away from the Buddha Way. Thus the Buddha urges caution.

TEXT nor does he resort to brutal sports, boxing, and wrestling, nor to the various performances of nartakas and others;

COMMENTARY *Brutal sports.* This means foolish and dangerous sport, play, or caprice.

- *Nartakas.* These are dancers, singers, and actors.

Today the tenor of the times has changed completely, and sports are regarded very highly. Games and sports harness aggressive instincts to peaceful purposes, and are valuable for both health and character building. Theatrical performances are also now thought of as excellent recreation. Nevertheless, both sport and performance can be abused, that is, become “brutal sports.” Betting on sports, for example, takes away one’s will to make an effort and can destroy one’s life completely if taken to extremes. Consider the people whose lives have been ruined as a result of excessive betting on horse races and so on. Popular entertainment pervades our lives, but there are some fans who lose all grip on reality in their frenzy to identify with stars. Magazine articles and television programs that focus on scandal or invade star athletes’ and entertainers’ privacy to report the kinds of details a doting public demands can also be termed “brutal sports” that corrupt people’s minds. We should stay well away from these things.

TEXT nor does he consort with candalas, keepers of pigs, sheep, fowl, and dogs, hunters, fishermen, and [those

engaged in] these evil pursuits; whenever such people as these sometimes come to him, he preaches the Law to them expecting nothing [in return].

COMMENTARY We must interpret this passage very flexibly to allow for differences in custom and culture between ancient India and the modern world. The *candalas* were a particular caste in ancient Indian society, made up of the children of Sudra fathers and Brahman mothers. Sudras were the lowest of the four castes, being virtually slaves. Brahmans, on the other hand, were the ritualists and scholars, the highest caste. Marriage between these two castes was forbidden, and so any child born of a union between them was casteless. Any person unaffiliated with any of the four castes was considered suitable only to fill such posts as executioner.

The occupations mentioned in the passage are all vital to society, and they should be highly regarded, since they provide people with necessary foodstuffs. This was not so in ancient India, however, as can be seen here. The “evil pursuits” mentioned refer in particular to jobs that involve the taking of life—or, more broadly, the kind of negative mental function that arises when one thinks, for example, that one must repeatedly take life in order to live. Today we would call this a subconscious sense of sin, self-disparagement, or despair.

The sutra, in saying that bodhisattvas should not consort with such people, is warning not that they should not approach them but that they must not be affected by the kind of atmosphere that may surround them. In other words, this admonition can be regarded as the expression of the care of

a loving parent. Indeed, it is very clear that bodhisattvas are told that they must teach, without discrimination, anyone who comes to them to hear the Law. They are warned, however that they should do so without expectation of any profit (“expecting nothing [in return]”), as is the case whenever they expound the Law, for this is the basic attitude of the bodhisattva practice.

TEXT Further, he does not consort with bhikshus, bhikshunis, and male and female lay devotees who seek after shravakaship, nor does he address them; neither in a room, nor in the place of promenade, nor in the hall does he dwell or stay with them; if at times they come to him he takes the opportunity of preaching the Law expecting nothing [in return].

COMMENTARY *A room.* This refers to a monk’s cell.

• *Promenade.* In India, it was customary to meditate upon the Law and to recite sutras while walking around. Places of promenade were especially constructed for this purpose, and their remains have been found in Buddhist monastic buildings and temples. They were a kind of corridor.

If inexperienced bodhisattvas come into close contact with monks who have forgotten the necessity of liberating all people or listen to their teachings, they may be drawn to the two vehicles, and so become immersed in the search for their own enlightenment alone. The above passage warns of this possibility.

TEXT “Manjushri! Again a bodhisattva-mahasattva should

not preach the Law to women, displaying an appearance capable of arousing passionate thoughts, nor have pleasure in seeing them; if he enters the homes of others, he does not converse with any girl, virgin, widow, and so forth, nor again does he become on friendly terms with any hermaphrodite;

COMMENTARY *A bodhisattva-mahasattva should not preach the Law to women, displaying an appearance capable of arousing passionate thoughts.* When a male bodhisattva preaches the Law to a woman, he should restrain himself from indulging in lustful thoughts toward her and from arousing such thoughts in her. If he tries to preach the Law in such circumstances he will commit a sin instead. This warning shows a keen understanding of the subtleties of human nature.

