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DHARMA WORLD

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Knowing Contentment

First World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan, 1970

Second World Assembly in Leuven, Belgium, 1974

Third World Assembly in Princeton, the United States, 1979

Fourth World Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, 1984

Fifth World Assembly in Melbourne, Australia, 1989

Religions for Peace
Japan

Religions for Peace Japan

Religions for Peace was established in 1970 as an international nongovernmental organization. It obtained general consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1999. As an international network of religious communities encompassing over ninety countries, the Religions for Peace family engages in conflict resolution, humanitarian assistance, and other peace-building activities through dialogue and cooperation across religions.

Religions for Peace Japan was established in 1972 as a committee for the international issues supported by Japanese Association of Religious Organizations. Since then it has served as the national chapter of Religions for Peace.

Purpose

1. Calling on religious communities to deeply reflect on their practices, address any that are exclusionary in nature, and engage in dialogue with one another in the spirit of tolerance and understanding.
2. Facilitating multireligious collaboration in making peace initiatives.
3. Working with peace organizations in all sectors and countries to address global issues.
4. Implementing religiously based peace education and awareness-raising activities.

Activity

Religions for Peace Japan promotes activities under the slogan: “Caring for Our Common Future: Advancing Shared Well-Being,” which include cooperating and collaborating with Religions for Peace and Religions for Peace Asia; participating in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference; cooperating and collaborating with both international and local faith-based organizations; and building networks with various sectors (politics, economics, academics, culture, media, and so forth). Religions for Peace Japan also promotes various programs related to peace education that include hosting peace research seminars and peace university symposiums.

Sixth World Assembly in Rome and Riva del Garda, Italy, 1994

Seventh World Assembly in Amman, Jordan, 1999

Eighth World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan, 2006

Ninth World Assembly in Vienna, Austria, 2013

Tenth World Assembly in Lindau, Germany, 2019

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FEATURES: Knowing Contentment

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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FEATURES

Contentment Is the Greatest Wealth

by Kyoko Nishio

Kyoko Nishio is the director of the Dharma Education and Human Resources Development Department of Rissho Kosei-kai.

As you go about your life, join your hands in prayer for all that you have received.

Buddhism teaches the importance of desiring little and knowing contentment.

Chapter 3 of the Lotus Sutra contains a passage that says, "All of the causes of suffering are rooted in greed and desire." When desires run wild, they become *kleshas*—poisoned states of mind that lead to unwholesome behavior. Greed is considered, along with hatred and delusion, one of the "three poisons" that are foremost among the *kleshas*.

We desire more and better of what we already have in wealth, honor, status, and so on, and we desire what we do not yet have. However, such things as excessive greed for money and consumption by lust give rise to envy, anger, and hatred toward oneself and others. The fact is, the *kleshas* are with us for as long as we live. It is perilous, therefore, to live life in headlong pursuit of our desires. The desires must always be kept under control.

Desire is inextricably linked to a mindset that thinks only of what it lacks. A person who has little but knows contentment, is grateful, and rejoices will lead a happy life. Conversely, a person who is materially and financially rich but always feels that they are lacking in something will be unable to lead a happy life, no matter what they may possess.

What is important for human beings is to live in harmony. By living in harmony with those around us, society as a whole will be in harmony. That is what makes us happy.

Do we realize how miraculous it is to be alive here and now? The light of the sun, water, air, plants, animals, and everything else in the universe are all essential to human survival, and it is only because all these things continue to function that we can survive. We are, in other words, "caused to live" by the entirety of existence. Simply realizing this will generate feelings of gratitude within us.

If we alter our mindset a little, we will see that the seeds of happiness lie all around us. Knowing contentment by curbing our greed and being grateful for what have received is the way of life that leads to happiness for us and those around us.

At Rissho Kosei-kai, we put our hands together in prayer and say the following words of thanks before every meal: "For what we are about to eat and drink, we are grateful to the Buddha, to nature, and to many people." One of our members once told me that, in the course of talking with her children about being thankful for having access to food every day, "receiving the lives of others" in order to live, and being supported by many people and nature, she discovered that they stopped leaving any food on their plates at mealtimes.

Our lives are seriously affected by sudden events such as natural disasters and epidemics. Advances in information technology and other recent developments have, moreover, led to drastic changes in the world's industrial structure and people's lives. Buddhism teaches "impermanence." This means that nothing remains the same for even a moment. Instead, everything is constantly changing.

Living in such uncertain times in which we cannot predict what will happen or when, what should we do in order to live our lives without letting the "three poisons" control our minds? In the Dhammapada, the Buddha taught, "Health is the greatest gift; contentment is the greatest wealth."

However, there are times when we cannot accept things with gratitude. At such times, it is important to begin with some outward "form," such as by joining our hands in prayer. In this way, we can be thankful and joyful, and truly satisfied and happy. As you go about your life, join your hands in prayer for all that you have received. It is from this that a sense of gratitude and joy is born, and where true satisfaction and happiness can be found.

We should always live our lives filled with a sense of gratitude—without complaint—for this most precious and one-and-only life that we have been given in this world. ❑

FEATURES

The Path to Contentment

by David R. Loy

David R. Loy is a professor, a writer, and a Zen teacher in the Sanbo Zen tradition of Japanese Zen Buddhism. He is a prolific author whose essays and books have been translated into many languages. He teaches nationally and internationally on various topics, focusing primarily on the encounter between Buddhism and modernity and what each can learn from the other. See www.davidloy.org.

There are two aspects to gratitude: appreciation of something, and thankfulness directed to its source.

To live contentedly is something we all may aspire to, but what does that really involve? Like the English word "happiness," contentment is a concept difficult to pin down. Another word for contentment is *satisfaction*, but that cannot mean fulfilling all our desires, because they are limitless. According to the first noble truth of Buddhism, our basic problem is *dukkha*, "suffering" in the broadest sense of the term: not only physical and mental discomfort, but dissatisfaction, frustration, anxiety, *dis-ease*. And the second noble truth points to the cause of our *dukkha*: *tanha* "craving." According to a common dictionary definition, to be content does not mean having no desires, but rather "having the desire limited to present enjoyments." If our enjoyments are (like everything else) impermanent, however, doesn't that imply contentment must also be impermanent? Unless, of course, we can develop a different relationship with desire in general.

To follow up on this, there are different aspects of Buddhist teachings that might be explored. One could, for example, consider the role of meditation in helping us "let go" of desires and disruptive passions. But there are other guidelines that have important implications for our long-term contentment.

According to the original teachings of Gautama Buddha in the Pali Canon, an essential part of the spiritual path is following the five precepts. We are advised to abstain from killing living beings (sometimes understood more broadly, as *not harming* living beings), from taking what is not given to us (stealing), from sexual misconduct, from improper speech (lying, etc.), and from intoxicating substances that dull the mind (such as alcohol and recreational drugs). These rules are not like the "thou shalt not . . ." commandments found in the Bible, decreed by God. They are vows that we voluntarily take—not to the Buddha or anyone else, but to ourselves—in the belief that *not* living according to these principles causes problems for others and is detrimental to our own well-being and contentment.

Thich Nhat Hanh calls the precepts "mindfulness trainings," replacing the usual "I undertake the precept to abstain from killing living beings," etc., with "I undertake the *course of training* to abstain . . ." The emphasis on training avoids perfectionism by allowing for inevitable shortcomings. We vow to keep doing the best we can, so when we violate a precept, we don't indulge in self-recrimination but dust ourselves off and try again.

In addition to these negative actions that we should avoid—"refrain from doing this"—the Buddha recommended some things that we should actively do. These include cultivating certain positive character traits, especially the four *brahmaviharas* or "divine abodes," also known as the four sublime states. The first, *metta*, is usually translated as loving-kindness; *karuna* is compassion for the suffering of others; *mudita* is empathetic joy that shares in the happiness of others; and *upekkha* is imperturbable equanimity. They are called divine abodes because they "take you to the heart of reality. Then, for all intents and purposes, you are in heaven. You practice that loving-kindness; you look at everyone with those eyes of compassion and joy and equanimity, and there's nowhere else to go. You're home" (Joanna Macy [https://www.buddhistinquiry.org/article/the-wings-of-the-bodhisattva/]). You are content.

The Pali term *metta* derives from Sanskrit roots that originally meant friendly, affectionate, benevolent, with goodwill. In place of the common translation "loving-kindness," I think that something like "basic friendliness" or "unconditional goodwill" better

describes the predisposition or baseline attitude with which one encounters people. The Buddha recommends *metta* practice in two discourses found in the Pali Canon. In one spiritual exercise popular today, the practitioner radiates *metta* ("may all beings be safe and happy") in all directions, starting with oneself—"may I be secure and happy"—and gradually extends the focus to include family and friends, followed by acquaintances, then people we don't like, and finally all sentient beings in the universe.

As Buddhist teachers like to point out, the one who benefits most from this practice is the person who does it, because it purifies our motivations and therefore our ways of relating to other people. It helps us realize that we are not separate from each other. And more generally, developing this basic personality trait changes the way we experience and respond to the world. According to the background story for one of the Metta Suttas, the Buddha sent a group of monastics into the forest to meditate, but they became frightened by *devas* (earth spirits) already living there. The Buddha taught the monks *metta* practice as a way to overcome their fear: radiating their good wishes for the well-being of the *devas* placated them.

Karuna, "compassion," is one of the most important virtues in all Buddhist traditions, comparable only to *prajna*, the higher wisdom that is enlightenment. *Com-passion*—literally "suffering with"—is the essential trait to be developed in our practice and expressed in our lives. We are not indifferent to the difficulties of others because we do not feel separate from them. Because *dukkha* has traditionally been understood in individual terms—as a consequence of one's own karma and mental condition—the emphasis has usually been on personal assistance. One of the challenges for Buddhism today is connecting compassion with the structural causes of social and ecological *dukkha*.

Mudita is the happiness we feel when sharing in the well-being of others. Instead of the "suffering with" of compassion, one "enjoys with," like a mother delighting in the joy of her child. This trait complements *karuna*, which can otherwise overwhelm our ability to empathize. I like what Emma Goldman said: "If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution!" The vast amount of suffering in the world does not mean we should not enjoy our lives. In fact, if our relationship with the world is not also a source of happiness, our ability to address that suffering will itself suffer. One important example, quite pertinent today, is that spending time in the natural world, communing with its other inhabitants, appreciating its serenity and beauty, can not only promote our own contentment but motivate us to work for its well-being.

Upekkha, equanimity or "even-mindedness," literally means "to look over," to see without being captured by what is seen. More generally, it is the capacity not to be disturbed by what happens to us, as we experience the eight vicissitudes of life: gain and loss, praise and blame, pleasure and pain, fame and disrepute. According to Gil Fronsdal, equanimity "is the ground for wisdom and freedom and the protector of compassion and love. While some may think of equanimity as dry neutrality or cool aloofness, mature equanimity produces a radiance and warmth of being. The Buddha described a mind filled with equanimity as 'abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility, and without ill-will.'" As this suggests,

> equanimity may be said to be the crown and culmination of the other three sublime states. The first three, if unconnected with equanimity and insight, may dwindle away due to the lack of a stabilizing factor. . . . It is the firm and balanced character of a person that knits isolated virtues into an organic and harmonious whole, within which the single qualities exhibit their best manifestations and avoid the pitfalls of their respective weaknesses. And this is the very function of equanimity, the way it contributes to an ideal relationship between all four sublime states. (Nyanaponika Thera, *The Four Sublime States* [Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1998], 27)

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His Holiness the Dalai Lama speaking during the second discussion of the fourteenth World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates in Rome, Italy, on December 12, 2014.

An ideal relationship that promotes contentment. Notice how Nyanaponika connects equanimity with insight. Equanimity is not simply a character trait that meditation develops; it becomes grounded in a realization about the nature of one's mind. In other words, it is characteristic of awakening. Ultimately, in Mahayana terms, it is an aspect of *shunyata*: insofar as my true nature is "empty" of any fixed form, ultimately there is no-thing to be disturbed.

There is, however, another divine abode that I think deserves to be added to the traditional four *brahmaviharas*. Perhaps it is already implicit in the others, but it merits more recognition, because "gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others" (Cicero).

According to the Dalai Lama, "the roots of all goodness lie in the

appreciation of gratitude," but frankly it has taken me a long time to appreciate the importance of that appreciation. Of course it's good to be grateful, so what's the point of emphasizing something so obvious? Eventually I realized something that hadn't been so obvious, at least to me: gratitude is not just something you feel, or not, but a transformative *practice*. "The day I acquired the habit of consciously pronouncing the words 'thank you,' I felt I had gained possession of a magic wand capable of transforming everything" (Omraam Mikhael Aivanhov). Including oneself.

As the poet John Milton expressed it, "Gratitude bestows reverence, allowing us to encounter everyday epiphanies, those transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience life and the world." There are two aspects to gratitude: appreciation of something, and thankfulness directed to its source or cause. As we habitually reflect on all the things we can be grateful for, the two merge and become a facet of our character. According to James Baraz, who teaches dharma courses on Awakening Joy, psychological studies show that people who are depressed improve when they end each day by writing down ten things they're grateful for that happened that day.

In his autobiography *Tales of Wonder*, the religion scholar Huston Smith describes an arduous month-long practice period at Myoshinji Zen monastery in Kyoto. When it was over and time to say goodbye, Smith went to pay his respects to the teacher, Zuigan Goto Roshi, who surprised him by knocking Zen off its pedestal: koans can be useful, but they are not Zen. Zazen—Zen meditation—is not Zen either. *Then what the hell is Zen?* Smith wondered.

