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Rimpusha

**Cover photo:** An eighth-century tapestry illustrating Shakyamuni delivering a sermon surrounded by arhats, bodhisattvas, celestial beings, and lay faithful. The master artwork, 208 x 158 cm in size and now designated a National Treasure, is thought to have hung in the hall of a Nara-period temple.

DHARMA WORLD presents Buddhism as a practical living religion and promotes inter-religious 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.

Kozo Ogawa

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**Note:** Because of their scholarly nature, some essays use diacritical marks or alternative spellings for foreign names and terms. Other essays do not, for easier reading.

## Peace Is Every Country's Responsibility

In the middle of February, President George W. Bush of the United States visited Japan. Since former President Bill Clinton failed to stop over when he made a visit to China in 1998, Bush's visit has, I think, left a favorable impression on most of the Japanese.

Using the word "partnership," Clinton would praise Germany when he visited Europe and China when he visited Asia. Toward the end of his second term he devoted his energies to encouraging the Middle East peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, but his efforts in this regard were not successful.

When the previous Democratic administration ended and Bush and the Republican Party took over, I wonder if the first inklings of the United States advocating a kind of "America first" policy were not apparent. It is certainly possible to detect an atmosphere of simple isolationism when looking back at the administrations of such past Republican presidents as Warren Harding (1921–23), Calvin Coolidge (1923–29), and Herbert Hoover (1929–33). It was the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, however, that galvanized the Americans into a global confrontation against terrorist organizations. At the same time, many people began to claim that the world was in fact moving in the direction described by Samuel P. Huntington in his 1996 book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*. Increasing numbers of people also are looking at the issue of terrorism and the situation in Afghanistan in terms of the conflict between Christianity and Islam in the Crusades of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. Violent anti-American demonstrations have erupted in such predominately Muslim countries as Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia. I do not think, however, that it is helpful to look at the situation simply as a "clash of cultures" or a twenty-first century version of the Crusades.

The International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan, held in Japan in January, was very fruitful, as the amounts of aid to be given to Afghanistan by the U.S., the EU, and Japan were determined. Nevertheless, the real problems lie in the future. There is little guaranteed security in Afghanistan outside the capital of Kabul, and it is not difficult to imagine that there will be many difficulties before the country is able to reach a full recovery.

The shock of the September 11 terrorist attacks will, with time, dim in the memories of people around the world. If at that point there is no longer a firm commitment to deal with terrorism on a global scale, what will happen to Afghanistan? People of religion must seriously consider the potential developments of such a time.

We must frankly acknowledge that the United States has, from the end of World War II to the present, been spurred by a passion to extend freedom and democracy to the entire world. It is a fact, however, that its tendency toward diplomacy by strength, as exemplified by President Bush's recent speeches, has set off warning bells in Europe. Since there is every possibility that a strong United States may step heavily on the accelerator, every country, including Japan, must be aware of its responsibility to act as a balance for good in the present situation. President Bush's recent visit to Japan brought this strongly home to me. □



Kinzo Takemura

We would like to share readers' thoughts and experiences of faith and also welcome your comments on the contents of this magazine. We would also appreciate your reports on recent events of interreligious collaboration in which you took part. All letters are subject to editing. Letters can be forwarded to us by regular mail, fax, or e-mail. Our mailing address, fax number, and e-mail address are:

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# Doing What Is Appropriate

by Nikkyo Niwano

*This essay is part of a continuing series of translations from a recent volume of inspirational writings by the late founder of Rissho Kosei-kai. DHARMA WORLD will continue to publish these essays because of their lasting value as guidance for the practice of one's faith in daily life.*

In Japan, the outer robe a Buddhist priest wears is called a *kesa*, a Japanese transliteration of the Sanskrit *kasaya*, which originally meant a simple robe that huntsmen in India wore. It was this garment that was adopted by the followers of the Buddha in the Sangha. The reddish-brown color is thought to have become widespread because it does not show the dirt. We are told that Shakyamuni himself advised his followers to garb themselves in clothing sewn from rags that others had discarded.

The type of robe worn by priests in India could not be used as such when Buddhism was transmitted to China and Japan because of the differences in climate. This led to the development of a Buddhist priest's robe suitable for the Japanese weather. What originally were simple garments gradually became more elaborate, however, and when priestly rankings were devised, extremely ornate robes of gold brocade came into use.

Since we are lay Buddhists, we do not use priestly robes, but it is still important for us to attend rituals and ceremonies in attitudes of appropriate dignity. Therefore instead of a *kesa* we put on a sash with the *o-daimoku* inscribed on it, having purified our bodies for the cere-

monies. That is why members of Rissho Kosei-kai are sometimes reprimanded by their leaders for drinking tea or eating cakes while still wearing the sash.

We often find the expression "baring the right shoulder" when we read the sutras. This was decreed in Buddhist communities as a mark of respect toward a venerable master, or when acknowledging wrongdoing and offering repentance. When we wear the sash over our left shoulder rather than the right, it stems from this Buddhist tradition.

In Rissho Kosei-kai we all wear the same type of sash because in the Sangha of Shakyamuni's time, everyone wore the same kind of robe.

Let us think about what is inscribed on the sash. In a previous issue I have already explained at length the *o-daimoku* itself,

*Namu Myoho Renge-kyo* (I take refuge in the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law). The words following the *o-daimoku* on the sash are "The Dharma by which bodhisattvas are taught" and "The place that buddhas protect." The former phrase tells us that the Lotus Sutra, on which we base our faith, is the Dharma by which bodhisattvas are taught. The Lotus Sutra is a teaching whereby all people can become bodhisattvas, the supreme teaching whose purpose is to have all people walk the bodhisattva path.

"The place that buddhas protect" refers to this important teaching that from the eternal past the buddhas kept protected as a great treasure.

Members of Rissho Kosei-kai wear the sash on signifi-

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*Nikkyo Niwano, the late founder of the Buddhist association Rissho Kosei-kai, was an honorary president of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) and was honorary chairman of Shimshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan) at the time of his death in October 1999.*



cant occasions as an indication of our determination and our vow to devote ourselves totally in body and mind to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

### The Importance of Sharing

Professor Yasuaki Nara, a well-known Buddhist scholar, says that contemporary people are like a Japanese fishmonger who sells only two types of fish: *tai* (bream), which is a homonym for a grammatical suffix meaning "I want" and *tara* (cod), which is a homonym meaning "if only." Full of their own desires, they want (*tai*) this and want that, and furthermore regret what they do not have, saying "If only (*tara*) I had more free time or more money. . . ."

Let me tell you another story that describes two kinds of human beings. Dr. Noboru Iwamura, who has done valuable volunteer medical work in Nepal, relates that once a young Nepalese man carried an old woman unfamiliar to him on his back for three days to Dr. Iwamura's clinic. She was ill with a severe case of tuberculosis. The doctor thanked the young man for his effort and tried to press some money, or perhaps some eggs or something else on the youth, but his offers were refused.

"All I did was give up three days of my life," the young man said. "I did not bring the old woman here in the hope of a reward. I have been blessed with a strong constitution, and have made use of it for others. We must depend on each other to continue in this life."

Dr. Iwamura commented, "This young man taught me anew how important the spirit of sharing is for people living together. I think there are only two types of people in the world: those who can think about others, can act according to the needs of others, and can live in harmony with others, and those who cannot."

In Buddhist terms the two types would be the bodhisattva and the person blinded by desires. The former are still far fewer than the latter. When we recite the Members' Vow, we promise to "pledge ourselves to follow the bodhisattva way." This must be our eternal vow, in order that we are able to live together with all the people of the world. We should reconfirm to ourselves that working for the benefit of others as well as ourselves is the true way of the lay Buddhist.

### The Importance of the Law

We speak every day of the importance of the Law. In Sanskrit, the word for "Law" is *dharma*, and in Pali *dhamma*. The basic meaning is "to preserve." The Law preserves what is humane about humanity, what humanity should be. From this comes the idea that it is a promise, a decision, a social regulation to make human beings what they should be. The law as a judicial measure is also an important connotation, and in that sense is the regulatory aspect of the Dharma.

We call the teachings of the Buddha based on the Dharma the Law. They are intended to enable all people

to continue being truly humane, and so the teachings themselves gradually grew in response to the changes in people's actual lives. That is why we have the expression "the eighty-four thousand gates to the Law." We must work to determine whether a certain way of teaching is appropriate or whether another way could bring greater understanding to people, according to the actual situation of the person's life and the time in which he or she is living. We should always resolve to maintain the mental attitude of seeking a better way. □

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Rokuharamitsu (*Six Paramitas, or Six Perfections*), calligraphy by Founder Nikkyo Niwano. The Six Perfections are the six kinds of practices that bodhisattvas should follow to attain enlightenment and to bring others to salvation.

# We Must Be Prepared to Share

by Robert Edward Green

*A retired American minister reminds us that governments will often claim a religious basis for their conflicts, but the roots of the problem lie in the poverty affecting much of the world's population.*

It is difficult and frustrating when we who believe that religion is, by definition, dedicated to peace for all humankind must face a war that has been instigated by religion. Yet that is exactly how Osama bin Laden has justified his acts of terrorism and his encouragement of a *jihād*, a "holy war," against the West. No less upsetting is that President George W. Bush and the government of the United States have accepted bin Laden's definition as

the underlying cause of the attacks on New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, and justification for the president's declaration of "war" against terrorists and all who support them.

Yet it is abundantly clear that the attack on Afghanistan's Taliban regime, and the threats that are being made to extend that military conflict elsewhere, are not based on religion, no matter how much anyone may try to hide behind its skirts. It is true that the Taliban had imposed upon the Afghans cultural practices based in seventh-century Islam, and that much of this violated our twentieth-century sense of human rights and religious tolerance. But that had not particularly bothered the American government prior to September 11. Political considerations, not religion, are what led the United States government to oust the Taliban regime, just as it is political considerations that led the Bush administration to declare Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as potential targets of U.S. action in days to come.

Likewise, it is not truly religion that motivates Osama bin Laden as much as antagonism to the government of Saudi Arabia, which he would very much like to overcome and replace.

It is not so much religion that motivates the Israelis and the Palestinians as a desire to occupy the same piece of territory.

It is not religion that motivates Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein so much as it is a yearning for power.

Nevertheless, religion, and we who are committed to religion, cannot escape our obligations simply by observing that none of these current conflicts are truly based on religion. Indeed, the very accusation of religious motivation makes it all that much more imperative for us to point to the realities that underlay these conflicts, and in the spirit of such religious leaders as the late Rev. Nikkyo Niwano and the late Dr. Dana McLean Greeley, the first president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, urge all people to join together to seek their alleviation.

Of all these causes, none is more significant than the

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poverty and economic disparity that afflicts so much of the world's population. That is evident enough in what we so blithely designate as the "Third World," and no doubt such conditions in that portion of our globe contribute to the rise of governments more inclined to power and oppression than to human good. But we ought not ignore the existence of these same conditions within our own "rich" nations, conditions that equally allow our governments to manipulate large parts of our citizenry to support national policies which contribute neither to peace nor human good.

No better example exists than that which lies at the root of the distress between the Muslim nations of the Middle East and the Christian nations of Europe and North America. During World War II, European Jews were deprived of their homes, their livelihoods, and for some six million of them, their lives. Those who survived needed someplace safe to live—someplace that no longer would remind them of concentration camps and lost relatives. Some could be resettled in the United States, but for many the only acceptable hope lay in a land of their own, specifically the historical Jewish homeland of Israel. With British and American support, Jewish terrorists succeeded in wresting that homeland from its then current inhabitants.

But these Arab inhabitants whose forbears had occupied Palestine for some twelve centuries were unwilling to yield their homes, their livelihoods, and their land to what they saw not as refugees, but as invaders. Even though pushed out of their habitation by violence and fear, they have refused to surrender for over half a century. Instead, adopting the tactics that they perceived as having been successful for their enemies, they have sought to use terrorism as a mechanism to restore themselves to the land that once was theirs.

To define this as a religious conflict between Muslims and Jews, as all too many would have us do, is not only a gross error but disguises the roots of the problem. This is not a religious war but a political one, an economic one, a struggle between two groups of human beings for the same land, the same source of economic support, the same homes. For the Israelis, possession of the land has meant a substantial degree of prosperity, much of it due to the ingenious use of modern technology. For the Palestinians, loss of the land has meant poverty, and for many, a bare survival in refugee camps where life is preserved only in the hope of violence.

Yet that is not what Islam or Judaism or Christianity at their roots teach. It is not what Buddhism or Shinto or

the Taoism/Confucianism of China at their roots teach. What religious teaching has in common is the concept of sharing.

Desire, the Buddha proclaimed, is the cause of all suffering; to overcome such selfishness is the height of religion.

To give to one's brother in need, Jesus taught, is to achieve godliness.

Almsgiving is one of the five obligations required of every Muslim.

Do not covet what another has, the Law of Judaism commands, and indeed it goes on to order the return every seven years or every fifty years of what has been taken from another.

It is in the commonality of religion, not in its divisiveness, that alone lies humanity's hope for peace. But that

hope cannot exist simply in a sense of spirituality or in a mere repetition of words. It must find its outlet in an application of its principles and teachings to the world in which it lives. It is religion's task to reveal and explain those causes that underlie hostility and war. More important, it is religion's task to urge people everywhere, and particularly those who would practice their religion by whatever name, to insist that these causes be dealt with, that the priority of every nation be to overcome poverty and inequality and ill health and hopelessness, for in those human failings lie the roots of war and in their overcoming alone exists the hope of peace and human security.

For too long governments in every part of the world have used religion to further their practices of hostility and division. Now is the moment for religions to unite and to demand that governments in every part of the world further our common conviction of peace, harmony, good will, and sharing among all people.

That is not an easy goal. And yet there is no greater purpose to which we might dedicate our lives and our mission as people of religion. For if peace is to be achieved, it will not come from treaties or declarations; it will come from the human heart and the human mind understanding our human commonality, our human unity, our human oneness. It will come from a human attitude that now realizes and understands that we are all brothers and sisters, parents and children, living in one world, interdependent upon each other's variety of skills and talents, and all as one in the same hope of a decent life for ourselves and our offspring, but a hope that can be realized only when we are prepared to share it with all others. □

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# Religion and the State

by I. Loganathan

*In all human history the name of India's great Emperor Ashoka, who reigned ca. 265–238 B.C.E., stands almost alone as a monarch who was so greatly influenced by the Buddha's teachings that he adopted them not only in his own life but also in the benevolent way he ruled his people.*

**B**uddhism is an ethical-religious social philosophy and, as such, it must be harmonized with a system of government. From time immemorial religion and politics have gone together and have furthered the advancement of civilization. In ancient days it was the function of ethics to prescribe the good life to the individual; it was the business of politics to determine the nature of the community in which the good life, as prescribed by ethics, could be lived. The guiding principle and ultimate motive of statecraft was how to make the subjects better spiritually and morally, in addition to making them happier materially.

The great empires of the ancient world—Assyria, Persia, Macedonia, Rome—had tried to build a universal state on the basis of power. The Buddha sought to found a wider community of humankind on the basis of love. Power meant the capacity to appropriate, to possess, to dominate; love meant the capacity to share, to renounce, to sacrifice.

It was only with the coming of Buddhism that love began to displace fear as the great motive force in humanity's religious life, and that the ethical conceptions of

people began to be related to a code of human conduct which would be regarded as valuable for its own sake.

The mighty empires, built on greed, hatred, and delusion, lasted just a few centuries. The impulse of self-denial carried the Buddhist community through twenty-five hundred years.

The philosophies behind the empires founded on power are very shallow; they have their day (it is really a very short day, and not a very restful one while it lasts), whereas the great and universal love preached by the Buddha goes deep down to the very roots, the very breath and rhythm of life.

It is the meek that will inherit the earth, it is the meek that have inherited the earth—because they alone are willing to live in harmony with it.

In the view of the Buddha, the end and object of life is to perfect the nature of men and women. This cannot be done merely by teaching and preaching, by calling on them to be better. The political structure in which they grow up must also be improved, must be made consonant with realities, that is to say, with the Law of the Buddha.

The task which the Buddha left to his followers was to create on earth a polity ordered in accordance with his teaching—a polity based, that is, on the infinite duty of each person to himself and herself and to their fellow human beings, as set forth in his exhortation.

Refrain from evil,  
Cultivate goodness,  
Cleanse the heart.

To the Buddha the final reality in human nature was not self-interest, but a faculty in people, however imperfect, of putting the interests of others before their own—the virtue that distinguishes human beings from beasts. To develop this faculty is to perfect humankind. The right kind of polity is one that depends for its working on the sense of duty in people to each other, and so develops that sense by its repetitive operation.

Emperor Ashoka was the first to translate the Buddha's

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*I. Loganathan is president of the Buddhist Society of India and of the Gautama Buddhist School, Karnataka State, India.*



Way of life into a polity. Ashoka made the people actually practice the Way of life preached by the Buddha. And look at the result achieved! A Chinese traveler to the India of later times has recorded: "Theft was unknown, people were extremely honest and truthful; peace and happiness reigned all over the country; there was no fighting between the rulers and the ruled, between the employer and the employed; and there was equitable distribution of wealth."

Compare this with the present state of affairs. Which is better?

Amidst the tens of thousands of monarchs that crowd the pages of history, the name of Ashoka shines and shines almost alone, as a star. In its main lines the code of life that Ashoka gave to his people, and tried to give to the whole world by a unique campaign for righteousness, was just the simple standard of social conduct preached by the Buddha, which is one of the conditions of the stability of a civilization. For the first and only time in history, Ashoka established a Ministry for the Development of Human Character. Another official in his government was the director of Women's Welfare. He had his moral exhortations or edicts carved on stone pillars, twenty to seventy feet in height, which he set up in all parts of his empire.

These celebrated edicts of the greatest of Buddhist monarchs, and, if H.G. Wells be right, the greatest monarch of all times anywhere in the world, are but discourses of the Buddha. Ashoka showed both in his personal life and in his administration that the Buddha's Dharma was not a mere philosophical doctrine but a way of life to be cultivated. Wells says in the *Outline of History*, with reference to the Eightfold Path of Buddhism, "How entirely Compatible that Way of living then was with the most useful and beneficent activities his [Ashoka's] life shows, Right aspiration, Right effort, Right livelihood distinguished his career." Those who criticize Buddhism as being "otherworldly" and out of touch with real life, implying its so-called impracticability, would give up their misconception if they would only read these edicts of Ashoka.