- *He does not converse with any girl, virgin, widow.* “Converse” refers here to friendly talk about worldly things. It is interesting that the inexperienced male bodhisattvas for whom this passage was written should have needed such an admonition.

- *Hermaphrodite.* The ancient Indians believed that there were five types of man physiologically not completely male. Such people carried with them a particular atmosphere that might cause young male bodhisattvas to waver in their aspiration for enlightenment. They were warned therefore to stay away from such people.

TEXT he does not enter the homes of others alone; if for some reason he must enter there alone, then with single mind he thinks of the Buddha;

COMMENTARY While it is not a problem for great bodhisattvas who have achieved the Way, visiting the houses of lay people alone may cause many difficulties for young and inexperienced bodhisattvas. Impure desires may arise as they seek to win favor or hanker after a warm welcome. Even when discoursing on the Law, they may well twist the truth of the Buddha’s teaching out of concern for others’ opinions.

When they are with their group, they should guard against an impure attitude, not let such desires influence them, and not distort the Law. This is why the Buddha tells bodhisattvas not to “enter the homes of others alone.” If there is a compelling reason to enter the homes of others alone, however, bodhisattvas must think of the Buddha “with single mind,” that is, they must constantly remember that they and the Buddha are one in mind, that the Buddha is always with them. If they are mindful that the Buddha is with them, inappropriate desires will not arise and they will not be halfhearted in preaching the Law.

The conviction that the Buddha is with one and is walking with one is a joyful state of mind that only a believer can know. Such a person can attain not only the merit of behaving as described here but also the even greater merit of peace of mind, the ability to rest easy at any time.

I have flown many times both within Japan and abroad, but I cannot remember ever being frightened of flying. This is

not because I am especially brave but because I have always been convinced that the Buddha is with me. When we have such a conviction, we are able to act spontaneously, seeing things exactly as they are. We can say with complete equanimity that we live because the Original Buddha has a purpose for us, and that when he considers the time has come for us to leave this world, we will pass on, existing through him in death as in life. Cushioned by such ease, on our journey through life we can enjoy our surroundings to the full, study as we wish, and happily mix with those who are traveling with us.

Our life is a journey. Sometimes it is painful, at others constrained, and often we must strive to communicate peacefully with our traveling companions. At the same time, we have the enjoyment of learning and experiencing a great deal. The greatest delight of life’s journey and its greatest significance is the ability to surrender to the Original Buddha the ultimate problem of birth and death. Having done so, we can move forward in the mission that has been assigned us. Then we will be able to pursue our real work, the creation of a truly human way of life. I believe this is the ultimate meaning that religion holds for us, and surmise that it was with this intent that Shakyamuni told the inexperienced bodhisattvas to think of the Buddha “with single mind.”

TEXT if he preaches the Law to women, he does not display his teeth in smiles nor let his breast be seen, nor even for the sake of the Law does he ever become intimate, how much less for other reasons.

COMMENTARY Since the Buddha here warns against loose behavior in order to prevent any misconduct between men and women, it goes without saying that this has nothing to do with the “gentle expression and kind words” considered to be the best attitude in teaching the Law.

TEXT He takes no pleasure in nurturing young pupils, shramaneras, and children, nor has he pleasure in sharing the same teacher with them;

COMMENTARY Here we have a warning against pederasty.

TEXT but ever preferring meditation and seclusion, he cultivates and controls his mind. Manjushri! This is termed the first [grade] sphere of intimacy [of a bodhisattva].

COMMENTARY *Meditation.* This is a reference to seated meditation, or zazen. That is not something practiced by followers of Zen Buddhism alone. It is important for all people who study and practice Buddhism. There are many ways of performing zazen, but all require the practitioner to sit quietly, control unruly thoughts, and enter the state of nonself. Without practicing meditation, the teaching that we have learned will not take deep root in our minds, nor will we be inclined to put it into practice. This is why some

form of meditation is an essential part of spiritual training in all religions.

The sutra has given us a series of warnings, all of which are closely related to ancient Indian customs and society. It is not necessary for us today to follow them literally, because they were warnings for inexperienced bodhisattvas, but we must strictly follow the underlying spirit of the words.

