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DHARMA
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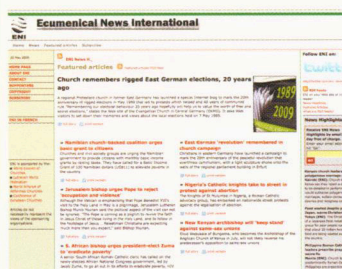
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DHARMA WORLD

For Living Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue

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

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Publisher: Moriyasu Okabe

Director: Isao Hayashi

Senior Editor: Koichiro Yoshida

Editor: Kazumasa Osaka

Editorial Advisors:

Gene Reeves, Yoshiaki Sanada, Michio T. Shinozaki

Copy Editors:

Stephen Comee, William Feuillan,
Gary Hoiby, DeAnna Satre

Editorial Staff:

Toshihiko Nishino, Katsuyuki Kikuchi,
Ryuichi Kaneko

Subscription Staff: Kazuyo Okazaki

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Readers can also learn about the organization directly from the branches, liaison offices, and sister organizations at the addresses listed below.

Rissho Kosei-kai Genève
1-5 route des Morillons
P.O. Box 2100, CH-1211, Geneva 2, Switzerland
Tel: 41-22-791-6261 Fax: 41-22-710-2053
rkkgva@wcc-coe.org

Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America
4255 Campus Drive
University Center Suite A-245
Irvine, CA 92612, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-949-336-4430 Fax: 1-949-336-4432
info@buddhistcenter-rkina.org
<http://www.buddhistcenter-rkina.org/>

Rissho Kosei-kai of New York
320 East 39th Street
New York, NY 10016, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-212-867-5677 Fax: 1-212-697-6499
koseiny@aol.com

Rissho Kosei-kai of Chicago
1 West Euclid Avenue
Mt. Prospect, IL 60056, U.S.A.
Tel & Fax: 1-847-394-0809
murakami3370@hotmail.com

Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco
1031 Valencia Way, Pacifica, CA 94044, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-650-359-6951 Fax: 1-650-359-5569
rksf@earthlink.net

**Rissho Kosei-kai of Seattle's
Buddhist Learning Center**
28621 Pacific Highway South
Federal Way, WA 98003, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-253-945-0024 Fax: 1-253-945-0261
rkseattle@juno.com

**Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of
Los Angeles**
2707 East First Street
Los Angeles, CA 90033, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-323-269-4741 Fax: 1-323-269-4567
rk-la@sbcglobal.net
www.rk-la.com

**Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of
San Antonio**
6083 Babcock Road
San Antonio, TX 78240, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-210-561-7991 Fax: 1-210-696-7745
tozuna48@yahoo.com
<http://www.rksanantonio.org/>

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Oklahoma
2745 N.W. 40th Street
Oklahoma City, OK 73112, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-405-943-5030 Fax: 1-405-943-5303
ok.risshokoseikai@gmail.com
www.rkok-dharmacenter.org

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Hawaii
2280 Auhuhu Street, Pearl City, HI 96782
U.S.A.
Tel: 1-808-455-3212 Fax: 1-808-455-4633
info@mail.rkhawaii.org
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Rissho Kosei-kai Maui Dharma Center
1817 Nani Street
Wailuku, Maui, HI 96793, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-808-242-6175 Fax: 1-808-244-4265

Rissho Kosei-kai Kona Branch
73-4592 Mamalahoa Highway
Kailua, Kona, HI 96750, U.S.A.
Tel & Fax: 1-808-325-0015

Rissho Kosei-kai of Hong Kong
Flat D, 5/F, Kiu Hing Mansion, 14 King's Road
North Point, Hong Kong, China
Tel: 852-2-369-1836 Fax: 852-2-368-3730

Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangkok
Thai Rissho Friendship Foundation
201 Soi 15/1, Praram 9 Road, Bangkapi
Huaykhwang, Bangkok 10310, Thailand
Tel: 66-2-716-8141 Fax: 66-2-716-8218
thairissho@csloxinfo.com

Rissho Kosei-kai of Kathmandu
Ward No. 3, Jhamsikhel, Sanepa-1, Lalitpur
Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: 977-1-552-9464 Fax: 977-1-553-9832
nrkk@wlink.com.np

Rissho Kosei-kai of Colombo
No. 18, Anura Mawatha, Off Anderson Road
Kalubowila, Dehiwala, Sri Lanka
Tel: 94-11-2763035 Fax: 94-11-4205632
rkkrsrilanka@visualnet.lk

Rissho Kosei-kai of Delhi
Delhi Dharma Center
B-117 (Top & Basement Floors), Kalkaji
New Delhi-110019, India
Tel: 91-11-2623-5060 Fax: 91-11-2685-5713
sakusena@hotmail.com

Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangladesh
79 Chanmari Road, Lalkhan Bazar
Chittagong, Bangladesh
Tel: 880-31-2850238
bimanrkkbimanrkk@yahoo.com

Rissho Kosei-kai do Brasil
Rua Dr. José Estefno 40, Vila Mariana
São Paulo-SP, CEP 04116-060, Brasil
Tel: 55-11-5549-4446 Fax: 55-11-5549-4304
hiromi_mat@ig.com.br
www.rkk.org.br

Rissho Kosei-kai of Taipei
4F, No. 10 Hengyang Road
Jhongheng District
Taipei City 100, Taiwan
Tel: 886-2-2381-1632 Fax: 886-2-2331-3433
<http://kosei-kai.blogspot.com/>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Tainan
No. 45, Chongming 23rd Street
East District, Tainan City, 701
Taiwan
Tel: 886-6-289-1478 Fax: 886-6-289-1488

Rissho Kosei-kai of Pingtung
No. 4, Lane 60, Minquan Road, Pingtung City
Pingtung County 900, Taiwan
Tel: 886-8-734-1241 Fax: 886-8-733-0774

Rissho Kosei-kai of Mongolia
39 Apartment, Room Number 13
Olympic Street, Khanuul District
Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
Tel & Fax: 976-11-318667
rkkmongolia@yahoo.co.jp

Korean Rissho Kosei-kai
423, Han-nam-dong, Young-san-ku
Seoul, Republic of Korea
Tel: 82-2-796-5571 Fax: 82-2-796-1696
krkk1125@hotmail.com

**International Buddhist Congregation
of Rissho Kosei-kai**
5F, Fumon Hall, 2-6-1 Wada, Suginami-ku
Tokyo 166-0012, Japan
Tel: 81-3-5341-1230 Fax: 81-3-5341-1224
ibcrk@kosei-kai.or.jp
www.ibc-rk.org

Religious Organizations and Public Relations Activities

by Takeshi Kawabata

In a certain sense, all religions since their inception have engaged in public relations activities. This is because public relations are part of missionary work itself. Naturally enough, missionary work was originally based on face-to-face conversations in which one person transmitted religious teachings to another. However, as times have changed, the range of methods for transmitting religious teachings has broadened.

Technological innovation has been the main driver of these changes. In former ages, Gutenberg's invention of the printing press and the first printing of the Bible allowed missionary work to be pursued through the printed word. There seems little doubt that the religious works most often printed from the fifteenth century to the present are the Bible and the Qur'an.

As we entered the twentieth century, technological development took off, and various types of media other than the printed word were created and used for missionary work. Photography, cinema, and recorded sound became available as media for missionary work, and radio and television came to serve as new ways to communicate religious messages. Some religious groups and organizations put particular emphasis on the use of commercial advertising as a medium for missionary work.

Now, in the twenty-first century, it is no exaggeration to say that the Internet is the most quickly developing medium for advertising and public relations. I expect there are very few religious groups and organizations today that do not have their own Web sites. On a global level, the amount of information now being offered must be immense. The provision of information by religious groups and organizations with Internet access will probably accelerate, and the Internet will no doubt become one of the predominant media for missionary work.

However, the problem with this scenario is, how far will provision of information in this way function as missionary work, and how far will it function as public relations? And what exactly is the difference between missionary work and public relations?

An extreme view of missionary work sees it as activity to win new converts by emphasizing that one's own religious group or organization is the most correct and most superior available. On the other hand, public relations activities as practiced by religious groups and organizations offer more objective information and thus aim to be more of a contribution to general public welfare.

At the very least, information provided for public relations should not aim at emphasizing that the group or organization offering the information is exclusively the most correct and most superior. In other words, I think the criteria for evaluating religious public relations activities should be based on how

well the group or organization suppresses its sense of exclusivism and achieves objectivity. From this standpoint, Rissho Kosei-kai makes a very clear distinction between its dissemination work and its public relations activities.

After attaining enlightenment, Shakyamuni preached the Middle Path, which eschews imbalanced thought and extreme action, and he advocated thought and action based on observation of how things interact. One of the scriptures that most accurately communicates the spirit of Shakyamuni's teaching in this respect is the Lotus Sutra, which expounds the spirit of the One Vehicle.

The spirit of the One Vehicle teaches us to leave behind the exclusivism of religious groups or organizations that encourages members to value only their own particular spiritual beliefs. Instead, it teaches tolerance of other religious viewpoints, approaching them as allies in the effort to contribute to world peace and human happiness. It is in this spirit that Rissho Kosei-kai promotes interreligious dialogue and interreligious cooperation. Its public relations activities are also quite naturally based on this approach.

In public relations activities, at present Rissho Kosei-kai distributes pamphlets, leaflets, and other printed material; puts up posters; places advertisements in newspapers, magazines, and in other printed media; holds press conferences and briefings on its events for the mass media; and posts information on its Web site. However, it does not really disseminate enough information through these outlets. We hope to be active in the use of the Internet to make more widely known the Dharma as taught by Shakyamuni, naturally including the Dharma talks of Rissho Kosei-kai Founder Nikkyo Niwano, from a standpoint consistently based on the Middle Path.

DHARMA WORLD magazine is of course one of our printed public relations materials; we are hoping to communicate its contents to a great many more people as part of the redesign of Rissho Kosei-kai's English-language Web site, which has gone online recently. □

Takeshi Kawabata is director of the General Affairs Bureau of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo.

Media as Peace-Building Tool in Sri Lanka— Religions Have a Long Way to Go

by Jehan Perera

The intertwining of ethnicity and religion means that the ethnic conflict also occupies a religious dimension. The politicization of religion has thus become a major impediment to peace building.

When distributing correct information and fact-based interpretations of current events, the media can be a powerful instrument of democracy. Media that provide accurate and comprehensive information are pillars of democracy and agents for conflict resolution by peaceful means. Through uninterrupted access to responsible news sources, the public is able to make the well-informed choices that sustain a democracy. However, the democratic establishment is impaired when the media become partial agents in society, intent on pushing their own agenda or the agenda of those in power. Where the media are not neutral reporters or peripheral observers but active participants in the conflict, they end up broadcasting and printing partisan information and polarizing divided communities further.

A major problem arises in the case of ethnic conflicts when national society itself polarizes between the ethnic groups in conflict. Even religious communities can become polarized and parties to the conflict, failing to engage in mutual dialogue and each taking a stand that excludes the other. In these circumstances, a medium becomes utilized by decision makers and opinion formers alike to become a part of the

conflict, disseminating partial and partisan information. The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict has been no exception. For nearly three decades, Sri Lanka has been embroiled in civil war. Ethnopolitical tensions in the early nation spurred a Tamil nationalist movement, with a separate Tamil state as its agenda, and infighting among ethnic groups soon escalated into a full-scale war.

The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict has been considered to be “one of the deadliest and most protracted conflicts of our time”¹ and, until the recent crushing of the rebel Tamil Tigers in war, was the longest-running civil war in the Asian region. Although the war is over, the ethnic conflict that preceded the war and, indeed gave birth to it, still continues and needs to be dealt with through a political solution. The cultural diversity found in Sri Lanka is an essential aspect of both the roots and the development of this conflict. The majority, at about 74 percent of the population, is Sinhalese, most of whom are Buddhist. The rest of the population is divided among the Sri Lankan Tamils, who are mostly Hindu by religion and compete with the Sinhalese for claims of historical entitlement to the land; the Sri Lankan Moors, who trace their roots to Arab traders; and the Indian Tamils, who, again, are predominantly Hindu and were brought to the island as plantation workers by the British. A relatively small minority of both Sinhalese and Tamils is Christian.

While ethnicity is the primary marker of identity in Sri Lanka, it has become both socially and politically conflated with religion. Since the late nineteenth century, there have been increasing instances of religious conflict. In the post-independence period, this trend has intensified. The Sinhalese have been very effectively mobilized through Buddhism; similarly the Tamil-speaking Muslims have asserted a more distinct identity for themselves based on their religion. Hinduism, another early religion of Sri Lanka, is associated with having pure Tamil roots. These interactions between ethnicity and religion suggest that even though race is the primary source of social stratification in Sri Lanka, people are always “aware of the religious identities associated with different communities”² and that all religions have political elements to them.

Jehan Perera is executive director of the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka, an organization that works for a negotiated political solution to the ethnic conflict in the country. He is also a political columnist for the Daily Mirror and Divaina newspapers. He was awarded the inaugural Sakai Peace Contribution Award by the city of Sakai, Japan, in 2008. Dr. Perera completed this essay as the Sri Lankan government announced its May victory over the separatist Tamil Tigers, ending the country's twenty-six years of civil war.

The civil war in Sri Lanka, though classified as an ethnic conflict, is thus also one based on sacred identities and religious separations. The mobilization of religion for ethno-nationalistic purposes plays a key role in the war's social and political history. To gain power, the early Sinhalese elite used the historical record of an ancient Buddhist heritage to unite the Sinhalese into a base of electoral support. In its rise to power, the ruling Sinhalese elite tended to ignore the needs of Sri Lanka's minorities, severely damaging its relations with them.

In response to the increasing power of the Sinhalese, the Tamils began to harden their own ethnic boundaries, eventually giving rise to a volatile form of Tamil nationalism around which the rebel group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was organized. Meanwhile, the Tamil-speaking Muslims, who saw their sociopolitical and economic interests floundering under increasing Tamil mobilization, asserted their own distinct ethnic identity. This intertwining of ethnicity and religion means that the ethnic conflict also occupies a religious dimension.

The politicization of religion has thus become a major impediment to peace building in Sri Lanka. The history of religious interference in political and social peace building has tainted modern perceptions of the potential of religions to advocate for reconciliation and forge peace. Furthermore, the recent political climate, one that has invested all of its energy and resources into a military "solution," does not look kindly upon messages of peace. Current faith-based peace-building efforts cannot be removed from this history or context, since each presents obstacles that must be tackled and overcome.

Such polarization is especially serious in light of the nationalistic atmosphere fostered by opposing extremist groups. These groups thrive by engendering societal divisions and bolstering conflicting nationalistic identities. Nationalistic identity, as defined by a political scientist, Benedict Anderson, is founded on how the nation-state is perceived by individuals;³ since this is purely a *perception*, however, it is subject to external manipulation. This is where the media play a key role. By publishing propagandist materials, by voicing only one-sided accounts, and by creating a general fear of "the other," the media are able to polarize Sri Lanka's ethnic communities and prolong their mutual dislike and distrust.

The media are thus an important informant in national identity formation and consolidation. Within Sri Lanka, they are particularly effective in promoting nationalism, since the public relies heavily on them for most of its conflict-related information. The perpetuation of nationalistic tendencies through the media is not by any means a new phenomenon. The powerful influence that the media hold over the people has allowed them to be repetitively manipulated for the use of substantiating and reaffirming nationalism. National governments, religious communities, and other establishments of power have all taken advantage of the media at

one point or another, using their influence to garner support for their own agendas.

Other cases throughout the world also show how the media can become tools of nationalism. The media can be influenced by nationalistic policies, as when American newspapers mirrored government stances during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁴ Media can also reflect the nationalism of the people, as when nationalistic rhetoric took over the Chinese media when a Chinese pilot was killed in a collision with a U.S. military aircraft over the South China Sea.⁵ Perhaps most dangerous is when the media regenerate nationalism as they do for second- and third-generation Muslims in the West, radicalizing them through nationalistic content and the creation of informal Internet-based diasporic networks.⁶

Particularly significant in the theme of nationalistic media is the concept of "patriotic journalism." This is evident in almost all media coverage of any homeland conflict. When wars are waged against "the other," or national interests are deemed to be threatened, the media find that they must align with their own nation or risk being called traitors. During the Gulf War, for instance, the U.S. government collaborated with American media to generate very high public support for the war. In the conflicts the United States has engaged in more recently in Iraq and Afghanistan, such authoritarian control of public information is still visible. While current news media are somewhat more sympathetic to the high toll on civilians in these regions, they are still operating under instructions to be circumspect in their television footage.

In the intensely nationalistic atmosphere created by such conflicts, the media are told "you are either with us, or against us."⁷ Their reporting thus becomes heavily one-sided, with no efforts to understand or engage with the opposition. The nation's failures are brushed aside in favor of critiques of the other, influencing the public to make uninformed decisions about whether such conflict is justifiable. The media thus become influential components of the conflict, reaffirming nationalism and sustaining the us versus them divide.

Much of the recent research and discussion on Sri Lankan media has found that it is currently difficult to find an independent, impartial voice in the media.⁸ Instead, information is both formally and informally controlled by those in power, creating inherent biases in the media structure. Thus the media repeatedly emphasize the tensions between the two groups by giving one-sided information, maintaining ethnic hatred, and destroying any wish the people may have for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Thus sections of the media not only polarize society now but sustain this for the future by not creating sufficient awareness among the general population about the need for mutual accommodation to arrive at a just and negotiated political solution to the conflict.

The escalation in conflict during the past few years has

The Inter-Religious Council of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka's most representative multireligious body, holding an international conference for peace building in Anuradhapura, northern Sri Lanka, in November 2008.

meant that there has been an increase in nationalistic thought and ethnic hostility within the country, the tensions of which are reflected in the media. The media are not detached observers of these events; instead the media actively encourage the conflict by intentionally reproducing prejudiced and incomplete knowledge. This is, in large part, because of who controls the local media. In Sri Lanka, the widest-reaching media are state run, with about 95 percent of the country having access to them.⁹ Since the majority of media establishments are aligned with the state, often out of a desire for sheer survival, much of the information distributed to the public is biased toward the government and rarely expresses the views of other parties.

Furthermore, since the media are primarily commercial institutions, they must ensure that they publish what is pleasing to their advertisers and their primary audience. This usually does not cause a problem when the consumers are diverse in background and opinion. Since readership in Sri Lanka is divided by ethnicity and religion, however, this allows the media to present a single, prejudicial, undisputed point of view. The difference is most glaring between the Sinhala- and Tamil-language media, where nationalism is consistently reaffirmed and the perspectives of the other remain distorted and unrecognized. Even the English-language media, though having a more varied audience, are influenced primarily by the dominant Sinhala perspective.

While ownership and an ethnically divided audience do influence the content of the media, media partiality can also be accredited to the personal biases of the journalists. The journalists, publishers, and editors who create the print media are not, as they are idealized, detached from society. They are very much a part of it. They are a part of the divisions, rivalries, and prejudices that constitute society. Being fully conscious of the powerful role they have, they seek to act in ways that promote the interests of the side they belong to. This personal bias that is introduced into the media is difficult to identify, since it is usually reflected simply

through the wording of a report. It can be especially dangerous, however, when it leads to an outright manipulation of the facts.

Since all of Sri Lanka's ethnic and religious communities feel that their existence is threatened,¹⁰ a large majority perceive the current nationalistic conflict as the only means of survival. In the current climate where fierce battles raged and increased ethnic tension, and ethnic polarization increased, it thus becomes difficult even for religious leaders of either group to speak of a peaceful reconciliation that involved political compromise that deals with the roots of the ethnic conflict. Since peace necessitates negotiating with those perceived as the enemy and maintaining a sustained collaboration, it is construed as diametrically opposed to the values of ethnic patriotism. Those who work for peace that involved political accommodation and compromise with the other are thus branded as traitors and are publicly vilified as such. In the aftermath of the Sri Lankan government's military victory, nationalistic fervor is at a high level, which can make the need for compromise that reaches out to the ethnic minorities seem totally unnecessary.

Also, since religion has been so effectively tied to the ethnic conflict, it becomes particularly difficult for religious leaders who seek to be close to the ethos of their coreligionists to abandon the norm and speak for such a negotiated peace. As representatives of their group's beliefs, their public personae are subject to both external and internal pressure. There is usually more inducement to adhere to the more popular nationalist agenda, which can make it extremely difficult for religious leaders to openly support a political peace. Buddhist monks, who are the most influential on the political leadership, are also the most subject to such restraint.