*One of the stone pillars set up by Ashoka, on which edicts are carved in Brahmi. The pillar now stands in New Delhi. Photo by Isamu Maruyama.*

Joseph McCabe in *The Golden Ages of History* says, Ashoka "did not confine his improvement of the State to a correction of individual conduct. He built a number of hospitals and had large gardens of medicinal herbs which he distributed to the poor. He reformed the prisons and, anticipating our advanced ideas on the subject, urged officials to help prisoners to see the blunder of crime

rather than punish them. He recommended the education and kindly treatment of slaves and servants. He built hostels, dug wells and planted trees along the roads for travelers. He opened 'spinning houses' (workshops) for widows and poor women and made provision for the aged. He had thousands of vessels of water placed on the streets of his capital to meet the contingency of fire, and he imposed a fine upon any man who would not help to extinguish a fire in his neighbor's house. He made it a penal offense to throw dead animals or filth upon the streets. He instituted a department of State to attend to the welfare of the backward races in his empire. And above all, he denounced war and most ardently desired the friendly intercourse of all nations, sending his missionaries as far as Syria in the West to preach his gospel. His own people were his children, but all men were his brothers."

How very modern, you reflect! Yes, this is the outcome, the result, when a country becomes imbued with the spirit of the teaching of the Master, and is ruled according to the Law of the Buddha.

A glance at the general state of affairs in the sixteenth century shows us that, even with Europe on the verge of the Renaissance, licentiousness and cruelty were still rampant in most countries. But in India, soon after the Buddha's

death, there occurred a social phenomenon which has not been duplicated anywhere else. The spiritual revolution brought about by the Buddha's teachings and the humanitarianism it inspired were quick in developing. Within two hundred years of the Buddha's death, we find in Ashoka's India humane laws and a culture and civilization unsurpassed even in modern times. □

# A Pioneer in Reducing Prejudice

*As if in response to what many see as the most basic need for world peace in our lifetimes, Eva Ruth Palmieri interviewed a multicultural teacher of intercultural relations who practices what he preaches: "Only by overcoming one's own prejudices can a person live successfully."*

**M**artin Nkafu Nkemnkia is an outstanding example of a multicultural individual who engages in the relentless promotion of intercultural relations. Born in Cameroon and a resident of Italy for 16 years, he teaches Intercultural Communication and African Culture and Religion at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He also teaches Introduction to Religions and Universal Values of African Thought at the Pontifical Urbanian University, also in Rome.

Nkafu also plays an active role at the institutional level since he is a member of the Italian Ministry of Education's National Commission for Intercultural Education in the country's schools. He is also on the board of the Catholic Church Commission for the Reduction of Foreign Debt in Poor Countries.

At the academic level, he focuses on dialogue with other religions through cultural education. His lessons, all held at the pontifical universities, are attended by Roman Catholics only, most of them not from Italy, and the intercultural atmosphere is dictated by the fact that the students are attending a course intended to enhance such dialogue.

"In some classes," Nkafu explained, "out of 74 students, as is the case at the Urbanian University, 50 students come from different countries on five continents. They start off having problems of integration. By attending the course, they begin

to see things differently. We encourage them to develop the awareness that they are citizens of the world, not of one country only."

"I don't give them a series of ideas to memorize," Nkafu said. "I am working on creating a dictionary together with all the students in a class. I ask each student in turn to give his definition of the same terms according to his individual experience and his particular cultural point of view. The definitions of these terms—like 'city' or 'citizen,' for example, or 'person' or 'society'—will vary a great deal depending on the student's national background. The different contributions are then shared and a multicultural vocabulary is gradually shaped.

"The students are eager to share their experiences, since they find that the setting promotes communication, but also eager to maintain the unique traits of each culture. After the terrorist attacks against the United States of September 11, 2001, something changed in the thinking of the entire world. Today we understand that there is no alternative to dialogue. Students are ever more aware that misunderstandings can and must be prevented with respect, trust, and equality."

"How will your students implement this knowledge?" we asked.

"Some of them will return to their own countries with this new background," Nkafu said. "Others, who are not European, will remain in

Italy, and unless they are sufficiently educated they may have serious problems of integration.

"We intend to generate in the students a way of thinking that will help them progress to a universal way of seeing the world. We give them the tools to allow them to realize they are citizens of the world. If they can rid their minds of prejudices, they are already universal citizens."

"How do you help them fight prejudice?" we inquired.

"I believe the important thing is that they do not hold prejudices against others. Because only by overcoming one's own prejudices can a person live successfully in a pluralistic world, in a multicultural community or society.

"The education for intercultural communication that we supply allows the students not only to feel that they belong to the world, but to believe so. All of our students, although not living in the country of their birth, are aware of the need for a united world in which individual differences are recognized as positive values, and not any longer as obstacles or negative values.

"The course on intercultural communication expands on intercultural theories, and subsequently on interreligious dialogue. The students learn to live in different cultural contexts while yet preserving their individual identities, which in fact is what they can offer to others."

"Is your approach also multireli-

gious and interreligious?" we wanted to know.

"Yes," Nkafu replied. "Because there is no religion before culture, there is no culture without a creed. We can say that there is no Catholic, no Muslim, no Jew before the culture of the Catholic, Muslim, and Jew exists. In other words, cultural roots have to be understood since a culture includes both human and spiritual dimensions. Every religion is experienced within the culture in such a

why we take into consideration the different cultures that determine a religion. I teach the students that they must first love one another as people, as human beings, and then as a Muslim, Buddhist, Jew, and so on. A deeper knowledge of a particular culture will subsequently lead to a better knowledge of the religion emerging from it.

"If we know and understand the culture, we naturally have to respect the religion coming from that cul-

ture first has to be dialogue between cultures?" we asked.

"Yes," Nkafu said. "We have to acknowledge the cultural differences. Dialogue is possible only between two identities. Respect for the other person comes from acceptance of the difference in identity, and this naturally leads to dialogue. Dialogue implies first knowing about the differences of those who differ from yourself. Dialogue stems from the encounter of two different identities that do not know each other.

"The exchange of learning from each other's differences brings about a new way of staying together, of sharing a common life. The problem is: What role does religion play within a culture? It is an indispensable aspect of a culture. If someone says we can live without religion, that person has taken no step, no stand. It is like saying, 'I can live without a culture.' In my course we study all cultures in order to discover the religion of each culture. If at a certain moment a religion 'disappears,' it means it never was a religion, because a religion is a value and values are everlasting.

"The evolution of a culture goes hand in hand with the evolution of a religion. There is no religion and no culture without a people who are incarnating this culture and this religion. That is why atheism does not exist, because it means in short renouncing your culture, which is not possible. We do not study in order to appreciate one religion or another; we want to discover where the roots of religion are, where the cultural values lie. When we understand this, we have matured. We have the foundation and we can respect the other religion because we know the value of other religions, thus promoting each of them."

"How do you intend to help your students achieve peace?" we asked.

"The matter of peace is also something that we discover within a culture. When the harmony of a culture is attacked, usually from outside, and nearly always for economic reasons,

*Professor Nkafu during his interview with DIARMA WORLD in Rome.*

way that there has to be a culture that incarnates it. It also must be said that there can be no religion without a group of people experiencing and expressing it within a given culture. There can be no Christianity without a Christian culture, just as there would be no Judaism without the Jewish culture.

"The course therefore first of all had to be multiculturally oriented, since religion is culture-based. This is

culture. Students are helped to learn the cultures and traditions of the different religions because they cannot know a religion without knowing what its culture is. You cannot 'know' a Jew without knowing the history of Judaism. The origins of any culture go a long way back, implying the need for the study of a long historical process."

"So is it right then that in order to promote interreligious dialogue,

the people must protect themselves. This undermines the stability of that culture, leading to violence and war. Peace always exists. It is simply a way of living in the absence of war. We have not yet understood sufficiently that the key to peace is respect for the other's identity and diversity. When this comes under attack, the entire cultural system is under attack. Peace requires not making war of any type—even discrimination is in one way a declaration of war on others.

“Peace consists in no longer producing the instruments of war, weapons. You cannot make war with rice. If money was invested not in the production of instruments of war, but in the maintenance of peace, there would be no war. The first instrument of peace is a universal call to cease the production of weapons. If the production of weapons becomes part of a culture, the culture is a culture of death.”

“So what do you suggest as a universal appeal?” we wanted to know.

“There should be a greater emphasis on the production of instruments for a culture of life. This can be achieved by knowing and respecting the many different cultures. Knowledge is the best weapon against war. Ignorance leads to war, and to violent death. The first aspect to stress is respect for and knowledge of the difference in the other person's culture. Throughout history, those who have tried to change ‘the other’ have never succeeded. You may change them today, but tomorrow they will return to their original state, because their originality is part of those cultural values that are eternal. Habits change, but values do not. Not even by persuasion can someone be convinced to abandon his or her religion and culture. You can only impose another religion or culture through coercion. People can change when they have no choice, but that does not mean they have truly changed. When they have the opportunity, they will return to their

original state, but with a new sense of revenge because of the pressures they experienced. Such revenge will lead to a new war of reaction and thus compromise the peace process in the world.

“All this can be avoided with knowledge and through education and the development of young

minds. The person who knows cannot be racist. Those who know cannot go against peace. They can only contribute love.” □

*Eva Ruth Palmieri worked for the Embassy of Israel to the Vatican for several years and has a deep personal interest in inter-religious dialogue.*

*Mahamayuri (Kujaku-myoo), a protector of Buddhism depicted as being seated in the lotus posture on a peacock, is the central image in an esoteric ritual performed for the cessation of natural disasters. Mahamayuri is worshiped for his power to remove all calamities, just as the peacock is thought to eat even poisonous worms. Colors on silk. 147.9 x 98.9 cm. Twelfth century. A National Treasure presently in the possession of the Tokyo National Museum.*



# The Enchanting World of the Lotus Sutra

(1)

by Gene Reeves

*This article represents the first installment in a new series of essays devoted to stories in the Lotus Sutra. Written by an American researcher on Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra, it offers fresh insights into how we can incorporate the teachings found in the sutra's dramatic stories in our daily lives.*

Having become someone who supposedly knows something about the Lotus Sutra, I am often asked about its teachings. Of course, the Lotus Sutra does have teachings. Indeed, one meaning of the term “dharma” is “teachings.” It is important and worthwhile to focus on them. Sometimes I do. But in this series of essays I want focus instead on the story dimension of the Lotus Sutra, on the Lotus Sutra as a genre that makes extensive use of dramatic stories.

The reason for this is quite simple. I believe that everything taught in the Lotus Sutra is for the purpose of re-orienting the lives of its hearers and readers. Its teachings, I believe, are not—at least not primarily—for giving us interesting ideas, or for adding to our store of knowledge, or for teaching us doctrines to believe or affirm. The teachings of the Lotus Sutra are aimed at changing people’s lives.

In this sense, the Lotus Sutra is as much, or more, an earthly, bodily, “physical” text as it is a spiritual one. It aims not merely for spiritual experiences, but change in behavior. In chapter 12, the Bodhisattva Accumulated Wisdom says, “I have observed that in the [whole] world there is not even a spot as small as a mustard seed where [the Buddha] has not laid down body and life as a bodhisattva for the sake of the living.”<sup>1</sup> The Lotus Sutra has to do with laying down one’s body and life.

This is why it is a book of enchantment. It uses a variety of stories, including its famous parables, to draw us into its world, a world in which, if we truly enter it, we are likely to be transformed.

## Kenji Miyazawa (1896–1933)

One person who understood well the importance of enchantment was Kenji Miyazawa, the poet, storyteller, science-fiction writer, scientist, and lover of the Lotus Sutra. Chanting *Namu Myōhō Renge-kyō*, he imagined his spirit flying in boundless space, where he was filled with joy in

the great cosmos, and from which he returned to earth, having acquired strength and courage to endure a life of suffering.

Known throughout the Tohoku area of Japan as “Kenji bosatsu” (Kenji the bodhisattva), Miyazawa devoted his whole life to the Lotus Sutra—to practicing the Lotus Sutra, to embodying the Lotus Sutra, to living the Lotus Sutra—by helping the struggling farmers of Iwate Prefecture with modern agricultural science.

One of his most ambitious works, *A Night on the Milky Way Railroad*, was turned into a popular animated film and used in various Japanese *manga* comic books.

It is a story about a young boy, Giovanni, and his friend Campanella, who ride a train to the stars together—a celestial railroad, soaring through deep space—experiencing

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*In this 1925 photo, Kenji Miyazawa, the poet, storyteller, science-fiction writer, scientist, and lover of the Lotus Sutra, teaches a class at Hanamaki Agricultural School about soil distribution in the Kitakami plain in his native Iwate Prefecture.*

numerous adventures and encountering unusual characters. In the final passages of the story it becomes clear that this night train to the stars that Giovanni and his friend Campanella are riding is actually a ferry for souls traveling to life after death!

In a chapter called “Giovanni’s Ticket,” the conductor asks the passengers for their tickets. Campanella, who is dead from drowning, like the other passengers has a small gray, one-way ticket. Giovanni, who at first is very nervous because he thinks he has no ticket at all, discovers in a pocket a larger folded piece of green paper with mysterious characters written down the center. Examining this ticket, the conductor is astonished, and asks: “Did you get this ticket from three-dimensional space?” Bird-catcher, another passenger, then exclaims:

Wow, this is really something. This ticket will even let you go up to the real heaven. And not just to heaven, it is a pass that enables you to travel anywhere you want. If you have this, in fact, you can travel anywhere on this Milky Way Railway of the imperfect fourth-dimension of fantasy.<sup>2</sup>

Giovanni alone on that train has a magical round-trip pass that enables him to freely travel from the “three-dimen-

sional space” of ordinary reality to anywhere in the “fourth-dimensional space” of the invisible, spiritual, imaginative, and enchanting world that is the Milky Way Railroad.

What is this extraordinary railway ticket that enables one to enter the fourth-dimensional world and then return to the ordinary world? Giovanni’s ticket is the *gohonzon* (object of worship), or mandala, of Nichiren, with its inscription of the *daimoku*, the sacred title of the Lotus Sutra: “*Namu Myoho Renge-kyo*.” The *daimoku*, as it represents and embodies the Lotus Sutra, provides a connection, a passage as it were, between earth and heaven, between earthly and cosmic perspectives, between science and imagination.

Like poets before him, Miyazawa understood the deepest meaning of the Lotus Sutra—an affirmation of the reality and importance of this world, the world in which suffering has to be endured, combined with an imaginative cosmic perspective engendered by devotion to the Lotus Sutra. And with his imaginative power and skill as a writer, Miyazawa offers Giovanni’s ticket to all of us. Like the sutra itself, he uses his own imagination to invite us into an imaginary other world in order to have us become more this-worldly.

In other words, the imagination, which makes it possible

to soar above the realities of everyday existence, also makes it possible to function more effectively in this world.

### Chapter I

A Chinese/Japanese term often used for "introduction" is more literally "entry gate." And while that is not what the first chapter of the Lotus Sutra is called, that is exactly what it is. It is a gateway through which one can enter a new and mysterious, enchanting world, a world of the imagination.

The setting, the opening scene, is on Sacred Eagle Peak. This Sacred Eagle Peak is not off somewhere in another world. It is a real place on a mountain in northeast India. I was there earlier this year. But as well as being an actual, physical, and historical place, the Sacred Eagle Peak of the Lotus Sutra is a mythical place.

The place which we visited, the geographical place, is like a platform set on a steep mountainside, perhaps three-fourths of the way up the mountain. Above and below it, the mountain is both steep and rough. It is not the kind of place where anyone could sit and listen to a sermon or lecture. And the clearing platform area itself would not hold more than three dozen or so people at one time.

In the sutra this little place is populated by a huge assembly, with thousands of monks and nuns, and lay people, eighty thousand bodhisattvas, and in addition a large number of gods, god-kings (including Indra, King of the Gods), dragon kings, chimera kings, centaur kings, titan kings, griffin kings, satyrs, pythons, minor kings, and holy wheel-rolling kings. Already, just from the listing of such a population, and there is more, we know we have entered a realm that is special, even magical.

We do not know much about the Indian origins of the Lotus Sutra, but we do know that it was produced in northern India by monks, and it is very likely that many of its first hearers and readers would have known perfectly well that Sacred Eagle Peak was in actuality much too small for the kind of assembly described at the beginning of chapter I. We are to understand from the very beginning, in other words, that this is a story, not a precise description of historical events, but a mythical account of historical events. It is meant not just for our knowledge, but for our participation. It invites us to use our own imagination to participate in the sutra's world of enchantment.

Some years ago when I wrote to a friend that I had moved to Japan to work on the Lotus Sutra, he responded that he had read the sutra a long time ago and could not remember much about it, except for the fact that it contained a lot of "miracle stories." There is, of course, a sense in which that is correct. The sutra does have a great many stories of fantastic, supernormal, or supernatural events and of the Buddha's and various bodhisattvas' divine or supernatural powers. But one thing these stories do not and cannot do, it has always seemed to me, is to function as "miracle stories" in the Christian sense of

that term, that is, as stories that can be used to "prove" something about the intervention of supernatural power in history.

The stories in the Lotus Sutra, or at least many of them, are so fantastic, so imaginative, so unlike anything we have experienced, that they cannot possibly be taken for history or description of factual matters, or stories about actual historical events. The reader of the Lotus Sutra knows from the very first chapter that he or she has entered an imaginary world quite different from what we ordinarily perceive. And if the stories are successful, the reader will come to understand that he or she is empowered to perform miracles.

That this setting is in the actual world, on earth, is very important for the Lotus Sutra. In it there is explicit rejection of forms of idealism, such as Platonism, in which actual things are only poor reflections of some other ideal reality. In Buddhism, idealism took the form especially of the two-truth theory of Nagarjuna, according to which there is a world of appearance or phenomenon and a world of reality or truth. For the Lotus Sutra, however, this *saha* world, the world of things (*dharmas*), is the ultimately real world. This is the world in which Shakyamuni Buddha lives, both historically and in the present. This is the world in which countless bodhisattvas emerge from below to indicate the importance of bodhisattvas of this world taking care of this world. This is the world to which buddhas and bodhisattvas from all over the universe come to witness the actions of Shakyamuni Buddha. This is the world that, as it is for Giovanni, can be a base from which the human imagination can soar. This is the world in which all human beings are offered a special opportunity to be bodhisattvas and practice the Buddha-way, the way in which we too can be buddhas, buddhas right here on earth in the midst of the world's suffering.