> "You will be flying home tomorrow," he [Goto] said. "Don't overlook how many people will help you get home—ticketing agents, pilots, cabin attendants, those who prepare your meals." He bowed and placed his palms together, demonstrating *gassho*, the gesture of gratitude. . . . Then he did a *gassho* to me. "Make your whole life unceasing gratitude," he said. "What is Zen? Simple, simple, so simple. Infinite gratitude toward all things past; infinite service to all things present; infinite responsibility to all things future. Have a safe journey home." And he gave me a wonderful smile. "I am glad you came." (Huston Smith, *Tales of Wonder* [New York: HarperCollins, 2009], 133–34)

Does this teaching help us understand karma? Whether or not karma is some objective cosmic law about moral cause and effect, as it is usually understood, it is a deep subjective truth about how our attitude toward the world literally changes the way we experience the world—and also the way that the world usually responds to us. From the beginning, Buddhism has emphasized intention. If what we do is motivated by the three poisons—greed, ill will, delusion—our actions are likely to create problems for ourselves as well as others. If, however, what we do is motivated by generosity, loving-kindness, and the wisdom that recognizes our interdependence, then the results are likely to be positive. Add the infinite gratitude that Goto Roshi teaches and one's world is transformed. Is this the key to genuine, lasting contentment?

With such a practice, means and ends—the exercise and its fruits—become the same thing.

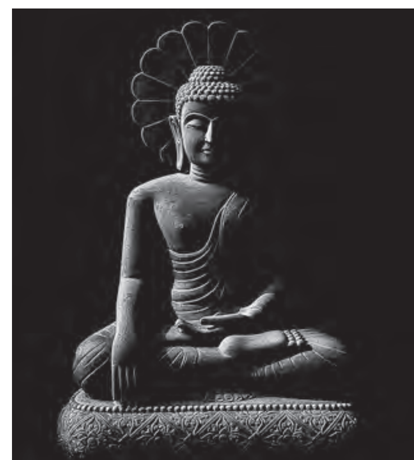
This practice is all the more important because we live in a culture that does *not* encourage us to be grateful. In fact, we are encouraged not to be grateful: consumerism involves dissatisfaction, because if people are happy with what they've got, then they are less concerned about getting more. But why is more and more always better if it can never be enough? "If a fellow isn't thankful for what he's got, he isn't likely to be thankful for what he's going to get" (Frank A. Clark).

As the Christian brother David Stendl-Rast puts it: "We are not grateful because we are happy, we are happy because we are grateful" [https://grateful.org/resource/want-to-be-happy-be-grateful].

The English word gratitude derives from the Latin *gratis*, meaning "for thanks," in the sense of "for nothing else in return, without recompense." We still use the term *gratis*, meaning something is "free of charge." Insofar as we are thankful, we participate in a gift economy rather than the exchange economy (where we pay for what we receive). Exchange emphasizes our separateness: transaction concluded, we go our own ways. Gratitude reinforces our connectedness: appreciation binds us together.

I especially cherish the way Meister Eckhart said it: if the only prayer you ever say in your life is *thank you*, that will be enough.

To cultivate these five *brahmaviharas* is not to live in a heavenly realm that transcends this world, but to transform this world by transforming ourselves. In that way we can realize a deep contentment with our lives that is not dependent on particular circumstances that are impermanent. ❑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An image of Shakyamuni Buddha touching the ground, symbolizing his attainment of buddhahood.

On Digging Momentum

by Gregory Grieve

Contentment thrives not in material stillness but in the vitality of purposeful action.

> A monk told Jōshū: "I have just entered the monastery. Please teach me."
>
> Jōshū asked: "Have you eaten your rice porridge?"
>
> The monk replied: "I have eaten."
>
> Jōshū said: "Then you had better wash your bowl."
>
> At that moment the monk was enlightened.
>
> —Jōshū's "Wash Your Bowl"

In November of 2023, I found myself in Busan, Korea, attending the 7th World Humanities Forum. The relentless grip of jet lag had me wide awake at an ungodly hour. As I gazed out my hotel window, there it was: Venus, hanging low on the horizon, gleaming like a precious gem. I was lodged near Haeundae Beach, and despite the pre-dawn darkness, an irresistible urge tugged at my soul. I grew up near a beach but now live hundreds of miles from the ocean. I felt compelled to pay my respects to the diamond-like morning star by strolling along the shoreline.

Descending to Haeundae Beach's Promenade, what greeted me was nothing short of astonishing. I was not alone in my pre-dawn pilgrimage. Dozens of souls had converged here, each pursuing their unique passions. Some scoured the sands with fervor; others captured moments through camera lenses. A painter found inspiration, martial artists practiced their forms, and a cluster of dreamers sculpted sandcastles. Before the sun had even dared grace the sky, they were all there, immersed in their chosen passions, and what struck me most profoundly was the palpable contentment that enveloped them.

I wondered to myself if contentment was the correct word, however. Contentment, at least as I have thought about it, is that serene embrace, a quiet satisfaction that washes over you when you find yourself in perfect sync with the here and now—when the relentless yearning for more is stilled, and you simply *are*, content with what is. While apparently in short supply in the contemporary world, this feeling, found across the tapestry of human cultures and spiritual beliefs, is a recurring theme, etched in the sacred scrolls of scripture and the profound musings of philosophy. Paul, Jesus's disciple, in his unwavering equanimity amidst life's turbulent storms, teaches us the essence of contentment. Zhuang Zhou, the Chinese sage, whispers his counsel on finding balance amid life's ever-shifting tides. And in the Qur'an, we find the eloquent reminder to cherish our possessions without succumbing to the venom of greed.

Buddha heralded contentment as pivotal in the realm of consciousness because he grasped that serene contentment's depths harbor a connection to liberation and the end of suffering. This truth is conspicuously evident in various Buddhist texts, none more so than in Case 7 of the thirteenth-century Chinese text, *The Gateless Gate* (無門関 *Mumonkan*), known as Jōshū's "Wash Your Bowl." In this case, a newly arrived monk, fresh to the monastery's austere corridors, humbly sought guidance from the revered Master Jōshū. Jōshū's reply, "Have you eaten your rice porridge?" assumes the guise of a metaphor, signifying the fundamental necessities of life. The act of nourishment carries the essence of contentment, for it is in partaking of what we possess that we discover the profound stillness within us.

Jōshū's ensuing directive, "Then you had better wash your bowl," extends an invitation to the monk—an invitation to embrace the profound practice of contentment within one's immediate circumstances. The monk's attainment of realization within this context serves as a symbol of the moment when he achieves a profound comprehension of the wisdom inherent in contentment. Instead of being ensnared in the ceaseless pursuit of desires or the elusive quest for external validation, the young monk awakens to the truth that authentic fulfillment resides in the profound appreciation of, and contentment with, the present moment, life's elemental necessities, and doing the next needed activity.

Mumon's commentary, "Don't you know that flame is fire? Your rice has

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long been cooked," hints at the profound depths concealed within Jōshū's discourse on contentment. It beckons us to look beneath the surface, to recognize that this case transcends the mere act of bowl-washing. It is an invitation to infuse contentment into the very fabric of our everyday existence, to make it a defining principle of our lives. The verse accompanying Case 7 carries a message that resonates deeply: *we may traverse great distances in search of contentment, only to realize that it has been residing within us all along*. It invites us to acknowledge and embrace the inherent contentment that lies dormant within our being, patiently waiting for recognition.

The act of washing your bowl poses a challenge, standing in stark contrast to our consumer-driven society's prevailing ethos. Under the deceptive veneer of the pursuit of happiness and satisfaction, those of us who live in a consumer society are incessantly prompted to yearn for more material possessions and an enhanced, perfected self. In this society, consumption reigns supreme, occupying a central position in the lives of its inhabitants. The relentless pursuit of material wealth and the ceaseless promotion of commodities through ubiquitous advertising define its essence. Mass production, the reliance on credit, and the throwaway mentality are unmistakable hallmarks, with personal identity inexplicably tethered to one's consumption choices. To sustain these habits, people toil tirelessly, like hungry ghosts, and the very bedrock of economic growth hinges on ever-increasing consumption. Yet beneath the veneer of prosperity and the abundance of offerings lies the perils of excess, environmental degradation, and the shallowness of materialism.

Contentment emerges as a countervailing force, pushing against the prevailing tide of consumerism that inundates our contemporary world. It asserts that authentic fulfillment and genuine well-being do not hinge on ceaseless material acquisition or pursuing an idealized self. Instead, the path to contentment beckons us to turn inward, cultivating self-awareness and seeking fulfillment in the depths of non-materialistic sources. It reminds us that the relentless quest for external goods may not be the source of our inner peace and well-being.

Thus, we return to that morning, the sun's first rays painting Haeundae Beach with its radiant hues. On that shoreline, as I said, a congregation of individuals could be witnessed, their dedication to their pursuits evident to any observer. Later in the day, in conversation with my host from the Humanities Forum, I sought to understand the meaning of this scene. In response, my host uttered, "They were digging momentum."

The term, "Digging Momentum," primarily spoken in English, encapsulates a contemporary phenomenon thriving in the heart of Korean culture. Individuals delve deep into their specific interests or hobbies with dedication. Its genesis lies in the core of DJ culture, where "digging" for the rarest and most obscure music records holds a sanctified position. Yet, as time unfurled its tapestry, "digging" shed its musical origins and found its place within the broader canvas of culture. In the vibrant landscape of Korea, "digging" evolved into something profound. It transformed into a symbol of passionate exploration into one's personal interests and hobbies—a journey not to be taken lightly but to be embraced with fervor.

The following day, still wrestling with the remnants of jet lag, I embarked on another journey to the shoreline. With the rising sun, the dawn chorus swelled, an orchestra of seagulls and the distant hum of the city stirring from slumber. Every note carried the essence of contentment, a harmonious blend with the kinetic energy of a world awakening. The activities I witnessed on Haeundae Beach were far from superficial. These individuals' fervent "digging" bore witness to their profound immersion in their chosen paths. By the end of 2023, digging momentum has etched itself deeply into the cultural tapestry of Korea. It symbolizes Korean society's transformative shift away from the shallow currents of mainstream trends toward the depths of personal exploration. It struck me then that contentment need not entail passivity or stillness; perhaps *active contentment* wields greater potency in our consumer-driven society.

On that beach, the scene unfolded much like the day before, each individual fully immersed in their role, their relentless digging momentum a testament to passion entwined with serenity.

As the golden light gently caressed the water's surface, it became abundantly clear that this was more than mere fervor—it was the tranquil satisfaction discovered within the embrace of one's passion. Digging momentum was a silent acknowledgment that in these moments of unadulterated engagement, the soul discovered its most profound contentment, igniting a flame within that rivaled even the brilliance of the dawn.

I acknowledge that digging momentum isn't a flawless solution, more like a workaround within the complex web of our consumer society. Nonetheless, for those of us navigating the currents of the contemporary world, this practice offers a unique source of contentment, joy, and overall well-being. It may not be the path to enlightenment, but it could offer insights into the essence of existence, the self, and the nature of suffering. Perhaps, when you're engrossed in something you truly "dig," it may help cultivate wisdom and compassion. While not a perfect match for the concept of contentment, digging momentum shares common ground with pursuing a meaningful and fulfilling life through spiritual growth and self-realization.

In the grip of our consumer society, digging momentum emerges as an active form of contentment, with the potential to lead the way toward virtue, moral excellence, and purposeful existence. It underscores that true happiness doesn't dwell in the pursuit of momentary pleasures but in the unwavering journey to realize life's full creative potential, while staying faithful to one's deeply ingrained values and virtues. By highlighting the significance of satisfying psychological needs through meaningful endeavors and creativity, digging momentum encourages individuals to actively unearth contentment within themselves and their connections, rather than solely seeking it through the accumulation of material possessions. During my final morning in Busan, as Venus faded and the first light of dawn crept silently over the horizon, casting its gentle glow upon Haeundae Beach, the age-old dance of discovery and contentment unfolded once more upon the sands. It was a tableau of humanity in all its diversity; regardless of their background, everyone was immersed in the intimate embrace of their own digging momentum. Every movement of focus resembled a brush stroke, adding another layer to the masterpiece of a life well-lived. In this collective rite of individuals, they did more than merely resist the seductive calls of our consumerist society; they transcended it. They unearthed a profound richness in the simplicity of their actions and the depth of their engagement. Like Jōshū telling the young monk to wash his bowl, the people on the beach's dedication served as a vivid testament to the idea that fulfillment often resides not in the relentless pursuit of material gain but in the deliberate choice to cherish and explore the treasures within one's grasp.

As I sat on the sand, it dawned upon me that this was a practice akin to active meditation, a living embodiment of the belief that contentment does not reside in the static realm of material gratification but thrives in the dynamic currents of purposeful endeavor. Digging momentum is a meditation of life itself, one that urges us to treasure each passing moment and every modest joy, fostering a profound satisfaction with the here and now. It compels us to nurture the passions that propel us forward on this intricate journey of existence.

Upon that very shore in Busan, digging momentum was not a mere pop-cultural phenomenon but a reflective mirror, echoing the potential for contentment within each of us. It beckoned us to ponder whether the wellspring of contentment emerges from the union of passion and presence, where the dance of engagement with the world meets the serenity within oneself. In the symphony of that morning, with the sun casting long shadows and the atmosphere brimming with the promise of a new day, I stumbled upon a tranquil acceptance of life as it exists, not as I wished it to be. And within that acceptance, I unearthed a contentment as boundless as the vast sea.

We need to ask ourselves, "Have we dug momentum?" While one might see digging momentum as inauthentic and faddish, my experience on that dawn morning was that it was a way to push back against consumer society strategically. It challenges the essence of our consumer-driven culture by championing a deeper, more profound route to fulfillment—one rooted in inner growth and authentic human bonds. On that Busan beach, digging momentum was not merely a cultural phenomenon; it was a mirror reflecting our potential for contentment. It suggested that perhaps the most profound contentment comes from the marriage of passion and presence, from the interplay of engagement with the world and peace within oneself. In the morning symphony, with the light casting long shadows and the air filled with the promise of a new day, I found a serene acceptance of life as it is, not as I wished it to be. And in that acceptance, I discovered contentment as vast as the sea, teaching me that the essence of a fulfilled life might lie in the joy of the journey rather than the destination.