It is important to keep these fears in mind when trying to establish an interreligious effort for peace. Those organizing such a project must understand that each religious group has its own specific concerns and that forming a unified idea of

“peace” will be a difficult task. It must also be understood that while there may be some level of consensus among the leaders, this may not be immediately translated to the public. Nationalism and an exclusivistic group identity will be the hardest to combat.

On the other hand, while the religious communities are largely compartmentalized, they hold significant power over events in Sri Lanka. If they could overcome their internal nationalistic leanings, the religious communities would be able to generate a great deal of positive change. Thus, while the current perspectives and actions of the religious communities uphold the conflict, they can, with some effort, work to end it. One primary asset of the religious communities is their exposure to ideas of the universalism of human values. This, combined with the greater level of education, could be a positive source of information for decision makers and people in Sri Lanka.

Literature in the field of religious peacemaking identifies a number of specific, though not unique, strengths that faith-based actors possess. These include “strong faith-based motivation, long-term commitment, long-term presence on the ground, moral and spiritual authority, and a niche to mobilize others for peace.”¹¹ Religious interventions can take many forms, involving local religious bodies, grassroots initiatives, or religious leaders to bridge “the divide between faiths to engage in dialogue, build relationships, and develop trust and work together to resolve common problems.”¹² One particular asset of faith-based peace building in Sri Lanka is that the country is inherently very spiritual; thus when these interventions are framed within a religious context and argue for peace using religious narratives, they become much more effective in persuading involved parties toward peace.

Although the media have by and large been used to perpetuate conflict, it must be recognized that one of the most effective resources of the religious communities is their access to the media. A network of immense proportions, the media can reach all members of the Sri Lankan community and be a persuasive voice for peace and reconciliation. The religious communities must take advantage of this freedom and use it to transcend their internal divisions. By interacting with each other, the various members of the religious communities may be able to share their perspectives and realize a common ground. Through small group meetings and interviews with the media, and by using the Internet, they could create and adopt a collective Sri Lankan identity through which the conflict could then be addressed.

At the same time, it is also important that the media provide the opportunity for religious leaders to focus on peace and negotiated, as opposed to unilateral, solutions as a universal value. Only by publicizing such peace efforts will it be recognized that ethnic reconciliation is a legitimate possibility. If religious groups initiate links with local and international peace efforts and give them a visible presence in the media, the potential for reconciliation will gradually be

publicly realized. Nationalism, though it may not wholly die out, will be visibly challenged, and constructive discussions on ethnic relations can then take place. If the religious communities can utilize the media positively and transform them into a proactive mode of ideological interaction, they will be able to reach a larger number of people with the message of peace. Through providing access to comprehensive information and a perspective informed by universalism, the religious communities could become a valuable vehicle for peace and democracy in Sri Lanka. □

Notes

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The News Media and Religion in the Blogging Era

by Peter Kenny

Many news items raise the issue of media and religion and how they intertwine in a landscape that in reality is far more complex than a robust debate between creationists and evolutionists.

Those who increasingly subscribe to the secular system see religion as a life activity compartmentalized from mainstream existence. In many countries “church” and “state” have been clearly separated or are in the process of such a divorce. This separation is often reinforced by perceptions advanced by the news media.

This is especially so in advanced industrialized nations, where religion as it existed in the past is often portrayed by the media as being on the wane. Yet in current or former communist nations, where atheism was once advocated as the accepted belief system, religion is reviving, as is the case in both China and Russia. Christianity is thriving in many developing nations, while Islam is growing in many countries in which its presence was once minimal. At the same time, it is becoming harder to distinguish certain nations as having only one dominating religion, faith, or denomination. Still, some countries vigorously resist the encroachment of new faiths.

News for its part covers every aspect of human endeavor, and religion is no less a niche in coverage than politics, sports, and lifestyle. Newspapers and blogs specializing in religion abound. Religion is interwoven with both old and

new media. There is even a Web site called Blog as Religion (blogasreligion.com) that says, “Blogs can inspire legions of followers only when they’re structured like a religion!” All the major faiths now have Web sites or portals devoted to news, some that cater more for secular tastes and others aimed at their own followers.

News Agencies

Buddhists and those interested in Buddhism are catered for online by the Buddhist Channel (www.buddhistchannel.tv), which carries secular news and opinion pieces about the faith. Those seeking news about religions that has a strong emphasis on Christians can read Ecumenical News International (www.eni.ch). ENI is an independent news service based in Switzerland that is funded by global church groups. In North America, Religion News Service (www.religionnews.com) says it is “the only secular news and photo service devoted to unbiased coverage of religion and ethics.” It provides news to mainstream media and has a sophisticated Web site. Both ENI and RNS, which have a news exchange agreement, tailor their news to secular consumption but are also used by religious-news outlets. There are news agencies, such as the Catholic News Service (www.catholicnews.com), that also have independent charters but cater for specific religious groups, such as the Roman Catholic Church in the case of CNS. The Jewish Telegraph Agency describes itself as “the global news service of the Jewish people,” publishing news of interest to them. iViews.com is an interactive publication that provides “timely reporting and insightful analysis and commentary” of importance to Muslims. “While the publication [www.iViews.com] is written from a Muslim perspective, its focus is not religious.” iViews.com says it seeks to “add balance and objectivity to an otherwise homogenous media pool.” Then there is the International Islamic News Agency, or IINA (www.islamicnews.org.sa), a specialized organ of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, based in Saudi Arabia. Among its stated aims is “to enhance and preserve the huge Islamic cultural heritage.” The Sarve Samachar Hindu News Service (news.hinduworld.com), sponsored by

Peter Kenny is editor-in-chief of Ecumenical News International, an independent news agency specializing in religious news that is backed by international church groups. He began his journalist career on South African newspapers and then worked for Agence France-Presse in southern Africa for five years. This was followed by nine years in Europe and Asia with United Press International, where he was serving as its Tokyo bureau chief when he left the wire service in 1999.

the Viraat Hindu Sabh, claimed when it began in 2004 to be the first Hindu news portal using a technology similar to the one used by Google News. Later, at its launch, Hindu Press International (www.hinduismtoday.com) said “the world’s oldest religion is donning shining new clothes,” with the aim of informing and inspiring “Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism.”

Reuters, the global secular news agency, has since 2007 had a special Web page devoted to religion called FaithWorld (blogs.reuters.com/faithworld) in which blogging takes place on every aspect of religion.

As well as the big secular and religious media players, there are tens of thousands of other denominational agencies, publications, and Web sites.

There are thousands of religious newspapers run by and for faiths and denominations. Then there are newspapers run or supported by religious organizations, such as the *Christian Science Monitor*, that are independent of their backers and provide credible secular news. Many religious newspapers, however, are facing a financial crisis, like many other kinds of newspapers throughout the world.

Religion is constantly mentioned in global news coverage. Often it is contentious and can involve reportage of conflicts stemming from purported religious bases. Every day a bishop, monk, or mullah makes the news headlines on political or social issues. Yet, when journalists who cover religion inquire about what people listen to, read, or watch in the news media, religion is rarely mentioned. For this reason some journalists who cover religion are pessimistic that not enough resources go into its coverage.

In the secular media each day, religious images flash across TV and Internet screens, and words and pictures about them are carried in newspapers and magazines or transmitted across the airwaves. There can be Pope Benedict XVI creating a stir when he speaks out on the Roman Catholic version of family life during a visit to Africa, a reaction to the Dalai Lama’s being refused a visa to South Africa so as not to offend China, a mosque being bombed by Islamic ultraextremists (“Taliban militants,” the government alleged) in Pakistan, or ultra-Orthodox Jews trying to expand a settlement into Palestinian areas of the Holy Land. News crops up concerning Hindu ultranationalists’ attacks on Christians or Muslims in India, or Buddhist nationalists protesting against Tamil rebel bomb blasts in Sri Lanka.

Nonbelievers Use Same Media

While believers of all faiths have quickly grasped the tools provided by new media to spread their message, so too have those who vigorously oppose them. An example is the use of advertising campaigns on buses in Europe and North America to challenge belief in God. Atheist guru and British academic Richard Dawkins, with his book *The God Delusion*, has established himself as the world’s highest-profile atheist polemicist using new and old media to spread his antireligious message.

Some bus advertisement campaigns in big cities of the world extol atheism, but others counter with support for faith. These signpost a growing public debate between those who have faith and those who strongly believe religion should have no part in life in our postmodern society. Those who believe there can be no God in their lives often use proselytizing fervor to propagate their nonbeliefs, and they have their own portal (www.atheismonline.com). These instances of daily-life actions are often based on belief, faith, and religion. Moreover, the fact that religion is often a key component in global and regional conflicts seems to have fueled the recent push by antireligious secularists to convert believers to atheism.

Many news items raise the issue of media and religion and how they intertwine in a landscape that in reality is far more complex than a robust debate between creationists and evolutionists. Because the history of the world may also be the history of religion, media in some form have always been part of the equation and are no less so now. Still, as the media have become more complex, so has their compartmentalization in covering global events. In the world of news coverage, there are now niche media for everything, including finance, health, politics, sports, and of course religion.

Apart from private prayer and meditation, religions have shared their messages verbally or in some written or pictorial form since their inception. Hindu Vedas and Buddhist sutras have long served the two religions that existed before Christianity and Islam. Jews used the Torah and Holy Scriptures for thousands of years, and later Christians spread their message through the Bible. Muslims developed the Qur’an from the same Abrahamic texts to deliver their message.

It is the Abrahamic faiths that seem to have the highest media profile in the twenty-first century. Christianity, followed by Islam, is the biggest religious faith, and both are often interpreted as being inclined to proselytize. After the Second World War, television took off globally as the most technologically advanced tool of the mass media. It took some years before religious organizations began to use publicly broadcast TV channels as tools for disseminating their messages.

Religion and New Media

Religious organizations were much quicker off the mark after the arrival of the Internet in 1989, which led to a proliferation of new media. The Internet offered new platforms for humanity to interrelate and communicate, and this time the world of faith was quick to catch on. Every large religion seems to use the Internet to disseminate its message. For better or worse, the world now has e-mail, blogs, e-books, portals, and social networking service as well as facilities to download and upload personal video material to the Internet. Most religions are using all of these tools. Even faith groups that remain opposed to modern human rights,

such as Islamic groups that deny women the most basic rights, enthusiastically embrace twenty-first-century media and Internet technology. The same can be said for socially conservative Christian groups, which often have highly sophisticated Web sites and allow controlled blogging.

In 1986 William F. Fore, then executive director of the Communication Commission of the New York-based National Council of Churches, wrote in the U.S.-based *Christian Century* magazine: “For years church leaders concerned about the communication revolution have been asking how to get the churches to take the changes seriously. What will it take to coax churches to become really involved in radio, television, satellites and computers—to join the communication revolution?”

Christian Century carries informed news, analysis, and features about religion in a format that can be understood by those who may not be active in their religion. Like most print-based publications, the magazine is backed by an Internet site that carries breaking news relating to religion, mainly Christian. In his article, Fore noted that the key task of accessing the media with religious terms and images entails extensive resources and processes that can turn out to be very costly.

Fore could have been speaking for all religions when he wrote that it is not possible for the church to meaningfully engage in deciding how people’s lives will be shaped without a society that is literate about the media. It is only in the provision of alternative conduits of the mass media that integrate messages about human and ethical values that media can help humanity overcome a growing dependence on those media that push an agenda seen by many religious leaders as based on relativist values, “celebrityism,” and material greed, and that are so easily spread in the technological era.

As regards the United States, news coverage of the religious landscape has in recent years gained visibility spurred by an increased interest in religious issues. Still, this now faces an uncertain future, given a state of flux in U.S. journalism, say prominent religion journalists. Among reasons for this are resources linked to the global financial crisis, which seems to permeate all aspects of life in the world, including religious publications and media.

Financial Crisis Hits Religious News

“The religion beat is suffering collateral damage,” reporter Michael Paulson, who covers religion for the *Boston Globe* newspaper, told members of the Religion Communicators’ Council, an interfaith professional association, in March 2009. Paulson spoke, in a panel discussion during the council’s annual meeting, with Rachel Zoll, who covers religion for the Associated Press, and John Yemma, the editor of the *Christian Science Monitor*. They told of frustrations and discouraging trends. These range from the reduction of staff to all-out elimination of sections devoted to religious reporting in U.S. newspapers. The journalists explained that the

once mighty *New York Times* now has only one reporter covering religion at the national level, instead of two, while a big regional newspaper such as the *Dallas Morning News* has abandoned a weekly religious news section that was one of the most comprehensive in the United States.

As far as North America is concerned, the problems of religious coverage are linked to U.S. journalism as a whole and seem also to be replicated in other parts of the globe. Newspapers in recent years have faced rapidly declining readership, often owing to readers’ no longer wanting to pay for news. This stems partially from news on the Internet or free sheets with compacted coverage. “There is a crisis in print,” said Martha Mann, the president of the Boston chapter of the Religion Communicators’ Council.

The situation has badly impacted the *Christian Science Monitor*, which has in its one hundred years of existence won seven Pulitzer Prizes. The *Monitor* is renowned for providing international coverage and analytical stories in a daily newspaper, but now it can no longer sustain its daily print edition. The newspaper now puts out a weekly print edition and has moved most of its coverage to the World Wide Web. Unfortunately, said the *Monitor*’s Yemma, “the traditional newspaper model is untenable.” Still, the *Monitor* might offer an opportunity to news agencies that cover religion to get greater usage.

In Britain, religion correspondent Ruth Gledhill, writing in her blog for the *Times* in London, said that when she began in journalism, every newspaper had a trade union correspondent. “Not any more. It was generally assumed our specialism [religion] would go the same way and there was little competition when I applied for this job more than 20 years ago. The opposite has happened, though. Not only is religion dominating the front pages, but newspaper executives now seek blessings on their ceremonies” at the British Press Awards by a member of the clergy “from a church where the curate, an ordained man, is an opinion columnist on a national newspaper.”

In the current era of interfaith initiatives on climate change, the fight against HIV and AIDS, and the resolution of regional conflicts, there seems to be increasing recognition that faith leaders should be part of the public discourse. At the same time, nonbelievers have stepped up their debate using the same technological tools offered by the new media that faith followers use. News and media that specialize in religion can present beliefs and what believers do in ways that enhance understanding rather than fuel the stereotypes of creeds that can be triggers for conflict.

While economic hard times linger, it is tempting to cut first the funding of religious news as an easy accounting ploy. Yet those who realize that religion is an eternal process of advocacy would be wise to appreciate that news is the oxygen of beliefs. Now is therefore the time to increase commitment to new media. In that way, when times return to normality and material values rebound, religious media will be better placed to present their essential news. □

The Role of the Media in Dialogue among Religions

by Michele Zanzucchi

*Communication between peoples of different faiths and ethnic backgrounds
has been implemented and fostered by the media, which at the same time
have contributed to the conflict between civilizations.*

I strongly feel that interreligious dialogue, which partakes very much of the dialogue between different civilizations, begins first of all at a very personal level, in what mass media experts call “interpersonal communication.” I think that the dialogue between people of different religions or people of different civilizations is strongly related to their reciprocal knowledge and feeds upon the handshakes they give each other, the cups of tea they have together, trips, and meetings.

Nevertheless, such dialogue has also been richly implemented and fostered by the development of the media and by globalization, which in turn the media’s contributions have served to stimulate and amplify. It cannot be denied that at the same time, the conflict between different civilizations has also been stimulated by the development in the media.

It is difficult to know how much good and how much bad will come out of the development in the media: what we know for certain, though, is that if problems have increased, so also has the possibility of doing some good for humanity.

What I mean is that, in the relationship between civilizations and religions, the media cannot possibly hold a neutral position. The media have an enormous potential for creating a positive and constructive atmosphere for dialogue: this potential is still very much hidden and as yet undisclosed.

Marshall McLuhan (1911–80), the Canadian educator who foresaw the development that would occur in the media in the second part of the twentieth century, idealistically imagined the media as tools to express the spiritual values of the civilization of the global village. The vision of this man, who had undergone a profound religious conversion from atheism to Christianity, has not been completely fulfilled, but it somehow still has a prophetic value.

Before analyzing both the risks and the possibilities that result from the encounter between newspapers, television, and the Internet on one side and the dialogue between religions on the other, I would like to make a realistic statement: people who work in the area of interreligious conferences have no right to claim anything from the media. It is, on the

contrary, up to them, together with those who work in the media, to make that world interested in them by transforming something like conferences and other initiatives into an event worth noticing and talking about.

Five Risks

The first risk is that those who work in the media may not manage to pass on a correct view of the events related to the relationship between civilizations and religions. This is a general problem of communication, and it is due to contemporary technological developments and to the prevalent working rhythms. I would like to mention, for example, sensationalism: in order to increase the audience, our attention is directed toward the most effective and exciting details of an event, even if reality thus results in being completely distorted. Half-truths are another example: often, because of lack of time or space, these are passed on as truthful information even though they certainly do not provide a correct global vision.

Another problem we must not forget to mention is the control of the sources: this is nowadays rarely and often only partially done. If two agencies present the same information,

Michele Zanzucchi is a journalist and writer who has published some thirty books. He is the editor of Città Nuova, the Italian edition of the Focolare Movement’s magazine, which is published in twenty-two languages. He teaches media at the Sophia University Institute in Loppiano, near Florence, and journalism at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

there is a tendency to think that information must then be correct, even if that is often not the case. There are unfortunately also several examples of news given in bad faith by people who want to spread tendentious information.

A second risk is related to giving an ideological interpretation to events, that is, to interpret events in the particular light of a specific current ideology. It is said that people who belong to a religion and are deeply involved in it have an ideological understanding of events. Even though I can see the risk, I do not think that this is totally correct, provided one makes sure there is no bad faith involved. I am not saying one should follow the philosophy of British journalism in the fifties, according to which the journalist should “disappear” and give space only to the events. This theory no longer holds, as it is clear that no one can tell the “total truth.”

But certainly a middle way exists, and people who work in the media must aim at truthfulness if not at truth. I am thinking of the embedded journalists with the American and British troops in the Persian Gulf War (1990–91). I am also thinking, on the other side, of the journalists paid by Saddam Hussein to stay in Iraq, in government-controlled areas. I am thinking of a Western or Turkish or Italian interpretation of facts: this is ideology too. Globalization should help us to lift up our vision, not to direct it to the tip of our toes.

A third risk is the possibility of taking intellectual shortcuts: when the pace at which the media are forced to produce increases, such shortcuts appear nearly inevitable. History, and all the different phases of coexistence and conflict, is an essential part of the dialogue between civilizations and religions. Unfortunately, journalists tend to have a general and not a specialized background: this often brings them to write or talk about subjects on which they have a limited expertise. For example, in recent years we have read many superficial and often banal comments about Islam, especially in Western countries.

Another risk is to muddle the different levels of analysis. Even though the political level is not the same thing as the religious level, and also not the same as the ethnic level of analysis, one finds very often in the media very doubtful expressions such as “ethnic and religious.”

Last but not least is the risk of being a victim of that type of narcissism that is so common among those who work with the media. In this case, one tends to think that one holds the only truth, that the truth that one knows is the only adequate one to represent and report events. Often it is the use of an exclusively individual point of view that creates so many problems. I recall a French journalist who gave a very personal interpretation of Algerian terrorism: his vision contributed a great deal to the breaking out again of acts of violence.

Five Opportunities

The first chance the media have is obviously the opportunity to have a positive influence on society, amplifying and

A graveyard filled with the victims of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Unbiased information provided by a private Catholic radio broadcaster probably contributed in the last few years to avoiding a new outburst of interethnic conflicts.

spreading good. I refer to all types of media, not only those that deal mainly with interreligious dialogue. Italian state television has recently produced an excellent series of reports from Iraq: the aim was to present people who, although living in a war context, whether they be Shiite or Sunni Muslims, Chaldeans or Kurds, were trying to spread seeds of peace. That series had an extraordinarily large audience.

Another opportunity we have is to give a balanced account of events thanks to our deep insight into a situation and to our specific knowledge of a certain context. This can help to ease tensions and to remind people not only of the previous conflicts but also of periods of peaceful coexistence. The press on the Gandhian movement is an excellent example in this respect. Also, recently in Punjab some of the media have greatly contributed to what seems to be an easier and calmer relationship between India and Pakistan.

I want to mention another opportunity that the media have. Once politics no longer works, once diplomacy is no longer functioning, the media may still have some space left to keep communication going and to keep some hope of peaceful coexistence alive. I am thinking, for instance, of

what happened in Kigali, the Rwandan capital. A private Catholic radio broadcaster managed to keep giving some unbiased information: this probably contributed in the last few years to avoiding a new outburst of interethnic conflicts in the city.

