

The Ties That Bind Families

by Nichiko Niwano

Since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, on March 11, 2011, I have often read and heard the Japanese word *kizuna*, meaning in English ties or bonds that connect things and people. It is used to refer to the ties of sympathy all Japanese feel for the disaster victims. At the same time, frequent news reports about the sad deaths of elderly people who lived alone make me think about the real meaning of “family” and “ties.”

I'll begin with the meaning of family. The traditional Japanese view of the family is imbued with the age-old East Asian concept of filial piety, which calls on children to respect their parents and serve them well. The parents, of course, are expected to love their children and treat them well in turn, and this mutual affection binds them together. That *Rissho Kosei-kai* places importance on showing respect for one's parents and making offerings and expressing reverence for one's ancestors is not unrelated to this Japanese view of the family.

In Japan, the influence of Confucian thought, with its emphasis on filial piety, and the teachings of the Buddha, which have compassion at their core, have blended over time, and it seems to me that most Japanese have come to consider an ideal family as one bound by ties filled with the love and respect inherent in these religious and cultural traditions.

Threads of Respect and Affection

The concept of filial piety is demonstrated by the continuation from parents to children, from those who are older

to those who are younger, and so on. When we consider the bonds we have with our parents and grandparents, or with our children and grandchildren, we should rededicate ourselves to expressing our gratitude and reciprocating the kindnesses we received.

Of course, this does not change in the nuclear family that is common today, but a family in which three or four generations are living together is a rare environment that truly enables its members to cultivate a sense of gratitude. Since the family can be considered a microcosm of society, it has many positive aspects, but there can also be numerous complications in a large extended family.

Even though that is the case, we should gladly accept these complications. While some people may think of them as ordinary family problems, the challenges that arise within a family can offer us the best means for developing our humanity.

When we think about the family situation this way, even though the views of parents and grandparents may sometimes be annoying to the younger members of the family, and even though the older generations may sometimes feel as if their children or grandchildren come from outer space, living together on a daily basis provides many opportunities for learning how to better understand people with different life experiences and from a generation different from our own. Encountering such complications truly does provide the material that helps to develop the human heart. Furthermore, it is one's own family

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members who listen to and commiserate with the troubles we cannot talk about with anyone else.

In other words, by cultivating one another's minds and showing one another kindness, family members spin threads of respect and affection that are genuine family ties. Then, in a home full of consideration and gratitude in which, for instance, the husband regularly performs daily sutra recitation and the wife does not fail to be sympathetic and speak considerately, these ties are never broken.

However, we should not think that such ties exist only among immediate family members. *Rissho Kosei-kai's* Dharma centers form the nuclei of regional communities that create bonds of consideration with their neighbors, regardless of whether or not they are members of the sangha. Such approaches as friendly calls by members upon people who are living alone in their neighborhoods are bodhisattva practices that prevent people from feeling isolated and bring liberation to both body and mind. Such actions bring people together with the ties that result in true peace of mind.

And of course, showing real consideration for others in such ways is a perfect example of the practice of compassion. □

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Modern Meanings of Festivals

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

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The Significance of Festivals for Rissho Kosei-kai

by Waichiro Izumita

The Oeshiki festivals allow participating young members to be at one with the mind of the Buddha and widen their circle of close friends.

Waichiro Izumita is director of the Youth Department of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo.

Festivals (Jpn., *matsuri*) are a vital part of religion, and Rissho Kosei-kai, too, has festivals.

For Rissho Kosei-kai, festivals are not simply for enjoyment but also offer the opportunity for people of the same faith to gather together, deepen mutual understanding, and renew their vows for daily religious practice. As someone in the service of Rissho Kosei-kai, I feel something very important when I take part in festivals, which is, in the words of our founder, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, “aiming at what is in the mind of the Buddha.” I do not concentrate only on the success of the festival itself but always ask myself, “Is my own aim in taking part in this festival at one with the mind of the Buddha?”

Every October we hold the Oeshiki Ichijo Festival at the headquarters in Tokyo to commemorate the virtuous deeds of Nichiren and our founder. It is one of Rissho Kosei-kai’s most important festivals. Young members parade through the streets to the Great Sacred Hall, vigorously twirling *matoi* (traditional Japanese firemen’s standards) and shaking *mando* (portable lighted pagodas). The sounds of flutes, gongs, and drums merge as the young people move in procession. Participating in the festival allows them to be at one with the mind of the Buddha as they learn about how Nichiren and Founder Niwano practiced

the Dharma as taught in the Lotus Sutra. Large crowds of spectators line the streets, and booths attended by members of various local Dharma centers selling local produce, as well as stalls offering festival foods such as fried noodles and cotton candy, cover the headquarters parking lots. It is a lively event.

In 2005, when I was the minister of the Kiryu Dharma Center, in Gunma Prefecture, one of our activities was to put on a local Oeshiki festival. We held it at the Nichiren sect temple Honmyoji, in the town of Ashio, one of the dissemination districts served by the Kiryu Dharma Center. It was held there because Honmyoji’s priest was a member of Rissho Kosei-kai. There had been a copper mine in Ashio since about 1600, and at one time it produced about a quarter of Japan’s copper. Ashio prospered, but since the mine closed in 1973, its population has dwindled and aged. However, for us at the Kiryu Dharma Center, Ashio was like a parent, having produced many senior members who worked hard to spread the teachings there. Out of gratitude and obligation, as to a parent, all of our center’s members went to Ashio.

During World War II, many of the people killed by a cave-in at the Ashio mine were from China or Korea, doing forced labor for the Japanese military. The first Oeshiki festival in Ashio, held in

2005, began with a memorial service for them. Afterward about two hundred smiling people paraded cheerfully through the streets. This first year of holding the festival in Ashio, there were few spectators, but as the years passed, the number gradually grew, until some began to help with the stalls set up in the temple grounds. In time the event became a true festival. The third year we held it, members from other Dharma centers came to see it, and today the Kiryu and Kanuma Dharma centers jointly hold the festival in the grounds of Honmyoji.

The young people participating in the festival widen their circle of close friends as they play flutes and gongs and display *matoi* and *mando*. It is also evident that many people who, in *hoza*, express worries about their friends find opportunities at Oeshiki rehearsals to talk with friends about their problems in the light of the Dharma. The rehearsals not only improve their dexterity but also deepen their faith.

I think that is why spectators are so impressed by the happy faces and the vitality and strength of the young people taking part in Oeshiki festivals.

As the director of the Youth Department, I hope to assist young people all over the country to be of one mind with the Buddha so they can correctly practice his teachings in their daily lives, both at home and at school. □

Chaos and Cosmos

Cultural Revival in the Wake of Natural Disasters

by Minoru Sonoda

The experience of recovering unbowed from natural disasters, from which Japan has suffered many times in its history, rising again out of catastrophic chaos through a trust in the regenerative power of nature and the ties binding the community, has been handed down to us within our religious culture in the form of shrine festivals and performing arts.

The magnitude 9.0 earthquake that struck northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011, and the enormous tsunami that followed along the Pacific coast destroyed fisheries and local communities, causing as many as twenty thousand deaths and leaving more than four hundred thousand people homeless. The earthquake and tsunami also damaged the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant and triggered severe radioactive contamination, causing shock waves around the world.

An equally severe earthquake, estimated at magnitude 8.3, and tsunami occurred on the twenty-sixth day of the fifth month of Jogan 11 (869), according to the Japanese historical record *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* (Veritable records of three reigns of Japan [901]). They too caused great destruction along the Pacific coast of northeastern Japan, and a thousand people are said to have drowned. Earthquakes and tsunamis have struck the region many times since, but history has shown that its rich agricultural and fishing industries have recovered each time. The recent case was particularly unfortunate because the strong breakwaters along the coast, built with advanced engineering techniques, had

already withstood smaller earthquakes and tsunamis, so nearby residents did not take seriously the approach of the 2011 tsunami.

In spite of the great losses, as has been widely reported, the people living in devastated coastal areas who had had all means of sustenance snatched away and were left without food, clothing, and shelter rallied together in their communities to maintain a well-ordered existence in evacuation centers—without any kind of disturbance or looting in their neighborhoods—as they received emergency aid from both home and abroad. The foreign media in particular were astonished that the evacuees maintained such good order and were unsparing in their praise.

Because the Japanese archipelago is at a point where four of the tectonic plates (the Eurasian, North American, Pacific, and Philippine) that make up the bedrock of the earth's surface press together, enormous earthquakes occur with great frequency; about a fifth of all the world's earthquakes happen here. Also, Japan is subject to numerous other natural disasters, lying as it does in a monsoonal climate zone, with vast amounts of rain. Typhoons cause

wind and flood damage, and heavy snow covers part of the country in winter. Volcanic eruptions are also not uncommon. As a result, the archipelago's inhabitants have from ancient times feared the ferocity of nature, which can strike anywhere. But at the same time, they have developed a religious culture marked by strong communal bonds that help them recover from disaster.

I would like to give a few specific examples of how the religious culture of local communities has provided spiritual nourishment to alleviate the suffering of survivors of the earthquake and tsunami caused by emotional trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder and fostered the energy people needed to face reconstruction.

Conditions of Shrines and Temples in Disaster Areas

As roads became passable again in disaster areas between March and May of 2011, a great many relief activities were set in motion. The various relief teams included scholars of different disciplines who conducted on-site surveys in conjunction with relief work. As a member of a university team and other teams, I too observed the situation in the course of a number of visits to the tsunami-ravaged areas of Miyagi and Iwate Prefectures, traveling to most places except the exclusion zone imposed in Fukushima Prefecture because of radioactive contamination from the nuclear accident.

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Each time I went, I witnessed a striking phenomenon common to all places. It was the almost miraculous survival of many community shrines, both large and small, in ports and fishing villages alike, left standing amid the ruins. In many cases local people were saved by taking refuge in them. One reason for the shrines' survival is that many are on high ground in the foothills behind towns and villages. Because of this, the shrines tend to be designated tsunami evacuation points for the local area. Comparatively large Buddhist temples on high ground also escaped the tsunami and sheltered evacuees.

What drew our attention in particular were the offerings of sake or other things, such as small amounts of money,

that had been carefully placed near ruins of numerous shrines and small sacred sites in lowland areas. Offerings were also placed at torii (gateways of Shinto shrines) that were barely left standing amid the devastation of lowland settlements. We easily supposed that the offerings were from tsunami survivors, such as the people we often witnessed visiting shrines in the devastated areas.

Many folklorists and historians who have visited the region have noted this phenomenon. One such scholar is Norio Akasaka, a professor at Gakushuin University and the director of the Fukushima Museum. He presented the paper "Disasters, Religion, Culture" at the symposium Disasters and Community Performing Arts held

in February 2012 at Ofunato in Iwate Prefecture, sponsored by the nonprofit Shinto Kokusai Gakkai (International Shinto Foundation). Having made an exhaustive investigation of the area affected by the tsunami, he remarked that in many places religion had become more visible. He recalled, "Our survey was virtually a pilgrimage to the shrines in each place." This bears out well the situation of shrines in the region.

Festivals in the Local Community

Next I would like to mention the remarkable revival of the festival culture and local performing arts that have been handed down in each locality. People from towns and villages along the coast that were wiped out by the tsunami have, despite the limitations imposed by living in evacuation centers, been working independently and through their own efforts to reconstruct their old communities. The restoration of the local festival culture and performing arts is one activity that has been strikingly effective. The Tohoku region, where the earthquake and tsunami struck hardest, has a rich heritage of religious culture in the form of festivals and performing arts, and it was these that each community revived before anything else following the disasters.

Particular performing arts that have been handed down in communities in the affected area include *dai-kagura* (great kagura), *oni kenbai* (demon sword dance), *shishimai* (lion dance),

shikamai (deer dance), and *toramai* (tiger dance), as well as ensembles riding on floats providing music for festivals (*yatai bayashi*) and various folk dances. Most local people learn these at a young age and enjoy them throughout their lives. They are a cultural asset, performed during annual events and festive gatherings, such as shrine festivals and *o-bon* observances—when people venerate their forebears—at temples.

Inevitably, the tsunami swept away many of the costumes, masks, and musical instruments used in these performances, and sadly, too, many of the performers lost their lives. Nevertheless, the surviving performers, with both recovered and improvised properties, toured the evacuation centers over a broad area, giving comfort to the grief-stricken survivors.

Let me mention two good examples showing the latent energy of festival culture. The first is the Ugoku Tanabata Festival (a parade of decorated floats) of the city of Rikuzentakata, which helped heal the spirits of survivors, and the second is the Yamada Festival, a popular

festival that was revived in the stricken fishing town of Yamada on the central Iwate coast, under the motto “A festival’s revival is a town’s revival.”

Rikuzentakata, at the southern tip of Iwate Prefecture, was a port famous for the scenic beauty of its indented coastline and was home to twenty-five thousand people. The tsunami swept away thirty-three hundred homes, and around two thousand people lost their lives. The city center was almost completely destroyed. In the aftermath of the disaster, ten thousand survivors had no alternative but to live apart in eighty-four separate evacuation centers. Every year the time-honored *o-bon* season has been heralded by a festival held at Tanabata on August 7, when thirteen brightly decorated floats would parade through the city to the accompaniment of lively music. However, all but three of the floats were destroyed by the tsunami. The young people of the city repaired the surviving three floats, decorated them, and drew them through the devastated and darkened city, illuminated only by paper lanterns, to the sound

of soul-stirring festival music. Since this festival traditionally precedes the *o-bon* observances, which welcome the spirits of those who have died during the past year, the holding of the festival, even with only three floats, deeply moved people who had lost many family members in the tsunami. Their display of emotion and the fact that the festival had eased some of their grief was widely reported on television, eliciting responses and sympathy from viewers all over the country.

The second example was in Yamada, where the Yamada Festival, centering on the festival of the Yamada Hachiman Shrine, was revived. Yamada, too, lies on a deeply indented coastline, and its deep coves are used to cultivate fish and shellfish. This prosperous town, with a population of eighteen thousand, was devastated by the tsunami. Close to fifteen hundred people died, and the town center near the port was left in ruins.

However, like shrines in many other towns and villages, Yamada’s tutelary shrine, Yamada Hachiman Shrine, was on high ground overlooking the port and, with its neighboring temple as well as the town hall, fortunately remained unharmed, beyond the reach of the tsunami. Local people delight, as a matter of local pride, in the annual Yamada Festival, with its splendid parade of *mikoshi* (divine palanquins) and offerings of local performing arts. Immediately after the tsunami, the energetic shrine priests and local young people formed a committee to perform the festival as usual. As a result of their efforts, the festival was revived on a large scale on September 15 and 16, 2012, demonstrating the previously mentioned motto “A festival’s revival is a town’s revival.” Most evident on the occasion was the enthusiastic participation of large numbers of young people and children in the *mikoshi* procession and the various ritual performances. It was truly a picture of a joyous festival that seemed to efface all memory of the disasters.

Hope in the Face of Disaster

Kamo no Chomei (1153–1216), a literary figure who witnessed a number of natural disasters and disturbances caused by war during his time, left an essay called *Hojoki* (An account of a ten-foot-square hut [1212]), in which he likened the world's impermanence to a flowing river. In similar fashion, there's no denying that Japanese tend to resign themselves to sorrow in the face of natural disaster or personal unhappiness, out of a Buddhist sense of impermanence. The Tohoku earthquake and tsunami were regarded by some as divine punishment, but I think most Japanese, not just the survivors, saw them as the kind of violence nature inflicts from time to time, and while it was to be feared, they regarded it as both an example of impermanence and a kind of trial.

However, as I have explained above, the Japanese possess the tradition, handed down from ancient times, of combating seasonal damage caused by wind and flood and the harshness of winter with the power of festivals performed by the local community as a whole.

One aspect of such popular culture can be seen in village *kagura*, dances that reenact mythological dramas, popular among people even today. They are performed at annual shrine festivals not only in the Tohoku region but also in communities all over Japan. Two such dramas are invariably performed: *Yamata no orochi taiji* (Killing the eight-headed snake) and *Ama no iwato-biraki* (Opening the Heavenly Cave Door).

The first tells how the hero-deity Susanoo killed the giant eight-headed snake that had each year been attacking the village and devouring a maiden given in sacrifice. Susanoo thus relieved the villagers' fear and sorrow. Not only did he marry Inada-hime, the maiden whose life he had saved, but he also found inside the body of the snake a jeweled sword, which he presented to

his sister the sun deity, Amaterasu. The vanquished snake, in fact, symbolizes the annual flooding of rivers, and the name Inada-hime represents a personification of rice (*ina*) paddies (*da*). This drama is therefore a mythologization of the cultural heroes who restored the cosmos (a condition of tranquillity) to local communities whose rice culture flourished through flood prevention, thus saving people from the misery of the destruction of their rice fields by the annually flooding rivers.

The second *kagura* tells how the sun deity, Amaterasu, angry over the violence wreaked by her brother, Susanoo, retired into a cave and plunged the world into darkness. Perturbed at the chaos this caused, the wise deity Yagokoro Omoikane and other deities together planned to lure her out by performing a lively festival at the mouth of the cave. This plan met with success, and the sun deity emerged, giving light again to the world. This festival serves either to represent the restoration of the waning sun at the time of the winter solstice through the power of the festival

or to restore the cosmos by venerating the sun deity at a time when the world has fallen into chaos through an unexpected eclipse or natural disaster.

Conclusion

Festivals held by local Japanese communities at their shrines, both in the present and in the past, are a phenomenon of religious culture, encouraging bonding of the community by restoring the cosmos after chaos caused by seasonal dangers or natural disasters. This idea of mythical regeneration has been present from ancient times, and it is this restoration of the cosmos from chaos that empowers festivals. The experience of recovering unbowed from natural disasters, from which Japan has suffered many times in its history, rising again out of catastrophic chaos through a trust in the regenerative power of nature and the ties binding the community, has been handed down to us within our religious culture in the form of shrine festivals and performing arts. □

Modern Meanings of *Kagura* Performances

by Irit Averbuch

In the period immediately following the tsunami, most folk performers in and around the devastated areas thought it was not possible to perform in such disastrous times. However, they soon remembered that their “arts” were originally rites of spirit pacification, and they started performing wherever they could, intentionally reestablishing the original meaning of their dances.