### Affirmation of the Concrete

William LaFleur<sup>3</sup> describes how Tendai thought, and especially Chih-i's *Mo-ho-chih-kuan* and the Lotus Sutra, influenced a transformation of Japanese poetry in the twelfth century. He points out that in the Lotus Sutra there is a philosophical move that is the opposite of what predominated in the West under the influence of Platonism. In the sutra, "the illustration is in no way subordinate to what it illustrates." Not a shadow of something else more real, "the narratives of the Lotus are not a means to an end beyond themselves. Their concrete mode of expression is not 'chaff' to be dispensed with in order to attain a more abstract, rational, or spiritual truth."

The sutra itself says:

Even if you search in all directions,  
There are no other vehicles,  
Except the skillful means of the Buddha.

*Detail of the Lotus Sutra Mandala at the temple Honko-ji, Shizuoka Prefecture, depicting the opening scene of the Lotus Sutra, in which Shakyamuni Buddha begins to deliver a sermon on Sacred Eagle Peak. Photo by Satokazu Yazawa.*



In other words, apart from concrete events, apart from stories, teachings, actions, and so on, there is no Buddhism.

Thus, LaFleur explains, Chih-i's contemplation is a kind of mindfulness (*vipassana*) directed toward objects of ordinary perception in which there is an implied rejection of the kind of ontological dualism in which essences are more real than concrete things. Thus what was important in the *Mo-ho-chih-kuan* for the poets Fujiwara no Shunzei (1114–1204) and Fujiwara no Teika (1162–1241) was the teaching of *gensho soku jisso*—the identity of the phenomenal and the real, held together in a dynamic tension by Chih-i's notion of the middle.

In LaFleur's words, this constitutes a kind of "ontological egalitarianism" in which the abstract is no more real than the concrete. As the philosopher of religion Shin'ichi Hisamatsu (1889–1980) suggested, "to dig to the core of the core is to discover the invalidity of such distinctions and also to discover that, seen from the inside, the surface is deep."

A famous poem of Teika is analyzed.

Gaze out far enough,  
beyond all cherry blossoms  
and scarlet maples,  
to those huts by the harbor  
fading in the autumn dusk.

This is no ordinary evocation of impermanence, but an invitation to see that by attempting to look over and beyond the ordinary and transient we discover that the huts in the distance have also begun to disappear, signifying a collapse of the distance between them and the cherries and maples.

LaFleur concludes:

The world of such poetry and such drama was one in which determinate emotions or ideas were no longer fixed to determinate images or actions. Simple symbols no longer seemed adequate; their portrait was deemed naive because it had too severely limited the relationship among phenomena. The Buddhists of medieval Japan, nurtured as they were in Tendai, held that the universe was such that even "in one thought there are three thousand worlds" (*ichinen sanzen*). This implied the boundlessness of the interpenetration of phenomena with one another. To the dimension of depth in the universe itself these Buddhists reacted with a sense of awe. . . . And, to poets such as Shunzei, a universe of this depth deserved a degree and a mode of appreciation beyond that given to it by the traditional aesthetic.

In chapter 1, before the vast assembly, having already preached the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, the Bud-

dha entered deeply into meditative concentration. Then, to prepare the assembly to hear the Buddha preach, various omens suddenly appeared—flowers rained down from heaven on everyone, the earth trembled and shook, and the Buddha emitted a ray of light from between his eyebrows, lighting up eighteen thousand worlds to the east, so that the whole assembly could see these worlds in great detail, including their heavens and hells, all their living beings, and even their past and present buddhas.

Surely we are being advised here that we are entering a different world, and a different kind of world, a world that is at once rich in fantasy and at the same time anchored in this world.

Enchantment, here, means a certain kind of fascination with the ordinary world. It means finding the special, even the supernatural, within the ordinary world of our existence. It means seeing this world itself as different, as special—as important and valuable. And this means that our lives—how we live and what we do—are important, not only for ourselves, but also for the Buddha and for the entire cosmos.

Thus the Lotus Sutra opens up this world as a magical world, a world in which flowers rain down from the heavens, drums sound by themselves, and Shakyamuni Buddha lights up all the worlds with beams of light. It is a world in which an illusory castle-city provides a resting place for weary travelers, in which a stupa emerges from the ground so that a buddha from long ago can praise Shakyamuni for teaching and preaching the Lotus Sutra, where the Bodhisattva Wonderful Voice, with his nearly perfect, giant, and radiant body, from another world makes flowers appear on Sacred Eagle Peak and then comes through countless millions of worlds with eighty-four thousand other bodhisattvas to visit Shakyamuni Buddha and others, or where the Bodhisattva Universal Sage comes flying through the sky on his white elephant with six tusks to visit this world.

*To be continued*

## Notes

1. Here, and throughout this series, translations of the Lotus Sutra are my own, based on the version of Kumārajīva's translation into Chinese published in three volumes by Iwanami Shoten, and with frequent reference to translations by Bunnō Katō et al. (Kosei Publishing Company, 1975), Leon Hurvitz (Columbia University Press, 1976), Senchū Murano (Nichiren Shū, 1991), Burton Watson (Columbia University Press, 1993), and Jean-Noël Robert (Fayard, 1997).

2. *Ginga Tetsudō no Yoru*, Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten Publishing Co., Ltd., 1985, pp. 201–2.

3. "Symbol and Yūgen: Shunzei's Use of Tendai Buddhism" in *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan* (University of California Press, 1983).

# The Mandate of Dialogue: Practical Proposals

by Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki

*I challenge America's clergy, lay leaders, theologians, and ordinary worshipers: Let us spur a new, pluralistic, socially responsible "great awakening" so that by 2010 Americans will be more deeply engaged than we are today in one or another spiritual community of meaning, while at the same time becoming more tolerant of the faiths and practices of other Americans.*

—Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone, The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), p. 409

Interreligious dialogue must go beyond the academic community and into the various faith denominations. I believe this movement should be both theoretical and practical, and that the two are necessarily intertwined. In my own work in these past few years with a Buddhist-Christian dialogue group, we have focused with some intensity on the common agreement that consumerism and ecological destruction are maladies that must be addressed individually and jointly by our respective religious traditions. Yet another pressing social problem needs to be addressed: the breakdown of community within the United States. One reason for our ability to address such issues together is that, for a variety of reasons, we all affirm the integrity and value of each other's religious faith and tradition. Our issue is not disagreements among

our religious views, but the wider problems that threaten the common good of earth and its creatures. And so we have focused on analyses of social problems from both Christian and Buddhist perspectives, each of us drawing from our respective traditions to condemn economic/ecological/social ill-being, and calling for alternative action. We have used aspects of our respective traditions to ground alternative actions.

While we are not isolated from our communities relative to such ethical imperatives, we are (and I speak for my own Christian community) much more likely to be isolated from our communities relative to our mutual knowledge and regard for one another. Many in our communities of faith do not share our mutual regard. While it is certainly possible to engage our communities in cooperative action simply on the basis of the common economic/ecological/social problems, I submit that unless we also address the perplexities and fears concerning religious pluralism, we will not have fulfilled our responsibilities adequately. People with experience in such a dialogue group are uniquely fitted to address these perplexities and fears, and by doing so we are more apt to gain interreligious cooperation on the ethical issues as well. In the process, we will in some small way increase the "social capital" of our cultural communal life together.

My argument proceeds in several phases, with the focus being the situation in Christian religious communities. I also refer, however, to the model of the Risho Kosei-kai Buddhist community in Japan, which offers inspiration concerning interreligious cooperation. So I argue for: 1) the plight of many Christian communities concerning attitudes toward other religions; 2) possibilities for addressing this situation; 3) the power of an affirming theology to change behavior; and 4) the imperative of changed behavior. Working to our advantage in this situation is the reality that traditions live in and through their own trans-

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formations. My argument suggests that the continuing life of at least the Christian tradition (and I hope the Buddhist, as well) calls for contemporary transformation in the direction of affirming the value, integrity, and effectiveness of many religions. Such affirmation is a basis for cooperative rather than competitive attitudes and actions relative to common problems.

### The Plight of the Christian Response to Pluralism

I need not reintroduce the well-known history of Christian exclusivism. It is scant comfort to know that no religion has an uncheckered past in this regard. Christian crusades and pogroms and exploitations of various kinds unfortunately have parallels in other religions. Let me immediately say that part of the “checkeredness” of that past is that Christianity, like other religions, also includes personal and social saintliness. Like all things human, we have known and participated in good and evil.

But whether for good or for evil, we Christians have tended toward exclusivism. The crux of the matter may well lie in our soteriology—our belief in salvation through Jesus Christ. Like all religions, Christians have named that which we, from our perspective, consider problematic about the human condition. We have not named this basic problem “suffering,” as has Buddhism. Rather, we have named the problem “sin.” Certainly sin has been variously interpreted, but it has usually conveyed at least these things: 1) humans are caught in a web of sin prior to their individual choices. This web functions somewhat like karma, inexorably working itself out both socially and individually, but it bends individuals toward perpetuation of the sin that binds us. 2) We are nonetheless responsible for sin. Even to name a situation as sin is to say, “This ought not to be the case.” 3) There is a better way, and through Jesus Christ this way is made possible for us.

So far this may seem rather innocuous. But we Christians have held that all peoples, and not just Christians, share this plight of sin. In one version of the story, a strange biology held sway. All human beings of whatever time were considered present as “homunculi” within Adam’s loins. When Adam fell from God’s grace, the whole of him fell, including his loins and their contents—everyone else ever to be born. Just as his guilt pervaded his whole being, even so those in his loins participated in that guilt. Everyone was born, then, bearing the guilt of Adam, and it was only a matter of time until each individual lived out the dark destiny of sin. Humans were free to choose *how* they would sin, but not *whether* they would sin.

This all sounds very mythological, and indeed, with the discovery of history and biology, Adam tended to recede as an explanatory cause of the human penchant to sin. I say “tended,” because there is a large contingent of followers of so-called Christian “creation science” who are adamantly bent on retaining the historical effectiveness of Adam as an explanation for human sin. But this is all a

story that I need not probe too closely here. The point is, Christian doctrine consigns the human race to sin, and then posits Jesus Christ as the answer to sin. Just as reasons for positing the human penchant to sin have changed over the centuries, even so the reason Jesus Christ saves from sin has also changed throughout Christian history. But *that* he saves from sin has been a constant. A major way of phrasing it has been that humans are in such a plight that only God can get us out of it. The death of Jesus Christ does get us out of it, and therefore Jesus is God, dying and rising to release us from the problem of sin and renew us in and toward righteousness. If God’s own self has thus saved us in Jesus Christ, then the only way to God is through Jesus Christ.

I have very baldly sketched the essence of Christian theology, but despite the variations it has been given, it nonetheless suggests that there is but one way out of the problem of human sin, and that is through Jesus Christ. If everyone is embroiled in the same problem of sin, then everyone must somehow or other, whether in this life or some other, go through the Jesus-gate, as it were, in order to be freed from sin and be right with God. The soteriology, then, argues against any ultimate validation of other religions. When they have been valued at all, they have been valued penultimately or less; ultimately, salvation comes only through Jesus Christ.

Now it may be that other religions are in the same situation. I understand that the Dalai Lama, who is justly famed for his kind attitude toward other religions, is convinced that the Buddha, who is skillful in means, will eventually make us all Buddhists. It simply takes more lives than many of us have currently experienced. In a sense then, soteriology, insofar as it requires a Jesus-gate or a Buddha-gate, appears to present somewhat of an obstacle to affirmation of other religions in and of themselves. And my concern here is primarily the difficulty this occasions within Christian communities.

I believe that the situation in many churches is this. Most Christians are good-hearted people who desire to affirm other faiths. I think this is true even of staunch fundamentalists who think all who differ from themselves will go to hell; this thought distresses them. In the main-line churches hell is no longer in vogue, but a tension exists between peoples’ heads and hearts. In their hearts they affirm their neighbors of other religious faiths, but their heads find no theological resource within their Christian faith for doing so. To the contrary, the soteriology argues against such affirmation, for unless people are covered by Jesus’ sacrifice for sin, their sins separate them from God. This creates a fundamental reserve and ambiguity: How can one be Christian—trusting that God has acted for us in Jesus Christ—and honestly affirm others who do not trust in Christ?

There is also the time-honored habit of stereotyping those whose ways are strange to us. One could almost



affirm the doctrine of original sin simply on the basis of the human habit of vilifying those who are different. I listened to a Hmong tribesman not long ago who told me the heart-wrenching story of how his father had been made to crawl on his belly to the home of a Laotian citizen in order to beg for salt. Why? Because he was a despised Hmong, a member of the mountain people of southern China and neighboring areas of Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand, who are subject to frequent discrimination. While this was in a Buddhist setting, the stench of American vilification of African-Americans, native Americans, and Asian and Mexican immigrants is certainly as ugly if not uglier. There is something in us humans that does not like difference. Thus the movement toward affirmation of others must fight not only against beliefs that insist we all be saved the same way; it also fights against differences in many modes. So the desire to affirm the other is challenged intellectually through ideologies, and instinctively through a mistrust of those who are seen as "different."

For all these problems—and I think they are deep—there are thousands of Christians of good will and loving hearts who desire to transcend the problems, and affirm others. And I know from my visit with Risho Kosei-kai in Japan in the summer of 2000 that there are thousands of Buddhists who have transcended the problems, and who are working toward the common good with people of other faiths. Perhaps in their heart of hearts they are convinced that eventually we will all be Buddhists in the Buddha's good time, and their respect for other religions stems from the profound Buddhist insight that the Buddha uses other religions as skillful means. Like the false carts in the parable in the Lotus Sutra, these other religions will eventually fall away. I do not know if this thought underlies the generosity of Risho Kosei-kai to other religions, however; I only know that these hospitable and good people reach out to work with many religious communities to relieve suffering around the world.

What about our Christian communities? Christians, too, cooperate with those of other faiths in humanitarian efforts. But for us I do not think it good enough to regard Buddhists, Muslims, Jains, Jews, etc., as folk who are to be affirmed because they will eventually come to Christ, whether in this life or after death. I think it essential to find ways to help Christians affirm others because those others are intrinsically valuable in their own right, and out of a genuinely Christian sense that it is God who calls various religions into being. This, of course, is a bit analogous to the thought that the Buddha uses other religions as skillful means. If the Buddha calls us not to the Buddha, but to what is called the buddha-nature, then the analogy is apt. Perhaps the method of salvation is the ultimate sticking point—but I still strive to reframe at least the Christian soteriology in as open a manner as possible.

For the intellectuals of our traditions, it is our job to

pitch in and help our communities toward authentic ways of affirming others, and thus of expanding the sense of community. It becomes one way in which we can do something positive in light of Robert Putnam's challenge quoted at the beginning of this essay. We must offer leadership to our communities to address the obstacles created by the belief in salvation only through Jesus Christ and the uneasiness that attends the fear of difference.

### Possibilities for Addressing the Situation

There are two strategies that I think must be followed. One is to explore and/or develop alternative salvation theologies for churches, and to develop liturgies, hymns, and curricula that offer more helpful ways to envision what God has done for us in Christ. This strategy focuses on intra-Christian learning. The other is to work with denominations designing curricula for teen and adult levels that acquaint Christians with the content of other religions. This work should be accompanied by, or followed by, local interfaith dialogue that in itself widens the sense of community. This creates a cooperative climate of friendship. Together as friends, communities of faith can address communal problems. Mutual work, in turn, reinforces mutual trust. Through such actions and trust, communities of faith become "social capital" toward the common good.

**Alternative Salvation Beliefs** While in any Christian era there may be a dominant salvation belief, it is not the case that there has always been only one. But American Christians tend to be an ahistorical people without any clear understanding of the development of doctrine. When they hear in many ways, whether in hymns, liturgies, or even through accounts of various TV evangelists, the single belief that God accepts and forgives us only because Jesus died in our place for our sins, they assume that Christians have always thought this. While this has indeed been dominant, there is an alternative "revelational" salvation theory that has grown in strength, particularly within the last decades. This view holds that Jesus died *because of sin*, not *for sin*, and that in and through his life, as well as his death and resurrection, Jesus reveals God's saving love. This love empowers us toward communities of justice.

Jesus died because of sin for the simple reason that it is sinful to torture living creatures. Thousands of crosses lined the Appian Way; brutality and cruelty were part and parcel of the Roman "peace." And this was sinful. Because of the human penchant to deal with dissidents by cruel death, and because Jesus was a dissident against injustice, he was tortured to death on the cross. He died because of sin.

The former cochair of the Jesus Seminar, John Dominic Crossan, tells us that the notion of resurrection began in ancient Israel when the righteous Maccabees were mar-



tyred because of their attempt to save the temple from sacrilege. If God rewards the righteous, how can God truly reward the righteous when in and through their righteousness, they were martyred? And so the notion of resurrection—already current in the Greco-Roman world—took life in Jewish thought. God would vindicate the righteous in a life beyond earthly death. Similarly, the righteous Jesus died, and the resurrection signified that God triumphs over our sin, that neither sin nor evil is final, that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Furthermore, the symbol of the resurrection vindicates the life and teaching of Jesus, so that they become authoritative for every Christian and therefore for every Christian community. We are baptized into his life, death, and resurrection, and who he was informs who we can be; we are constitutively saved by him. This salvation encompasses the whole of our living: the love of God manifested in him is to be manifested in us, to the end that we shall live toward righteousness in the world. The reason that we *can* be saved by him is because of the nature of God. It is not that Jesus died, and therefore God saves us; rather, God saves us, and therefore when Jesus died God creatively transformed that death into a means of salvation for those of us who are informed by its trajectory.

Again, I have baldly outlined a salvation belief, just as I previously sketched out a vicarious atonement. My point is not to use this essay to develop a full-fledged soteriology, but simply to indicate that salvation beliefs based on revelation rather than on vicarious suffering have come to prominence in the past century. If a salvific doctrine is based on the nature of God, with Christ being a revelation of that nature, there is in principle no reason there could not be other salvific revelations. In a culture that defines the fundamental problem to be sin and separation from God, the salvation theology will be framed in languages of forgiveness and reconciliation with God. But again, there is no reason in principle that the problem must be so formulated—particularly if the ancient story of our joint presence in Adam is not biologically true. That there are problems in our finite and needy human situation is fairly universal; how those problems are analyzed philosophically and/or religiously is variable. Salvific doctrines will be as various as the cultures in which they are formed. And a Christian can say that the gracious love of God works in all cultures to draw persons into meaningful and caring communities that reflect in finite form the love of God. These communities, like Christianity, are life-empowering in their own distinctive ways.

