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For Living Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue

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Cover photo: Buddhist and Roman Catholic priests and scholars gathered at the headquarters of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo from September 29 through October 3, 2002, for a Buddhist-Christian colloquium, the third in the series of interreligious encounter programs promoted by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the Vatican.

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

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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.

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The Fundamental Concept of Religion

Here we are starting the new year, 2003, but I hope you will forgive me for writing about something sad. Late on the night of October 12 last year, a huge bomb explosion occurred in a nightclub on the Indonesian island of Bali, killing nearly 200 tourists and wounding a great many other people. It is said that two more bombs were exploded at two locations in the vicinity of the United States Consulate-General. People of more than ten nationalities were among those who lost their lives.

It was a great shock that this could happen on the beautiful island of Bali, known as one of the most peaceful places in the world. During the year that preceded this tragegy, we had been paying attention mainly to events in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Israel/Palestine, and Iraq, so these acts of apparent terrorism took us quite by surprise. News about Osama bin Laden is always vague, so it is unknown how much ability to engage in terrorism the Al Qaeda group retains. Judging from the large amount of explosives used in the bombings on Bali, I cannot help but entertain misgivings that they were the work of Al Qaeda or a related group.

The preamble to the UNESCO charter reads, "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed," but I sometimes feel that these have become mere empty words.

It is true that criticism has been leveled against Samuel P. Huntington's 1996 book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. The criticism is that his book, which describes a confrontational world order, has in itself instigated a crisis.

In any event, there seems to be no doubt that the world today is heading toward the kind of clash he wrote about. Moreover, Huntington asserts that the world is complex and that cultural identity is a more important factor than political identity in the development of civilizations, the most important element in cultural identity being religion. It is true that clashes in the name of religion are on the increase.

Of course, it may not be possible to classify terrorism as a clash of civilizations, but it cannot be denied that it is taking place against a background of confrontation between Western civilization and Islamic civilization.

At present, monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are major world faiths. From a monotheistic point of view, no matter what occurs there can be no alternative or choice. This leads me to a somewhat simplistic question. Doesn't this imply a kind of contradiction in which you must believe that your own monotheistic religion is the true one and deny the validity of the monotheistic religion of another? Also, doesn't this negate the correct approach to peace that we call democracy, in which the existence of a multiplicity of value systems is allowed?

In the field of religious studies, polytheistic religions are accorded low status. At the oldest and most primitive level in the development of religion is animism. Animism is the belief that everything in the natural world has a soul, and lately I have started to think that we may have reached the point at which we should go back and rethink what religion is all about, starting with these simple animistic beliefs.

I feel this way because I think the idea that all things have a soul is the fundamental concept on which the religious spirit is based. I am not a professor of religious studies, and I am sure many people will disagree with my ideas. For that reason, I think the mission of organizations of religious leaders, such as the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) and the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), will continue to be difficult, as well as being all the more important. ❑

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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Becoming Endowed with Compassionate Eyes

by Nikkyo Niwano

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

During the Kamakura period (1185–1333), a number of distinguished Buddhist priests who founded new sects appeared one after another in Japan. It was through their efforts that Buddhism, until then largely the preserve of the aristocracy, began to spread widely among the common people.

The most important thing about what those men taught was that their teachings were their own understanding of Buddhism, expressed in their own words and exemplified by their own deeds. Zen master Dogen advocated attaining enlightenment solely through sitting in Zen meditation; Honen and Shinran preached the path of salvation through *nembutsu*, the chanting of Amida's name; and Nichiren espoused the single-minded chanting of the *o-daimoku*, the invocation of the name of the Lotus Sutra. They were all alike in that they had studied at the great Tendai monastery Enryakuji, on Mount Hiei near Kyoto, and they all fervently believed that their own way was the only way through which people could be saved. What they taught has been termed "single-practice," since all that is necessary for salvation is to maintain one practice—whether it be Zen meditation or chanting—and one only.

Since there are people of many different capacities in society, it is not surprising that there are many different ways to enter religious faith and many methods to practice it. What the founders of the new sects had in common was a burning faith and the ability to express their religious experience in their own words.

Even if we could read all the thousands of volumes of sutras and teach them eloquently, unless we had actually practiced the teachings they contain and were able to speak about our faith in them in our own words, we would be unable to move the hearts of our listeners. This is the kind of religious faith I would like every one of you to have. A commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra (*Daichido-ron*) speaks of "being able to enter the great ocean of the Buddha Dharma (Law) with faith," and the Flower Garland Sutra says that "Faith is the source of the Way, the mother of [all] virtue." In the chapter "A Parable" in the Lotus Sutra, we are told that we can enter the path espoused by the Lotus Sutra through faith (Jpn. *i shin toku nyu*). Thus, faith is the beginning of all your religious practice, a staff to support you throughout your life.

Faith as a Support

For those who can swim, water enfolds them gently and enables them to float. It is even possible to sleep while floating face up. However, those who cannot swim are not able to do so, however much people say to them, "Don't worry, just relax and let the water support you." They cannot do so simply because they cannot believe that they can float upon the water. Because they are obsessed with the idea that there is no reason such a heavy object as their body should float, they struggle desperately not to sink—and it is their struggling that causes them to sink little by little.

Religious faith is the same. If we would like to make people, who upon hearing that they can enter the great ocean of the Buddha Dharma through faith, feel like deciding to try, we must serve as examples for them so that they might trust what we say.

On Becoming Bodhisattvas

In the Nirvana Sutra, the religious training of a bodhisattva is divided into five categories. One of them is termed "discipline of sickness." This seems slightly strange, but it means the practice of knowing the nature of pain and suffering through our own experience of getting ill, and us-

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 Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan) at the time of his death in October 1999.

Founder Niwano during his guidance session for Rissho Kosei-kai branch heads at the headquarters in 1995.

ing the opportunity to foster empathy with one suffering the pain and anxiety of illness. We are reminded of the words of the Vimalakirti Sutra, "Because all living beings are ill, I too am ill."

When people become ill, their first tendency is to get angry and complain, asking, "Why me?" and they are at the mercy of their illness. People working in companies may suffer additional anxiety that coworkers will overtake them while they are away sick, and so be prevented from taking the rest they need. And even if the body is comfortable, the mind may not be at rest. The mind as well as the body suffers. How is it different if we truly understand the implications of the "discipline of sickness" of the Nirvana Sutra?

Gradually we come to realize something like this: "Isn't my sickness reminding me to live my daily life with gratitude, something I have forgotten to do? Surely it is the compassion of the Buddha, telling me to bring consolation to others by taking on their suffering by truly understanding their pain. I am being enabled, through my illness, to undertake religious training in order to bring salvation to those who are suffering." There is a gap as wide as that between heaven and earth between undergoing medical care with this attitude, and receiving treatment in a mood of pain and irritation. There is also a great difference in the kind of gratitude we feel toward those in our family who care for us.

The Buddha's disciple Assaji regretted that he had never experienced illness, since a healthy person, always being strong, tends to regard life too optimistically and is unable to appreciate that illness can be a good friend, leading one to richer life.

Through Helping Others We Help Ourselves

Chapter 2, "Preaching," of the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings points out that "All living beings, however, discriminate falsely: 'It is this' or 'It is that,' and 'It is advantageous' or 'It is disadvantageous'; they entertain evil thoughts, make various evil karmas, and [thus] transmigrate within the six realms of existence; and they suffer all manner of miseries, and cannot escape from there during infinite kotis of kalpas. Bodhisattva-mahasattvas, observing rightly like this, should raise the mind of compassion, display the great mercy desiring to relieve others of suffering, and once again penetrate deeply into all laws." This is very clear and requires no further explanation. It is as if it had been written specifically for those living in our society today.

Fortunately, we have been able to come into contact with the Dharma, but, as this sutra says, those who have no contact with the teachings continue to transmigrate again and again and remain mired within the six realms of existence. This is why Shakyamuni calls upon us to walk the way of the bodhisattva in order to arouse compassion within ourselves, so that we can stretch out the hand of salvation, truly feeling compassion for those who are suffering. Thus we can lead those people to the Buddha's Way. We must engrave the words of this sutra indelibly within our hearts.

Above all, I want you to take to heart the words, "[They] transmigrate within the six realms of existence; and they suffer all manner of miseries, and cannot escape from there during infinite kotis of kalpas." There is no way that those with no connection with the Buddha's teachings can extract themselves from rebirth within the six realms. Somewhere around you there may be someone whom others have given up as hopeless, with no chance of salvation. Such a person is not hopeless, but is like someone struggling with his feet stuck in the mud and who cannot escape by his own efforts. In fact, it might even be more correct to say that he does not even know he is struggling. To care for someone like that is to be endowed with compassionate eyes.

With that gentle vision, when we see people in pain, we cannot help extending our hands to them, encouraging them to hold on to us. Giving religious guidance to others should be undertaken in order to fulfill Shakyamuni's commission to us. This is its starting point. There is also a further aspect that we should consider: it is through relating sincerely to people who come to us for guidance that we are able to discern our own weak points and so be enabled to grow as human beings. ❑

Being Open to the Wisdom of Others

by John B. Cobb, Jr.

One of the most influential Christian theologians today, Dr. Cobb visited Rissho Kosei-kai last May to deliver a sermon on the Christian response to a religiously pluralistic world during a special service sponsored by the organization's International Buddhist Congregation. This is a slightly edited transcription of that sermon.

It is a great honor for me to be invited to preach a Christian sermon to a primarily Buddhist congregation. I hope that there will be some meaning and significance also for you. I will read now from my scriptures only very briefly. This is from a long address by Jesus to his disciples shortly before his crucifixion, from the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel according to Saint John.

"I have told you all this while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and recall to you everything I have said. Peace I leave to you, my peace, I give to you; I give it not as the world gives its 'Peace!' Let not your hearts be disquieted or timid. You heard me tell you I was going away and coming back to you; if you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father—for the Father is greater than I am." (John 14:25–28. Moffatt translation.)

And from that passage, the particular text that I will refer back to as I proceed with my sermon is about "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, [who] will teach you everything and recall to you everything I have said." I am using the text in a rather unusual context tonight, in order to talk to you, from a Christian point of view, about how we understand the religious pluralism of our time, and how we as Christians should be relating to other religious communities.

Now, we have always lived in a religiously pluralistic world; that is, there has never been a time when there was only one form of religious life on the planet Earth. Nevertheless, it was possible for many people in many centuries to live most of their lives without any serious awareness of the significance and reality of other religious traditions.

This has probably been true more in other parts of the world than in Japan. In Japan, you have had for many centuries at least, Shinto, Buddhist, and Confucian elements coexisting in the culture, and have learned how to adapt to them. But in other parts of the world, and especially where the Abrahamic traditions—by that I mean Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—have been primary, the situation has been different. There have been large areas of the world in which Christians only met other Christians. And there have been other large areas of the world where Muslims only met other Muslims. And the teachings of both Christianity and Islam have made it very difficult for believers in those traditions to adjust to the reality, importance, and the value of other traditions.

So I am going to be speaking primarily of the difficulties and potentialities of these Abrahamic traditions, and of course as a Christian, I am speaking primarily of the Christian problem of recognizing and relating in a positive way to other religious communities.

John B. Cobb, Jr., has been involved in Buddhist-Christian dialogue for many years, and has founded an International Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter group together with Masao Abe. His theological position is influenced by the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and is called "process theology," which has many affinities with Buddhism. Dr. Cobb's many important theological works include A Christian Natural Theology, Process Theology as Political Theology, *and* Christ in a Pluralistic Age. *From 1958 to 1990, he taught at the Claremont School of Theology in California, of which he is now a professor emeritus.*

Now I think the reason that it is more difficult for Christians and Muslims to adjust to the plurality of religions is because both of them teach that their faith is, or should be, a totally comprehensive way of life that should address and speak to every feature of our existence. I think in Japan for some time it is possible to say that Confucianism dealt with one dimension of human life and Buddhism with another dimension, and Shinto, perhaps, with another dimension. In China, also, it was possible for religions to live at peace with one another, because none of them emphatically claimed to be total in its demand and in its control over human life. But if one belongs to a faith such as Christianity, for example, which does affirm that every aspect of life should be shaped and formed by this particular faith, then what does one do with those who don't adopt this faith at all? This question has become a very burning and practical question for many Christians only in fairly recent times.

In the United States, probably the last thirty years have been the time when most ordinary Christians have found that they have to deal with the question of the plurality of religions because they now have neighbors or friends or someone in the community who is not a Christian. We are accustomed of course to many kinds of Christianity; that has been a rather different kind of an issue. But what do we do in relation to Jews; how do we understand ourselves in relation to Hindus, to Buddhists, to Muslims, and so forth. It is now a very urgent question.

There is an altogether too common reaction, and I think one can find analogies to it in many other traditions. That is, if we find that we have a tradition that we believe has the truth, and we encounter someone who lives by another set of beliefs and understanding, we simply assume the other to be totally wrong. If they do not agree with us, and we are right, how can they be anything else but wrong? The very possibility of encountering people whom one has to recognize as sensitive, thoughtful, concerned, committed, serious people who don't believe the things we have supposed one should believe inspires fear and anxiety among many Christians. And the reaction to fear and anxiety can often be rigidity and dogmatic reaffirmations of what one has believed and thought beforehand. We often used the word "fundamentalism" to describe this psychological and theological reaction. And there are many Christian fundamentalists. These days, we tend to use the term fundamentalism rather loosely, and speak not only of Christian fundamentalists, but also of Islamic fundamentalists and Hindu fundamentalists, and perhaps even Buddhist fundamentalists, though I think that is less common than in many other traditions.

The majority of American and European Christians reject fundamentalism, but the group that accepts it is large enough and strong enough that politically and sociologically we have to take it very seriously. And of course we talk a great deal about Islamic fundamentalism today, which is quite different, but has the same psychological and sociological character of responding and reacting to the challenge to the fullness of one's own truth by rejecting, condemning, and opposing all those who project apparent criticism against them.

A second, very common reaction among Christians to the encounter with people of other faiths is to minimize the differences, by saying that even though superficially Muslims, or Jews, or Buddhists, or Hindus, or Sikhs, or Confucianists seem to be different from us, really, if you move away the cultural trappings, if you get down to the heart of the matter, we are all very much alike.

Some people say there is an essence of religion and that all of our communities embody that essence, and that if you distinguish the essence from the superficial elements and recognize our commonality, then we can work together, live together, and rejoice together, and that is a happy solution to the problem. Others use the image, which I think came from Hinduism, of there being many paths up the same mountain. Our goal is the same. We all want to achieve the same thing in the end, and we simply go about getting there in different ways. Both of these are examples of minimizing differences and hoping to achieve mutuality and commonality and the ability to work together and to respect and admire each other by saying, "There's not really much significant difference among us."

Now I need to explain why I don't accept this position, because it is certainly an attractive solution to many people. I think it is too bad to say that we can only appreciate and respect people who are very much like ourselves. It seems to me that we should be able to appreciate and respect people who are different from ourselves. It will be almost disappointing to find out that we are all really very much alike and our differences are not very significant.

In reality, I do not think that all of the great religious communities and traditions are trying to arrive at the same end. I think our purposes are sometimes very different. I believe one reason that it was possible in China for Confucianists and Buddhists to get along so well was that these were not two ways of trying to do the same thing. They were two ways to do rather different things. Chinese could, therefore, assign different aspects of life to different traditions and communities. And I think the same thing is true between Buddhists and Christians, although there are real overlaps between us. Our deepest purposes and goals are somewhat different from each other. And perhaps just for that reason, we can learn more from each other than if we were simply trying to accomplish the same goal in different ways. If there are apparent differences between us, we should celebrate those differences rather than try to make them disappear. At least from my Christian point of view, I prefer to speak of the great value and richness of difference rather than only to seek similarity and commonality as the basis for our friendly relationship.

Now, there is a third response to this issue of the encounter among religious communities that takes the matter of difference much further than I would like to take it. This is called sometimes post-modernism. There are some kinds of post-modernism I like, but this particular form, I think, is dangerous. One way in which it is put is to say that each of these religious systems or cultural systems is a complete whole that expresses itself in a particular language, in a particular pattern of symbols. Within that whole, the meaning of every word or every symbol can only be understood in relationship to other words and other symbols that make up the whole cultural, linguistic system. Now, frankly, I think this is a view that people attain only when they are brainwashed in a university, rather than in the normal process of growing up. But because it is so highly regarded today in academic circles, intellectual circles, as being the cutting-edge view, I need to mention it and say why I think it is wrong.

One reason I think it is wrong is because people who adopt that view sometimes say to me, "Dialogue between people in different religious communities is impossible, because they cannot ever be meaning the same thing. There is no way of translating terms from one religious community into the language of another religious community." I agree that we need to be warned against the easy translations that have often been made. But I've spent enough time in dialogue to be convinced that Christians can really learn something about what Buddhists mean by their Buddhist terms. We may have no existing term that means the same thing, but we can learn. We are able, in communication with each other, to gain information about how the other thinks and even to learn things about the nature of reality that we would never have learned if we had remained only in our own tradition. So I am convinced in fact that dialogue is possible, that communication is possible, between people who live and think and operate in different communities. Therefore I reject the idea that we simply need to live in different cultural, linguistic systems and let others live in theirs without any attempt to understand one another, or to interact with one another.