Getting off the Shinkansen (bullet train) at Shin-Hanamaki Station in Iwate Prefecture, one is struck by the formidable *shishi* figures, with their tall stature, wild black animal faces, and glittering golden teeth. These are the images of mountain deities that are manifested in all *kagura* performances in the vicinity. Placed here as local

landmarks, they lure the traveler to visit the area and enjoy its attractions. One is likely to encounter similar posters or galleries that advertise the so-called folk performing arts in most train or bus stations in the Japanese countryside as part of official efforts to promote tourism and enliven local economies. Judging by the great number of entries,

blogs, and YouTube links that pop up in a Net search for *kagura* events, *kagura* seems to be a thriving form of performance that attracts both young and old. This modern-day appeal to the general Japanese public is a remarkable achievement for a performance considered as the most ancient ritual form in Japan.

Traditional performing arts have always been a source of local pride. Certain areas in Japan (Hiroshima Prefecture, for example) host heated competitions in *kagura* performance skills. Artistic *kagura* groups (Takachiho Kagura, for example) have gained national fame and stage regular *kagura* “shows” for visitors. Other *kagura* groups even boast international fame and travel abroad (in 2009 Hayachine Kagura was designated by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage).

In reality, however, *kagura* and other folk performing-art forms are struggling to survive in today’s Japan. Modern life has brought great changes to traditional communities and to the fortunes of many folk performing-art forms. With new economic and education concerns, the rural population is rapidly dwindling today. This depletion of population now poses the greatest threat to the survival of *kagura* and other folk performances. Preserving a performing-art tradition requires time, financial resources, and community effort. In many cases, it has become mandatory to rely on outside official and public support to preserve traditional cultural performances such as *kagura*.

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Indeed, government support and preservation societies greatly contribute to the survival of local performing arts. In addition to financial sponsorship, national or regional recognition as an Important Intangible Cultural Property promotes local pride and provides an incentive for the younger generations to carry on the tradition. Mass media help spread fame by exposing local *kagura* to national audiences. And as mentioned, local performing arts are now used as tourist attractions to enliven rural communities. The local performers themselves make every effort to preserve their tradition. Former residents of remote communities insist on returning to their ancestral villages on festival days to keep up and perpetuate their *kagura* rites (as with Hanamatsuri, Tsugao Kagura, and Shiromi Kagura). In many places, *kagura* dances are taught in schools to prepare a future generation of performers.

Even though traditional values and beliefs have lost ground among Japanese youth, during the last decade I have encountered many youngsters enthusiastically participating in their local *kagura* performances. True, young people today perform *kagura* more for its communal value and for its artistic quality. For them, *kagura* acts as a social bonding event or as an acrobatic spectacle, as “sport” and entertainment. On the same note, modern-day official and public support is granted to *kagura* groups as traditional *performing arts* and as *cultural assets*. Yet *kagura* has never lost its original essence: it functions as a *living ritual* even today.

Kagura Origins and History

Kagura is a general scholarly term for a great variety of ritual events that include deity worship in the form of performing arts. The Chinese characters for *kagura* mean “kami music” or “pleasure,” but scholars agree that the word may be a contraction of *kami no kura*, or “seat of the kami.” For a performance of *kagura*, a sacred space is prepared, the kami are summoned to reside and perform in it, and their divine presence imbues the surroundings with their life energies. During their visit the kami are entertained and enlivened with offerings of sake, music, and dance performances.

Kagura is commonly performed as part of a shrine *matsuri* (festival); outside the shrine context it forms a *matsuri* on its own. Indeed, *kagura* is considered to be the prototypical *matsuri* and the origin of the performing arts. Tradition relates its birth to the myth of the Heavenly Cave Door. The myth recounts how the myriads of kami, fearing the Sun Goddess’s retreat into her cave-tomb and the world’s imminent death, gathered in front of the Cave Door and conducted a life-restoring ritual. Their complex rite climaxed with the frenzied possession dance of the divine shamaness Ame-no-uzume, which enticed the myriads of kami to laugh. Their raucous laughter aroused the curiosity of the dying Sun Goddess (that is, awakened her life energy), and caused her to open the Cave Door and be pulled back to life. The prototypical essence of

this mythical rite of revival is carried through all *matsuri* and *kagura* events.

An earlier rite (called *chinkon*) to rejuvenate the spirits of the Sun Goddess’s imperial descendants was performed at court from ancient times. Later called *kagura*, this rite consisted in both “spirit pacification” and “spirit shaking” or “enlivening” through songs and dances. Folk *kagura* forms and genres that developed and spread during medieval and premodern times absorbed the esoteric Buddhist practices and worldview and acquired magical potency to grant blessings and protection. The strong Shinto influence that permeated many old *kagura* schools through political cohesion in the Meiji period (1868–1912) did not affect their basic nature. Throughout history, and in all of its various forms, *kagura* has retained its essential functions: to employ its ritual and magical power to purify, protect,

prevent calamities, ensure fertility, and induce the renewal of life forces on both cosmic and village levels. Many varied genres of *kagura* still abound in today's Japan.

Kagura Community and Audience

A *kagura* performance unites a village in a celebration to welcome the gods into its midst, thereby strengthening local ties and creating a sense of community. As a joint social enterprise, a *kagura* event can sometimes become a complex operation (in certain places, preparations for *kagura* events may last weeks or months). Community members contribute to its organization, both financially and physically: constructing and decorating the sacred stage and preparing costumes, tools, offerings, or the concluding feast.

The great variety of *kagura* forms, however, presents different degrees of audience participation in the performance. At Hanamatsuri, for example, all dancers and spectators gather around a boiling cauldron. Roles are traditionally assigned to particular families: the elders perform the rituals, then other age groups, including young children, take turns dancing around the cauldron. Spectators, dancers, and manifesting deities join and mingle in the dances. Here we see a communal event, prepared and performed with general participation, that creates a strong sense of community and local identity.

In most other places, however, *kagura* is performed by a chosen few on a sacred stage and observed from a distance. At times religious professionals perform alongside a trained group of village dancers (as in Ōmoto Kagura or Hiba Kōjin Kagura); in other cases local community members perform their traditional priestly roles (as in Shiromi Kagura). In northeastern Japan, *kagura* is performed by itinerant, semiprofessional groups (such as Hayachine Kagura and Kuromori Kagura) who visit villages on

fixed occasions or by special invitation. Here, too, whether on shrine stages or in private homes, *kagura* occasions a public celebration and spreads its blessings to all involved.

Kagura Meaning and Function

As mentioned, *kagura* performances constitute more than mere prayers or offerings to the kami: they are traditionally believed to possess magical powers and to carry divine blessings. As we saw, performances are known to ensure the renewal of vital energies. Specifically, they promise protection from harm and trouble, exorcism of evil, and healing. In northeastern Japan, for example, *kagura* groups specialize in fire-prevention charms. *Kagura* performances work to induce fertility of both fields and wombs and to bestow prosperity on homes and families. Depending on the community, they bless it with rich harvests, lucky catches, or good game. And most *kagura* forms retain their ancient function as a rite to pacify ancestral spirits.

Kagura thus constitutes a potent rite essential to the survival of the community, which may explain *kagura*'s survival as a living tradition in modern times. However, as is obvious in today's Japan, *kagura*'s artistic aspect is of central importance. *Kagura* stages theatrical, dramatic, educational, amusing, awe-inspiring, even acrobatic, performances. It is believed that a skillful performance of *kagura* activates its inherent magical powers and enacts its blessings at the same time that it uplifts the spirits of its audience, who drinks, laughs, and celebrates.

Many now claim that its artistic or entertaining value is what enables *kagura* to survive in modern times, while its ritual meaning and effects have blurred and faded. The younger generations, it's claimed, are less occupied with kami worship and are now interested in *kagura* more as a communal

activity that enhances local identity and local pride.

I find that this claim presents an incomplete picture. My mid-1980s research among Hayachine Kagura audiences (of all ages) yielded more complicated findings (Irit Averbuch, "Yamabushi Kagura: A Study of a Traditional Ritual Dance in Contemporary Japan" [PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1990]: 388–401, 456–65). Although most respondents (53 percent) admitted that they came to watch the performances for their artistic and entertaining aspects, an overwhelming majority (89 percent) considered *kagura* as ritual for the kami. Only a few (6 percent) thought that the *kagura* they watched was invited for entertainment or artistic reasons. In fact, most claimed it was performed for magical and religious reasons (for example, to prevent calamities [46.3 percent], to be blessed with good harvests [41.3 percent], or to please the kami and perform its ritual [23 percent]). In other words, at least in the 1980s, *kagura* were invited to perform for traditional reasons, but people came to watch *kagura* for fun. Indeed, as my research revealed, *kagura*'s artistic skill is believed to enhance its magical powers.

Undoubtedly, *kagura*'s artistic excellence and the performers' stage skills appeal to audiences. As we saw, *kagura* schools today are regarded as cultural assets and thus put an emphasis on their showmanship aspect. However, one aspect does not necessarily come at the expense of another. We see this today when we witness how *kagura* reorients itself toward its ancient functions when the tide is turned.

Kagura and Folk Performing Arts in Tōhoku Today

In the aftermath of the great earthquake and tsunami in northeastern Japan in 2011, in the following year there was an increased demand for all forms of folk

performances, especially for the north-eastern *kagura* groups.

In the period immediately following the tsunami, most folk performers in and around the devastated areas thought it was not possible to perform in such disastrous times. However, they soon remembered that their “arts” were originally rites of spirit pacification, and they started performing wherever they could, intentionally reestablishing the original meaning of their dances. This is true, for example, of Kitakami Oni Kenbai, a popular, energetic, and acrobatic performance that originated as a rite of spirit pacification of the *nenbutsu* (invocation of Amida Buddha) tradition (Takeshi Abe, “Iwate-ken no mukei minzoku bunkazai hisai jōkyō hōkoku,” *Minzoku geinō kenkyū* 52 [March 2012]: 20–21). Interestingly, performers of other folk performing arts in the area now tend to expand the original purpose of their auspicious rites and perform them with a new meaning, as prayers for the dead (*ibid.*, 21, 27).

The Kuromori Kagura group, however, does not need to be reminded of its ritual roles. It is based in one of the places hardest hit by the tsunami: Miyako City, on the Rikuchū coast of Iwate Prefecture. It is an itinerant *kagura* group that annually travels along the Rikuchū coast (alternating north and south rounds with Unedori Kagura). When arriving in a village, the performers go from house

to house to dance their auspicious *shishi* dance and then visit the local cemetery to perform a special rite for the repose of the dead (*haka jishi*). Then they stop at a private residence where the villagers gather to watch their energetic and entertaining program of night-*kagura*. The next morning they conduct another rite for the repose of the hosting household’s departed souls (*kagura nenbutsu*). Kuromori Kagura thus fulfills its traditional functions, performing both spirit pacification and spirit rejuvenation.

Though they escaped direct harm, Kuromori Kagura members faced difficulty in continuing their performances, especially when their host communities were so badly damaged. Naturally, they were called upon to perform their *kagura nenbutsu* rite facing the pounded shores and devastated areas. Nowadays Kuromori Kagura is exceptionally busy and is constantly called on to perform in various places in that area and elsewhere around Japan. Its performances have increased far beyond their regular annual rounds. But significantly, today Kuromori Kagura is invited mainly to perform *kagura* as a rite of rejuvenation, to strengthen the life energies of the local communities. It is asked to perform its dances as healing charms that can activate the area’s powers of growth. We here witness the renewed importance of *kagura*’s original role

as a magical rite of rejuvenation that can infuse life energies into weakened communities.

Processes of rejuvenation have taken place in some Hōin Kagura groups in Miyagi Prefecture, which suffered severe personal losses when performers and their families perished in the tsunami (*ibid.*, 22–24). These groups now strive to renew performances: to borrow or recreate missing implements, costumes, and tools; to combine surviving members and create new groups that can carry on performances—at first as consolation and spirit pacification but now increasingly as rites to regain spiritual strength and restore their audiences, as well as their own, life energies. Again, in this commendable effort to perform at all costs, we see that *kagura* groups now pay less attention to their showmanship and revert to their original ritual meaning and function as spirit-pacification, magical-protection, and especially, life-renewal rites.

In Tōhoku today we see how *kagura* reverses the modern-day attitude to consider it as mere tourist entertainment and redirects our attention to its true nature as a life-strengthening ritual of rejuvenation. We thus witness *kagura*’s flexibility in adjusting to changing times, and its own powers of self-regeneration and self-rejuvenation, which perpetuate it as a relevant ritual performing-art form even today.

Many now consider the preservation and continuation of the folk performing arts as essential for rebuilding the devastated communities of Tōhoku (Hiroyuki Hashimoto, “Hisaiichi no mukei minzoku bunkazai fukkō shi jōkyō hōkoku,” *Minzoku geinō kenkyū* 52 [March 2012]: 54). Preservation of local *kagura* and other performances may reconnect residents to their ancestral traditions and cultural identity, and the communal enterprise required to perform them could invoke the necessary energy to rebuild the broken communities of northeastern Japan. □

Kagura: Dramatic Interplay between Nature and Humanity

by Masataka Suzuki

Kagura has diversity—it may be a solemn ritual inviting the deities to a sacred ritual site, or equally a secular event associated with town revitalization and the promotion of the local area.

An important part of many local festivals (*matsuri*) in Japan is the performance of songs, dances, and dramas that communicate and make interplay with the deities. This is called *kagura*. *Kagura* has diversity—it may be a solemn ritual inviting the deities to a sacred ritual site, or equally a secular event associated with town revitalization and the promotion of the local area. This invokes the question: why hasn't *kagura* declined in the face of modernization?

The first main type of *kagura* is called Shimotsuki Kagura, a term taken from the name of the eleventh month in the lunar calendar (*shimotsuki* means “month of frosts”). Today this type of *kagura* is performed in December in the solar calendar in winter. It has many forms and is called by different names in each region: for example, the Flower Festival (Hanamatsuri) of the Oku Mikawa area in northern Aichi Prefecture, the Tōyama Festival in southern Nagano Prefecture, the Kōjin Kagura in Hiroshima and Okayama Prefectures, the Hongawa Kagura (Kōchi Prefecture), and the Kagura of Mount Horoha (Akita Prefecture). The Shimotsuki Kagura is suggestive of an agricultural ritual, giving thanks to the deities for the harvesting of the rich crops of this year and praying for a plentiful harvest in

the next year. This season is also close to the winter solstice, a time when the hours of daylight are at their shortest and when it was once believed that the sun itself was waning and the vitality of human body seemed in corresponding decline. People are intoxicated by the dances, which last the whole night through, and people confirm their regeneration by venerating the newly risen sun the following morning. Today many such *kagura* are held on weekends in November or December, though in the past they were performed during the

two weeks between the new moon and the full moon of the eleventh month of the lunar calendar, and also around the fifteenth, eighteenth, and twenty-third days of the same month. The *kagura*, performed as a supplication for stronger vitality, was thus closely related to the waning and waxing of the moon. Its purpose was to assure people that there was a correspondence between them and the cosmos, in both the movements of the sun and moon and other heavenly bodies. *Kagura* performance represents the natural flow of the seasons from autumn to winter and winter to spring, thus revivifying them and restoring the communication between nature and humanity.

One example of the Shimotsuki Kagura is the Tōyama Festival (Iida City, Nagano Prefecture). It is characterized

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as a *yudate* (boiling water) *kagura*, where water is boiled in one or more cauldrons (*kamado*) that are erected in the center of the sacred space and around which the performers dance with songs and spells. Drops of boiling water (called *tama*, meaning “jewels” and “spirits”) are splashed on the spectators, giving them the sensation of having their lives renewed. The sacred song (*kamiuta*) sung during the part called the List of the Kami (Jinmyōchō) describes the arrival, when winter comes, of the deities riding the wind and clouds and rain:

When winter comes,
Someone has made it known.
[Deities] arrive,
Riding the rain clouds
From the North Country.

There is also the *kagura* song that goes:

Snow on the peaks,
Hail in the dead of night,
Rain in the villages,
Sheets of ice in the valleys.

In the season when snow falls on the high mountains, rain falls in the villages, and ice hardens in the valleys, and when the barley sprouts, there are gatherings of worshippers of the mountain deity (*yama no kami*), during which people offer skewers of potatoes or rice cakes to the deity and share a feast. When the feast is over, the Shimotsuki Matsuri, or festival of the month of

frosts, begins. *Yudate* is performed for the various deities, one by one, as their origins are related. They are then offered prayers and dances. After midnight, elements of making offerings to the spirits of the dead are added, but as dawn approaches, masked deities, familiar to the spectators, come out for their appearance and dance raucously among them. Finally, in the last of the masked dances, the mountain deity, known as Tenpaku, appears. He sprays water from the cauldron around the sacred space, displaying his supernatural powers and undertaking to return the following year. At the end of the all-night festival, a sacred song is sung in farewell to the deities:

Deities, go forth!
Dwell in your groves.
When winter comes again,
We will call you back
To this village.

The kami will return to their faraway mountains, but there are also some for whom the village is their original abode and they will remain in shrines or groves there. This communication with the deities, spirits, and nature builds up a rhythm in villagers' everyday lives, year in year out.

The Kōjin Kagura of Bingo (Shōbara City, Hiroshima Prefecture) prays for the fierce earth deity Kōjin and is performed by members of ten or so households, called *myō*. Large-scale *kagura* (Great Kagura) are held in every seventh, thirteenth, and thirty-third year. They

used to last four days and four nights and were performed in the residence of the *tōya*, the family responsible for the festival that particular year. It has gradually shortened, first to three days and two nights, until now when it lasts two days and one night. At the end of the Great Kagura, a dance called *Kōjin no mai asobi* is performed. The oracle man (*shinbashira*) swings a length of white cloth and dances leaning over a long straw rope suspended across the room, called Tatsu (a dragon deity, a messenger of Kōjin). The oracle man enters a trance and tells an oracle from the Kōjin that possesses him. People in this region order their everyday lives according to this oracle, received through a direct encounter with the deities and spirits, seeking compatibility with them and focusing one's mind on them.