Clearly, I only need refer again to the sorry Christian history of pogroms and witch-burnings to underscore the fact that no religious tradition, whether Christian or oth-

**The movement toward affirmation of others must fight not only against beliefs that insist we all be saved the same way; it must also fight against differences in many modes.**

erwise, is free from ambiguity and evil. I am not trying to affirm an unqualified goodness to every religion, nor to suggest blanket approval of everything any religion does. One (but only one) function of inter-religious dialogue is to see ourselves as much as possible through one another's eyes, and so to discern afresh areas within our own traditions requiring creative transformation. But that is another topic. My point is to suggest rather strongly that salvific doctrines are available within Christianity that do not require all persons to be saved by Jesus Christ. Soteriology need

not be a block to the affirmation of religions other than Christianity.

Having suggested this, however, I would argue that the place where such salvation beliefs are needed is not particularly in the academy or among theologians or in inter-religious dialogue. Rather, the soteriological discussion belongs in the church. Congregations need to know their own histories, to understand the theological options available, and to reflect more deeply on what it means to be saved by God in and through our faith in Jesus Christ. Congregations need to realize that there are theological reasons, consistent with Christian faith, for the wholehearted affirmation of one's religiously different neighbors.

In order for this to happen, we who are academic theologians need to orient at least some of our written work toward the laity, and to work with our denominations to devise educational and liturgical materials reflecting revelational salvific doctrines. That there is more than one Christian way to interpret the meaning of the death of Christ needs to be known in Christian communities.

**Education** When American teenagers reach college age, if they take any course in religion at all it is most likely to be in Eastern religions. I speak from the experience of having taught introductory courses in Eastern religions at Wichita State University, Wright State University, and the University of Cincinnati. My students were young people whose basic religious orientation was Christian. But all the evidence indicates that they had little acquaintance with their own religion, and no acquaintance at all with any other until they entered the university and included "religion" as an elective. I could only conclude that the church does a very poor job of educating its young people, since it seems that their first encounter with any scholarly study of religion must await their entrance to a secular university. Furthermore, since there is no requirement that students in secular universities study religion, whether or not they do so is also a variable. We who are intellectual leaders in the Christian tradition have a responsibility to influence our respective communities to take education seriously. Our youth and our adults must

be offered serious education in their own tradition, and then in other traditions as well.

There are ample opportunities for doing this. I mention two that fortuitously came my way: I blush to state that I did not seek them out. The first had to do with a confirmation curriculum that was being developed by the Christian religious publisher Abingdon Press for use with young teens. Publisher Harriet Olson asked if I would “be so kind” as to look it over and give a critique. I did read the materials, and was appalled by the superficiality of content in what was to be the culminating study guide for children. It basically said that it is a nice world, God loves us, and we should be good. If these statements were conclusions to Christian knowledge one would not quarrel with them, but when they are simply stated with neither foundation nor further implication, they reflect and lead to a shallow faith soon wrecked, as Whitehead said, “on the shoals of the problem of evil.”

Because I am a Christian theologian who was in the right place at the right time, I was offered the opportunity to make many suggestions concerning the rewriting of the curriculum, suggestions which, to my gratitude, were taken seriously. Shouldn't I go further? Shouldn't I seek out opportunities to work with Christian educators in the initial design of the curriculum intended for the youth of our churches? Shouldn't we academics all seek such service? In the process, can we not share with congregations some of the contemporary options in salvific doctrine?

The second opportunity concerns a group of about twenty people in a United Methodist Church in Tyler, Texas, who have been studying biblical scholars and theologians for the past five years. They happened to begin studying my own work several years ago, and—because my daughter lives in nearby Dallas—I have visited the group twice. I found typical lay people in that they were highly educated in various professions, but somewhat atypical in that an assistant pastor had responded to their discomfort with their own ignorance of things Christian by launching them on a path of serious study. This group is now working with me as critics of my current project, a book on a Christian theology of religious pluralism. Instead of being “found” by such an opportunity, what if we sought them out?

A colleague, John B. Cobb, Jr., is far ahead of me on this issue; for the past decade he has undertaken serious publications oriented toward a lay audience. But I am teased by the responsibility of academic theologians and religionists to work with actual communities of faith in developing our work. Our profession, like every profession, has developed its own useful jargon that helps us to communicate quickly with one another, but closes the

**We leaders have a responsibility to take education seriously. Our youth and our adults must be offered serious education in their own tradition, and then in other traditions as well.**

door to those unaccustomed to the professional language. If we could learn how to share that language with the laity, would our works become more accessible? Could we then speak with and from the church, both learning and leading? Through such partnership, can congregations think *with* us as we develop theology? Must the academic theologian always live in a thought world far removed from that of the congregation in which he or she worships? I think not.

With regard to direct teaching concerning other religions, the twentieth century saw denominational attempts to offer some knowledge of other religions, particularly Judaism. But when we seldom go very deeply into our own religion, it is hard to press much further into another. We settle for surface knowledge, visiting one another's places of worship, occasionally cooperating with one another toward some communal good. These exchanges and cooperations are to be cherished. But more is needed. Many of us have richly benefited from written and personal knowledge gained through sustained dialogue. Why not promote such dialogue among religious communities? Such dialogue can itself be the catalyst toward learning more about one's own faith, in order to be a faithful representative in dialogue with another. Dialogue also pushes toward learning more about the other's faith, replacing stereotypes with friendships that in turn foster joint civic projects.

Robert Putnam notes that despite membership declines that mirror the decline in American society, people who participate in mainline religious groups tend to serve civic life more directly than do other Americans. He also points out that unlike more conservative church members, mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics tend to share the cultural shift toward a greater acceptance of various forms of diversity.

While we who are Christians who represent mainline Protestants and Catholics do devote some time to sharing our faith perspectives, by far we have been more intensely occupied with common civic and environmental problems of economism/consumerism. Perhaps this same movement would happen were we to be successful in promoting interfaith dialogue at the congregational level. Perhaps the concerns about beliefs would lead to greater trust of one another, which would itself bear fruit in discovering common civic concerns.

### **The Power of an Affirming Theology**

I refer once again to Rissho Kosei-kai, admitting that I have a bare acquaintance with the group. But as I understand it, this form of Tendai Buddhism came into being in Japan in the 1930s. From its earliest stages, the mission of Rissho Kosei-kai was not to convert the world to Bud-

dhism, much less to its own variation of Buddhism. To be sure, it was concerned to share its identity—a concern that involved me in their summer 2000 conference, “The Lotus Sutra and Process Thought.” In many ways, Rissho Kosei-kai seeks to make the wisdom of this sutra known throughout the world.

But this sharing of identity was for the purpose of meaningful partnership with other religions in dealing together with suffering. Accordingly, for the past sixty years, Rissho Kosei-kai members have unstintingly worked toward peace by allying themselves with other religious leaders in efforts to work together with governments. And Rissho Kosei-kai members are found throughout the world wherever there is suffering, whether from natural disasters or from human greed and/or hatred.

My impression is that the major reasons for the effectiveness of Rissho Kosei-kai are: 1) they do not fear different religions; 2) they understand well their own, along with its imperatives of wisdom and compassion; 3) they have Buddhist reasons for affirming the value of many religions. As a result, they are remarkably unified in their actions toward seeking basic welfare for all beings in the world, particularly in the human community. This is not done imperialistically: To the contrary, because they seek to work cooperatively, they work with other religions and with the people they serve toward agreed upon goods: food instead of hunger, peace instead of war, shelter instead of homelessness, safety instead of harm. They become a telling illustration of the power of an affirming theology to motivate an entire religious group toward actions that seek the common good.

If the way one thinks about other religions makes a difference to how one responds to other religions, and if we are—as Rissho Kosei-kai affirms—in a world situation today where we *must* work together—then we who are Christian theologians cannot ignore our responsibility to share theologies affirming other religions with the communities we represent and serve. And obviously, I hold Rissho Kosei-kai as an example within the Buddhist community as well.

I live in a community that is home to a rather spectacular retirement community called “Pilgrim Place.” Truthfully, “retirement” is an odd word to use for such active folks, but Pilgrim Place is now home for many retired missionaries. In my experience, people who are most open to Christian affirmation of other religions are those people who have spent their lives working in the midst of other religions. What may have begun as an effort simply to convert others to Christianity often seems to have become an effort to work with a group toward their own communal well-being. I recently heard a retired Methodist missionary from Chile speak about the Agricultural College the church founded in the desert of northern Chile. Its purpose? Caught between war and famine, mountain people were leaving their homes and traveling

to the cities in order to find work—but in the cities they found themselves the “lowest of the low,” exploited and beaten. The Agricultural College was to share new techniques of mountain farming methods with the people so that they could live productively on the land they loved. Since the establishment of the college in 1992, the flow of the people to the desolation of the cities has ceased. The purpose of the mission was to work with the people toward their own well-being. Christian identity was not hidden, any more than Buddhist identity is in Rissho Kosei-kai. But Christian identity pushed beyond its own replication, and into the creative transformation of the lives of the people it served.

The missionaries responsible for this work did not fear others, nor were they ignorant or unappreciative of the beliefs of the Chileans. Their own theologies did not require that others first conform to these theologies, and then and only then would they be loved by God. To the contrary, they were convinced that God loved the Chileans whether the missionaries were there or not, and that God worked with the Chileans toward their own well-being, whether or not the missionaries were there. The missionaries’ self-understanding was gratitude at the privilege of being partners with God and with the Chilean people in contributing to the common good. A theology of affirmation is a powerful catalyst for working together toward the communal good.

### The Imperative of Changed Behavior

The book *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam underscores the breakdown of civic life in America. Where once Americans lived in communities that valued relationships and action for the common good, we now live in disconnection and fragmentation. Putnam’s analysis of our plight is particularly alarming. Actions and policies with adverse effects on the environment will continue unchecked if there is no concerted public action against them. Public action is based on what Putnam calls social capital. Therefore, we must increase the social capital of our communities of faith at the same time that we energize them to meet the environmental and consumerist crises of our times. Engaging our faith communities in interreligious dialogue is one way to increase the social capital of our communities, and therefore to provide grounds for mutual cooperative action toward the common good.

The specific suggestions I have mentioned may or may not have much merit, but I hope they will generate even better ideas for ways of extending our work beyond dialogue with each other into greater dialogue at the denominational and congregational levels. Some dialogue is already taking place, and for this we are all grateful. My argument is based on the conviction that much more is needed, and that we theologians ourselves can be agents toward the creative transformations that dialogue makes newly possible. □



## Mexican Bishop Selected as the Recipient of the 19th Niwano Peace Prize

The Niwano Peace Foundation announced on February 22 that it will award the 19th Niwano Peace Prize to Bishop Samuel Ruiz García, president of the Oscar Romero International Solidarity Secretariat, Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Human Rights Center, and Service and Advice for the Peace in Mexico. The 77-year-old Bishop Ruiz has served as a Roman Catholic bishop for over 40 years in the Mexican state of Chiapas.

Bishop Ruiz was selected as recipient of the prize following rigorous screening by a committee of seven members, representing the world's major religions, from among those nominated by 1,000 persons of recognized stature from 125 countries worldwide. The presentation ceremony will be held in a Tokyo hotel on May 9. He will receive a citation and a medal together with an award of 20 million yen.

Bishop Ruiz has long been engaged in human-rights activities in Mexico and elsewhere in Central and South America. He has devoted himself untiringly especially to raising the social standing of the indigenous communities of Mexico and to the reclamation and preservation of their native cultures. Sincerity and impartiality are hallmarks of his personality and his activities based on his religious faith have brought him the deep trust of ordinary citizens, who lovingly call him "the bishop of the poor." The path he has followed, which is the unvarying pursuit of an ethic that is universal to all of humanity, instead of placing a disproportionate emphasis on political and economic issues, has achieved tremendous influence not only in Latin America but all over the world.

Bishop Ruiz was born in Irapuato in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico, in 1924 as the first of five brothers and sisters. After finishing his elementary and secondary education in Irapuato, he enrolled in a theological seminary. In 1947 he went on to pursue further studies at the Pontifical Gregorian

University in Rome. He was ordained a priest in 1949, and in 1959, at the young age of 35, he was appointed bishop of the diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, in the state of Chiapas. Soon after his appointment, Bishop Ruiz began making the rounds of his diocese, leaving no location unvisited. This enabled him to become keenly aware of the social injustices that the country's indigenous peoples had long been forced to endure.

Mexico's native people have suffered poverty, oppression, and discrimination for over 500 years, since the time of Christopher Columbus and the subsequent Spanish colonial rule. It is generally known that over the years the governments in power and a handful of influential families usurped all rights to the land and its uses from the indigenous peoples, who instead worked as cheap labor. Influential families called *cacique* monopolized the wealth and ruled over hundreds and thousands of members of the native peoples. This was the situation that had continued, in which powerful landowners and giant corporations maintained overt ties with the local and national governments. At the time of Bishop Ruiz's appointment the situation of the indigenous people in Chiapas was especially desperate. Some 60 percent of the laborers in the state re-

ceived a minimum wage of less than US\$120 per month and the infant mortality rate in the state was the highest in the country. Under the official discriminatory policy, indigenous peoples were not allowed even to use the raised sidewalks, but were required to walk only in the roadways. The solid, immobile social foundation that existed maintained itself through discrimination and exploitation.

These grave social injustices made Bishop Ruiz's heart ache. This was around the time of the Second Vatican Council, which began in 1962. The bishop participated in all of the sessions. The experience was a turning point for him as a man of religion. Vatican II declared that evangelism does not mean the uniform transmission of the gospel; rather, it means the clarifying and embodying of the meaning of the Christian message in the actual history and culture of a region. It was a fact that past evangelism in Central and South America accompanied the introduction of Western culture into the region, which was often used as a factor in suppressing native culture. Based on his reflection on these historical facts, Bishop Ruiz began a new approach to the training of local clergy and missionaries. In his view, those who are to serve as missionaries should begin their careers by learning the language and culture of the place to which they are assigned. A new evangelical vision rooted in the actual conditions gradually took form in the process of applying his new approach.

A variety of reforms then began to take place in Bishop Ruiz's diocese. What many people consider the most important of them was the holding of the National Indigenous Congress in 1974. Instead of limiting this to a series of theoretical discussions, the bishop invited representatives of the indigenous peoples to participate and made it an opportunity for all who took part to share in the real problems and to promote collaboration among



them. Through their participation in the Congress, representatives of the indigenous peoples were able to make heard their claims that, for their subsistence, they needed: access to education and to marketing channels for the produce they raise; to benefit from land distribution; and to receive better health and hygiene services.

Facing these demands deeply rooted in the reality of their lives, Bishop Ruiz realized that the evangelical plans for his diocese were still far from meeting the actual needs of the local people. He became firmly convinced that the message of the church must not re-

gain their own identities—gradually but steadily became shared by the native peoples themselves and took root in their hearts.

In January 1994, the Chiapas-based Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) declared war against the Mexican Army when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), of which Mexico was to become a member along with the United States and Canada, came into effect. If free trade became a fact, it was feared that an influx of giant capital from the United States might seriously affect the farming of the native peoples, for

EZLN's Sub-commander Marcos described Bishop Ruiz's mediation efforts this way: "As the chief representative of the national committee that acted as mediator between us to remove every obstacle in the path to peace, Bishop Ruiz has demonstrated genuine and unchanging care. . . . If peace can be brought to our land, it is no doubt thanks to the efforts of the national committee, which endeavors to achieve peace. We offer our sincere respect to the sacrificing activities of the members of the national mediation committee, most of all to Bishop Samuel Ruiz."

Bishop Ruiz was even detained by the government of those days and once became the target of an assassination attempt by a group connected to the ruling political party. Despite such incidents, he continued his dedicated mediation efforts, which have gained him deep respect and acclaim from people not only in Mexico but the world over. He is truly a symbol of peace with justice and dignity.

"We cannot find our own way if we are not searching for the way of the others as well." Bishop Ruiz quoted this passage from the Bible once when he said it is important for the creation of community sentiment to love others, to observe carefully the developments of history, and to try to understand others. At the same time, he said, these are things that people are able to learn from the community to which they belong.

Regarding international collaboration among the different Church groups involved in mediation and peacemaking to share experiences and engage in common theological reflections, Bishop Ruiz has said, "It is not only a question of making a summary of the work of mediation in various places. It is a matter of performing critical reflection on the method and process of mediation and peace-building so that we can avoid the mistakes of others and learn from each other's experiences." Bishop Ruiz is not only a key person in the ecumenical movement as such, but also plays an important role in the activities of international interreligious dialogue and cooperation toward peace. □

*A peace dialogue between Mexican government representatives and the EZLN commanders convened at Peace Cathedral in San Cristóbal de Las Casas in 1994.*

main an ideal transcending everyday life, but must provide answers to the problems arising in actual society.

Immediately after the National Indigenous Congress, Bishop Ruiz began to energetically develop a social action program for the poverty-stricken people of the region. He constantly stressed the importance of the indigenous peoples becoming "the subject of their history." Instead of allowing others to decide their history and destiny, they should become their own masters. The aspiration of Bishop Ruiz—that the indigenous peoples should reclaim their ethnic and cultural roots and re-

whom the mainstays were the growing of coffee and corn, making their dire living conditions even worse. What EZLN demanded more than anything else was the protection of the livelihood of indigenous peoples and the recovery and preservation of their rights. Eleven days after the declaration of "war," the government of Mexico proposed a cease-fire, which EZLN agreed to accept. It was Bishop Ruiz who acted as only one mediator between the two sides. He later became the chief representative of a national committee that was organized for consolidating mediation capability.