The media that specifically deal with the dialogue between different civilizations and different religions also have another very important opportunity. That is, they can give voice to ethnic and religious minorities, regardless of their numerical size and extent. Within the context of interreligious or interethnic conflicts, allowing minorities to express their own point of view helps to decrease tensions and to reach stability.

Another possibility is to find stories related to interreligious dialogue that can be appealing to the media. This is not always easy, as often what at first looks like a "perfect story" is not necessarily good for television or newspapers or the Internet. I have long been involved in the production of such programs, and I am very satisfied with the results. One could also envisage applying fiction to the area of interreligious dialogue.

The Media and Religions

The five risks and the five opportunities I have mentioned involve religious and specifically interreligious activities at various points, and they underline the fact that the media and religions have to work together with the goal of future peaceful coexistence among cultures and religions and nations.

Things, of course, stand quite differently according to whether we refer to the media that have a specific interest in interreligious dialogue or to the media in general, which normally have only an occasional interest in such matters. In order to reach credibility, the media that are specifically dedicated to interreligious dialogue must make a special effort to portray events in the most objective and complete way possible. On the other hand, the general media should allow more space for truthful accounts of events in the area of the dialogue between civilizations.

Nevertheless, it must be said that in recent years, most of the media, be it newspapers, radio, or television, have given ample space to the relationship among different religions. This is mainly owing to the results of the recent conflicts in the Middle East and the increase in terrorist acts all over the world.

It is also clear that in the area of interreligious dialogue, if we want to be faithful to our moral values, we must respect some basic communication rules. I present to you four of them; they were quoted by the late Chiara Lubich in a speech about the media. Ms. Lubich, who died in 2008, was an honorary president of the World Conference of Religions for Peace and the founder of the Focolare Movement, one of the most active organizations in the area of interreligious dialogue, which she started in wartime Italy in 1943.

In June 2000 she said, during a conference on the subject of communication and unity: "Globalization will not choke

people, on the contrary, it will be a tool towards a global sharing among civilizations and cultures. All material and spiritual riches will be part of a common heritage: individual differences will not be annulled, but highlighted and respected, in a fair game between unity and distinction."

First communication rule. The common goal, the ultimate aim of any communication between people, is universal brotherhood. Communication is an essential tool toward creating a just and fair society. That is why communication must help toward the fulfillment of the good of society.

Second rule. Communication must serve humanity's needs. Communication is deeply rooted in humankind's nature: it has an ontological root, and it is an essential part of our history. Communication is an expression of the basic fraternity that ties all human beings together.

Third rule. Communication is, in itself, positive. The media, therefore, are also in themselves positive. Of course, if used incorrectly, they may become negative tools. In all forms of communication, but particularly in the world of the media, one should be able to stress and underline what helps humanity move toward its ultimate goal, which is unity, and not what distracts from it. In communication, reporting and revealing evil should also be motivated by and oriented toward the good of humankind. This is why communication in the media requires as strong an ethical commitment as the goal it works toward.

Fourth rule. In order to communicate effectively, we must ourselves be able to listen with respect to others. We must show respect, and also (why not?) love. From this point of view I think that it makes very much sense for people who work in the world of the media to keep the Golden Rule as a fundamental element for dialogue between civilizations and religions. The so-called Golden Rule, which exists in the holy books of all religions, reminds us that we should not do to others what we would not want done to ourselves. Always keeping in mind the Golden Rule can help us put into practice acts of reciprocity. This concept is becoming more and more important, and not only in the field of interreligious dialogue. We are not dealing here with automatic, mechanical answers to a question but with an answer given with respect, care, and love to a question asked with equal respect, care, and love. This would be a very interesting area to tackle.

Crossroads

I recently published a book about the presence of religions in the Caucasus, one of the richest and most complex meeting points between peoples of different religions and ethnic backgrounds. It is precisely these vital centers that have been mined and attacked in recent decades. I am thinking specifically of Lebanon, Jerusalem, Nigeria, Somalia, and East Timor.

It is my sincere hope that the media will play an important role in making these regions an example of dialogue among different religions, ethnic groups, and civilizations. □

The Information Age and Religious Belief

TV Puts Its Imprint on Religion in Japan

by Kenji Ishii

*Is there not a need for unbiased, balanced reporting on religious organizations
and for more broadcasting of quality programs on religion?*

The New Year season and the Bon Festival in summer to honor the spirits of ancestors are the two times of the year when the Japanese become most actively religious. As Christmas and New Year's Eve approach, even the Japanese see this as a time for looking back over the past year with deep emotion. Then, on January 1, our TV screens show huge crowds making a *hatsumode*, the first visit of the New Year to a shrine or temple. The scene seems to inform us that the religious side of the Japanese has gone unchanged from ancient times to the present, but this may be a fabrication of the TV images.

It is said that some 20 percent of the Japanese these days prepare no *osechi ryori*, the traditional Japanese foods of the New Year season. Traditional New Year customs are disappearing from households and communities, and amid the hustle and bustle of modern life, rejoicing at the arrival of the New Year has become a thing of the past. One nonfiction writer even stated that the New Year steps out to greet us from the TV screen while we watch the annual "Yukutoshi kurutoshi" program ring the old year out and the new one in on New Year's Eve, gaze at scenes of crowds lined up

before shrines and temples, and enjoy other New Year's programs.

To urban residents, some of the key images that represent the end of one year and the start of the next are those broadcast on "Yukutoshi kurutoshi." The program begins with the scene at a temple as its bell rings out the old year and ends with a scene at a shrine where the New Year is joyously welcomed. By imperceptible degrees, we have come under the influence of religious information delivered by television. In fact, we may have been more than influenced. Perhaps the very religious reality of the contemporary Japanese has come to be created by the TV.

Two Changes in the Postwar Religious Nature of the Japanese

When we take a bird's-eye view of the religious behavior and attitudes of the Japanese since World War II, two major changes stand out. One is the weakening of religious sentiment and the other is the strengthening of critical attitudes toward religious organizations.

After the war, close to 70 percent of the Japanese replied yes to the question, "Do you have a religious belief?" Today, some sixty years later, fewer than 30 percent answer in the affirmative. The share of the Japanese who say they are interested in religion has also declined. And among young Japanese, those who reply that religion is "not important" have come to outnumber those who say it is "important."

Religion is on the retreat as an element of daily life. Shinto altars (*kamidana*) and Buddhist altars (*butsudan*) used to be normal fixtures of the Japanese home, but the number of households with them rapidly dwindled during the postwar years. More than half of all households in the nation lack Shinto altars, and in Tokyo only about one family in four has one. Buddhist altars have fared somewhat better, but even they remain in only about half of homes nationwide and 40 percent of homes in Tokyo.

We are witnessing a weakening of the religious nature of the Japanese, which used to be nurtured in daily life through rites of passage and annual events. Only a few such religious

*Kenji Ishii is a professor in the Faculty of Shinto Studies of Kokugakuin University in Tokyo. He specializes in religious studies and the sociology of religion. He is the author of many books on Japanese religion, including *Ginza no kamigami: Toshi ni tokekomu shukyo* (The gods in Ginza: Religions integrated into the cities) and *Sengo no shakai hendo to jinja Shinto* (Japan's postwar social changes and Shrine Shinto).*

activities have managed somehow to remain popular, among them *hatsumode* and the Bon Festival, as mentioned at the start of this essay. Another is the visits many people make to graves to comfort the souls of ancestors and family members who have departed. These occur on the occasion of *ohigan*, a one-week period twice a year centered on the vernal and autumn equinox days.

In 1995 the Japanese were severely shocked when the Aum Shinrikyo cult released the deadly sarin gas in Tokyo subways. The coordinated attacks by this religious group killed twelve people and injured more than five thousand. The postwar Japanese had been growing increasingly critical of religious organizations, and this atrocity cemented that attitude. Even today, religious organizations have been unable to regain much trust, with people rating them alongside Japan's parliament as untrustworthy bodies.

Religious Information Grows Stereotypical

In the midst of the changing postwar situation, television has continued to provide a wide variety of religious information. Even as organized religion has fallen out of favor, whether traditional religions or new religions are concerned, television is the one institution that has continued to transmit messages relating to religion. But the images and information on religion delivered by TV are growing stereotypical.

The American journalist Walter Lippmann (1889–1974) coined the term *stereotype* in its modern sense in his 1922 work *Public Opinion*. This is an oversimplified, preconceived, and distorted notion or image of some social phenomena shared by the members of a specified social group. Stereotypes are often used as tools for social control, one infamous example being the Nazi propaganda about the Jews.

Four Types of TV Programs Providing Religious Information

TV programs relating to religion can be broadly grouped into four categories. The first is the programs religious organizations themselves supply. At present none of the key TV stations are airing any of these programs. In the past, several such programs were broadcast, including *Hiei no hikari* (Light on Mount Hiei) and *Kokoro no tomoshibi* (A lamp in the heart). After other programs had been discontinued, one of the private broadcasters, NTV (Nippon Television Network Corporation), continued to present *Shukyo no jikan* (Religion's hour) for a number of years, but in March 2001 this, too, went off the air. It was unilaterally terminated at the convenience of the broadcaster.

The second category consists of educational programs, a representative example being *Kokoro no jidai* (The spiritual age) of the public broadcaster NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation). The private broadcasters also air programs of this type, although such programs are few. I find it disturbing that these programs have recently become overly focused on just the temples and churches on the UNESCO World

Heritage list. Educational programs are a genre I would like to see get greater attention.

The third category covers news reports with a religious angle. Often they are reports on incidents or scandals or coverage of seasonal events and festivals. In the area of incidents and scandals, just a few examples are the affair of the Ark of Jesus cult, which was accused of kidnapping and brainwashing; the alleged swindling scandal by the Ho no Hana Sanpogyo cult; the case of the Kigenkai cult, one of whose members was beaten to death; and a whole string of incidents involving Aum Shinrikyo. Incidents and scandals caused by religious organizations tend to get intensive

Members of the media crowding at a checkpoint in Yamanashi Prefecture to film and interview members of the Pana Wave Laboratory in May 2003. Pana Wave members, clothed in white, prepare to put up a curtain to shield them from the eyes of the press and curious spectators.

media coverage and are often mined for their sensational, attention-attracting value, with segments of the daytime talk shows devoted to them. Anybody who has been watching Japanese TV in recent years will recall that this was the kind of treatment accorded to the doomsday Chino Shoho cult and its "scientific" arm, Pana Wave Laboratory. In the case of new religions, about the only time they receive any coverage is when they get involved in difficulties. Religious activities that make contributions to society rarely find their way to the TV screen.

Within this category of news reports is some coverage of religion in daily life, such as the religious customs I mentioned at the start, as well as reports that mention religions overseas. Often a function at a shrine or temple will be reported in the news as a seasonal event. This type of coverage is becoming stereotypical through its focus on familiar traditional religious events.

The reporting on religion overseas is extremely one-sided. Islam is mentioned only in connection with reports on inci-

Popular Japanese TV actresses performing a ceremony called mamemaki (bean-throwing) to expel misfortune and invite good fortune on the day of setsubun at a Buddhist temple in Osaka on February 3, 2001. Setsubun (lit., seasonal division) is a festival held on February 3 or 4, one day before the start of spring according to the Japanese traditional lunar calendar. This is a good example of a function at a shrine or temple that is often reported in the news as a seasonal event.

dents caused by extremists; Hinduism is portrayed as if it were an undeveloped religion. In general the reports on the world's religions feature bizarre rituals or strange customs, and they seem of little use in enhancing understanding of foreign cultures. Because viewers watch the programs without much conscious thought, more consideration should be paid to what is presented.

The fourth category is variety shows with religious content. In the 1970s programs on the alleged supernatural powers of such psychics as Uri Geller debuted on prime-time TV, and today they have flowered into a whole broadcasting genre covering alleged supernatural powers, spiritualist phenomena, unidentified flying objects, mythical creatures, and other such subjects. In recent years these programs have begun to receive critical scrutiny, and they have been attacked as promoting emotionally manipulative sales and giving support to pseudoscience, thereby violating the program standards of the broadcasters.

Wanted: Religious Literacy and Quality Programs

There is much that needs to be said, but here I will sum up my thoughts in just two points. The first is that there is an insufficiency of what is called religious literacy. In view of the fact that religion plays an important role the world over, should we not be disturbed by the problems in the religious information delivered by television today? It is not just that TV broadcasters are failing in a duty they have set for themselves, which is to contribute to public welfare and cultural improvement. Worse than that, quite a few harmful programs that perpetuate prejudiced views are being aired.

Second, is there not a need for unbiased, balanced reporting on religious organizations and for more broadcasting of

quality cultural programs on religion? Toward this end, we would be wise to create an organization charged with regularly checking the veracity of TV reporting on religion, calling attention to problem points and giving public praise to quality programs.

The Changing Information Environment

It was in the second half of the 1990s that use of the Internet began to spread in Japan as people became familiar with it. Today the Internet has become a widely employed information tool. Talk about the media formerly considered only newspapers and television, but the times are greatly changing.

From the viewpoint of users, the element of chance draws a sharp dividing line between TV and the Internet. Whereas chance is a major factor in what TV viewers watch, it plays a much smaller role in Internet use. Until now TV viewers would happen to encounter shows on alleged supernatural powers and spiritualist phenomena as they surfed channels, and indeed these shows were put together with that in mind, but one does not come across these subjects on the Internet unless one searches for them.

As the structure of daily life changes, will not the religious nature of the Japanese grow weaker yet? And among those who are keenly interested in religion, will they not acquire more and more information about it? Along the way, we may see the formation of an insurmountable barrier of understanding dividing these religiously oriented citizens from the rest of the public.

It is my fervent hope that what we will witness instead is the arrival of an age in which respect for religious culture spreads widely among the Japanese. □

Religion and the Media Could Raise Consideration for Others

by Hajime Ozaki

Buddhism and the mass media share the potential for playing a positive social role. They can turn people's eyes to what they cannot see for themselves and open their minds to consideration for others.

It seems to me that the Japanese these days have lost interest in others whom they usually don't see. They don't show compassion, and they don't even dare to know the sufferings of people far from them. These are the same people who so easily shed their tears over the film *Departures* (original Japanese title *Okuribito*) or exclaimed "I was really moved. They gave me an emotional boost. I was encouraged," when they watched Japan win the World Baseball Classic. That's fine. They may have good reasons to be so moved.

What bothers me, however, is the wide gap between this sort of enthusiasm and their indifference to the outside world. I don't recall when, why, and how the Japanese started to show excessive expressions of excitement. But one thing is clear to me. Now it's quite easy to move the Japanese by dramatic events if they are highly visible, while it's all too difficult to open their eyes to invisible things. How many Japanese, I wonder, are concerned about the agony of the people in Darfur, Sudan? How many of them paid attention to the atrocity that was taking place in northern Sri Lanka? How many of them are aware that over a billion people around the world live on less than one U.S. dollar a day? How many of them actually extend helping hands to such people?

This does not just involve events happening in the rest of the world. The widening economic disparity within Japan and the marginalization of the socially disadvantaged would go unnoticed by the vast majority of Japanese were many of them not among the victims. The former prime minister who initiated policies that led to the disparity was very popular until the nightmare of several hundred thousand people suddenly losing their jobs became a reality. The random killings of a series of innocent citizens in Tokyo's popular Akihabara district, the nursing home fire in Shibukawa City, Gunma Prefecture, that killed ten elderly residents—if such crimes and accidents had not taken place, the issue of working and living conditions for the nation's large numbers of temporary workers, or the pitiful situation of not being able to ensure the safety of homes for

the elderly living on government assistance, would not have attracted public interest.

The Japanese have hardened into an inward-looking people over the period since the "lost decade" of the 1990s, which started with the bursting of the economic bubble and has continued into the twenty-first century, as if to counter what some see as the progress toward globalism. Troubling phenomena are occurring around the world, from fears that vital national interests will be lost to the advance of globalism, to nations and their citizens turning protectionist and nationalistic. According to a Japanese university professor I spoke with recently, the average college student of today shows no interest in studying abroad, and regarding Japan's leading ally, the United States, there are more than a few who have an attitude he describes as "beyond anti-American, it is contempt for America." There are strong feelings against former U.S. president George W. Bush, who paved an unfortunate road to an expansion of international terrorism when he stepped over the line by going to war against Iraq in response to the terrorist attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001. Japan's former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi worsened relations with the neighboring countries of China and South Korea when he made an

Hajime Ozaki reported mainly on global affairs and multilateral diplomacy from Israel and the United States as a Kyodo News correspondent for more than twenty years. Back in Tokyo he covered the 9/11 attacks in the United States at the foreign news desk until he was assigned to the Geneva bureau. Since December 2007, he has been serving as the Maebashi bureau chief in Gunma Prefecture.

Unemployed workers receiving a cup of soba (buckwheat noodles) in Hibiya Park, central Tokyo, on December 31, 2008. A camp was set up by nonprofit volunteers to offer the homeless temporary shelter and meals over the New Year's holiday.

official visit to Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, where the nation's war dead are enshrined, including some designated as Class A war criminals following World War II. These perhaps are among the causes for what is in Japan's case a tendency to isolate itself from the world.

This trend to face inward is not limited to relations between Japan and the rest of the world, however. Even within Japan people have lost their feelings of solidarity and have become indifferent to those whose circumstances are different from their own. Perhaps it is because economic opportunities have diminished, or perhaps it is because of problems involving education at home or at school, or maybe it is caused to some degree by the coverage in the media. I do not think any single element is to blame. Whatever the case may be, Japanese society—the ordinary people who make up that society—has in the past twenty years or so gradually lost the sense of caring for others.

Since the “Lehman shock” of September 2008, when the huge international investment bank Lehman Brothers suddenly collapsed, a slight change seems to have occurred in Japan when people of many different backgrounds offered helping hands to the part-time and noncontract workers who had unexpectedly lost their jobs. In a park that is within walking distance of both the Imperial Palace, the home of the emperor and empress, and Ginza, Tokyo's fashionable shopping district, a camp was set up by nonprofit volunteers to offer jobless workers a temporary housing arrangement and meal service over the New Year's holiday. In

Gunma Prefecture, where I work, many Brazilians of Japanese descent have been working in the automobile plants and other factories. When local Christian churches offered meals and places to live to the many who recently lost their jobs and company housing, that was big news.

The plight of noncontract and part-time workers has been publicized throughout Japan, but I have not seen or heard anything about priests from Buddhist temples or Shinto shrines pitching in to help them. I have no recollection of seeing any report of that sort in the past few months.

Unfortunately, it is extremely rare for Buddhist or Shinto priests to play an active role in humanitarian assistance, or for them to work to correct social inequities. The more traditional the religious organization, the more it appears to shun actively providing assistance to those in society who need it.

The priests are seen only when they conduct annual services for such occasions as welcoming in the new year and the summer Bon Festival of the dead, or at formal ceremonies such as funerals and weddings. They do not speak out or take a stand against social injustice, social inequity, or violations of human rights. There is a good reason that Buddhism is sometimes contemptuously referred to as “funeral Buddhism,” meaning that many people turn to it only for conducting rites for departed loved ones.

In 1982 a dispute arose in Kyoto, Japan's ancient capital, over a new tax to be levied on temple visitors. The mayor of Kyoto at the time announced his intention to tax the entrance fees charged by the temples. Famous temples, including Kiyomizu-dera, had been collecting several hundred yen per head for operations and maintenance. Needless to say, the temples opposed the mayor's plan. The clerics claimed that because visiting temples is a religious act, taxing such visits violated religious freedom and was therefore unconstitutional. Many of the so-called tourist temples threatened to close their gates to visitors, and the two sides came to an impasse.

What method did the priests use so the citizens of Kyoto and temple visitors could hear their side of the argument? They turned to the media. They held press conferences to appeal to the public and express their viewpoint. They provided information to the media only when it suited them. They are not civil servants, so they even were not truthful when it was to their advantage. When elections are scheduled in Japan, the candidates move out-of-doors to make public speeches, trying to garner voter support for as long as their voices hold up, but the priests had too much pride to expose themselves in that way. Perhaps they did not want to appear to be pleading their case before the citizenry. At any rate, they were never seen actually out in the streets of Kyoto directly explaining their position to the people. The only way to interpret this, it seemed to me, was that they were waving the banners of vested rights and privilege and using the means most useful to them for attaining their objective.

The media crowding around protesters at Darfur International Day of Action event in London, April 2007. How many of the cries of the protesters have reached Japan?

I was in Kyoto at the time, covering the dispute between the temples and the mayor, and I was disappointed in the priests' attitude. Public opinion did not support their efforts to close the temples, which are an important part of Japan's cultural heritage.