I realized that digging momentum is active meditation. It certainly possesses a family relation to Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura's notion of the flow state, feeling fully immersed in an activity, or the Greek *eudaimonia*, or human flourishing. It embodies the philosophy that contentment thrives not in material stillness but in the vitality of purposeful action. It is a meditation that encourages us to cherish each moment and each small joy, to cultivate a sense of satisfaction with the present, and to nurture the passions that propel us forward.

How are *you* digging momentum? ❑

Contentment in the Age of Technology: A Case for Cautious Optimism

by Joshua C. Gellers

Joshua C. Gellers, PhD, is a professor of political science at the University of North Florida, an expert with the Global AI Ethics Institute, and a former Fulbright scholar to Sri Lanka. His research focuses on environmental governance, rights, and technology. He has published over two dozen articles, edited Earth System Governance on AI and Digitalization*, and written two books,* The Global Emergence of Constitutional Environmental Rights *(Routledge 2017) and* Rights for Robots: Artificial Intelligence, Animal and Environmental Law *(Routledge 2020). Follow him on Twitter/X @ JoshGellers.*

Contentment is a "cardinal virtue" achieved by the deliberate cultivation of mental and spiritual tranquility.

We live in a time of great technological advancement. Developments once considered the stuff of science fiction have now invaded our reality. Innovations from autonomous vehicles to genetic editing to robot bartenders have entered human society, with the promise of making life easier, longer, more efficient, and less dreadful. But we have also witnessed the emergence of technological applications designed with less noble intentions in mind, including biased algorithms, military drones powered by artificial intelligence, and social media platforms that bring out our worst qualities.

Attempting to determine whether such novel technologies are inherently good or bad may prove impossible. Experts participating in this debate traditionally fall into one of two camps—techno-optimists or techno-pessimists. The former argue that the benefits outweigh the risks, whereas the latter find the downsides too great to ignore. The trouble with performing such a seemingly straightforward analysis is that some of the very same technologies lauded for their emancipatory potential can and are being used in ways that pose grave harm to humans, animals, and nature.

Another way to think about the overwhelmingly complex impact of technology is to focus our discussion using the narrower lens of contentment. Contentment is a concept found in many world religions that holds particular significance in Buddhist traditions. For Buddhists, contentment (*santosa*) serves as one of the four sources of happiness (Thera 2014). As one scholar explains, contentment involves the "lack of desire to acquire anything except what comes of itself without exertion and what is absolutely necessary for bare living" (Shakya 2019, p. 174). Thus, happiness resides, at least in part, in consciously avoiding consumption unnecessary for one's continued existence.

On its face, this definition suggests a kind of minimalism likely to be violated by the excesses, materiality, and superfluousness of modern technological life. After all, much of what qualifies as technology involves devices, techniques, or practices intended to deliver improvements over the status quo, not its maintenance. Fire opened up new dietary options that may have spurred human intellectual development; agriculture allowed humans to settle in one place; and the steam engine sped up commerce and communication. Such examples of thoroughly disruptive technologies represent exciting changes in the course of human history to be sure, but they were arguably not *necessary* in the literal sense. Some of what flies under the banner of technology these days is even less so (think: TikTok dance videos).

But contentment need not dwell exclusively in austerity and familiarity. Far from championing a "vacuum of life experience," contentment can embrace technology to the extent that it facilitates meaningful ends like "expressing gratitude, educating oneself, [and] engaging with the arts, friendships or altruistic activities" (Kjønstad 2020, p. 9). That is to say, technology can work in the service of contentment if it is deployed in a mindful, deliberate manner.

By taking a broader view of the possibilities for contentment enabled by emerging technologies, I hope to

demonstrate that the divide between techno-optimism and techno-pessimism constitutes a false choice. We need not commit ourselves to the view that technology is generally good or generally bad, and the path to this more enlightened perspective is paved by contentment. I adopt a stance of *cautious optimism* that, while not discounting the serious downsides of technology, probes and even celebrates some of the advances already dawning on our horizon. In particular, I examine three forms of technology—mobile phone applications, robotics, and social media—that may meaningfully contribute to the quest for contentment, providing us with some measure of comfort while keeping us sensitized to the presence of potential and realized pitfalls.

With an ever-increasing array of mobile apps available in various online stores, it is not likely that many of them will sow the seeds of our contentment. After all, there is a stunning diversity of products to select from, including apps focused on everything from entertainment to food to productivity to travel and beyond. These areas hardly figure as central to "bare living."

Furthermore, lurking behind the apparent convenience, fun, and utility of such apps resides the profit motive of the companies that build them and the clients they serve. Interestingly, this very variety has been characterized as enabling the satisfaction of "almost every basic need" (Kushnir 2023), which certainly *sounds* like a fruitful (if ambitious) way of fostering contentment.

But two types of mobile apps in particular—healthcare and religious—offer promising examples of technology that may promote contentment. In the healthcare domain, there is some evidence that mobile apps can improve certain outcomes related to mental health and quality of life issues (Grundy 2022). These initial results speak to the capacity of mobile apps to address challenges to one's mental state, potentially correcting feelings that manifest in the form of a desire to fill emotional voids through consumptive behavior. More plainly, such apps may strengthen mental health, thus reducing discontent with one's station in life. However, more research on this relationship is needed since many recent studies assess apps that have not been readily available to the general public.

Religious apps play numerous roles in spiritual life. They allow users to study scripture, engage in prayer, watch or participate in live services, learn about religion, practice meditation and mindfulness, locate restaurants that meet religious standards, and connect with members of faith communities.

Although research on the effectiveness of religious apps is scarce, one recent study regarding a spiritual self-care app reports that users who engaged with the app more frequently were more likely to experience lower levels of anxiety and greater personal spiritual well-being (Park, et al. 2023). While no single study is dispositive, this initial set of findings lends some credence to the idea that this kind of technology may encourage behaviors conducive to contentment.

Over a century has passed since Karel Čapek's play *Rossum's Universal Robots* gave us the Czech word "robota," meaning "forced labor." Today, robots can be found in many sectors, including banking, education, hospitality, manufacturing, and medicine. While conventional wisdom holds that we will replace human labor with robots when the tasks are considered dull, dirty, or dangerous, the increasing presence of robots in social spaces adds a new layer to this discussion. Indeed, a whole generation of scholars (myself included) are finding that social robots may be eligible for elevated moral or legal status based on their capacities and relations with living beings (Gunkel, et al. 2022). But how might the rise of robots affect us and our pursuit of contentment?

Robots can be deployed in a variety of contexts to perform a range of functions that contribute to contentment. For instance, robot tutors have been shown to improve learning outcomes among students (Belpaeme, et al. 2018). Robots have helped reduce feelings of loneliness for people living in a residential care facility (Robinson, et al. 2013). One team of researchers suggests that robots could assist humans as partners in art therapy (Cooney and Menezes 2018). These examples illustrate that, beyond their reputation as mere tools or toys, robots can enrich our daily lives and clear some of the modern roadblocks obstructing our happiness.

Finally, social media can also play a role in the cultivation of contentment. This claim may no doubt seem strange to the reader, as social media was identified at the outset of this essay as one of the chief exemplars of technology's maleficence. But that criticism reflects only one side of the coin. While the drawbacks of social media use are immense and well-known—addiction, cyber-bullying, depression, privacy violations, and the spread of misinformation, to name but a few—less commonly appreciated are the benefits, many of which feed into our contentment and well-being.

The effects of social media vary in terms of usage and by user. Evidence suggests that limited use can positively impact one's well-being (Twenge 2019), but that such impacts may differ on a person-to-person basis (Beyens, et al. 2020). With those caveats in mind, social media can brighten our lives in some important ways:

Firstly, it offers a platform for unprecedented levels of human connectivity. This kind of peer-to-peer access can build empathy, reveal new cultures and perspectives, and generate

a sense of camaraderie with people located all over the world. To wit, some of my co-authors are folks I have never actually met in person, but we found each other through our participation in social media.

Secondly, it can help us to educate ourselves, enhancing our knowledge on many subjects and empowering us with the acquisition of new skills. Thanks to social media, for instance, I learned how to tune up an old lawnmower, restoring it to its former working condition.

Thirdly, it can expand awareness of important social causes and direct resources to address these problems. For example, one study finds that people who post about a charitable organization on social media are more likely to volunteer time or donate money to the group (Wallace, et al. 2017)—acts that can promote happiness. These examples only scratch the surface of the ways social media can positively contribute to our contentment.

Although the above review is by no means exhaustive, it does highlight how emerging technologies augment our ability to lead meaningful lives. Of course, the degree to which this remains true requires vigilance and the implementation of certain safeguards. Companies should be prohibited from obtaining personal data without user consent and monetizing it in a manner that promotes excess consumption and mindless activity. Governments should regulate technology companies and avoid engaging in the kind of surveillance and utilization of biased algorithmic output that threatens our well-being. The public, especially marginalized and vulnerable people, will need to play an active role in the development and assessment of new technologies to ensure that they are designed in a just manner with their happiness in mind (Costanza-Chock 2020).

Contentment is more than a state of basic existence, of mere physical survival. It is a "cardinal virtue" (Shakya 2019, p. 174) achieved by the deliberate cultivation of mental and spiritual tranquility. When obtained, contentment fulfills the wish of happiness. Although technology might not seem like an obvious partner in this journey, I hope to have shown that it can be, even while our relationship with it remains ambivalent (Wadhwa and Palvia 2018). For these reasons, I remain cautiously optimistic about the prospects of harnessing technology to make our lives richer, more meaningful, and ultimately happier. ❑

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NIWANO PEACE PRIZE

The 41st Niwano Peace Prize Is Awarded to Professor Mohammed Abu-Nimer

Reasons for Selection

by Flaminia Giovanelli

The Niwano Peace Foundation announced the selection of the Palestinian-American professor Mohammed Abu-Nimer as the 2024 recipient of the Niwano Peace Prize, in recognition of his lifelong dedication to peace and interfaith dialogue. The reason for selection issued by Dr. Flaminia Giovanelli, chair of the Niwano Peace Prize Committee, follows.

During a period marked by some of the darkest hours the world has faced since the beginning of the Millennium, with two major wars underway and more than fifty-five armed conflicts between states, I carry the responsibility and honor to announce, on behalf of the Niwano Peace Prize Committee (NPPC), that the 41st Niwano Peace Prize shall be awarded to Professor Mohammed Abu-Nimer.

A Palestinian-American scholar and peace activist, Dr. Abu-Nimer has dedicated his entire life, since his youth, to the cause of peace and interfaith dialogue. Given that his homeland, Israel/Palestine, is currently torn apart by one of the worst wars in the region, and considering that the title of his initial book is *Conflict Resolution between Arabs and Jews in Israel* (1993), I believe that it is both fitting and timely for the committee, which is tasked with honoring and encouraging precisely those who dedicate themselves to interreligious cooperation in the cause of peace, to award him this year's prize. What is most impressive about Dr. Abu-Nimer is his holistic contribution to the cause of peace, which combines the practice of conflict resolution and peacebuilding with teaching.

Dr. Abu-Nimer's teaching is of two kinds. First is teaching of an academic/theoretical nature, focused on peacebuilding learning and taking place mainly at American University in Washington, D.C., and other university-level institutions. He engages in a second, more practical type of teaching aimed at resolving ongoing conflicts, including through the instrument of development, at the various institutes he himself created or helped to create around the world. These include the Salam Institute for Peace and Justice in the United States, the Peacebuilding and Development Institute at American University, the Center for Conflict Resolution and Mediation at Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute Foundation in the Philippines. Dr. Abu-Nimer's dedication to peace, rooted in his Muslim faith and Sufi teachings, serves as a source of inspiration for his work, reflecting the religious values instilled within his family. For over sixty years, his grandfather and uncle were the imams of his hometown, an interfaith village in Galilee, Northern Israel, where Muslims lived alongside numerous Christians and Druze. The 2024 Niwano Prize recipient has always been convinced that Islam offers a robust framework within which to promote peace, building on values integral to the faith, such as forgiveness, "which liberates the soul," and reconciliation. "Non-violence itself," he said, "is part of theology, and the concept of mercy is the basis of Islam since Mercy is one of the Names of God." From 1993, Dr. Abu-Nimer has significantly contributed to the exploration of Islamic principles such as reconciliation, forgiveness, and nonviolence, thereby advancing the theological understanding of Islam's stance on peace.

Dr. Abu-Nimer's rich biography illustrates how his personal and professional journey is marked by a minority status. It begins with the circumstances and place of his birth in 1962 in the Galilee; the environment in which he pursued his undergraduate studies: the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (1981–87); and the setting in which he completed his doctorate: George Mason University in the U.S. (1993). Dr. Abu-Nimer effectively and constructively navigated this status, however, championing the rights and dignity of every man and woman from all ethnic and religious backgrounds through a holistic methodology and a vision for change that links head, heart, hand, and spiritual identity.

His roles as a negotiator, mediator, and peacebuilder have made it possible for him to engage in conflict resolution in numerous parts of the world.

Dr. Mohammed Abu-Nimer, a professor at American University in Washington, D.C.