TEXT “Further, a bodhisattva-mahasattva contemplates all laws as empty—appearances as they really are, neither upside down, nor moving, nor receding, nor turning, just like space, of the nature of nothingness,

COMMENTARY The sutra speaks here of the realization of emptiness. We have already studied this in chapter 2, “Preaching,” of the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings (see the January/February 1993 issue of DHARMA WORLD), but I strongly recommend further study of the meaning of emptiness, for it is one of the basic truths of the Buddha Dharma and we, as bodhisattvas, must always preach the Law on the basis of this truth (“sitting on the throne of the Tathagata”).

- *All laws.* Here “laws” means “phenomena.”
- *Appearances as they really are.* This phrase can be interpreted as accepting the phenomena we perceive just as they are, but here it means the original form of all things.
- *Neither upside down.* Given that all phenomena are originally empty and inherently equal, why is it that we see them as different, looking only at the various surface variations? We do so because of our ignorance, our fundamental lack of wisdom. This point has been explained in the discussion of the Law of the Twelve Causes and Conditions (see the January/February 2004 issue). “Upside down” means regarding what is the same as different, thinking that what has no fixed form is permanent, and viewing things as the reverse of what they are.
- *Just like space, of the nature of nothingness.* “Space” refers to the sky, or a place where there is nothing at all. “Nature of nothingness” means that nothing has self-nature and that there is no fixed substance.

TEXT cut off from the course of all words and expressions, unborn, not coming forth, not arising, nameless, formless, really without existence, infinite, boundless, unimpeded, unrestrained,

COMMENTARY When one contemplates all things in the world correctly, one sees that it is almost impossible to explain their essence in “words and expressions.” Nevertheless, I feel confident that people of today, educated in concepts and theories, will be able to glean the gist of the above passage.

- *Really without existence.* All things in this world exist according to the law of dependent origination. There is no such thing, therefore, as an absolute existence or a fixed and eternal substance. Yet it is a fact that those things do exist as

temporary forms, so we can interpret the phrase as “existing in this world but having no fixed substance.”

- *Unimpeded, unrestrained.* We have the idea that all the phenomena that surround us actually exist in those forms. For example, if we see a concrete or metal wall in front of us, we naturally consider it an obstacle to our progress. Within an atom of even one of the densest metals, lead, however, elementary particles occupy only a hundred thousandth of it; all the rest is space. Thus even a thick lead wall can be penetrated, if considered in these terms. This may be easier to understand if I rephrase it and say that seeing things from the standpoint of elementary particles is viewing things in terms of the contemplation of emptiness. The more we resolve to devote ourselves to the contemplation of emptiness, the freer and more unrestricted our minds become, and the more unconscious we become of the impediments and restraints of phenomena.

TEXT only existing by causes and conditions, and produced through perversion [of thought]. Therefore I say constantly to delight in the contemplation of things [or laws] such as these is termed a bodhisattva-mahasattva’s second sphere of intimacy.”

COMMENTARY This is another important passage. All phenomena are originally empty, coming into being through the interplay of causes and conditions. If we look upon the things that surround us as fixed and unchanging, we will register only their differences and not realize that they are all originally equal. This happens because our view of things is topsy-turvy; we look at things the wrong way around and are unable to discern their true form or perceive them just as they are.

- *The contemplation of things [or laws] such as these.* “Laws” here refers to the true form, or aspect, of all things. Bodhisattvas must constantly and willingly discern causes and conditions (dependent origination) and be thorough in the contemplation of emptiness, viewing all things correctly.

This is the sphere of intimacy, the way in which bodhisattvas should relate to others. It is highly significant that the Buddha teaches here that bodhisattvas must spare no pains in the contemplation of emptiness as a way of relating to people. After all, such contemplation is the means by which bodhisattvas perceive the equality of human beings’ true nature (buddha-nature), and it is by realizing this equality that they experience the knowledge that they and others are one, thus allowing deep compassion to be generated from within.

To be continued

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

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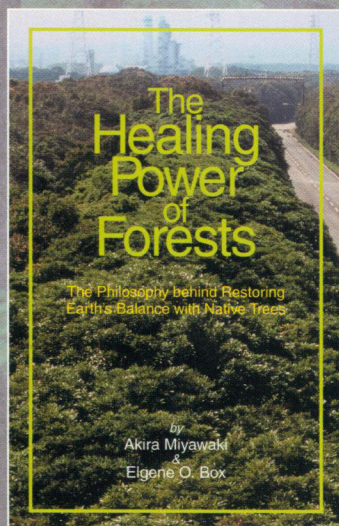
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