Kōjin, enshrined under a tree, besides being a fierce earth deity, also has aspects of a water deity, who appears as a snake or a dragon. Kōjin shrines are often located in old graveyards, and many people consider Kōjin to be ancestral spirits. From the late Middle Ages until the seventeenth century, under the influence of Buddhism, *kagura* intermingled with an annual agricultural ritual and memorial services for the spirits of the dead in fixed years after their deaths. Originally, little distinction was made between Japanese concepts of deities and Buddhist divinities. Japanese Buddhism has been characterized by syncretism that mixes buddhas and bodhisattvas with Japanese deities and spirits. But canonical Shintō's influence on *kagura* increased from the late seventeenth century, with acceptance of Yoshida Shintō doctrine. In the nineteenth century the influence of Kokugaku, an indigenous and nationalistic movement, was added to *kagura*, transforming it into the story of an ancient myth. The ritual for spirits of the dead and for ancestors disappeared from *kagura*. After the Meiji restoration in 1868, under the government's decree of separation between Buddhism and Shintō, Buddhist elements were completely eliminated from *kagura*. This situation continues down to the present. *Kagura*—once based on a worldview where nature, deities and spirits, and human beings are one—has now changed greatly, into an occasion for the entertainment of the living—in other words, a colorful and joyful event.

On December 3–4, 2011, the Great Kagura was held at Takemori, in the Tōjō district of Shōbara in Hiroshima Prefecture, after an interval of thirty-three years. I had made a trip to see it on the previous occasion, September 29–30, 1979. Despite the long time that had passed, it was conducted in the same place in 2011, and under the responsibility of the same household as before. What allows the continuity of tradition is the idea of the prayerful vow (*gan*)

that underlies it. The Great Kagura held every thirty-three years is both a pledge and vow to an intimate “Kōjin-san” and a return of thanks for prayers that have been fulfilled. Such prayers concern not only a plentiful harvest and personal health but also the overcoming of ill fortune, such as sickness or disaster. People believe that Kōjin fulfill prayers and grant wishes. This kind of “belief” is not so much a Western idea of a religious concept as a kind of reliance on deities. At a deep spiritual level, there is reciprocity between deities and human beings. When this relationship is lost, ties with the invisible world decline, and *kagura* changes simply into an enjoyable and entertaining event.

The Shimotsuki Kagura is also performed in the mountainous region of southern Kyūshū. The Shiromi Kagura of Mera (Saito City, Miyazaki Prefecture) is varied and rich in detail, and spectators lose all sense of the passage of time. Thirty-three kinds of dances are performed on the occasion of the great festival of Shiromi Shrine each year in December. The central deity, the deity of Mount Ryūbusa, which rises behind the village, is also called Nishinomiya Daimyōjin. A dancing place is constructed outdoors in front of the Hanaya, a house where ancestor spirits of the shrine priest are enshrined. This *kagura* derives from the belief of mountain and ancestor worship, while under the influence of Tendai esoteric Buddhism and Kumano Shugendō, there was a mixture of kami and buddhas. However, again as a result of the increasing influence of canonical Shintō in the Edo period (1603–1868) and the proceeding succeeding process of National Shintō in the modern age, the Shiromi Kagura is today a completely Shintō ritual.

People in this region used to live by slash-and-burn agriculture and hunting in those days, and now, through *kagura*, they make a petition to the deities for a good hunt, especially of wild boar. Hunters place the heads of the wild boars

as offerings on an altar, in the shape of a mountain, on an outdoor altar. The villagers hunt boar before the festival and, oddly enough, always claim success. The *kagura* is conducted by Shintō priests, but its core is conducted by devotees called *hourī*, selected from men in surrounding villages who belong to twelve hereditary households. The number “twelve” is the same as the number of the designated hunting areas (*kakura*), which demonstrates the strong link between these places and the *kagura*. Today there are a large number of dancers who perform as a special prayer (*gan*) to the deities (*gan hourī*); their qualifications to participate to *kagura* are not hereditary like those of the *hourī* proper.

The first of the thirty-three dances, the Star Kagura (Hoshi no Kagura), is performed indoors on December 13 as a dance of prayer. On the afternoon of the following day, Shintō priests and *hourī* pick up the masks of the various deities from shrines scattered through the valley and bring the masks to the *kagura* site. This is called Mensama Mukae, welcoming sacred-mask beings. The remaining thirty-two dances are then performed through the night into the next morning, mostly at the dancing site in front of the Hanaya. The first part of the evening consists of a succession of purificatory dances, followed by masked dances representing the descent (*orii*) of three kinds of deities: outer deities, the main deities (Nishinomiya Daimyōjin and Shukujin Sanpō Kōjin), and local deities. The main deities are solemn and awesome. The priests wear the masks of the deities of their own shrines and dance in the constricted space of the stage, under an elaborate canopy of paper cuttings. This is the climax of the first half of the dances.

The second half again begins with a succession of purificatory dances, and includes performances of Mori no Kōjin (a fierce forest deity), Kannagi (a female shaman), Tsuna no Kōjin (a fierce rope deity), Ise Kagura, Kijin (a demon deity),

and various other deities. These “outer deities” belong to high-status deities that have been invited from the outside world to the village. They appear aloof and inaccessible to the other deities. On the contrary, the local deities, connected with agriculture and hunting, are familiar to villagers. Agricultural deities ensure prosperity and a rich crop, and also protect the fields. Hunting deities are supplicated for safety during the conduct and for a good bag.

The dancers share much in common with the participants and spectators, and during their dances, people are caught up in gales of laughter at their comical gestures and sexual clowning and make a wish for a plentiful harvest.

On the last day, early in the morning, the fire deity appears in women’s clothing and shows an androgynous character. The fire deity is also the tutelary deity of weaving and food in everyday life, and after the dance, the actor goes to the kitchen, where he receives an offering of sake and side dishes. The fire deity is the guardian of the hearth in the kitchen and so has an intimacy with women, and is also connected with the fire used in slash-and-burn agriculture in the past. The mountain deity is female. The strong reliance on female power is one of the principles of *kagura* performance.

Around noon of this day, December 15, the Shishitogiri, the mimicry drama of hunting, is performed at the dancing site. It is a humorous skit featuring wild boar hunting. A pile of brushwood on the site represents the mountain. Three actors perform the skit: a husband and wife with masks, and a hunt leader, unmasked. A cutting board hidden in the brushwood stands for the boar. The hunters take their prey with much horseplay. When all the dances are over, the villagers are served a rice soup containing wild boar meat.

Early on the morning of December 16, the final day, the Kōzaki ritual takes place on the riverbed. The *hour*i makes

offerings on the rocks, and the boar’s left ear, cut into seven pieces and placed on a skewer, represents the seven hunting spirits (*kōzaki*) associated with the mountain deity. Kneeling in the presence of the mountain, the devotee performs a memorial service for the dead wild boar, in expiation for the taking of its life, which is in itself an expression of the love of life. The view of nature and life held by people who live by hunting permeates this ritual. The Shiromi Kagura is a condensation of the imaginative power of a mountain people with deep wisdom learned by their close interaction with nature.

All the *kagura* I have described here have been registered as Important Intangible Folk Cultural Properties by the Japanese government since 1975. Nowadays people go to see them as great fun, and information about *kagura* has been shown on various Web sites. *Kagura* is also used to promote tourism as a cultural resource. Some kinds of *kagura* will be gradually added to UNESCO’s intangible cultural heritage list in the near future. The concepts of heritage and property have already changed the character of *kagura*. Japan’s declining birthrate and an aging population have

made *kagura*’s preservation and continuation difficult. Even so, the fact that *kagura* has been kept up continuously testifies to its transmission as “folk wisdom,” with its insight into the rebirth and circulation of nature. *Kagura*’s founding philosophy is a worldview where

both human beings and nature conceive “life,” and coexist with seasonal rhythms. *Kagura* has been a drama of the interplay between nature and humanity for a long period based on the knowledge of local people. It may have great potential for changing the lifestyle of contemporary people who are accustomed to thinking only in modern terms. ≥

The Cultivation of Memory and Invention in Contemporary Thai Festivals

by Rachele M. Scott

Some Thai festivals are reputed to have ancient origins that are based on the agricultural seasons and stories from Hindu, Buddhist, and Chinese traditions, while others are wholly new—the products of skillful tourist marketing or new cultural tastes and sensibilities.

Tourist literature often describes Thailand as the Land of Smiles, but the country could equally be described as the Land of a Hundred Festivals. Some of these festivals are reputed to have ancient origins that are based on the agricultural seasons and stories from Hindu, Buddhist, and Chinese traditions, while others are wholly new—the products of skillful tourist marketing or new cultural tastes and sensibilities. Some of the festivals with older origins, yet new expressions, include the Bun Bang Fai Rocket Festival in May, which ushers in the rainy season; the Ubon Ratchathani Candle Festival, in which dozens of beautifully sculpted candle images, taken from Buddhist stories, are paraded through the streets to mark the beginning of the monks' rainy-season retreat (*khao phansa*); and Songkran, the Thai Buddhist new year festival, which is widely known as a "get wet and have fun" festival. Festivals with a more recent origin include the Bangkok Motorbike Festival, the Bo Sang Umbrella Festival, and the Hua Hin Jazz Festival. In the contemporary world, all of these festivals (both old and new) offer participants a glimpse of the varied social, cultural, and economic worlds that produce and sustain them.

Some observers today claim that cultural festivals embody the past, capturing the essence of a place, a people, and/or a tradition; while others contend that festivals today reflect nothing of the past—only the corruption of tradition by the corroding processes of modernization. I suggest that cultural festivals are sites of both memory and invention that engage diverse audiences with a wide variety of practices and narratives. In other words, religious festivals are sites with multiple meanings and associations; they signify a dynamic religious field rather than a static religious event. The diversity of festival practice is nothing new, but the processes that facilitate memories of the past and new experiences in the present have radically changed over the past few decades. National and regional tourism agencies, Internet travel sites, local television, and mass print media all play a role in the defining of a particular festival—what it signifies, what one will see, and what one should do as a participant.

In this essay, I examine three different festivals that demonstrate the dynamic, reflective, and inventive character of Thai festivals today: the Loy Krathong Festival, the Mekong Fireball Festival,

and the Phuket Vegetarian Festival. These three examples highlight the varied flows of both memory and invention as well as the creation of locality (ideas of the local) amid globalization.

Loy Krathong

The festival of Loy Krathong, with its floating lotus boats and spectacular lights, is perhaps the most well known of all of Thailand's festivals. When I first arrived in Thailand more than fifteen years ago, I was repeatedly told that the practice of floating a *krathong* (a decorative lotus-shaped float) was an act of paying respect to Phra Mae Khongkha (Mother Ganges, the goddess of the river) and of asking forgiveness for bad actions—especially acts that have led to the pollution of water. The *krathongs* serve as the means both for expressing gratitude and for expiating the demerit of immoral action. This description is, by far, the most common interpretation of the festival, but the TAT (Tourist Authority of Thailand) Loy Krathong Web site lists a number of other interpretations: the festival commemorates the return of the Buddha from heaven; it is a Brahmanic purification ritual; it celebrates the footprint of the Buddha on the Nammathanati River beach; it facilitates worship of Chulamane in heaven (where a hair relic of the Buddha dwells) as well as worship of Bhakabhrama in heaven and the revered saint Uppakutta-dhera (www.loikrathong.net). As with most festivals and rituals in Thailand, the plurality of

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interpretation does nothing to detract from the sacrality of the event. In fact, this plurality only enhances and expands its significance.

The origin of the practice of floating a *krathong* purportedly dates back to the Sukhothai period, when Nang Noppamas, the favorite concubine of a Sukhothai king, made a *krathong* that resembled a lotus flower, placed incense and candles in it, and then floated it down the river. While this history is contested, the practice is alive and well in Thailand today and is conducted on the full-moon night of the twelfth lunar month. It is celebrated all across Thailand, with regional variations such as the royal barge procession in Bangkok, the floating lanterns in Chiang Mai, and the local beauty contests in provinces across the country. In fact, the image of a newly crowned beauty queen, wearing “traditional Thai clothing” (*chud Thai*) and holding a *krathong*, often graces the covers of Thai magazines, foreign tour books, and TAT billboards.

Both the beauty queen and the *krathong* itself embody memory and invention—both are natural yet manufactured. The beauty queen is linked to the historical Nang Noppamas (the contests are called Noppamas beauty contests) and dons a “traditional dress”—but which of Thailand’s diverse historical and cultural traditions does the costume represent? More often than not, *chud Thai* dress today emphasizes the modern history of central Thailand over other regional styles. In addition, the participants’ hair, makeup,

and perfectly manicured fingernails all reflect a contemporary beauty aesthetic. The *krathongs* similarly embody both the present and the past. They continue to resemble lotus flowers, but many are constructed from mass-produced materials such as Styrofoam as well as traditional materials such as banana leaves and tree trunks. Discourses on the quality of the beauty queen (what aspects of beauty are emphasized) and the *krathong* (what materials are used) demonstrate how both serve to signify the present as well as the past.

Today, participants in this festival, especially in larger cities such as Bangkok and Chiang Mai, are a broad mix of local residents and domestic and foreign tourists. Roengchai Tansuchat

and Chanita Panmanee’s 2010 survey of more than fifteen hundred participants in the Loy Krathong Festival in Chiang Mai, Sukhothai, and Tak Provinces demonstrated that the festival served multiple audiences and that tourism in these locations often serviced young Thai adults who combined travel (*pai tieow*) and fun (*sanuk*) with religious practice (“Tourist Motivation, Characteristic and Satisfaction in Night Festival,” http://iscthr.turismo.wu-wien.ac.at/files/papers/p25_fullpaper.pdf).

In this study, Roengchai and Chanita also noted that a vast majority of the participants, local people as well as domestic and foreign tourists, favored the *krathongs* made of natural materials over the man-made variety and that many

found the fireworks displays to be unnecessary to the performance of floating *krathongs*. Roengchai and Chanita's survey questions about the environmental impact of contemporary practices demonstrate that environmental concerns are now a part of the national discourse on the Loy Krathong Festival, an issue that points back in time (memory of the tradition) as it embraces a postmodern ethic (environmental conservation).

Mekong Fireball Festival

The Mekong Fireball Festival in Nong Khai Province has, like many local festivals in Thailand, grown exponentially over the past decade. Its growth has been fueled by modern media—not only by the agents of tourism but also by the film industry, as a widely popular movie, *Mekhong Full Moon Party*, served as a medium for both popularizing and defining the festival as a site for debates over tradition and invention. The fireballs, like the beauty queen and the *krathong*, engender discourses on the past (memories of past sightings) as well as questions concerning authenticity (what really causes them).

The principal focus of the festival today is the witnessing of *naga* (water serpents; in Thai, *naka*) fireballs (*hong fai phyanak*) along the Mekong River, on the full moon of the eleventh lunar month, a day that marks the end of the Buddhist monks' rainy-season retreat. *Nagas* are present in folklore throughout South and Southeast Asia and occupy a primary place in religious art and architecture. It is a *naga* on which the Hindu god Vishnu reclines, and the Buddha is often depicted with Muchalinda, the serpent king, who protects him during his meditations. In Thailand, *nagas* are generally presented as devout followers of the Buddha, and many say that sightings of their fireballs extend far back in history (Erik Cohen, "The 'Postmodernization' of a Mythical Event: Naga Fireballs on the Mekong River," *Tourism Culture and Communication* 7 [2007]: 172).

Erik Cohen argues that what was once an event that occurred on multiple days and attracted little attention has now transformed into a featured festival for domestic local tourists. This transformation is due in large part to the creation of a new master narrative about the festival and its dissemination through mass media. In the early

1990s, a local police officer linked the supernatural event to the end of the Buddhist lent (*ok pansa*). In so doing, he linked local beliefs about the actions of *nagas* to a highly potent time in the Buddhist calendar. Cohen argues that attendance at the festival also dramatically increased after the release of the movie *Mekhong Full Moon Party*, in 2002. The film raised serious questions about the origins of the fireballs, while simultaneously validating the importance of mythic narratives and practices for the community. A subsequent investigative report by the British ITV program *Code Cracking* (*Thord rahat*) further questioned the authenticity of the fireballs, claiming that they might be the result of gunfire on the Laos side of the border (Cohen, "Postmodernization," 174.)

The investigative report did not lead to a diminishing of interest in the event (although it did stir a lot of debate and controversy); on the contrary, it appeared to foster even more interest in the event. The TAT now promotes the festival as one of the principal symbols of the region and suggests that tourists will be "amazed by various colors of mysterious fireballs abruptly soaring up from the water high into the air" (www.tourismthailand.org). Tourism and souvenir marketing are booming. One tourist Web site (www.thailand-travelonline.com) provides a map of the best places to watch the fireballs along the Mekong River, and it details festival events: "The Naga Fireball festival will also feature food stalls, Naga legend information, Naga Fireball exhibitions, night bazaar, long-boat races, light and sound show, and other events. If you like to join in the fun and be part of the crowd, the Naga Fireball Festival promises to be unique and enjoyable." If you are unable to attend the festival in person, there are a number of video clips available on YouTube that include not only the *naga* lights but also the sounds from the crowd as each light pierces the water and enters the

sky. The Mekong Fireball Festival aptly demonstrates the simultaneous cultivation of both memory (*naga* stories from the past) and inventive narratives and modes of expression. It also highlights how debates over authenticity may foster or renew interest in contemporary religious festivals.

Phuket Vegetarian Festival

The Phuket Vegetarian Festival, like the Loy Krathong and Mekong Fireball festivals, commemorates an event within Thailand, but unlike the other two festivals, the Phuket Vegetarian Festival has origins within the Chinese community. It occurs during the ninth lunar month of the Chinese calendar and functions as an event for spiritual cleansing and merit making. During a period of ten days, people of Chinese ancestry in the Phuket region (and elsewhere in Thailand, especially in Bangkok) follow a strict vegetarian (often vegan) diet to facilitate the purification of their bodies. As with the other festivals, there are several main origin narratives for this festival, but the general story tells of an opera group from China who fell ill while traveling in the Phuket area in the early nineteenth century. Some say that the cause of the illness was their failure to pay proper respect to the nine emperor gods in Daoism. To cure themselves, they had to refrain from unclean activities, including eating meat, drinking alcohol, and engaging in sexual activities.