I celebrate differences in the deep belief that we can learn from one another, and that often we can learn the most from the people who are most different from us, rather than from people who really, at a deep down level, already believe the same thing we do. And it is because other religious communities have learned things that we have not learned, have experienced dimensions of reality that we Christians have not experienced, that it is so valuable for us to encounter people from other traditions.

Of course there is a risk involved; those who say this is dangerous are not wrong. But the joy of discovering new truth, aspects of reality that have not occurred to us before, and the potential contribution this can make to us are so great that I think the risk is well worth taking. The results are far greater, far richer, than they would be if we simply tried to stay within our own narrower limits and live out our lives in those terms.

I have spoken in quite general ways without making an explicit appeal to the Christian tradition, to justify this approach, which I call the "way of transformation." It is quite different from the way of defensive retreat or building a wall against attack, which is what we are calling fundamentalism. It is quite different from saying we are all really alike anyway. It is quite different from saying we are so different that we cannot communicate with each other. It is saying that we are wonderfully different, none of us knows everything, there is far more to learn than we have ever learned, and that the encounter with those who have a different wisdom from ours is a marvelous opportunity for growth.

When I say this, preaching in my own Christian context, there are some who shake their heads and think this is very dangerous. I am risking the truth of my own heritage. That is, I am likely to end up abandoning some of my beliefs because they no longer seem very convincing after I have encountered other people with different beliefs. I am likely to end up with a watered-down version of Christianity. These are the ways in which many Christians respond to what I am putting forward as a healthy Christian response in our new religiously pluralistic context or situation. So I think that it is very important not merely to recommend this attitude, but to say how it is, out of the Christian scriptures and out of the Christian tradition, that this is a responsible and deeply Christian response to the problems of our time.

Since I read a scripture about the Spirit, let me take that as one of the many points from which I could take departure in order to make this argument. Remember, this is Jesus speaking to the disciples shortly before he is to die, and therefore be physically removed from the presence of the disciples. Jesus says that the Father, that is God, will send the Helper in his name. The point is, "the Helper will lead you into truth."

Our scripture says that the Helper, which John also calls the Spirit of truth (16:13), will teach us truth in two ways. One is to recall what Jesus has said. The other is to communicate new truth. In other words, not all truth, not everything we need to know, was already given to us nineteen centuries ago in the teaching of Jesus, or in the response to Jesus of the earliest disciples. On the contrary, we are to learn more truth as time goes by. Now there are many other ways in which I could make the basic point I want to make here. That is, if we return to our own scriptures to find what they teach us, they point us toward the future. They do not say everything we need to know and everything our descendants for all time will need to know. On the contrary, it points to the future as the time of fulfillment. Saint Paul says, "Now I see things darkly as in a mirror, but then face to face." Clearly, then, in the fu-

Dr. Cobb delivering this sermon at a Rissho Kosei-kai facility in Tokyo on May 16, 2002.

ture more will be known than can be known now. Jesus points not so much to himself but to a future world in which God's will will be done. It is usually spoken of as the Kingdom of God. Of course we are drawn back to those events around the life of Jesus Christ—there is no question of their importance—but when we go back to those events, we find ourselves pointed forward to a situation that is still not fulfilled and completed. That means that there is more to learn. That means that when we encounter wisdom and truth in any source—perhaps it is in the natural sciences, perhaps it is in histories, but perhaps it is in other religious communities—to learn what we can learn through that is to be guided by the Spirit of truth into the fuller truth, toward which Jesus pointed us.

Now, when I say this in many Christian congregations there still is great anxiety, because people like to feel that they already have everything they will ever need to have. The idea that our knowledge now is incomplete, that our understanding is unfinished, that what we already have received through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is not the totality of all that we need is terrifying to many. But this effort to find a place that is already complete is, in my opinion, from a Christian point of view, an effort to claim that we are not the finite creatures that our Bible tells us that we are. It is an effort to suppose that what we have already grasped is enough.

Central to the teaching of Jesus, and central also to the teaching of Christianity throughout the years, has been the idea expressed in the Greek word, *metanoia*. Now it is translated into English as "repentance." And many people think of repentance as feeling ashamed for the bad things we have done. There's nothing wrong with feeling ashamed of the bad things we have done. But that's not really the meaning of *metanoia*; *metanoia* means a change of mind, shift of direction. Of course, recognizing that there is something wrong with the direction you are going may be a prerequisite for changing the direction, so there is a close connection between the acknowledgment of our sinfulness, of our foolishness, of our lack of understanding, and *metanoia*, change in direction.

Many Christians again will say, "Well, we only need to repent once. Once you have changed your mind, once you have made this shift, then you are a Christian. Once you are a Christian, there is no more problem." But thoughtful Christians know that isn't so. The fact that we have become Christians does not mean that we do not still need to repent. And every Sunday morning, in our worship service, we repent again—or at least we say we do. It is part of the liturgy that we enact. We need, again and again, to shift direction.

What can prod us to change direction? Many things. But in our day, there is no prod that is stronger, more promising, more hopeful than that of encountering saintly people, wise people, who have come to their wisdom and to their saintliness through a very different history from ours, and in the process have learned many things that we have not learned. So I believe strongly that the call to repentance can be responded to and fulfilled in many ways more helpfully today than ever before. Some Christians will respond to me and say, "Oh, this is a brand-new teaching. Obviously Christians have never done this before." But they are profoundly mistaken. The study of our history is a study of drastic changes in response to new stimuli.

That does not mean that all the changes that we have made have been wholly, purely positive and purely good. We responded as a community to the wisdom of the Greeks in very drastic ways in the early centuries of the church; that is, the faith that we derive from our biblical history was transformed in its articulation by the impact especially of Greek philosophy. Stoics had an enormous influence in shaping our ethical teaching, and Neo-Platonist Christians drew upon Plato and upon Aristotle. Christianity in the Mediterranean world was profoundly Hellenized.

There are many Christians today who would say that was a bad thing. We should have remained more purely true to our origin. And I am one of those who thinks that some of the things we learned from the Greeks have misdirected us. I have actually argued that it would have been better if Christianity had moved East rather than West. And, of course, it did to some extent, but that was not the part of Christianity that survived and developed to shape the future. If we had moved East and had been

transformed by our encounter with Indian thought, Christianity would have taken a very different shape. Nevertheless, with all the problems that Greek thought has introduced for us in Christian history, I think it was an extremely important thing, and a very positive thing, that Christians adjusted to and appropriated the wisdom of the Greeks. If we had not done so, I am not sure that Christianity would have survived as an important factor in world history.

I read a historian once who said that in the third century of the Christian era, there were two great spiritual, intellectual forces competing for leadership in the Mediterranean world. One was Neo-Platonism and the other was Christianity. Christianity won, not by showing that Neo-Platonism was wrong, but by taking Neo-Platonist wisdom into itself. Christianity was able to incorporate the wisdom of Neo-Platonism, whereas Neo-Platonism was not able to incorporate the wisdom of Christianity. Saint Augustine is of course a great figure for Western Christianity who did this. Origen and others had a great influence in the Eastern tradition. There are many things wrong with Saint Augustine, and there are many things wrong with Eastern theology, but both were also richer because they were open to receiving a wisdom that did not come to them out of the Bible.

In more recent times, Christianity has been profoundly interactive with modern science. Now, once again, the results of the encounter with modern science have been in many ways very problematic. We adopted elements of a worldview that I think have been damaging to us, so I do not mean to imply that our transformation by modern science has been problem-free. But I do believe that if we had failed to be open to the wisdom of the scientists, the enormous accomplishment of the scientists, to incorporate that into the way we think about the world, we would have relegated ourselves to near irrelevance or worse, as the centuries passed by. There have been enormous transformations of Christian teaching as a result of our incorporation of the natural sciences within our thought structures. And we have had gains and losses.

Now, the fundamentalists in principle would say, "Yes, we have done all these things, that is why we are in so much trouble. If we had simply kept to the purity of the original word and not allowed philosophy, not allowed science, to influence us, how much better off we would be." I cannot agree with them. I believe that that would not have been a Christian response to the challenges of the past, and I am glad that the church chose to take the risks of openness and learning, rather than the risks of closing ourselves up and simply repeating the same things over and over again regardless of the context in which we found ourselves.

But, yes, of some of what we adopted, we need now to repent. And one of the best sources for seeing how we need to repent of the influence of Greek thought is the encounter with Eastern thought. Much of the harm that Greek thought has done us can be undone in the encounter with Buddhism. And much of the harm that we incorporated through Western science can be undone through the encounter and the appropriation of the wisdom of Buddhism. So I believe that this is a time of enormous opportunity for Christians, and that when we open ourselves to a new source of wisdom, a new truth, that does not come to us directly from the Bible, we do so in obedience to our faith in Jesus Christ—that is the heart of who and what we are.

Now, I have been speaking quite obviously as a Christian about the particular history of Christianity and the particular doctrines in Christianity that have called us to be open to wisdom wherever it is to be found, wherever it is to be received. I do not think that the reasons for openness in Hinduism or in Islam would be exactly the same as the reasons for openness in Christianity. I do not think the reasons for openness in Buddhism would be exactly the same. I am not even sure that the nature of the openness that is appropriate is the same. I even believe that there are religious communities for which openness is not desirable, at least is not felt to be desirable at all.

An example of that at the present time would be Native American religious communities. They feel themselves, with much justification, so much under pressure to adjust and adapt to the larger context of Western modernity, including its Christian forms and expressions, that they exert all their energies in order to preserve the deep and rich traditions of their ancestors and to make them come alive again in as pure a form as possible. I do not criticize them because they are not open to us. Perhaps some day they might be. That's for them to decide. Similarly, Jews in Christendom for many, many centuries have felt that their task is not to be open to the influence of Christianity but to protect the purity of their heritage and their way of life in a context where it is constantly threatened by an environment that is primarily composed of others.

But as a *Christian* I am convinced that it is our duty, it is our privilege, it is our opportunity, to open ourselves to the wisdom of others, to incorporate that wisdom into our own tradition, and in this way to move forward to our goal, which I believe to be the coming of God's will on Earth. I do not mean to turn that into a universal for all traditions. But I do believe that if we make it our goal, we can share that and explain it to others and encourage others then to explain to us whether they share an inner desire to be open to learn from others and to be transformed by that learning, or whether they have reasons for a different kind of response to this pluralistic world in which we live. In any case, ours is, in fact, a world of religious pluralism, and all of us can recognize that there is great wisdom, great virtue, and great promise in many communities besides our own. We can live in appreciation, in confidence, and trust in that larger community. ❑

Third Vatican Buddhist-Christian Colloquium Meets at Rissho Kosei-kai

Participants in the Buddhist-Christian colloquium engaged in conversations that not only were theoretical, but also reached personal and spiritual levels.

Buddhist and Roman Catholic priests and scholars gathered at the headquarters of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo from September 29 through October 3, 2002, for a Buddhist-Christian colloquium. This event was the third in a series of Buddhist-Christian encounters promoted by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) at the Vatican. The colloquium's theme was "Sangha in Buddhism and Church in Christianity." Participants of both religions explored the dimension of community life in the two traditions. Some 30 attendees, all clergy or lay specialists in religion, came from Singapore, Hong Kong, Macao, Japan, India, Myanmar, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Italy, and the United States. Buddhist representatives included those from the Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana traditions. Among the Buddhists were three Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters staff members, including Dr. Michio Shinozaki, director of the general secretariat. All the Christian participants were Catholics. Taking part on behalf of the PCID were Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, president of the council, and Msgr. Felix A. Machado, under-secretary.

The first colloquium of the series was held in 1995 at the Buddhist monastery of Fo Guang Shan in Kao-hsiung, Taiwan; the second took place in 1998 at the Asirvanam Benedictine monastery in Bangalore, India. The first encounter addressed the convergences and divergences between Buddhism and Christianity; at the second meeting participants discussed the more specific theme "Word and Silence in Buddhist and Christian Traditions." This year's meeting, held at Rissho Kosei-kai's Horin-kaku Guest Hall, was the first time the colloquium had taken place at a lay Buddhist center.

Some 60 people were present at the inaugural session on the evening of September 29. Addresses were delivered by Peter Cardinal Seiichi Shirayanagi, Archbishop Ambrose De Paoli, apostolic nuncio to Japan; Archbishop Peter Okada of Tokyo; and Rev. Katsunori Yamanoi, chairman of Rissho Kosei-kai.

For Archbishop Fitzgerald, participation in the colloquium was his first official responsibility as the new president of PCID; he had assumed office on October 1, succeeding Francis Cardinal Arinze, who became the president of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of Sacraments. The archbishop expressed his gratitude for Rissho Kosei-kai's cooperation in the colloquium and extended greetings to all the participants and guests, declaring that those attending would enter the meeting in a spirit of openness, discovering and appreciating what Buddhism and Christianity have in common and clarifying the distinctive features of the two religions. He said that he was convinced that "mutual sharing will help us to consolidate good relations between Buddhists and Catholics, not only for our own benefit, but also for that of many other people around the world." Rev. Yamanoi expressed his appreciation of the PCID for choosing Rissho Kosei-kai as the venue of the third colloquium, and briefly reviewed the history of exchanges between the Vatican and Rissho Kosei-kai from 1965, when the organization's late founder, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, was invited to the Second Vatican Council.

The theme of the colloquium was divided into four pairs of subthemes, which were discussed in eight sessions over the course of the four-day meeting. They were: 1) "Jesus Christ and His Church" and "The Buddha and His Sangha"; 2) "Apostles, Martyrs, Saints, and Teachers (Doctors) in Christianity" and "Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Arhats, and Lamas in Buddhism"; 3) "Monks, Nuns, and Monasteries in Buddhism and Their Place in Society" and "Monks and Nuns in Christianity and Their Role of Service to Society"; and 4) "Members of the Laity and Their Relationship to the Sangha in Buddhism" and "Members of the Laity and Their Relationship to the Church in Christianity." Before the colloquium, participants had prepared eight papers using religious reflection and research. Each session began with the presentation of a paper; a member of the other religious tradition then responded.

Discussions centered on clarifying and understanding the structure and dynamics of the religious communities in the two traditions. The subsequent conversations, especially at the breakout sessions, did not remain purely theoretical but reached the personal and spiritual levels. Msgr. Machado said that throughout the colloquium "the

participants shared their strong desire to do something to transform society, their desire to contribute to peace in the world." He added that the attendees demonstrated their willingness to be engaged in the problems of the world, as members of religious communities "not aloof from the world, but more to be of service to the world, just like the Buddha himself shared his compassion and Jesus Christ told us to love even our enemies."

The colloquium was another important step forward in the history of Buddhist-Christian dialogue. On the last day, the participants adopted a statement that emphasized active participation by all Christians in the life and mission of the Church and the bodhisattva ideal that motivates Buddhists to address suffering in the secular world. Noting that interreligious dialogue has fostered kinship among fellow pilgrims of different religious traditions in ways that strengthen their sense of fellowship with all humankind, the statement said, "This openness to the wider community of humanity, a sense of belonging to one human family, is very much needed in today's world, where division, prejudice, nationalism, and ethnic sectarianism cause so much human suffering, and do so much damage to our common environment."

It concludes, "This vision of our place in the world as brothers and sisters leads us, in the face of war and terrorism, to commit ourselves together to seek peaceful solutions to social and political problems. We need to support a culture of ongoing dialogue where persons of all religions come to know and respect each other. In the service of peace, we value the witness of intercultural and interreligious cooperation to show the world that living peacefully with our differences is indeed possible." ❑

Cambodian Interreligious Council Inaugurated

On October 10, 2002, the inauguration ceremony of the Cambodian Interreligious Council (CIC) was held at a hall in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, under the patronage of His Majesty King Sihanouk. The CIC was initiated as a national chapter of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP); the ceremony marked the first coalition of Cambodia's Muslim, Buddhist, and Christian communities to take joint action in search of peace. The delegates—200 Buddhists, 200 Muslims, and 100 Christians—took part in the ceremony and welcomed representatives from the Cambodian government and the United Nations, as well as guests from overseas organizations.

The opening remarks, delivered by His Excellency Mr. Chhorn Iem, secretary of state of the Cambodian Ministry of Religious Affairs, were followed by the introduction of the WCRP by Dr. William F. Vendley, secretary general. Six founding members from Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian communities in Cambodia offered comments on the establishment of the CIC. His Holiness Supreme Patriarch Tep Vong of the Mahanikaya Buddhist Order of Cambodia mentioned that this remarkable day was a historic event. He also said that the ceremony encouraged people of different religions to come together in solidarity and cooperate with the government, the UN, and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to bring about social stability in Cambodia. Then the royal address of His Majesty King Norodom Sihanouk was read by proxy, and the Cambodian religious leaders signed their joint statement. Congratulatory messages were delivered by representatives of the Cambodian government, UN organs in Cambodia, and the WCRP.

In his congratulatory address as one of the international presidents of the WCRP, Rev. Nichiko Niwano, president of Rissho Kosei-kai, said that through his experience with the WCRP's interreligious cooperation he had realized the importance of collaborating with the religious and local communities and, above all, the significance of working together to solve real social problems. He expressed his conviction that the CIC would demonstrate the ability of religions to contribute not only to social development but also to social reconciliation, to bring about peace in Cambodia.