Around that same time, I went to Italy for the first time, to cover the World Day of Prayer for Peace, a gathering of world religious leaders on October 27, 1986, presided over by Pope John Paul II. There were churches in every city center I visited, and they were all open to the public. I had thought an entrance fee would be required at Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, which was not the case. I learned Italy is quite different from Japan.

I am not trying to idealize the Christian system. I do not think that Japanese society, which consists of Buddhist and Shinto values superimposed on traditions of animism and ancestor veneration, is inferior to societies based on Christianity or other great religions. Nor do I think that the Japanese are lacking in religious sentiment or beliefs. They may not be converting to monotheism or know how to read the Buddhist sutras, but I do not think we can say that the vast majority of Japanese are therefore atheists.

It is just that in Japan religion does not function as a moral guide for society. For most people, religion does not provide a set of values that they can follow as an ethical standard. While Japanese society has many ancient traditions, the role that religion plays in the nation's life is one of decidedly low priority.

Societies that are overexposed to religion can bring about intolerance of others, I feel certain, so I do not think it is

desirable to attach too much importance to religious values only. Since the end of World War II, however, the traditional religious organizations in Japan, and the leaders affiliated with them in particular, have distanced themselves too greatly from society, and they seem to be in a state of near withdrawal. It appears that they are so afraid of being hurt or misunderstood that they have given up working directly with society.

Religion and the media have different basic functions, of course, but it seems to me that they share the potential for playing a positive social role. They can turn people's eyes to what they cannot see for themselves. Appealing to public sensitivities, they can open their minds. In these ways, consideration for others can deepen, and people may begin to work toward the realization of a society where citizens help each other. For this to happen, however, we need religion to become more visible.

The media are also due some criticism. They also suffer from diminished influence. The reasons are probably the same. The media are resting on the laurels of past performance, on what they consider their vested rights and privilege, and are too removed from the sensibilities of the average citizen.

While events in the world and people's thinking are constantly changing, people are forced to listen to the same "song" over and over again. How long will it be before we tire of it? Maybe it is all as simple as that. Perhaps some tunes need to be repeated. But if they are not sung in a way that reaches people's hearts and minds, then the way they are being sung should change. □

Japan's Spiritual Culture and Buddhism

The Religious Outlook of the Japanese as Seen through the Performing Arts

by Michihiko Komine

Popular actors in the fourteenth century performed in works that richly incorporated Buddhist faith and doctrine. While being entertained, audiences simultaneously learned the ideas of Buddhism.

Characteristic elements of the religious outlook of the Japanese are readily seen within daily life. For example, people attend memorial services at their family temple, visit graves during the spring and autumn equinoxes, and pray before Buddhist altars set up within their homes and enshrine a talisman received from a Shinto shrine in their family Shinto altars, while on a personal level they carry amulets and often treasure them highly. At the same time, even people who are not Christians have little hesitation about celebrating Christmas or holding their weddings in churches.

In fact, many religious festivals have been turned into popular "events," belief being transformed into a general celebration. Christmas and Valentine's Day are typical of this trend. Some Buddhist observances have similarly changed from ritual to festival, as for example the summertime outdoor Bon dance, which was originally an offering to the spirits of the departed. The religious significance has, at least for the present, given way to entertainment. People's connections with Buddhist temples center around veneration of deceased family members and the attainment of worldly benefits through occasional temple visits. There is

nothing here resembling the prayers of atonement and devotion found in Christianity.

To put it another way, Buddhism, unlike monotheistic religions where worship is centered on God, gives priority to blessings that enrich the lives of individuals. This does not mean, however, that the Japanese lack religious belief, simply that their ideas about religion are essentially different from those of Judaism and the Christianity and Islam that grew out of it.

Japan's Religious Outlook—Causation and the Mandala

The basic factors making up the specific religious outlook of the Japanese are the natural environment, related to Japan's geographic location, and the permeation of Buddhist thought in Japanese culture. Being an island country, relatively distant from the Asian mainland, Japan in the past did not suffer military domination by other peoples, and consequently the Japanese do not look on things from abroad as a threat but rather as being potentially advantageous to them personally.

At the foundation of Buddhist thought are the doctrine of causation and the mandala. The word we translate as "causation" is the compound *hetu-pratyaya*; *hetu* refers to a direct cause and *pratyaya* to an indirect one. Causation refers to the multilayered, interdependent nature of existence, attributed to the belief that nothing can exist completely unrelated to everything else.

A direct cause of an action can be said to be the will, while the indirect cause would be the surrounding environment. For example, a seed needs water and warmth in its surrounding environment to sprout; it cannot do so by its own will alone. For anything to be accomplished, the will of one person is not enough—the direct and indirect support of those around the person are also essential. The doctrine of causation clearly indicates that our own individual existence is intertwined with other existences, and from this emerges the idea that we should give others priority over

Michihiko Komine is head priest of Kanzo'in in Tokyo, a temple belonging to the Chisan branch of the Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism and president of Taisho University in Tokyo. His special fields are early Mahayana Buddhism and the Shingon Buddhist doctrine. He is the author of numerous books on esoteric Buddhist paintings.

ourselves. The Japanese expression *okagesama*, which is used to thank someone for showing concern and translates literally as “in your shadow,” has this sense.

A mandala is a concrete expression of the principle of causation. It is a way of conveying a doctrinal system, not in everyday language, but in color and form. It shows a large number of buddhas and bodhisattvas in a particular order of relationship. The idea expressed by the mandala is that all people are endowed with a mind of great compassion and constantly seek enlightenment. The action people take with this spiritual state is skillful means (Skt., *upaya*), the actions of a Buddhist to bring benefit to others. I interpret this mind of compassion expressed in the mandala to mean revering each individual's characteristics, leading to the harmony of all.

The idea conveyed by the mandala of incorporating all things into one has gradually permeated the ethos of the Japanese, as water seeps into the ground. In the Kamakura period (1185–1333), Japanese Buddhism separated into different sects with specific sets of doctrines and practices, such as Zen and recitation of the name of the Buddha (*nen-butsu*), and a trend began to develop of specialization in single practices rather than learning Buddhism as a whole. But though we talk of specialization, what happened was an emphasis on one characteristic practice or another. There was no sense here of any kind of fundamentalist rejection of other ideas and practices, for the idea of overall cohesion

remained. This cohesiveness in fact found expression in combination religious forms such as the cults of the Thirteen Buddhas, who were believed to help people in life and guide them to the realm of enlightenment after death, and the Seven Deities of Good Luck, as well as the concept of *honji suijaku*, where native deities were interpreted as incarnations of Buddhist divinities. This outlook remains today in every part of Japan.

Temples and the Performing Arts

One of the reasons combined forms of Buddhism etched themselves into the hearts of the Japanese was their association with the performing arts. This trend increased dramatically in the Muromachi period (1336–1573) with the appearance of performers such as Kan'ami and his son Zeami in the fourteenth century. Kan'ami and other actors greatly popularized culture, and this implied at the same time the expansion of Buddhism among the populace. This was because the works in which they performed richly incorporated Buddhist faith and doctrine, so that audiences watching their performances simultaneously learned the ideas of Buddhism.

What we must not forget is that learning about Buddhism meant not only gaining knowledge and culture but, above all, becoming cultivated people rich in humanity. Thus such performances served as fitting textbooks for teaching the moral codes of Buddhism. Even in terms of a stage per-

A scene from *Kanjincho* (*The donation list*), a Kabuki play. Benkei in yamabushi attire (standing at center) before the interrogator (at right) at the barrier gate of Ataka.

A priest running from a demon, who as a young girl lived near the temple and had fallen in love with the priest. A part of the Dojoji engi emaki (Illustrated scroll of the legends of Dojoji) preserved at the temple Dojoji, Wakayama Prefecture.

formance, however, the content of the dramas was intended not simply to be entertaining; because they were of a high quality, it was natural that they would contain Buddhist teachings.

The role of the performing arts was highly valued in temples and shrines, and performances were actively employed on behalf of fund-raising activities (Jpn., *kanjin*). This is clearly seen in expressions incorporating the word *kanjin* to denote fund-raising events, such as *kanjin sumo* (sumo tournaments), *kanjin shibai* (theatrical performances), *kanjin-no* (Noh plays), *kanjinmai* (dances), and *kanjin heike* (public recitation of the epic *Tale of the Heike* by blind lute players who were Buddhist priests or who adopted priestly garb).

Other expressions, such as *daikanjin*, *kanjinmoto*, *kanjin-shoku*, and *kanjin hijiri*, refer to superintendents, organizers, promoters, and fund-raisers. A *kanjinbune*, on the other hand, was a boat used by such fund-raisers, mainly on inland waters, as a place where people could gather to hear sermons. Later the term was applied to the boats used to transport performers involved in fund-raising activities, such as the theatrical arts and sumo. *Kanjin* itself is an abbreviation of a phrase meaning “to encourage people to follow the teachings of the Buddha,” which as a matter of course came to mean the dissemination activities of temples. For example, the *nenbutsu kanjin* taught people the importance of accumulating merit by stimulating them to plant the roots of goodness by reciting the name of the Amida (Amitabha)

Buddha. Such merit could also be achieved by making donations to temples for specific purposes, such as carving a new statue or carrying out repairs. Thus the scope of *kanjin* activities extended to fund-raising events.

Kanjin was carried out in a positive way in both senses of the word: it was a religious activity that had as its purpose bringing people to salvation through Buddhism, and it was a fund-raising activity that sought broad financial support to build and repair temples, shrines, and civil engineering projects such as bridges.

***Kanjin* Performing Arts**

I would now like to look at some specific examples of popular entertainment such as Noh plays, Noh recitation (*yokyoku*), and Kabuki. First, *Kanjincho* (The donation list) is a Kabuki play based on the Noh play *Ataka*. It tells of an episode in the flight of the great warrior Minamoto no Yoshitsune and his companion Benkei to the northern part of Japan to escape Yoshitsune’s brother Minamoto no Yoritomo. Benkei, who had trained as a mountain ascetic (*yamabushi*), had adopted that persona, and Yoshitsune was disguised as his porter. They were stopped at the barrier gate of *Ataka*, where the guards had been warned that they might try to pass. The two men managed to allay the suspicions of the guards, thanks to the ability of Benkei to answer questions about Buddhism and its practices correctly.

The so-called *yamabushi mondo* was a device employed by temples to check that visiting *yamabushi* were not impos-

tors. The questions included items about esoteric doctrines, such as the five wisdoms and the mandala; about Buddhist doctrine and beliefs, such as the Law of the Twelve Causes and faith in Amida; and about Daoist-influenced practices such as the *kuji* spell, the magical phrase *kyukyu nyoritsuryo* that was written after talismanic inscriptions to bind them, and the ritual of “teeth tapping.”

This collection of questions indicates the penetration of combination practices into Japanese religion. There were also questions about the esoteric meanings of *yamabushi* dress and implements, such as the round *tokin* worn on the forehead, the surcoat called *suzukake*, the sword, and the staff. Since esoteric Buddhism considers all that exists to be temporary manifestations of the cosmic Buddha Mahavairocana, any physical appearance, be it the pictures in a mandala, three-dimensional representations such as Buddhist statues, buildings such as pagodas, implements such as the five-pronged *vajra* (thunderbolt scepter), or actions such as mudras, and even the colors applied to these Buddhist images, pictures, buildings, and implements can all be interpreted doctrinally. In this sense, a feature of esoteric Buddhism is that it is clearly different from religions that prohibit the veneration of images.

The second example is the Kabuki play *Dojoji*, from which can be inferred how religious faith goes hand in hand with worldly benefits. It is based on a story that appeared, for example, in the twelfth-century anthology *Tales of Times Now Past* (*Konjaku monogatari*). The temple Dojoji in Wakayama Prefecture had a picture scroll made based on this story to account for its origin. The Noh play *Dojoji* was taken from this, and the Kabuki play *Kyoganoko musume Dojoji* was adapted from the Noh version. It tells the story of a female temple dancer who visited Dojoji when a new temple bell was being dedicated. At the end of her dance she jumps up inside the bell and pulls it down over herself and then appears as a demon snake. She was revealed to be a demon who had as a young girl lived near the temple and fallen in love with a priest. He ran from her and hid under the temple bell. In fury, she turned into a giant snake and, coiling herself around the bell, melted it.

Incidentally, Dojoji, which had previously been relatively unknown, greatly increased the number of its devotees by means of storytelling using the picture scroll (*etoki*). In either case, however, Buddhist beliefs formed the basis of the “performance.” What is interesting is that whereas in the picture scroll we find the motif of the miraculous powers of the Lotus Sutra, in the Noh drama it is faith in the deity Fudo Myoo that is emphasized. Such changes in the story only add further interest.

The third example is the Noh play *Sotoba Komachi*, which centers on the exchange of questions and answers between the aged Ono no Komachi, who had been a celebrated poet and beauty, and a young priest from Mount Koya. In the course of their debate about the nature of the stupa (*sotoba*) Komachi is sitting on, various points of esoteric doctrine

are developed. The interest of the play focuses on the subtleties of the exchange, in contrast to the way questions of faith are dealt with in Dojoji. At the end, the up-and-coming young priest, who had immersed himself in all the learning Mount Koya had to offer, had to yield to the decrepit old woman. The play can also be interpreted in terms of a layperson’s cynicism about an ordained priest. The questions and answers they exchanged contain elements not just of esoteric Buddhism but of general Buddhism and Zen doctrine as well. By analyzing them, we are able to ascertain the extent to which ordinary people understood Buddhist beliefs.

Each of the three works we have considered looks at Buddhism in a different way, allowing us to see it from various aspects. We can also discern within them evidence of combined religion—not beliefs associated just with the various Buddhist sects but with Daoism and Shinto as well. I think that the absence among Japanese of any idea that other religions should be eliminated as heretical comes from their underlying mandala-type way of thinking in which the individual exists within the whole. All three of these dramatic works remain popular today. It is of particular interest that the Kabuki actor Matsumoto Koshiro IX gave his one-thousandth performance of Benkei in *Kanjincho* in October 2008 at the temple Todaiji in Nara. Here was an example of Buddhism being propagated in an entertaining way, and it also demonstrates the importance of a subtle method of dissemination. □

In the Noh play Sotoba Komachi (performed by Keiji Inada of the Kanze school), the aged Ono no Komachi debates with a young priest about the nature of the stupa.

Japanese Religions, the Media, and the Internet: A Very Special Relationship

by Michael Pye

Japanese religious organizations and activists have hurried to establish their presence somehow on the Internet. However, some important distinctions about this use have to be made.

One might imagine that in this age of new technologies advancing through a globalized culture, the relations between religions and the media would assume rather similar characteristics wherever you go. However, this is not always the case. Therefore, after noting some widely recognized features of “mediatized” religion worldwide, I will present here some key features of the Japanese scene in this regard, concentrating in particular on the use of the Internet in the communication of religious systems. At the same time, other media are important in Japan, too, as everywhere, so I will begin with some general remarks.

During a recent visit to Brazil, I was struck by the constant battle for attention on the TV channels among various kinds of Protestant religions, supposedly “charismatic” (i.e., moved by the Holy Spirit) but in fact highly manipulated, and Catholic media shows emanating from nationally popular shrines such as Aparecida or the media village Canção Nova (New Song). Whether Catholic or charismatic, the originating churches are believed to be the locus of miracles of healing. However that may be, it seems that there is some

kind of daily shouting or singing match transmitted on endlessly running channels. Such is the competition for market share in the world of religious provision. Commercialized religious channels are also found in other parts of the world, not least in North America and Europe, and in the latter case there is a strong North American missionary aspect. However, they are not really characteristic of Japan. There the religions that advertise themselves strongly often do so in the printed media, taking whole sections in the daily newspapers or advertising their publications and services in the weekly magazines.

In most European countries, religious services and talks are broadcast on publicly sponsored channels. Here the question of balance, that is, of being fair to the various religions in the country, becomes important. In Germany, for example, the religious service in the main TV slot on Sunday morning alternates between large Catholic and Protestant (Lutheran) churches. In Britain things are similar, but a greater range of churches is reflected. There is also a popular devotional program named *Songs of Praise*, which is broadcast from churches of various Christian denominations all over the country.

The underlying concept in these European arrangements is that religion in general is “a good thing” and that it should be given public time and media space. At the same time, the minor religions are squeezed out. Even if there has been a recent shift to benefit religious traditions of ethnic minorities, with a view to social harmony, minority *new* religions are regarded as a potential threat to the social balance that religion is supposed to help to maintain. The Internet shifts the balance again. For example, on the British radio program *Prayer for the Day* there is regular participation by Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, and Baha’is, as well as by representatives of the major Christian denominations, but no participation by members of the Unification Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons), or the Church of Scientology. But on the

Michael Pye was professor of religious studies at the University of Marburg, Germany, until 2004. He is now a visiting professor at Otani University, Kyoto. From 1995 to 2000, Dr. Pye served as president of the International Association for the History of Religions. His books include Skilful Means: A Concept in Mahayana Buddhism and MacMillan Dictionary of Religion.

Internet all religions have equal access, and all interested persons also have equal access.

The situation in South Africa has been particularly interesting, in that programs on religion have quite consciously been regarded as a vehicle for nation building in the post-apartheid era. As Rosalind Hackett writes:

There have been, and still are, great hopes for the modern media to help realize the African Renaissance, in whatever modality that is imagined—cultural pride, academic recognition, spiritual rediscovery, moral renewal, informational accuracy, political freedom, economic growth or social harmony. . . . In that regard, the particular focus in this essay on religious broadcasting demonstrates the strategic role that the state can, and should, play in transitional democracies such as South Africa, in promoting religious tolerance. (Hackett 2006)

Of course this underlying approach is not without difficulties in practice, as explored authoritatively in Hackett's article.

In Japan the situation is rather different from some of these Western or developing countries with large Western-derived churches. There are no full transmissions of religious services on public channels, although there is a slot for edifying talks by leading religious personalities during low viewing times. What we do find is that regular news programs commonly end with a short clip about a current religious event or festival, taken either from Buddhism or from Shinto. These events are not presented as "religion," for the public media are not supposed to infringe the separation of religion and the public realm. Rather, they are presented as part of the general cultural pattern that the inhabitants of Japan share. However, the new religions are never included in these news items, even though in several cases their followers run into millions. They are just not regarded as part of the religiously or culturally dominant establishment. Thus, there is an unspoken control of the message by the public media, which reinforces traditional religions.

The commercial channels lose no time in reporting at length, and in the manner of rather scurrilous magazines, any problems or scandals that arise in the leadership of religious bodies. Here the new religions come in for especially heavy treatment. This attitude is the same as that found in weekly magazines. In other words, where sex and corruption are concerned, the media will report on minor religions, but not otherwise.

One theme that is taken up from time to time is the financial cost of religious services. In late 2008 there was a TV report on an independent religious group named Ho'on no Hikari (Light of Recompense), which combines three main themes in its teaching or services. The first step is to analyze one's fate (*unsei*) for the high fee of thirty thousand yen (about U.S.\$300). Apparently, since the results of this

A shrine maiden (miko) at Kabushima Shrine in Aomori Prefecture displaying amulets depicting a turnip.

analysis are usually unfavorable, comprehensive counseling is then called for. Typically, it then emerges that one's ancestors have been neglected, so that care for them is needed to avoid further misfortunes. This service is also provided, naturally for a fee. The impression is left that this "new religion" is little more than a new religious business, making large profits by dwelling on people's anxieties. However justified this critical journalism may have been, the problem remains that it is always small religions that tend to be attacked in the media. After all, it is well known that there is widespread dissatisfaction with the high cost of quite normal Buddhist funeral services, but this is not "news." The immense media attention given to the Aum Shinrikyo case in the 1990s, while the courts have shown that it was justified in itself, also had the effect of giving *all* new religions "bad press," with very negative effects on their activities.

To be fair, the more traditional religions do not completely escape attention. Another recent news item told of a sudden interest in the little-known Kabushima Shrine, located just on the coastline of Aomori Prefecture in northern Japan. The word *kabu* not only means "turnip," as in the name of the shrine, but also, as a pun, "stocks" or "shares" in the financial sense. At the time of the financial crash in late 2008 there began a soaring postal trade in amulets (*o-mamori*) from this shrine, which were ordered by securities companies for their customers. Of course, once reported on television, they could also easily be found on the Internet. Similar considerations apply to a shrine on a small island off the coast of Kyushu, whose amulets appeared to bring about lottery wins.