While this festival has origins within the Chinese community of southern Thailand, the festival, along with other Chinese signifiers such as worship of Jow Mae Kwan Im (Guan Yin), is increasingly identified as an aspect of Thai culture. In fact, many Bangkok residents will eat vegetarian food during the festival even if they do not self-identify as being of Chinese origin. In Phuket, city officials have linked the Chinese festival with a prayer ritual at the Krabi

city pillar, thereby making the festival a part of Thai civic religion (Erik Cohen, “The Vegetarian Festival and the City Pillar: The Appropriation of a Chinese Religious Custom for a Cult of the Thai Civic Religion,” *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 10, no.1 [2012]: 1–21). At the same time, rituals and festivals of Chinese origin are also subject to global processes. The religious sites of southern Thailand are a popular destination for Chinese-Malaysian and Singaporean tourists (Mark Askew, “Materializing Merit: The Symbolic Economy of Religious Monuments and Tourist-Pilgrimage in Contemporary Thailand,” in *Religious Commodifications in Asia: Marketing Gods*, ed. Pattana Kitiarsa [Routledge, 2008]), and the Discovery Channel and numerous Internet sites have successfully redefined the Phuket Vegetarian Festival as an event of extreme body piercing rather than bodily purification.

Role of Festivals Today

Cultural festivals are sites of both confluence and contestation. They unite communities across generations and regions, but they also cultivate multiple meanings and practices. Festival space, like

any space, is produced and reproduced over time (Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace* [Anthropos, 1974]), and this space is the “active product of intellect rather than its passive receptacle” (Jonathon Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* [University of Chicago Press, 1987], 26). As such, festivals highlight so dramatically what takes place in other, more ordinary, spaces—the embodiment of both memory and invention. While the production of festival space has always been subject to a myriad of voices, reflections, and interests, the rapid pace of postmodern social change and global communication has fostered even more diversity within the contours of a religious festival. Tourists and the agents of tourism now define these events along with local holders of memory and tradition. Critics lament the commercialization and commodification of religion in the contemporary era, but even these criticisms are a part of the production of the festival. Nostalgic memories of “authentic” festival practices play a key role in the reproduction of festival space, as do the narratives and practices of distant and unfamiliar participants. Together, they aptly represent the multiplicity of festival space and are the sources for both memory and invention. □

Shugendo, Festivals, and the Performing Arts

by Gaynor Sekimori

In recent years there have been efforts to embrace lost Shugendo traditions to create a distinct local culture that enriches the whole community and is attractive to visitors.

Shugendo, the name given to the beliefs and practices of men who undertook austerities in the mountains of Japan, has had a deep, though little-acknowledged, influence on the country's religious culture and performing arts, particularly *kagura* (see the articles in this issue by Suzuki and Averbuch). Its practitioners, called *yamabushi*, "those who lie down in the mountains," had long been associated with the performance of magico-religious rites for personal, family, and communal well-being, though they were also reputed to be able to perform more malevolent acts, such as bringing down

curses. While from the seventeenth century they were mainly associated, directly or indirectly, with large mountain shrine-temple complexes, and their head temples were powerful organizations with close ties to the ruling elite, they had an ambivalent reputation that resulted in Shugendo's being banned in 1872 as a superstitious religion, little suited to the enlightened civilization the new Meiji government was trying to foster. Even though Shugendo was not legally permitted to reemerge until 1945, many of its traditions were preserved in the form of festivals and rituals that had

become part of the broader religious landscape. Some of these are now completely divorced from Shugendo and are performed within the Shinto milieu, others are community festivals, while still others retain their roots within the revived Shugendo.

The word *festival* translates the Japanese word *matsuri*, which today is most closely associated with shrine festivals, where the tutelary kami is paraded in palanquins called *mikoshi* through the streets of the area over which the kami holds sway. It is highly probable that our modern English term derives from the Portuguese *festival* or *festa*, words describing the processions of saints that are a feature of the Catholic world and that share much visually with the parade of *mikoshi* in Japan. Though *matsuri* are most often related to modern

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Shinto and its shrines and their relation with the local community, the word is also used to refer to large-scale rituals and rites associated with Buddhism. The term *matsuri* is also used to refer to particular esoteric Buddhist rituals, to some Onmyodo rituals, and to Chinese-derived calendrical events, such as the Girls' Festival (*hinamatsuri*) in March. In addition, it is applied to a wide variety of secular events, such as the famous Sapporo Snow Festival, pop and jazz festivals, cultural festivals, and flower-viewing festivals—and department stores will sometimes describe their bargain sales as “*matsuri*” as well. Here, though, I will limit my discussion to various festivals directly or indirectly related to Shugendo, and to instances of the recent revival of festivals that fell into desuetude after 1872, to highlight how local communities are reviving lost traditions as “events.” I will present these *matsuri* in the context of traditional Shugendo ritual practices to highlight their relationship to mountain religion.

Yamakita Mineiri

The most important event for practitioners of Shugendo is the annual “mountain-entry” (*mine-iri*) practice; secluding themselves in the mountains for a set period of time, they purify themselves, make contact with the numinous powers there, and reemerge to bring the sacred power to their community. The trope of death, conception, and rebirth is at the heart of the ritual

practice, and it underlies other types of Shugendo *matsuri* as well. Today the best-known mountain entries are the Okugake of the Omine mountains (Nara and Wakayama Prefectures) and the Akinomine (Autumn Peak) of Mount Haguro (Yamagata Prefecture). In the past, though, especially before the religious changes of 1868 that separated Buddhism and Shinto, and then the ban on Shugendo in 1872, as many as two thousand sacred mountains existed in Japan, where *yamabushi* isolated themselves at set times for ritual and ascetic purposes. The Yamakita Mineiri, a festival performed every five years in October in the town of Yamakita in Kanagawa Prefecture, retains memories of the mountain-entry practice that once existed in the local region.

Eighty-one men, said to be descendants of the old *yamabushi*, form into twenty-nine groups to perform eleven different dances, whose names, such as Purification, Dance of the Staffs, and the Ascetic's Dance, clearly recall their Shugendo heritage. The dances are performed twice, first in a square near the town station and then deep among hilly tea plantations at Shinmei Shrine, three kilometers away, to which the dancers process. The ritual site is purified at both the beginning and the end of the festival in two dances featuring an old round-faced woman (*okame*) carrying a large white papier-mâché penis (*haribote*) on her back and a wand with five-colored paper fronds and a bell in her hands. In each dance she waves the wand in front of four small saplings that

represent each of the four directions and then in front of the altar (fig. 1). The second of the dances is called the Dance of the Five Colors; here she purifies the five directions and sings verses depicting the color appropriate to the direction being purified. The identification of various sets of five, including the colors and the directions (deriving ultimately from Chinese yin-yang ideas), as well as Buddhist divinities, is very important in Shugendo. For example, in Haguro Shugendo, the five main officials of the Akinomine represent each of the five directions and the five elements and wear surcoats or robes of the associated color: the ritual leader (*dai-sendatsu*) wears white (center, earth), the *doshi* (in charge of ritual administration) wears purple, denoting black (north, metal), the *kogi sendatsu* (in charge of firewood) wears green (east, wood), the *aka sendatsu* (in charge of water) wears red (south, water), and the *kari sendatsu* (who clears the way with his long ax) wears yellow (south, fire).

The dance most reminiscent of the *yamabushi* is the Ascetic's Dance (*shugyo odori*). To the sound of a conch shell, four dancers dressed as *yamabushi* enter the ritual area, in the middle of which is an oblong box containing pine leaves. They wear red robes, a surplice with four yellow pompoms, and, on their forehead, a black pillbox cap. Each carries a black box festooned with white paper fronds on his back, representing the portable altar carried by *yamabushi*. The first dancer, who is identified as being from Haguro, blows the conch

shell, the second (Mount Atago) carries an ax, the third (Mount Fuji) carries a staff with metal rings on top, and the fourth (Kumano) carries a wand of twisted paper. The conch blower performs the *kuji* (literally, nine syllables) in front of the altar, making a grid of nine intercut lines with one hand while intoning nine syllables and then slashing the grid with two strokes of a sword. This magical action is closely associated with Shugendo and now permeates all areas of esoteric practice in Japan. He then sets fire to the pine leaves, recalling the *saito goma* (bonfire) ritual discussed below. The fact that the ritual leader is said to be from Haguro suggests that *yamabushi* in this area may have been affiliated with that mountain in the past (fig. 2).

Fire Walking

When *yamabushi* emerged from the mountain after their training, they were expected to prove in some fashion that they had indeed attained magico-religious power. Thus in many Shugendo traditions a fire-walking ceremony is held at the end of the period of mountain entry. The actual ritual is called *saito*

goma, and it derives from the indoor *homa* (Jpn., *goma*) ritual of esoteric Buddhism in Japan. In both cases, the central divinity invoked is usually Fudo Myoo. Sacred fire is considered to be spiritually purifying, burning away the 108 defilements, and it is also a way to transmit people's prayers and wishes; pieces of wood so inscribed are thrown on the flames. When the flames have eventually died down, the coals of the *saito goma* are raked in preparation for the *yamabushi* to walk over them. Logs are usually placed in a zigzag fashion on top of the coals, which may still be burning. Before walking across, the *yamabushi* rub the soles of their feet with salt, a purificatory action that also has the effect of making them more resistant to heat. Fire walking is one of the biggest of Shugendo's drawing cards today, and large public performances, like that at Mount Takao near Tokyo in March, draw enormous crowds who vie to cross the coals as soon as the priests have finished (fig. 3).

Genkurabe

Fire walking is just one example of the manifestation of ascetic and spiritual

attainment, which is known as *genkurabe* (comparing one's power). In some cases it has become completely ritualized, as, for example, during the New Year shrine festival at Haguro, called Shoreisai, where there are two *genkurabe* "performances." The first is "crow jumping" (*karasu tobi*), where two teams of six shrine *yamabushi* compete in leaping high around the hall like the divine crow associated with the founding of Haguro Shugendo. The second is a test of skill between a figure in the guise of a rabbit (associated with nearby Gassan Peak) and two *yamabushi* and six priests.

Another form of *genkurabe* is called blade climbing (*tsurugi-watari*). Though rare, it is still performed today at the Spring Festival at Fukan Reijo Shrine in Honjo (Saitama Prefecture) by Ontake-kyo practitioners, among whom Shugendo influence is strong. A wooden tower is erected, against which is tied a ladder whose crosspieces are made of thirteen sword blades wrapped in white paper at each end and tied to the uprights with rope. The uprights are wrapped in diagonal bands of red and white bunting. It is important when climbing to keep the feet lengthwise

along the blades, not straight on, to dissipate the pressure. Practitioners climb buoyed by the chanting of mantras by the watching group and by the exhortations of the *sendatsu* (an instructor or leader of Shugendo practitioners), who has climbed first (fig. 4).

Yamabushi are held to be masters over fire, and this is demonstrated through four “ordeals” that feature in the Fire Samadhi (*kasho zanmai*) ritual held annually in June at the temple Kongoji, which lies at the foot of Mount Akakura in Aomori Prefecture. Secret manuals reveal the importance of the trope of death, conception, and rebirth in each ordeal. The first is called *taimatsu* and involves the *yamabushi* pulling burning torches through the sleeves and legs of his clothing (fig. 5). The second, “iron hoe” (*tetsukuwa*), consists of holding on to a red-hot blade protected only by a sheet of paper covered in a one-centimeter layer of salt. According to the researcher Andrea Castiglioni, contact between the hot surface of the blade and the salt sparks a chemical reaction that produces water and allows the practitioner to take hold of the blade. If the blade is not held tightly enough, air will penetrate the open

space between the hand and the surface of the paper, increasing the heat. Conversely, the tighter the practitioner grabs the blade, the less the heat (fig. 6). The third ordeal is the hot cauldron (*atsugama*), where the *yamabushi* sits inside a cauldron of boiling water (fig. 7). The fourth is the fire walking described in the previous section. Like other Shugendo or Shugendo-derived *matsuri*, this was traditionally regarded as a ritual to protect against and cure epidemic disease. To spectators these seem death-defying acts, but like many other Shugendo “performances,” they are made possible by a knowledge of certain principles that we recognize today as scientific.

Interestingly, the first and third of these ordeals have been incorporated into Haguro Shugendo as an ancillary performance preceding the *saito goma*. This is owing to the fact that one of the senior officers of the Akinomine is also a practitioner at this festival. In a state of pseudopossession, he roars as he passes the torches through his sleeves and the legs of his *hakama* (voluminous trousers). When the torches have burned out, he takes up bundles of reeds, wets them in a nearby spring, and sprays

water over the spectators. He then proceeds to a cauldron of water boiling over hot coals and is lifted onto it by assistants, balancing on a board across the lip. Once again he flails those around him with droplets of water—this time hot—roaring ferociously.

Atsugama, the hot cauldron, is a form of the hot-water rite *yudate*. Though its origins are obscure, *yudate* was spread by *yamabushi* throughout Japan in medieval times and today is performed across a broad spectrum of religious affiliation during festivals. Many such festivals demonstrate the *yamabushi*’s mastery over fire, such as the Hibuse [fire-prevention] Festival held each December at Ryogakuin temple in Odawara, south of Tokyo. About thirty *yamabushi* attend the festival, where glutinous rice (*mochi*) is pounded for presentation to the seventy-five mountain deities and sacred sake is given to spectators to sip from a large bowl by *yamabushi* wearing the mask of a crow or a rabbit (sun and moon). When a *yamabushi* performs *yudate* (fig. 8), spectators rush forward to feel the hot drops of water on their bodies. The festival’s climax, when night has fallen, is a *saito goma* followed by fire walking.

Events

Shugendo was lost in many parts of Japan as a result of nineteenth-century government legislation, but in recent years local communities have revived many of its rituals as events to attract tourism. Since local government cannot be seen as sponsoring religious events, tensions have sometimes emerged between the government sponsors and the performers, as in the case of the revival of the Nunohashi Kanjoe (Brocade Bridge Consecration) at Tateyama. This ritual was devised in the early nineteenth century by one of the Shugendo centers there to appeal to women pilgrims, who were not allowed to set foot on the mountain itself. A bridge over a ravine marked this boundary; women were led blindfolded from the Enma Hall, where they had received the precepts, across the bridge, now covered in white cloth, to the Ubadō (inside the forbidden area), where they received a certificate to say they had been transformed into males and were assured of rebirth in the Pure Land. When this ceremony was revived in 1996, it was intended to be a secular *matsuri* celebrating local culture, not a religious ritual, and officiating priests

were told to their bemusement not to introduce religious elements. Since this was patently an impossible request, they wisely chose to ignore it. Government officials were reportedly taken aback when many of the women participants spoke of a strong spiritual experience, and the event was not held again until 2005, when to all intents and purposes it was conducted as a religious ritual by Shingon and Tendai priests and local *yamabushi* (fig. 9).

A second example of the revival of Shugendo tradition comes from within a shrine context. When the Shugendo temples on Mount Togakushi in Nagano Prefecture were forcibly converted into state shrines after 1868, the triennial Hashiramatsu [stands of pine] Festival, a divination rite involving the firing of three stands of brushwood fixed to the tops of tall pillars, was abolished. Like many other sacred mountains in Japan, Mount Togakushi is now divorced from its past, but in recent years there have been efforts here, and in other places, to embrace lost Shugendo traditions to create a distinct local culture that enriches the whole community and is attractive to visitors. The Hashiramatsu Festival was revived at Togakushi Shrine

in 2003 as part of a broader event that included performances of drumming and *kagura*. It is now held every three years. According to the researcher Caleb Carter, the ritualists have included both shrine priests and visiting *yamabushi*; banners at the ritual site have carried the pre-Meiji temple names, not the shrine names; and both Shinto purificatory prayers and the Buddhist Heart Sutra have been recited. After the three stands of pine are set alight, *yamabushi* circumambulate them, another indication of their assumed mastery of fire (fig. 10).

Such modern revivals point to how local communities are seeking to reaffirm their identity through traditional festivals. Reclaiming the past is particularly important in view of the rent caused in religious culture 150 years ago by the separation of Buddhism and Shinto. By understanding the nature of this religious culture, where the deities and buddhas were not artificially kept apart, people are better able to appreciate the rich traditions that underlie the festivals that bind their community together and through them confirm their place within the cosmic order in this twenty-first century. □

On the Islamic View of Global Ethical Values

by Anis Ahmad

How are we to determine values that can be globally acceptable? There can be at least five benchmarks for evaluating and judging global relevance, acceptability, and application of values: universality, consistency and practicality, flexibility, simplicity and understandability, impartiality.

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Ethics and values are usually understood in a cultural and historical context. Asian values and European values are often mentioned as contrary and conflicting. Ethics and concepts of good and bad, virtue and vice, are also visualized as specific to place and time. Influenced by the concept of evolution, what is considered ethical at one time or at an individual level is sometimes considered not good when society evolves. According to a similarly evolutionary mind-set, in the East and in the West humans are defined as social animals. Humans, in Islamic thought and culture, are regarded as ethical beings and not just social animals. The Qur'an calls humans Allah's vice regents or deputies (al-Baqarah 2:30), gifted with freedom of will and given power to accept good (*ma'ruf*) or bad (*munkar*), to adopt virtue (*birr*) or follow vice (*ithm*), and to stand for truth (*haqq*) and piety (*taqwa*) or indulge in injustice (*zulm*) and oppression (*taghut*).

Ethical conduct and freedom of will, in Islamic thought, are two sides of a single coin. But how are we to determine values that can be globally acceptable? There can be at least five benchmarks for evaluating and judging global relevance,

acceptability, and application of values. First and foremost is the values' universality; rather than being particular to a people, place, and time, they have universal applicability. Second, they are consistent and practical. Third, they are flexible enough to respond to modernity and avoid rigidity leading to fossilization. Fourth, they are simple and understandable rather than complex. Last but not least, they are blind, not discriminating on the basis of gender, color, ethnicity, or faith. Here I will use these five benchmarks to identify values that can help realize global peace, the dignity of humanity, and a just social order.