The CIC hopes that Cambodian religious organizations will cooperate with the government, the UN, and NGOs to help tackle the problems caused by the Pol Pot regime and the ensuing civil war: poverty, violation of human rights, environmental destruction, HIV infec-

Cambodian religious leaders signing the joint statement, while representatives of the Cambodian government, the United Nations, and the WCRP look on.

tion, land mines, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. To support the establishment of the CIC, the Japanese Committee of the WCRP will allot one million Japanese yen per year for three years from its Fund for Peace and Development. The WCRP also hopes to establish national chapters in Southeast Asian countries such as Laos, Vietnam, and Myanmar. ❑

Cambodia's Buddhist Institute Completed

The completed building of the National Buddhist Institute of Cambodia.

On October 9 a ceremony marking the completion of the National Buddhist Institute of Cambodia took place in front of the institute's building in Phnom Penh. Some 1,000 Cambodians, including Buddhist priests and school students, took part.

Construction of the institute began in 1995; the main building was completed in 1998. Subsequent construction has equipped the building with a printing room, a library, waterworks, ventilation systems, a parking lot, and outer walls. The Buddhist Institute, which was originally established in 1921 as Cambodia's major academic and cultural facility, was destroyed in the late 1970s by the Pol Pot regime; some 40,000 books were burned to ashes. At the request of Cambodia's Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA), Rissho Kosei-kai has supported the construction of the institute since 1995 in the belief that reclaiming Cambodia's Buddhist cultural heritage is key to the country's rehabilitation. The organization's Peace Fund contributed the construction cost of 124 million yen. Rissho Kosei-kai, in cooperation with SVA and the Japanese Committee of the WCRP, has also promoted the reprinting of Buddhist scriptures and books for Cambodian clerics and children. ❑

WCRP/Japan Sends Peace Mission to China

At the invitation of the Chinese Conference on Religion and Peace (CCRP), a national chapter of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), the Japanese Committee of WCRP (WCRP/Japan) sent a peace mission to China from October 21 through 26, 2002. Headed by Peter Cardinal Seiichi Shirayanagi, president of WCRP/Japan, the group consisted of 12 members, including Rev. Gijun Sugitani, its secretary general, and Ms. Yoshiko Izumida, director of its Women's Board. They visited Beijing, Shanghai, and Xi'an to promote friendly relations among religionists in the year commemorating the 30th anniversary of the resumption of diplomatic ties between Japan and China.

On October 21, the party visited the Guangji monastery, headquarters of the Buddhist Association of China in Beijing, and met with Rev. Yi Cheng, president of the association, who took office in September. The members then moved to the general office of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and were welcomed by CCRP members. In their meeting, the members of the group exchanged greetings with 13 representatives from five major religions in China, including Rev. Min Zhiting, vice president of the CCRP and president of the Taoist Association of China; and Rev. Chen Uangyuan, also a CCRP vice president and president of the Islamic Association of China.

During their stay in Beijing the group visited the Taoist Association of China and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, and met with Mr. Ye Xiaowen, director-general of China's Administration for Religious Affairs Bureau. The group also traveled to Xi'an and worshiped at the Great Wild Goose Pagoda and at the China Christian Council in Shanghai. ❑

Peace mission members pose for a commemorative photo with Rev. Yi Cheng, president of the Buddhist Association of China (fourth from left), at the association's headquarters, Guangji monastery, in Beijing.

Week of Prayer for World Peace Observed

From October 20 through 27, 2002, a multireligious "Week of Prayer" took place in many parts of the world. This event was promoted by the Week of Prayer for World Peace, an association that was founded in the United Kingdom more than 20 years ago and that currently consists of 37 religious organizations—Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist—and nonreligious groups. For eight days, people in the member organizations offered prayers for the eternal peace of all humankind.

Rissho Kosei-kai has been participating in the "Week of Prayer" for 16 years. During the week, members attended morning devotional services to pray for world peace at the Tokyo headquarters' Great Sacred Hall, at their respective branches, and at their homes.

The daily recitations included special "words of prayer for world peace" that referred to current issues such as the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001; the ensuing military action by the United States and the United Kingdom in Afghanistan; armed conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians; and U.S. President George Bush's advocacy of a preemptive military strike against Iraq.

Some branches also took the initiative to hold "interreligious prayer gatherings" in their communities, in cooperation with local members of different faiths. ❑

Official Catholic-Jewish Dialogue Celebrates 37th Anniversary

October 28 marked the 37th anniversary of the publication of *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council document that paved the way for a new chapter in interreligious relations. For the first time, the Vatican condemned and deplored all forms of anti-Semitism, closing centuries of anti-

WCRP European Council of Religious Leaders Inaugurated

Senior religious leaders of Europe meet at an inaugural meeting of the European Council of Religious Leaders in Oslo.

Senior religious leaders from across Europe, members of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), established the WCRP European Council of Religious Leaders (WCRP/ECRL), the first multireligious structure of senior religious leaders in Europe, at an inaugural meeting in the Norwegian capital of Oslo on November 11–12, 2002.

The founding members of the ECRL include Godfried Cardinal Daneels, archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels; Bishop Gunnar Stälsett, Lutheran bishop of Oslo and a member of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee; Grand Rabbi René-Samuel Sirat, vice president of the Council of European Rabbis; Metropolitan Kirill, metropolitan of Smolensk of the Russian Orthodox Church; Dr. Mustafa Ceric, the *reisu-l-ulema*, or supreme head of the Islamic community of Bosnia-Herzegovina; and Mr. Jehangir Sarosh, moderator of the WCRP Europe Governing Board.

In its final statement, the ECRL acknowledged "the bloody history of religious conflicts in Europe, as well as current attempts to twist religions to fuel the fires of ethnic conflicts both here and around the world." The 30-member council committed itself to working to end conflicts, to reaffirming the religious rejection of terror, and to promoting justice and peaceful coexistence among the diversity of peoples, religions, and traditions in Europe.

The ECRL called on European politicians on both national and regional levels for a serious, systematic, and ongoing dialogue as Europe is common home of diverse cultures and traditions. The delegates applauded the unanimous strategy agreed upon by the United Nations Security Council in dealing with Iraq and appealed to the political leadership in Iraq to comply with the Security Council resolution. ❑

Semitic contempt based on Catholic teachings that held the Jews responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. These and more anti-Semitic teachings were annulled by the *Nostra Aetate* document.

The basis for the placing of this milestone in Jewish-Catholic relations was given by French historian Jules Isaac, who visited Pope John XXIII in 1960 when he learned that the church had decided to celebrate a council. He suggested that the church take a new stand in its relations with the Jews. The council fathers signed the document in 1965, explicitly decrying "hatred, persecutions, [and] anti-Semitism."

These solemn events were recalled by the participants to the conference held in Rome during the celebrations for *Nostra Aetate*'s 37th anniversary. In particular, Walter Cardinal Kasper, president of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with Jews, said that *Nostra Aetate*, which remains a real "turning point" in Jewish-Christian relations, allowed Catholics to discover "that they could look back at the complex phenomenon of anti-Semitism and deplore it."

Rabbi Adin Steinsalz, founder of the Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications and a renowned Jewish theologian, said that Jesus Christ, his times, teachers, and context cannot be understood if it is not kept in mind that he was a Jew.

Father Dan Madigan, in charge of the recently inaugurated department for Jewish-Catholic studies of the Gregorian Pontifical University, said that in recognizing the "other" we must avoid not respecting his uniqueness.

Rabbi David Rosen, director of Interfaith Affairs of the American Jewish Committee, praised *Nostra Aetate* as the most remarkable affirmation of eternity of the Covenant between God and the Jewish people. Rome's Chief Rabbi Riccardo Di Segni said that the more dialogue progresses, the more new challenges arise.

As Cardinal Kasper said: "You can live far from your brother, but not forever. You can be wrong and remain silent in a situation of tragedy: but you cannot remain silent forever." ❑

Eva Ruth Palmieri

Oxford Conference Debates Globalization from Interfaith Perspective

The following first-hand report is by Dr. Kamran Mofid, an economist who served as convener of last summer's annual international conference on the theme "An Interfaith Perspective on Globalization."

For the one week between July 27 and August 3, 2002, over 60 speakers from around the world, as well as many additional participants, met at Plater College in Oxford, England, and formed a community committed to exploring and debating visions and ideas for celebrating diversity and enabling us to transform our mutual respect and some of our disagreements into understanding.

We came together in these troubled times, when we need new perspectives, so that we could find humane answers to the challenges of globalization, based on a profound respect for the differences of cultures and religions in our world community.

We had many debates and discussions. We engaged with one another on different aspects of globalization from different traditions, cultures, and religions. To aid us in this endeavor, there were 22 plenary sessions.

Throughout the conference, we observed that there are two forces at work in society, the material and the spiritual. When either of these is ignored or neglected, so that the two appear to be at odds with one another, society tends to run down and become fragmented, and rifts manifest with greater force and frequency. We noted that this is exactly what has happened today, leading to a situation of imbalance. Only the reawakening of compassion will save us from our own worst extreme. Physical wealth must once again go hand in hand with spiritual, moral, and ethical wealth.

In short, it was noted that, the greed-motivated world is spinning out of control. Maybe it is time for us to redefine our values. We observed that by far the best critique of this "greed" is provided by the traditional religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as well as others such as Sikhism, Sufism, Zoroastrianism, the Baha'i faith, and the "primitive" animist religions of the Mayas of Central America, Aborigines from Australia, Maoris from New Zealand, and native peoples from Africa, Canada, and the United States. They all offer a wealth of teachings and recommendations as to how we should ethically and morally lead our lives, and how we can achieve happiness away from greed and delusion.

Finally, we noted that the limited benefits of globalization have been mainly based on the principles of economics (regarding human society primarily as a group of economic systems in which economic considerations alone govern our choices and decisions), while other equally important aspects of life have remained neglected.

We decided that we should not reject economics, politics, and business, but should work hard to achieve globalization for the common good, where everybody benefits from trade, business, and commerce. This, we believe, will coincide with God's vision of His Kingdom, in which the leading perspective is not the profit of the fittest, but a level playing field for all.

We also decided that the conference should become an annual event and take place in a different country so that we can embrace many more people with our message and vision. To this effect, in 2003 we will gather in St. Petersburg, Russia, and in 2004 in Barcelona, Spain. Other venues are currently being considered. ❑

The Second International Annual Conference on the theme "An Interfaith Perspective on Globalization" will be held in St. Petersburg, April 25–30, 2003. Further information can be obtained at:

E-mail: k.mofid@plater.ac.uk
Web site: http://commongood.info

Undogmatic Christianity and Its Impact on Interfaith Dialogue

by Andreas Roessler

There is no "dogma-free" Christianity, but there is the option of an open, tolerant, and emancipating Christianity, this writer says. It is a sound basis for interreligious encounter and understanding.

It is my thesis that, from the Christian side, an "undogmatic Christianity" is a valuable starting point for interfaith dialogue. The same may be the case with undogmatic Buddhism, undogmatic Islam, undogmatic Judaism, and so on.

The term "undogmatic Christianity" may sound quite strange. But it has had its place within the German theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It has been a catchword for a liberal or free theology, especially within the context of Protestant Christianity. Whether the phenomenon of an "undogmatic Christianity" may be marked with exactly this term or not is less important. What matters is the phenomenon itself.

In theological history the term "undogmatic Christianity" is particularly associated with the position of the famous church historian Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930), who opposed a "dogmatic Christianity." He did not fundamentally reject dogma, for "Christian religion is based on a mission that contains a definite belief in God and his representative Jesus Christ." Dogma as a "clear expression of the content" of Christianity is, on the one hand, unavoidable, and, on the other hand, limited by historical development, and "Christianity is above all something different than the sum of handed down teachings. It is rather the conviction that the father of Jesus Christ has awakened in men's hearts through the Gospel." "Undogmatic Christianity" would then be the emphasis on personal conviction, behavior, and relationship to God, as opposed to an authoritarian system of doctrines. In this way, Harnack stands in the tradition of the great liberal theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who described belief in God as the "feeling of unconditional dependence."

Schleiermacher and Harnack would agree that there is no "dogma-free" Christianity, in the sense of a Christianity without any binding statements of faith or creeds (confessions of faith). But there is the option of an open, tolerant, and emancipating Christianity, a Christianity without spiritual compulsion. It is not authoritarian, not doctrinaire. It does not conflict with reason, insight, experience, and wisdom but encompasses all that and also transcends it. What counts here is the power of conviction, of experiences, of arguments, and of truthfulness.

In Christian theology and church history, "dogma" basically means a binding doctrine. "Undogmatic Christianity" is not generally opposed to such a binding doctrine as such, for every faith, Christian or Buddhist or whatever else, needs some indispensable convictions. It is only opposed to a certain understanding of dogma, especially in the Roman Catholic church, but also in some conservative Protestant churches or movements, where dogma is seen as an infallible truth, a kind of law of faith, which must be accepted in order to achieve eternal salvation. In

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the Athanasian Creed (fifth century), the third of the old church statements of belief, the formal introductory paragraph (before the statement of contents) reads: "Anyone who wants to have eternal life must accept the Catholic faith. Anyone who does not accept this completely will without doubt be condemned to hell." Equally it states in its conclusion: "This is the Catholic faith. Anyone who does not accept this completely and utterly cannot achieve salvation."

One must differentiate between the formal side and the content of dogmas, confessions, or binding statements of faith. Seen in a formal light, it is a question of what weight or authority should be given to the dogma. In the Roman Catholic tradition, dogma is infallible and necessary for salvation. In the predominant Protestant tradition, dogmas are admittedly binding but seen as doctrines that are subordinate to, and clarified by, the Bible. According to Protestant theory, the Bible is the decisive document of faith—the Bible understood in its core, its essence, its general tendency, but maybe not in all its peripheral details.

The content of the binding doctrines (dogmas, confessions) consists in the essential and inalienable Christian beliefs. The fundamental Christian articles of faith are concerned principally about God the Creator, the very basis and goal of everything; about the eternal Christ (or Logos) as the Word or Son of God; about the central revelation of the eternal Christ in Jesus of Nazareth; about the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth, his way of life, his service, suffering, and martyr's death, and his continuing communion with God even after death; about the Holy Spirit as the God-given power that liberates and renews people; about the surprising grace of God that grants the gift of life as well as forgiveness of sins and the eternal fulfillment of life; about justice and love, freedom and peace, truth and truthfulness as the will of God; about eternal life in the future Kingdom of God as the final goal of all human existence.

A dogma in this understanding of an "undogmatic Christianity" is not set in stone. It is of course specific, but it is also somewhat broad and open, allowing further interpretation and granting new insights. Whether we are dealing with the divine trinity of God the creator, redeemer, and fulfiller (in other words: the divine creation, the divine revelation to the world, the healing and redeeming power of God), or whether we are dealing with the divine sonship of Christ, with Jesus' life and death for humankind, with Jesus' resurrection, or with the future Kingdom of God—we must always leave room for new insights and new interpretations.

This emphasis on the key issues, the basic tendency of the biblical message, is rather in contrast with the theory of Christian fundamentalism, which since 1910 insists on a literal interpretation and even on the absolute infallibility of the Bible. Therefore, Christian fundamentalism advocates, for instance, the virgin birth of Jesus of Nazareth in a literal, biological sense; the death of Jesus understood as healing the sins of the world and overcoming the wrath of God; the physical resurrection of Jesus after this crucifixion; a physical second coming of Jesus Christ on earth. But this literal, nonsymbolic understanding of Christian dogma cannot be reconciled with God-given human reason.

Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) and Paul Tillich (1886–1965), two great Protestant thinkers of a free, open, liberal understanding of Christian faith, represent two different models of an "undogmatic Christianity" (although Tillich does not use the term himself).

In Tillich's work the old church dogmas as well as the Protestant professions of faith of the sixteenth century are not questioned as such, but they are interpreted symbolically. In Tillich's interpretation, religious language is always symbolic, allegorical, and therefore room must be created for more and more new interpretations of the basic Christian dogmas. We need powerful dogmas or statements of faith, rituals, images, with all their imperfections and shortcomings. They should be interpreted freely and honestly. For example, Jesus gives several radical teachings in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), which are always open to interpretation and which will always remain stimulating. They are a stimulus to further consideration.

Religious language is always symbolic, allegorical, and therefore room must be created for more and more new interpretations of the basic Christian dogmas.

Tillich differentiates between the "Catholic substance," which means the essential and common Christian tradition, and the "Protestant principle," which means a free, truthful, honest dealing with this Christian tradition, with the reservation that God alone is unconditional and absolute.

Thus Tillich for instance accepts the old Christian dogma of a divine trinity of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He interprets it as the three aspects of God himself, his creative, revealing, and liberating work in the world and the fulfillment of all being in God. "The Trinity is above all the experience of God as a living God; he goes beyond himself in creation, he shares in our suffering by overcoming suffering and fulfilling creation. In this the Divine goes beyond itself; it is not lost but returns to itself. God remains God for eternity" (1960; *Gesammelte Werke* 13, Stuttgart, 1972, pp. 484–85).

Schweitzer, on the other hand, rather prefers a literal view of biblical and Christian doctrines, but because of his explicit liberal theology, he tends to drop what he cannot accept literally. In comparison with Tillich, Schweitzer

reduces the Christian dogmas in their substance to something that in Tillich's theology is not the substance but only a plausible modern interpretation of the dogmas.