A field of religion that has no official existence as a registered corporation is the wide area of informal religious activity known as "spirituality," "New Age culture," or even "mysticism." These are not really appropriate designations, and indeed it is difficult to sum up this wide field of religion

except as “noninstitutional.” The main features are the attempt to identify one’s existential situation through astrology, divination, or other means; the search for healing and a new or refreshed identity; and various ways to restructure one’s life, both body and spirit, in harmony with holistic and idealistic visions of the universe. The wide interest in these themes is evidenced by innumerable publications found in bookstores, and it is also a growth area on the Internet.

As one might expect, Japanese religious organizations and activists have hurried to establish their presence somehow on the Internet. However, some important distinctions must be made. Some Japanese religious Internet sites are straightforward, informative *presentations* of well-established religions. These sites may be searched and viewed. Others, by contrast, invite the Internet surfer personally to participate in rituals online. That is, the user is invited to engage in religious behavior *operatively* by means of the site. Those who use religious Internet sites are therefore either viewers of presentational sites or actors in operational sites. In the latter case, the ritual can take place at one’s own desk, insofar as keyboard keys are struck, and in one’s own mind at a shrine that may exist somewhere else, or not. A second important distinction lies, therefore, in whether Internet sites relate to identifiable institutions that really exist in a place, or whether the religious institution or agency is itself virtual, that is, *only* virtual, having no counterpart in the religious geography of the country. Such ambiguity is typical of the Japanese cultural imagination. The widely used term *interactive* is too general for this analysis. It does not do justice to the religious action that is operationalized by the user. After all, even a presentational site is interactive in the simple sense that the viewer can move around within the site. The terms *presentational* and *operational* are therefore preferred in contrast to some others because they emphasize the diverse weighting of the relevant agency.¹

A typical presentational site is that of the Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja Honcho). This is an umbrella organization for the Shinto religion, which, as it says on the site, reveres Ise Shrine as its main focus while linking together eighty thousand shrines all over Japan. The home page seeks to give an easily understood introduction to Shinto as a faith (*shinko*) unique to Japan. It also emphasizes reverence for the imperial family, which is identified with the centrally important Ise Shrine. The few interactive options are limited to the exploration of the site and its links. These refer to shrines that can also be located geographically. Thus, it is possible to travel around Japan, as if in real time and space, visiting the Association of Shinto Shrines, Ise Shrine, or indeed any other of the eighty thousand shrines of the country.

Of course, eighty thousand is a traditional symbolic number and does not correspond to a real set of buildings. It is an archaic hint of potential “virtuality.” What, after all, is a shrine? At its simplest, a shrine is a spot where the

sacred is localized, as marked by the appropriate symbols, which may be massive—or very tiny. The main hall of a shrine, where the *kami* themselves reside, is smaller than the hall for human visitors, which suggests that the *kami* have no particular size. So it may be argued that Shinto has always had an intimate relation with virtuality.

There are also operational sites in the general area of Shinto.² The practice of drawing a fortune slip (*o-mikuji*) is of course common at Shinto shrines. Today the Web site of Shirasagi Shrine in Tochigi Prefecture invites its visitors to draw a virtual fortune slip. The request is then sent off by e-mail. In another example, Sakura Jingu, a real shrine in Tokyo, invites surfers to perform a virtual shrine visit. That is, without ever entering Tokyo’s complex underground system, one can carry out a religious “visit” (*o-mairi*) that corresponds in meaning to an actual one. Both of these are operational sites that correspond both in name and in the practices performed with real shrines that can be geographically located.

A site called *uebbu-jingu* (Web shrine) takes us further into operational virtuality. This picks up the high-sounding word *jingu*, for “shrine,” but this *jingu* is not at Ise or anywhere else in the islands of Japan. It is a virtual shrine that can be accessed only via the Internet. Further clicking gives the options of drawing a fortune-telling slip or even “visiting for worship” (*sanpai*). A similar site is entitled “computer qualifications shrine” (*denno gokaku jinja*). Here we find the idea, popular among students, that a shrine is a good place to pray for the attainment of educational qualifications. Here, too, there is no corresponding shrine outside the electronic network. The click-on options are both serious and playful: “visiting the shrine” (*o-mairi suru*), “qualifications,” “computer fortune-telling slip,” “playtime,” and “cherry-blossom notice board.” Other sites invite the user to pay veneration to a deceased person or animal. With all of these sites, the main point is to invite ritual behavior in the form of electronic interaction.

We find that electronic representations of religion in Japan build upon six well-established characteristics of Japanese cultural style in religious matters.

1. Readiness to use technological aids in religious contexts
2. Readiness to provide abbreviations of symbols and rituals
3. Acceptance of remote access to sacred foci
4. Readiness to provide popularized representations
5. Individual control over much (though not all) religious action
6. Undefined relations between reality and unreality

Space permits only the briefest examples here.³ A nice example of item 1 is the remote-controlled Buddhist home altar, which saves walking back and forth in the room in order to open and close the doors. For item 2, we may recall the miniature Mount Fuji mounds, only a few meters high,

for those who find it difficult to go on a tiresome climb for pilgrimage purposes. Turning to item 3, we note the concept common in Shinto, but not restricted to it, of “worship from afar” (*yohai*). This implies that one can stand before a miniature shrine anywhere in Japan and pay reverence to *kami* whose residence is far distant. Since there are so many potential ritual actors, we also find a wealth of popularized representations of sacred beings to be venerated (item 4), a

products such as amulets, ancestor mementos, or devotional aids, for real money. It remains to be seen how profitable the offers for virtual benefits will become. It seems doubtful that virtual transactions will seriously reduce the need for real-space temple and shrine visits and reduce transport congestion! Because of the frequent connections between religious destinations and leisure travel, many Internet sites help to maintain interest in the real-space, institu-

A young priest of Sakura Jingu in Tokyo responding to visitors to its Internet site.

common example being the bodhisattva Jizo, who may be found standing in a fine hall, swelling the ranks of the images in a hillside cemetery, or simply standing by the roadside. This variety of religious representations is related to the wishes of the people who have significant individual control over their religious actions (item 5). Finally, just as we have seen that reality or unreality is not an issue in Shinto, the Mahayana Buddhist refusal to discriminate between existence and nonexistence is also relevant (item 6). This final ambiguity underlies the teachings or practices of practically all Japanese religions. It is significant that *all* of the features named here are particularly suitable for transference to the Internet.

The Internet undoubtedly helps to maintain and develop awareness of the ideas and values associated with traditional religious institutions. Only lack of space prevents us from charting the increased global presence of well-organized Japanese religions. On the other hand, the institutionally unrelated area is being enlarged at the cost of specific religious institutions. What differential is to be expected between Japan and Europe? In Europe, it may be anticipated that the strengthening of “informal spiritualities” will continue and that more Internet use will continue to relativize institutionalized religion. In Japan, religious institutions may be able to reinforce their position by Internet sales of real

tionalized sector as well. Nevertheless, it appears that some typical characteristics of religion in Japan encourage a very special relationship between religion and the Internet. □

Notes

1. Other proposals may be found in Helland 2002 and Karaflogka 2002.
2. I am grateful to Ms. Petra Kienle (University of Marburg) for pointing out some of these to me.
3. There is much more detail about these matters in Pye 2005 (on “electronic projections of Japanese religion and the growth of informal spiritualities,” but in a Finnish translation) and related writings.

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Called to Be Ambassadors of Life and Peace

Acceptance Address of the Twenty-sixth Niwano Peace Prize

by Canon Gideon Baguma Byamugisha

The Niwano Peace Foundation presented the twenty-sixth Niwano Peace Prize to Canon Gideon Baguma Byamugisha, an Anglican priest in Uganda. Rev. Byamugisha was honored for his endeavors to uphold the dignity and human rights of people with HIV/AIDS. The presentation took place on May 7 at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan in Tokyo. Because of the international swine flu alert, Rev. Byamugisha, who is HIV-positive, did not attend the ceremony. On his behalf, the Most Rev. Nathaniel Makoto Uematsu, primate of the Nippon Sei Ko Kai (Anglican Episcopal Church in Japan) accepted the prize. Following are excerpts of the acceptance address that Rev. Byamugisha had prepared for the presentation ceremony.

It is with great joy and humility that I do hereby acknowledge, accept, and receive the twenty-sixth Niwano Peace Prize. I would like to do so on behalf of all those HIV-positive “Ambassadors of Life and Peace” dedicated to and involved in the struggle to bring about a safer, healthier, more productive, more fulfilling, and more peace-filled

world for all of us—irrespective of our age, gender, color, creed, or geographical location.

At first I did not believe the e-mail letter I received from the Niwano Peace Foundation secretary-general informing me that I would be the recipient of the prize for 2009. My first reaction to the letter was to think that I was being scammed by Internet con men and fraudsters who tell you that you have won lots of money from a lottery or from a rich dead donor, then trick you into sending them your personal contacts and bank details, and finally succeed in taking even the very little savings one has accumulated. I began knowing it was genuine when Mr. Tadashi Takatani, secretary-general of the Niwano Peace Foundation, visited us in October 2008 and brought with him a signed letter from the chairperson of the Niwano Peace Foundation.

As Professor Hans Küng acknowledged in his own acceptance speech in 2005: “There are dreams that never come true and on the other hand one can experience realities in life which one would never have dreamt of.”¹

Since then I have tried to read and learn a lot about the Niwano Peace Foundation. I am particularly pleased and encouraged to learn (both from my readings and from interactions with the Niwano Peace Foundation secretary-general) that the Niwano Peace Foundation exerts great energy in encouraging, supporting, and complementing interreligious cooperation in the cause of world peace.

From the part of the world where I live and work, this involves overcoming the following:

Canon Gideon Baguma Byamugisha, who was born in 1959, learned in 1991 that he was HIV-positive. He was the first African priest to declare publicly that he was HIV-positive, breaking one of the most important barriers in the struggle against HIV, that of stigma-induced silence. Rev. Byamugisha has helped to raise public awareness of the disease in a way that has brought distinction to religious and cultural communities in his own country, Uganda, across the African continent, and on a global level. He is the canon of two cathedrals, in Uganda and Zambia, and works through many other channels to fight injustice, with a special focus on children.

- Socioeconomic, cultural, educational, technological, spiritual, and political poverty
- Preventable and controllable infections, illnesses, and deaths
- Socioeconomic, cultural, educational, technological, religious, and political injustice, discrimination, marginalization, and conflicts
- Extreme vulnerability to life-threatening, life-reducing, life-taking, and life-wasting behaviors, decisions, practices, policies, programs, partnerships, resource-allocation regimes, and occurrences at the individual, family, local community, national, regional, and global level that form part of our daily spiritual struggle, devotion, cooperation, and reflection in search of holistic peace, health, and well-being

Rev. Byamugisha ordained as a canon in December 2001.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic (largely preventable, manageable, and controllable with good science, good self-governance, and good international relations) continues to wreak havoc on individuals, families, local communities, nations, and regions most vulnerable because of the lack of the following:

- Accurate information for self-protection and care
- Appropriate attitudes for appreciating various contexts of risk and vulnerability
- Appropriate skills and services for increased HIV/AIDS prevention, care, treatment, and impact mitigation
- Supportive socioeconomic, cultural, educational, technological, medical, spiritual, and political environments that make safe behaviors, practices, and happenings widely known, easy to adopt, popular, and routine (while making unsafe ones known, difficult to adopt, unpopular, and rare)

Indeed, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is one of today's leading humanitarian, cultural, religious, economic, educational, developmental, human-rights, health, security, technological, and self-governance challenges that will continue to test the strength of our attitudes, science, spirituality, religiosity, and morality as individuals, families, communities, and nations, and even as a global community. It will also test the strength of the economic, social, cultural, educational, medical, technological, spiritual, and political strategies, policies, and partnerships we have in place in the face of all the life-threatening, life-reducing, life-taking, and life-wasting infections, illnesses, and occurrences we are facing as global citizens.

The good news is that we have what it takes (as global citizens and global leaders) to halt, reverse, and eventually defeat HIV/AIDS in terms of knowledge, science, technology, values, and structures for international cooperation and action.

What is needed is to expand and multiply our "Citizens' Diplomacy"² for what His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan calls "Mutually Assured Survival."³ We should never doubt that the action of thoughtful, dedicated, and committed individuals, groups, associations, and foundations like the Niwano Peace Foundation can make this world safer, healthier, and more peaceful. In fact, according to the American cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead: "It is the only thing that ever does."⁴

Mutually Assured Survival in the context of HIV/AIDS means that state, nonstate, and interstate Ambassadors of Life and Peace must work to put in place policies, plans, programs, personnel, partnerships, funding mechanisms, messages, and prayer patterns that accomplish the following:

- Accelerate the defeat of HIV/AIDS-related stigma, shame, denial, discrimination, inaction, and misaction (SSDDIM)
- Promote and multiply SAVE:
Safe practices: A (abstinence from sexual activity) + B (being faithful to a single partner) + C (correct and consistent condom use) + PMTCT (Preventing mother-to-child transmission) + safe blood + safe injections, safe circumcision, and safe microbicides + vaccine development, and so on
Access: to treatment for OIs (opportunistic infections) and STIs (sexually transmitted infections), to PEP (postexposure prophylaxis) and ARVs (antiretrovirals), and to good nutrition
Voluntary, routine, and stigma-free HIV counseling and testing
Empowerment of children, youths, women, men, families, communities, and nations living with or vulnerable to HIV and AIDS (economically, socially, culturally, spiritually, educationally, technologically, and politically)

As HIV/AIDS-related infections, illnesses, and deaths continue to soar unacceptably in many countries and regions of Africa and beyond (even in the face of so many efforts, programs, and initiatives), some of us in the most vulnerable communities and nations of the world have come to realize that half measures do not effectively work against this deadly epidemic.

Limited, inaccurate, and stigmatizing approaches and messages that focus on the individual alone, without evoking equal responsibility and accountability at the family, local community, national, regional, and global level, are failing to save our children, youths, women, men, families, communities, and nations from the epidemic.

What is most urgently needed are creative partnerships (public and private, global and local) that are dedicated and committed to the defeat of HIV/AIDS-related SSDDIM and to the multiplication of SAVE at all levels and in all sectors of life.

The leadership and support of the faith leaders and faith communities in this two-pronged ministry will continue to be greatly needed, given our reach, our presence, our unique tradition of compassion, care, and “love for neighbor,” and given our potential for sustainability over the long haul.

I thank you once again, dear friends, for this very great honor, and for the wonderful encouragement, fellowship, and hospitality that I and my team have experienced and will continue to treasure even beyond this great ceremony.

Together in partnership with other Ambassadors of Life and Peace, we will win the war against HIV and AIDS sooner than most of us anticipate, especially if we perfect

Rev. Byamugisha and Swami Agnivesh, president of the World Council of Arya Samaj in India, on the occasion of their participation in an international conference on HIV/AIDS held in the Republic of Guyana in January 2009.

our collective art, science, and will of “blaming each other less and supporting each other more” as individuals, families, communities, nations, regions, and continents of the global community. □

Notes

1. Hans Küng, “22nd Niwano Peace Prize Commemorative Address,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, vol. 26 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), pp. 203–8.

2. “Citizens’ Diplomacy” is the concept that in a vibrant democracy the individual citizen or groups of citizens have the right—even the responsibility—to shape international relations and cooperation and outcomes on a given issue of critical importance. In the context of HIV/AIDS, the Ambassadors of Life and Peace are all of those people committed to building a safer, healthier, more fulfilling, and more peaceful world for all, irrespective of age, gender, creed, or geographical location. They are committed to mobilizing state, nonstate and interstate actions, policies, programs, funding regimes, messages, and prayers that can accomplish the following:

- Accelerate the defeat of HIV/AIDS-related SSDDIM
- Promote and multiply SAVE
- Bring about a world free from HIV, AIDS, and other life-reducing, life-threatening, life-taking, and life-wasting infections, illnesses, and occurrences

3. His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan Bin Talal, “25th Niwano Peace Prize Acceptance Address” (Tokyo, May 8, 2008) p. 2.

4. Margaret Mead, quoted from the Coalition for Citizen Diplomacy Web site, <http://www.coalitionforcitizendiplomacy.org/about.html>.

UN officials celebrating Rev. Byamugisha on his forty-first birthday during a preparatory meeting for a global leaders’ forum on HIV/AIDS held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 2000.

The Importance of Knowing One's Self

by Nichiko Niwano

*When our concern about affairs outside ourselves grows,
we become likely to neglect our precious inner lives.*

These days, the Internet can bring us knowledge, news, and entertainment from around the world. We can be in contact with other people, even in faraway countries, with complete ease, which is truly convenient.

With the amount of available information constantly growing, however, sorting through it all keeps us busy. When people become busy, they can lose sight of what is essential to themselves and tend to become careless in their ability to critically examine the quality of all this information and to determine its value. Furthermore, when our concern about affairs outside ourselves grows, we become likely to neglect our precious inner lives. Precisely because we are living in such an era, it is especially important that we really know ourselves.

We could say that Shakyamuni's motive in leaving his royal home was to learn to know himself. It is no exaggeration to say that religion plays an essential role in attaining this knowledge of self.

Incidentally, in the many languages of the world there are various ways to express the concept of one's own self. The Japanese word *jibun* is considered to do this extremely well.

The *ji* of *jibun* refers to being individual or unique. But no matter how unique someone or something may be, people and things exist in relation to other things (in Buddhism, we speak of others' selves), and form part of a whole. One's self is unique, and at the same time it is a part, one's own portion, of the whole.

We human beings have independent existences and, at the same time, we have relationships with the selves of others, and thus we also have a relationship with the whole. Because the sum of these relationships is a perfect whole, the concept of "one's self" has many deep layers of meaning.

Over the years, much food for thought has been developed from the idea of self contained in the following words of Zen master Dogen: "To learn the Buddha Way is to learn one's self. To learn one's self is to forget one's self."

The Zen master's understanding of Buddhism can be found in the phrase, "All existence is the buddha-nature,"

which means that everything existing in the universe is a manifestation of the buddha-nature, the Life from which all things spring. Taking this into consideration, when we reflect on the meaning of Dogen's phrase, we will realize that the idea it conveys is "Learning the Buddha Way" is to learn the buddha-nature, in other words, discerning what is meant by the buddha-nature. Similarly, "to learn one's self," meaning to learn about one's self, is to learn about the buddha-nature, and since one's self is a manifestation of the buddha-nature, the Life from which all things spring, we are caused to live in a world in which the buddha-nature that pervades all existence is unfolded for us. By his words "to forget one's self," Dogen exhorts us to recognize that we are one with the buddha-nature. I think you can agree with this if you think about the fact that when we sleep well, we are unaware that we are sleeping and thus forget about being asleep.

We have covered a range of aspects of this broad topic, from "knowing one's self" to "learning about one's self," and it may have been a little difficult to grasp, but let us open our eyes to the buddha-nature, the Life from which all things spring and together walk the Buddha Way. □

Nichiko Niwano is president of Rissho Kosei-kai and the Niwano Peace Foundation, a president of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, and special advisor to Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan).

Bodhisattva Practice and Lotus Sutra–Based New Religions of Japan: The Concept of Integration

by Susumu Shimazono

New religious organizations in Japan today clearly reveal that Buddhism has retained its influence on modern Japanese society.

Lay Buddhist Movements in Modern Japan

It is widely said that the Japanese people have no religion or that they have abandoned their religious traditions in the process of Westernization. Buddhist temples have been accused of having lost their religious energies and of conducting only funerals and related services since early modern times. In fact, modern Buddhist movements in Japan are playing great roles in the political, economic, and social spheres. This is the result of Buddhist organizations living up to their philosophies and ways of living, which in turn influences the thoughts and behavior of the people. Thus, new religious organizations in Japan today clearly reveal that Buddhism has retained its influence on modern Japanese society.

These modern religious movements vary in character. The most influential were established during the early nine-

teenth century and have doctrines different from the traditional religious organizations. They are collectively called New Religions, and can be largely divided into Buddhist-inspired and Shinto-inspired groups. An overwhelming majority of Buddhist-oriented New Religions are based on the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Buddhism. They include Soka Gakkai, by far the largest in membership; Rissho Kosei-kai, the second largest in membership, emphasizing a peace movement and interreligious cooperation; Reiyukai, which has given rise to other religious organizations of laypersons; Myochikai, under the Reiyukai umbrella, which places an emphasis on social activities; Honmon Butsuryuko, the first of the Buddhist-oriented New Religions; Hoonji Temple, successor to Bukkyo Kanka Kyusaikai, which was considered a remarkable case of socially engaged Buddhism; and Nihonzan Myohoji Temple, which has striven to propagate its doctrine overseas and to promote its peace movement. In parallel to these New Religions, there have been Kokuchukai, established by Chigaku Tanaka; Toitsukaku, by Nissho Honda; and others as influential movements targeted at Buddhist monks and intellectuals.¹

Although these religious organizations and movements have carried on much of the Lotus Sutra tradition of Nichiren Buddhism, the ways they have succeeded and developed vary. Considering that so many religious organizations that are based on Lotus Sutra/Nichiren Buddhism have developed in modern Japan, a need naturally emerges to identify the points that many of those religions have in common, to examine the characteristics of them, and to explain the reason for their development.