## The Buddha's Entry into Nirvana Observed

On February 15, the anniversary of the Buddha's entrance into nirvana was observed in the Great Sacred Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo and all branches throughout Japan. This ceremony is one of three major annual Buddhist events and helps all members to ponder the Buddha's teachings and to vow anew to devote themselves to greater efforts as a Buddhist. Some 3,600 members, including those visiting Tokyo on group pilgrimages, took part in the ceremony at the Great Sacred Hall. Forty-seven young women members wearing saris joined in the ritual offering of flowers and lighted candles before the statue of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, followed by the recitation of the Lotus Sutra, led by President Nichiko Niwano. In his subsequent guidance, President Niwano explained the significance of the nirvana that the Buddha attained and pointed out the ultimate Truth, that is, the law of transience, by saying, "It is important for us to understand that being given life here and now is invaluable, and that we realize the preciousness of life." □

## Rissho Kosei-kai Solemnly Celebrates Its 64th Anniversary

Rissho Kosei-kai celebrated its 64th anniversary on March 5 in the Great Sacred Hall. Some 4,700 members took part in the event, which was relayed by satellite to all branches throughout Japan, each of which conducted its own ceremony simultaneously. The ceremony in the headquarters opened with the offering of candles and flowers before the altar by 20 members of the young women's group. This was followed by a sutra recitation led by President Nichiko Niwano, who then delivered a dedicatory prayer, followed by Rev. Katsunori Yamao, chairman of Rissho Kosei-kai, who addressed the members.

Rev. Seihan Mori, head priest of the temple Kiyomizu-dera in Kyoto, representing the guests, offered congratulatory comments, saying, "All members of Rissho Kosei-kai, please cultivate the fields in your hearts and minds and sow the seeds of faith, and also help to save this confused world. And please strive for that with the understanding that handing it down to the following generations is most important."

President Niwano then addressed the participants. He emphasized the need to humbly reflect on problems and look within oneself to find solutions, saying that Rissho Kosei-kai's founder, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, had always taught us that we ourselves are the ultimate cause of our suffering. Quoting the Dhammapada, "Hatred is never conquered by hatred; hatred can only be conquered by non-hatred," he stressed the importance for both an individual person and a nation to employ "religious wisdom" and learn lessons from the troubles they face instead of only criticizing others based on everyday knowledge. Finally, President Niwano called on members to renew the pledge to rededicate themselves to the founding spirit to save all human beings and to reform society. □

## WCRP Secretary General Reports on Activities

On January 29, Dr. William F. Vendley, secretary general of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), visited Rissho Kosei-kai Tokyo headquarters and met with the organization's president, Rev. Nichiko Niwano, currently serving as a president of the WCRP.

Dr. Vendley reported on the WCRP's recent activities following the international religious symposium in New York on October 23-24, 2001. In his report, he mentioned attending several meetings of religious and political leaders of the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities, one of which was the religious summit meeting at Alexandria, Egypt, on January 20-21, 2002, chaired by Dr. George Carey, the archbishop of Canterbury who is also serving as a WCRP president. Dr. Vendley explained that the missions of the WCRP were becoming steadily more important and that one of them is to pursue the implementation of the declaration issued at the end of the summit meeting. He said that the WCRP will work for mediation among the three monotheistic faiths in the

*During Rissho Kosei-kai's 64th anniversary celebration, President Niwano addresses members in the Great Sacred Hall on the importance of "religious wisdom."*

Holy Land for the founding of an interreligious council for the Middle East.

President Niwano responded that it was significant for the WCRP to react to the world situation following the symposium of October 2001, and he expressed gratitude that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had placed high hopes on the WCRP's activities.

Dr. Vendley revealed that many African orphans are born as HIV carriers and described the difficulty of supporting them scattered over a wide area without the help of religious organizations deeply rooted in the local communities. He emphasized that the meeting of the Governing Board of the WCRP to be held in Nairobi, Kenya, in June would be a conference that would have special significance for supporting African religious leaders. □

### Rev. Norio Sakai Observes UUA Projects in India

From February 10 through 19, Rev. Norio Sakai, an emeritus executive board member of Rissho Kosei-kai, and Rev. Yoshiko Izumida, the organization's dissemination advisor, joined the president of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) in the United States, Rev. William Sinkford, and the organization's former moderator, Ms. Denise Davidoff, in a visit to India to monitor the UUA's assistance projects in that country. Mr. Masahiro Nemoto, head of the Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation Group of Rissho Kosei-kai, also took part in the survey trip on behalf of the organization's Peace Fund.

Some 15 percent of India's population are classified as *dalits*, who, as members of the lowest caste, are marginalized, discriminated against, and forced to endure the hardships of impoverished lives. The UUA assists groups in India that are engaged in improving the lives of the *dalits* and in protecting their human rights.

On February 12, the survey team vis-

ited the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Ahmadabad in the state of Gujarat, where they learned of a project to promote the social status of women and to support their economic independence. On the following day, they visited Navsarjan Center in the same city and met its founder, Martin Macwan. Under the leadership of Mr. Macwan, a lawyer, Navsarjan Center tackles with social discrimination against *dalits* through the law, while also strengthening solidarity among *dalits*.

During their stay in India, the survey team also traveled to the state of Maharashtra, where they visited the Vidhayaksansad, a village development movement that aims to deliver the *dalits* and mountain-tribe people from their virtually outcast state. □

### Peace Fund Reports Aid Grants for First Term of Fiscal 2002

The Executive Committee of the Rissho Kosei-kai Peace Fund announced in March the recipients of its subsidies for the first term of fiscal 2002. A total of about 60 million Japanese yen is to be used for financial assistance to nongovernmental and social-welfare organizations in Japan and abroad that had supported the 31 projects in African and Asian countries. The Fund had been donated by Rissho Kosei-kai members through the organization's Donate a Meal Campaign throughout Japan.

In the category of general grants, the Fund decided to support 16 ongoing projects. In addition, it will make grants available to 11 new projects, including the following two: some 2.3 million yen to the Cooperative Orthotic and Prosthetic Enterprise (COPE) to support the provision of artificial arms and legs to Laotian victims of unexploded shells and landmines and 3.25 million yen to AMDA (Association of Medical Doctors of Asia), in support of its project to prevent the HIV contagion in the Kibera slum of Nairobi. □

To support United Nations activities, the Fund will also provide 2 million yen for the holding of the eighth United Nations Symposium on North-east Asia in Kanazawa, Japan, in June, to allow government officials and staff members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from northeast Asian countries to discuss issues related to environmental protection, disarmament, and trust-building among the region's nations.

As provisional aid grants, the Fund will support three projects, including a donation of 960,000 yen to the Kansai NGO Council to hold the first Network-NGOs Conference at the Osaka International Centre of Japan International Cooperation Agency on February 24 and 25. □

### WCRP/Japan Women's Committee Celebrates 20th Anniversary

On February 9, the Women's Committee of the Japanese Committee of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP/Japan) observed the 20th anniversary ceremony of its founding in Fumon Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai Tokyo headquarters. Some 100 women religious representatives from member organizations of WCRP/Japan took part. After a congratulatory address by Peter Cardinal Seiichi Shirayanagi, president of WCRP/Japan, Professor Emeritus Keizo Yamada of Sophia University in Tokyo delivered a lecture entitled "Religion and Peace—The Future of East Timor."

The Women's Committee of WCRP/Japan was established in 1981 and consists of the women from various Japanese religious organizations. The committee has undertaken various social-action activities, including support for a foster-parent program for orphans in Cambodia, the reprinting and distribution of books in the Khmer language in Cambodia, and support for education for Afghan citizens affected by the fighting and severe drought. □

# Tips for Honing Selflessness

by Nichiko Niwano

*In our daily lives, we usually exchange greetings with others without giving them any thought; but in making the effort to communicate directly from the heart, we can strip away the trappings of the ego and develop pure selflessness.*

Greetings are generally regarded as a courtesy, a social and interpersonal lubricant. But there is more to greetings than that; in a broader sense, they represent a means of achieving a state of selflessness that lets us establish empathy and harmony with others.

When we meet others, we can greet them spontaneously because we have forgotten the self. The same applies to the ability to respond with a crisp “Yes” as soon as someone calls us. When we are preoccupied, we cannot greet or respond to others spontaneously. We modern people, with our strong egos, find it very hard to let go of the self, but exchanging greetings loosens the framework of the ego, allowing us to empathize and thus achieve harmony with others.

The Japanese word for greeting or salutation, *aisatsu*, is originally a Buddhist term. Both *ai* and *satsu* have the sense of approaching or drawing near. In a Buddhist con-

text, *aisatsu* refers to the way a master gauges the extent of a disciple’s spiritual endeavor by the way the latter responds when summoned. When the master calls, “You, there!” the way the disciple replies, “Yes,” is enough to tell the master whether the disciple is in a selfless state and has a firm grasp of the Dharma.

Interpersonal relations flow as smoothly as water when we exchange greetings frankly and honestly; only the ego blocks us from doing so. When the father of a family does not greet family members of his own accord, for example, it is because he has the fixed notion that it is proper for others to greet him first. Even people who cannot greet others in a straightforward manner really want to do so in their heart of hearts, but self-pride stands in the way. The inability to utter a simple greeting deprives them of the joy of feeling the heart expand and open up. In this sense, they are suffering.

I feel uncomfortable when I am in an elevator with someone I do not know and we both stand there silently, neither of us acknowledging the other. If, however, I take the initiative and say, “Hello,” the other person invariably responds, “Hello,” and the atmosphere relaxes. Thus is a certain harmony established.

When we see a flower and spontaneously murmur, “Oh, how pretty,” this honest expression of feeling is a kind of greeting. The great potter Kanjiro Kawai once said, “I gaze at the flower, the flower gazes at me.” Perhaps it is because we sense the flower’s subtle gaze that we look at it. In this way we and the flower exchange greetings; in other words, life resonates with life.

As members of Rissho Kosei-kai, we chant the *o-daimoku*, *Namu Myoho Renge-kyo*, daily as a greeting signifying our unity with the universe. This is the most important greeting of all.

## Practicing Selflessness at Home

Pondering whether we cannot somehow break down self-centeredness in the context of daily life or not, I came to realize that there are several easy ways to do so, and I

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*Rev. Niwano exchanges greetings with members visiting the Great Sacred Hall in the headquarters of Rissho Kosei-kai.*

would like to talk about them when opportunity permits. They are amazingly simple.

First, if we think about whether husband and wife, parents and children, actually say good morning to one another, I imagine we will discover that surprisingly often people do not bother to greet their nearest and dearest. So the first practice is to say good morning to other members of our own family. Since this sets the tone for the day, it is important not to mumble sleepily but to greet one another cheerfully.

In families where people are not in the habit of saying good morning to one another, whoever resolves to do so first should take the initiative. It takes a bit of courage to begin with, but it is good training for divesting oneself of ego. Taking the initiative in greeting others is an important way of breaking down self-centeredness.

Second, we should respond clearly and crisply when someone calls us. In our dealings with people in the outside world, we automatically respond when addressed, but we should reflect on whether we do so in our own home. When we are self-absorbed we cannot respond pleasantly. We cannot say the simple word "yes" unless we break down

self-centeredness. The way someone says yes reveals his or her character immediately. The ideal is to be able to respond in a way that makes everyone around us feel good. If we can respond in this way at home, we will be able to greet people cheerfully and respond clearly wherever we may be. This is the most important way to ensure smooth interpersonal relations.

Third, when you leave the dining table push in your chair, and when you take your shoes off line them up neatly. Doing so braces you mentally and emotionally. If people are taught to do these things from early childhood they will be able to exercise balance and moderation when they grow up. They will be discriminating, not squandering money or being careless about things. One who can master this skill will not deviate from the right path.

The philosopher and educator Nobuzo Mori advocated these three practices as the secret of education in the home. They have an important impact on character formation and interpersonal relations. These three simple practices make for a peaceful home and agreeable interpersonal relations at work and in the wider society. That is because they break down self-centeredness and promote selflessness.

### The Ability to Say Thank You

There is more. The first thing is to be the kind of person who can say thank you when someone does something for you. Developing the habit of expressing thanks in a frank and honest manner eventually translates into the ability to say thank you from the heart. This is something you can do only when you are selfless; it is impossible when ego gets in the way.

The second is to be able to say "I'm fine, thank you" when someone asks how you are. Just a plain "I'm fine" will do, but the response "I'm fine, thank you" expresses the joy of selflessness. *Okagesama de*, a Japanese phrase which we often say and hear when we exchange greetings with others exactly expresses this joy of selflessness. The phrase actually represents our recognition that we owe our existence here and now to everything in the universe, that our life is sustained in countless ways. That is why, when someone asks, "How are you?" you should reply from the heart, "I'm fine, thank you."

The third is to be able to say "I'm sorry." No one is perfect; we all make mistakes. When we slip up, we need to be able to say we are sorry frankly. It is when people have committed a blunder that self-pride is most liable to come to the fore. Saying one is sorry is a shortcut to stripping away the ego. Buddhism teaches the importance of self-reflection and repentance, or *sange* in Japanese. Put simply, saying sorry comes from repentance.

Striving to become someone who can honestly say "thank you," "I'm fine, thank you," and "I'm sorry" is an everyday way of stripping away self-centeredness. The Buddha's teachings are found close to home. □

# Warm Spring Sunlight at the End of the Tunnel

by Katsue Ishii

*The story of a mother's struggle to understand why her son refuses to go to school and why she has so much trouble dealing with it, through which she also learns how she can be a better mother, and how she can give others their freedom by giving them love.*

It was toward the end of the year before last. My elder son, Yasutomo, twelve, who was at the time a fifth grader in elementary school, came home from school in tears. Apparently this was from the shock of being told by his classmates, "You're an idiot! Drop dead! Don't come to school any more!" However, at that time we paid little attention to his feelings, as the winter vacation was beginning.

However, after New Year's and with the start of the new school semester, Yasutomo said that he did not want to go to school. The next day, and the day after that, he was also absent from school.

I tried talking with him and made an effort to understand what he was going through. One day I managed to get him to go to school, but the home room teacher called to say that Yasutomo had not come to school. When he came home in the afternoon and I asked where he had been, he said, "I couldn't go into the school building, so I spent the whole day crouched down in the parking lot."

Now and then his friends would come for him in the morning, but he never made a move toward going to school. Neither his elder sister, Rie, fifteen, nor his younger brother, Yoshikazu, nine, said that they could not go to school, and so I was impatient wondering "Why is Yasutomo the only one not going to school?"

From that point on, every morning I drove him to school in the car. However, even if his teacher came out to meet us, he would make no move toward getting out of the car. Even if we managed to get him into the school

building somehow, he would lock himself into a toilet stall, refusing to enter the classroom.

His teacher spoke to me rather severely, saying, "The school is doing everything we can, but what is his family doing? In observing your behavior as a mother, I don't get the feeling that you have any real enthusiasm for dealing with this." However, I felt that I was doing everything I could think of to make Yasutomo go to school.

## Frustration

Yoshikazu took his brother's side, saying "It's because his classmates told him not to come to school any more." However, I could not afford to think about Yasutomo's feelings. As a staff member for education affairs of a chapter of the Toshima Branch of Rissho Kosei-kai, I knew in my mind that "All things change; seek the ability to see things as they really are," but whenever I looked at Yasutomo, I became emotional, and was not able to think about the matter calmly.

"Because you won't go to school, your mother cannot go to the branch and fulfill her duties," I said to him. "Would you rather I didn't exist, then?" he said. These words startled me and I thought regretfully that I had hurt his feelings. In spite of this, I continued to blame him for the problem.

Unable to contain my frustration, one day I smashed to bits the *fusuma* sliding doors [made of light wood and paper] in our living room. That night when my husband came home, I told him that I smashed the *fusuma* doors while waiting for him to come home, upset over what to do about Yasutomo.

I thought he would be angry, but he spoke kindly to

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*Katsue Ishii is a member of the Toshima Branch of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo.*

me, saying, "I'm just glad you didn't raise your hand against the child. I can see that you were upset enough to smash the *fusuma* doors." Touched by my husband's kind words, the dam burst and I dissolved in a flood of tears.

### Acting Like a Parent

One day, my parents came over to stay for a night. They soon noticed that I was not quite myself and asked me what was wrong. In answer to my mother's questions, I spilled the whole story of my troubles. Hearing my story, both my parents joined me in tears.

I felt ashamed of myself, thinking, "My parents raised me, their only child, with so much love, and now I am causing them so much sorrow. I am not a very good child to them." I was also filled with gratitude that "Even though I am all grown up, my parents still worry about me." Had I been caring this much about Yasutomo? "The person suffering the most since Yasutomo stopped going to school is Yasutomo himself. I'm so sorry I failed to understand his feelings!" I thought.

Feeling contrite, I prayed in the morning and evening at our home Buddhist altar, and soon my heart began to feel calm. As days went past, my feeling that "Yasutomo has to go to school" gradually became weaker, and we began to do more things together, such as playing cards together at home, going to the circus together, and so on.

Some days after that, my husband said, "Today I will take Yasutomo to work with me. You take a rest." Since Yasutomo had been off from school, he had been asking to go with my husband to his job, and my husband had apologetically asked for the understanding of his co-workers. With Yasutomo happily saying, "We're off!" he left with my husband. I had not seen such a happy expression on his face for a long time.

### A Shift in Values

In April, when Yasutomo was to be going into the sixth grade [Note: In Japan the school year ends in March and begins in April], he still found it impossible to go to school. Around the time when it occurred to me that he might continue his absence from school indefinitely, I attended a women's education study group sponsored by the Tokyo district (a two-day, overnight meeting held once a month). I had been attending these meetings since February of the previous year, and this was the third meeting of the new year. At this meeting, when I read in one of the founder's discourses, "Accept your children just as they are and hold them close to you," I felt that my eyes opened.

Up until then, I had been focusing only on the fact that Yasutomo would not go to school, blaming him for it and trying to change him. Rather than try to understand and

*Mrs. Ishii and Rie watch Yoshikazu (middle) is playing soccer with his elder brother, Yasutomo (right).*

Then, in June while I was attending the women's education session with the head of education affairs and the head of the young wives' group, my cell phone rang. I heard Yasutomo's voice saying, "Mom, I went into my classroom during the fifth period. . . ." He sounded very happy. Everybody with me shed tears of joy as if it were their own son. "Good for you, Yasutomo," I replied.

That day was a turning point. Yasutomo gradually began to spend a little more time in the classroom, and on the day of the first-semester closing ceremony, he went to school with his brother, Yoshikazu. He was now able to do the same things everyone else was doing.