He began his peacebuilding journey in 1982, shortly after the Oasis of Peace Village (Nave Shalom) was founded near Jerusalem. His training in dialogue facilitation mainly focused on teaching participants to enable dialogues between Arab and Jewish youth. From the early 1990s, Dr. Abu-Nimer worked on Catholic-Protestant relations in Northern Ireland and Buddhist-Hindu relations in Sri Lanka, where during the civil war (1999–2007), he supported and advised the launching of the Muslim Peace Secretariat and the Peacebuilding and Development Institute Sri Lanka. Between 1999 and 2005, our prizewinner served as an advisor to the leaders of various Islamic separatist groups and the Office of the Peace Process in Mindanao, Philippines. Additionally, they were one of the first founding facilitators of the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute Foundation. Between 1993 and 1999, Dr. Abu-Nimer conducted most of the conflict resolution and peacebuilding training for civil society and faith-based organizations in the Arab Region for the Search for Common Ground program. As part of these efforts, he helped establish the first conflict resolution and community mediation center in the Gaza Strip in 1996. Moreover, when ISIS was in Northern Iraq in 2015, Dr. Abu-Nimer went to Erbil to train young religious leaders how to promote interreligious understanding and led a solidarity delegation to the holiest temple of the Yizidi in Lalish, Iraq.

Dr. Abu-Nimer has also shown his dedication to peace and dialogue on the African Continent. During ongoing conflicts in Darfur, Niger, Chad, the Central African Republic, and Nigeria, among others, he worked with religious leaders to counter violence committed in the name of religion and to overcome religious divisions. Through Salam Institute work, and between 2008–16, Dr. Abu-Nimer led a major initiative to train teachers and students in Islamic religious schools (Qur'anic School-Madrasa) in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon.

Already a full professor at the School of International Service (SIS) of American University and the Director of the Peacebuilding and Development Institute, Dr. Abu-Nimer was designated as the inaugural Abdul Aziz Said Chair in International Peace and Conflict Resolution at SIS in September 2023. In addition to his scholarly career, Dr. Abu-Nimer has initiated numerous interreligious projects at the King Abdullah Centre of Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue (KAICIID) and led them in their initial phases, including international fellowships, interreligious regional platforms, and the European Muslim Jewish Religious Council, among others. He also acted as Senior Adviser for eight years of this important Center—the first intergovernmental organization dedicated to interreligious and intercultural dialogue—and as a board member, he has participated in the nongovernmental organization Nonviolence International (NVI) for the past twenty-eight years.

Finally, his publishing output is extensive. He has authored, edited, and coedited more than seventeen books on faith-based and interfaith peacebuilding. Among his notable works are: *Nonviolence and Peacebuilding in Islam: Theory and Praxis* (2003), translated into five languages; *Evaluating Interreligious Peacebuilding and Dialogue* (2021); *Unity in Diversity: Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East* (2007), and *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims* (2007), translated into four languages. In addition to having been a cofounder and co-editor of the academic publication *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, Dr. Abu-Nimer has authored numerous articles in refereed journals, such as the *International Review of Education*, the *Journal of International and Comparative Education*, *Journal of Religious Ethics*, and many others. In summary, Dr. Abu-Nimer stands out for his holistic contribution to the field of Peacebuilding through Interreligious Dialogue. His diverse impact stems from his ability to engage effectively on multiple levels: firstly, with people at the grassroots; secondly, with structures and institutions, including educational institutions, and thirdly, at the policy level. In recognition of his outstanding contributions, the Niwano Peace Prize Committee is delighted to choose Dr. Mohammed Abu-Nimer to receive the 41st Niwano Peace Prize. ❑

ESSAY

Thich Nhat Hanh and Nikkyo Niwano: The Active Dimension of Buddhism

by Mike Sonksen

The six paramitas embody nonattachment because they are practiced while expecting nothing in return.

The Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (b. 1926) passed away on January 21, 2022, leaving behind an incredible legacy. As the author of over 100 books and known for promoting mindfulness and Engaged Buddhism, he embodied the bodhisattva spirit of helping people find liberation better than just about any spiritual leader in modern times.

Nikkyo Niwano (1906–99), the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, a lay Buddhist organization from Japan, also lived a long life like Thich Nhat Hanh, promoting a kindred Japanese version of Engaged Buddhism. Rissho Kosei-kai was founded in Tokyo in 1938 with thirty original members. Today they have one million member households worldwide, and eight American Dharma centers: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Pearl City (Hawaii), San Antonio, New York, Chicago, and Oklahoma City.

In 1970 both Thich Nhat Hanh and Nikkyo Niwano were official participants at the First World Assembly of Religions for Peace held in Kyoto, Japan. They had two public conversations a month apart—one in Tokyo and one in Kyoto. Their exchange was warm and revealed their similar goals. At one point Hanh told Niwano: "I am truly happy to see you. I am encouraged to know of your efforts for peace. Not only that, but I am sure that even those who are under fire will be encouraged that you have allowed me to speak. It is a pity that I did not know you when I came to Japan eight years ago." Held in the midst of the Vietnam War, this event was groundbreaking.

Masatoshi Kohno, a longtime Rissho Kosei-kai reverend in Japan who interacted with both Hanh and Niwano in this era, translated into English a summary of their conversation that was originally printed in a Japanese publication in 1970. The above quote from Thich Nhat Hanh is taken from Kohno's translation, which appears at the end of this essay. A close look at Thich Nhat Hanh and Nikkyo Niwano demonstrates their commonalities and how they both excelled at spreading Engaged Buddhism in the action dimension.

Both leaders were focused on modernizing Buddhism, bringing it to the masses, and promoting interfaith dialogue. Thich Nhat Hanh describes his intentions with "Engaged Buddhism" in his book, *The Pocket Thich Nhat Hanh*: "We wanted Buddhism present in every walk of life—not just in the temple, but also in our society, in our schools, our families, and our workplaces, even in politics and the military. Compassion and understanding should be present everywhere." Thich Nhat Hanh was a lifelong champion of interfaith dialogue, whether it was his friendship with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., or his celebrated book, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*.

Though Niwano is not as well-known as Hanh, his brand of what his organization calls "Everyday Buddhism for everyday people," has much in common with Thich Nhat Hanh's Engaged Buddhism. Niwano's vehicle for teaching Buddhism is the Lotus Sutra, which is considered the final teaching of the Buddha. "The Lotus Sutra," writes Niwano's son Nichiko Niwano in the book *Cultivating the Buddhist Heart*, "teaches us that everything has value, everything is to be extolled. You and I, this flower and that tree, this living being and that robot, all are worthy of praise." Nikkyo Niwano also really pushed for interfaith dialogue and he spearheaded organizations like Religions for Peace. In his quest for bringing about world peace, he felt that interfaith dialogue builds bridges across religions, countries, and cultures. Niwano even met with Pope Paul VI at the Vatican in 1965.

One of the final books Niwano wrote was *Buddhism for Everyday Life*. He believed that fundamental Buddhist practices like thinking of others first awakens your buddha nature and then ripples outward to everyone around you. He believed in making the Dharma practical and making everyday life one's Buddhist practice, with daily sutra recitations and simple acts like pushing in your chair, greeting other people with a smile, and responding cheerfully and clearly when you are spoken to. The name Rissho Kosei-kai reflects Niwano's intentions with the organization. Here's a quick summary of what the name means:

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"Rissho" means establishing the teachings of the true Dharma (Lotus Sutra) in the world. The "Ko" of Kosei signifies mutual exchange of thoughts among people seeking spiritual growth—that is, the principle of spiritual unity among all human beings. "Sei" stands for perfection of the personality and the attainment of buddhahood. "Kai" means association or society. Our purpose is to learn and understand Shakyamuni Buddha's realization of the Truth, to practice these teachings in our daily lives, and create a prosperous life, brighter society, and peaceful world. As this etymology reveals, Rissho Kosei-kai is very much in the same spirit as Hanh with Engaged Buddhism.

Hanh, as his millions of readers worldwide know, not only embodies Engaged Buddhism; he has made Buddhist practice more accessible to the Western World. Dr. Dominick Scarangello is a theologian who has translated some of Niwano's writing into English, and he is deeply familiar with the Lotus Sutra and Buddhist practices. Thich Nhat Hanh, according to Dr. Scarangello, "did a great job of adapting a monastic tradition to the contemporary world. He revamped the ordination system with both lay and monastic ordinations, and also did a great job of translating and adapting traditional ritual practices."

"It's not enough to translate the language of a tradition," Dr. Scarangello continues. "The ritual and embodied practices must also be 'translated.' The phenomenon of translation cannot be understood as just a linguistic project." Dr. Scarangello is in awe of how Thich Nhat Hanh has adapted and recontextualized the chanting of sutras: "Have you ever heard his version of the Heart Sutra? His organization chants the English and European language translations to what sounds like medieval folk music . . . or something like Templar chants."

Religious leaders participating in a plenary session during the First World Assembly of Religions for Peace in Kyoto, 1970.

The Action Dimension

In his book *Peaceful Action, Open Heart*, Thich Nhat Hanh writes about the Lotus Sutra. Essentially writing a chapter for all twenty-eight of the Lotus Sutra chapters, Hanh dives deep, explicating and illuminating the meaning, symbolism, and many messages of the text. Hanh reflects on the Lotus Sutra with a special emphasis on the bodhisattva way to help people become liberated. He declares that the Lotus Sutra is divided into both the historical dimension and ultimate dimension, but he also talks about a third dimension, which is the "Dimension of Action." He paraphrases this third action dimension as "the bodhisattva's sphere of engaged practice." In this dimension, we use our energy to help others.

"Practicing the path," Hanh writes, "and liberating beings from suffering is the action of the bodhisattvas." He begins his focus on the action dimension with chapter 20 in the Lotus Sutra. Chapter 20 features the Bodhisattva

Never Unworthy of Respect as an example of this action dimension. In chapter 20 the bodhisattva discussed is one who practices reverencing the buddha nature of everyone he comes into contact with, even those who are hostile or antagonistic. For this bodhisattva, everyone is worthy of respect no matter who they are or how they act.

Nikkyo Niwano's book *Buddhism for Today* also explicates the Lotus Sutra chapter by chapter, and his explanation of chapter 20 aligns with Hanh's. Niwano explains that "by practicing only the virtue of paying respect to others, an ordinary man realizes his faith and finally the perfection of his character." The practice of paying respect to others' buddha nature is a direct action we can all practice.

Chapter 20 is a core concept for Rissho Kosei-kai, and even the Buddha statues in their Dharma centers align with this. Rissho Kosei-kai's Buddha statues are all standing because they are in action. The standing Buddha represents a Buddha in motion helping people. Reverend Yoshizawa is the director of Rissho Kosei-kai International in North America (RKINA) based in Los Angeles at the Dharma center located in the Boyle Heights neighborhood. The reverend heard Niwano in a Dharma talk say that "Rissho Kosei-kai's Buddha statue is standing because it shows us that he is always ready to take action to help others."

Another key practice of the action dimension discussed by both is using the Six Paramitas—also called Six Perfections—to help others and practice the bodhisattva way. The Six Paramitas are generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom. These Six Paramitas are transcendent because the subject, object, and practice of the perfections are free of self, so they are said to have threefold purity. The Six Paramitas also embody nonattachment because they are practiced expecting nothing in return.

Thich Nhat Hanh writes about the Six Paramitas in chapter 28 of *Peaceful Action, Open Heart*. "The Six Paramitas are called the doors of action because this practice is the basis of the Bodhisattva path." Nichiko Niwano corroborates with Hanh when he writes in *Cultivating the Buddhist Heart*, "Cultivation of the Six Perfections is regarded as the bodhisattva practice. A bodhisattva is one who strives to emulate the Buddha and aspires to be saved, together with everyone else, by working for the happiness of others. The bodhisattva practice is impossible without a warm heart."

Thich Nhat Hanh's ideas are completely in line with Rissho Kosei-kai and the idea of everyday Buddhism for everyday people. Rissho Kosei-kai is an Engaged Buddhism very much in this dimension of action. One of Rissho Kosei-kai's primary goals is to help people manifest their buddha nature and this can be achieved faster when a person stays in action serving others.

In Nikkyo Niwano's book *Buddhism for Everyday Life*, there is a section titled "Only Action Leads to Achievement." In one of the paragraphs, he writes: "You cannot achieve a goal if you are not determined to act for it. You should apply yourself to the point where you are free from concern about gain and loss." This dimension of action is all about doing things wholeheartedly. Thich Nhat Hanh and Nikkyo Niwano propagated the idea that our everyday lives are the practice, even if it is just doing the dishes or greeting our neighbors.

Dr. Masaki Matsubara is an eighteenth generation Rinzai Zen priest and the abbot of the Zen temple Butsumoji in Chiba Prefecture, Japan, and has taught at Brown University and Hunter College in New York City. Matsubara is a Buddhist leader kindred to Hanh and Niwano with his own practice: "My everyday activities," he shares, "from sweeping my house to raising my family, my relationships, and my dreams and intentions as both a Zen priest and a scholar of Japanese Buddhism, have all found a stability in Buddhist practice that has moved me deeply and made my life feel very deep and rich. I am grateful to the many teachers who have come before me and left such a well-lit path for me to follow. These teachers, to me, include Rev. Nikkyo Niwano and Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh."

Dr. Matsubara is following in the footsteps of Thich Nhat Hanh and Nikkyo Niwano by advocating for an everyday Buddhism for these times: "Their voices always resonate deep in my mind, asking how I can apply these in this very life where I stand today."

The lines below are a summary of the 1970 conversation between Thich Nhat Hanh and Nikkyo Niwano. This was originally published in Japanese in the *Kosei Shimbun* publication on October 16, 1970. This was translated into English by Masatoshi Kohno in the spring of 2022.

Peace Is Our Desire

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano's Dialogue with Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh

One of the leading figures in the Buddhist community in South Vietnam, Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh visited then-president of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, at the Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo on the ninth of October, 1970. A sweater over the chocolate-colored monk's robe. Acorn-shaped eyes. He is forty-four years old but looks much younger than his age. When President Niwano said to him, "You are young," he replied in a calm voice, "No, you are much younger than I am." At first, it was planned to be a courtesy call on President Niwano, as the chairman of the Japanese executive committee, but it ended up being an hour talking about the Vietnam issue and other topics. Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh came to Japan to attend the World Conference of Religions for Peace and was scheduled to give a "summary and critique" of the conference in general on the final day of the conference

(October 21). The following is a summary of the dialogue.

Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh: (after thanking President Niwano for providing him with a lodging facility) I appreciate your efforts for the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

Rev. Niwano: Thank you very much. I am also grateful for your efforts because I believe that now is the time for Buddhists to make such efforts. It is very significant that a Buddhist from the Vietnam War is attending the peace conference.

Hanh: I am also thinking of making a proposal from Vietnam.

Niwano: Certainly, when we consider today's situation, we cannot just talk in abstract terms. Idealism is also not enough. In that respect, since the themes of "Disarmament," "Human Rights," and "Development" have been decided, I expect that we will be able to have quite concrete discussions at the conference.

Hanh: I intend to speak about the true picture of Vietnam through my own experiences in Vietnam.

Niwano: I have high expectations. There have been many reports on the Vietnam issue in the past, but, unfortunately, I think that most of them have captured the ironic and phenomenal side of the issue. As a religious person, I think it is most important to know the true picture when trying to think about the problem from its essence.

Hanh: I agree. I believe that the Vietnam problem must also be recognized from the standpoint of Buddhism, which transcends ideological waking and has universality—otherwise, there will be no true solution to the problem. I am truly happy to see you. I am encouraged to know of your efforts for peace. Not only that, but I am sure that even those who are under fire will be encouraged that you have allowed me to speak. It is a pity that I did not know you when I came to Japan eight years ago.

Niwano: We are going to discuss how to embody the love and compassion of God and the Buddha as religious people, based on three themes.

Hanh: I am very happy to hear your comments. However, there are some issues that we cannot do because we are in Vietnam. Therefore, I think it would be a good idea if Japanese and Vietnamese Buddhists get together and hold a seminar for cooperation. At that time, I would like President Niwano to take the initiative.

Niwano: Although there are differences between Vietnamese and Japanese Buddhism, it is important to discuss the fundamentals of the doctrine. I believe that the time has come for Buddhists to unite and discuss Buddha's teachings.

Hanh: (presenting the Japanese translation of his book *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire*): This book has been translated into eleven languages. Please read it so that you can understand my feelings. I was also deeply impressed by Rissho Kosei-kai's teaching of the Buddha and its application in daily life. When I return to Vietnam, I would like to tell people about Rissho Kosei-kai and about President Niwano.

Niwano: Thank you very much. By the way, you have 300,000 followers, is that because of your study or because of your actions?

Hanh: I became a monk at the age of sixteen and later studied Buddhist philosophy at a specialized institution. At one time, I wanted to become a writer. However, I wondered if I could make use of the teachings in my daily life, and now I am promoting a movement to make the teachings a part of my life. When I was at Columbia University in the U.S., I advocated volunteer activities among the youth and received very positive cooperation. Unfortunately, this has not been well accepted by the U.S. or North Vietnam.

Niwano: The fact that the movement was opposed by both ideologically conflicting countries is probably because it was the right thing to do. There is still hope. But seriously, there are Christians in the U.S. who share the same views as us Buddhists. So there is a good chance that we will join hands. I would like you to know this as well. For example, Dr. Greeley of the International Association for Religious Freedom.

Hanh: I am glad to hear that. I met Dr. Greeley once. I don't know the details . . . but please introduce him to me during the conference.

Niwano: I would like to ask you one last question. Is there any way to solve the Vietnam problem without receiving aid from either the free or communist countries?

Hanh: As you say, we strongly hope for that. We are very much hoping for a solution because a solution by force is not a real solution. The Vietnamese people are exhausted from the long war. They do not want to win the war. They just want peace. Therefore, a Buddhist solution is the most desirable, but as you know, the problem in Vietnam has become an international problem. Therefore, what we Vietnamese Buddhists are seeking most is the support of international Buddhists. We believe that the support of Buddhists beyond national borders will have a great impact.

Niwano: I hope that the conference will be fruitful and include such opinions. It is a great pleasure for me to meet you today. ❑

ESSAY

A Call to Be Audacious

by Keiichi Akagawa

Since 1986, the Community of Sant'Egidio has sponsored a yearly "World Day of Prayer for Peace," a gathering of religious leaders from around the world for a day of joint prayer.

In September 2023, the thirty-seventh international gathering for peace under the theme "The Audacity of Peace" was held from September 10th through the 12th in Berlin. Representing Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Keiichi Akagawa, the director of Rissho Kosei-kai International, gave a speech during one of the sessions held under the theme "The Humanitarian Emergencies of Our Time." Rev. Yoshinori Shinohara, representing Religions for Peace Japan and Asia, also gave a speech during one of the sessions held under the theme "A World Free from Nuclear Weapons." Their addresses follow.

Thank you for my introduction, Moderator. Good morning, everyone. I am very happy to be invited to this year's annual prayer meeting. I am also grateful that, following the protracted influence of COVID-19, we can once again meet in person.

My name is Keiichi Akagawa, and I am the director of Rissho Kosei-kai International. Rissho Kosei-kai is a lay Mahayana Buddhist organization established in Japan in 1938, and today has some one million member households throughout the world. I would like to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to the Community of Sant'Egidio for inviting Rissho Kosei-kai to participate in this gathering and giving me the opportunity to speak at this conference, as in past years.

Audacity Means Taking Risks

I would like to begin with the main theme of this conference. The word "audacity" means "a willingness to take bold risks." When I learned the meaning of this word, the first thing that came to mind was the Buddha Shakyamuni. Shakyamuni was full of the spirit of "audacity" when he taught human equality, declaring that any person, regardless of age, gender, or nationality, could awaken and achieve liberation from the bonds of suffering.

The word "audacity" also reminds me of a scene from forty-five years ago. At the United Nations First Special Session on Disarmament in 1978, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, appealed to the leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union, the two Cold War adversaries, to work for peace with the following words:

> May we, motivated by our several religions, suggest that risks must be taken by statesmen for peace as they are obviously taking risks today with arms? I ask especially President Carter and First Secretary Brezhnev, instead of taking risks with arms, please take major risks for peace and disarmament. We urge national and regional initiatives for disarmament, which may or may not require immediate reciprocation. We pray that some State, out of strength and not weakness, will take major risks for peace and disarmament.

Audacity is taking bold risks, and only by taking risks can we achieve peace. For this reason, peace is always "audacious."

The Humanitarian Crises of Our Time

The theme of this session is "The Humanitarian Emergencies of Our Time." Despite the economic and technological progress humanity has made, humanitarian emergencies and crises seem to continually arise. There are, unfortunately, too many humanitarian crises to discuss in detail, but I will identify some of the most prominent emergencies or crises facing humanity today.

Keiichi Akagawa is the director of Rissho Kosei-kai International of Rissho Kosei-kai.

On June 12, 1978, as a representative of Religions for Peace, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, addressed the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament.

First is the humanitarian emergencies in Ukraine following the invasion by Russia. This conflict has caused the displacement of civilians, destruction of infrastructure, an enormous loss of life, and strained access to essential resources. The conflict cries out for international efforts to alleviate suffering and restore peace and stability in the region.

Second, the Rohingya people, an ethnic and religious minority group in South Asia, have faced a continuing humanitarian crisis spanning decades. Their situation involves persecution and displacement, and is complicated by complex geopolitical factors.

Third, the humanitarian emergencies resulting from the Yemen civil war are deeply concerning. The war has led to widespread suffering and disease among the civilian population from severe shortages of food, clean water, and medical supplies.

Fourth, the humanitarian crisis in Syria is a complex and ongoing situation characterized by internal conflict, displacement, and the widespread violation of human rights.

Fifth is the migration crisis in Europe and North America. A large influx of migrants and refugees fleeing conflict, persecution, poverty, and environmental change has presented significant challenges to both continents.

Finally, climate change is increasingly being recognized as a humanitarian emergency due to its profound impact on vulnerable populations and the potential to exacerbate existing social, economic, and political challenges.

Palliative Care

The Buddha was often called the great physician because he taught people how to heal spiritual sicknesses. And just like a doctor, the Buddha treated spiritual illness in two ways: First, he brought people comfort and ease by treating the sufferings they experienced from spiritual illnesses. These practices are like a doctor's palliative care that reduces the sufferings that accompany the symptoms of illness. Second, the Buddha taught practices to cure the underlying spiritual illnesses that are the causes of human suffering. This can be compared to a doctor's curative care, which eliminates the disease that is the root cause of suffering.

Faced with the immense human suffering of the many humanitarian emergencies of our time, we must act to alleviate people's immediate suffering. To give some examples of this kind of palliative care, I will share with you those I know best—a few of the efforts of Rissho Kosei-kai.

The oldest is the "Donate-a-Meal" movement, which began as a response to hunger. Today, the funds from the Donate-a-Meal Fund for Peace are used

to implement support activities to areas in need through a wide variety of projects in twelve countries that focus on poverty alleviation; education and human resource development; emergency and reconstruction assistance; environmental initiatives and refugee assistance; as well as health, medicine, and welfare.

Other ways in which Rissho Kosei-kai has tried to alleviate the suffering of people around the world include providing financial and moral support for two of the peace projects of Sant'Egidio: the DREAM project and the BRAVO project.

In the 1980s, Rissho Kosei-kai became involved in supporting refugees from Vietnam by establishing reception centers in Japan. And also, like many of the religious groups represented here today, Rissho Kosei-kai has provided assistance to refugees displaced by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

These are just a few of the ways we've tried to respond to humanitarian crises, and I know that all the faiths represented here today have likewise worked tirelessly to alleviate the immediate human suffering of the humanitarian emergencies of our time.

Curative Care

We must respond to those who are suffering and bring them comfort and ease. But in his wisdom, the Buddha also taught us that we should not confuse alleviating the pain and difficulty of immediate suffering with true liberation. Similarly, the good doctor alleviates the suffering of a symptom, while at the same time working to eliminate the underlying disease causing the symptom.

We all intuitively understand this. Suppose that people who frequently suffer headaches caused by high blood pressure take ibuprofen for the pain. They will experience temporary relief from discomfort, but they are not truly free of the problem. They will never fully recover from intermittent headaches as long as they do not deal with their high blood pressure, which is the root cause.

Humanitarian emergencies arise one after another because their underlying causes remain largely untreated. Our immediate responses save lives, and so on an individual level, we do help people attain liberation from suffering, but I believe that to achieve lasting peace and an end to the unremitting rise of humanitarian emergencies, we must also seek to treat the root causes of humanitarian crises. For this, I am guided by the teachings of the Buddha.

The Buddha taught that the underlying diseases that cause human suffering are the greed, anger, and ignorance in our hearts, which he called the "three poisons." Among these, ignorance is the most fundamental. This is a specific type of ignorance. It is ignorance of the oneness of ourselves and other people. Our lives are interdependent and interwoven, and from the standpoint of the Lotus Sutra, Rissho Kosei-kai's primary scripture, we are all manifestations of the very same entity, and so humanity is one. Each faith knows this entity, this underlying oneness, by different names. For those of us who practice the Lotus Sutra, we envision this entity as the Eternal Original Buddha, and we believe we are all the Buddha's children. Because of this fundamental unity, another person's suffering is our own suffering, and causing harm to another is actually harming ourselves. Our failure to understand this is the fundamental ignorance that brings greed and anger into being, and all human sufferings, including war, racial strife, economic disparity, prejudice, and even the climate crisis, are in one way or another, outgrowths of the anger and greed caused by ignorance.

The curative care for humanitarian crises is found in transforming the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance into generosity, compassion, and wisdom. The Lotus Sutra teaches me that this can be done by practicing the bodhisattva way. Simply put, the bodhisattva way is living life in the recognition of the oneness of humanity.

If we were to awaken to our underlying entity, which we can think of as a great life that sustains equally all of us—a great life that we all live together—we could also embrace the diverse countries, cultures, ways of thinking, and many faiths of humanity. And realizing the oneness of ourselves and others would even open our eyes to the deep truth that, as manifestations of the very same entity that gives us the gift of life, those whom we see as our enemies are here in this world to teach us something, and to make us better, wiser, more humane people.

A Call to Be "Audacious"

I realize that it is difficult for us to show the world a path toward permanent solutions to humanitarian crises. However, we can help move our societies and nations in a better direction. You can see yourself and those around you as one, and expand that vision to include your local community, your country, and the people of other countries and faiths as forming one existence, as comprising one life. Please live this truth and share it with everyone.

This will require audacity. We will have to take risks. But making many more friends—friends who love and care for the people of other countries and faiths as they do their own—will lead to the realization of a world in which everyone can live in peace and comfort.

I would like to conclude my remarks by expressing my gratitude for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you. Thank you for your kind attention. ❑

ESSAY

Peace through Common Action

by Yoshinori Shinohara

Yoshinori Shinohara is the secretary general of Religions for Peace Japan and Asia.

Since its founding, Religions for Peace has sought to bring together the diverse resources of religions to achieve common action.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak at the session on "A World Free from Nuclear Weapons." I am Yoshinori Shinohara, secretary general of Religions for Peace Japan and Asia.

First of all, I would like to express my heartfelt respect to the Community of Sant'Egidio and all those who have been holding this Prayer Meeting every year for thirty-seven years since 1986. In the midst of the challenging international situation, I am amazed at how many people have been encouraged by this Prayer Meeting.