It is useful to note the ideological characteristics that many New Religions have in common with the ideological characteristics of the traditions of the Lotus Sutra and the Nichiren sects that they have succeeded. Three elements appear to be important, namely, a concept of integration

Susumu Shimazono is a professor in the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology at the University of Tokyo. His special fields are the comparative study of religious movements and the history of religion in modern Japan. He has also taught as a guest professor at universities in the United States, France, Germany, and Egypt. He is the author of numerous books on religion, spirituality, and bioethics.

through horizontal solidarity, an emphasis on helping people to become self-reliant, and a this-world orientation.

Features of Lotus Sutra/Nichiren-School Buddhism Adapted to Modern Society

Integration through Horizontal Solidarity

At present, the people's sense of solidarity has been lost, and there are divisions and conflicts within and among classes, nations, and religions that we should attempt to overcome through solidarity on the horizontal level instead of through hierarchic relations. In general, religions seeking salvation have an inclination toward integration through horizontal solidarity.²

Two important characteristics of salvation religions are that they awaken in individuals an awareness of their identity and promote integration through horizontal solidarity. Such a concept is needed in an age when new political and social orders are being formed. In modern times, capitalism spread globally with Western colonialism, and the concept of the nation-state divided the world. It was an age when a concept of horizontal integration was sought in lieu of the conventional idea of hierarchical integration. In other words, individuals, faced with new types of differences and diversity, began to seek a vision of horizontal integration anew.

The Lotus Sutra arose from the Mahayana movement, which taught a belief in bodhisattvas in an effort to narrow the gap between monks and lay followers. Comparing bodhisattvas with the Hinayana ascetics called *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, distinguishing among the three vehicles (the Bodhisattva Vehicle, teachings not only for oneself but to lead others to the level of enlightenment; the *Śrāvaka* Vehicle, teachings transmitted directly from Shakyamuni Buddha with the aim of attaining enlightenment for oneself; and the *Pratyekabuddha* Vehicle, teachings to attain enlightenment by oneself that are not directly transmitted by the Buddha), and noting the diversity of the many sutras and doctrines preached by Shakyamuni Buddha, the Lotus Sutra attempts to integrate them beyond their differences into the One Vehicle of the Buddha's true teachings, through which all followers can reach enlightenment.

Along with the development of the Mahayana tradition, doctrines, sutras, organizations, and relationships with society branched out in different directions, leading to disunion within the Buddhist community. While taking into consideration how these differences and conflicts widened and deepened, the Lotus Sutra evolved a unique philosophy as to how the integration of Buddhism and society could be restored. Belief in the One Vehicle of the Lotus Sutra could integrate the whole Buddhist world and thus build one religious community. This belief exerted a great influence on the Lotus Sutra Buddhism of T'ien-t'ai Chih-i in late-sixth-century China as well as on the traditions of various Buddhist sects originating from the Tendai sect, which was founded in Japan by Saicho (767–822).

Nichiren (1222–82) saw that unity had been lost and the Buddhist community was divided into various organizations under various sects. He attempted to reintegrate the Buddhist organizations under the Lotus Sutra. In ancient Japan, all Buddhist sects were, in principle, integrated under the major temples around Nara and Kyoto. However, when the power of the Heian court collapsed and rival clans of warriors took control of the land, pessimism resulting from the teaching of the Latter Day of the Law became prevalent. The Latter Day of the Law comprises the last of the three periods of Buddhism following Shakyamuni Buddha's death, when his teachings are believed to fall into confusion and lose the power to lead people to enlightenment. Buddhist organizations created by independent recluse monks increased. The advent of the Jodo (Pure Land) sect by Honen, who attempted to exclude all practices except for chanting *nenbutsu* (a prayer to Amitabha) following armed conflicts in Kyoto, made people think that Buddhist teachings could not control the chaos in society. There was also the impending danger of a Mongolian invasion.

Under such circumstances, Nichiren thought that only a belief in the Lotus Sutra would be able to restore the integration of Buddhist organizations and rescue the nation from crisis. He also thought that it would restore the Japanese state in the face of the attempted invasion by Kublai Khan. It was the desire for horizontal integration among people who were engaged in bodhisattva practice that would enable such integration to happen. Nichiren attempted to redirect the strong orientation toward integration described in the Lotus Sutra into the reintegration of the state and the Buddhist community in an age of crisis.

It is easily understood that the tradition of integration based on the horizontal solidarity of Lotus Sutra/Nichiren Buddhism has inspired the populace in modern Japan. Indeed, New Religions based on Lotus Sutra/Nichiren Buddhism have become conspicuous for presenting methods of integration. The concept of integration through religious solidarity has at times been in harmony, and at other times in conflict, with that of national integration, and both concepts, influencing each other, have contributed to the formation of the concept of spiritual integration in modern Japan.

The Principle of Self-Reliance

The term *principle of self-reliance* (*jirikishugi*), which was coined by Shigeru Nishiyama in 1990, expresses the characteristic of the New Religions in the Lotus Sutra/Nichiren tradition that as practitioners of the bodhisattva way, people should take part in religious, social, and political activities.

Salvation religions are meant for everyone, and they place stress upon self-reliance as an important factor in attaining salvation. This concept was contained to some extent in ancient Buddhism, but it was the Mahayana concept of the

bodhisattva that developed the potential to its full scale. With bodhisattva practice, the principle of self-reliance places stress on respecting the positive participation and practice of laypersons.

The concept of bodhisattva practice occupies the central position in the Lotus Sutra, which describes ideal followers as those who ardently accept, read, chant, explain, and transcribe the Lotus Sutra, strongly advocating that they withstand suffering and help the suffering people around them to attain salvation. The images of the bodhisattva who suffers because of his faith (chapter 13 of the Lotus Sutra), the bodhisattva who tries to find something to respect in each person (Bodhisattva Never Despise), and a number of bodhisattvas that emerge from the earth following the teachings of Shakyamuni as the Eternal Buddha were considered to be ideal models for followers of the Lotus Sutra.

Nichiren attempted to live up to the ideal image of the bodhisattva as described in the Lotus Sutra. He believed that he embodied the life of a bodhisattva, and he persuaded others to follow his way of putting his belief into practice. He preached right living and righteous faith and devoted himself to saving the people and the country. In the course of his activities, he was confronted with many hardships, and he asked himself why he had to go through such hardships; he finally realized that it was because he was a bodhisattva with an extremely important mission. He taught that people should follow the path of a bodhisattva. Nichiren insisted that by chanting *Namu Myoho Renge-kyo* (I take refuge in the Lotus Sutra), people could embody the true character of the Buddha in themselves and thus be enabled to stand on their own feet and go forward as Buddhists.

The principle of self-reliance in Lotus Sutra/Nichiren Buddhism presented a symbolic resource that the leaders and followers of New Religions in modern Japan could follow. As the process of modernization advanced, it became increasingly necessary for individuals to become aware of being bearers of their own destinies, that is, to have self-identity and responsibility as individuals, and the principle of self-reliance of Lotus Sutra/Nichiren Buddhism must have been very encouraging for them. They chose their faith and lifestyles and intended to overcome hardships themselves. Then they chose to speak about their experiences with others in order to help them become self-reliant and to persuade them to explore their lives with a sense of mission.

This-World Orientation

The opposite of this-world orientation is other-world orientation, or the denial of this world. In religions, particularly in salvation religions, the existence of the other world, which is quite different from this world, is usually assumed. The concept of salvation often accompanies a vision that one will relate with a divine being in a realm beyond the limits in this world, especially beyond death. The realm different from this world, for example, may be the other-world after death or the state of tranquillity (nirvana) beyond the world of

transmigration. Supposing the existence of the sublime realm, this world is given a negative value and characterized as being filled with wrongs and sufferings. In salvation religions in which asceticism in line with the orientation of denying this world is considered the ideal for clergy, the salvation concept means emancipation from this world.

However, in Japanese New Religions, there is a strong inclination toward seeking salvation here within this world. This view of salvation is characterized as a "vitalistic view of salvation" (Tsushima et al., 1979). Considering that God, the Buddha, and the universe are the source of life, people

A statue of Nichiren that stands inside the precincts of the temple Shishin-kaku on Mount Minobu, Yamanashi Prefecture.

consider themselves to be saved if they can live a happy life in this world by being united with the Great Source of Life and blessed with good health. They seldom show any interest in the other world. They are more concerned about their individual and group life in this world and are actively involved in improving their lives. In the explanation of integration based on horizontal solidarity, a reference was made to interest in daily life, and this interest is inseparable from the tendency of this-world orientation.

In traditional Japanese Buddhism, the Pure Land sects show a conspicuous trend toward an other-world orientation. In particular, as Buddhism came to be increasingly involved in conducting funerals and memorial services, the tendency of Japanese Buddhism toward other-world orientation was

strengthened. On the other hand, interest in this world continued to exist in Japanese Buddhism, which was derived from esoteric Buddhism and the Tendai Hongaku (Original Enlightenment) philosophy, and this tendency occupied a strong position in the Lotus Sutra/Nichiren Buddhist tradition. One expression of this-world orientation is interest in divine favor in this world. In the Lotus Sutra, promises that people can become free from turmoil in this world frequently appear. They include an emphasis on meritorious deeds and on salvation from all kinds of sufferings (chapters 25, on the bodhisattva Kannon, and 26, on *dharani*, or the mystic Buddhist formula). In the Lotus Sutra, one is supposed to seek enlightenment and nirvana in this world while interacting with others. A typical example is found in chapter 20, on the bodhisattva Never Despair, which depicts a monk who venerates all people he meets for their potential to become buddhas.

This-world orientation became quite strong in Nichiren Buddhism. By introducing the chanting of the *daimoku*, practices as instructed in the Lotus Sutra, including remembering its teachings, were simplified and made easier. At the same time, greater importance was given to the ideas that divine favor could be realized during one's lifetime and that buddhahood could be attained in this world. The simplification of practice was based on the interpretation of Chih-i's doctrine of the "three thousand realms in a single thought." Here the foundation of the salvation theory was established. Texts such as the *Kanjin honzon sho* (The object of worship in contemplation) by Nichiren were developed on the theory of this-world-oriented salvation.

It is easy to understand that the this-world orientation in the Lotus Sutra/Nichiren tradition found sympathy among modern Japanese who are interested in improving their destinies and in contributing to the solution of common problems. New Religions in the Lotus Sutra/Nichiren tradition have positively advocated the realization of divine favor and meritorious deeds and have taught that each individual can be reborn through these practices to live a new life in this world. They encourage people to address common problems while positively interacting with others so that they can live a fulfilled life.

Interrelationship among the Three Concepts

These three concepts are interrelated. The vision for integration based on horizontal solidarity is related to the principle of self-reliance, which is linked to this-world orientation, and this naturally has a tendency to bring religious values closer to home. This-world orientation is often connected with the tendency of people to share matters of common interest, since it aims to address the problems in their daily lives as religious problems that need to be fixed in order to improve their lives.

The three concepts are deeply related to the bodhisattva practices. When focusing on religious practices, the principle of self-reliance is the most deeply related to bodhisattva

practices. But the three are also deeply related to the concept of integration through horizontal solidarity and this-world orientation because they relate to people's daily lives and bring about religious integration while people are still involved in the problems in this world. An analysis of the characteristics of modern religious movements focusing on the tradition of Lotus Sutra/Nichiren Buddhism would reveal several notable aspects of the bodhisattva practices.

Integration through Horizontal Solidarity in Lotus Sutra/Nichiren-Related New Religions

While being influenced by nationalism, by practices intended to facilitate participation in society, by a criticism against authoritarian hierarchic social relations, and by individualism and egocentrism, New Religions presented a new integrated vision based on horizontal solidarity and gained people's support. In the following sections, the emphasis placed on matters of daily interest, nationalism, and participation in society are examined.

Emphasis on Matters of Daily Interest and Talking about Personal Experiences

The representative movements of Lotus Sutra/Nichiren-school Buddhism during the Meiji period (1868–1912) were Honmon Butsuryuko and Kokuchukai. As both were established in the same period and both followed the same Lotus Sutra/Nichiren-school Buddhism, they naturally had much in common. When compared, however, they are found to present distinct differences. The leaders of both movements emerged from Lotus Sutra/Nichiren-sect lay associations in the Tokugawa period. Honmon Butsuryuko evolved as a mass movement, while Kokuchukai developed as an ideological movement, mainly among intellectuals. While Honmon Butsuryuko emphasized the pursuit of divine favor in this world with a strong tendency toward privatism focusing its attention on matters of daily interest, Kokuchukai (Association of the State Pillar), as its name suggests, focused on the integration of the nation and the development of the religious sect (Nichiren organizations) as its major concerns, with little interest in problems of people's daily lives. Kokuchukai, which became independent but maintained both partner and rival relationships with the Nichiren sect, has never developed into a mass-movement religious organization. Therefore, if Kokuchukai can be called a New Religion, it should be placed outside the mainstream on the whole New Religion map.

The New Religions that were established later have more points in common with Honmon Butsuryuko. After the late Taisho period (1912–26), people-centered organizations became more concerned with practical problems in daily life. The two most powerful organizations are Reiyukai (and its offshoots) and Soka Gakkai. The concept of integration through horizontal solidarity plays a great role in these organizations. Along with the formation of a national society, the awareness of individual independence, equality, and

solidarity as members of the nation was strengthened among the Japanese populace. Against such a social background, Lotus Sutra/Nichiren-school New Religions promoted their activities through nurturing the sense of solidarity among members by sharing troubles and happiness in the daily lives of the followers. Most notable were small-group activities and the sharing of personal experience.

Small-group activities that had begun as the activity of such lay associations as Hokkeko and Daimokuko in the Tokugawa period were placed in the center of the religious activity of the lay-centered Honmon Butsuryuko. Nissen Nagamatsu, its founder, apprehended that the current state of the Buddhist community as led by priests, especially the Nichiren sect, was suffocating Buddhist belief in its true sense and oppressing solidarity among lay followers. He attempted to build a network of solidarity based on associations of lay followers instead of on temples led by priests. The horizontal network of organizations of lay followers and religious practices conducted therein laid the foundation for the later mass movements of the sect. Honmon Butsuryuko played an important role in forming the concept of lay Buddhism.

Small-group activities by lay followers expanded explosively in and after the 1920s in both Reiyukai (and its offshoots) and Soka Gakkai. One of the driving forces of that development was an activity in which people talked about personal experiences. Reiyukai encouraged its members to talk about their experiences, teaching that they could understand the core of religion only through experience, and saying that anyone could take part in horizontal solidarity by sharing experiences. A little later, Soka Gakkai also encouraged its members to create value in their lives while building horizontal solidarity through round-table meeting activities. The outstanding characteristic of Lotus Sutra/Nichiren-school New Religions is that they allow their followers to maintain their consciousness as religious followers and are committed to horizontal solidarity.

Nationalism as a Vision of Integration

As stated above, one characteristic of New Religions is emphasis on people's daily lives and the followers' participation in activities through talking about their experiences. There are aspects of individualism that emphasize people's own experiences and the realization of their happiness and that require individuals to make efforts to realize their happiness. Interest in the pursuit of divine favor in this world and in the solution of conflicts in everyday life is prominent in Honmon Butsuryuko and other New Religions following Lotus Sutra/Nichiren Buddhism. They are related to the principle of self-reliance. Reiyukai and Soka Gakkai also have the vision of ultimately integrating society by working toward the realization of the ideal world. In this respect, these New Religions are inheriting the horizon explored by Kokuchukai.

The nationalistic vision of integration in Lotus Sutra/

Nichiren-school New Religions stems from Nichiren, who advocated the salvation of the nation through the Lotus Sutra at the critical time just before the Mongolian attack on Japan. With the conviction that the unification of religions was required to overcome the crisis, Nichiren put forward a proposal for national integration and rescuing the state by the Lotus Sutra. Behind his belief was the sense of crisis stemming from the feeling of pessimism that arose from the theory of the Latter Day of the Law. There was, on the other hand, a future-oriented utopia-like sense of time (Sueki, 2000). After the Meiji period, this tradition was reactivated by movements such as Kokuchukai, led by Chigaku Tanaka, and as a result, Lotus Sutra/Nichiren Buddhism became one of the main bearers of religious nationalism in modern Japan. Tanaka considered the "ordination platform of Honmon" as the "national ordination platform" and put forth his vision to save the state and build an ideal society by establishing it firmly. A little later, Toshizo Nishida founded Bussho Gonenkai (1906–18) and taught that saving the state and realizing the mission of the state should be achieved through conducting ancestor worship based on the Lotus Sutra.

The prewar movement of Soka Gakkai had an underlying vision of the millennium and strove to create an ideal world through the construction of the national ordination platform. However, this vision was not publicly announced because of the prewar social situation. This was also true with Reiyukai, which has inherited the philosophy of Nishida almost entirely. In considering the characteristics of New Religions, it is important to note that the two movements had the same vision before the end of World War II—that the relief of the state can be achieved through the integration of horizontal solidarity under Lotus Sutra/Nichiren Buddhism. After the 1930s, the whole nation was mobilized under State Shinto, and the vision of the salvation of people and the world by the emperor-centered state prevailed. During this period, Lotus Sutra/Nichiren-school religious movements were accumulating the philosophical resources that would provide the vision of integration based on horizontal solidarity, which was different from the vision of State Shinto.

After World War II, Lotus Sutra/Nichiren-school New Religions made great advances, and in the process, the nationalistic integration vision played an important role. In both Soka Gakkai and Reiyukai, the idea that true Buddhism would prevail and that the state would be saved through their movements played a large role. But needless to say, the ideological climate after the war was greatly changed. Soka Gakkai has poured much energy into political activities, and because of this, its vision of integration through the state as a medium has been maintained and given a concrete image. Even so, the objective of the organization has tended to be the expansion of its political forces in actual politics, and its vision to save human beings has lost ground. In postwar New Religions, the vision of integration based on horizontal soli-

darity was sought for dimensions that cannot be achieved by salvation through the state. That is a vision of integration through society.

Integration through Society

As members of society, religious organizations adapt themselves to society or oppose it while being pressured and influenced by it; at the same time, they gain opportunities to be positively involved in solving various problems in society in their own ways. Typical examples are conducting welfare and charity activities, contributing to education and medical care, and peace movements. In the 1900s, Christian organizations presented abundant activity models in these fields. Traditional Buddhist organizations also began to carry out various social activities. Then New Religions such as Tenrikyo began social activities on a small scale. The Lotus Sutra/Nichiren-school movement widely conducted relief activities at times of war and natural disasters as well as long-term charitable social activities. However, these activities were not part of the main field of activities of the religious organizations.

Already in the second decade of the 1900s, there was a budding movement among New Religions under the Lotus Sutra/Nichiren school that attempted to pursue horizontal solidarity in society, rather than developing solidarity among their own groups and people around themselves or aiming to achieve their vision of the millennium using the state as an intermediary step. A remarkable example was Bukkyo Kanka Kyusaikai (Buddhist Influence and Relief Association), which would later develop into organizations such as Hoonji and Daijokyo. Tatsuko Sugiyama, its founder, considered support activities for needy people and suffering people outside the community of those who shared the same faith to be an essential part of religious activities. She was earnestly engaged in relief activities ranging from attempting to heal lepers through faith healing and supporting hospital management to managing social welfare institutions for disabled children and others and establishing educational institutions for social welfare workers.

The activities of Bukkyo Kanka Kyusaikai can be seen as responses to the social problems that became apparent in large cities after the 1890s and more seriously in the early 1900s. In these decades, gaps between landowners and tenant farmers and between capitalists and laborers expanded, slums in cities increased, girls endured wretched working conditions in factories, and the miserable conditions of the families of deceased and invalid soldiers became apparent. The government gave greater attention to relief activities and at the same time expected the private sector to provide social service activities also. The government, however, was cautious about religious groups, gaining greater numbers of followers and supporters by preaching divine favors such as healing diseases, and the authorities sometimes controlled the activities of religious groups. This suppression may be a reason underlying Sugiyama's promotion of relief activities

in partnership with medical institutions. Sugiyama and her successors, Hitoshi Murakami and Shugaku Suzuki, were eagerly engaged in caregiving, as they considered their service to be a practical act of bodhisattva practices through which they could train themselves as bodhisattvas. The care activity of Bukkyo Kanka Kyusaikai was passed on to Hoonji Temple, which Suzuki succeeded after World War II, and has continued to date.