On some days, Yasutomo still cannot get to school in time for the first period. When this happens, I feel hurt, but I reflect on what our chapter leader said. "The fact that your son does not go to school is hard, but it helps you to understand the feelings of others better and to look after them with infinite care in proportion to how much you suffer." Keeping this in mind, I am also more careful not to force my own ideas on others. □

*She goes over the text for the women's study group.*

accept my son's feelings, I had been thinking only of my own values and pushing him to conform. Now I realized what I had been doing, and so I could see him not merely as "the boy who will not go to school," but as "the boy who will not go to school, but who is kind and thoughtful, prepares food for me when I am out, and looks after his younger brother," seeing the good together with the bad.

The speaker also told us, "Everything is a manifestation of the Buddha's compassion. Your children are also gifts from the Buddha. Look after them with an open mind and a heart as big as all outdoors."

I had been blaming others for the fact that Yasutomo would not go to school, thinking it was his friends' fault, or that my husband was partly to blame because he was too busy at work to spend much time with the children when they were small. However, I could now see that precisely because his truancy from school was inconvenient and mortifying for me, it could also be a chance for me to take a fresh look at myself and develop a deeper understanding of life. As soon as I saw this, my heart became lighter and I felt more at ease.

When I got home, I determined to reform my own outlook and actions. I greeted every member of the family with a cheery "Good Morning," made sure to thank them for any little thing they did for me, and answer right away when they called me. As I continued to do this, everyone, beginning with Yasutomo, started to look happier. My husband began to take the whole family out for excursions on his days off, something he had not done before. Somewhere along the line, Yasutomo started to feel able to go to school, though he still spent his day in the nurse's office.

*Mrs. Ishii is taking a walk in the neighborhood with her husband.*



# A Powerful Pair of Benevolent Kings

by Takeshi Kuno; photos by Kozo Ogawa

*These masterworks of the Kamakura period (1185–1333), believed carved by the sculptor Jokei, still serve as guardians of the deities on the altar of the Saikondo at the temple Kofuku-ji in Nara.*

The sculptural masterpieces pictured here, statues of the protector deities called Kongo Rikishi and also known as the two benevolent kings (Nio), were made by a sculptor of the Unkei school, noted in the early Kamakura period for the bold masculine energy displayed in its works. The power that surges through the body of the statue on the right is concentrated in the raised left hand, which displays a strength that seemingly could pierce rock.

The statue with its mouth open as if shouting, symbolizing the letter A (which represents the Alpha and thus the essence and origin of everything, or strength) is 154 cm in height, and the other, with its mouth closed, symbolizing the syllable UM (which represents the Omega and thus the end of everything, or wisdom) has a height of 153.7 cm. The pair was created to stand as the guardians of other statues on the altar of the Saikondo of the temple Kofuku-ji in Nara. The two Sanskrit sounds that they represent symbolize the supposed foundation of all sounds and writing. Together, they form AUM, the Alpha and the Omega, and represent the totality of creation. The sculptures stood with the famous dry-lacquer statues of the ten great disciples and the eight guardians of the Buddha.

The statues together are considered to be one of the top ten masterpieces among Kongo Rikishi carvings in Japan, with their fierce expressions as if ready to bear down on the enemies of Buddhism, and the dramatic element of their skirts streaming out behind them, capturing the suppressed movement of their muscular bodies. According to experts in artistic anatomy, the pronounced musculature, which at first glance might seem exaggerated, is in fact anatomically the most correct representation of musculature to be found in Japanese sculpture.

The statues were carved of Japanese cypress (*hinoki*) using the joined-block method (*yosegi-zukuri*), with inset

crystal eyes. Cloth was pasted over the surface, a coating of lacquer containing whetstone dust (*sabi shitaji*) was applied over that, and the statues were then painted. A pale vermilion over white clay gave color to the bodies. The skirts were painted in elaborate patterns featuring vermilion, verdigris, light green, ultramarine, and gold, with the borders delineated in cut gold leaf (*kirikane*) and gold foil used on the hems. The skirt of the statue with the open mouth has a phoenix-and-flower motif on a vermilion base, while the borders feature a cloud-and-dragon motif with an arabesque pattern. The statue with its mouth closed has a flower-and-wheel motif on the skirt with a peony arabesque pattern on the borders. These designs were not part of the original work, however, but are thought to have been added when the statues were repaired in 1288.

According to the *Kofuku-ji ranshoki* (Records of the Origins of Kofuku-ji), the statues were made in the Kenkyu era (1190–99) by Kasuga Daibusshi Jokei. Today, however, there are many other attributions. Since the records are assumed to have been compiled after 1717 in the Tokugawa period (1600–1868), questions about their reliability exist. Because of the notable stylistic differences in comparison with other works at Kofuku-ji that definitely were made by Jokei, statues of Vimalakirti and Brahma (Bonten), it has been suggested that the Kongo Rikishi were perhaps the work of Koen (b. 1207), but this is hard to accept.

During the Kamakura period, three sculptors were known as Jokei. The earliest is the above-mentioned Kasuga Daibusshi, who flourished at the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth. The earliest of his works that can be dated (the second month of 1184) is a Noh mask belonging to Kasuga Shrine in Nara that was patterned after a mask originally belonging to the temple Gango-ji, also in Nara. He made the Vimalakirti statue for Kofuku-ji in 1197, and then, between the twelfth month of 1201 and the third month of 1202, statues of Brahma (Bonten) and Indra (Taishakuten), with the help of a number of assistants. He received the honorary

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*Takeshi Kuno, formerly a director of the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Property, is now director-general of the Institute of Buddhist Art Research in Tokyo.*

*The “UM-form” of Kongo Rikishi, 153.7 cm in height, in the Saikondo of the temple Kofuku-ji in Nara.*

Buddhist rank of *hoin*, and with Unkei (d. 1223) and Kaikei (fl. late twelfth–early thirteenth centuries) was known as one of the masters who perfected the Kamakura sculptural style early during the period.

Most statues of Kongo Rikishi are placed on either side of a temple gate to protect the precincts. That those

shown here are enshrined on the altar within the Saikondo reflects a tradition that dates back to the Tempyo era (710–794). Another example of Kongo Rikishi thus enshrined dating from that time (around 748) can be found in the Hokkedo (Lotus Hall) of Todai-ji. The Kongo Rikishi there today still guard the various deities on the

*The "A-form," 154 cm in height, that stands in the same Saikondo.*

altar, including Avalokiteshvara of the Unfailing Lasso (Fukukenjaku Kannon), Brahma, and Indra. Unlike the Kofuku-ji pair, they are in the form of armor-clad warriors and probably are typical of the placement of guardian deities within halls during the Tempyo era. The original Saikondo of Kofuku-ji, too, would have had such a place-

ment, which the Kongo Rikishi under discussion reflect. The Saikondo was destroyed in 1180, during the war for supremacy between the Taira and Minamoto factions, but when it was rebuilt, its restored Kongo Rikishi sculptures were placed within it to maintain the ancient tradition. □

# Gotama Goes to Vesālī

by Hajime Nakamura

*At the age of 80, Śākyamuni Buddha set forth on his final journey, during which he visited the prosperous city of Vesālī [Skt. Vaiśālī], where he and his disciples stayed in the mango grove of the courtesan Ambapālī [Skt. Āmrapālī]. After hearing his teachings on mindfulness, she invited him and his entourage to a meal at her home, and later donated her grove to the Buddhist Saṅgha.*

Gotama next went to the prosperous commercial city of Vesālī. Its site is now a village located in the plain on a bank of the Gandak River. Before India's independence the village was known as Basār or Basārḥ. It appears in many books as Besarḥ or Bēsārḥ, though these are not correct. After independence it was given its former name of Vaiśālī as part of the attempt to restore native traditions. It appears in the Rāmāyaṇa as Viśālā. The name is often translated into Chinese as Kuang-yen-ch'eng, interpreting *viśāla*, upon which the name is based, as "broad and wonderful."

Vaiśālī is located in Hājipur Subdivision of Muzaffarpur District in Bihar State, at a point 25°59'N and 85°8'E. It is some fifty kilometers north, and slightly west, of Patna. Today a bridge has been built across the Ganges, making access much easier than in the past. After crossing the Ganges at Patna and entering northern Bihar, the traveler sees a large number of mango groves. There is little ground cover, so each tree is clearly visible. It is surprising how closely the scene matches descriptions in Buddhist writings. A sign stands at the entrance of the village, reading, in English: "The Earliest Republican State of Vaishali Welcomes You." Well before I came to this sign I saw a low, one-storied resthouse, but having signposts only in Hindi it is visited by few foreigners.

The birthplace of Mahāvira, Vaiśālī is a holy place for the Jains as well as the Buddhists. The founder of Jainism was born of a noble family in the city and spent his childhood and youth there. He also went there, or near it, twelve times for the summer retreat after he became an ascetic. Vaiśālī is mentioned frequently in the Jaina scriptures, but there are very few remains from that time.

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*The late Hajime Nakamura, an authority on Indian philosophy, was president of the Eastern Institute in Tokyo and a professor emeritus of the University of Tokyo at the time of his death in October 1999. This ongoing series is a translation of Gotama Buddha, vol. 2, Tokyo, Shunjūsha, 1992.*

Only a group of dwellings in the moat-surrounded central part of the city has been discovered and excavated.

One of the most prominent of the remains is a standing column erected by King Aśoka. It rises more than 10.5 meters (35 feet) above the ground; it is said that a further 5.5 meters (18 feet) remain buried. The column is not actually situated in Vaiśālī, but in the village of Kolhua in the same Muzaffarpur District. There is no inscription, although in recent times people have written on it, in the Nāgarī, Tibetan, and Roman scripts. The area in the immediate vicinity is surrounded by a wire fence; within it are the remains of two stupas, of which the one nearest to the column is said by local people to be Ānanda's. When I visited Vaiśālī on January 31, 1986, there was neither supervisor nor office there, and certainly not a store. Outside the fence was a small farmhouse that looked like a storage shed, and a heavily laden papaya tree, but no sign of any inhabitant. The arrival of our bus, however, was a major event that drew crowds of children from somewhere or other. Both stupas were excavated on one side to the central core, perhaps by thieves, for there was no sign of reconstruction. A mound of cement in a small hut to the side of Aśoka's column and a pile of bricks outside suggested that the stupas were about to be repaired. The area was surrounded by fields. A museum (*purātana-tattva-saṃgrahālaya*) stood close by, but it was closed on Fridays.

The Vaiśālī stupa was mentioned in the *Pa-ta-ling-t'atsan* as one of the eight great sites of pilgrimage that should be visited. Both Fa-hsien and Hsüan-tsang's travel records tell us that there were various sacred remains here, intimating that Vaiśālī must have been a considerable center for pilgrims. Since both of the Chinese travelers were interested only in the religious nature of the places they visited, it is hardly surprising that they made no mention of its commerce or its republican system of government. However, by their time the city's ancient significance had been forgotten and it was known as a place of pilgrimage



*King Aśoka's column in the village of Kolhua near Vaiśālī, beside the legendary "Monkey's Pond." Photo by Isamu Maruyama.*

alone. After the invasions of the Muslim armies, even this meaning was lost.

The boundary around the ancient city was about sixteen kilometers in length, and covered several villages, except that of Basār. The site contains the remains of many stupas. Another site, containing a number of remains near Bakhirā village in the northwest corner of the city, may have been situated outside the city walls, made of earth, not stone. The remains of the ruler's dwelling, known as Bisālgaṛh (King Bisāl's castle), were in the southeast corner of the city, and the name shows the ancestry of the place. Close to the ruins of the "palace" is the Coronation Tank (*abhiṣeka-puṣkarinī*). The village of Basār is south-southwest of this site. Hsüan-tsang's description was able to identify this place, and seals inscribed "Vesāli" have been found there. (Around one thousand dated be-

tween 200 B.C.E. and ca. 500 C.E. have been unearthed, but only two or three mention the city's name.) The city has been excavated by three archaeologists, Cunningham, Bloch, and Spooner, but few results have yet been attained. After the destruction caused by the Muslim invasion, pilgrims ceased to visit Vaiśālī and no more temples were built. It is only in recent years that visitors have begun to return.

### **History of Vesāli**

The tide of history seems to have passed Vaiśālī by, as it did not lie in the mainstream of Indian civilization. Its name cannot be found in Brahmanical or Hindu works, which means it was ignored by the religions. Hsüan-tsang attests to the existence of a Hindu temple in the seventh century, but it was not of great importance. Nevertheless,

Vaiśālī does have an important place in Indian civilization, for it lay astride the king's highway connecting Patna and Nepal. Along this road Aśoka placed four columns, and there are numbers of other remains as well. In the Buddha's time, Vaiśālī was the capital of the Licchavis, part of the Vṛjī (Skt.; Pāli, Vajji) tribe. Hsüan-tsang, however, made a distinction between them, saying that Vṛjī territory was northeast of Vaiśālī, in the area of the modern Darbhāṅgā.

It has been conjectured that the Licchavis came originally from abroad. P.B. Spooner suggested they were Persian immigrants, while Vincent A. Smith thought they were Mongolian by race, resembling the Tibetans and the hill tribes of the Himalayas. They certainly possessed customs not typical of Hinduism in general. The Laws of Manu (X, 22) treat them as Vṛātya Kṣatriya, not enforcing fully the Hindu Dharma. Their government was an oligarchy, the head of which was called a "king." The luxury of their lives was mentioned often in Buddhist writings. For example, the Tibetan *Vinaya* (Dul-ba) says:

"Vaiśālī is divided into three sections. The first has seven thousand houses with golden towers; the second has fourteen thousand houses with silver towers; and the third has twenty-one thousand houses with copper towers. Here people live according to whether they are of the upper, middle, or lower class."

The inhabitants thought of their city as being heaven

on earth. Its head fought with kings Bimbisāra and Ajātasattu of Magadha. The Tibetan *Vinaya* includes it as one of the six greatest cities of the time. The water from its special tank was considered holy and necessary to anoint newly crowned kings at their coronation. Legend says that at one time Prince Bandhula of the Mallas, who lived at Kusinārā (Skt., Kuśinagara), was deemed responsible for polluting the holy tank; the Licchavis were all killed when they went out to fight him. This was not the end of the Licchavis, however. A seal from the time of Chandragupta II (ca. 375–413) of the Gupta dynasty indicates it was an important area under Gupta domination. The city was still in existence when Fa-hsien visited it early in the fifth century. However, it went into decline between the time of Fa-hsien's and Hsüan-tsang's visits (405–637) and its monasteries and temples fell into ruin. It may have been laid waste by the Huns, who invaded northern India in the fifth–sixth centuries after the collapse of the Gupta dynasty.

When Hsüan-tsang visited Vaiśālī in around 637, all was desolate waste and he had to stay at a small Hinayāna temple populated by only a few monks. He was shown the site of the Second Council. Today the ruins near Bakhirā, in the northwest corner of the city, are virtually the same as those described by Hsüan-tsang. There were a large number of ponds and swampy areas around Vaiśālī. The pond near Aśoka's column is called Ramakuṅḍ; it is the legendary "Monkey's Pond." According to a story in the Buddhist scriptures, when Sakyamuni, during another visit to Vaiśālī, was walking along the side of this pond together with his disciples, a monkey came down from a tree and chose the Buddha's bowl, which had been placed together with those of his disciples. This the monkey filled with honey from a beehive in the tree and offered it to the Buddha. The name of the pond is said to derive from the fact that monkeys dug the pond for the Buddha's benefit. It is said to have been beside the Gabled Hall in the Great Forest (Mahāvana), where the Buddha spent the rainy season retreat, but as yet no remains of the hall have been found. The scene of the monkey offering the honey-filled bowl to the Buddha is depicted in one of the reliefs at Sāñcī. What appears to be two monkeys in the bottom section is in fact the same monkey, making its offering. The method of depiction resembles techniques used in modern drama and cinema. Sakyamuni himself is not shown, but his presence is symbolized by the Bodhi tree and the platform beneath it.

### The Courtesan Ambapālī

The meeting with Ambapālī (Skt., Āmrapālī, Āmrapālikā) is an episode of great interest. We will look at it in the main through the Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta.

"(11) The Venerable Master, having stayed at Nāḍika as long as he wished, said to the young Ānanda: 'Come, Ānanda, let us go to Vesālī [Skt. Vaiśālī].' 'Yes, Master,'

*A reliefs at Sāñcī depicting a monkey offering honey to the Buddha who is symbolized by a Bodhi tree and a platform beneath it. Photo by Isamu Maruyama.*

*Coronation tank in Vaiśālī. Photo by Isamu Maruyama.*

replied the young Ānanda. Then, the Venerable Master went to Vesālī together with a large company of *bhikkhus*. At Vesālī, the Venerable Master stayed at Ambapālī's grove." (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, II, 11)

Although Gotama had gone to Vesālī, he had no wish to stay in the busy center of the city. Similarly, when he was at Rājagaha he preferred to dwell in a quiet place in the suburbs far from the urban bustle. An ancient verse says that "Sakyamuni stayed in the forest of Vesālī." Here, however, Gotama is said specifically to have stayed in a grove belonging to the courtesan Ambapālī. The name "Ambapālī" means "woman protecting the mango grove"

or "[female] mango grower." Although the sutra says the Buddha "stayed at Ambapālī's grove," wandering ascetics usually stayed at such places without the express permission of the landholder. The concept of ownership then was not as narrow as it is in modern times. Today, not only the immediate vicinity of Vaiśālī, but also an area of northern Bihar stretching from Patna to Vaiśālī, is covered with mango groves. There is very little undergrowth, which allows for breezes to flow freely through the groves, and there seem to be few poisonous snakes or noxious insects. The groves filter the bright sunlight, and they make an excellent place to take a rest. Ambapālī, although a

courtesan, was wealthy and lived in a great house; she provided entertainment in the form of singing and dancing for wealthy patrons, holding a high social status comparable to that of the *shirabyōshi* dancers of thirteenth-century Japan and the *hetaerae* of ancient Greece in the age of Pericles (c. 495–429 B.C.E.).

The equivalent passage in the Pan-ni-yüan-ching says:

“At that time, the Buddha said to the Venerable Ānanda, ‘Let us go to the country of Wei-yeh-li [Vaiśālī].’ And so it happened. The Buddha, having taken pleasure in Chū-li [Koṭi], circled the town and left. . . . He came [to Vaiśālī] and stayed in the *nai-tze* grove of an old prostitute outside the city.”