In his paper "Religion in Modern Culture" (1934), Schweitzer accepted a "dogma-free" (once even an "undogmatic") religion in contrast to a dogmatic religion. According to Schweitzer, there are "two different streams" in one and the same religion, for example, in Christianity. "Dogmatic religion is based on the professions of faith in the early Church and in the Reformation. Dogma-free religion is ethical, limiting itself to ethical basic truths, and tries, inasmuch as it lies within its power, to remain true to logical thought. It is trying to realize a part of God's Kingdom on earth."

In his writings, Schweitzer hardly ever raises the dogma of the divine trinity as such, but instead he offers the interpretation that God reveals himself in Jesus of Nazareth as an act of love, and the spirit of Jesus enables humankind to do some work in favor of the Kingdom of God. The important thing is "that we recognize God properly as our father, that we love Jesus Christ properly, and that we allow the Holy Spirit to rule in our hearts" (letter of September 19, 1957).

Schweitzer neglects the Christian message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ because he cannot accept a bodily resurrection. Therefore he no longer uses the strong symbol of resurrection, although this could be adopted in a spiritual instead of a material way. At best Schweitzer talks about Jesus' continuing existence with God, sometimes only about his continuing spiritual influence.

With all their differences in many details, Tillich and Schweitzer agree that in the light of an "undogmatic Christianity" the binding Christian doctrines have to be interpreted in such a way that they fit in with personal truth, reason, and experience. The position of Tillich seems to be more plausible, for with his theory of the symbolic character of all religious knowledge he can take seriously the substance or content of the biblical message and the Christian dogmas without being bound to its somehow old-fashioned images and ideas and to the worldview of ancient times. Religious language and knowledge is always to be understood symbolically and not literally.

An "undogmatic" option of Christianity is most helpful for interfaith dialogue. Paul Tillich and Albert Schweitzer, the two outstanding representatives of an undogmatic Christianity, are the best examples themselves.

Tillich visited Japan in 1960. He was most impressed by his encounter with Buddhist tradition and spirituality and wrote a famous little book *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (1963). There he concentrates on the Christian-Buddhist dialogue. He establishes basic principles for interfaith dialogue: There is a common ground between the religions, namely the awareness of the Unconditional; there should be a clear conviction of ultimate truth within one's own religion; there should be the presupposition that there is also truth to be found in the other religions; we should be ready to learn from each other and to be self-critical. A few days before his death, Tillich presented a paper "The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian," in which he emphasized the fundamental unity of the world religions.

Schweitzer wrote a book titled *The Worldview of the Indian Thinkers* (1935) and left manuscripts called "Chinese Thinking" (1937–40). The latter writings were just published in 2002. But most of all, Schweitzer wrote a small but most valuable book titled *Christianity and the World Religions* (1923), which shows at the same time his being deeply rooted in Christian faith and his sympathy for the other world religions. A basic idea of this book is that human understanding of the Divine is always limited. God's work in nature and in history remains hidden. But he reveals his will in human conscience. There we recognize that God is love and that his will is love, justice, and reverence for life and truth.

It is a fundamental "dogma" of "undogmatic Christianity" that God is always greater than human understanding and experience.

It is a fundamental "dogma" of "undogmatic Christianity" that God is always greater than human understanding and experience (in a Latin saying, *Deus semper major*), that the Divine is beyond human imagination. It is a mystery to which the defined Christian doctrines point, without ever being able to penetrate the mystery of God. When we say "God," we mean the source, the origin, and the guarantee of truth. "God is always greater" is therefore identical with "The ultimate, eternal truth is always greater," beyond all understanding, experience, and imagination.

"Undogmatic Christianity" knows that we can approach the ultimate truth that on the other hand remains beyond our grasp. Therefore Christian dogmas or professions of faith reflect God and hint at his truth by means of images and symbols, but the whole truth of the Divine remains hidden. It is possible to attain clear religious convictions, helpful and plausible answers to the basic questions about life and its meaning, and therefore to get an inner certainty. But there always remain questions and doubts.

"Undogmatic Buddhism," "undogmatic Islam," "undogmatic Judaism," and the liberal, free movements within other religions would also be aware that the Divine is beyond full human understanding. This consciousness of human limitation and fallibility prevents people from fanaticism. It helps to be modest and humble. It leads to toleration. It is a sound basis for interfaith encounter and dialogue. ❑

The Rich Father and the Poor Son

by Gene Reeves

There are many lessons to be learned from this well-known parable, including some that we may teach ourselves.

As we have seen, in chapter 3 of the Lotus Sutra, the parable of the three vehicles was used by the Buddha to explain why there is a diversity of Buddhist teachings and why he is now teaching the One-Buddha–Way. Having heard this explanation, four shravakas,[1] Subhuti, Maha-Katyayana, Maha-Kashyapa, and Maha-Maudgalyayana, all "living a life of wisdom," hearing from the Buddha a teaching that they had never heard before, and also hearing the Buddha's assurance of Shariputra's eventual supreme enlightenment, were astonished and ecstatic with joy. In chapter 4, they tell the parable of the rich father and the poor son as a way of checking out whether or not they have understood the matter correctly.[2]

The Story

As a boy, a man had run away from home, only to live a life of desperate poverty, moving from place to place in search of menial work. Meanwhile, his father, who had become extremely rich and powerful, had searched everywhere for the lost son but could not find him.

One day the son accidentally came to the town where the father lived. He saw his father in the distance surrounded by servants and signs of great wealth but did not recognize him, and he fled in fear of such wealth and power. But the father, secretly longing for his son for many decades and wanting to give his inheritance to him, recognized the man immediately and sent a servant after him. But when the servant caught up with him, the son, fearing that he would be forced to work or even be killed, pleaded that he had done nothing wrong and fell to the ground in a faint. Seeing this, the father told the servant to douse him with cold water to wake him up, tell him he could go wherever he liked, and then leave him alone.

The son went off to another village to look for food and clothing. Later, the father secretly sent two poorly dressed servants to go to the son and offer to hire him to work with them at double-pay shoveling animal dung. To this, the son agreed and went to work at his father's house. Later, seeing how poorly the son looked, the father himself, disguised as a lowly worker, went to the son, praised his work and promised him better wages and treatment if he would continue to work for him, explaining that as he was old he wanted to treat the man just like a son. The son was pleased, and continued to shovel dung for another twenty years, gradually becoming more confident and more trusted by the father. But still, lacking self-confidence, he continued to have a very low regard for himself and live in a hovel outside the gate.[3]

Eventually the rich man became ill. Knowing he would die soon, he asked the son to take charge of his various properties and businesses. As the time of his death grew near, the father called together various officials and all of his relatives and friends and servants and revealed to

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Detail from the Lotus Sutra Mandala, scroll 1, owned by the temple Honkoji in Shizuoka Prefecture, depicting the parable of the poor son. Painted in 1335. Important Cultural Property. Photo: Nara National Museum.

them that the poor man was in fact his son and would inherit all of his wealth. With such enormous wealth coming to him quite unexpectedly, the son was very amazed.

Some Lessons

Imbedded in this story are many of the lessons which are to be found in the Lotus Sutra. Below are some of them. No doubt you will find others as well.

(1) Have faith in yourself. At a recent meeting of the International Buddhist Congregation in Tokyo, a young woman described how, dissatisfied with the faith in which she had been raised, she had searched among Christian and Buddhist traditions for an appropriate faith for herself, finally discovering with some joy the importance of having faith in herself. We might think that faith in oneself is not enough. It isn't. But it is an important beginning. The poor man in this story was not able to become a functioning contributor to his family and society until he gained some respect for and confidence in himself.

The Lotus Sutra stresses that each of us is somebody important—important to himself or herself, important to others, and important to the Buddha. Each of us is a person of great potential. For this reason we are sought after

by the Buddha. The Buddha's wealth, supreme awakening or enlightenment, is not something you have to earn or purchase in any way; it already belongs to you; it was yours from before your birth; it is your rightful inheritance.

Self-respect and self-confidence are primarily attitudes, types of emotional and psychological states, but they also entail respecting what has been given to you, including your body. If we eat, or drink, or take drugs to excess, we show disrespect for ourselves and deprive the Buddha of what he is trying to achieve in our lives.

The Buddha needs us. The Buddha's compassion is for all the living.

(2) On the other hand, we should not be overly humble or servile—or allow others to be oppressed into such servility. Oppression is the worst kind of evil, because it denies the buddha-nature of all creatures. It is an insult to the Buddha.

Though this story does not directly advocate social responsibility, it makes evident the need for those who seek to follow the Lotus Sutra to be concerned about social as well as individual evil. War, class oppression, racism, and environmental pollution can all be affronts to the Buddha.

(3) Apart from the Buddha, we are wandering around, destitute, impoverished, without purpose, miserable. This is the destiny of those who do not, in some way, follow the Buddha Way. In some way, however, this does not mean that one has to be a Buddhist in the ordinary sense. To follow the Buddha is to put one's trust in and devote oneself to the life of the whole. It is to share in a kind of common human faith that life is meaningful, a faith that finds expression in a variety of religious and other forms.

(4) The Buddha needs you. The focus of this story is the poor son and his attitude toward himself, but it is also, in important ways not always recognized, a story about the Buddha and his teaching methods. Here we are told that the Buddha needs his son, yearns for his son, and seeks to find him. Why? Because he wants to give him the great treasure that is his inheritance.

Shakyamuni Buddha was a human being who lived for a time in India, eating and sleeping like other human beings. He left to his descendants a great treasure house of profound teachings. He died and his body was cremated, the ashes being distributed in stupas. He is no longer around in the way that he once was. Responsibility for taking care of that great treasure house, for preserving those teachings and developing them by applying them in new situations, and especially for sharing them with others, is given to his children. The Buddha's work must be done by us. It is we who can embody the Buddha in the contemporary world, enabling the Buddha to continue to live.

(5) We are children of the Buddha. In the Lotus Sutra, the term "children of the Buddha" is used primarily to refer to bodhisattvas, including those who do not even understand that they are bodhisattvas. A bodhisattva is one who is on the way to being a buddha, one who is becoming a buddha, by doing bodhisattva practices—that is, by teaching and helping others. We are children of the Buddha because our lives have been shaped by the Buddha.

While saying that we are children of the Buddha says something important about us, it also says something important about the Buddha. Over and over again, the Lotus Sutra uses such personal language to speak of an ultimate reality. And this sense of the Buddha as father is reinforced dramatically in several parables, where, as in this one, the Buddha is represented by a father figure. Far from being some kind of philosophical "absolute," the Buddha of the Lotus Sutra yearns for his lost son, and for all of his children. That is another meaning of being a child of the Buddha.

(6) The Buddha is nearer than we think. Even when we think we cannot see him, the Buddha can be found right next to us. The Buddha may not even go by the name of the Buddha. Sometimes perhaps he goes by the name of Christ, or Krishna. Belonging to Rissho Kosei-kai or any other such organization is not, in itself, the Buddha Way, nor is it the only way to follow the Buddha Way. The "universal gate," which I will discuss at length later, is many gates, many more than you or I could possibly know.

Among those many gates can be our family members, or friends, our neighbors. The Buddha lives all around us, even if we are unaware of his being near us.

(7) The Buddha uses skillful means. The Buddha has to use appropriate ways to free people from harmful attachments and lead them to happiness. In this story, as in the previous story of the three vehicles, what the father tries first does not work. It causes the son to faint in terror. So the father has to devise another way. He does not go to his bookshelf to find a formula for what to do in this situation. He calls upon his own creativity to figure out, in an experimental way, how to guide his son to greater control over his own life. The fathers in these stories are skillful, not because they already know what will work, but because they are wise enough to figure out what will work and abandon what does not.

This can be understood as an invitation for us to be creative and imaginative when dealing with difficult problems. Of course, there will be many times when we will need to seek expert advice from doctors and lawyers and books, but it remains for us to use such advice creatively and in this way to rely on ourselves as well as on others.

(8) The Buddha does not use force. I do not think it is an accident that in each of these two parables, an attempt to use force fails. The father in the parable of the three

vehicles cannot force his children to flee the burning house, and the father in this parable cannot force his son to return home. Similarly, no one can force you to be creative, or to do the best thing, or to follow the Buddha Way. The Buddha lures us gradually into greater responsibility for our own lives.

If the Buddha does not use force, why should we? Usually, if not always, the use of force is an indication of a failure to be imaginative in dealing with the problem at hand.

(9) Sometimes we are being led to the Buddha even when we do not know it. Even when we are not looking for the Buddha Way, we may be being led to it. At the beginning of this story, the son is not seeking his father, at least not consciously. He is satisfied with a very low level of existence, almost bare subsistence. He has no ambition and feels no need to improve himself. It is the father who seeks him out and guides him. But what he guides him to is a gradual recovery of his self-confidence, and hence of his strength and his ability to contribute. The son is given guidance by the father not only because he is weak, and also because he is potentially strong. We can be led by the Buddha precisely because the potential to become awakened, to enter the Way, is already there.

For followers of the Lotus Sutra, there is no such thing as a "hopeless case." Everyone, without exception, has within an inner strength, a great power, to flourish in some way.

(10) We too may run away. The son, seeing the great power and wealth of the father, runs away in fear. Sometimes, when we see how great is the Buddha's treasury—how great the responsibility of compassionate knowing—we too may run away in fear. It is not easy to be a follower of the Lotus Sutra or of the bodhisattva way. It involves taking responsibility, both for one's own life and for the lives of others. And that can be frightening. That is why it is not enough for a religion to teach doctrine; it must provide assurance, over and over again—assurance that life can be meaningful, even wonderful; assurance that will overcome our natural tendency to run away in fear.

(11) Menial tasks may be beneficial. Sometimes a very humble task, such as removing dung, is important preparation for something greater. One of the basic lessons of the Lotus Sutra, which I will discuss later, is that one can find in every situation that there is something to be learned. Sometimes an unpleasant situation or task can be understood as being a present given to us by the Buddha, an opportunity for learning and growth, just as the son in this story received the present of shoveling dung from his father. We can learn from just about any situation, even from very unpleasant ones, if we approach it with a right attitude. If all we do is complain and feel sorry for ourselves, on the other hand, we will not learn from our experience.

Of course, what might be learned in some situations is that the best thing to do is to change the situation or even flee from it. The Lotus Sutra is not a recipe for being passive and accepting every situation, no matter how bad. But it *does* urge us not to be mere sufferers or victims, but always, inasmuch as we are able, to seek the best in any situation.

(12) The end is the beginning. At the end of this story, the son is happy, as he has acquired great wealth, much greater wealth than he had ever imagined. But, while it is the end of the story, we must not imagine that it is the end of the matter. We can even say that his difficulties—that is, his responsibilities—have now really only begun. Awakening is a way, a process, not so much an end as it is a path, not so much a destination as it is a commencement, not so much a conclusion as it is a new beginning—a responsibility as much as an achievement.

As the shravakas say right after the telling of this parable, we should never become complacent and satisfied with some lesser level of awakening, such as some great experience of nirvana, but always pursue the Buddha Way. Perhaps above all, this chapter is an exhortation never to be complacent with what one has achieved, an invitation to continue to grow in wisdom, compassion, and service. That is the bodhisattva way.

To be continued

Notes:

1. This word (Jpn., *shomon*) literally means "voice-hearer." It is used in the Lotus Sutra, especially in the early chapters of the sutra, to indicate those who follow an older tradition in which the highest goal is to become an awakened arhat. The shravaka way is contrasted with the bodhisattva way, in which the goal is to become a buddha.

2. The Chinese/Japanese title of this chapter (*hsin chieh* in Chinese pronunciation and *shinge* in Japanese) can be reasonably translated as "Faith and Understanding" or "Faithful Understanding" or something similar. But the meaning of the chapter title in Sanskrit, *adhimukti*, is quite different. It means something more like a disposition or attitude. It is a reference to the son's attitude toward his own life. So it seems that Kumarajiva, rather than translating, may have devised a new chapter title. Though it is used in a scattering of places throughout the sutra, the term does not appear at all in chapter 4 itself.

3. It is worth noting that when the shravakas who have told this story explain it, they say that "nirvana" is "like a mere day's pay"—it gets you somewhere, but not far. Very often in the Lotus Sutra, nirvana, which is often taken elsewhere to be the goal of Buddhist practice, is understood to be a lesser goal, something that facilitates one's going on to bodhisattva practice and the goal of becoming a buddha.

The Role of Dharma in Interreligious World Peace

by Alexandru I. Stan

This Romanian priest first came to know Rev. Nikkyo Niwano's name in the early 1970s. It was from him that he learned that being a layperson does not mean excluding oneself from the sacred.

Having been born in the Romanian village of Smeeni, and having lived there as a child and a teenager, I often recall with great satisfaction those carefree and joyful years. Our parents' house, still standing, has a large courtyard where my brother Simion and I used to enjoy many a beautiful day playing in all kinds of village sports together with other children from the neighborhood. Sometimes we drew a straight line on the ground in order to mark or to separate two playing fields: one reserved for our team and the other one for our friends. Such a line is called a *darma* in simple village Romanian. But it was not until I began to study world religions that I became conscious that the word dharma or dhamma belonged to a different civilization and to a different spirituality. Discovering that was an eye-opener for me; it was like putting on a pair of glasses to look into a world of thought and life I had never experienced before. The term dharma, or dhamma, belongs to Buddhism, but it comes from a language that had been spoken long before the birth of Buddhism in a vast area stretching from India to Dacia and possibly Italy. *Darma* in Romanian means a visible line that is drawn on purpose on the ground and that must be respected while you are playing, for it helps to define your respectful manners toward your partner or partners in the game. Nobody is allowed to cross it or to destroy it until it becomes unnecessary for one reason or another.