The Qur'an, though revealed in the Arabic language, calls itself a revelation for the whole of mankind: "During the month of Ramadan the Qur'an was sent down as guidance to humans with clear signs of true guidance and as criterion [between right and wrong]" (al-Baqarah 2:185).

To begin with, the first global ethical value underscored by the Qur'an is unity in life. It implies that it is unethical to follow double standards of morality and ethics in human relations as well as in personal, social, economic,

and political relations and in international policies.

The Qur'an invites humans to create unity in their lives in the same manner as unity exists in the universe. The essence of *tawhid* is elimination of the duality and multiplicity of gods and confirmation of the one and only Creator and Sustainer as true and legitimate, which means Oneness, or Unity. A *tawhidi* personality does not consider personal glory, the glamour of power, or individual benefit as the ultimate objective in life. While freedom of will and the right to make individual judgments are recognized, the value of unity in life creates a synergy between individuals, society, and the state. It encourages individuals to exercise freedom of will in order to live in accordance with the divine universal principles of truth, justice and fairness (*'adl*), and doing good and seeking Allah's pleasure (*rida*) in all actions in life.

The second global ethical value, of *'adl*, leads to moderation, balance, and fairness in all human transactions. "Believers! Be upright bearers of witness to Allah, and do not let the enmity of any people move you to deviate from justice

(*ʿadl*). Act justly, that is near to God-fearing” (al-Maʿidah 5:8). This applied principle implies avoiding excessive behavior. The Qurʾanic profile of a just (*ʿadil*) person includes modest speech, fairness in conduct and interactions, and balance in economic, social, political, and cultural behavior. It demands conformity and coherence in conduct and dealings.

The realization of social justice, peace, and balance, or *ʿadl*, in life therefore becomes one major objective of the individual, society, and the state. This globally applied ethical principle, like the first principle, is not limited to Muslims. Wherever and whenever this principle is adopted, it is bound to bring a change in human conduct and behavior. Instead of becoming a slave to one’s own desires and benefits, a person is led to a socially responsible attitude and concern for the welfare of fellow human beings.

The value of *ʿadl* persuades a person to act with responsibility and fairness. Like filial piety in Confucianism, it creates a sense of doing one’s duty to one’s own self, parents, wife, children,

friends, and neighbors, and to the global human community.

The third global ethical value highlighted in the Qurʾan is respect for and promotion and protection of life. The unjust killing of one person, the Qurʾan tells us, is like killing the whole of humanity. “And he who saves a life shall be as if he had given life to all mankind” (al-Maʿidah 5:32). All the forces of evil that exploit, oppress, and suppress human beings are condemned, and removal of oppression (*fitnah* and *fasad*) is an obligation for Muslims and is a major objective of jihad (waging war against injustice). “Keep on fighting against them until mischief ends and the way prescribed by Allah [law and order] prevails” (al-Baqarah 2:193).

In a world where the lives of innocent children, the elderly, women, and youth are threatened by the man-made technology of drones such as Predators—whose frequent use has taken a heavy toll on thousands of innocent civilians, including children, women, and men, in various parts of the world—realization of this global ethical principle is vital for the survival of sanity, security,

and protection of life. Needless to say, it, too, is a global value, not particular to Muslims. The life of a non-Muslim, even of a bird, is as valuable as the life of one’s own child. The Prophet, peace be unto him, in an authentic tradition (hadith), says that on the Day of Judgment he will plead for a bird needlessly killed by someone.

The fourth applied global ethical value underscored by Islam is primacy of rational behavior, or living a life in which emotional intelligence and rational intelligence work hand in glove. Modern psychological research indicates that people act spontaneously according to emotional intelligence. Consequently, judgments made in haste can lead later on to regret and lamentation, which are of no use. The Islamic ethical principle of a rational and reasonable attitude (*ʿaql*) calls for reason to precede action. “Believers, when an ungodly person brings to you a piece of news, carefully ascertain its truth, lest you should hurt people unwillingly and thereafter repent of what you did” (al-Hujurat 49:6). Consequently, all things that hinder or obstruct the use of reason are considered prohibited by Islamic ethics and law. This includes the use of drugs, alcoholic drinks, tranquilizers, depressants, and so on (al-Maʿidah 5:90–91).

The fifth applied global ethical value is respect for religious and cultural freedom. The plurality of religions and cultures, or *hifz al-din*, is one of the major objectives of Islamic sharia law. The term *din*, used in the Qurʾan about eighty-five times, carries a wider connotation than the English word *religion* or the Arabic term *madhhab*. In addition to worship and devotions, it includes the realization of peace and order in society and the establishment of a just economic and political order. It also means implementation of divine law, or sharia, in an Islamic state. The Qurʾan upholds the principle of religious freedom and plurality. “To you it is your religion and to me it is my way of life” (al-Kafirun

109:6). It also says, “There is no compulsion in religion [*din*]” (al-Baqarah 2:256). An Islamic state not only tolerates but makes sure that no one interrupts the religious practices of non-Muslim citizens. It is an obligation of an Islamic society and state to protect the places of worship of all non-Muslim citizens. “If Allah were not to repel some through others [through jihad], monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques wherein the name of Allah is much mentioned would certainly have been pulled down” (al-Hajj 22:40). This Qur’anic *ayah* (sign) dispels, for once and for all, the misconception that jihad means the use of force to convert. On the contrary, it is to be done to protect monasteries, synagogues, and churches.

The sixth applied global value is dignity of human gene. This has two dimensions: First, human life in its early form, that is, gene, is as valuable as the life of a human being. Second, the biological parenthood of a child cannot be changed even when a child is adopted. Living a family life is considered a sign of piety. Family is a major means for civilization’s continuity. The dignity of human genes demands no sexual relation outside a legal marriage. Similarly, the commercialization of genes, such as surrogate motherhood, is not considered ethical.

The seventh applied global ethical value is the sanctity of property. One should not become a slave to greed, enmity, or jealousy to the extent of stealing or depriving a rightful owner of his or her property. The Qur’an and the Prophet’s teachings are explicit in saying that one should never exploit one’s fellow human beings financially, economically, or in terms of ownership. In a world where so-called developed economies not only influence but practically maintain economic hegemony, it becomes extremely important to understand the threat of global capitalism to the world’s developing economies. The poor get poorer. The natural resources of 85 percent of the world’s population

are, perforce, taken over by the other 15 percent of its population in the North, through economic imperialism and in the name of a capitalist world order.

This applied global ethical principle demands realization of a just, fair, and equitable global economic order inspired by ethical principles and not controlled by naked greed, and without the vicious and mischievous grabbing of poor nations’ resources by the so-called developed nations. This is why, on the basis of this applied ethical principle, the Qur’an goes to the extent of declaring: “As for the thief—male or female—cut off the hands of both. This is recompense for what they have done, and an exemplary punishment from Allah. Allah is All Mighty, All Wise” (al-Ma’idah 5:38).

From a legal perspective, the application of Islamic ethical principles and values logically requires legislation. For example, if theft, defamation, or sex crimes are immoral and unethical, society should not be satisfied only with verbal condemnation. Ethics should have an applied dimension. When an ethical and moral crime is proven in a court of law, an Islamic state is expected to use

its legal authority to penalize the perpetrator to deter others from committing the same crime. This is why in societies where moral and ethical values are the basis of law, crimes are marginalized.

These seven applied global ethical values provide a framework for global peace and security, the dignity of humanity, respect for human life, and protection of honor and property.

These values, in the classical texts of Islamic legal philosophy (*usul-al-fiqh*), are called objectives of sharia. It would be wrong to consider a sharia founded on these principles particular to the Muslims, for the simple reason that it addresses on an applied and proactive level basic issues and challenges that humanity faces today and shall face in the future. For lasting benefit to humanity, global Islamic ethics deserve serious examination by all of those who believe in the unity of humankind and of the universe.

Wama tawfiqi illa, bi Allah, wa Allahu A’lamu bi alsawab (Help comes only from Allah, and only Allah knows best). □

An Ongoing Journey into Buddhism

An interview with Dr. Elizabeth J. Harris

Dr. Elizabeth J. Harris, president of the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies, visited Rishsho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo on September 11, 2012, to confer with interfaith affairs directors. Dharma World interviewed her about her journey into Buddhism and her perspectives on Buddhist-Christian encounter in Europe.

Editor: As a British Methodist you visited Sri Lanka in 1984 for the first time. In *Buddhism for a Violent World* you said it was there that you had your first encounter with the Buddha. Could you elaborate on that encounter again?

Harris: When I went to Sri Lanka in 1984, I was already involved in interfaith relations. I was part of an interfaith group near where I lived in London, but I didn't know much about Buddhism. I had visited a Sri Lankan Buddhist temple in London, but that was about all. As I recount in my book, during that visit to Sri Lanka, the group I was with went to Anuradhapura, which was one of the ancient capitals in Sri Lanka. We visited the area around the sacred Bodhi tree. Buddhists believe that the Bodhi tree in Anuradhapura grew from a sapling from the original tree under which the Buddha was enlightened.

It is believed that a nun called Sanghamitra brought the sapling with her to Sri Lanka and that it was planted in Anuradhapura. Now there is a shrine room next to the Bodhi tree, and I went away from the group at one point and just sat in that shrine room, and something happened. I'm not sure exactly what happened, but I was looking at the Buddha image, and there was a kind of

internal connection between me and the Buddha image. The Buddha seemed to be surrounded with light and seemed to have a kind of cosmic significance for just a few moments. The way I put it is that I realized there was unfinished business between the Buddha and me, as it were. But it was just a small event, and I returned to Britain and went back to the job I was doing. Then I heard that a Christian institute in Colombo [Sri Lanka] had put up a new building with study bedrooms and that they were inviting people from the West to come and study Buddhism there.

When I heard that, I realized in my heart that that was what I wanted to do. I wanted to go to Sri Lanka and study Buddhism. I thought it would prepare me to come back to Britain and work in interfaith relations. I was successful in getting a scholarship from the World Council of Churches.

The ironic thing is that I thought I was going for one year, but I stayed nearly seven and a half years, because one thing led to another. I went much more deeply into Buddhism during those years than I ever thought possible.

Elizabeth J. Harris is an Associate Professor in the Comparative Study of Religion at Liverpool Hope University. From 1996 to 2007, she was the executive secretary for interfaith relations for the Methodist Church in Britain. Dr. Harris has been involved in Buddhist-Christian encounter for more than twenty years and serves as president of the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies. Her latest book is Buddhism for a Violent World (London: Epworth Press, 2010; now published by SCM Press).

Editor: Your time in Sri Lanka was a period of ethnic conflict and civil unrest that frequently resulted in appalling acts of violence by both the government forces and the Tamil Tigers. How did the civil war affect your life?

Harris: I don't think I ever felt fear for myself, but I felt fear for others. I made friends with those who were under threat from the Tamil Tigers or the government. I became involved with the Movement for Interracial Justice and Equality, and with women's groups such as the Women's Commission of the National Council of Churches. So I was hearing from people who were affected.

It was a period in which I had to ask serious questions about Buddhism, because many Buddhists in Sri Lanka supported the military option to end the conflict. I had to ask, could Buddhism actually justify, or was Buddhism justifying, violence? Some Buddhists were certainly justifying violence in that situation. There were appalling acts of violence by both the Tamil Tigers and the government forces. So living in that context affected my study of Buddhism. I couldn't look at Buddhism through rose-colored spectacles. It was really encountering Buddhism with all of its different sides, and sides that I might not agree with as well. It had a very deep effect on me being in that situation of war.

Very important to some Sri Lankan Buddhists is defending Buddhism when they see it under attack. Certainly, the demand for a separate state coming from the Tamil Tigers was seen by many

Buddhists as a threat to the very existence of Buddhism, because the whole of the teardrop island of Sri Lanka is seen by many Buddhists as holy to the Buddha. This is reinforced by the myth that the Buddha visited the island three times, coming to Nagadeepa at the top, to Kelaniya in the west, and to Mahiyangana in the center. So Sri Lankan Buddhists surround the whole island with a narrative connected with the Buddha.

As one Buddhist academic told me, for some Buddhists, to have a separate state in Sri Lanka would be like having their heads cut off, because they link the island of Sri Lanka with the Buddha and almost with their own bodies as Buddhists.

Editor: It is estimated that a million Buddhists live in Europe. Has their growing number changed Europeans' notions of Buddhism?

Harris: At the beginning of the twentieth century there were just a few Western converts to Buddhism. Among these was a handful of Westerners who had become Buddhist monks. One of these was Allan Bennett, who was ordained as Ananda Metteyya in Burma and brought the first Buddhist mission to Britain from there in 1908. Then there were the theosophists, some of whom had embraced Buddhism in a certain way. There were, in fact, two main reactions to Buddhism at this time. One was a negative reaction. The negative representation of Buddhism by those who were influenced by Christian missionaries to

Asia held that Buddhism was pessimistic and nihilistic, that nirvana was annihilation, and that its ethics were not effective because there was no judge, there was no God. According to this view, Buddhism was also idolatrous because Buddhists worshipped images.

Then you had the opposite reaction. Buddhism was seen as a life-giving philosophy and system of ethics, especially among freethinkers who wanted to reject the idea of God, in the light of Darwinism. Buddhism therefore presented itself as a rational philosophy and as a life-giving ethical system. Some of the theosophists adopted this view, some of whom were influenced by Edwin Arnold's poem *The Light of Asia*.

Then I would say there was a third view of Buddhism. It was a kind of romantic "other." It was connected with the East, it was surrounded by legend and strange practices, and it was romantic and attractive. It was colorful. The greyness of Britain in winter was contrasted with the color of the Orient—of Japan or Sri Lanka or Burma.

None of these stereotypes of Buddhism was completely accurate. Buddhism is not negative and nihilistic. Buddhism is more than a philosophy, I would say. It's a whole way of life. It is religion in every sense of the word. And Buddhism is more than just a romantic "other." It's something to give meaning to the world. As more Westerners have converted to Buddhism and as more Buddhists have come to Europe from Asia, these stereotypes

Editor: What are some of the objectives of the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies, of which you are president?

Harris: It has an academic objective, which is to focus on questions that are important to Buddhist-Christian studies: questions that haven't been looked at very much before. So the network endeavors to push the boundaries of discussion between Buddhists and Christians and to take up topics that might be controversial. For instance, one conference several years back focused on creation, which is a controversial topic. Christians say God created the world, but many Buddhists would say that the beginning of the cosmos is so far back in time that conversation about it is fruitless. We took up that topic and published a book of papers on it.

The most recent conference [2011], at Liverpool Hope University in England, was on the subject of hope. Is hope a delusion? Hope features quite strongly in the Christian framework. But some Buddhists might say hope is a form of attachment. If you cling to hope, if you're hoping, you're attached to the object of your hope. At this conference, we delved into the question of hope. Some Buddhists argued that hope

was important in Buddhism, but others argued that it was simply not relevant within the Buddhist worldview.

The conference in 2013 in Belgium will be about Buddhist and Christian attitudes to history. How important is history and modern historical method? Many forms of Buddhism are surrounded by stories, myths, and so on, but what is their history? So that's the academic objective of the network, to push out the barriers of Buddhist-Christian studies.

Also, there's a social and interpersonal objective: to bring together Buddhists and Christians deeply involved in Buddhist-Christian studies so that they can relate to one another, learn from one another, and so promote better interfaith relations. We present ourselves as a network of friends that has porous boundaries. Anyone interested in Buddhist-Christian studies can come and be part of it. Our conferences have meditation sessions in the morning and so on. The conferences are not strictly academic. They include cultural tours and visits, things like that. There's a social networking, social interaction objective as well, so that Buddhists can understand Christianity better and Christians can understand Buddhism better.

So there are two sets of objectives. One set is academic and the other is

have changed a little bit, because people have met Buddhists in various interfaith groups. In Britain, Buddhists are now contributing to discussions in the advisory groups that the government has set up. In chaplaincy—prison chaplaincy, hospital chaplaincy—Buddhists are present and are working together with people of other religions, with the imam, with the Christian minister, and so on. Buddhists are there and are involved in British society at different levels. Schoolchildren are visiting Buddhist centers as well, in the major cities. They might visit—for their religious education lessons—the mosque, the church, the Sikh gurdwara, and also the Buddhist center.

I think Europeans' notions of Buddhism are changing because Buddhists are seen now as real people who are able to contribute to society. But some Westerners are still confused about the sheer variety of Buddhists. As I and other academics have pointed out, what has happened in the West is unique in the history of Buddhism, because you have every form of Buddhism now in the West.

social, interpersonal, and interfaith. Our main activity is our biannual conferences. We also have a Web site, which has information about our publications and other things (<http://www.buddhist-christian-studies.net/>).

Editor: Buddhism includes profoundly differing, even apparently contradictory traditions. How do you approach that diversity when you are involved in dialogue?

Harris: I think there is an issue here. Sometimes people in the West have a window, through dialogue, into one part of Buddhism but not into the totality of Buddhism. If they meet, in an interfaith group, some Buddhists of one particular school, then they might think that school is the whole of Buddhism, whereas Buddhism is incredibly diverse. The related question is how should Buddhism be taught when there is such diversity? This is a very relevant question for me.

I don't think there is any religion, except perhaps the Baha'i tradition, in which there have been no internal splits. I encourage my students to understand that wherever Buddhism went, it, in different ways, adapted to the local situation and developed differently. For instance, there is the difference between Theravada

and Mahayana. My own view on that, however, is that most of the things emphasized in Mahayana Buddhism are also emphasized in Theravada. They're not two distinct types of Buddhism. Both place a lot of emphasis on compassion, and both have the concept of the bodhisattva, although in Mahayana Buddhism the concept of the bodhisattva has become much more important. Nevertheless, we can't deny that the two schools have developed in different ways.

Editor: You have continued your journey into Buddhism for nearly thirty years as a researcher, a director of interfaith programs, and an individual seeker. Where has this journey brought you?

Harris: Well, I would say that it's an ongoing journey. I mean, in one life you couldn't learn everything there is to learn about Buddhism. In interfaith relations, it's Buddhism that I have chosen, that's what I've become close to, although on my interfaith journey I have learned a great deal from Sikhism, Hinduism, and many other religions. I'm also fascinated by Zoroastrianism.