Photo: Source: Wikimedia Commons File Bulletin Atomic Scientists Cover.jpg

The cover of the 1947 Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists *issue featuring the Doomsday Clock at "seven minutes to midnight."*

Religions for Peace is an international organization founded in 1970 to promote peace activities through solidarity among various religions. It has been granted General Consultative Status by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 1999. Religions for Peace is engaged in peace activities such as conflict reconciliation, disarmament, humanitarian activities, environmental protection, and peace education, through interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

One of the main reasons for the founding of Religions for Peace was the abolition of nuclear weapons, since the world's religious leaders—who feared the imminent destruction of humanity due to the extraordinary nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union from 1960 to 1970—stood up for the prevention of nuclear war and the abolition of nuclear weapons, advocating love for humanity and brotherhood, and formed Religions for Peace.

Fifty-three years have passed since then. However, nuclear weapons have not disappeared, and the threat of nuclear war has only increased in recent years. The Doomsday Clock of *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, an American scientific journal, shows the worst time so far this year. This means that we are living in the midst of a great crisis. One of the main reasons for this is the growing risk of nuclear weapons use around the situation in Ukraine. President Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials often refer to the use of nuclear weapons.

What action is required of religious leaders in response to this situation? Religions for Peace Japan, a coalition of religious leaders based in Japan (the only country to have experienced the use of nuclear weapons in wartime), has been discussing and trying to take action to overcome this difficult international situation.

This May, the G7 Summit was held in Hiroshima. Religions for Peace places a high priority on dialogue with political leaders in peacebuilding. One of its most important actions is to bundle the voices of the world's religious leaders and bring them directly to political leaders. Religions for Peace Japan delivered in person a statement made by Japanese religious leaders on various global issues to the Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who served as chair of the G7 Summit in Hiroshima. We were deeply aware of the significance of the G7 Summit held in Hiroshima, the site of the atomic bombing in 1945. Since we had a strong hope that nuclear war would never happen again, our statement was titled "Religious Leaders' Recommendations for the G7

Photo: REUTERS / AFLO

U.S. President Joe Biden, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and other G7 leaders pose for a photo before a working session on Ukraine during the G7 Summit in Hiroshima, Japan, on May 21, 2023.

Summit—Aiming for Sustainable Peace Guided by the Spirit of Hiroshima." The six items requested in this statement urged the following: "Reversing the trend from division to reconciliation and from opposition to dialogue," "Averting nuclear war and abolishing nuclear weapons," "Fulfilling the responsibility for global sustainability," "Fulfilling the responsibility to achieve the SDGs," "Correcting extreme economic disparity," and "Protecting the freedom of religion."

In particular, we emphasized recommending that G7 counties repeatedly issue the message that the use of nuclear weapons will not be tolerated under any circumstances, along with the early abolition of nuclear weapons because we are now facing an increased risk of the use of nuclear weapons by the Ukraine crisis. And we insisted that this war has infected the world with a strong binary opposition of mutual distrust, in which the world is clearly divided into friend and enemy. In response to the current situation, the countries participating in the G7 Summit should take the initiative to send out and move from division to reconciliation and from confrontation to dialogue in order to end the war.

The G7 Hiroshima Summit has both achievements and challenges. As for achievements, it was historically significant that the G7 Summit was held in Hiroshima, that the leaders of the seven countries prayed at the Cenotaph for the atom bomb victims, that they visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, and that they realized dialogue with the A-bomb survivors. The fact that the leaders of the seven countries made a note at the museum and sent a message of peace, even if only as a "personal wish," was a ray of light. I understand that this is because they learned about the reality of the atomic bombing in Hiroshima, and that they accepted the spirit of Hiroshima. It is certain that the world's attention was drawn to that region and the momentum for the abolition of nuclear weapons was further strengthened.

Unfortunately, however, I must also point out that there are some issues related to our proposal statement. The first is that in the "G7 Leaders' Hiroshima Vision on Nuclear Disarmament," which was an official statement, there is no indication of a will to abolish nuclear weapons; rather, it justifies in the A-bombed city the theory of nuclear deterrence and acknowledges the maintenance and possession of nuclear weapons. I must express our regret at the contradictory stance shown by the government, which acknowledges the existence of nuclear weapons, realizing the tragedy therein. Second, with regard to the situation in Ukraine, the discussion of military assistance to Ukraine and the strengthening of sanctions against Russia was limited to a discussion of the two sides of the conflict—a trend that has further deepened the confrontation by presupposing which side is considered the "enemy." It is also regrettable that there was no message on a broad vision toward ending the war or on efforts toward dialogue and reconciliation to resolve the situation. We must not forget that the G7 should make diplomatic efforts toward a ceasefire, not just to strengthen the confrontation of power with power.

We will continue to work through dialogue with political leaders to pave the way for the abolition of nuclear weapons and an end to war.

Furthermore, Religions for Peace Japan considers action by religious leaders themselves to be of paramount importance, in addition to appeals to political leaders for peacebuilding. With regard to the situation in Ukraine, where there is an increased possibility of nuclear weapons use, we, as religious people, have taken steps to resolve the situation of this crisis.

So, in an effort to bring this serious tragedy to an early end, last year Religions for Peace Japan, together with our global network, held the First Tokyo Peace Roundtable dialogue, where religious leaders from Russia and Ukraine participated to discuss reconciliation. Approximately one hundred religious leaders and government officials from Ukraine, Russia, and fourteen other countries in the Middle East and Asia participated as well. We focused on the religious values and religious influences that are important to both sides and aimed to promote reconciliation between religious leaders.

Photo: Religions for Peace Japan

H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel Adamakis, Elder Metropolitan of Chalcedon, speakes during the First Peace Roundtable, September 21–29, 2022, in Tokyo.

The significance of this Roundtable was the realization of the simultaneous presence of delegates from both Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox Churches, which confirmed the effectiveness of the dialogue. From Russia, a representative of the Russian Orthodox Church attended on behalf of Patriarch Kirill. Other Russian participants included the president of the Russian Muslim Spiritual Assembly and the director of the Federation of Russian Jewish Communities.

The official representative of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was the archbishop in charge of public relations. Also present from Ukraine were a Greek Catholic priest and the director of the Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. In addition, a unique feature of this Roundtable was the presence of representatives from the Greek Orthodox Church (Constantinople), which has deep historical ties to both the Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches. We had the presence of H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel Adamakis, Elder Metropolitan of Chalcedon, who serves as co-moderator of Religions for Peace International. By the presence of the representatives of the Orthodox Churches of Greece (Constantinople), I believe the influence and effectiveness of the conference has increased even further.

The Roundtable was at times heated and contentious, but both sides were able to finally reach a common understanding of their future efforts, codifying it in a single mutual message. I think the most significant aspect of the Roundtable was the unanimous adoption of these statements: "All parties are committed to a process of long-term reconciliation" and wish to "continue this Peace Roundtable to build interfaith cooperation and peace." I was so impressed to witness that all the participants together made the pledge to continue this dialogue in the future.

I believe the reason why direct dialogue between Ukraine and Russia—which had not been possible in the past—was fruitfully realized in Tokyo, and why both sides were able to confirm the importance of dialogue and cooperation in common, is because the Roundtable was held in Tokyo, at great geographical distance from Ukraine. And more importantly, it is because during the Roundtable, all participants visited in Tokyo the Shinto shrine of Meiji Jingu, the Buddhist temple of Sensoji, and the lay Buddhist organization of Rissho Kosei-kai, to be able to experience Japanese religious spirituality. I humbly believe that through encounters with the spirit of harmony that these Japanese religions cherish—and the spirituality that values the relationship between people, nature, and the gods and the buddhas—the Roundtable participants, even in the midst of war, have emerged with a conviction based on religious spirituality for peace that is definitely present within them.

Of course, this single conference cannot be expected to bring about an immediate end to the war that has caused so many casualties and so much damage. This is but the first modest attempt at reconciliation—an opening salvo for peace, if you will. But Religions for Peace Japan will continue to hold these kinds of peace roundtables as often as possible, persistently seeking a path to an end to the war.

Since its founding, Religions for Peace has sought to bring together the diverse resources of religions to achieve common action. As we look toward "A World Free from Nuclear Weapons," we must more actively bring together the wisdom of our religious traditions and work together to take strong action toward a common agenda. And if the collective impact generated from this is able to affect various areas of the world and society, we may indeed one day realize our goal of a world free from nuclear weapons. If nothing is done, nothing will change. Let us work together.

Thank you very much for your attention. ❑

Photo: Religions for Peace Japan

The Tokyo Peace Roundtable brought together religious leaders from countries in the midst of conflicts to identify and assess the specific roles of multireligious leaders working together in reconciliation and rebuilding peaceful relations.

Sealing the Cracks in Your Mind

by Nichiko Niwano

Nichiko Niwano is president of Rissho Kosei-kai and an honorary president of Religions for Peace. He also serves as an advisor to Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan).

Buddhism teaches us that greed, anger, and ignorance are the basic delusions that poison people's minds. The mind that wants more than is necessary in any situation and doesn't know how to be satisfied (the greedy mind), then there is the angry mind, and finally the mind that doesn't understand the truth about reality and only considers the immediate future (the ignorant mind); these delusions bring about jealousy, hatred, and discord and cause us to suffer.

To be human is to have these delusions, often called "the three poisons," so of course they existed in the Buddha as well. However, the difference between us and the Buddha is our difficulty reining in our desires and anger. When we're unable to exercise firm control of our greed or anger, we unintentionally act rashly or do something bad, which adds extra suffering to our load.

At such times, we often say things like, "I was tempted by a demon." In Buddhist terms, this "demon" is a *māra* that does harm to others or distracts and disturbs our minds, hindering our practice of the teaching.

However, demons don't invade our minds from the outside. Just as the gods and the buddhas are projections of our own minds, demons are also products of our own minds.

Fortunately, chapter 26 of the Lotus Sutra, "Dharanis," tells us that when we receive protection in the form of a dharani, even if demons probe for our weaknesses, they will be unable to take advantage of them. Therefore, even if your mind gives rise to "hungry spirits" full of greedy desire and you start to crave one thing or another, as long as you have a dharani, you can rein in your mind before it runs wild.

Words That Encourage Us to Always Be Diligent

But what exactly are dharanis? And how do we attain them? Rissho Kosei-kai defines a dharani as something with the power to stop all forms of evil and promote all forms of good. It also explains that dharanis are mysterious words that, through their recitation, allow you to directly enter the realm of the buddhas.

To rephrase this a little more simply, a dharani is an incantation that has the power, when recited, to suppress greedy, angry, and self-centered thoughts and activate your inner buddha mind.

In the past, I have mentioned a phrase, *atomiyo sowaka* ("review what you've done, *svāhā*"), which comes from the early eighteenth-century Bushido text *Hagakure* (Eng. "hidden by the leaves"). This phrase reminds us to look and see if we've forgotten something, or to double-check our work. In other words, it's a dharani urging us to review our actions.

As *svāhā* is a word invoking buddhas that also has the meaning of "completely accomplishing a goal," it calls forth our inner buddha and turns on the switch that returns us to our buddha minds.

When I feel the blood about to rise to my head, in my mind I chant, *on niko-niko hara tatsumaizoya sowaka* ("smile, don't lose your temper, *svāhā*"). By doing so, the wave of emotion calms down and I can refrain from saying or doing something regrettable.

No matter how strong-willed you may be, it's difficult to overcome the temptations of greed, anger, and ignorance that are likened to demons. However, as long as you have a "dharani" switch that turns on self-reflection whenever cracks seem to be forming in your mind, you can seal the cracks and change your frame of mind before the demon springs into action. In my understanding, the "Dharanis" chapter teaches us how to do this because, although we've vowed to pursue the bodhisattva way, we often become confused or worried.

While the traditional usage of dharanis focuses on fulfilling a wish by chanting difficult words without understanding their meaning or logic, all dharanis have the power to always bring us back to the path of diligent practice and inspire us.

What, then, is your own personal dharani? It's something you devise and master that helps you seal any cracks that form in your mind. ❑

All Roads Lead to Awakening: Re-Enchanting the World by Transforming Our Relationship with the Environment

by Dominick Scarangello

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We and all the other existences in this world are not separate like we tend to think, and so neither is our buddha nature—our unique dynamic potentialities. We can envision ourselves sharing one grand buddha nature and actualizing a single integrated buddhahood.

Introduction: The Environmental Crisis and the "Disenchantment of the World"

> Mountains and waters right now actualize the ancient buddha expression. Each, abiding in its condition, unfolds its full potential. Because mountains and waters have been active since before the Empty eon, they are alive at this moment. Because they have been the self since before form arose, they are emancipation actualized.
>
> —Zen master Dōgen, "Mountains and Waters Sutra" (Tanahashi 2012, 154)

For this issue of *Dharma World* exploring the theme of "contentedness" and its importance to spiritual and physical wellbeing, I would like to delve into the related topic of our relationship with the environment. As societies and individuals, our lack of contentment with the material circumstances of our lives is inseparable from the environmental crisis humanity faces in the twenty-first century. Our lack of contentment manifesting as the insatiable desire for consumer goods and convenience leads directly to the ever-increasing extraction of resources from the natural environment. This rapacious exploitation scars the face of the earth through activities such as mountain-top removal mining, empties the oceans of its life by overfishing, soaks the soil of the earth and pollutes its rivers with chemicals and waste from industries like factory farming (not to mention poisoning the air with carbon emissions and other harmful byproducts of internal combustion engines).

The environmental crisis is a result of our species' industrial and technological way of life, but even though most of us are aware of this, why can't we change? Many observers have associated our mistreatment of the environment with the modern materialist view of the world as composed of lifeless matter and the notion of human beings as unique existences that stand above and apart from the natural world. We gaze upon the environment with very different eyes than our ancestors of only a few hundred years ago. They saw a world to which they were intimately interconnected—a living environment imbued with spirit, or psyche, animated by divine power, or the abode of innumerable gods and spirits. Surely, we moderns can still admire the beauty of the natural world, but our sense of matter is usually disconnected from divinity. As Morris Berman describes the modern consciousness:

> The history of the West, according to both the sociologist and the poet, is the progressive removal of mind, or spirit, from phenomenal appearances. The hallmark of modern consciousness is that it recognizes no element of mind in the so-called inert objects that surround us. The whole materialist position, in fact, assumes the existence of a world "out there" independent of human thought, which is "in here." (Berman 1981, 69)

The German sociologist Max Weber famously described this

change in human consciousness as "*die Entzauberung der Welt*," the "disenchantment of the world"; the poet Friedrich von Schiller called it "*die Entgötterung der Natur*," or the "disgodding of nature" (ibid.). Our consciousness today is what Berman styles "nonparticipating" because "knowledge is acquired by recognizing distance between ourselves and nature."