Darma or Dharma makes one avoid quarrels, aggression, and suffering through mutual recognition. There is a similar perception in Eastern Orthodox Christianity. It is called in Romanian *dreapta socotinta*, meaning a correct line of thought discovered and lived after a deep and real experience of life and wisdom directed by grace. It helps one to travel the path of life with a specific and positive conviction that life has a meaning at its core, that it can be made void of suffering, if not always of difficulties. But what is suffering in the world today? Indeed, it is the effect primarily of harming and wounding. Wounding being not solely physical, it leads many times into death. It is the main cause of quarrels and bitterness toward others and eventually turns against all of us far and wide. The sign of a wound is blood, the blood coming out of the injured part of the body. A wound is usually a physical injury and an open one. The wounded person needs quick and special care and may die soon if not properly taken care of, because a wound is a gate for evil, for destruction. It hurts a lot. It weakens the heart and the nerves, the personality itself. A man or a woman wounded physically or spiritually usually cries out for help, invokes the name of his or her mother to come and help, and even dies with the word "mother" on the lips. This phenomenon is universal, beyond color of skin, beyond age, beyond gender, beyond culture and talents, beyond species—every living being can be wounded, hurt, or injured, and sometimes even crushed to death without knowing it. Bombs going off unexpectedly kill people. The fish in the seas and oceans, the fowl

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in the air, all kinds of animals on the ground, and humans are severely threatened and pushed into grievous suffering by the hurricanes of life with an incredible force. Their victims encounter the evil in their minds, their spirits, and in their bodies. Evil comes about carefully planned and disguised by various aggressors. "Eating up" the other seems to have been one of the primitive laws of existence. Yet, in parallel, there has always existed the love and care for one's breed, for one's mate, nest, or family. But realizing the depths and the simplicity of life is hampered by instincts of defense turned into instruments of killing. The dead lose everything and return into the dust whence they had come. Even the author of suffering has a limited spell of life, for life is not eternal in the body of dust.

Several founders of religions and streams of spirituality have long since discovered the roots of suffering: craving, injustice, lack of wisdom, disease, dissatisfaction in life, imbalanced living, nervousness, vain pride, and insanity. The Church Fathers in Christianity have day in and day out drawn the attention of Christians toward seeking for *hesychia*, or tranquillity, in their earthly lives. *Hesychia* means a sacred, active, loving calm believed to be the status of the saints in the hereafter. It is like living in an unending ecstasy, while watchful over the facts of life.

I know of two great men of religion in Romania who together decided to never harm their bodies by excesses of any kind and to help their bodies last as long as they could in the present life, and keep the mind as clear as crystal. Late in their lives, they told this oath-like decision to us, the theological students of the time. I do not know whether my former fellow students recall it. I never could get it out of my mind. It means in a way that these two people—one of them still alive, very old, and amazingly healthy in both body and mind—discovered the principle of personal peace and non-suffering and applied it with the intention to be grateful for the life received and as a living example for others.

Many ascetics in Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, and other world faiths have long sought healing of life in isolation, in absolute privacy for the sake of gaining bliss. They felt the suffering caused them by the unkind excesses of civilization, by individual anger, by unwise and aggressive actions of nature, and by neighbors who had wounded their lives. They also felt the dangers stored in the future of humankind; they became seers and prophets for others in spite of the fact that they knew their lives were short. I dare say that one such modern seer was the late Rev. Nikkyo Niwano. It was in the early 1970s that I first came to know his name and to see his picture in the pages of DHARMA WORLD, received from time to time by the library of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Bucharest. Slowly I began to acquaint myself, though inadequately and insufficiently, with fragments of the Lotus Sutra and with the ideas and comments made by Rev. Niwano. Then, when I had the chance, I imparted these ideas to my theological students and to the students of the Academy for the Study of History of Culture and Religions in Bucharest. By teaching others, I deepened my thought and understood how great it was for Rev. Niwano to have established lay Buddhism just before the breaking out of the Second World War. It required a buddha's mind to feel and see into the future and to offer a solution even before the disaster and the unbearable suffering came about. His thinking was paradoxical in the most happy way. He had drawn a *darma*, a special line on the ground of history, as in childrens' games, in order to impose some order upon the game of earthly life itself in our common but bitterly tormented world. Lay Buddhism is sacred but not secular. Being a layperson—as it was explained to me by a great creator of lay Buddhism—does not mean to exclude oneself from the sacred.

My fellow Romanian and a great scholar in the phenomenology of world religions, Mircea Eliade, used to speak and to write at length on how closely related and linked were the sacred and the profane in spirituality in the pre-Indo-European, Central Asian, and Far Eastern civilizations and religions. Fascinated by this, he was trying, together with his great friend Joseph Kitagawa, to ring a bell about the loss being created in world spirituality by the severing of the sacred and the profane, a mistake made even in the past history of humankind. It is true, as Rev.

Those who are pushed into grievous suffering cry for help. This Somali child, severely undernourished, waits voicelessly for a meal service by UNICEF at a facility in Mogadishu. Photo: UNICEF/ C-97 Somalia 20 / Betty Press / Japan Committee for UNICEF.

The First Assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace was held in Kyoto in 1970. The WCRP has become the largest coalition of religious representatives collaborating for peace.

Niwano has clearly established, that a world without sacredness is just as confused as a world pushed into the corner of total rejection of current life. An entirely monastic world would annihilate the human species in one or two generations!

The message of Rev. Niwano is strongly being spread, and it is heard. Alternatives to monastic monisms in religion are efficient for the modern person. By this I am in no way against monasticism as such. Sacredness today must be widely open to all and everyone in order that we might all share the everlasting wisdom and light. I believe that all humans are sacred in their infancy and childhood. Something after that comes to the fore and changes the previous status and causes great suffering. For where there is no sharing, there is no spirit of community. Yet, sharing in what promotes honest, creative, industrious life is good; but sharing in what brings about tensions, poverty, lies, ignorance, and hatred is always evil. One great event in the peaceful relationships among the religions of the world in the middle of the twentieth century was the creation, in 1970, of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) at Kyoto. The French name of this interfaith organization is La Conférence Mondiale des Religions pour la Paix, that is, the World Conference of Religions for Peace. The two titles signify something different but convergent. This is why, I believe, Rev. Niwano rightly understood how the lay Buddhist ideals taken from the Lotus Sutra match those of the Gospels and of the Christian founders of the WCRP, and Rissho Kosei-kai joined hands with the WCRP. Great ideals and great personalities have given a lot of time and thought to the curing of the contemporary world from the fears of a third world war, to a reasonable study of conflict situations in order to avoid clashes using the force of religious beliefs. It works very well when there is enough understanding that religion means living one's life to the full in communion with all human beings and with the living creatures of nature.

There is no doubt that the Christian Eastern Orthodox concept of suffering does not signify inimical attitudes toward life. The Eastern Orthodox theology centers around the concept of resurrection from the dead, even all those who, while leading an apparently blissful earthly life supported by wealth gained at the expense of their neighbors, had no compassion toward all their fellow humans, not even elementary respect.

In order to develop a new understanding of what it means to come closer together as people of various faiths in Romania, the WCRP-Romania (APAR = *Asociatia pentru Pacea Religiilor din Romania*) has initiated artistic programs performed by teams of dancers, singers, and choirs of the various religions and Christian churches in Romania, an international religious musical contest, anniversaries of leading religious and lay personalities in Romania, and other significant interfaith encounters. From time to time, the association awards to very distinguished personalities the "Diploma and the Golden and Silver Medal for Sustained Peaceful Activities among the Religions in Romania." It has been my humble privilege to offer the WCRP-Romania my ecumenical and interfaith international experience of over thirty years. Financial and logistic support was given with generosity by Mrs. Marcela Ghiulbenghian, one of the presidents and the president

of the Executive Board of the WCRP-Romania. As far as one can see, we are trying to relieve a great and long suffering caused by separation in the name of religion through convergent interfaith actions to the extent such actions are accepted and carried out by the local communities and institutions. We therefore provide a meeting ground and a place for encounter, but we are also happy to be present at significant meetings occasioned by feast-days or celebrations that take place in the religious communities in Bucharest or elsewhere. This is extremely important after half a century of militant atheism and hatred leveled against religion by the former regime.

We have been fortunate to have the open and sincere cooperation of the president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania, Prof. Dr. Nicolae Cajal, one of the most outstanding virologists in Romania and vice-president of the Romanian Academy, and of two muftis in succession from the Muslim side: Osman Negeat, my good friend, and the new Mufti Bagas Sahingherai. We also have been honored at our artistic events by the presence of two Secretaries of State for Religious Affairs, as well as by the presence of bishops from the Orthodox Church in Romania. And, indeed, we can say we have been greatly privileged and blessed to have such a good reception for our ideas and actions in this respect.

In my capacity as secretary-general of the WCRP-Romania, I do hope and pray that the future might preserve good occasions for strong links between at least one community or two of Rissho Kosei-kai in Japan or from any part of the world and us in order for us to make Rissho Kosei-kai known in Romania as a very significant world movement able to deal with the suffering of mind and spirit of many who wish to be healed in the name of the living Light and Wisdom. I am very happy to see that many scholars of the Christian, Buddhist, Jain, Hindu, Muslim, and other faiths contribute to the exchange of ideas and experience through DHARMA WORLD. In fact, this respectful interfaith publication has created a round table and has become a written interfaith forum, ready to link together so many different regions and interreligious attitudes around the world. Someone has to do it at a time when market religion begins to organize itself and to somehow emotionally attract only people of different faith toward themselves. We all travel in the sacred toward the Sacred. Our lives are dedicated to the overcoming of all kinds of suffering, using not only medical prescriptions, but also our centuries-long experience whereby souls were healed first and then bodies. May it be that the spirit of Rissho Kosei-kai and the blessed spirit of the generous Rev. Nikkyo Niwano be present with us as one of the greatest practitioners and reformers in the best sense his religion has ever seen. The new millennium needs a new influx of spiritual power in order to help people understand what their lives are worth and what everyone should do at this special time. ❑

A wooden statue of Amida Buddha carved by the Kamakura-period sculptor Eisen in 1259. Height: 97 cm. Important Cultural Property. Tokyo National Museum.

Buddhism in the Latter Day of the Law

by Myoshin-Friedrich Fenzl

Even some who claim to be Buddhists sometimes deny the existence of the karmic law of cause and effect because they regard it as a reactionary obstacle to the progressive future of mankind.

In the eighth chapter of *Shozomatsu Wasan* by Shinran (1173–1262), the eschatological phenomenon of the period known as *mappo*, the period of the Latter Day of the Law, is described as the last stage of a karmic circle.

> Ignorance and bliss passions abound,
> Pervading everywhere like innumerable particles of dust.
> Desire and hatred arising out of conflict and accord
> Are like high peaks and mountain ridges.

There is no doubt that we are in the immediate age of the Latter Day of the Law. Its manifestation is seen not only in the mundane world, for example, in empty temples and the decrease of donations for the Dharma, but also in the loss of spiritual and socioethical values in our society. We notice with great concern that even those who claim to be Buddhists sometimes deny the existence of the karmic law of cause and effect, because they regard it as a reactionary obstacle to the progressive future of mankind.

A German Buddhist teacher of the Pure Land tradition for decades wrote to me recently, saying that even the most noble precept of Buddhist ethics, "not to kill and not to do any harm to a living being," is being questioned on behalf of a dubious positivist social moral.

He quotes genetic engineering experiments with humans (cloning) and the official regulations surrounding euthanasia in a West European country. He criticizes the completely unscrupulous behavior of many scientists and politicians, which is just a result of an ideology without any religious background.

I should perhaps draw your attention to the neo-German term *Selbstverwirklichung* ("self-realization"), which obviously paraphrases in a euphemistic sense an unlimited egocentrism that has no consideration for the well-being of other human beings and produces therefore suffering, disappointment, and bitterness.

It is greed that drives humans to jeopardize and destroy the biotopes of our fellow living beings, animals, and plants. We cut down huge tropical rain forests and devastate as a result the "green lungs" of our planet, which are so important for the health and survival of all life on earth. We poison the seas, lakes, and rivers by discharging the chemical and toxic garbage of our industries. Great outrage erupted recently in the countries of the European Union when tens of thousands of cattle were slaughtered just to reduce the immense quantities of beef raised by the overpopulated countries of the EU. Tens of thousands of our fellow beings had to go through a painful death in order to correct the errors of our economic policies. Do we actually realize that this behavior is diametrically opposed to the noble truth of Shakyamuni and the spirit of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) and *maitri* (loving kindness)?

A Buddhist economist writes in his book *Small Is Beautiful*: "Buddhist economics is distinguished from modern materialism because, according to Buddhist doctrine, the

Myoshin-Friedrich Fenzl, leader of the Jodo-Shin movement in Austria, is the founder and deputy chairman of the Buddhist Society of Salzburg, which promotes a variety of Buddhist and interreligious activities, including meditation sessions, lectures, video performances, annual Buddhist festivals, religious education for children and youth, and hospital chaplaincy.

A kerosene container discarded on the seashore—a sign of our indifference to the life of other living things. Photo: PPS

nature of culture is not the multiplication of human needs, but the reformation of human character" (E.F. Schuhmacher).

We may realize this self-centered "greed," this autistic obsession, this inability to communicate even in marriage, and the exclusive orientation to one's own ego in many fields: in marriage and friendship, in business and politics, and even in religion. Although I have been a loyal follower of Pure Land Buddhism and Honganji for forty years, I have always let other denominations get a word in and respected and appreciated their traditions and doctrines, but alas, neither the Jodo-Shin sect nor myself were given credit for this, as Shin Buddhism was excluded from seminars, meetings, and hearings, and relegated to an "outsider position."

Our modern post-industrial society is without any doubts an "autistic society" in which all people are focused on their own egos, with eyes closed to the needs and problems of their fellow beings and even unable to communicate with them.

We should avoid companionship with a society of snobbish trend followers, who abuse the Buddha Dharma simply in order to demonstrate a pseudo-religious spirituality. And is the teaching of Shakyamuni and Shinran sometimes not used as a career ladder? Some years ago my old friend, the retired German doctor Helmut Klar, coined the word *Beschaffungsbuddhismus* (procurement Buddhism), describing the activities of some clever people who regard the Dharma as a comfortable source of income. Indeed, we are in the Latter Day of the Law, which offers false prophets and ambitious gurus an excellent field for carrying on an easy business.

How should we cope with the perils of this degenerate age?

First, we should take care of friendship, brotherhood, and solidarity, which form the fundamental basis of every Buddhist Sangha. Narrow-minded rivalry and a "neurosis about somebody's image" are not good tools to use in the pursuit of the teaching and dissemination of Buddhism. Doctrinal differences should not be overemphasized. I appeal to our Japanese friends to cultivate and promote relations personally, by letters, papers, the Internet, TV and videos, and the like to strengthen our links.

Second, we should not listen to the temptations of the "Pied Pipers" in our contemporary society. Religions like Buddhism are created for great ages of mankind, for centuries of human history. Religions must not modify their doctrines and tenets just as political parties alter their programs according to the "spirit of the age" every forty or fifty years. Religions should transcend ethics based on natural law and not succumb to a mere positivistic social morality.

Third, we should promote cooperation with like-minded people. Religions are moved together by the globalization of media and communications. Apart from a narrow-minded fundamentalism, the readiness of many religious communities to work together regardless of dogmatic barriers has been growing in the past few decades.

Fourth, we must be vigilant to the temptations of a "brave new world"! Human progress must never be at the expense of the weak, the defenseless, and the voiceless. The protection of life must have absolute priority above materialistic advantages and social progress. The humanity of a society is manifested in the way in which the social and legal protection of the weakest members is handled. Manipulations to the detriment of human life and human dignity are not acceptable from a Buddhist point of view. Buddhism, like other great religions, has a high degree of responsibility in our world. ❑

Mindfulness, the Essence of Religion

by Nichiko Niwano

Mindfulness is scrutiny of not only one's individual actions but one's entire inner landscape, oneself as a whole. It means looking at oneself as a whole human being.

Religion lays great value on mindfulness, on looking deep within oneself—so much so that we can even equate the two. Religion is found where there is mindfulness; where there is no mindfulness, there is no religion. Thus, the essence of religion is mindfulness. It follows, of course, that the essence of Buddhism is mindfulness. As we know, Shakyamuni gained enlightenment through deep contemplation, that is, mindfulness.

Self-reflection is the inward examination of one's daily actions, one by one. Mindfulness is scrutiny of not only one's individual actions but one's entire inner landscape, oneself as a whole. It means looking at oneself as a whole human being, not just at this or that aspect of oneself.

As living things, human beings are constantly changing; they are not fixed entities. To look at the totality of this ever-changing self is to look at the very self. It is to view the human condition in its entirety. In other words, it is to gaze at the living, moving source of life, the true form of life.