After World War II, large-scale welfare or environmental improvement activities and peace movements were begun by many religious organizations. The most notable in terms of scale is the peace movement by Rissho Kosei-kai and Myochikai, which is inseparable from religious cooperation activities. The antiwar and anti-A-bomb movements during the Korean War and the Cold War between East and West in the 1950s led to the rise of nationwide peace movements that developed to express the nation's will to rebuild Japan as a peace-oriented state. New Religions, in particular some of those in the Lotus Sutra/Nichiren school, played a great role in developing a groundswell for the peace movement by their religious cooperation in organizing movements.

Rissho Kosei-kai played a great role in the establishment of the World Conference of Religions for Peace in 1970 and its development in the following years. It launched the Brighter Society Movement and thus involved local branch organizations in peace and environmental activities. It was intended to expand the concept of bodhisattva practice to people outside the organization through interacting with nonmembers by participating in religious cooperation and community environmental activities.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Myochikai, while cooperating with the activities of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, launched moral education for children as a part of its international cooperation. Because of its exclusivist doctrine, Soka Gakkai does not participate in cooperation activities with other religious organizations. It chooses to expand its contact with society not only through the activities of its associate political party (New Komeito) but also through direct contact with the general public through its own activities. Peace is also a great theme for Soka Gakkai. It aims to contribute to world peace through the leader's outgoing international activities, exhibitions, and publications. These are typical contemporary examples of bringing about the vision of integration through horizontal solidarity that the New Religions of the Lotus Sutra/Nichiren school have been pursuing.

Exclusivity and Toleration

In the Lotus Sutra/Nichiren Buddhist tradition, there is a tendency for subject organizations to be divided into exclusive and intolerant groups regarding the diversity of thought and faith. Nichiren accused Buddhist sects in his day of reviling the teachings of the Buddha by not following the Lotus Sutra, which strongly urges people to have faith in that sutra rather than other sutras. It may be understood

that the Lotus Sutra itself is exclusivist in nature. But although it places some teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha that have been conveyed in other forms at lower positions, this does not mean that the value of these teachings is totally denied but that they are recognized as being “skillful means.” As such, both exclusive and tolerant positions have come to coexist in the integration vision presented by New Religions in the Lotus Sutra/Nichiren school. The exclusivist position is represented by Honmon Butsuryuko and Soka Gakkai, and the tolerant position by Hoonji, Rissho Kosei-kai, and Myochikai.

Both positions can be seen as responses to the disunion in ideology and values that became apparent in the process of modernization. One tendency looks at the vision of integration through horizontal solidarity as a means to develop solidarity among followers in the organization and to exclude those who do not positively enter the circle of solidarity. The other tendency is to consider that people outside the followers’ groups should also be incorporated into the circle of their solidarity. The latter position is deeply connected with “cooperation” for the state or, in other words, the “cooperation” demanded by the state that was prevalent before 1945. Religious cooperation in Japan began with a tripartite meeting in 1912, when representatives from Shinto, Buddhism, and Christianity met together at the same table and began a dialogue. This was initiated by the government and by scholars who were cooperating with the government. Later, religious cooperation for peace and religious cooperation in support of war efforts by the state were both promoted. There were also cases of voluntary religious cooperation, but the great majority of the cases were led by the state and were carried out with the intention to achieve goals set by the state. The prewar experience provided the base for religious cooperation after World War II.

After World War II, voluntary cooperation among religious organizations was promoted. Reflecting the prewar suppression of religious activities by the government, religious cooperation was overshadowed by a fear of state control and nationalism. In particular, this fear was strongly shared among the affiliates of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan), which was founded in 1951. An important point is that international religious cooperation was promoted through the activities of the World Conference of Religions for Peace and other groups. New Religions became aware of international society and have begun to pour great amounts of energy into interreligious cooperation activities and peace movements. Syncretized Shinto-oriented New Religions such as Oomoto and Konkokyo have made great contributions in this field, as well as Lotus Sutra/Nichiren-school organizations. It was a notable development in postwar days that their integrated vision of horizontal solidarity had evolved into expanding voluntary religious cooperation and activities in international society.

Uniqueness of the Concept of Integration Based on Horizontal Solidarity in Modern Japan

New Religions have carried on and further developed the concept of integration based on horizontal solidarity in the Lotus Sutra/Nichiren Buddhist concept of bodhisattva practice, which is an important element in the Lotus Sutra that was developed through Nichiren Buddhism and that bears the distinctive characteristics of Japanese Buddhism and of the modern age.

Characteristics of Japanese Buddhism Seen in the Integration Concept of New Religions in the Lotus Sutra/Nichiren Tradition

Buddhist organizations in other countries may place significance on faith and practice by lay followers, but one unique characteristic of Japanese Buddhism is that it places such great significance on the faith and practice of laypeople. The term lay orientation implies all the characteristics of the concept of integration through horizontal solidarity, the principle of self-reliance, and this-world orientation. The fact that the term already existed in Japan before modern times may suggest that it is a notable characteristic of Japanese Buddhism. The formation of lay orientation may have been related to the process of positive efforts to spread Japanese Buddhism among people while being influenced by the Lotus Sutra, Pure Land teachings, and esoteric Buddhism, and while promoting its spread through syncretization with Shinto.

The move to enhance the involvement of laypeople by removing the distinction between them and monks appears in historic documents from the Nara period (710–94), together with the names of Gyoki and En no Ozunu. The Pure Land and the Shugendo (mountain asceticism) traditions promoted their nonorthodox ways of training and practices for laypeople in respective directions, resulting in the relativization of the authority of those who had taken the tonsure. Nonpriests and nonlay leaders were developed in organized ways in Shugendo and in the Pure Land sects to meet the people’s quest for salvation. Moreover, recluse monks in black clothing in the Kamakura period (1185–1333) and Buddhist groups formed by recluse monks became widespread in other forms. It should be remembered that the wide prevalence of lay Buddhist followers has supported the development of Lotus Sutra/Nichiren Buddhism in Japan.

Nichiren himself did not encourage lay orientation. However, the trend to place emphasis on laypeople developed in the Nichiren tradition in the form of lay associations eventually called Hokke-ko and other names. The most active lay associations were the Happon subsect of the Honnoji Temple school of the Nichiryu line, and Fujimon-ryu of the Taisekiji Temple school of the Nikko line in Edo (Tokyo) and Kyoto toward the end of the Tokugawa period. Hon-

mon Butsuryuko and Soka Gakkai both reflect this lay tradition. In the meanwhile, during the Tokugawa period, the tradition of the Nichiren sect was united with shamanism, and follower groups were formed around ascetics who responded to people's needs. Nyoraikyo, the earliest New Religion, was established by a woman in Atsuta in Owari Province (present-day Aichi Prefecture), a former servant in a warrior's house, who was strongly influenced by an ascetic of Nichiren Buddhism. The foundation of Reiyukai's movement was laid by Chise Wakatsuki, a female ascetic in Nichiren Buddhism, in cooperation with Kakutaro Kubo.

dhist tradition was so influential in Japan in the modern age of nationalism will not be understood without taking into account its concern for protecting and saving the nation.

As described above, the spread of lay-centered religious organizations and the strong interest in national integration in Nichiren Buddhism laid the foundation for the development of New Religions in the Lotus Sutra/Nichiren tradition. The concept of integration through horizontal solidarity upheld by those New Religions has evolved on the basis of the lay-centered Buddhist tradition, which is also concerned with national integration. Both the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren

A meeting of the Executive Board of Directors of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan) held at a Rissho Kosei-kai facility in Tokyo in 1952.

These lay associations of the two lines of Nichiren Buddhism have contrasting natures, in that one inherits its exclusive nature while the other inherits its tolerant nature and syncretism with Shinto. Even before the Meiji Restoration (1868), there were two lines of religious organizations aiming for horizontal solidarity by involving laypeople as participants, advocating both exclusivity on the one hand and tolerance on the other.

The development of the tradition of bodhisattva practice in the Lotus Sutra in the direction of nationalism is deeply related to the tradition emphasized in Japanese Buddhism of keeping the nation tranquil by reciting Buddhist prayers and conducting Buddhist ceremonies. Historically, this began with Prince Shotoku (574–622), who placed a premium on the Lotus Sutra; he was succeeded by Saicho and Nichiren, who emphasized the concept of protecting and saving the nation through the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren, in particular, warned Japan of the danger of Mongolian invasion and taught that the nation could be saved by the Lotus Sutra and through constructing an ideal Buddhist state. He redirected the concept of integration based on horizontal solidarity toward integration under the state. The fact that the Nichiren Bud-

Buddhism put forward the integration concept based on horizontal solidarity. This can be understood as a part of the characteristics of bodhisattva practice, one of the central concepts of the Lotus Sutra.

Modernity of the Integration Concept of New Religions

Thanks to the advancement of printing techniques and school education, the formation and spread of a national consciousness reflecting a democratic political ideology became prevalent not only in Japan but also in various countries from the beginning of the nineteenth century onward. The vision of integration through horizontal solidarity and the vision contained in various New Religions have evolved in many entangled ways. A religious tradition emphasizing the subjectivity or self-reliance of the people may have found it easier to keep pace with democratic nation-states.

Among the New Religions of the Lotus Sutra/Nichiren school, very few organizations have developed away from the trend of nationalism. Among them, those that were founded and have developed rapidly between the 1920s and the 1960s have the strongest inclination toward nationalism. Typical are Reiyukai and Soka Gakkai. In these organi-

zations, nationalism was associated with their vision of the millennium and was developed while competing with State Shintoist nationalism. The integrated vision of Lotus Sutra/Nichiren Buddhism was based strongly on horizontal solidarity and was favorably accepted by people as a guiding principle to use in overcoming any crises confronting the nation. It is no wonder, therefore, that the integrated vision of New Religions contains abundant elements of nationalism.

In modern times, people have become increasingly aware not only of the existence of various religions and people within each country but also of the need for coexistence of all countries and cultures in the world. Religious organizations are required to show an awareness of being members of global society and also to display a religious spirit while coping with social needs. It is against the social background of modern times that the perception of religious diversity and the promotion of international cooperation for peace have come to occupy important positions in the New Religions of the Lotus Sutra/Nichiren tradition. These features were observed earlier in Bukkyo Kanka Kyusaikai. In postwar days, the concept of integration in diversity has developed in Rissho Kosei-kai, Myochikai, Soka Gakkai, and other religious organizations.

Finally, it should be noted that the integrated vision of horizontal solidarity of New Religions has kept pace with modern egalitarianism and progressive thought. One feature of Lotus Sutra/Nichiren-school New Religions is that they evaluate the development of modern times positively. Integration based on horizontal solidarity greatly affects their evaluation. They believe that people can attain direct access to the truth taught in the Lotus Sutra and involve themselves in the practice of genuine Buddhism because of the advancements made in modern times. On the other hand, the pessimistic view based on the concept of the Latter Day of the Law is also emphasized, warning that righteous Buddhism is not practiced in current times and that a crisis is growing. Contradictory as these two ideas may appear, they can be seen to be supporting each other in a state of delicate balance. While celebrating advances in the human spirit together with technological progress, these organizations also see the human tendency to become violent and to ignore the truth—against which genuine Buddhism should take a stand.

New Religions in the Lotus Sutra/Nichiren school can be understood as examples of a modern embodiment of Mahayana Buddhism, more specifically, its concept of bodhi-sattva practices. However, in order to fully understand this, its entire historical development must be considered from ancient times, when Mahayana Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra were conveyed to Japan through China, accepted in the Japanese style, and crystallized as Lotus Sutra/Nichiren Buddhism through the great efforts of such intermediaries as Saicho and Nichiren. □

Notes

1. Toitsukaku is considered to be a movement within the framework of traditional Buddhism, while Kokuchukai is often classified as a New Religion, as it is highly independent from traditional Buddhism in both thought and organization.

2. The concept of “integration based on horizontal solidarity” is a common tendency in salvation religions at any time, but it gains greater adaptability in modern society. Characteristics of the “principle of self-reliance” and “this-world orientation” were not notable in salvation religions in premodern times and were observed in the tradition of only limited sects. Both are more adaptable to society in modern times.

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The One Fundamental Principle of All Religions

by Nikkyo Niwano

This essay is part of a continuing series of translations from a volume of inspirational writings by the 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.

At every opportunity, I emphasize the fact that a single underlying principle is common to every major religion. If followers of each religion master the fundamental beliefs of their own faith, they will realize that, despite superficial differences of expression, the truth is that humankind is one. They will discover that religion teaches us that to live in harmony with others is to live in accordance with truth. In this way, all people on the planet can grasp, through their own religious beliefs, the fundamental truth of human existence. When they succeed at reversing any prejudices they may have held to a sense of unity, the world at last will witness the advent of true peace and happiness.

Each follower of a religion usually strongly believes that his or her own faith is supreme, and as a result, in the past they tended to insist that their own religion or sect or denomination was the correct one, and so slid into feelings of exclusivity and self-righteousness. Such attitudes have left behind a history of war and strife brought about by religion. This was against the wishes of God and the Buddha and the fault of followers of religions themselves. Religions and religious organizations do not exist for their own sake. Rather, they exist for humankind.

The Bible says that there is only One Truth, and Buddhism speaks of the One Buddha Vehicle that is the single path to enlightenment. I believe that, although the phrasing is different, these concepts express from the perspective of God and the Buddha the hope that religious truth would bring happiness equally to all humankind. If people of all religious beliefs throughout the world were able to open their eyes to the truth of all religions and seriously study their teachings, they could then not fail to realize that all share one fundamental principle. I believe that if they did so, they would be only too willing to join hands and advance together to enter the first gateway on the road toward world peace.

The major religions have always been inspired by the laws of the universe. The great founders of different faiths, through divine intuition or following their own deep contemplation, have realized the universal laws that underlie the phenomenal world. Religions are based on their founder's teaching of those laws so that ordinary people can understand them. In a dialogue recorded in a book called *Toyo no kokoro* (The heart of the East) between Hajime Nakamura, professor emeritus of the University of Tokyo, and Tetsuji Morohashi, the compiler of *Dai kanwa jiten* (Encyclopedic Chinese-Japanese dictionary), Professor Nakamura stated that religions are based on fundamental principles that cannot successfully be expressed in words. We have to use words to explain religions to people, however, so the teachings of each faith come into being, he said. I believe that at their base are the laws of the universe.

If we were to explain what these laws of the universe actually are, I believe they boil down to two ideas: interdependence and constant circulation. Earth, along with the other planets, circles the sun along a fixed orbit. The moon similarly orbits the earth. The reason these bodies maintain a

Nikkyo Niwano, the 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.

fixed orbit is that their gravity attracts them to each other, which means that they are interdependent.

Our solar system is merely a fragment of a larger galaxy, and there are vast numbers of other groups of stars like our own system in the universe. These stars, unimaginable in number, are balanced against one another in a state of interdependence as they move through the universe. When we look away from the macrocosm of the universe to the microcosm of the atom, we find the same situation. Inside the nucleus of a single atom, protons and neutrons, protons and protons, and neutrons and neutrons are tightly bonded together, moving with great force while constantly dependent on one another.

Human society needs to be the same. The natural order of things, according to the laws of the universe, is for human beings to be in a state of balance, forming strong bonds with each other and thus living interdependently. Interdependence is essentially what Buddhism calls nonself, that is, all things are devoid of self. Human beings, however, are too attached to their own interests, and because of their greed they live with their backs turned to the great universal laws. As a result, they fall into pain and suffering. This is why the great religious leaders who understand the laws of the universe teach us to be without an ego, to discard the self, and to live in the service of others. The origin of all great religions lies in this.

The other law, constant circulation, is expressed in Buddhism as the fact that all things are impermanent. The heavenly bodies and the microscopic atoms are all constantly moving and always changing. The sun burns ever brighter. Earth, on which we stand, is not permanent either. It is continually changing form. Somewhere it explodes and somewhere magma flows. Water evaporates and rises into the sky; it turns to rain and falls back onto us. Plants absorb the carbon dioxide that sentient beings exhale. This in turn is converted by photosynthesis to create carbohydrates, which are then eaten by human beings and animals to survive. The waste matter excreted is decomposed by bacteria and becomes nutrients for plants. This cycle is constantly repeated. Even though it may look as if thousands of organisms are born and perish, they do not really live or die, since they are a part of a cycle, in constant circulation.

Thus great teachers who have come to understand the laws of the universe have taught us to be thankful for everything, never to forget our indebtedness to all around us, and to take care of all the people and things in the world so that the necessary circulation does not become clogged by human selfishness. All great religions agree on this point.

There is basically not the slightest difference between the Christian teachings of the love of God and love for our fellow beings and the Buddhist teachings of deep compassion and mercy. They are identical in their aim in showing us the right way to live and guiding us along the road that leads to lasting peace. It is truly as Shakyamuni said, "There is only one Buddha vehicle, not two or three." □

Participants in the twenty-fourth congress of the International Association for Religious Freedom, held in the Netherlands in 1981, pose for a commemorative photo.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 15

Springing Up out of the Earth

(1)

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

Two especially important points arise in this chapter. The first is that when the bodhisattvas who had come from other lands to this saha world said to the World-honored One that they would strive to convert the living beings here, the Buddha declined their offer, assigning that task to the many bodhisattvas who had sprung up out of the earth. These bodhisattvas had experienced the numerous pains and problems of everyday life and, pursuing their religious practice within it, had, without secluding themselves, attained the highest enlightenment. Because they had experienced and overcome suffering and anxiety, they possessed true strength and resourcefulness, and were therefore the most suitable people to teach and convert living beings. To entrust the saha world to them is thus to instruct us that this world can be purified and made peaceful by everyone living in it, and that we must build our own happiness in life. Thus, it is our responsibility to construct our own Land of Tranquil Light. Our happiness must be achieved through our own efforts. What a powerful and positive message this is!

Shakyamuni himself passed through a similar process in order to attain ultimate enlightenment. This is a clear point of difference between Buddhism and other religions. While other beliefs have excellent teachings too, it is difficult for us to understand the process by which their founders came to comprehend those teachings. Whether they were sent from God or given by divine revelation, they are imbued with a mystery incomprehensible to the human mind. The means by which Buddhism came about, on the other hand, are clearly apparent: Shakyamuni, born into this world as human as any one of us, experienced the same joys and tribulations as other human beings but, having resolved to undergo strict asceticism and meditation, finally arrived at complete realization. If we follow the path that Shakyamuni revealed to us, we can be certain that, like him, we will eventually attain the same supreme enlightenment. Because the Buddha's teachings sprang up out of the earth (actual life), we are able to follow them, and because we have experienced the earth (actual life), we are truly able to bring others to

liberation and enlightenment. This is the first thing that this chapter emphasizes.

The second point is that, as mentioned at the end of chapter 14, this chapter marks the beginning of the realm of origin, the second half of the sutra; the first half of the chapter is the introductory part of the realm of origin, leading to chapter 16, which reveals the true form of the Buddha. The latter half of the chapter, together with chapter 16 and the first half of chapter 17, are considered to be the main part of the realm of origin.

I admit that stating that we have only to follow the path Shakyamuni laid down for us to be assured of perfect enlightenment poses many difficulties for ordinary people. This is why Shakyamuni taught a more direct and complete way of salvation in the main part of the realm of origin. Let us now read the text, bearing these points in mind.

TEXT At that time the bodhisattva-mahasattvas who had come from other lands, numerous as the sands of eight Ganges, arose in the great assembly, and with folded hands saluted and spoke to the Buddha, saying: "World-honored One! If the Buddha will allow us, after his extinction, diligently and zealously to protect and keep, read and recite, copy and worship this sutra in this saha world, we would preach it abroad in this land." Thereupon the Buddha addressed all the host of those bodhisattva-mahasattvas: "Enough! My good sons! There is no need for you to protect and keep this sutra. Wherefore? Because in my saha world there are in fact bodhisattva-mahasattvas [numerous] as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges; each one of these bodhisattvas has a retinue [numerous] as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges; these persons are able, after my extinction, to protect and keep, read and recite, and preach abroad this sutra."

COMMENTARY "Enough" is a strong expression. Here we can feel Shakyamuni's determined spirit. We should regard the Buddha's words as having a special significance for

those of us living in later times, interpreting them not as Shakyamuni's response to the bodhisattvas from other lands but as an encouragement to us not to seek salvation from other sources.