The Chinese characters translated here as “old prostitute” do not necessarily mean old in years, but rather refer to the fact that she had been known to the Buddha (as a lay follower) for many years. Ambapālī is also referred to in the Yu-hsing-ching as a “prostitute”; the original in Sanskrit is *gaṇikā* (courtesan). I-ching’s translation of the equivalent section in the Sarvāstivādin *Vinaya*, the *P’i-nai-yeh tsa-shih*, hides her calling and says merely that “she was a woman of the city.” This choice of expression has its origin in Chinese ethical attitudes, and there are many other instances in the Chinese translation of Buddhist writings where the Sanskrit *gaṇika* has been obscured.

The Pāli text then says that the Buddha taught the *bhikkhus* about “mindfulness.”

“(12) Then Sakyamuni addressed the *bhikkhus*. ‘*Bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* should be mindful and well aware. This is our teaching given to you. How, *bhikkhus*, should a *bhikkhu* be mindful? *Bhikkhus*, here, a *bhikkhu* observes his body as a body, earnestly and well aware. Put away greed and the sorrows of the world. A *bhikkhu* observes his feelings as feelings, earnestly and well aware. Put away greed and the sorrows of the world. A *bhikkhu* observes his mind as mind, earnestly and well aware. Put away greed and the sorrows of the world. A *bhikkhu* observes all objects as objects, earnestly and well aware. Put away greed and the sorrows of the world. It is in this way that a *bhikkhu* is [correctly] mindful.”

“(13) ‘And how, *bhikkhus*, should a *bhikkhu* be well aware? Here, a *bhikkhu*, when going out or returning, is well aware of what he is doing. When looking ahead or back, he is well aware of what he is doing. When bending or stretching out his arm, he is well aware of what he is doing. When taking up his outer robe or his bowl, he is well aware of what he is doing. When eating, drinking, chewing, or tasting his food, he is well aware of what he is doing. When defecating or urinating, he is well aware of what he is doing. In walking, standing, sitting, lying down, waking, talking, or staying silent, he is well aware of what he is doing. That is how, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* should be well aware. *Bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* should in this way be mindful and well aware. This is our teaching given to you.’” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, II, 12–13)

The expression “our teaching” (*aṃhākaṃ anusāsani*) indicates that the Buddha did not maintain his personal and special authority as the founder of Buddhism. It was probably later Buddhists who attributed personal authority to him.

Why does this section on being aware appear at this point? Other recensions make the introductory comment that the Buddha, seeing Ambapālī coming, warned the *bhikkhus* not to be captivated by her woman’s perfume. This is very likely.

“(14) The courtesan Ambapālī heard that the Venerable Master had come to Vesālī and was staying at her grove in Vesālī. Thus the courtesan Ambapālī had a number of finely decorated carriages prepared and riding in one of them, she left Vesālī with her train and went to her park.” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, II, 14)

At that time courtesans of superior rank were quite wealthy and would have owned such parks. An inscription (first–second centuries B.C.E.) discovered at Mathurā tells of one such wealthy courtesan who made a great donation to a Jaina temple there. Ambapālī was not only beautiful and rich in material possessions, but also even responsible for much of the prosperity of Vesālī.

“Vesālī was rich and thriving, with many residents, a place where people gathered, of great material wealth. It had 7,707 palaces, 7,707 towers, 7,707 pleasure gardens, and 7,707 lotus ponds. The courtesan Ambapālī was there, beautiful, comely, and glorious to behold, like a lotus flower; skilled at dancing, singing, and music; courted, receiving fifty pieces of gold for a night. Because of her, Vesālī prospered even more greatly.” (*Vinaya*, “Mahāvagga,” VIII, 1, 1–3)

Hearing this, and unwilling to admit inferiority to Vesālī, the people of Rājagaha (Skt., Rājagṛha) paid the girl Sālavatī, a courtesan to rival Ambapālī, “one hundred pieces of gold for a night.” It is said that the famous physician Jivaka was her son. The ability of an urban culture to categorize courtesans by the amount they earned in a night indicates the spread of a money economy and shows how essentially different in nature were urban centers and the culture of rural communities as represented by Vedic ritual. From such an overripe, decadent atmosphere appeared new religions like Buddhism to provide answers to problems inherent in such a society and provide escape from them. (Athens in the age of the statesman Pericles could also be cited in this context.)

Ambapālī is said to have long been a follower of the Buddha. She therefore wanted to go and meet him as quickly as possible.

“(14, cont.) She went as far as she could by carriage, and then stepped down from it, and on foot went to where the Venerable Master was. Drawing near, she greeted the Venerable Master and sat down to one side. As she sat, the Venerable Master taught her by means of a lecture on the Dhamma, instructing her, encouraging her,



and delighting her. Then the courtesan Ambapālī, instructed, encouraged, and delighted by the teachings of the Dhamma, said to the Venerable Master, 'May the Venerable One consent to eating a meal at my house tomorrow, together with his *bhikkhus*.' The Venerable Master gave his assent by silence. Then the courtesan Ambapālī, understanding the Venerable Master's assent, rose from her seat, paid her respects to the Venerable Master, turned her right shoulder to him, circled the Venerable Master, and left." (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, II, 14)

Although the Sanskrit recension says that Āmrāpālī "made obeisance so that her head rested upon the feet of the Venerable Master" (X, 16), it is more likely that she would have bared her right shoulder before him as an expression of respect. In a relief at Bhārhut showing the building of the Jetavāna monastery (now in the Indian Museum, Calcutta), Sudatta is depicted as baring his right shoulder to show his respect. Lay people, including Ambapālī, would have done likewise.

Gotama's journey was on a simple scale, and only a few *bhikkhus* accompanied him. The courtesan heard of their arrival before anybody else in the city because they stopped at her grove. Later, word of the Buddha's arrival came to the ears of some Licchavi nobles, which indicates that no prior announcement of it had been made. It is fairly certain also that the Buddha and his companions camped outdoors, a perfectly reasonable assumption since the nights are dry and warm once the rainy season is finished.

According to the Sanskrit text, Gotama Buddha spoke to his disciples here of the need to endeavor to practice good.

"(X, 4) The courtesan Āmrāpālī heard that the Venerable Master had arrived in Vaiśālī and was in her mango grove in Vaiśālī.

"(X, 5) The courtesan Āmrāpālī applied cosmetics to herself, then, accompanied by her maidservants, climbed aboard a splendid carriage and went out of Vaiśālī. She wanted to see the Venerable Master and make offerings to the Venerable Master.

"(X, 6) She rode in her carriage as far as the way would allow, and then she stepped down and walked to where the Venerable Master was.

"(X, 7) The Venerable Master was sitting surrounded by several hundred *bhikkhus* when he saw Āmrāpālī approaching from afar. Seeing her, he addressed the *bhikkhus*:

"(X, 8) 'Endeavor, *bhikkhus*, always to be mindful and well aware. Āmrāpālī is coming here.

"(X, 9) 'How should a *bhikkhu* strive and practice zealously?

"(X, 10) 'Here, a *bhikkhu* gives rise to the determination to put away all that evil he has created already, to put away all that is not good, endeavoring, striving, holding [to his purpose], and making every effort. He gives rise to the determination not to create any evil he has not created already, not to create anything that is not good, endeavor-

ing, striving, holding [to his purpose], and making every effort. He gives rise to the determination to create the good he has not created already, endeavoring, striving, holding [to his purpose], and making every effort. He gives rise to the determination that the good that has been created abides in stability, is further practiced, is not lost, is perfectly satisfying, and is broadened and extended, endeavoring, striving, holding [to his purpose], and making every effort. This is how a *bhikkhu* should strive and practice zealously.

"(X, 11) 'And how should a *bhikkhu* be conscious and aware?

"(X, 12) 'Here, a *bhikkhu*, when going out or returning, when looking ahead or turning back, when stretching out in front, when holding his outer robe or bowl, when walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, when waking, talking, maintaining silence, sleeping, working, or resting, he must be conscious and aware. This is how a *bhikkhu* should be conscious and aware.

"(X, 13) 'How, then, *bhikkhus*, should a *bhikkhu* maintain mindfulness?

"(X, 14) 'Here, a *bhikkhu* should put away greed and the sorrows of the world, by internally observing his body as a body, striving zealously, being sufficiently aware, and being ever mindful, . . . by externally observing his body as a body, . . . by internally and externally observing his body, . . . by observing internally the functioning of his feelings, by externally observing the functioning of his feelings, . . . by observing internally and externally the functioning of his feelings, . . . by internally observing his mind, . . . by externally observing his mind, . . . by internally and externally observing his mind, . . . by internally observing all things, . . . by externally observing all things, . . . by internally and externally observing all things, a *bhikkhu* should put away greed and the sorrows of the world, by observing all things, striving zealously, being sufficiently aware, and being ever mindful.

"(X, 15) '*Bhikkhus*, strive zealously, be sufficiently aware, and be ever mindful. Āmrāpālī is coming here. Thus I have spoken to you.'" (Ernst Waldschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, X, 4-15)

Here the disciples are being taught to give rise to a determination (*chandaṃ janayati*) toward what is good. Buddhism never negates the subjective will to do something. Buddhism encourages *bhikkhus* to strive to destroy evil and create good, and respects the determination (*chanda*) to do so. Then they make a positive effort (*viriyam ārabhati*).

This episode linking the teaching, "Be ever mindful. Āmrāpālī is coming here," was probably added at a later date after the Saṅgha had expanded considerably. Gotama Buddha would have welcomed Ambapālī as a follower of long standing. The repudiation of women by the Saṅgha of later times was contrary to Gotama's way of thinking.

*To be continued*

# The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

## Chapter 5

### The Parable of the Herbs (1)

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

**INTRODUCTION** In the previous chapter, “Faith Discernment,” the four great shravakas—the Venerable Subhuti, Maha-Katyayana, Maha-Kashyapa, and Maha-Maudgalyayana—report to the Buddha on their understanding of his teachings through chapter 3 of the Lotus Sutra, “A Parable,” by means of the parable of the poor son. Then, representing the others, Maha-Kashyapa speaks in verse, extolling the boundless merits and virtues of the Buddha and thanking him from the depths of his heart. In reply Shakyamuni praises his disciples’ profound understanding and extends his teaching by another skillful parable in order to deepen their faith and understanding. This discourse is the fifth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, “The Parable of the Herbs.”

A careful examination of the way the discourse has so far developed brings home to us how full of vigor and life the Dharma meeting of the Lotus Sutra is. Let us therefore review it from the beginning. In the first chapter, “Introductory,” the Buddha has entered into contemplation, at which time a glorious ray of light is emitted from the circle of white hair between his eyebrows, illuminating eighteen thousand worlds in the eastern quarter. This is the manifestation of the fact that Shakyamuni’s enlightenment has elucidated the true aspect of the universe and is proof that he is an enlightened one who has become perfectly one with the Eternal Original Buddha (or the Absolute Truth, *tathata*). Gazing at this fine scene, all in the congregation are filled with awe. Then Maitreya Bodhisattva, representing the entire company, asks a senior bodhisattva, Manjushri, the meaning of the auspicious sign. When Manjushri explains that it signals that Shakyamuni is about to deliver a very important discourse, puzzlement turns to expectation, which grows as the company hears Manjushri say: “Be aware, all of you! / Fold your hands and with all your mind await! / The Buddha will pour the rain of the Law / To satisfy those who seek the Way. / If those who seek after the three vehicles / Have any doubts or regrets, / The Buddha will rid them of them / So that none whatever shall remain.”

When expectation has reached its peak, Shakyamuni rises from his contemplation and says: “The wisdom of the buddhas is very profound and infinite. The gate to their wisdom is difficult to understand and difficult to enter.” Then he states: “Only a buddha together with a buddha can fathom the true aspect of all things.” Unless one has become one with the Eternal Original Buddha, it is impossible to realize perfectly the ultimate truth, that is, the real aspect of all things. Thus he clarifies for the first time the actuality of his enlightenment. Next he explains that the various teachings he has expounded to this point are connected with this ultimate truth. So profound are his words, though, that the company is unable to understand him. Therefore Shakyamuni hesitates, feeling that it may still be too soon to speak of the truth itself, and only resolves to continue after Shariputra begs him earnestly three times to do so and after the dramatic withdrawal from the company of a number of people who are too proud or too weak willed to listen to the Buddha’s discourse.

Shakyamuni then explains in detail the purpose of the buddhas’ appearance in the world and reveals that all living beings can attain the same state as the Buddha by hearing his teaching (Dharma). This is the discourse of the second chapter, “Tactfulness.” Having heard the Buddha’s words, Shariputra attains enlightenment, the first of the company to do so, and Shakyamuni immediately makes a declaration guaranteeing his future attainment of buddhahood. This makes a deep impression on the company. The Buddha, knowing that it is difficult for many people to understand by theory alone, restates his teaching in the form of the parable of the burning house, the core of the third chapter, “A Parable.” As a result four more of his listeners, Subhuti, Katyayana, Kashyapa, and Maudgalyayana, attain enlightenment; they declare their understanding by means of the parable of the poor son, the essence of the fourth chapter, “Faith Discernment.” Shakyamuni, joyful that they have understood, praises them, saying: “Good! Good! Kashyapa; you have well proclaimed

the real merits of the Tathagata. Truly they are as you have said."

A special characteristic of the Dharma meeting of the Lotus Sutra, one not so obvious elsewhere, is the vibrant collision, the flying sparks, between the spirits of those teaching the Dharma and those hearing it. The Buddha's great compassion and the response to it are in constant interchange. Through such contacts between spirit and spirit, faith and understanding grow ever more profound.

Our Dharma meetings too should be like this. First, we must yearn for and pursue that which is mysterious. Without this, we cannot be said to have faith. Albert Einstein, one of the greatest scientists of the twentieth century, wrote: "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed." He went on to say that it was the experience of mystery—even if mixed with fear—that engendered religion. A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, our perceptions of the profound reason and the most radiant beauty, which only in their most primitive forms are accessible to our minds—it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute true religiosity.

Science is the pursuit of the mysterious by means of human knowledge. This is, of course, very important. Religion, by contrast, penetrates mystery directly and intuitively. It was with such rare intuition that Shakyamuni firmly grasped the mystery of the universe, discerning completely the real aspect of everything in it. This discernment is the Buddha wisdom. The Buddha formulated, systematized, and explained this real aspect by means of skillful theories and parables in his endeavor to enable everyone to understand it. It is the Buddha's teaching. Therefore, if we devote ourselves to the study of this teaching, it is not impossible to attain the same state as Shakyamuni. Through this teaching we try to discern the true form, or real aspect, of everything in the universe. Conversely, through the realization of the real aspect of all things, we try to return all living things to their correct, original orbit. There are many stages in religious faith and a wide variety of practices, but ultimately that is the point we must reach. What is important is to possess an unflagging longing for the realm of mystery, which is always a strange domain to human beings, and the will to pursue it to the ultimate. We must never tire in our efforts to recognize, with a frank, open, straightforward mind, mystery as mystery and to unravel its meaning through the Dharma.

Second, an important element in any vibrant Dharma meeting is the interaction between the minds of leaders and participants. This requires deep compassion on the part of leaders and an earnest, serious attitude of grateful acceptance by participants. If both can cast off their small

vanity, or display, and their calculating, narrow judgment, and truly aspire to make others happy by means of the Dharma and to be true human beings through the Dharma, a powerful mutual response will arise. It will surely be manifested in concrete results. In this sense, too, the Dharma meeting of the Lotus Sutra is an excellent model for us.

Third, it is important that we react keenly and sensitively. The Buddha's disciples, deeply impressed with Shakyamuni's discourse, show clearly how deeply they have been moved. Reaching a certain level of enlightenment, they immediately report on their understanding. Thereupon Shakyamuni praises them, saying: "Good! Good!" It is when there is such a vibrant exchange of reactions, when teacher and learners spark off each other, that truly living education becomes possible. There can be no development of the teachings if there is only one-way communication between a leader who just preaches the Law and an audience that simply listens passively. Thus we should deeply study the animated exchanges of the Dharma meeting of the Lotus Sutra.

I have used the word *leader* here, but in the Buddhist order during Shakyamuni's lifetime there was no distinction of superior and inferior between the leader and the led. Under the Buddha Dharma (the truth), all are completely equal. Therefore "leader" here means one who has thoroughly understood the Dharma even a little earlier than others and reaches out to guide those who have not yet reached the same level.

With this discussion in mind, let us now look closely at the text of this chapter, "The Parable of the Herbs."

**TEXT** At that time the World-honored One addressed Maha-Kashyapa and the [other] great disciples: "Good! Good! Kashyapa; you have well proclaimed the real merits of the Tathagata. Truly they are as you have said. The Tathagata, in addition, has infinite, boundless, asamkhyeya merits, [which] if you spoke of for infinite kotis of kalpas you could not fully express. Know, Kashyapa! The Tathagata is the king of the Law. Whatever he declares is wholly free from falsity. He expounds all the laws by wise tactfulness. The Law preached by him all leads to the stage of perfect knowledge.

**COMMENTARY** *Merits.* Generally speaking, "merits" indicates the virtues and the function of leading others and saving the world. This term has a still deeper meaning, however. "Merits" is a translation of the Sanskrit word *guna*. The Chinese translated it as *kung-te*, meaning "the working, effect, ability, or power of virtuous acts." The Chinese scholar-priest Hui-yüan (523–92) discusses the term as follows in his commentary on the Vimalakirtinirdesha-sutra, the *Wei-mo-ching-i-chi*:

"Merits" can also be expressed as *fu-te* (blessings arising from good actions). *Fu* (blessings) indicates *fu-li*



(well-being). Good actions that bring others happiness penetrate the character of the one who has performed them and elevate it. It is because these actions benefit the performer that they are called *fu*.

*Fu*, that is, actions bringing happiness to others, are themselves *te* (virtues) for the person doing the action. Therefore they are called *fu-te* (blessings arising from good actions). It is like water being clear and cool (and quenching people's thirst and easing the heat) and that clearness and coolness being in themselves the *te* of the water.

The word *kung* refers to *kung-neng* (working, effect, ability, or power). Good actions have the function of helping, enriching, and benefiting others. That is why they are called *kung*. Furthermore, good actions do not only benefit others; they are also in themselves *te* for the person performing them. For this reason they are called *kung-te*.