Shakyamuni said to the Brahman Kasibharadvaja, "Mindfulness is my plowshare and goad." "Plowshare" refers to the origin or occasion of something, that which triggers it. Mindfulness, then, provides the occasion for cultivating the heart and mind.

Mindfulness is possible any time, any place—in a crowded train on the way to work, in the quiet moments before sleep. Morning and evening sutra recitation is a good time for mindfulness, and there are many other such times and places. If we aspire to constant mindfulness, we can touch the true form of life, the source of life.

Touching the Absolute

Gazing upon one's inner landscape, at one's very self, one arrives at something absolute, what an eminent Buddhist educator, Shuichi Maida, calls "the impulse of life." Labor and childbirth, he points out, do not arise of a woman's own volition. They are natural workings. And the newborn baby's suckling is not a conscious action; it is an impulse or drive.

Likewise, we grow sleepy naturally; it is not something we do deliberately. Hunger, too, is something that occurs naturally, regardless of our will. What causes these phenomena? The same kind of natural working can be seen in regard to emotions. When we are attracted to the opposite sex, it is not because we deliberately set out to be attracted; it just happens. Attraction comes first; we attach reasons to it later. Again, we do not get angry because we decide we are going to. Anger grabs us unawares. Thus, the varied emotions we feel are not subject to our power. They emerge from somewhere beyond ourselves. They are touched off by contact with an irresistible force.

Thought is supposedly a conscious act, but it too is triggered by an irresistible force. If, when we think of something, we are asked why we did so, all we can say is "I don't know, I just did." We can even say that something compelled us to think as we did, that something

Nichiko Niwano is president of Rissho Kosei-kai and the Niwano Peace Foundation, a president of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), and vice-chairman of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan).

must have triggered the thought. It is said that human beings do not think about things that are not necessary to their own lives, which means that we think because it is essential to life.

Although we may believe we are doing all this of our own volition, each and every case depends on the working of an absolute force beyond ourselves. In every aspect of daily life we are in touch with something beyond humanity. Through mindfulness we realize that our daily life itself, our very existence, is informed by an irresistible force, a force beyond humanity. Human beings, with their finite lives, are in touch with infinite life. Individual selves are in touch with an absolute force that transcends the individual.

It is through mindfulness that we become aware of the absolute force within ourselves. And we realize that the source of our actions, emotions, and thoughts lies not within ourselves but in this absolute force. We are powerless to sway it, nor can we create or destroy it at our whim. This, indeed, is the true form of life.

We Do Not Live by Our Own Power

Another aspect of mindfulness is that through it we discover that we are sustained by absolute life, that we are enveloped by absolute life and live in its embrace. The intuitive realization that we are given life alerts us to the importance of respect for life. In the exchange between Shakyamuni and Kasibharadvaja, the Brahman started out saying, in effect, that he lived through his own efforts, but Shakyamuni said that the Brahman was *given* life. Shakyamuni's whole life was infused by this spirit.

When we rigidly pride ourselves on making a living by creating something through our own labor, we are prone to accuse others of doing nothing. Shakyamuni demonstrated, however, that we do not live by our own power but are given life. This is a key feature of Buddhism. Society takes the narrow view that our lives and achievements depend on our own efforts. Effort is important to life, but the Buddha's teaching is much wider and deeper. Through it we realize the error of priding ourselves on living by our own power, and it awakens us to the fact that our lives are sustained by many other people and by the Buddha.

Shakyamuni's verse prompted Kasibharadvaja to pledge himself to the Buddha on the spot, and eventually he became an arhat. He was transformed by Shakyamuni's words. ❑

On October 9, 2002, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Rev. Niwano visited a museum, formerly a prison in which 20,000 Cambodians had been imprisoned, tortured, and killed during the Pol Pot regime. He bowed before numerous human skulls exhibited in memory of the atrocities that the revolutionaries had perpetrated upon their fellow human beings.

The Need to Meditate Now

by Bhikkhu Sanghasena

In our long journey, meditation is the art of cleansing our consciousness. That is why we need to start meditating now. Once we sow the seed in the proper soil of Dharma, enlightenment is bound to arise.

Today human beings have achieved the most remarkable material things. They have created robots, computers, e-mail, digital cameras, and satellites. The modern home is equipped with food processors, microwave ovens, a variety of electrical kitchen gadgets, dishwashers, cellular phones, washing machines, multichannel TVs, and many other things. The medical achievements include organ transplants, genetic engineering, and laser-beam surgery, just to name a few. Human beings have made bombs capable of destroying the world, have climbed up to the peak of Mount Everest, have dived to the bottom of the sea, and have even landed on the moon.

Yet human beings are engulfed in deep darkness. In the pervading darkness we have lost our direction and have become rudderless. Human desire has succeeded in conquering everything on earth except the mind. We have achieved everything except happiness. We have failed to understand the teaching of love, compassion, and meditation. We have not learned how to live in peace and harmony.

Our outer richness is meaningless without inner richness. What is the use of having an expensive pillow, if we do not get peaceful sleep? We will continue to be hollow and frustrated as long as we do not turn inward. The inward is the way to real happiness, real growth, and real fulfillment. Forgetting that real, unconditional happiness comes from within, we go on seeking happiness in distraction, and end up in failure. Stressing this truth, Zen Master Hakuin says: "There are no buddhas outside living beings. Not knowing it is near, they seek afar. What a pity! It is like one in water who cries out in thirst; it is like the child of a rich house, who has strayed away among the poor. Charity, morality, and the other perfections, taking the name, repentance, discipline, and many other right actions all come back to the practice of meditation. By the merit of a single sitting, he destroys all accumulated karmas."

Our life is short, but our attachment is long; our needs are few, but our desires are many, our love is weak, but our hatred is strong; our wisdom is small, but our ignorance is great. Although there is darkness, although we have no sense of direction in life, it is possible through meditation, and only through meditation, to light a lamp within and to give a proper direction to life. It seems that only meditation can save humanity from going astray.

Taking a purposeful decision to meditate should not be delayed. There has to be a sense of urgency. At one time, a person who had the chance to listen to Milarepa, the great Tibetan Yogi, learned how to meditate. When he experienced a little taste of meditation, he said to the master, "Dear Jetsun, when I think of the miseries of samsara, the world of ignorance, and of the happiness of liberation, I cannot sit in idleness even for a single moment. Please accept me as your disciple, and I will meditate day and night."

A single moment lost cannot be regained at any cost. We have wasted countless lives. Not only in previous lives,

Bhikkhu Sanghasena, born in Ladakh, India, received full ordination under Ven. Acharya Buddharakhita Maha Thera, founder-president of the Mahabodhi Society Bangalore. He founded the Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre at Leh, Ladakh, to promote meditation and compassion.

even in this very life we have wasted so many years. It is time now to wake up and think deeply. It is time now to make a strong resolution to make the best use of the remaining time. A wise person cannot afford to waste even a single moment, because the future is so uncertain. Nobody knows when death will knock at the door. It is time that we pause for a while and contemplate our fast running life. Where are we going? Why are we running? Why are we so busy? What is the real purpose of running so fast?

We should contemplate these words of the Buddha: "Which do you think is more, the tears you have shed during the rounds of many rebirths, united with the undesired, separated from the desired, or the waters of the four oceans? Long have you suffered the death of father and mother, of sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. And while you were thus suffering, you have, indeed, shed more tears than there is water in the four oceans.

"Which do you think is more? The stream of blood that, through your being beheaded, has flowed upon this long way in samsara, or the waters of the four oceans? Long have you been caught by robbers or highwaymen or adulterers; and through your being beheaded, verily more blood has flowed than there is water in the four oceans.

"Thus I say, how can you find delight and mirth where there is burning without end? In deepest darkness you are wrapped! Why do you not seek for the light?"

In our long journey, life after life, layers of karma dust have gathered, and meditation is the art of cleansing our consciousness. That is why we need to start meditating now. At the beginning, meditation may seem to be difficult and boring, but once we develop a taste for it, the delight will be like that of a blind person who gains sight.

Truth and happiness are to be found where there is ignorance and suffering. To meditate is to look inward. Lord Buddha declared that in this very fathom-long body, with its sense impressions, thoughts, and ideas, is the world of suffering, the origin of the world, the end, and the path leading to the end of suffering.

Meditation leads us to our hearts. The greatest gift of Lord Buddha to humanity is meditation. Without meditation and Dharma, life is barren, like a tree without foliage, flower, or fragrance. Meditation is the state of no-thought, a state of mental purity. Having stopped all ambitions, longings, daydreams, frustrations, and egoistic tendencies, the mind becomes silent. The silence is meditation. The mind should experience not the tumult of the supermarket, but the silence of superconsciousness.

The important thing is to start and then to keep on meditating. Remember the words of Lao-tzu: "A tree that takes both arms to encircle, grows from a tiny shoot. A multistoried pagoda is built by placing one brick upon another. A journey of a thousand leagues begins with a single step." So let us not waste any more time. Let us begin our spiritual journey seriously. Let us not hesitate; let us begin. Let us not think about it—let us begin.

Young monks at a monastery in Sri Lanka practice meditation. Photo by Isamu Maruyama.

Let us learn to meditate, to find a meditation center or someone who can help us to begin meditation. If we are able to find such a person, that is very good; we are most fortunate. But even if we don't, we should not waste our whole lives just searching for one. We have to start where we stand. We have to start with imperfection and achieve perfection. First, we need to know the beginning well and not become overly obsessed with the goal. We need to start in a simple way, just watching and controlling the monkey mind, through observation of our breathing. This starting point is the foundation of our spiritual journey. Once we start and keep at it, everything will unfold on its own. There is a saying, "When the disciple is ready, the master will appear."

But we should not expect instant nirvana. Once meditation is initiated and has been maintained, no matter how long the journey might be, we will reach the destination. Once we sow the seed in the proper soil of Dharma, the *sila* (moral purification), *samadhi* (purification of mind), and *panna* (purification of wisdom) are bound to arise of themselves.

May the seed of meditation blossom in our hearts.

May all buddhas and bodhisattvas bless us, so that the river of our lives can reach the ocean of truth and deathlessness.

This is my sincere wish. ❑

The Buddha's Compassion Prepares Me for My Mission

by Mae Takamoto

A third-generation Japanese-American woman describes how membership in Rissho Kosei-kai of Hawaii taught her, after many years of unhappiness, how the Lotus Sutra can help us change our lives.

My name is Mae Takamoto. I am a member of Rissho Kosei-kai of Hawaii, which I joined nearly thirty years ago, in 1973. I am a third-generation Japanese-American. My grandparents are originally from Okinawa, and they immigrated to Hawaii, where I have lived all of my life.

In the early 1970s, the Hawaii Branch consisted mainly of Japanese-speaking people and local English-speaking people. The operations of the branch were conducted mainly in Japanese. In 2000, we formally established an English-language branch to enhance the English missionary section. I was honored to be assigned as the English missionary branch leader of the Hawaii Branch from January 1, 2001.

We began the new era of the English Missionary Branch by first organizing a missionary network system by assigning district leaders, group leaders, and division chairpeople. Our goal and mission is to be able to network efficiently and to spread the teachings to each individual member and further, to grasp and understand each member's current situation, their troubles and problems, and to be able to assist them positively through the sharing of the teachings. The branch ceremonies, special programs, and seminars are held in the English language; monthly duties are now assigned by districts, and we also have prayer services and hoza group counseling in English.

The first goal of our English-language section is not to be in conflict with the teachings and the way of practice as taught in the Japanese-language section, but to study and understand the essential and basic aspects of the teachings and to practice what we learned in the English language. In that way, we will be able to share the precious teachings and the spiritual way of life as taught by Rissho Kosei-kai with English-speaking people. Although there was a tremendous language barrier during the foundation of the Hawaii branch, I knew deep within my heart that I was saved by these precious teachings. I am determined to continue to lead my life in these teachings so that I am able to share my meaningful experiences with others.

Mae Takamoto, English missionary branch leader of Rissho Kosei-kai of Hawaii, delivers her testimonial speech in the Great Sacred Hall at the organization's headquarters in Tokyo in October, 2001.

To Change Myself

I married at the age of twenty and lived with my in-laws. My mother-in-law did not accept me. Her only hope and dream for her son was for him to continue his education

Ms. Takamoto (center) at Rissho Kosei-kai of Hawaii in Pearl City, together with her fellow members of the Sangha, including those who took part in a Young Mothers' Dharma Seminar, which is held twice a year.

and to attend college. We got married due to my pregnancy, and my mother-in-law felt that I had ruined her son's life. She was very unhappy with our marriage, and I felt unwelcome in her home. She was very cold toward me, and I lived with a lot of mental anguish. My husband could not help me or protect me because he was so close to his mother. Two years later, because I could not endure this hardship any more, I left with my daughter, Lori, who was two years old, to live at my mother's home. Sadly, I had to divorce my husband whom I cared for and loved deeply. I truly despised my mother-in-law for destroying my marriage.

During this time, my longtime childhood friend, Ms. Cyd Kikuyama, who was an English-speaking member of Rissho Kosei-kai, saw my suffering. Concerned about me, she introduced me to the teachings and invited me to attend an English hoza, where I had the opportunity to share my problems with the other members and received guidance from the leader. They listened intently to my problems and accepted my pain and further gave me guidance. Then the leader explained that everything happens for a reason and not out of coincidence; that this suffering is the chance we receive from the Buddha to reflect upon ourselves; that this is the opportunity to cultivate our minds and hearts. I tried my best to follow this guidance that was given to me, but it was very difficult to realize its true meaning at once. Gradually, however, I was able to understand what was being taught to me. The branch leader encouraged me to enshrine the *Sokaimyo*, focus of ancestor veneration. I decided to accept the symbol of faith. This enshrinement was the beginning of the reestablishment of the foundation of my life—by focusing on my Buddhist faith and its practices.

I was instructed to recite portions of the Lotus Sutra as the first practice of my faith. However, the first prayer books in those days were in Japanese written in roman letters, so I had a very difficult time reciting the sutra. I did not comprehend what I was reading. But I was determined to escape from my suffering and pain. I carried the prayer book with me everywhere, and whenever I had a chance I would practice pronouncing each syllable. Eventually, I could read the sutra flowingly with the other members. Through the practice of reciting the sutra, I felt that I began paving my path to my new life with Lori.

Hoza was most precious as it offered a place where I could learn the teachings. Hoza is the core and the life of Rissho Kosei-kai. I received much encouragement and support and felt the compassion of the Eternal Buddha. I recall that older members would always tell me that even if I didn't understand what was being taught at that moment, it was all right because the Buddha's wisdom and compassion were going through my pores. I was taught that

I cannot change anyone else, but, if I first change myself, my surroundings will begin to change. I was very moved by these teachings and practices, which made sense to me. I realized that Rissho Kosei-kai is a living religion.

Through the teachings of causation and karma, I became aware that my suffering had been caused by my own selfish views of life. If I reflected upon these teachings and applied them to my own life, I could no longer blame my mother-in-law. I finally could see that I was indeed the cause of her suffering. I could not return to my past; however, I was able to repent and to deeply realize the negative feelings I had toward my mother-in-law and my ex-husband.

Looking back at my childhood, I had countless hardships because my father was a heavy drinker, which caused continued fighting between my parents. I worried about my mother's well-being because my father abused her mentally and physically. When my brother and I got older, my parents were divorced. My brother dropped out of school at about age seventeen and began gambling. He became addicted to gambling and got deeper into debt. This continued for several years, causing lots of hardship to my whole family. He tried very hard to quit gambling but could not do it. In 1993, he ended his life, leaving a wife and daughter. I believe he took his own life to make it easier for our family.

I realized that my suffering was also related to and connected to my parents, and also to my ancestors. My ancestors carried many hardships, which caused much suffering, when they immigrated to Hawaii. My parents also experienced many hardships in their lives, just as my brother and I. I was in a state of deep pain and helplessness. I felt that within my life, there was deep karma. I was taught that this deep karma within my life was not just fate, nor was it an evil karma, but that through my deep appreciation of the foundation of life, through the practice of venerating my ancestors through reciting the Lotus Sutra, I would finally begin to change the course of my karma.

During this time, I was a divorced single mother without a job who could not rely on my parents for help. The beginning of my new life with the teachings was not an easy one. However, I was still very determined to live according to the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai.

Guidance of My Mother and Friends to the Faith

I found myself an apartment and lived on my own. I decided that I did not want to place my daughter with someone else while I went out to work. I lived off my savings and collected food stamps for our survival. When my daughter was of age to attend elementary school, I found a part-time job. I wanted to be with her during her early years of growing up. As she grew older, the company I worked for expanded and offered me a full-time job, which I gladly accepted. When my daughter entered high school, she began showing worrisome signs. She would not attend school and was getting into trouble. I was very concerned about her, which caused a lot of fretful and sleepless nights. My brother at that time worked as a security guard for the school Lori attended. Through his concern for her, he guided and supported her until she got back on the right path. Looking back now, I realize that he must have felt that he did not want my daughter to follow in his footsteps. I really appreciate my late brother's compassion and love for my daughter and me. I realized through the teachings that I too must have made my parents worry.