It would be an oversimplification to say that this disgodding of nature and our alienation from it is the cause of our environmental crisis, but I and many others think that it certainly facilitates it. What is to be done, then? To save the environment, and save ourselves in the process, must we turn our backs on the scientific knowledge we have gained in the last several centuries and return to pre-industrial ways of life and thinking? That is unlikely if not impossible. But we must transform both our consciousness and the way we live in human society. Morris Berman sums up our predicament thusly:

> We cannot go back to alchemy or animism—at least that does not seem likely; but the alternative is the grim, scientistic, totally controlled world of nuclear reactors, microprocessors, and genetic engineering—a world that is virtually upon us already. Some type of holistic, or participating, consciousness and a corresponding sociopolitical formation have to emerge if we are to survive as a species. (Ibid., 23)

Berman was prescient—perhaps even prophetic—when he wrote this in the early 1980s. We have already been living now for some time in the world he describes. What Berman and others hold is that for humanity to survive we will have to see the re-emergence of some sort of new participating consciousness for the twenty-first century and beyond.

Spiritual Resources for Changing Our Consciousness

Many believe that religious traditions can play an important role in encouraging the re-emergence of a new participating consciousness. As Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft observe:

> Leading environmentalists have made it clear that the dilemmas we face cannot be solved solely by technological, political, or economic means. Spiritual traditions will also play a critical role in collaborative efforts to stem the tide of devastation. (Kaza and Kraft 2000, 1)

I think one of the Buddhist spiritual resources that could contribute to changing our environmental consciousness is the East Asian Buddhist notion that the existences of the natural environment have the nature or essence of awakening, often called "buddha nature," and furthermore, that by manifesting to the fullest the total potential of their being, they actualize buddhahood for all of us. In East Asia, this ecological perspective was often called the "attainment of buddhahood by grasses and trees," (Jpn., *sōmoku jōbutsu* 草木成仏), or the "attainment of buddhahood by the entire land of the nation and all its flora" (Jpn., *sōmoku kokudo shikkai jōbutsu* 草木国土悉皆成仏). Perhaps this sounds like animism to you? Exactly what Berman says we cannot return to, but I will focus on two East Asian Buddhists whose version of this ecological perspective may still be plausible for us today: the Japanese monk Dōgen (1200–1253), founder of the Sōtō sect of Zen Buddhism, and Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, founder and first president of the Japanese lay Buddhist organization Rissho Kosei-kai. While nearly eight centuries separate these two, both held a process-oriented view of buddhahood as activity—a way of functioning and being in the world—that is compatible with modernity, and that I think also makes their version of the buddhahood of nonsentient and nonliving existences something that people today could draw upon in the effort to re-enchant the natural world by forging a new participating consciousness. As part of this effort, I will adapt my translation of this term *sōmoku jōbutsu* to make it more amenable to our modern consciousness and to match both Dōgen and Rev. Niwano's sense of it by rendering it "actualization of buddhahood."

The Lotus Sutra and Dōgen's Understanding of Nature's Actualization of Buddhahood

The poem I began with above, from a piece titled "Mountains and Waters," is one of the most representative examples of Dōgen's ecological vision. Dōgen shows the "mountains and waters" expressing the truth of the Buddha—the Buddha Way—simply by manifesting their existence in this world. In this piece, the mountains and waters do this by each abiding in their condition, or their "dharma position." As Hee-Jin Kim explains, for Dōgen, a "dharma position" is "a particular here and now," a "spacio-temporal existence in the world," comprised of the "existential particularities" of a given a moment (Kim 1987, 149). "Dharma position" is a rather difficult Buddhist concept, but put in more readily understandable terms, occupying one's dharma position can mean that something is simply being itself, but manifesting to the fullest, to the point of completion, its potential to be what it is. In Dōgen's eyes, by doing this the things of the natural world manifest the truth to which the Buddha awoke, the principle of the ultimate reality of all things, and in the moment-by-moment of that activity, each becomes an ultimacy, actualizing buddha. Dōgen

may read like a mystic, but I think his is a mysticism of the wonder that is the ordinariness of everyday life and existence—of the world right in front of our faces—as reality itself.

Dōgen is known as a Zen master, but his poem above is also in part an allusion to the Lotus Sutra and its teachings. The notion of the things of the world manifesting truth by "abiding in their condition," or "dharma position" points to a short and enigmatic passage in the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra: "These phenomena abide in their inherent dharma position, by which the attributes of the world eternally abide" (是法住法位 / 世間相常住; *Miaofa lianhua jing*, T262.9.9b10; Rissho Kosei-kai 2019, 422–23). And when Dōgen says that each thing actualizes buddhahood for us when it "unfolds its full potential" in its dharma position, he's using the word *kujin* 究盡 (pronounced *gūjin* in Japanese Zen writings), a term that is famous for appearing in crucial passages of the Lotus Sutra, and particularly the second chapter's discussion of ultimate reality, where it is translated as "fathom": "Only a buddha together with a buddha can fathom the ultimate reality of all things" (Rissho Kosei-kai 2019, 58).

In most translations of the Lotus Sutra, this term is rendered like this as "fathom" or "understand," but fundamentally, it means to "exhaust" or "empty" something. For Dōgen, "*gūjin*" becomes "thoroughly manifesting truth," expressing an absolute dynamism, and he often uses this word as part of a phrase: the "total exertion of a single thing" (*ippō gūjin* 一法究盡), which is to exhaustively express the potentials of a single act or single being—a "dharma position"—such that the ultimate reality of all things is enacted and present moment-by-moment. Another way he describes this is "total functioning" (Jpn., *zenki* 全機). Commenting on the famous passage from the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra above, Dōgen reads it to mean that "being able to totally exert is the 'ultimate reality of all things'" (see "The Ultimate Reality of All Things" chapter of *Shōbōgenzō* [Treasury of the True Dharma Eye], T2582.82.188b08). Turning his eyes toward the things of the natural world, exemplified by mountains and waters in the quote above, Dōgen sees them totally exerting their entire being, presenting the face of the buddhas to us by enacting the ultimate reality of all things. In Dōgen's writings, we discover a natural world that, continuously manifesting the Buddha's Dharma, is the very body of the buddha itself, reciting the sacred scriptures of the Buddha for us:

> How sad for those who miss the dharma of the manifested buddha body! How are mountain colors and valley sounds heard otherwise? (from "Valley Sounds, Mountain Colors," in Tanahashi 2012, 86)

Dōgen was not unique in reading the Lotus Sutra in this way, however. In the tradition of the Lotus Sutra, the world of our everyday experience, including the things of the natural world, sentient and insentient, living and nonliving, is an enchanted world. All existences are, just by being what they are to their fullest extent, constantly actualizing buddhahood. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, echoed Dōgen's "total exertion of a single thing" when he taught that "to manifest completely the innate nature unique to that individual being is, in fact, the attainment of buddhahood for that being" (Niwano 1975, 50–51). And, like Dōgen, he also applied this criterion to the natural world:

> This idea can also be stated as follows: "Even plants and earth can become buddhas because all beings, sentient and nonsentient, have the buddha nature." Here we find a thoroughgoing compassion based on a comprehensive view of equality not seen in any other religion. [. . .] Because all forms, both sentient and nonsentient, are manifestations of this reality, any form that can manifest the complete embodiment of its distinctive innate nature has in fact achieved buddhahood. A tree that has manifested completely the buddha-nature unique to that tree has just as surely attained buddhahood as any human being who has perfected the buddha-nature unique to him. (Ibid.)

Essentially, Niwano is saying the same thing as Dōgen in ordinary modern language. In Japan, this ecological consciousness that saw in the natural world the functioning of buddha came to be known as the "actualization of buddhahood by grasses and trees" (Jpn., *sōmoku jōbutsu* 草木成仏) or the "actualization of buddhahood by the entire land of the nation and all its flora" (Jpn., *sōmoku kokudo shikkai jōbutsu* 草木国土悉皆成仏).

Buddha Nature Embraces Both Sentient and Insentient—as Well as Living and Nonliving—Things

For modern humans, with our "nonparticipating consciousness," this way of looking at the natural world might strike us as magical thinking or "woo-woo," something Rev. Niwano was conscious of. "On hearing that even nonhuman existences can attain buddhahood, you might at first think it strange; but when you recall the truth of the reality of all existence, it is not at all peculiar" (ibid.). Rev. Niwano's words here require some unpacking.

In Buddhism, everything that exists is a function of, or is facilitated by, the deepest truths of the universe, and as

such, seen through the eyes of awakening, everything, including nonsentient and nonliving existences and all their attributes, is ultimate truth. According to some schools of Buddhism, this ultimate quality of all existence is called "emptiness," that is, the absence of any fixed nature and the openness to innumerable possibilities for development and creativity. Other schools of Buddhism see everything as an expression of "suchness," or "reality itself." Suchness was equated to a sea of purity, and all existences were compared to the waves and currents moving through the sea. Sometimes the ultimate reality of things was called "dharma nature," the true characteristic or attribute of all existence. In the Lotus Sutra and other texts, this is called the "ultimate reality of all things." Additionally, the fundamental nature of reality was also considered "buddha nature" or "the capacity to become a buddha." And while some Buddhists enthusiastically described buddha nature using many metaphors and similes, others took apophatic approaches, logically refuting statements describing buddha nature to demonstrate that it is "unobtainable"—beyond our human words and conceptualizations. Sometimes this was called "middle way buddha nature," because it was thought to be the true nature of all things as a middle way that dynamically embraces both the oneness of all things and their particularity. Often citing the Chinese monk Zhiyi's (538–597) famous declaration that "There is not a single sound nor smell that is not the middle way" (see Donner and Stevenson 1993, 112–13) Buddhists extended middle-way buddha nature to all phenomena. Another argument for extending buddha nature to the natural environment was the teaching that since a buddha and its buddha land are in a state of nonduality, whenever a buddha awakens, all the phenomena in that land participate in that buddha's awakening.

The Lotus Sutra and the Buddha Nature of Nonliving and Nonsentient Existences

The most important thing to note, however, is that whatever the various sutras or schools of Buddhism called this universal aspect or attribute of phenomena, many saw it as a dynamism that facilitated the arising of all things, and some found inspiration for this in the Threefold Lotus Sutra. In the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, the first or "opening" portion of the Threefold Lotus Sutra, it says "The innumerable meanings arise from the one Dharma, and this One Dharma is, namely, the state of having no attributes" (Rissho Kosei-kai 2019, 14). While somewhat abstruse, this statement is understood to mean that the arising of all phenomena is facilitated by the workings of the ultimate truth, which, depending on the school, can be "emptiness," the "ultimate reality of all things," or buddha nature. In the "closing sutra," the third and the final portion of the Threefold Lotus Sutra, we are told that Shakyamuni Buddha permeates the entire cosmos. This is understood to demonstrate that no existence is outside of the Buddha, as Zhiyi asserts: "Know, therefore, that all dharmas [i.e., all phenomena] are the Buddha's dharma, for they are all the *dharmadhātu* [the "dharma realm"] of the Tathāgatas (Donner and Stevenson 1993, 196).

However, some Buddhists also read the fifth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, "The Parable of the Medicinal Herbs," to be an account of the buddhahood of the natural world. In this chapter's parable, the Buddha describes how a grand cloud precipitates a great rain that nourishes all the world's "plants, trees, thickets, forests, and medicinal herbs." Later, the Buddha clearly explains to his disciples that the cloud represents himself, the rain represents his Dharma teachings, and the "plants, trees, thickets, forests, and medicinal herbs" represent Buddhist practitioners of various degrees of awakening. Even though these types of vegetation were metaphors for people, there was a belief that the deepest, most profound message of this chapter was that even grasses and trees can become buddhas.

How Can Grasses and Trees Practice the Dharma?

The biggest problem with this ecological vision of the natural environment actualizing buddhahood was the question of how—even if the grasses, trees, rocks, and soil of the world did have buddha nature—could they "practice" in order to obtain buddhahood? Without practicing, human beings don't realize their potential to become buddhas. Wouldn't the same be true of grasses and trees? The ancient Japanese monk Ryōgen (912–985) was one who offered an answer. Ryōgen proposed that for the existences of the natural world, the four phases that characterize all phenomena (the aspects of arising, stabilizing, changing, and extinguishing), were, just as they are, the four great stages of the way to becoming a buddha: developing the aspiration for awakening, cultivating practice, attaining awakening, and entering paranirvana (Miyamoto 1961, 676). In other words, by being what they inherently are and manifesting their existence, grasses and trees are practicing the Buddha Way.

An example of this point of view is found in the interpretation of the "Medicinal Herbs" chapter in the medieval Lotus Sutra commentary *Compendium of the Leaves Gathered from the Forest of Divine Eagle Peak* (Jpn., *Hokekyō jurin shūyō shō* 法華経鷲林拾葉鈔). The commentary asserts

Photo: Universal Images Group / AFLO

Su Shi's Ode to His Second Visit to the Red Cliff. *Artist: Kano Hogai (Japanese, 1828–88). Nineteenth century. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.*

that the attainment of buddhahood by grasses and trees is one of the three important teachings of the "Medicinal Herbs" chapter and describes the "deep mystery" that, by growing in their natural way—developing their roots, stems, branches, leaves, and so on—grasses and trees are all accomplishing buddhahood.