TEXT When the Buddha had thus spoken, all the earth of the three-thousand-great-thousandfold land of the saha world trembled and quaked, and from its midst there issued together innumerable thousand myriad kotis of bodhisattva-mahasattvas. All these bodhisattvas with their golden-hued bodies, thirty-two signs, and boundless radiance had all before been dwelling in [infinite] space below this saha world. All these bodhisattvas, hearing the voice of Shakyamuni Buddha preaching, sprang forth from below.

COMMENTARY Because these bodhisattvas were endowed with the same thirty-two primary marks of excellence as the Buddha himself and because they emitted a golden radiance from their bodies, they were certainly bodhisattvas very close to the Buddha's enlightenment. Buddhist scholars regard these bodhisattvas as having been directly converted by the Eternal Original Buddha, and so call them "bodhisattvas of the origin." Those converted by Shakyamuni, on the other hand, are termed "bodhisattvas of the trace." More important for us than this division, however, is the meaning underlying the appearance in this world of the bodhisattvas who remained in the space beneath the saha world. There are many interpretations; let us look at them one by one.

First, the bodhisattvas were people who had long since attained enlightenment. This is why they are said to have been dwelling in space. They were standing by in the Pure Land waiting to begin their liberating action in the saha world. It is in this preparedness that the true worth of the bodhisattva is found. If those in the Pure Land were to dwell there for all eternity, they would become aloof from suffering beings and so lose their right to be called bodhisattvas. Thus the point to note here is that as soon as Shakyamuni called them the bodhisattvas sprang up out of the earth and appeared in the saha world.

Passing through the earth necessitated enormous strength, which the bodhisattvas possessed. In other words, they were bodhisattvas who had practical strengths in the everyday world. Religious people who simply gain enlightenment and dwell peacefully in the realm of that enlightenment without using their power to save people are not bodhisattvas. It is those who possess the power to rip through the earth who are the truly religious, the true spiritual leaders.

Passing through the earth has the further meaning of experiencing the life of the actual world. Bodhisattvas of the origin are both emanations of the Eternal Original Buddha and personifications of that buddha. This is why they were standing by in space, that is, in the Pure Land. In order to save people living in this world, those bodhisattvas must experience actual life and use that experience to guide and teach people. Otherwise they cannot offer true liberation.

People who study religious texts and write theoretical tomes have an important role, but such people alone cannot save people in the actuality of their lives. Those who would be active bodhisattvas must immerse themselves in humanity, suffering amid the grime and pollution of the world, coming into direct contact with human pain and anxiety and human weakness and meanness. It is only by doing so that they can lead people effectively and raise them up. This is the significance of the bodhisattvas' passing through the earth.

Looking at this from another angle, we can interpret the passage as teaching us a process of development in the way we see things. Dwelling in the space beneath the saha world can mean being within the enlightenment of emptiness (*shunyata*). This enlightenment is, in human terms, the truth that the essence of a human being is the buddha-nature, which all people possess equally. This is supreme realization, the fundamental principle for liberating living beings. But no one will be saved if the bodhisattva remains within that enlightenment and does not move on. People in the real world are diverse in their characteristics: Some are wise, others foolish, and still others kind or cruel, tenacious or apathetic, unselfish or avaricious, capable or incompetent. A person who can look upon all these people equally, disregarding their differences, is worthy to be called wise.

It is not enough, however, to admire a wise person; that does nothing to help the world. Merely being a wise person is the same as being a hermit living alone in the mountains, for there is no contact with living people and actual society. If that person perceives the differences that mark living human beings and penetrates the truth of the source of those differences, however, he or she develops a way of salvation for people. To understand the marks of difference belonging to living beings is to pass through the earth.

When we read on a little further, we find that the bodhisattvas who sprang up out of the earth remained in the sky after making obeisance before the Jeweled Stupa. This signifies that, having understood the marks of difference among human beings, the bodhisattvas once again contemplated the equality of the buddha-nature. To remain at the stage of perceiving differences is to become enmeshed in those differences. It is necessary to pass beyond that stage and see the buddha-nature that is the essence of all human beings. The understanding of the buddha-nature and of equality achieved in this process differs from the conceptual ideas about them held formerly, in that it has a driving force that is the energy to save all living beings.

When one gains such an understanding of the buddha-nature and of equality, a vast and boundless compassion is born within one, and one perfects one's qualifications to act as a savior, not only of humanity but of all living beings. The process by which one moves from essential equality to actual marks of difference, and then deepens one's understanding by returning to the essential equality that underlies all differences, is symbolized in the movement of the bodhi-

sattvas from the space under the earth to the earth and to the space above the saha world.

We should not skim through this very important chapter, seeing it merely as a strange or mystical story, for, as we have seen, it contains profound truths.

TEXT Each one of these bodhisattvas was the commander of a great host, leading a retinue [numerous] as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges; moreover, others led retinues [numerous] as the sands of fifty thousand, forty thousand, thirty thousand, twenty thousand, ten thousand Ganges; moreover, down to the sands of one Ganges, the sands of half a Ganges, a quarter of it, down to a fraction of a thousand myriad kotis of nayutas; moreover, a thousand myriad kotis of nayutas of followers; moreover, myriads of kotis of followers; moreover, a thousand myriad, a hundred myriad, or even a myriad; moreover, a thousand, a hundred, or even ten; moreover, those who lead five, four, three, two, or one disciples; moreover, one who is alone, happy in the practice of isolation. Such [bodhisattvas] as these are immeasurable, illimitable, beyond the powers of comprehension by calculation or comparison.

COMMENTARY The description of the great differences in the number of followers is very realistic and interesting. Perhaps the number of followers depends on the practical strength and influence of the bodhisattva.

TEXT When these bodhisattvas had emerged from the earth, each went up to the wonderful Stupa of the Precious Seven in the sky, where were the Tathagata Abundant Treasures and Shakyamuni Buddha. On their arrival they made obeisance, with faces to the ground, to both the World-honored Ones, and going to the buddhas seated on the lion thrones under the jewel trees, they also saluted them, three times making procession round them on their right, with folded hands revering them, and extolling them with all kinds of bodhisattva hymns. Then they stood to one side, with delight gazing upon both the World-honored Ones.

COMMENTARY The Stupa of the Precious Seven (the Jeweled Stupa), as mentioned in chapter 11, "Beholding the Precious Stupa," represents the buddha-nature, the essence of all human beings. Thus the description of the bodhisattvas who emerged from the earth going up to the Stupa of the Precious Seven in the sky and making obeisance to the two tathagatas represents the action of expressing gratitude to and trust in Shakyamuni, who first brought the teachings to the saha world, and to the buddha-nature of absolute equality. It was natural too that the bodhisattvas, as liberators of the saha world, should praise and express a desire to emulate the emanated buddhas, for they had spoken of the truth of the buddha-nature of absolute equality.

• *Three times making procession round them on their right.* This is a traditional Indian form of devotion. Even today,

people visiting places like stupas circle them three times to the right, bowing each time they pass the front. That is why stupas are constructed to be circumambulated.

• *Extolling them with all kinds of bodhisattva hymns.* While the surface meaning is the ways the bodhisattvas praised the Buddha, what is more important is the underlying spiritual meaning. The bodhisattvas knew better than ordinary people, even bhikshus and bhikshunis, true gratitude to the Buddha. Thus when they extolled him, they did so in the true meaning of the word. Ordinary people praise the Buddha, thanking him for rescuing them from their suffering. Bhikshus and bhikshunis are likely to speak highly of him as the great master of their lives who has rid them of their defilements. These bodhisattvas, on the other hand, applauded him for his virtue and actions, for they knew the truth about him. We do not know the exact words they used, but they must have reflected the bodhisattvas' knowledge.

This is an important thing to remember, even regarding our daily lives. It is easy to praise someone, but true praise is extremely difficult. We must be especially careful when we are speaking of someone of high degree. People who think that any kind of praise will do often find themselves wide of the mark. This is often counterproductive, and they are thought to be indulging in mere flattery; considered to be lacking in understanding, they are scorned.

The central issue is whether we can deliver true praise. The ability to do so is closely related to a person's inner growth. Nichiren said that though he was respected by people, veneration for the wrong reasons has no meaning at all. He viewed his role as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra in his society to be to transmit the true spirit of Shakyamuni. It would be a mistake, he said, to show him gratitude for his teachings, when they were not his but the Buddha's. It is ironic that there are some groups who view Nichiren as the same as the Original Buddha; this is an excellent example of mistaken veneration.

Raising the level of our inner life is perhaps the most important task we have. When we have achieved spiritual richness we will be able to praise others in the truest way. Let us therefore strive to learn and practice the Buddha's teachings so that we will be able to sing the praises of the Buddha in the truest sense.

TEXT From the time that these bodhisattva-mahasattvas first issued from the earth and extolled the buddhas with all kinds of bodhisattva hymns, in the interval there had passed fifty minor kalpas. During all this time Shakyamuni Buddha sat in silence, and silent also were the four groups; [but] the fifty minor kalpas, through the divine power of the Buddha, seemed to the great multitude as half a day.

COMMENTARY Here we read that the bodhisattvas who had emerged from the earth praised the Buddha for fifty minor kalpas (about 850 million years). This symbolizes the fact that however much we praise the Buddha's virtues we can

never reach an end. That the Buddha sat during that time in silence means that he acknowledged the rightness of the bodhisattvas' praise of him, that is, that they well understood his true essence. The assembly, the ordained and lay practitioners, also sat in silence, forgetting who and where they were in the exaltation they felt when listening to the hymns of the bodhisattvas to the Buddha. What a wonderful religious experience that must have been, when the Buddha (preacher of the Dharma), the bodhisattvas (those who had practiced the Dharma) and religious practitioners (those who had studied the Dharma) were as one body! In this state of exaltation fifty minor kalpas passed as though they were only half a day.

Physics has shown that time is not absolute. Furthermore, subjectively, time is an unreliable measure. When we are absorbed in work the day flies past, but when we have nothing to do it seems endless. It is not just a matter of perception: It is far more worthwhile to spend one day on meaningful work than a year loafing around. Similarly, fifty years working even in part for others is time better spent than one hundred years of no particular effort.

In our spiritual life it is the same. Chanting sutras and venerating the Buddha for hours but with no real concentration is not the mark of a devout believer. It makes no sense to say to others that if chanting the *daimoku*, "I take refuge in the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law," for an hour a day does not bring benefits they should chant for two hours, or even three. This is foolish advice and demonstrates a lack of understanding of the nature of time. Belief has nothing at all to do with the duration of time. Some may experience a million years in a second, while others may spend fifty, a hundred, a thousand, or even ten thousand years and still not reach the end of the path. It is important that we understand that in the religious life fifty minor kalpas may be half a day, or half a day may be fifty minor kalpas. In both the secular and the religious life, it is time fully spent that is of value. This passage teaches us that life is led in the truest way when time is regarded thus.

TEXT At that time the four groups, also by the divine power of the Buddha, saw the bodhisattvas who everywhere fill the space of innumerable hundred thousand myriad kotis of domains. Among the host of those bodhisattvas there were the four leading teachers: the first was named Eminent Conduct, the second named Boundless Conduct, the third named Pure Conduct, and the fourth named Steadfast Conduct. These four bodhisattvas were of their hosts the chief heads and leaders.

COMMENTARY *Eminent Conduct.* This is one who practices the supreme Dharma.

• *Boundless Conduct.* This is one who undertakes limitless practice.

• *Pure Conduct.* This is one who is pure in practice.

• *Steadfast Conduct.* This is one who is certain in practice.

The meaning of "conduct" (religious practice) calls for some comment. All the bodhisattvas mentioned were practitioners of their belief. As soon as the discourse of the realm of trace, the first half of the Lotus Sutra, with its theoretical teachings of wisdom, was over, countless bodhisattvas to whom religious practice was the prime concern appeared. There is no further need for doctrinal explanation. The leaders of these bodhisattvas were Eminent Conduct, Boundless Conduct, Pure Conduct, and Steadfast Conduct. Together they symbolize the four universal vows of the bodhisattva. These vows express the workings of the mind of the Buddha and are the fundamental wishes of one practicing the Buddha Way.

The first vow is "However innumerable living beings are, I vow to save them." This is the most specific of the four vows, for it has a clear objective. One who practices this vow is steadfast in religious training, concerned that his or her practice can be actualized. That is why this bodhisattva is called Steadfast Conduct.

The second vow is "However immeasurable the defilements are, I vow to extinguish them." This is a vow to purify the spiritual life. One who practices to do that is undertaking pure practice and therefore is called Pure Conduct.

The third vow is "However inexhaustible the Buddha's teachings are, I vow to master them." The Buddha's teachings are vast and boundless. Even though we can study them, penetrating their more profound meanings is very difficult. Thus, in taking refuge in the Three Treasures we say, "May we embrace the riches of the sutra and make our wisdom wide and deep as the sea." However boundless the teachings are, and however long it takes to practice them, the bodhisattva vows to penetrate them all. One who practices to do that is undertaking boundless practice and therefore is called Boundless Conduct.

The fourth vow is "However infinite the Buddha Way [enlightenment] is, I vow to attain it." Attaining the Buddha Way means understanding the supreme Dharma that runs through all existences in the universe, causing them all to live happily based on this Dharma, and leading all human beings to the ideal Buddha realm. A great bodhisattva strives to reach this realm but, out of compassion for all living beings, at the same time works to take them there as well. One who practices to do that is practicing the supreme, limitless Dharma and therefore is called Eminent Conduct.

All these bodhisattvas have the word *conduct* in their names and so are religious practitioners first and foremost, who manifest in actual life the wisdom of the real aspect of all things taught in the realm of trace, the first half of the sutra, and realize the truth of the equality of the buddha-nature through the exercise of compassion. We, as modern-day believers, are the inheritors of their work, and it is our task to realize it in our daily life. If we do not, we have not grasped the implications of the teaching given here.

TEXT In front of [their] great hosts, each of them with folded hands looked toward Shakyamuni Buddha and inquired of him, saying: "World-honored One! Hast thou few ailments and few troubles, and art thou at ease? Are those whom thou must save readily receiving thy teaching? Do they cause the World-honored One not to become weary?"

COMMENTARY *Hast thou few ailments and few troubles?* "Few" here does not mean "few in number" but translates a Chinese word that serves a negating function. Thus, it means "Hast thou no ailments and no troubles?"

• *Those whom thou must save.* This refers to those whom Shakyamuni teaches and liberates from their sufferings. The phrase indicates all living beings, starting with his direct disciples.

TEXT Thereupon the four great bodhisattvas spoke thus in verse:

"Is the World-honored One at ease, / With few ailments and few troubles? / In instructing all the living beings, / Is he free from weariness? / And are all the living / Readily accepting his teaching? / Do they cause the World-honored One / Not to get tired?"

Then the World-honored One, in the great assembly of the bodhisattvas, spoke thus: "So it is, so it is, my good sons! The Tathagata is at ease, with few ailments and few troubles. These beings are easy to transform and I am free from weariness.

COMMENTARY Shakyamuni was already elderly, and we can assume that his great task of teaching living beings had taken a toll. Yet because of his boundless compassion, he did not consider his work to be difficult or tiring.

TEXT Wherefore? Because all these beings for generations have constantly received my instruction and worshiped and honored the former buddhas, cultivating roots of goodness. All these beings, from first seeing me and hearing my preaching, received it in faith and entered the Tathagata wisdom, except those who had previously practiced and learned the small vehicle; [but] even such people as these I have now caused to hear this sutra and enter the Buddha wisdom."

COMMENTARY I have already noted that the link between the Buddha and living beings is not a matter of one or two generations. The Buddha makes that clear in this passage.

• *Except those who had previously practiced and learned the small vehicle.* This is a phrase easy to misinterpret. Practitioners of the small vehicle are those who have come into contact with the Buddha in this world, having had no previous links with him, and who seek to serve him as shravakas or pratyekabuddhas. Because they either have not com-

pleted the preliminary stages of practice by not having grown the roots of virtue through the accumulation of good actions or have no traces in their subconscious of having heard the Mahayana teachings in a past life, they are unable to accept easily the true Mahayana teachings when they hear them. Since the only difference is that practitioners of the small vehicle have begun to practice in this life what other people have been taught in a past life, however, they too will eventually be able to attain the same enlightenment, though they may arrive at it later. It makes no difference, in the context of the eternal Buddha Way, whether one studied the teachings in the past and becomes enlightened in the present or studies them for the first time in the present and reaches enlightenment in the future.

TEXT Thereupon these great bodhisattvas spoke thus in verse:

"Good, good! / Great Hero, World-honored One! / All these living beings / Are easily transformed [by thee], / Are able to inquire into / The profound wisdom of buddhas, / And, hearing, to believe and discern. / We congratulate thee."

COMMENTARY *Congratulate.* This word means literally "the joy that follows." "Joy" is the profound delight that arises from a feeling of deep gratitude for the teachings, and "follows" refers to being wholly devoted to the person who gives the teachings.

TEXT Then the World-honored One extolled these supreme chiefs, the great bodhisattvas, [saying]: "Good, good! My good sons! You may [rightly] be minded to congratulate the Tathagata."

COMMENTARY The Buddha's response is reflexive. As soon as the great bodhisattvas speak to him in gratitude as their refuge, he praises them in return. It is this kind of interchange that deepens belief and extends the teaching. A simple one-way traffic between mentor and practitioner or teacher and pupil does not give rise to such development. The exchange between the Buddha and the great bodhisattvas teaches us this.

It is important, too, that the Buddha praises the bodhisattvas for their congratulations, that is, for their profound delight in the teachings. Religious teaching does not involve simply studying doctrine or understanding in a theoretical manner what has been taught. That alone does not lead to actual practice and, by extension, to causing the world to move. Understanding and expressing delight in the teachings generate a great energy that finds expression in practice. Experiencing "the joy that follows" is the *raison d'être* of religion, for it gives rise to the power to liberate the world. A religious teacher must have a deep understanding of this point.

TEXT Then Maitreya Bodhisattva and the host of [other] bodhisattvas, numerous as the sands of eight thousand Ganges, all reflected thus: “From of old we have never seen nor heard of such a host of great bodhisattva-mahasattvas issuing from the earth, standing in the presence of the World-honored Ones, with folded hands worshipping and inquiring of the Tathagata.”

COMMENTARY Maitreya and all the other bodhisattvas, who have been acting as the Buddha’s assistants, are still sitting at the Buddha’s feet receiving his teachings. Maitreya in particular, being the one who has received Shakyamuni’s assurance that he will be the next Buddha to appear in the saha world, will naturally have been the most distinguished of all the bodhisattvas. Suddenly, however, bodhisattvas even greater than him and his companions have appeared like clouds out of the earth and have greeted Shakyamuni in a familiar fashion. Shakyamuni too has responded to them as old acquaintances as they exchange words of praise. Is it any wonder that Maitreya is taken aback?

TEXT Then Maitreya Bodhisattva-Mahasattva, being aware of the thoughts in the minds of all the bodhisattvas, numerous as the sands of eight thousand Ganges, and desiring also to resolve his own doubt, folded his hands toward the Buddha and asked him thus in verse:

“[These] innumerable thousand myriad kotis, / [This] great host of bodhisattvas, / Are such as we have never seen before. / Be pleased to explain, Honored of Men, / From what places they have come, / For what reason they have assembled. / Huge of body, of transcendent [power], / Of wisdom inconceivable, / Firm of will and memory, / With

great powers of forbearance, / Whom all the living rejoice to see: / Whence have they come?

COMMENTARY *Honored of Men.* The literal meaning of the Chinese phrase is “the highest of all two-legged beings,” an epithet of the Buddha.

• *Huge of body.* It was an ancient Indian custom to symbolize personal greatness in terms of physical size. According to legend, Shakyamuni was about five meters tall. “Huge of body” is doubtless an expression praising his great virtue. We find such references throughout the sutras, and experience the idea vividly when we see giant statues of the Buddha, such as those of the Buddha entering nirvana at Kushinagara in India and Wat Po in Thailand, the great standing statue of the Buddha at Polonnaruwa in Sri Lanka, the giant rock-cut images of the Buddha at Yün-kang in China, the Great Buddhas of Nara and Kamakura in Japan, and other images too numerous to mention. Let us remember that a huge body is a symbol of great virtue.

• *Whom all the living rejoice to see.* This is an expression often found in the sutras. A person of extremely great merit has the power to attract people. Without this power, a person lacks the qualification to be a spiritual guide and leader. We should all aspire to be someone that others “rejoice to see.”

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.

Byaku-e Kannon (*White-Robed Kuan-yin*), an ink painting by Founder Nikkyo Niwano.

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