Thereafter, my daughter successfully graduated from high school and moved to Virginia to live there for three years. Traveling so far away, I had deep concerns about her safety. All I could do was to leave my worries and concerns up to the Buddha, praying that he would protect and guide her. Being miles apart, I entrusted her to the Buddha, and diligently went to the branch and concentrated on my branch duties. Because of the Buddha's compassion, my daughter has grown into a mature and responsible young woman. When I left my marriage with my daughter I had nothing, but thanks to Rissho Kosei-kai, I am happily living in a home we purchased together. I am very fortunate to have worked for the same company for over twenty-five years. Because I now practice my faith, I am truly blessed by the Eternal Buddha.

I had experienced many of "life's lessons" in my early years. With the Buddha's blessing, I had very good friends around me who helped me through it all. Remembering the compassion Cyd showed me when I was troubled, I wanted to share this compassion with my friends.

I was able to introduce my mother to the teachings. She understood my faith and came to worship with me. I am grateful that she had a chance to be a part of Rissho Kosei-kai. Now looking back, I understand that, at that time, my mother wanted to protect my brother, my daughter, and me from continuing the karma she had. I understand her deep feelings of sorrow; I realize that she believed that she was causing the pain and suffering in our lives. She did not want us to follow in her footsteps and learned to do her prayers to make life better for all of us.

My closest friends, Charlotte Higa and Sharlyn Lau, had family problems similar to mine. I invited them to hoza with me, and they eventually joined Rissho Kosei-kai.

Charlotte experienced taking care of her parents and having relationship problems. Sharlyn also had relationship problems and was divorced. Through their hardships, I could realize that they are my mirrors in many ways. Through the sharing of our problems, we became closer in our daily lives. We helped each other in many aspects of our lives and participated together in our branch activities.

Currently, in our Hawaii Branch we have learned various aspects of the teachings, such as the importance of reciting the Lotus Sutra. We have also started receiving posthumous names in roman characters. Most of the

English-speaking members have begun positively practicing the recitation of the sutra at their individual homes. The leaders of the English sections visit the members' homes for home prayer services. In the beginning, there were concerns and worries from the members about other members visiting their homes. They felt embarrassed and not prepared to accept visitors into their homes. However, I can definitely see gradual changes in those homes where the prayer services are continued. I feel the connection with the spiritual world, which extends into our present life. The English-speaking members feel the need to do their prayer services so that they are able to build a happier and more confident life. Reciting our daily prayers, practicing, and spreading the teachings are the foundation upon which we can build our road of life. Early on our road of life, there are many rocks or even potholes, and at times we come across cracks, but we continue our efforts and overcome these difficulties. By practicing the teachings and with the support of the Sangha community, gradually our paths will be paved and our roads will become smooth.

Ms. Takamoto leads an informal hoza session for English-speaking members at Rissho Kosei-kai of Hawaii.

Opening the Path to Experience the Teaching

Now I realized, through my recitation of the Lotus Sutra, that all my experiences up until today were nothing but the Buddha's compassionate arrangements to prepare me for my mission on this earth, which is to serve as the English missionary branch leader.

In 2001, I received the certificate of assignment from President Niwano. I am slowly but surely understanding and realizing President Niwano's compassion. Various phenomena in life constantly change depending upon the relationship between the causes and effects in our lives. Since we are all not perfect, life seems full of misery, mistakes, and hardships; however, through the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, we are able to realize that with the compassion of the Eternal Buddha we have the ability to reflect on our mistakes and to be truly grateful for the life that we are given. Through this reflection and gratitude, we are able to change our lives and to realize true happiness in the life we live.

The branches in the United States consist of people of many backgrounds and many cultures. As an English missionary branch leader, I know that with all the differences, we are all still learning and practicing together the teachings on the Eternal Buddha's One Great Vehicle, and we are continuing to mature and grow. I know in my heart that this is the Buddha's plan and that it is my mission to do my best to help as many people as possible with the guidance of the Buddha. Our society has become so rich in material things that we have lost the spiritual richness in our lives. We need to spread the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai to as many people as possible and show them compassion, love, and the preciousness of life. I feel the need to open the path for the people of America to freely experience this wonderful teaching of the Lotus Sutra. ❑

The Decision to Enter *Nibbāna*

by Hajime Nakamura

In ancient India, people like the hero Bhīṣma were thought able to die by determination. This idea transferred to another person regarded as great, Sakyamuni.

Vesālī was a place where Gotama had often stayed during his long wandering life, and probably held many memories for him. He set off for the cool shade of the sacred tree (*cetiya*) of Vesālī.

"(1) Then the Venerable Master, in the early morning, put on his inner robe, took up his outer robe and bowl, and entered Vesālī to seek alms. He walked about Vesālī seeking alms, and when he had returned from his alms round, and had eaten his food, he said to the young Ānanda, 'Ānanda, bring a mat. We will go to the sacred tree of Cāpāla for the midday rest.' 'Yes, Master,' replied the young Ānanda, and taking up a mat he followed after the Venerable Master.

"(2) Then the Venerable Master came to the sacred tree of Cāpāla." (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, III, 1–2)

The Buddha took his rest beneath the great tree known as Cāpāla. Here we find the habits and customs of wandering ascetics described. Sakyamuni's life was lived no differently.

"(2 *continued*) Arriving [at the foot of the sacred tree of Cāpāla, Gotama Buddha] sat down in the seat prepared for him. The young Ānanda saluted the Venerable Master and sat down to one side. Then the Buddha said, 'Ānanda, Vesālī is delightful. The sacred tree of Udena is delightful. The sacred tree of Gotamaka is delightful. The sacred tree of Sattambaka is delightful. The sacred tree of Bahuputta is delightful. The sacred tree of Sārandada is delightful. The sacred tree of Cāpāla is delightful.'" (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, III, 2)

A few recensions (the Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Sarvāstivādin) have almost the same text. The Pan-ni-yüan-ching adds "This realm, the sixteen great countries, and all their capitals and towns, are delightful." The other Chinese translations do not contain this passage at all and so it may be a later accretion. The Sanskrit text contains the following moving passage:

"'Vaiśālī, the land of the Vṛjjis, is delightful. The sacred tree of Cāpāla is delightful. The sacred tree of Sattambaka is delightful. The sacred tree of the luxuriant leaves is delightful. The banyan tree called Gautama is delightful. The grove of *śāla* trees is delightful. The sacred tree, called the place where the Mallas dropped their burden, is delightful. The sacred tree, called the bank of the Monkey's Pond, is delightful. The world is a delightful place. Human life is sweet and beautiful.'" (Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra, XV, 9)

Because he was approaching eighty years of age, Gotama Buddha had left Rājagaha, capital of the greatest country of the time, Magadha, and set out for his birthplace. With no form of transport, but only his own legs to carry him, it was a demanding endeavor. In the course of what was to be his last journey, he arrived at the thriving commercial city of Vesālī and there spoke of his longing for certain places. The Vṛjjis mentioned in the Sanskrit text were the ruling nobility of Vaiśālī (Pāli, Vesālī). The city had a number of sacred trees, at whose foot a small shrine

The late Dr. 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.*

All that remains of Vesālī, where the Buddha stayed often during his long life of wandering. Photo by Isamu Maruyama.

had been built in honor of one deity or another. Since the midday sun is fierce in India, religious ascetics would take their rest beneath such sacred trees. Though vegetation does not grow thick on the outer reaches of the Ganges, large, broad-leaved trees like banyans grow here and there. Beneath their spreading branches it is very cool. Gotama therefore remembered the various sacred trees he had rested beneath with great fondness. The concluding sentence of the Sanskrit text, "The world is a delightful place; human life is sweet and beautiful," uses the word *madhura* (translated here as "sweet and beautiful"), which means "as sweet as honey," or "sweet to the taste." The corresponding Chinese text reads: "The lands of the world [Jambudvīpa] are like they were painted in the five colors, and for a human being to be born and live in this world is delightful." (Occasionally we find the expression translated into Chinese as "very delightful" or "extremely lovely and delightful.")

When death approaches, people inevitably regret the coming parting with the world they have known and are

moved by the world's beauty and the kindness of those they have known. Buddhists of ancient India themselves recognized such an emotion in the above words of Gotama Buddha the man. Scholars of later times, however, held that such sentiments were not those of an enlightened person. Nevertheless, is it not to be desired that a person approaching death should feel joy regarding the place where he was born, gratitude to the people with whom he had come into contact, and the knowledge that his own life had been spent happily?

Buddhism is known for its teaching that all things are characterized by suffering, that human life is filled with suffering. Thus to think of life as having deep significance seems a contradiction. Resolving this inconsistency is somewhat difficult. Perhaps we can say that though the Buddha's point of departure was after all an emphasis on suffering, decades of careful consideration and reflection had led him to realize that human life was significant after all, and could hold delight.

Māra's Temptation

When Gotama Buddha was resting under the sacred tree of Cāpāla in Vesālī, Māra appeared and encouraged him to enter *nibbāna*, Gotama agreed. All recensions have long sections describing this event, and Fa-hsien's Ta-pan-nieh-p'an-ching in fact begins here. Doubtless, people of later times who were deeply attached to the memory of the Buddha felt that such a great and superhuman being should be able to live eternally and not face death like an ordinary person. If he had to die, there must have been a reason. Therefore he was considered to have made of his own accord the decision to enter *nibbāna*. Thus this episode became a central theme in the sutra recounting the "Great Decease," and that is the reason Fa-hsien's text begins with this episode.

It was at this point that Sakyamuni gave Ānanda the suggestion to beg him to remain forever in this world. Ānanda, though, his mind possessed by Māra, did not beg his master to do so. Thus Sakyamuni decided of his own will to abandon the life remaining to him, and promised Māra that three months from that time he would enter *nibbāna*.

This legend appears in considerable detail in the Pāli recension.

"(3) 'Ānanda, whoever is developed in the four psychic powers, who has practiced them well, who has made them his practice, like a [yoked] vehicle, who has made them firm like the foundations of a house, who puts them into action, who has completely accumulated them, and who has skillfully accomplished them, could, if he wished, remain in this world to the limits of his life span, or could remain for an even longer period.'

"'Ānanda, the Tathāgata, who is developed in the four psychic powers, has practiced them well, has made them his practice, like a [yoked] vehicle, has made them firm like the foundations of a house, puts them into action, has completely accumulated them, and has skillfully accomplished them, could, if he wished, remain in this world to the limits of his life span, or could remain for even a longer period.'

"(4) However, the young Ānanda, failing to understand this clear hint, this clear sign of the Venerable Master, did not beg the Venerable Master, saying to him: 'Revered One, may the Venerable Master remain in this world to

the limits of his life span. May the Blessed One [the Buddha] remain in this world to the limits of his life span, for the benefit of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the people of the world, for the benefit and happiness of *devas* and human beings.' This was because his mind was possessed by Māra.

"(5) A second time . . . a third time, the Venerable Master said to the young Ānanda: 'Ānanda, Vesālī is delightful. The sacred tree of Udena is delightful. The sacred tree of Gotamaka is delightful. The sacred tree of Sattambaka is delightful. The sacred tree of Bahuputta is delightful. The sacred tree of Sārandada is delightful. The sacred tree of Cāpāla is delightful.'

"'Ānanda, whoever is developed in the four psychic powers, who has practiced them well, who has made them his practice, like a [yoked] vehicle, who has made them firm like the foundations of a house, who puts them into action, who has completely accumulated them, and who has skillfully accomplished them, could, if he wished, remain in this world to the limits of his life span, or could remain for an even longer period.'

"'Ānanda, the Tathāgata, who is developed in the four psychic powers, has practiced them well, has made them his practice, like a [yoked] vehicle, has made them firm like the foundations of a house, puts them into action, has completely accumulated them, and has skillfully accomplished them, could, if he wished, remain in this world to the limits of his life span, or could remain for an even longer period.'

"However, the young Ānanda, failing to understand this clear hint, this clear sign of the Venerable Master, did not beg the Venerable Master, saying to him: 'Revered One, may the Venerable Master remain in this world to the limits of his life span. May the Blessed One remain in this world to the limits of his life span, for the benefit of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the people of the world, for the benefit and happiness of *devas* and human beings.' This was because his mind was possessed by Māra.

"(6) Then the Venerable Master said to the young Ānanda, 'Ānanda, you may leave as it suits you.' 'Yes, Master,' replied Ānanda to the Venerable Master, and he rose from his seat, saluted the Venerable Master, and, with his right shoulder toward [the Buddha], he circled him and sat under a tree nearby.

"(7) Soon after the young Ānanda had left, Māra, the Evil One, approached the Venerable Master, and stood to one side. Standing to one side, Māra, the Evil One, said to the Venerable Master, 'Revered One, may the Venerable Master now enter *nibbāna*. May the Blessed One now enter *nibbāna*. Now is the time when the Venerable Master should die. In the past, the Venerable Master said: "Evil One, I will not enter *nibbāna* until the disciples who are my *bhikkhus* become wise, trained, correctly knowledgeable, learned, preservers of the Dhamma, acting in accordance with the Dhamma, trained according to the Dhamma, acting appropriately to it, preserving that which they know and have been taught by the Master, explaining it, teaching it, making it known, establishing it, elucidating it, analyzing it, and defining it, until they can refute any objections by means of the Dhamma, and explain the teachings without rebuttal."'

"(8) 'And now the *bhikkhus*, the disciples of the Venerable Master have become wise, trained, correctly knowledgeable, learned, preservers of the Dhamma, acting in accordance with the Dhamma, trained according to the Dhamma, acting appropriately to it, preserving that which they know and have been taught by the Master, explaining it, teaching it, making it known, establishing it, elucidating it, analyzing it, and defining it, until they can refute any objections by means of the Dhamma, and explain the

A stone image of the Buddha produced during the Kushan dynasty (late first to third century C.E.). Unearthed at Gandhara in Pakistan. Height, 77.3 cm. Tokyo National Museum.

teachings without rebuttal. Revered One, may the Venerable Master now enter *nibbāna*. May the Blessed One now enter *nibbāna*. Now is the time when the Venerable Master should die.'

"'Revered One, the Venerable Master has said, "Evil One, I will not enter *nibbāna* until the disciples who are my *bhikkhunīs* become wise, . . . until the disciples who are my lay male followers become wise, . . . until the disciples who are my lay female followers become wise, trained, correctly knowledgeable, learned, preservers of the Dhamma, acting in accordance with the Dhamma, trained according to the Dhamma, acting appropriately to it, preserving that which they know and have been taught by the Master, explaining it, teaching it, making it known, establishing it, elucidating it, analyzing it, and defining it, until they can refute any objections by means of the Dhamma, and explain the teachings without rebuttal." Revered One, may the Venerable Master now enter *nibbāna*. May the Blessed One now enter *nibbāna*. Now is the time when the Venerable Master should die.'

"'Revered One, the Venerable Master has said, "Evil One, I will not enter *nibbāna* until the pure practice is established and is flourishing, widespread, well-known by people far and wide, and well-proclaimed to *devas* and human beings." And now, Revered One, the Venerable Master's pure practice is established and is flourishing, widespread, well-known by people far and wide, and well-proclaimed to *devas* and human beings. May the Venerable Master now enter *nibbāna*. May the Blessed One now enter *nibbāna*. Now is the time when the Venerable Master should die.'

"(9) With this, the Venerable Master said to Māra, 'Evil One, be easy. Before long the Tathāgata will enter *nibbāna*. Three months from now the Tathāgata will die.'" (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, III, 3–9)

Māra's temptation has received considerable attention in the sutra, and though it is easy to dismiss the episode as a fairy tale, there must be some reason why it was treated in such detail. The legend has elements of modern existentialism about it, in the portrayal of Ānanda, Gotama's beloved disciple and longtime attendant, as not wishing for his master's prolonged life but saying in effect, "If he is going to die, it cannot be helped." In recent times more people have come to regard old age as a problem, to think that an old person who becomes ill would be better off dying quickly so as not to be a burden on others. This is to take an extremely objective view of the matter. In this case Ānanda is not necessarily open to criticism, since unlike the other disciples who maintained a certain distance, he was dedicated to the Buddha.

When in later times the Buddha became deified, Ānanda also received semi-deification. Thus commentators assumed that Ānanda was "possessed" by Māra, and so the legend was born. Abhidharma scholars of later centuries debated among themselves about the action of remaining alive versus that of giving up life. Nevertheless, the issue is serious, for it is an essential human problem that however much a child loves his or her parents, it is impossible to be perfectly filial at all times. Further, the episode shows that even a religious practitioner can be possessed by Māra. The problem of evil nature in human existence was pursued at length by non-Indian Buddhist philosophers, leading eventually to the development of the Chinese T'ien-t'ai school's doctrine of the "interpenetration of the ten realms."

A further issue that draws our attention here is that of determining to die. In ancient India, people like the hero Bhīṣma were thought able to die by determination (*icchāmaraṇa*). This idea was transferred to another person regarded as great, Sakyamuni. Later Buddhist scholars exercised themselves over the meaning of Sakyamuni's electing to enter *nibbāna*, though eternal life was an option for him. This question is essentially no different from the theme of the Lotus Sutra. In this sense, the spirit of the Lotus Sutra can be said to derive from earliest Buddhism, and the idea finds continuation in the Pure Land sutras.

We are concerned here not with the Sakyamuni of myth and legend, but with elucidating the life of Gotama Buddha, the historical personage, and therefore must consider the issue while excluding the legend. The legend, in fact, derives from the following verse later in the third section of the Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, which reveals the state of mind of the Buddha as his death approached.