> Grasses and trees are divided into the three thousand kinds of grasses and ten thousand varieties of trees, and despite differing in size and capacity, they grow from the single ground of suchness and also return to the single ground of suchness. This is said to be the achievement of all-embracing wisdom. For this reason, the "buddhahood of grasses and trees" is the culmination of this chapter. Furthermore, as grasses and trees are endowed with form with the five elements [that are the body of the cosmic Buddha], they accomplish the five eyes of the buddhas' wisdom, and moreover, their having roots, stems, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit, luster and color, is their mastery of the eight virtues and the accomplishment of buddhahood by subtly displaying the eight acts of a buddha. These teachings are all deep mysteries. (*Hokekyō jurin shūyō shō*, 330)

The notion that grasses and trees enact in some hidden or quite subtle way the eight actions of a buddha, including a buddha's birth, departure from the royal palace, ascetic practice, rolling the wheel of the Dharma, and so forth, may strike us today as highly fanciful. But I think it's important to note that this description shares with Dōgen and Rev. Niwano a sense that by simply being what they are, by functioning—growing roots, stems, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit, as well as putting forth colors—grasses and trees practice the Buddha Way.

An Example of the Lotus Sutra's Ecological Perspective in Japanese Culture and Its Influence on Nikkyo Niwano's Ecophilosophy

This way of actualizing buddhahood by exerting one's inherent potentialities or natural functioning found its way into the wider culture as the "buddhahood of grasses and trees," becoming a significant theme in Japanese arts and literature. As M. Cody Poulton observes, there is a genre of Nō (traditional Japanese theater) in which the protagonist is a flower, plant, or tree, and at least forty of these plays have lines that refer to the idea of the buddhahood of grasses and trees (Poulton 2018, 20). The actor's lines in the Nō play *Bashō* (or "Plantain Tree") resonate uncannily with the belief that the existences of the natural world actualize buddhahood by manifesting their existence in the phenomenal world. In this play, the spirit of a plantain tree takes the form of a woman and seeks the Buddhist teachings from a monk who is reciting the Lotus Sutra while staying in the mountains nearby. In a portion of their dialogue, the monk introduces the teaching to the mysterious woman who shows up at his hut unannounced:

> Monk: It [the buddhahood of grasses and trees] is revealed in the "Parable of the Medicinal Herbs" chapter of the Lotus Sutra. All grasses and trees, and even the soils of the country, whether sentient or not, and just as they are, possess the true attribute of reality.
>
> Woman: The storms lashing the mountain peaks . . .
>
> Monk: . . . and even the sound of the mountain valley streams . . .

Monk and Woman together: . . . are performing the buddhas' work, [which we realize] when our minds are as placid as the water at the bottom of a temple's well.

Reciters: [. . .] By knowing "the crimson of the flower and the green of the willow," you can realize that the grasses and trees attain buddhahood by displaying their colors and fragrance exactly as they are. The grasses and trees, as well as the land of the country, can all attain buddhahood. (Caliber Cast 2023, 5)

"Displaying their colors and fragrance" is an allusion to Zhiyi's assertion that everything that exists is the truth of the middle way. "Crimson of the flower and the green of the willow" is a reference to a poem by the Song dynasty poet Su Shi (1037–1101) that has often been quoted in East Asia to express the essence of being a buddha as fully manifesting what you inherently are.

This Nō play was extremely influential on Rev. Niwano's way of talking about the actualization of buddhahood by both human beings and all other existences. First, Rev. Niwano was very fond of this verse of poetry from Su Shi, which he saw as an artistic expression of unity in diversity, as he explained in the following way.

If we can fully manifest our potential just as we are, this will also vitalize the lives of others, and, in so doing, we can realize the unity of ourselves and others and the underlying oneness within the diversity of all living things. (Niwano 2023, 163)

And describing how both human beings and the existences of the natural world actualize their buddhahood:

If we consider with clear minds, we can understand that both a violent mountain storm and a gentle valley stream are products of the great life of the universe. Because all forms, both sentient and nonsentient, are manifestations of this reality, any form that can manifest the complete embodiment of its distinctive innate nature has in fact achieved buddhahood. A tree that has manifested completely the buddha nature unique to that tree has just as surely attained buddhahood as any human being who has perfected the buddha nature unique to him. (Niwano 1975, 51–52)

Notice Rev. Niwano's allusions to the conversation between the monk and woman in the Nō play with the mention of the "mountain storm" and "valley stream." Moreover, "complete embodiment" and "perfected buddha nature" also echo Dōgen's "total exertion of a single thing" and "total functioning." What we can also see here is that Rev. Niwano's basic understanding of buddhahood as the complete manifestation of a thing's inherent potentiality bridges the modern materialistic worldview's irreconcilable divide between sentient and nonsentient, living and nonliving, existences.

Fulfilling a Role as Actualizing Buddhahood

There is one more element that I think is important to understanding Rev. Niwano's ecological perspective, and this is the concept of "role." His sense of the actualization of buddhahood, for both the natural environment and for people, is closely related to his notion of "role." As we have seen, for Rev. Niwano, all existences are equal as expressions of the most fundamental truth of phenomena. However, each thing, whether living or nonliving, sentient or insentient, contributes to the world in its own unique ways through the performing to its fullest its own distinctive functioning. This activity, which becomes the thing's contribution to the world, is its "role":

There are both living things and nonliving things. Living things range from simple amoebae to the most complex plants and animals, including [human beings]. When these numerous living and nonliving things fully develop their innate natures and talents, and completely fulfill their inherent roles, total harmony will be achieved. This kind of harmony is called nirvana, or absolute peace. (Niwano 1975, 57)

"Role" is the unique activity or workings that a thing, whether human or otherwise, performs, but since its role is the position the thing occupies in the scheme of things, "role" is also something like a place. As a "place" that one inhabits by performing one's inherent functioning. I think Rev. Niwano's notion of "role" is a modern understanding of "dharma position" discussed above. It is by fulfilling its role that something actualizes its buddhahood. Put in Dōgen's terms, a role is the "single thing" that is totally exerted.

All beings are essentially equal, and though they phenomenally manifest in myriad different roles, they all become buddhas by fulfilling their roles to the fullest. (Niwano 2018, 49–50)

And it is in fulfilling roles to the utmost, what we could call "total functioning" by borrowing Dōgen's words, that the gap between the living and nonliving, sentient and insentient, is collapsed.

In a fundamental sense, "roles" are something that people have in abundance as long as they are born in this world as human beings, irrespective of their circumstances or the jobs they do. And it's not just human

> beings; every living thing, and even inanimate entities like air, water, and soil, has its own role. (Ibid., 50)

Every existence makes a contribution to our world, playing its part in creating the ecosystem that is our earth. In doing so, it manifests the totality of its potentiality, which, in Rev. Niwano's perspective, is what it means to be a buddha for all things, whether sentient or insentient, living or nonliving.

We Actualize Our Buddhahood Together with the Grasses and Trees

If, as Rev. Niwano and many Buddhists before him asserted, the things of the natural world actualize buddhahood in a way like human buddhas—by being true to themselves to manifest their potential to its fullest—we might wonder whether the grasses, trees, and other existences of the natural world always actualize their buddhahood. Or, like us, do they ever become indolent, failing to live up to their potential and passing up opportunities to contribute to the great system of life that is our world? Rev. Niwano thought that this is where humanity makes all the difference. When we denigrate the environment with our actions, we are preventing the grasses, trees, and other things of the natural world from being what they can be, from actualizing buddhahood. Rev. Niwano held that because we forget that nature is sacred—that it possesses and actualizes its own buddha nature—

> we selfishly harm, contaminate, and destroy nature, stealing from it its innate form. It is as though we arrogantly feel that our existence is superior to that of animals, plants, and the earth. This is in fact the taking of the "life" of nature and is also the heinous act of preventing those animals and plants and even the earth from attaining the buddhahood that they have the potential to achieve. (Niwano 1975, 52)

Our participation is crucial. If we not only see the grasses and trees as sacred but follow through by putting that ecological perspective into concrete practice in our lives, we can create the necessary conditions for the other existences on this planet to actualize their buddhahood. I wrote above that many Buddhists of the past thought that when a buddha awakens, all things in that world partake in that buddha's awakening, even the nonsentient existences. When it comes to us, today, it's much the same. If we awaken to how our behavior impacts the natural environment, and we change how we see and interact with it, that will provide the conditions for the existences of the natural environment to exert their potential to the fullest. The grasses and trees will partake in our awakening. And what's more, if we provide the conditions for the things of the natural environment to "totally function" as they "abide in their conditions," the natural world will respond by providing us with the proper conditions for our lives, allowing us to fully actualize our own potentiality—for us to become buddhas.

We and all the other existences in this world are not separate like we tend to think, and so neither is our buddha nature, our unique dynamic potentialities. We can envision ourselves sharing one grand buddha nature and actualizing a single integrated buddhahood. As the Japanese monk Annen 安然 (841–?) described buddha nature:

> It is not confined to the inside or outside or to the simultaneous combination of both; buddha nature permeates internally, externally, and in between. It is not the case that sentient beings and non-sentient beings each have their own separate individual buddha natures as cause and effect; rather, all sentient and non-sentient beings share the same buddha nature. (*Taizō kongō bodai shin giryaku mondō shō*, T2397.75.0484c23–c26)

Our world operates as one cohesive ecological system, where all existences, whether sentient or insentient, living or nonliving, are interconnected. Imagine our world as a single body, where the vitality of the whole and the vitality of each individual component are intertwined and inseparable. Each part of this vast system energizes and sustains the others, as well as the greater whole, while the collective vitality of the whole sustains the vitality of each individual component. The life force of every single element and the life force of the entire system are interwoven, mutually influencing one another, and ultimately indivisible. In the case of our physical bodies, we are as reliant on our hearts and livers for survival as those organs are on the intricate functioning of our entire organism. Our hearts and livers cannot survive outside the body, nor can our body survive without them. Similarly, interwoven into the world's fabric of "interlife," it may be more appropriate to think of the totality of existence as comprising one great buddha nature rather than each existence having its own separate buddha nature. And this is why the actualization of our own buddhahood can never be separate from the actualization of the buddhahood of grasses and trees. We must actualize our buddhahoods together, as one.

Toward a New Participating Consciousness

The natural world participates in our awakening, and we partake in the awakening of the natural world. We can only awaken together. I think this is an example of the kind of "participating consciousness" that Berman says we need to rekindle in order to save ourselves.

No doubt the idea of the natural world actualizing buddhahood may be hard for many people to embrace, given the notion that we usually think of buddhahood in anthropomorphic terms, and the powerful grip that the materialistic view of the world has on us. Perhaps we could phrase it better by saying the natural world “actualizes awakening.” But in recent years the conception of dead matter is increasingly challenged by many philosophers and even some physicists. I would encourage readers to explore the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and his heirs in process theology, who hold that elementary forms of experience “go all the way down” to subatomic particles, that novelty and creativity are attributes of all things that exist, and that reality is fundamentally relational (see Mesle 2008).

In any case, I don’t think environmental scientific knowledge alone will be enough to change our consciousness, which ultimately motivates our behavior, because the interconnected and reflexive functioning of the biosphere is something we really cannot wrap our minds around. It is what philosopher Timothy Morton calls a “hyperobject.” As he describes them, hyperobjects are “real entities whose primordial reality is withdrawn from humans” because they have characteristics such as nonlocality, temporalities that outstrip human timescales, and are invisible to the human eye (Morton 2018, Introduction). We will need to employ our imagination, using metaphors and symbolism to develop a new participating consciousness. And this is why it is a religious task.

I will conclude with Rev. Niwano’s appeal to change how we see and interact with the natural world, which is even more urgent for us today than when he first uttered it:

> If we prevent others from attaining buddhahood, that is to say, if we thwart the perfect manifestation of the innate nature of others, our actions will finally rebound upon us alone. According to the principle that nothing has an independent ego, it cannot be otherwise. An obvious proof of this principle is to be seen in the so-called civilized nations, where people are now suffering the effects of environmental pollution. Man is an element of nature, an integral part of nature. Therefore, if man destroys nature, he will surely destroy himself. It is high time that we human beings freed ourselves from our narrow, shortsighted, selfish idea that it is sufficient that mankind alone be happy. It is time for us to return to the spirit of the Lotus Sutra, which teaches us to live in harmony with nature and with other beings, letting each form of existence fulfill its potential to perfect its own buddha nature. (Niwano 1975, 52) ❑

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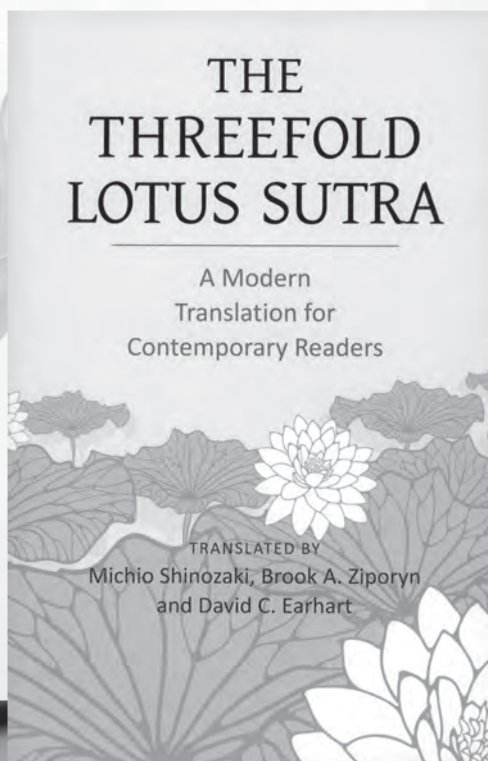

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