All of these religions have fed me in certain ways, but Buddhism certainly is the religion I have gained the most from. I would say that it's an ongoing

journey and that the two religions—Buddhism and Christianity—are still in dialogue within my own head. I don't see Christianity in the same way now that I did before I encountered Buddhism. For instance, the *anatta* doctrine in Buddhism, the doctrine of non-self, has made me see what Christianity says about giving up the self in a much more radical light. So Buddhism has helped me to see certain Christian doctrines more deeply.

At one level, I think we are all one because we are all human beings on a journey between birth and death. We're all part of the human race, and we are all in a sense on a spiritual journey, so I want to affirm a very deep commonality among all of us at that level. But then there are differences in what we believe, which must be honored and respected. I actually believe that some of the most creative things in interfaith dialogue can come about through the differences between us, because differences can help us to see our own faith in a new light. Differences can challenge us and help us grow.

So, where has this journey brought me? I'm still a seeker. I'm still a researcher, and I will go on doing this. Yes, until I die, I suppose, I shall work for a better understanding between religions. □

Spiritual Plenty from One Cup of Tea

by Sojitsu Kobori

In the Way of Tea, we constantly focus on what we ourselves should do so that our guests are satisfied. That being said, it is still impossible to learn in a short time to put others first. That is why daily practice is so important.

In the Japanese tea ceremony (*chanoyu*), “getting pleasure from a small amount” is connected with the spirit of *wabi-sabi*, a way of perceiving things or an aesthetic sensibility that has been cultivated by the Japanese over the course of their long history.

The tea ceremony is ultimately about each guest drinking one cup of tea. But each time tea is prepared, it is done with single-minded care so that each cup can be taken by the guests to be most delicious.

The guest, sensing this sort of consideration and care, shows heartfelt appreciation, and through this the objective—connecting the host’s and the guests’ hearts and minds—is accomplished.

Murata Juko (1422–1502), who can be said to be the founder of the tea ceremony as performed today, practiced Zen meditation under Zen master Ikkyu (1394–1481). With the Buddhist teaching of *shoyoku chisoku* (being satisfied with little) as the basis, he gave birth to the *soan* (grass-thatched hut) tea ceremony, held in an empty space the size of four and a half tatami mats. This was in contrast to the prevailing Muromachi *shoin* (reception room) style, centered on ornate wares and specialty products from China. This was also the birth of

the particularly Japanese Way of Tea (*sado* or *chado*), which respects the tea ceremony’s spiritual nature as well as its form.

Eventually the *soan* style evolved into the *wabi-cha* style, which further pruned unnecessary things. It was notably practiced by the wealthy merchant Takeno Jo’o (1502–55), considered a master of the tea ceremony, and his disciple Sen no Rikyu (1522–91). They lived in Sakai, a city near present-day Osaka, that flourished with foreign

trade. Kobori Enshu (1579–1647) established the Way of Tea called *kirei-sabi*, further refining the style of *wabi-sabi* by adding objectivity, balance, and harmony. The term *kirei*, meaning gracefulness and simplicity, as used here refers not just to the appearance of the tea room and the utensils but also to the importance of gracefulness and simplicity of mind.

The Importance of Character

In his last instructions about the Way of Tea, called *Kakisute no fumi*, Enshu wrote the following:

Tea utensils should not be chosen for their rarity or fame; they are no

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different from other utensils. Ones that are now old were new when made. What makes a utensil truly special is its careful use by our elders, who bequested it to us. Don't use an old item if the shape lacks character. Don't throw away a new one if the shape is good. Furthermore, don't covet a great variety of tea utensils. Don't be upset just to have a few. Even a single one deserves to be passed along by virtue of its repeated, careful use.

What he is saying is that although tea utensils can be expensive and rare, they are not necessarily good. They must also have dignity, a certain character. Even if utensils are new, as long as they have character and give delight, one should not hesitate to start using them. There is no need to envy other people's having many utensils, and there is no shame in having few. Enshu means that even one object, if used repeatedly with care, will eventually be bequeathed to descendants to become a treasure in their house.

In other words, the lesson is that tea utensils must be selected with a flexible mind; and of equal importance, an object becomes precious through gentle, affectionate use.

This lesson is applicable not only to things but also to how people should live. It teaches that it is also important for people to have dignity and character and that someone with social position or assets but lacking in human dignity and good character is worthless.

Training That Nurtures the Mind

All people carry an egotistic "self" in their minds. We feel ourselves lacking compared with other people and are trying to get more, and this gradually impoverishes our souls. It can often lead

to misfortune. For people to acquire good character, it may be necessary for them to take the time to focus their attention on this egotistical self to get rid of their desires.

In the Way of Tea, we constantly focus on what we ourselves should do so that our guests are satisfied. That being said, it is still impossible to learn in a short time to put others first. That is why daily practice is so important.

The *o-temae* is the series of procedures for offering tea to a guest with the thought, "What should I be doing to delight my guest?" First there is the guest, and then oneself. Repeated training aims to foster an attitude of putting others first.

It has been said that as people gradually acquire more and more possessions, it becomes harder for them to be content with little. Being content with little does not simply mean abstinence or frugality, namely, making do with what there is. I believe it means actively discovering delight and happiness in whatever you have. It is realizing and accepting that although there may not be enough, it is adequate for your present self.

At the end of *Kakisute no fumi*, Enshu says, "One must have an accepting heart, welcoming people with warm goodwill at all times."

A warm welcome and goodwill with even one cup of tea is the spirit of the tea ceremony. I would be very happy if you would take this opportunity to become familiar with the Way of Tea. □

Our Future Depends on “A Little”

by Keibo Oiwa

The ability to enjoy “a little” is a function of great wisdom. Humanity’s future hangs on this. It depends on whether we can get back enough wisdom to stop depleting resources and start living with less energy use.

You might be familiar with the German folktale of the sorcerer’s apprentice, a young man serving as a trainee under a famous wizard.

One day the sorcerer departs for an international sorcerers’ conference, having ordered his apprentice to clean the house while he is away. The apprentice soon tires of his chores, however, and uses a spell he has only recently learned to enchant brooms to carry water and clean the floor. A while later, the apprentice realizes something. He has learned how to cast the spell but not how to break it. It is too late, however; the brooms continue to carry buckets

of water and empty them on the floor, and soon the whole house is flooded.

In today’s Japan, this folktale is not just something to laugh about. As a result of the nuclear power plant accident in Fukushima Prefecture after the March 11, 2011, earthquake, this story is now coming to life. For several decades into the future and beyond, we will be exposed to a dangerous “flood” of serious radioactive contamination.

Nuclear power has been advertised as a miracle technology that can provide the most efficient, cheapest energy—modern magic, as it were. However, spent fuel from nuclear reactors becomes

radioactive waste that must be carefully secured for a hundred thousand years before it becomes harmless. This is a negative legacy for our posterity. Nobody has yet figured out the way to break this magic spell.

A single error made in managing the fearsome sorcerer’s magic that is nuclear power can potentially rob all humankind of its future. Still, it’s not only nuclear power that can do that. Another flood—that of environmental pollution—is still spreading over the world. This continues because we know how to cast spells using the magic we call science and technology, even though we haven’t figured out how to break them yet.

The Bottom Line for Human Survival

The phrase *the bottom line* is now part of the Japanese vocabulary. It means the most basic thing among all the basics—that without which we cannot live.

Until now we have been taking this bottom line to mean money. We assume that as long as we have money, we can get anything we want and solve any problem. This is why we always pursue economic growth and expansion. We have phrases such as *bigger, better, faster* that indicate the direction we should be taking, the direction toward happiness. This is how we have been thinking. We think this is progress, which we value so highly that most people spend the better part of their lives in its pursuit.

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However, how does this look after the nuclear power plant disaster? I think the prayers of parents of small children must be something like “Please give this child clean water to drink, clean air to breathe, and safe food to eat. More than this we do not ask.” I think this is the true bottom line.

Among our minimum requirements for survival are water, air, soil, and sunlight. Biological diversity should also be on the list of such requirements. Somewhere along the line, we have lost sight of the fact that we exist because we are being given life through our connections with the natural world.

Humans are just one species among the tens of millions of plants and animals living on the earth. This one species has until now consistently behaved so as to monopolize the planet’s riches. What we have ended up doing is polluting the environment, exhausting natural

resources, and driving other species to extinction, to the point where it appears likely that we will destroy the very basis for human survival. What is this if not a crime? It is a crime against future generations, a crime against nature, and a crime against the gods and the buddhas.

We need to shift our bottom line from money to life.

Now Is the Time to Demonstrate a Careful Way to Live

The ability to enjoy “a little” is a function of great wisdom. Humanity’s future hangs on this.

Our future depends on whether we can get back enough wisdom to stop depleting resources and start living with less energy use.

From the point of view of younger generations and developing countries,

when those who have continued to flagrantly squander and scatter resources say “you should use less,” it seems like selfish nonsense.

That is precisely why we should refrain from telling others what to do. Instead, our own generation, here in the developed country of Japan, should take up and practice a new way of life so as to give an example. People in developed countries now have a terrific superabundance of possessions but can’t seem to part with any of them. Our deep attachment continues, and we cry for “more, more!” As Buddhism teaches, this only gives rise to more suffering.

In November 2011 the king and queen of Bhutan visited Japan. Bhutan is known for introducing the concept of GNH (Gross National Happiness) to the world as an alternative to the path of economic growth, which does not necessarily lead to happiness. They visited the city of Soma in Fukushima Prefecture, where people are suffering from radioactive contamination. Here the royal couple prayed with the Buddhist priests who accompanied them. I think this was not simply a diplomatic gesture.

To pray for others, give to others, and share with others—these are smart ways for everyone to enjoy “a little.” I think this is the secret of the great happiness that the Bhutanese people generally feel.

Let us rethink what constitutes true wealth and happiness and how we can secure these for future generations. Let us bequeath to our children and grandchildren the gifts we have received from the natural world. □

Simple Living for Our Shared Future

by Mary Pat Fisher

We seem to lack the political and personal motivation to change our living patterns. As if oblivious to the effects on our children and grandchildren—let alone other people's children and grandchildren—we continue our patterns of overconsumption, pollution, and destruction of the natural environment.

Superstorms, floods, droughts, heat waves, melting glaciers and sea ice, species extinctions—each catastrophe is a warning signal that we are running out of time to lessen the burdens we have been placing on our planetary home. The signs of climate change linked to human activities are becoming more and more evident. However, we seem to lack the political and personal motivation to change our living patterns. As if oblivious to the effects on our children and grandchildren—let alone other people's children and grandchildren—we continue our patterns of overconsumption, pollution, and destruction of the natural environment.

How can we develop the personal and political will to change? All prophets, all scriptures, have offered us sustainable alternatives that are ultimately highly satisfying, carrying great inner rewards. All have encouraged us to seek spiritual treasures rather than the accumulation of worldly goods. By their words and their own examples, the prophets have also encouraged us to share with each other rather than hoarding and competing for goods. Through communal living—whether in spiritual communities such as Gobind

Sadan (God's House without Walls) in India, where I live, or other models of sharing and simple living—we can both lighten our impact on the earth and find inner happiness that no worldly wealth can match.

The Buddha put it very succinctly: "High thinking and simple living—This is the teaching of the enlightened ones" (P. Lal, trans., *The Dhammapada* [Noonday Press, 1967], 201). During the 1990s when I was living in Gobind Sadan's farming community called Shiv Sadan on the banks of the Ganges River, we lived in huts made of the local grasses, worked in the communal fields, ate simple food

together, and helped the very poor people of the local area. At the same time, we were carrying on spiritual devotions around the clock. We were quite contented and happy, feeling God's presence everywhere. Baba Virsa Singh, our teacher, once said to me as we were walking through the fields,

Always try to live close to nature, for you will be very near to God. Worry, fear, and pressure will be far from you. Your mind will be open, free, and clear, with no enmity. Your mind will be fearless, kind, and full of love. The muscles of your mind—as well as of your body—will be strong. A person with a strong mind is not susceptible to evil; it cannot enter his thoughts. His mind goes straight ahead. And one day his inner truth mixes with the Great Truth. (*Loving God: The Practical Teachings of Baba Virsa Singh*, 3rd ed. [Gobind Sadan/Sterling Publishers, 2006], 52–53)

For decades, Mary Pat Fisher has traveled the world studying and writing about the essence of religions. Since 1991 she has lived in the outskirts of New Delhi at the Gobind Sadan Institute for Advanced Studies in Comparative Religion, where people of all faiths and all social levels live, work, and worship together. Her books about the world's religions include the acclaimed textbook *Living Religions*, now in its ninth edition.

Nichiko Niwano, president of Rissho Kosei-kai, advocates “cultivating the Buddhist heart” for true inner peace and fulfillment. He advises:

“Simplicity” is the watchword of our new era. . . . Simplicity means the absence of frills, the reduction of waste. It means a life that is unadorned and plain.

The Japanese word for “simplicity,” *kanso*, is written with two characters, one meaning consistent and uncomplicated, the other meaning integral and without waste. Thus the simple life is one that retains the essentials yet avoids wasteful excess. To attain simplicity we must pinpoint what is necessary and rid ourselves of all that is not. This means clarifying the true meaning of life and living with that as our ultimate aim and ideal. . . . Seek out the essentials, and you will discover the secret to a happy life. (*Cultivating the Buddhist Heart*, trans. Susan Murata and Suzanne Trumbull [Kosei Publishing Co., 2008], 97–98)

Jesus advised people that if they really wanted to follow him, they should first sell their possessions and give the income to the poor. Apparently some people did so and then lived in communities with sharing of goods and meals. Jews and Gentiles ate together, setting an example that was contrary to the exclusive social norms of those times. Jesus's program was a radical economic, social, and spiritual way that is not practiced

by most Christians today. Instead, individualism and market capitalism are the *modus operandi*. Christian theologian Sallie McFague explains,

Market capitalism is a type of economics that allocates scarce resources on the basis of individuals successfully competing for them, not with regard to the needs of the planet's inhabitants nor with an eye to its sustainability. . . . Market capitalism denies one huge fact: Unless the limited resources of the planet are justly distributed among its myriad life forms so they all can flourish, there will be no sustainable future for even the greediest among us. (“God's Household,” in *Subverting Greed: Religious Perspectives on the Global Economy*, ed. Paul F. Knitter and Chandra Muzaffar [Orbis Books, 2002], 121, 133)

In contrast to the growing gap between rich and poor in the world,

Jewish scripture stresses justice, with the underlying guideline: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). Charitable giving is thus a strong part of Jewish tradition.

The prophet Muhammad and his family usually lived in dire poverty because of the Prophet's generosity to people in need. The Holy Qur'an describes charity as benefiting both giver and receiver, especially if it is hidden rather than showy:

If you dispense your alms openly, it is well, but if you conceal it and give it to the poor (in secret), this is better for you; and God will (make it an atonement to) blot out some of your evil deeds. . . . Those who spend their wealth night and day, secretly and in public, their reward is with their Lord, and they will have no fear, nor will they grieve. (Ali Unal, *The Qur'an with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English*, Surah 2:271–74 [The Light, 2006])

The Buddha taught that charitable giving—*dana*—is necessary for a peaceful world. He cited the disastrous story of a wealthy king who chose not to give any of his resources to the poor:

From the not giving of property to the needy, poverty became widespread, from the growth of poverty, the taking of what was not given increased, from the increase of theft, the use of weapons increased, from the increased use of weapons, the taking of life increased. (Digha-Nikaya III, 65 ff., in *The Long Discourses*, 396–405, as quoted by David R. Loy, “Pave the Planet or Wear Shoes? A Buddhist Perspective on Greed and Globalization” in Knitter and Muzaffar, *Subverting Greed*, 63)

One can easily see that increasing wealth does not make people fundamentally happier. Poor children in India have no toys, no television. They help their parents and happily play with each other, inventing games, making temporary playthings out of whatever is at hand—a brick, a discarded box, a piece of string, a leaf. If they are pitied by a wealthy person and given a store-bought toy, it brings only momentary joy, soon followed by unhappiness as they try to keep it to themselves, defending their new possession against others who have no store-bought toys.

Many wealthier people today are anxious and depressed because of the pressures required to earn money to pay for the “toys” of modern civilization that they and their family have learned to think they need. Traditional cultures of communal sharing have given way to commercially inspired overconsumption and private property. How then can people who have grown up surrounded by excess toys be happy with only what is needed? How can they be encouraged to share with others?

Governments try to agree on environmental protocols, but governments

are structures composed of humans. Even in the face of potential planetary disaster, they cannot behave wisely and unselfishly unless their leaders and citizens are wise and unselfish. Where do we find true wisdom and unselfishness? Only in our great religious teachers. They have always directed us toward the path of true happiness. It is not a path of overconsumption, of satisfying every desire, of traveling to exotic tourist destinations. It is the path that leads inward to the Great Truth, to the Beloved. Listen to Kabir, the great Sufi saint:

I said to the wanting-creature inside me: . . .

Do you believe there is some place that will make the soul less thirsty?

In that great absence you will find nothing.

Be strong then, and enter into your own body;

there you have a solid place for your feet.

Think about it carefully!

Don't go off somewhere else!

Kabir says this: just throw away all thoughts of imaginary things, and stand firm in that which you are.

(*Kabir: Ecstatic Poems*, trans. Robert Bly [Beacon Press, 2004], 26–27)

The vehicle for this inward journey is not an expensive fuel-consuming car; it is utterly free and nonpolluting. The only vehicle on the spiritual path is meditation. As Kabir says, what we really want is already inside us. The only way to find it is by turning our attention inward. When we begin to meditate, the first thing we discover is that our minds are totally cluttered with worldly thoughts, to such an extent that even in silence we cannot find inner peace. In meditation, we can observe the clutter and slowly, slowly weed out all that is unnecessary. As we weed the mind and begin to see glimmers of the inner light, begin to encounter the inner

Truth, we automatically begin to lose interest in the clutter of material goods around us. Longing shifts away from accumulation toward an appreciation of material simplicity. The more we simplify and attend to the present moment rather than past and future, the more satisfaction we find.