Hui-yüan has almost completely explained the significance of merit. Essentially, merit is something to be given rather than received. In this discourse, when Shakyamuni says: "Kashyapa; you have well proclaimed the real merits of the Tathagata," the merits he refers to are pure merits of giving. This, however, pertains to the Buddha, who has attained all virtues. We are unlike the Buddha. For us, giving itself results in receiving, as Hui-yüan explains. If we act to bring happiness to others, those acts in themselves raise us. In his commentary Hui-yüan says: "When one performs good acts on others' behalf, that good penetrates, without one's knowing, one's whole body and spirit, enriching and raising one's character. In other words, the practice of good is virtue."

Thus good acts should be understood as a never-ending circulation from oneself to others, from others to oneself, and again from oneself to others, gradually bringing happiness and advancement to all throughout the world. This circulatory function of good acts is by no means limited to the spiritual realm. Since body and mind are essentially one, that function appears in the body, too. Since there is no essential difference between the material and the mental, that function is bound to appear in the material realm. We should note, however, that one must not make the mistake of believing that a good act rebounds, just as it is, on oneself. Rather, it is by accumulating good acts that one's way of life changes for the better, a change that manifests itself in terms of one's health and circumstances. If one performs good acts expecting merits to rebound on oneself (though this is better than not doing good acts at all), one will often have that hope disappointed.

When Bodhidharma (fl. ca. 520) arrived in China from India to teach Zen, the Liang-dynasty emperor Wu Ti (r. 502–49), who had heard of his eminence, asked him: "Since my accession I have worked hard for Buddhism,

building temples, copying sutras, and making offerings to priests. What is my merit for this?" "No merit," replied Bodhidharma. This does not mean that there is no merit in those acts, but that building temples, copying sutras, and making offerings to priests are meritorious in themselves and it is wrong to seek any merit outside those acts. If we compare this story with Hui-yüan's explanation of merit, the true meaning of Bodhidharma's answer will be readily apparent.

To sum up, merit can be defined as follows: If through good acts we benefit other people and society, this results automatically in heightening our own virtues and also becomes the motive force to benefit other people and society. This never-ending circulation is merit. People of faith must take this true meaning to heart and never tire of accumulating the merit of daily giving happiness to others.

- *Whatever he declares is wholly free from falsity.* In the expression "Whatever he declares," Shakyamuni includes the sense of "even if he has expounded things that seem to be very familiar or lowly." He is referring to the teaching of skillful means (or tactfulness). "Free from falsity" means that none of these teachings of skillful means is futile, fake, or useless; rather, they are sure to lead to the truth itself. To make this meaning clear, Shakyamuni goes on to say: "He expounds all the laws by wise tactfulness."

- *The stage of perfect knowledge.* "Perfect knowledge" refers to the wisdom of knowing the truth of all things. Since "stage" means the source of such wisdom, this phrase indicates Thusness, or the Absolute Truth. More simply, it is the state of the enlightened Buddha. The Buddha comprehends the differences among all people and teaches everyone according to the person and the situation ("He expounds all the laws by wise tactfulness"), but his true intention is to ultimately lead all people to the highest wisdom, that of knowing the real aspect of all things.

**TEXT** The Tathagata sees and knows what is the good of all the laws and also knows what all living beings in their inmost hearts are doing; he penetrates them without hindrance. Moreover, in regard to all laws, having the utmost understanding of them, he reveals to all living beings the wisdom of perfect knowledge.

**COMMENTARY** *Sees and knows what is the good of all the laws.* The Buddha penetrates all things (that is, how they arise, how they change, and where they reach and settle). It is natural that the Buddha, who is able to see the real aspect of all things, can discern and foresee the changes of all phenomena in this world through to the future.

- *What all living beings in their inmost hearts are doing.* This refers not only to what people are thinking but also to the functioning of the subconscious. However secretly and inwardly a person thinks over something, it remains a function of the surface consciousness, and people who have accumulated considerable religious practice can per-



*This carved wooden relief at Daikyo-ji temple in Tokyo depicts the many varied types of plants and trees receiving their life-giving moisture that are described in the chapter, "The Parable of the Herbs."*

ceive it in others. Deep in the mind, however, lies the subconscious, which we cannot penetrate, but which influences us, for good and bad, in our body, mind, and actions. The Buddha, however, can see clearly what people are thinking, not only on the surface of the mind, but also in the deepest part of the mind.

- *He reveals to all living beings the wisdom of perfect knowledge.* What is important here is that Shakyamuni does not just reveal that the Buddha has this excellent wisdom, but through revealing it enlightens living beings and encourages them to raise the mind of aspiring to attain such wisdom, that is, the aspiration for enlightenment. This is the true intention of the Buddha, and we must grasp that.

Shakyamuni then relates a parable about the connection between rain and vegetation to make what he has stated easier to understand. This is the parable of the herbs.

TEXT "Kashyapa! Suppose, in the three-thousand-great-thousandfold world there are growing on the mountains, along the rivers and streams, in the valleys and on the

land, plants, trees, thickets, forests, and medicinal herbs of various and numerous kinds, with names and colors all different. A dense cloud, spreading over and everywhere covering the whole three-thousand-great-thousandfold world, pours down [its rain] equally at the same time. Its moisture universally fertilizes the plants, trees, thickets, forests, and medicinal herbs, with their tiny roots, tiny stalks, tiny twigs, tiny leaves, their medium[-sized] roots, medium stalks, medium twigs, medium leaves, their big roots, big stalks, big twigs, and big leaves; every tree big or little, according to its superior, middle, or lower [capacity], receives its share. From the rain of the one cloud [each] according to the nature of its kind acquires its development, opening its blossoms and bearing its fruit. Though produced in one soil and moistened by the same rain, yet these plants and trees are all different.

COMMENTARY *The three-thousand-great-thousandfold world.* This refers to one universe in the Buddhist cosmology, the sphere in which a buddha instructs. In modern terms we can consider it to be the universe we live in.

• *Roots, stalks, twigs, leaves.* These indicate the four elements of religious faith. The roots are faith, the stalks are the precepts, the twigs are meditation, and the leaves are wisdom. The most important component of trees and other plants is the roots. Without the roots, there would be no stalks, twigs, or leaves. The roots, then, are faith. When faith is strong, the precepts (the Buddha's instructions or admonitions) are kept; because the precepts are kept, the practitioner can enter the state of meditation (the unwavering mind that is concentrated on the truth); through meditation (or concentration) the wisdom of knowing the real aspect of all things in the universe can be attained. Conversely, however strong the roots may be, if the twigs and leaves fall and the stalks are broken, the roots will eventually die. Similarly, if there is no wisdom, faith itself becomes corrupt. Religious faith grows by means of the precepts and meditation to become wisdom; all four elements must always firmly be tied together and co-exist. The essential thing is to grasp that if any one of them is missing religious faith is not perfect and will cease to grow.

• *Every tree big or little, according to its superior, middle, or lower [capacity], receives its share.* This passage refers to the caliber, or ability, of a person of faith and to the person's capacity to be enhanced by receiving the teaching. We must learn the lesson taught here from the standpoint not only of believers but also of people living in the modern world. Some people have a large capacity, others a small capacity. Some are wondrously wise, some are ordinary, some are of weak understanding. Then there are differences among people in personality, in physical strength, in talent, in the type of work they do. These surface differences, however, do not determine a person's value. There are two types of things that do that: external and internal. In regard to the external, a person's value as a human being is determined by the extent to which he or she can work for the benefit of society in various occupations or roles, fully utilizing intellect, talent, personality, and physical strength. Even a government minister has low value as a human being if that person is so absorbed in party politics and self-interest that the welfare of the people as a whole becomes subordinate, while even a garbage collector sincerely devoted to keeping the streets and the drains clean so that others can live in comfort is a highly valuable human being.

Some trees grow tall, like the cryptomeria, the pine, and the cypress, as do some grasses, like rushes and pampas grass. Other trees, like the tangerine, the box tree, and the creeping pine, do not gain much height, nor do grasses like rape and vetch. But who can say that the tall trees and grasses are superior to the low-growing ones? Imagine what it would be like if only tall trees and grasses grew on Earth! I shudder at the mere thought of it. When we come to the human world, though, surprisingly few people understand this obvious truth. We have people who

are like the box tree yearning to become cryptomerias, or who feel inferior because they are like vetch. If you yourself feel that way, I ask you to meditate deeply on the Buddha's teaching of "the three kinds of medicinal herbs and the two kinds of trees."

The internal factors of value judgment relate to the mind. A person with a fine, true spirit who lives in the best way possible while working hard for others is a true human being, a human being of value. That the converse is also true goes without saying. The internal factors, rather than the external ones like intelligence, talent, or occupation, determine most profoundly the value of a person as a human being. I would like you all to understand this firmly and engrave its truth on your hearts. A person who fully exhibits human values internally and externally is called a bodhisattva. A bodhisattva is by no means a mythical personage who appears only in the Buddhist sutras.

• *Produced in one soil.* The "one soil" is the great compassion of the Buddha, through which we human beings are sustained.

• *Moistened by the same rain.* This phrase means that the Buddha's teachings are originally one; all people benefit equally from them and are led toward their true destiny as human beings. This one teaching is, needless to say, the teaching of the real aspect of all things. The rain of the Buddha's teachings falls entirely from the great cloud of this teaching, but people who receive it do not realize this and say: "This is the rain of small drops (Hinayana)," or "This is the rain of large drops (Mahayana)."

TEXT "Know, Kashyapa! The Tathagata is also like this; he appears in the world like the rising of [that] great cloud. Universally he extends his great call over the world of gods, men, and asuras, just as that great cloud everywhere covers the three-thousand-great-thousandfold region.

COMMENTARY *He extends his great call.* This refers to the great and powerful teaching that can save all people.

• *Over the world of gods, men, and asuras.* This means not only human beings but also the beings of the heavenly realms (devas) and the demonic spirits (asuras)—that is, all living beings.

TEXT In the great assembly he sounds forth these words: 'I am the Tathagata, the Worshipful, the All Wise, the Perfectly Enlightened in Conduct, the Well Departed, the Understander of the World, the Peerless Leader, the Controller, the Teacher of Gods and Men, the Buddha, the World-honored One. Those who have not yet been saved I cause to be saved; those who have not yet been set free to be set free; those who have not yet been comforted to be comforted; those who have not yet obtained nirvana to obtain nirvana.

COMMENTARY *The Tathagata, the Worshipful, the All Wise, the Perfectly Enlightened in Conduct, the Well Departed, the Understander of the World, the Peerless Leader, the Controller, the Teacher of Gods and Men, the Buddha, the World-honored One.* These are the virtues of the Buddha and, by extension, his epithets. They are called the ten epithets of a buddha. (For detailed explanations, see the January/February 1997 issue of *Dharma World*.)

• *Those who have not yet been saved I cause to be saved; those who have not been set free to be set free; those who have not yet been comforted to be comforted; those who have not yet obtained nirvana to obtain nirvana.* This is a very important passage, for it is a concise exposition of the general (all-embracing) vow of the Buddha known as the four universal vows. “To be saved” literally means “to be taken across,” that is, to be enabled to cross from this shore of birth and death, that is, the world of transmigration, to the other shore, which transcends the cycle of birth and death. It is salvation from the world of suffering. The Buddha has vowed that as long as there is even one person remaining in this world of suffering, he will not cease his efforts to save him or her. In the same way, the bodhisattva vows: “However innumerable living beings are, I vow to save them.” This vow does not change even when the bodhisattva attains buddhahood. “To be set free” means to be released from the fetters of the defilements. The Buddha has vowed that as long as there is one person remaining deluded and bound by the defilements, he will not cease his efforts to set him or her free. In the same way, the bodhisattva swears: “However immeasurable the defilements are, I vow to extinguish them.” From the standpoint of the Buddha, as long as even one person remains bound by the defilements and lost in illusion, he cannot rest from his efforts to set him or her free. “To be comforted” indicates the way (the teaching) that leads to peace of mind. In terms of the Four Noble Truths, this is the truth of the Way. The Buddha has vowed that as long as there is even one person remaining without knowledge of the Way that leads

to true peace of mind, he will not cease his efforts to teach and guide him or her. The bodhisattva says: “However inexhaustible the Buddha’s teachings are, I vow to master them.” From the standpoint of the Buddha, as long as even one person remains who does not know the Way to attain peace of mind he cannot cease his efforts to teach about it. “To obtain nirvana” is to realize the real aspect of all things and attain buddhahood. It is to become one with the Buddha. The Buddha has vowed that as long as there remains even one person who has not gained that stage, he will not cease his teaching activities. The bodhisattva too says: “However infinite the Buddha’s Way [enlightenment] is, I vow to attain it.” The Buddha is determined to cause all people to attain the Buddha’s enlightenment.

The four universal vows are the “general vows,” fundamental and common to all who believe in the Buddha, study the Buddha Dharma, and are determined to attain the Buddha Way. They should therefore be kept firmly in mind. To help you remember them, I will set out the four universal vows of the Buddha and the four universal vows of the bodhisattva below.

TEXT I know the present world and the world to come as they really are. I am the All Knowing, the All Seeing, the Knower of the Way, the Opener of the Way, the Preacher of the Way. Come to me, all you gods, men, and asuras, to hear the Law.’

COMMENTARY *I know the present world and the world to come as they really are.* To understand the future clearly seems strange and mysterious, but it is not really so. A person like the Buddha who can discern the real aspect of all things knows it freely and unrestrictedly, for such a person understands the true nature of all things in the universe and knows thoroughly their causes and conditions and therefore can predict exactly what will happen in the future.

• *The All Knowing.* This phrase indicates the omniscient one, who discerns the truth of all things in this world.

### The Four Universal Vows of the Buddha

Those who have not yet been saved, I cause to be saved.

Those who have not been set free, [I cause] to be set free.

Those who have not yet been comforted, [I cause] to be comforted.

Those who have not yet obtained nirvana, [I cause] to obtain nirvana.

### The Four Universal Vows of the Bodhisattva

However innumerable living beings are, I vow to save them [all by all means].

However immeasurable the defilements are, I vow to extinguish them [all by all means].

However inexhaustible the Buddha’s teachings are, I vow to master them [by all means].

However infinite the Buddha’s Way [enlightenment] is, I vow to realize it [by all means].



More specifically, it refers to a person who has the three kinds of wisdom: the wisdom of knowing thoroughly all things in their equal aspects, the wisdom of knowing all things in their discriminative aspects, and the wisdom of knowing all things in both their equal and their discriminative aspects. Of course, no one but the Buddha possesses such transcendent wisdom.

- *The All Seeing.* This term refers to one who discerns the real aspect of all things, specifically, one who possesses the five types of vision: the physical eye, the divine eye, the wisdom eye, the Dharma eye, and the Buddha eye. The physical eye can only perceive the surface forms of things, and those but partially, and frequently mistakes what it sees. By extension, the physical eye refers to ordinary people's way of seeing things, which is attached to phenomena; it is very superficial and unreliable.

The divine eye is the ability to see beyond the limitations of the physical eye, and to discern what the physical eye cannot. This is not necessarily a mystical power, but is akin to the "scientific eye," which sees water as a compound of hydrogen and oxygen and knows exactly when what stars will approach a particular point in space and can therefore predict accurately the shape of the heavens in the remote future as well as the quantity of oil likely to be under the ground at a particular place. In the modern age, this interpretation is more appropriate than that of supernatural ability.

The wisdom eye is the visual consciousness that can distinguish more deeply than the divine eye the true state of all things in the universe. This can be said to be the philosophical way of seeing things. Einstein, for example, saw this universe in terms of four dimensions. Day-to-day experience tells us that we live in a three-dimensional world, but Einstein saw a fourth dimension, time. This is only one example of the power of the wisdom eye, the ability to know clearly the vast and limitless laws that are far beyond the vision of the physical eye or the reasoning of the divine eye. In Buddhist scholarship, therefore, the wisdom eye is said to be the insight to discern the "emptiness" of all things. The Dharma eye, likewise, is the eye that observes the depths of all things.

We can say that the divine eye is scientific vision, the wisdom eye philosophical vision, and the Dharma eye artistic vision. A person whose mind is crystal clear can touch directly the life of nature and feel with his or her mind the truth about human beings and human life. Such understanding, whether it is called touching the depths of things or knowing with all one's physical and mental forces, allows a person to see clearly the essence of all things. This is the Dharma eye. In olden times artists and doctors of great accomplishment received the term "Dharma eye" as a title of respect.

The Buddha eye refers to the way of viewing things comprehensively, synthesizing all other ways of seeing things. The Buddha eye not only sees clearly the real as-

pect of all things in the universe but also watches over and safeguards them all with compassion. Being able to discern the real aspect of all things is premised on allowing them all to make the most of their lives (their individual value) as they really are. In other words, this can be said to be the religious way of looking at things in the true sense, incorporating the other four modes of vision and underlaying them with great benevolence and compassion. Since the Buddha is the honored one who possesses the five types of vision, he is called "the All Seeing."

- *The Knower of the Way.* This term refers to the one who knows the true Way, by which all human beings can become buddhas.

- *The Opener of the Way.* This phrase indicates the one who opens up the true Way for the sake of many people. Since it is difficult to attain buddhahood in one bound, the Buddha opens up a number of paths in order to lead everyone to the true Way. The phrase thus refers to one who has opened the paths of skillful means.

- *The Preacher of the Way.* This expression refers to the one who teaches the correct Way for human beings, the Way to buddhahood.

According to Chih-i's *Fa-hua-wen-chu*, the Knower of the Way, the Opener of the Way, and the Preacher of the Way exemplify the greatness of the Buddha's three actions of body, speech, and mind. The one in whom all three are perfectly combined is the Buddha. If one knows the Way with one's mind but does not open it with one's body and preach it with one's mouth, it has no living strength. We must take this teaching to heart. First, we hear the preaching, learn the doctrine, and know the Way. This is our departure point. Second, when we know the Way a little ourselves, we must open it to others, those around us or with whom we have some relationship, setting up the most appropriate means to guide them to the teachings, taking into consideration their individual personalities and standpoints. In other words, we must formulate skillful means. Often, though, we do not have the confidence to do this. This is why it is so important that we have the Sangha (the religious community) behind us, for there we can seek advice from religious leaders and those with more experience. Third, we preach the Way. It does not matter how poor or inexperienced we may be as speakers. What is necessary is sincerity of heart. As long as we possess sincerity, we will be able to communicate with others. Thus our practice of the Buddha Law by means of the three actions of body, speech, and mind allows us to be true children of the Buddha and true practitioners of the Lotus Sutra.

*To be continued*

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