To meditate does not necessarily mean abandoning compassion for the suffering world. Nikkyo Niwano, founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, set a great example of combining spiritual practice and faith with hard work to support others as well as oneself. He explained,

My belief is that serving others is the fundamental qualification for true humanity and that allowing the maximum number of people to know the desire to serve is the way to produce a truly happy and peaceful human society. . . . This seems a remote ideal to some people. . . . On the contrary, I think it is the image of a world that can be realized in the relatively near future. (*Lifetime Beginner: An Autobiography*, trans. Richard L. Gage [Kosei Publishing Co., 1978], 81)

Guru Nanak, First Guru of Sikhs, taught a very simple spiritual way, in which the seeker is enjoined to stay in the world helping others: Work hard to earn your living by honest means, share with others from what you earn, and always remember God. He and his successors, nine more enlightened gurus,

developed the tradition of *langar*—free community kitchen in which everyone sits side by side in long rows on the floor, without distinctions, eating the same simple vegetarian food—to help bring down barriers of caste and creed between people as well as to make sure that no one goes hungry. To provide food for the *langar*, Guru Nanak developed a collective farm in his settlement in Kartarpur.

In the twentieth century, the great spiritual teacher Baba Virsa Singh began to put the principles of Guru Nanak into practice again. Rather than solicit donations to support his interfaith mission, he and his followers worked very hard to develop barren wastelands into productive farms, which in turn provided food and income for *langar* and food, medicines, education, and clothing, as well as employment, for the poor. Babaji and his devotees, including me, lived very simply, focusing their efforts on developing croplands and dairy rather than elaborate buildings. Despite great differences in educational backgrounds, castes, and creeds, we lived and worked together like a large family, united by our devotion to our teacher and to one

God. In these simple circumstances, we experienced paradise.

Now that Babaji has left his physical body, devotees still live simply in Gobind Sadan, his central community on the outskirts of New Delhi. When the weather is cold, we use jackets and blankets rather than room heaters; when the weather is very hot, we use “desert coolers,” an indigenous technology in which water is pumped across grass mats and then blown into the room by a small fan, lowering the room temperature by evaporation. We have very few vehicles. A small van suffices to bring things from the market, and otherwise we mostly use bicycles, bus, and Metro. Most families live in only one room each but enjoy use of the whole eighty-acre

community. We have built many large underground tanks to capture and reuse great quantities of water. Our *langar* is supplied by our own organic crops and dairy. Waste materials of all sorts are reused or sold to recyclers. There is continual free distribution of medicines and good used clothing donated by those who have plenty. Places of worship for all religions and peaceful gardens offer an oasis of spiritual refreshment open to all.

Seeing this example and being touched by the spiritual magnetism of the twenty-four-hour-a-day devotions under Babaji’s blessings, visitors from all over the world begin to change. The happiness of the children, the friendliness of greetings, the open nature of this extensive family, and the peaceful environment automatically bring people to question their own patterns of living. Many are inspired to begin sharing with others in whatever way they can. Even in India’s caste-defined social setting, people begin to regard others of different castes and different religions as their own family members and to care about their welfare. It is our hope that this model of the pleasures of simple living and sharing will spread its influence around the world, inspiring people everywhere to remember and live by the teachings of their own prophets—that in simple living and high thinking, in working hard and sharing with others, we will find the path to happiness and Truth, which will be to everyone’s benefit, and to the future of our planet. □

The Restructuring of Rissho Kosei-kai

by Nikkyo Niwano

In March 1999 an autobiography by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (1906–99), the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, was published in Japanese under the title Kono michi: Ichibutsujo no sekai o mezashite (The path that we have walked: Aspiring to the world of the One Buddha Vehicle). The book is a lively account of the life of Founder Niwano as a leader of an international lay Buddhist association and a pioneer of interreligious cooperation who dedicated himself to liberating all people from suffering with firm faith in the Lotus Sutra. Dharma World will continue to publish excerpts from the book in installments.

On June 8, 1958, I left Haneda airport in Tokyo for Brazil. I had been invited to take part in celebrations that summer in São Paulo marking the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the first Japanese immigrants to Brazil.

The death of Myoko Sensei [Myoko Naganuma, cofounder of Rissho Kosei-kai] had left me feeling bereft, like a bird with only one wing. The invitation to visit Brazil came just when the nationwide implementation of the revised education program of Rissho Kosei-kai was being consolidated, so it seemed to me to be a good time to accept the invitation. Motoyuki Naganuma and I were chosen to represent our organization at the celebration, whose other guests included Prince and Princess Mikasa and Japanese representatives from the fields of politics, economics, religion, art, and sports.

It was a wonderful opportunity to learn about the religious situation in other countries. With this in mind, I planned to spend two and a half months in the Americas, visiting not only Brazil but also other countries in the area to observe their religious and cultural life. This, my first trip abroad, seemed to me

to have been arranged by the Buddha, since it planted many suggestions in my mind, both about how dissemination was conducted overseas and about the construction of Rissho Kosei-kai's Great Sacred Hall.

I learned a great deal from my observations during my time in Brazil, but space does not permit me to go into detail here. However, there is one thing that happened that was completely unexpected. Mr. Mitsuto Mizumoto, president of the *São Paulo Shimbun*, a Japanese-language newspaper, had invited me to meet local journalists at a welcoming party. He introduced the journalists to me one by one. We exchanged business cards and chatted about all kinds of things. However, one person stood alone, isolated from the crowd, seemingly hesitant about coming forward. I asked Mr. Mizumoto who it was. "Ah, a journalist from the *Yomiuri Shimbun*" [one of Japan's leading newspapers], he replied. I took it upon myself to go up to him and introduce myself. "I am Niwano from Rissho Kosei-kai," I said, and offered my card. He looked deeply embarrassed and said, "Sir, it was I who wrote those articles about Rissho

Kosei-kai. After that, I was transferred to Brazil. I had no idea that I would meet you here. I'm afraid I caused you a great deal of trouble." I was very surprised and still remember what I said to him. "It's all over now," I replied. "Thanks to the articles you wrote, I was able to reflect on how things were, and as a result, Rissho Kosei-kai was able to experience further growth. Please, don't brood over the matter but do a good job in Brazil." [Editor's note: Beginning in January 1956, over a period of about two months, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* published a series of articles criticizing Rissho Kosei-kai about the purchase of real estate, the nature of its beliefs, the way the organization was managed, and other things, against the backdrop of the organization's rapid growth.]

I spent fifty-five days in Brazil and four other South American countries. On the night of August 3, I left São Paulo for New York on a Pan American flight and arrived there the following evening. While there I visited the headquarters of the United Nations and Columbia University and then flew on to Boston to visit the world headquarters of Christian Science. I then traveled to Washington,

Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, was an honorary president of the World Conference of Religions for Peace and honorary chairman of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan) at the time of his death in October 1999. He was awarded the 1979 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.

DC; Chicago; and Los Angeles. In Los Angeles I visited a synagogue. I flew from San Francisco to Honolulu and spent some busy days making a pilgrimage to the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (also called the Punchbowl National Cemetery) and visiting Pearl Harbor.

Everything I saw or heard taught me something. A case in point was my visit to the headquarters of the (Mormon) Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City, Utah, where I met its president, David O. McKay. I expressed my thanks to him for the Mormons' kind support for the Japanese citizens who had remained in the United States at the beginning of World War II. He replied, "War happens between governments. We are all, Americans and Japanese alike, God's children, and so brothers and sisters. Because we are human beings, it is only natural that we should take care of each other." I was greatly moved.

The rules of Mormonism are very strict: Mormons cannot drink alcohol or even coffee or tea. Despite this, church membership is rapidly increasing. While people speak of the sluggish growth of the traditional Christian denominations, which take a more lenient view toward the commandments, there seems to be an increasing number of people seeking to follow the Way by imposing strict precepts upon themselves. I think that this tells us something important about the way to practice faith.

If a religious organization accommodates itself to society and swims with the stream, all reason for people to enter

the faith disappears, and if it accommodates itself too far, it will become completely secularized. On the other hand, if it leans too far into its own different identity, it will become estranged from society. The eternal question facing religious organizations is, I think, how to steer skillfully between universality and peculiarity, how to walk the Middle Path.

My experience during this trip, both to South America and to the United States, where I spent fifteen days, bore many fruits and expanded my horizons. Many ideas rose in my mind about the type of structure Rissho Kosei-kai should have and how we should go about disseminating our faith.

One impression that I had received during my trip, which remained strongly with me, was of the large buildings occupied by churches wherever I went. Inevitably, my thoughts traveled to our Great Sacred Hall, then under construction. Circular in shape, its plans were revised many times before the actual construction began. We had examined the architect's plans with the greatest attention, but it was after I actually saw church architecture in the Americas, reflecting a long history, that I realized how much we could learn from it. I dearly wanted to incorporate the good points of such buildings into the architecture of the Great Sacred Hall.

Whenever I visited a church during my travels, I would look up at its tower or steeple and slowly walk around its interior. Motoyuki Naganuma, seeing me constantly pausing, once asked me if there was anything wrong. I replied

laughingly that I could never get our Great Sacred Hall out of my thoughts. The churches I saw abroad without doubt played an important role in the construction of the Great Sacred Hall.

I returned to Japan on August 22, finishing my seventy-five-day journey, including the flights from Japan to Brazil and from the United States to Japan.

Ken'ichi Takemura, a best-selling author and Japan's best-known television commentator, has said that two types of eye are necessary to discern the essence of something. In order to be able to proceed without error, he said, we need the eyes of an ant that see reality from ground level and the eyes of a bird that look at the situation from high in the sky.

My trip to Brazil allowed me to separate myself a little from the actuality of Rissho Kosei-kai and look at it again more objectively and from a perspective of world religion. It also gave me the chance to think about what form it should take in the future.

A New Structure

With the affirmation of the main focus of devotion for Rissho Kosei-kai as the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, and the implementation of a program of doctrinal study for our members, the restructuring of the organization had become an unavoidable and pressing need.

Until then I had not thought that running a religious organization was a particularly difficult thing. Our first and greatest duty had always been to save each and every person, so structures were set up as the need arose. Thus, when a number of people had grouped together, one person was selected to look after them and transmit the thinking of the headquarters correctly to them. This was the nucleus of chapters. People had first met together in one another's homes, but this became impossible when the number of members increased. It was then that training halls began to be built.

In the beginning, the chapters that spread all over the country were not necessarily geographically organized but based rather on a vertical relationship between the chapter leader acting as a "godparent" giving spiritual guidance to his or her "godchildren." This type of lineage existed in the eighty-four chapters around Tokyo and continued when members increased at a great rate outside the capital too.

The chapters were each like a family group, with a high degree of cohesion. However, the way they were organized meant that people living in the same area might be affiliated with different chapters, and members of a single chapter might be scattered throughout Japan. Communication between chapter members often involved considerable losses in both time and money.

After I announced the true nature of our organization (the Manifestation of the Truth in 1958), I traveled throughout the country seeing with my own eyes how guidance was given in the training halls and liaison offices. I was

deeply moved by the self-sacrificing efforts of chapter heads and members that I witnessed. However, it was clear to me that there was often little to show for their exertions in terms of concrete results, and I felt this was a great waste of good intentions. For the spirit of the Lotus Sutra to be disseminated not only among members but to all people everywhere, I was convinced that somehow or other the whole organizational structure of Rissho Kosei-kai had to be revised.

In the eleventh chapter of the Lotus Sutra, "Beholding the Precious Stupa," we find the words "The Buddha desires to bequeath this Wonderful Law-Flower Sutra so that it may ever exist." "May ever exist" means manifesting the true worth of that which exists. The teachings of the Lotus Sutra bring out the best in everything. They are taught not just through theory but also through causality and parable. If only we can fully manifest the true worth of that which exists within each and every person, a great harmony will fill the world. Rissho Kosei-kai's role is to bring out that which is within all people and to allow it to bloom.

I often use the metaphor of the carrot and the white radish to explain what faith is. Faith does not try to change the radish into a carrot but allows the radish to be the very best it can be as a radish. Similarly, faith makes sure the carrot tastes its most delicious as a carrot. In other words, faith brings the individual abilities of each and every person into full play and makes all people bodhisattvas within their own sphere. Surely this is the purpose of a life of faith. Bringing into play everything that we are made of converts to an amazing strength. I was convinced this was why we had to change the structure of Rissho Kosei-kai.

Deciding on a National System of Regions

The year 1955 marked an important turning point in Japan's postwar history, for

it witnessed the rapid growth in industrial productivity, the modernization of agricultural practices, and the liberalization of trade that paved the way for a high level of economic growth. The first boom, in the mid-1950s, was described in the mass media as the time of greatest prosperity since the reign of the first legendary emperor, Jinmu. The second boom, from 1958 to the end of 1961, was hailed as being unprecedented since the time of the sun goddess, Amaterasu. People were convinced that the postwar period had finally come to an end and were taking their first steps toward a new and prosperous life. The idea of creating a nationwide system of regions for conducting dissemination activities in response to these social changes had long been maturing in my mind.

First it was vital to send leaders with a correct understanding of Buddhism to every corner of the country. A leadership system based on a balanced relationship of intellect, emotion, and will was necessary if members' efforts were to bear fruit in the pursuit of the truth. I spoke to members about the need to change.

"Now it is no longer enough for one person to shut him- or herself away at home and perform ancestral veneration. We must gather together as many people as possible in *hoza* [Dharma circles, a form of group interaction guided by experienced leaders] and discuss things together from many angles so that people of different temperaments and personalities are able to reach understanding, repent together, and through correct faith deserving of the name of Rissho Kosei-kai, go on to perfect themselves through interaction. This is the sort of organization we must become."

On November 15, 1959, to mark my birthday, I issued the first statement about the appointment of chapter heads, to lay the ground for the reform of the lineage system into one of regions covering the whole country. Then, the following January, I made an appeal in the magazine *Kosei* to our members

regarding the necessity of establishing a new organizational structure. I wrote:

Chapter heads and senior leaders understand fully the need to make fundamental reforms to the organization of Rissho Kosei-kai by setting up a national system of regions. However, I think there are still some members who do not understand the point of the reorganization at all well.

During the twenty-two years that have passed since its founding, Rissho Kosei-kai has gone through a number of small reforms as experience has suggested, until we have come to what you see today. Our structure of spiritual guidance based on chapters, lineage, and the relationship between those who guide and those who are guided is characteristic of our organization. It has been the strong foundation on which we have achieved great results and has provided the framework for the practice of more than two million members.

Because the vertical relationship within lineage groups has been over-emphasized, however, there has been a lack of positive exchanges among members belonging to different chapters and lineage groups. On occasion, in dissemination and guidance activities, this has unfortunately led to a lack of cooperation between different chapters and groups, even though their members all belong to one Rissho Kosei-kai. This is why we must slough off our old skin and, through reorganization, focus on the original form of the teachings with the aim of building a strong dissemination system that is balanced both horizontally and vertically.

The decision to embark on this new system has been taken after many years of deep thought and consideration by the leaders of Rissho Kosei-kai about how best to improve dissemination nationwide. We are not

permitted to waste our time adhering to the old way. We must leave aside minor differences for the sake of our greater unity, and we ask you to recognize how important it is to build a basis for Rissho Kosei-kai's continued growth in the future and deepen your understanding of its significance.

It was my greatest wish that by placing the right trained person in the right place through this reorganization, we would be able to foster a dissemination system that marked Rissho Kosei-kai as an organization based on the Lotus Sutra. Thus a second aim of establishing a national system of regions was to provide a way for our teachings to permeate all members in a way not possible under the old vertical system. Since the word *Rissho* in our title refers to establishing the correct Dharma, the Buddhist teachings had to be at the center of our endeavors. We were seeking a way of building a structure that depended not on a person but on the teachings.

To a certain extent, it was quite natural that people endowed with common sense could not be satisfied with guidance that veered overmuch toward spiritual powers. But through the study of Buddhist doctrine, we could confidently instruct any person anywhere with all the courage of our convictions. All the same, there remained some who said that there was something unsatisfying in rational teachings that anyone could understand and know from common sense.

Members could not easily give up the system that had existed till that time, of the godparent-godchild relationship based on ties of sympathy and compassion. A too-rapid imposition of the new organization would only result in reducing the impact of faith.

In the February issue of *Kosei* that year [1960], I spoke again about the relation between true faith, vigorous dissemination, and the national system of regions. I appealed to the membership concerning the need to first put into practice the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Six Perfections in order to grasp the essential way of liberation as true Buddhists and the importance of religious effort for self-perfection and for upholding the ideal of attaining buddhahood.

A New Beginning

The change to the national system of regions was a piece of major surgery, severing from their godparent those living in different areas. The organization of chapters until then, which centered on the chapter head as the godparent guiding its other members, was more than anything else a matter of emotion. Moving to a new system that did not destroy this relationship was the most difficult of all of our tasks. From the emotional standpoint, the loving relationship between the person offering guidance and the person being guided, like that between a parent and a child, is very beautiful. However, a broader view is required from the Mahayana

standpoint, the teaching of liberation of all living beings, and from that of making a contribution to the society within which members live. We also had to consider that eventually Japan's Rissho Kosei-kai would move out into the larger world. We had to be able to develop the dissemination of teachings that everyone could wholeheartedly accept and dissemination that is capable of responding swiftly to various situations.

With these issues in mind, we divided Japan into ten regions with a total of 102 branches. Each branch was divided into smaller groups, each of which had its own leader. We also created group and block leaders to handle liaison. Nevertheless, when old patterns are broken and an organization is modified, inevitably there are some people who find it difficult to break with the human relationships they have been used to. While understanding theoretically the need to move toward a new type of structure, it was hard for them to part from those with whom they had done their daily religious training.

I was asked time and time again whether or not the new system of regions would mean that the old ties between the godparent and the godchild would be dissolved. I replied that this would not happen, even though the organizational basis would change. The bond between parent and child in the Dharma is eternal. Even if members lived in different places and so were a part of different organizational regions, there would be no problem about their attending memorial services or seeking the advice of the godparent over family matters, for example. After all, this was the person who understood them the best. However, attempts to break down the new system out of an excess of emotion, without thinking of the needs of bettering the local society, would not be tolerated.

Of course there was uneasiness within the membership, but this was the labor pains necessary for the birth

of a new organizational body. There could be no sloughing off of the old skin, no forward movement, without such anguish.

I launched the organizational reforms between November 15 and December 15, 1959, with the appointment of new chapter heads, and this brought to a conclusion the reorganization of the regional chapter system. Whenever I visited the local training halls for various ceremonies, I continued to speak about the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and how we should conduct our daily lives in their light. It was at this time, too, that I wrote *Buddhism for Today*, a modern interpretation of the Threefold Lotus Sutra, in order to make these teachings known to each and every person. The Japanese edition was published in five volumes, the first covering the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings through "The Parable of the Herbs" chapter in the Lotus Sutra; the second volume the chapters "Prediction" through "Springing Up Out of the Earth"; the third volume the chapter "Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata"; the fourth volume the chapters "Discrimination of Merits" through "The Final Commission"; and the fifth volume the chapter "The Story of the Bodhisattva Medicine King" to the end of the Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue.

In writing this commentary, I did not confine myself to the Rissho Kosei-kai teachings as they currently existed but set my sights on an interpretation fitting a new age. I was determined to give everything I had to each word I wrote. I wanted to elevate the Lotus Sutra as a practical teaching able to be a guiding principle for setting up a worldview and an outlook on life for people living in modern times. That I was able to do so was due both to my efforts over a long period of time to read the Lotus Sutra with all of my being in light of my experiences and to the teaching of Arai Sensei [Sukunobu Arai, a Reiyu-kai chapter leader who introduced the

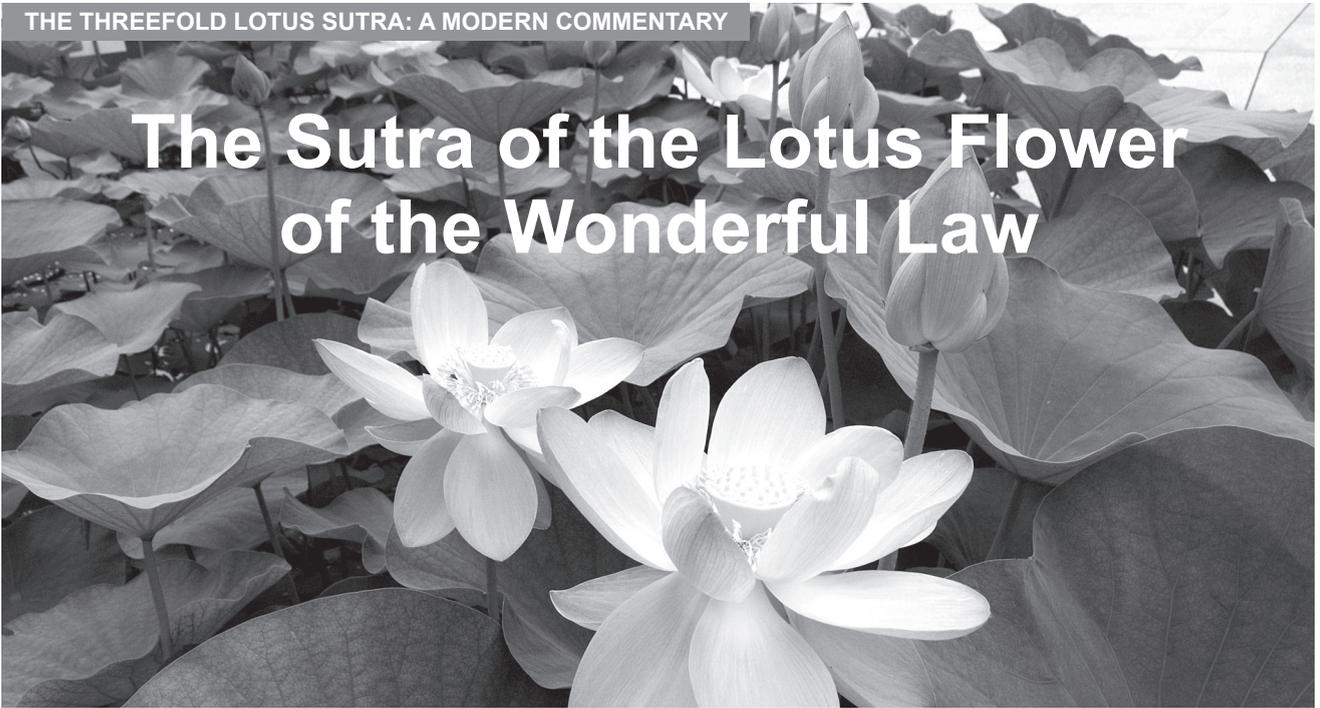
author to the Lotus Sutra], who interpreted it and showed me its true spirit.

I think that it was in 1936 (when I was a member of Reiyu-kai in Arai Sensei's chapter) that the rumor spread that if we climbed Mount Shichimen (a holy mountain near Mount Minobu) and were present at the sunrise, we would see the Precious Stupa appear in the sky. I think this story arose because the event was to happen in November (the eleventh month) in the eleventh year of the Showa period (1926–89) according to the Japanese calendar, and "Beholding the Precious Stupa" is the eleventh chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

Half believing and half doubting, I asked Arai Sensei's advice. All he said to me was "Why don't you go and see?" Therefore I joined the group climbing Mount Shichimen. It was raining on the mountain. The next morning, when the Precious Stupa was supposed to appear, the rain had stopped, but haze enveloped the mountain and thick clouds covered the sky. And when I reached the lookout, my heart pounding with excitement, not only was there no Precious Stupa but we could not even see the sunrise to venerate it. When I met Arai Sensei after my return to Tokyo, he asked me whether the Precious Stupa had appeared. "No, we couldn't see a single thing, let alone the Precious Stupa!" I replied. Arai Sensei then said to me, "Mr. Niwano, you must read the sutra properly. Certainly it tells us that the Precious Stupa appeared, but you mustn't just read it on the surface. You must prove the verities of what is written in the Lotus Sutra by practicing according to those teachings. You will find the Precious Stupa in yourself through your actions. Nichiren Shonin wrote in a letter to his follower Abutsubo that Abutsubo is the Precious Stupa itself, and the Precious Stupa is Abutsubo. Of course the Precious Stupa didn't appear at Mount Shichimen, and it is good that it didn't." I felt his words awaken me.

To be continued

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law



Chapter 20

The Bodhisattva Never Despise

(4)

*This is the 112th installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra
by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.*

TEXT Great Power Obtained! What is your opinion? Those four groups at that time, who constantly scorned that bodhisattva—can they indeed be somebody else? They are now in this assembly—the five hundred bodhisattvas Bhadravajra and the others, the five hundred bhikshus Lion Moon and the others, the five hundred upasakas Thinking of Buddha and the others, who all never retreat from Perfect Enlightenment.

COMMENTARY Here the Buddha is tacitly preaching the opportunities arising from resistance to the teachings. These are opportunities to help those who have been hostile to the Buddha and bodhisattvas and rejected the Dharma and induce them to accept instruction and enter the Buddha Way.

Other people are immediately receptive to the teachings. They are willing to take refuge in the Buddha and bodhisattvas and obediently listen to the Dharma as they preach.

Needless to say, receptivity is the direct way to liberation.

That is the great road we must strive to build for as many people as possible. At the same time we must not entirely neglect the uses of resistance.

Antagonism and combativeness imply, in any case, a degree of interest. Although that interest is hostile, its existence must be taken as a plus, because it becomes the key to persuasion.

By contrast, nothing can be done for someone who shows absolutely no interest for good or ill. There is no place to get a grip.

Imagine for a moment that you are on a diet for reasons of health and trying to impress people with its effectiveness. Someone else on a diet the opposite of yours will have in any case interest in food, and the two of you still can have a useful discussion with at least the chance that you can win him over to your view. But if that person has no interest at all in diets, discussing them would be a waste of time.

The same is true with the Buddha Way. If a person shows

absolutely no willingness to consider religion or the Buddha Dharma, no positive result can be expected. This is what is meant by the saying “Sentient beings without relation to the Buddha Dharma are liberated with difficulty.”

As a matter of course, we should set great store in people who welcome the teachings, and they are fortunate, but we must also do the same for people who have no interest in the teachings.

Unfortunate people who resist the teachings may have mistaken ideas and be very emotional about their beliefs. But because somewhere inside them there is something singleminded and pure, they oppose the Buddha Way entirely of their own accord. Therefore, once you persuade them, help them see their error, and draw them into the gate of the Buddha Way, they will be transformed into extremely reliable kindred spirits.

This is quite important even in everyday life. Whatever the occasion, rather than considering someone who resists the teachings as an absolute opponent, it is essential to be magnanimous and persevering enough to accept that person broadmindedly with the intention one day of bringing that person into one’s own camp. This is the spirit of the Buddha Way, and the Bodhisattva Never Despise is an exemplar.

TEXT Know, Great Power Obtained! This Dharma Flower Sutra greatly benefits all bodhisattva-mahasattvas and enables them to reach Perfect Enlightenment. Therefore all bodhisattva-mahasattvas, after the extinction of the Tathagata, should ever receive and keep, read and recite, expound and copy this sutra.”

COMMENTARY The Buddha once more advocates the five practices of teachers of the Dharma. He is saying that we must not perform these practices perfunctorily, but embrace the fundamental spirit of revering and revealing all people’s buddha-nature, and in that spirit devote ourselves to the five practices of teachers of the Dharma. In terms of the order of preaching, this must be admitted and accepted.

TEXT Then the World-honored One, desiring to proclaim this meaning over again, spoke thus in verse:

“In the past there was a buddha / Styled King of Majestic Voice, / Boundless in divine wisdom, / Leader of all living beings; / Gods, men, dragons, spirits / All paid homage to him.

COMMENTARY *Divine wisdom.* This is the superhuman wisdom that discerns the real aspect of all things in this world.

TEXT After this buddha’s extinction, / When the Dharma

drew near its end, / There existed a bodhisattva / Whose name was Never Despise. / At that time the four groups / Clung to their own views of the teachings. / The Bodhisattva Never Despise / On approaching them / Would address them thus: / ‘I may not despise you; / You walk the Way, / And will all become buddhas.’

COMMENTARY *Clung to their own views of the teachings.* They see everything from only their own point of view, with self-centered motives, and interpret everything to suit themselves. They cling to their own views, completely caught up in them.

It is perfectly natural that interpretations of the Dharma change more or less with the times, and one must be very flexible in interpreting the Dharma for each country, people, and time. Distorting the Dharma to one’s own advantage undermines the Buddha’s teachings. One must be very careful to avoid this.

- *Walk the Way.* This refers to the bodhisattva way.

TEXT When they had heard it, they / Contemned or reviled him. / The Bodhisattva Never Despise / Bore it all patiently.

COMMENTARY *Contemned or reviled.* The original Chinese text consists of four characters meaning, respectively, “scorn,” “censure,” “insult,” and “insinuation.”

- *Bore . . . patiently.* This does not mean putting up with others unwillingly but accepting them in a spirit of generosity and understanding. Just accepting what others say and do greatly enhances our own character.

TEXT When his sins were expiated / And his end was drawing near, / He heard this sutra / And his organs were clarified. / By his transcendent power / He prolonged his period of life / And again, to all the people, / Widely preached this sutra.

COMMENTARY *When his sins were expiated.* “Sin” here means the residual karma of past lives. Since the Bodhisattva Never Despise, at least as far as he is presented in this chapter, is from beginning to end performing the noble bodhisattva practice of venerating others’ buddha-nature, he can sin no more.

However, even the Bodhisattva Never Despise was originally an ordinary person. Before renouncing the world he must sometimes have behaved badly and given into anger selfishly, hated some people, and been jealous of others. He must have accumulated bad karma from this in former lives. By his bodhisattva practices after he renounced the world, he purged himself of the bad karma of former

lives. We have used charts to explain the expiation of bad karma in considerable detail in the May/June 1994 issue of *Dharma World*.

TEXT The groups [formerly] clung to their own views of the teachings / All received from this bodhisattva / Instruction and perfection, / Being led to abide in the Buddha Way.

COMMENTARY This passage means essentially that all those who had been attached to the lesser teachings were instructed by the Bodhisattva Never Despise and became better people as a result, and he guided them along the path to supreme enlightenment.

The Chinese word for “perfection” used here has profound implications. It can also mean “accomplishment,” and in Buddhism it means the attainment of great wisdom or great self-improvement. In this instance, it does not mean absolute perfection, but can reasonably be interpreted as meaning “becoming truly human.”

TEXT Never Despise, his lifetime ended, / Met with countless buddhas, / And through his preaching of this sutra / Obtained inestimable happiness. / Gradually perfecting his merits, / He soon accomplished the Buddha Way.

Never Despise of that time / Is really I myself. / The four groups of that time, / Clinging to their own views of

the teachings, / Who heard Never Despise say, / ‘You are to become buddhas,’ / And who because of this cause and condition / Met with countless buddhas / Are the bodhisattvas of this assembly, / The host of five hundred, / And also the four groups / Of pure believers, men and women, / Who are now before me / Listening to the Dharma.

COMMENTARY *The four groups.* This refers to bhikshus, bhikshunis, upasakas, and upasikas. Upasakas are male lay followers; upasikas are female lay followers.

TEXT I, in my former lives, / Exhorted these people / To hear and receive this sutra, / The peerless Dharma, / And opened [their minds] and showed [the Buddha knowledge] to them. / That they might abide in nirvana. / Age by age have [I] received and kept / This so [wonderful] a sutra.

COMMENTARY *Opened [their minds] and showed [the Buddha knowledge].* As we have previously noted, the order of the four stages in which people are led to the Buddha knowledge is opening, showing, awakening, and entering (see the March/April 1998 issue of *Dharma World*). The passage refers to the first two in that order.

“Opened [their minds]” comes first, for if their minds are closed, they understand nothing. At this stage, their minds are opened to the truth that all people possess the buddha-nature.

“Showed [the Buddha knowledge]” means showing the doctrine of dependent origination, by which we see the world as it really is in the light of the Buddha’s wisdom and the principle of cause, condition, effect, and retribution. This principle is the fundamental law.

• *Abide in nirvana.* The two kinds of nirvana are the Hinayana nirvana of “great ease” and the Mahayana nirvana of “great harmony.” Since they have commenced opening and showing, it is safe to interpret this passage to mean the nirvana of “great ease.”

After the stages of opening and showing, in the third stage, people are led to experience firsthand what they have been taught, and thus experience awakening for themselves, deepening their understanding of the Buddha’s wisdom. In the fourth stage, they are led to enter the way of the bodhisattva practice through the aspiration for buddhahood.

Progress deep into the fourth stage brings the vision of a vibrant, harmonious world. This is called the nirvana of Mahayana.

TEXT During myriads of kotis and kotis of kalpas / Of inconceivable reach, / Rare are the times that have heard / This Dharma Flower Sutra. / During myriads of kotis and kotis of kalpas / Of inconceivable reach, / Buddhas, world-honored ones, / At rare times preach this sutra.

COMMENTARY Emphasis is given here to just how difficult it is to hear the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and accordingly just how fortunate (because of the merit they have previously accumulated) are those who encounter it.

TEXT Therefore let his practitioners, / After the Buddha’s extinction, / On hearing such a sutra as this, / Not conceive doubt or perplexity. / But let them wholeheartedly / Publish abroad this sutra, / And age by age meeting buddhas, / They will speedily accomplish the Buddha Way.”

COMMENTARY *Practitioners.* Because the Lotus Sutra propounds first and foremost the importance of bodhisattva practice for the liberation of all, it usually refers to “practitioners” rather than “believers,” since some Buddhist sects advocate individual liberation through belief in the “other power” of Amitabha Buddha.

• *Doubt or perplexity.* “Doubt” refers to doubt about the truth of the Dharma. “Perplexity” means hesitation in accepting the Dharma.

The last four lines—“But let them wholeheartedly / Publish abroad this sutra, / And age by age meeting buddhas, / They will speedily accomplish the Buddha Way”—concisely expresses the merits of preaching the Buddha Way. This passage is well worth reciting.

At the beginning of chapter 20, “The Bodhisattva Never Despise,” it is emphasized that he continued only the single practice of honoring the buddha-nature in everyone he met. This chapter teaches us that the fundamental practice of the Buddha Way—that which precedes all else—is awakening to and honoring people’s buddha-nature and does not deny the necessity of reading and reciting the sutras or preaching the Dharma.

By means of the merit the Bodhisattva Never Despise acquired through the single practice of honoring others’ buddha-nature, he mastered the teachings of the Lotus Sutra on his own, and in the course of many reincarnations he preached it and brought merit to countless others. Precisely because he continued that altruistic practice, he embodied the Lotus Sutra (“age by age meeting buddhas”), gradually deepened his understanding, and finally attained supreme enlightenment (“accomplish the Buddha Way”).

This sequence of events applies perfectly to people of succeeding generations, as the Lotus Sutra teaches. Therefore, when we emulate the Bodhisattva Never Despise in revering others’ buddha-nature, we must also emulate his efforts to reveal all people’s buddha-nature by preaching the Dharma.

The most important passage in this chapter is “when he saw afar off [a member of the] four groups, he would specially go and pay respect to them.” This attitude is vital for preaching the Dharma. In other words, one must not wait passively for people to come and hear the Dharma, or preach it only when convenient. One must be zealous enough in preaching the Dharma to reach out to people. This is the true bodhisattva attitude of trying to liberate others.

The Bodhisattva Never Despise was determined enough to do that constantly. At first he was disliked, or angered people who felt he was meddling in their affairs, but gradually they sensed his sincerity, and eventually he touched their hearts. We must think deeply about this active attitude in spreading the Buddha’s teachings.

In brief, this chapter speaks intimately to us, as a chapter that applies directly to our everyday lives in modern society, teaching us the proper attitude we each should take, the appropriate attitude in all human relationships, and the attitude of a Buddhist in disseminating the Dharma. I firmly believe that this chapter, whose teachings we can apply exactly as they are in our world, is a gem of the Lotus Sutra.

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.