> Ripe am I with years, and my days now are numbered.
> Leaving you behind, I will go on my way.
> I have made myself my own refuge.
> *Bhikkhus*, be untiring and mindful, keeping the precepts well.
> Guard your minds by concentrating your thoughts.
> He who practices these teachings and regulations unceasingly
> Lays aside transmigration of the recurring birth,
> And puts an end to all suffering.
>
> (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, III, 51)

There will be no teachers after his death—the disciples should consider their teacher to be the Dharma, the teachings of Truth, and the precepts to be the regulations governing conduct. This is one of his last sermons. From this it seems apparent that the central thought of early Buddhism was to strive with one's own religious training.

Gotama made his decision to enter *nibbāna* when he was at the Cāpāla *cetiya*; the Pan-ni-yüan-ching alone says that this occurred at the "Ape and Monkey Pavilion" in Vaiśālī; all the recensions agree that the event took place at Vesālī.

To be continued

A Lifelike Image of a Revered National Teacher

by Takeshi Kuno

There are only two Zen-style portrait statues of the renowned Zen master Muso Kokushi extant. The seated one shown here is a beautiful image whose quiet grace hints at Muso's imperial descent, great artistic talent, and supreme enlightenment.

Muso Soseki (1275–1351), known also by the title Muso Kokushi (National Teacher), was an influential Zen master who was active during the Northern and Southern Courts period (1336–92). The image pictured here was carved as a seated statue (79.5 cm in height) and is in the possession of Zuisenji in Kamakura. It depicts him wearing a surplice (*kesa*) held in place with a ring (*kanpai*) over a flowing robe whose sleeves and skirt fall in long folds. He is seated on a chair in the full lotus position, his hands on his lap forming the meditation mudra. These are all common features of Zen portrait statues.

Muso Soseki is portrayed as being gentle and calm. He has sloping shoulders, but there is none of the rusticity here that is often seen in such Zen sculpture. The statue well conveys that he was a descendant of Emperor Uda (r. 887–97) and that he was a gifted man who made important contributions to landscape garden design and literature.

Muso was born in Ise province (now part of Mie Prefecture) in 1275, became a novice priest at Heienzanji in Kai province (Yamanashi Prefecture) in 1283, and received the full precepts with his formal ordination at Todaiji in 1292. He studied under many famous Zen masters, including the eminent Chinese priest I-shan I-ning (Issan Ichinei, 1247–1317), and received the Dharma transmission from Koho Kennichi (Bukkoku Kokushi, 1241–1316) in 1305. After that he was active mainly in Kai, Kamakura, and Kyoto. He was revered by many—both commoners and nobles of the court, including Emperor Godaigo (r. 1318–39) himself, and he resided at such famous temples as Engakuji (Kamakura), Erinji (Kai), Rinsenji (Saga), and Nanzenji and Saihoji (Kyoto). In his later years, he established Tenryuji in Kyoto for the salvation of Emperor Godaigo. He died of an illness in 1351 at the age of 77.

Muso was endowed with great artistic talent and excelled at poetry and prose. He inspired a great number of scholar priests who contributed to the flowering of what is known as Gozan (Five-Temple) literature, writings in the Chinese language that emanated from the five great Zen temples of Kyoto and Kamakura. It is said too that his beautiful voice reciting the verse of the transference of merit in Buddhist ceremonies enchanted his listeners. He was also proficient at landscape gardening, and many of his gardens still exist, including one at Zuisenji, the temple that now houses this statue. This garden, which uses Mount Fuji as a "borrowed background" and was finished in 1327, is typical of Muso's garden design.

This statue of Muso Kokushi was carved by the joint-block method (*yosegi-zukuri*) with inset crystal eyes (*gyokugan*), and the surface was colored. The head and the main body sections were made from different blocks of wood. The head consists of two sections, back and front, attached to each other, and the section in front of the ears was split and joined (*warihagi*) and the eyes then inserted. The piece of wood used for the head extends down to the chest and was fastened to a second piece used for the body itself with a tenon-and-mortise joint. The body was largely shaped from another piece of wood, but the back section has two slats attached. The section in front of the knees was made from a single piece of wood and attached to the main section. The folds of the sleeves and hem of the robe too were made separately. The paintwork we see today is largely that of later restoration.

The vibrant style of the statue suggests that it was carved in the fourteenth century, soon after Muso's death. It is one of only two portrait statues of Muso that are known; the other is in Kochozenji, in Yamanashi Prefecture. ❑

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

Photo: Kamakura Museum

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 6
Prediction (1)

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

INTRODUCTION The term *prediction* (*vyakarana*) means that the Buddha discerns the practitioners' destinies, predicts their eventual attainment of the highest enlightenment, and grants the assurance, "You can definitely attain buddhahood." The Lotus Sutra is studded with such predictions. Already in chapter 3, "A Parable," Shariputra has been assured of his eventual attainment of buddhahood, and in the present chapter we will see how Maha-Kashyapa, Maudgalyayana, Subhuti, and Katyayana also receive such predictions.

When first studying this sutra, beginners tend to think that prediction is an assurance of buddhahood given to particularly learned and able disciples alone. This, however, is incorrect. As will become evident when we read the eighth and ninth chapters, countless people receive the prediction of buddhahood; in addition, chapter 12, "Devadatta," shows that the attainment of buddhahood is predicted even for the eight-year-old daughter of the dragon king and for an evil person like Devadatta. It is no surprise therefore that some call the Lotus Sutra the "sutra of prediction of buddhahood." It is truly a sutra that gives the prediction of buddhahood to all living beings.

In other words, the Lotus Sutra elucidates in minute detail, sometimes by reasoning, sometimes by example, sometimes by parable, the truth that all living beings can become buddhas. Prediction of buddhahood therefore is not a mere prophecy; it is indeed an assurance. Since all people possess the buddha-nature, it is natural that they have the potential to attain buddhahood. Shakyamuni makes this truth clear in the Lotus Sutra; that is, he guarantees all people's attainment of buddhahood, based on the universal truth.

We must be very careful, though, not to interpret this as a facile assurance that we can become buddhas by doing nothing. As a religion decays, there is a tendency for its leaders to preach rebirth in some paradise by the mere intonation of a particular phrase, and nothing else. There are also cases in which believers are encouraged to buy a particular talisman in the belief that it will extinguish all their sins and take them to heaven. Such activities should be disdained by all people of good sense.

The attainment of buddhahood taught by Shakyamuni and the predictions of buddhahood given by him are not that easy. Therefore, before we begin our discussion of this chapter, we should consider the nature of the prediction of buddhahood from a variety of angles so as to equip ourselves with the background knowledge necessary to understand it.

First, there is the fact that Shakyamuni never says, "You are a buddha," but rather states, "You too can become a buddha." Though from his point of view all living beings are endowed with the buddha-nature, if he told everyone, "You are already a buddha," many people would greatly misunderstand him. Ordinary people are apt to take the Buddha's words casually and become very conceited, thinking that they are already buddhas despite their actual delusion-ridden state or assuming that they can become buddhas without any effort, as if they were riding an escalator. Therefore an indispensable condition is set: that they must continue such-and-such a religious practice.

That is to say, a prediction of buddhahood is not a diploma verifying attainment of the Buddha Way but rather an admission permit. The Buddha's assurance signifies: "You have passed the entrance examination to the highest university, where you can attain buddhahood. If you study hard for some years at this place, you will surely be able to graduate and become a buddha." That is why greater practice and endeavor than ever remain necessary. But what a wonderful, joyful thing it is to have been admitted to such a university. Thus when in chapter 3, "A Parable," Shariputra became the first of the shravakas to receive such an assurance, it was natural that the multitude assembled to hear the Buddha preach "rejoiced greatly in unbounded ecstasy."

This is how we too will feel. As we will see when we read the eighth and ninth chapters, we also have gained admission to that university. We need therefore feel no shame even if we have not studied at a top-class university in the secular world. Anyone who believes deeply in the Lotus Sutra and who puts its spirit into practice has been admitted to the highest university and is capable of attaining buddhahood. How proud we feel, and how worthwhile our life is! We must not, however, let this lead to self-satisfaction. It is meaningless if we make satisfaction our personal joy alone. This is the second important point.

As we read through this chapter, we find Maudgalyayana, Subhuti, and Katyayana intently asking the Buddha, "Great Hero, World-honored One! / Thou dost ever desire to pacify the world; / Be pleased to bestow our prediction." What they are saying is "The Buddha aspires always to bring people to peace and freedom from anxiety. We too aspire to attain buddhahood and to make people feel at ease. So please address us, saying, 'You too can become buddhas.'"

They do not seek their own salvation and buddhahood alone, or their own attainment of perfect freedom. They are ultimately motivated by what will bring happiness to all the people of the world. This is an extremely important point. Unless we realize that these disciples' true motive in eagerly seeking assurance of their future attainment of buddhahood is their desire to gain the power of perfect freedom of action in order to make all people happy, we run the risk of mistakenly thinking that their hopes are based on the wish to achieve personal enlightenment and peace of mind alone.

The third point relates to the question of why the Buddha's disciples want individual predictions of buddhahood, when they should already know from Shakyamuni's teaching that they will become buddhas. This is where religious faith differs from learning. I have stated many times that Buddhism is a teaching that we can understand by means of reason. That is true. Understanding through reason may be sufficient in an academic sense, but mere understanding does not suffice in the case of religion, for it grasps only half the value of religion. When attainment of some religious knowledge gives rise to pleasure, it grows into faith for the first time. When faith arises, we are compelled to spread it for the good of people and society. Religious belief, or religion, is thus a matter of understanding becoming faith, which in turn develops into action for the sake of people and society.

There is and must always be power in true religious faith. From what does such pleasure or deep emotion, the foundation of that power, emerge? It certainly does not arise from theory; it comes from contact between spirit and spirit. When we encounter a great person and listen to the person's exalted words that penetrate to our own spirit, we are profoundly moved and a burning conviction arises within us to follow intently this path that has been shown to us, even at the risk of our life.

The greatness of the appearing Buddha, Shakyamuni, is shown here. When we hear the universal truth through the words of Shakyamuni, whom we revere and adore as the human ideal, it gives us a strength that goes beyond mere understanding and rouses us to activity. This is why the Buddha's disciples are fired with enthusiasm to hear his assurance that they too will become buddhas. Just by hearing these words they receive decisive strength.

The Chinese ideograph for "belief" is made up of two components, one signifying "person" and the other, "word." Words are essential in creating belief. Our thoughts are always expressed in words. Without words there would be no thoughts. We are told that human beings have developed far beyond the other animals because we possess spirit. This spirit is in fact formed through language. Without language there would be no spirit and no thought.

Since ancient times in Japan, the spirit has been accorded great significance, as attested by the term *kotodama*, "word-spirit." This expresses the idea that words are infused with life. This is reminiscent of the opening verse of the Gospel According to John in the New Testament: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The words that we think constitute our mentality, our thought, our belief; they form us and move us. In the same way, the words that we utter form and move others. They can make or break a person. Since even the words of ordinary people have such power, we can easily imagine how much more powerful must be the words of truth spoken by a great sage.

This is why the Buddha's disciples are so eager to hear the Buddha tell them that they too will become buddhas. I hope that you will think deeply about the power of the word, and employ it correctly within your own daily and religious life.

TEXT At that time the World-honored One, after pronouncing this verse, addressed all the great assembly, uttering words like these: "This my disciple Maha-Kashyapa in the world to come shall do homage to three hundred myriad kotis of world-honored buddhas, serving, revering, honoring, and extolling them and widely proclaiming the infinite great Law of the buddhas. In his final bodily state he will become a buddha, whose name will be called Radiance Tathagata, Worshipful, All Wise, Perfectly Enlightened in Conduct, Well Departed, Understander of the World, Peerless Leader, Controller, Teacher of Gods and Men, Buddha, World-honored One,

COMMENTARY Maha-Kashyapa has already proclaimed his understanding of the Buddha's teaching through his use of the parable of the poor son and expressed his

heartfelt gratitude to the Buddha. Shakyamuni, seeing that Maha-Kashyapa has come to complete realization of the truth of the teaching, that his faith is deep and his determination strong, declares the prediction of his buddhahood.

When such predictions are made, the Buddha always designates the future buddha's title, his domain, and his kalpa. To Maha-Kashyapa, the Buddha gives the name Radiance Tathagata. The ten epithets of a buddha, whose meaning has been already explained (see the January/February 1997 issue of DHARMA WORLD), symbolize a buddha's perfect virtues and powers. Thus it is made clear that Maha-Kashyapa too can become a buddha who ranks with Shakyamuni. We can clearly see Shakyamuni's disinterested reverence for the truth through his statement that if only one can realize the truth, one can become Shakyamuni's equal.

• *Serving.* "Serving" here refers to worship or veneration, a general term for the action that expresses "taking refuge in" and the sincerity of one's gratitude to a buddha or his teaching. Serving the Buddha and attending him are also veneration, as is making food offerings to him or spreading his teaching. We venerate and serve the Buddha when we recite the sutras, offer water, tea, or flowers at the family altar, or lead others to the Buddha Way. (See the November/December 1991, May/June 1992, and November/December 1995 issues.)

TEXT whose domain is named Radiant Virtue, and whose kalpa is named Great Magnificence. The lifetime of [that] buddha will be twelve minor kalpas, his Righteous Law will abide in the world for twenty minor kalpas, and the Counterfeit Law will also abide for twenty minor kalpas.

COMMENTARY *The lifetime of [that] buddha.* This phrase expresses the period during which the buddha will abide in that domain. The Law-body buddha of course neither arises nor perishes. The buddha mentioned here is the "manifest body" (see the May/June 1992 issue).

• *Minor kalpas.* Minor kalpa and kalpa are units measuring enormously long periods of time. One explanation says that a minor kalpa lasts about 17 million years.

• *His Righteous Law will abide in the world.* This indicates the condition in which the teaching of the buddha is transmitted correctly, in terms of its content, its practice, and the fruit of its practice (see the March/April 2000 issue).

• *The Counterfeit Law.* This refers to the condition in which the buddha's teaching is transmitted in form as it has been during the period of the Righteous Law, but though it is taught and practiced correctly in form, the fruit of its practice cannot be readily attained, because its essential spirit is deficient. The Last Law, incidentally, is the condition in which, though the teaching barely manages to survive, there are few who practice it, so there can be few fruits of enlightenment. Such an age is called the period of the Last Law.

TEXT His domain will be beautiful, devoid of dirt, potsherds, thorns, and unclean ordure; its land will be level and straight, with no uneven places, neither pitfalls nor mounds, its ground of lapis lazuli, lines of jewel trees, golden cords to bound the ways, strewn with precious flowers, and purity [reigning] everywhere.

COMMENTARY Through the description of the domain of Radiant Virtue the Buddha presents the ideal form of the world in which we human beings live.

TEXT In that domain the bodhisattvas will number infinite thousand kotis, with shravakas numberless. No Mara deeds will be there, and though there are Mara and Mara's people, they all will protect the Buddha Law."

COMMENTARY A bodhisattva is a person who safeguards and practices the Buddha's teaching, proclaiming it and spreading it widely. By contrast, a shravaka is a person who is still seeking the Buddha's teaching or is in various stages of learning it.

• *No Mara deeds will be there, and though there are Mara and Mara's people, they all will protect the Buddha Law.* This is an important sentence. "Mara" refers to all that blocks the true Way. "Mara's people" are Mara's retainers. They have great strength, transform themselves to tempt and confuse those who are trying to realize the true Way, and band together to obstruct and intimidate those who are practicing the true Way. It was Mara's band that came to where Shakyamuni was meditating at Buddhagaya, prior to his enlightenment, and employed various means to disturb him. Where an ordinary person might have quailed before their advance, Shakyamuni routed them in short order. It was because Shakyamuni overcame their temptations and intimidation that his enlightenment was so unshakable. Thus, in terms of the result, Mara became a force that aided Shakyamuni's enlightenment.

There are two kinds of Mara. The first is the "internal Mara," the accumulation of delusions that nest in our subconscious, the drives that threaten to disrupt our centered mind, and various evil thoughts. The second is the "external Mara," the temptations and pressures that come from without. In an ideal land like the domain of Radiant Virtue, all people genuinely seek out and truly practice the teaching of the Buddha. Even if they are occasionally subject to the temptations and intimidations of the "internal Mara," these function to strengthen their determination to seek the Way. As a result they turn to protecting the Buddha Law. Therefore, though there are Mara and Mara's people, Mara deeds disappear.

The "external Mara" refers to the power of words and

actions of people who try to tempt, criticize, obstruct, and intimidate those who are striving to practice and spread the Buddha Law. However, as the proverb "Extremes in wickedness make for extremes in goodness" shows, when the situation is applied to the ideal society of the domain of Radiant Virtue, such people are completely changed and come to use their great power to protect the Buddha Law. All living beings are endowed with the buddha-nature. Even those who seem as terrifying as demons are capable, once they are awakened to their buddha-nature, of great work far beyond the ability of a good but weak person. We can see many such examples in our immediate surroundings.

Seen in this light, the phrase "though there are Mara and Mara's people, they all will protect the Buddha Law" teaches us that Mara acts as a negative force within the

This relief on the north gate to Stupa No. 1 at Sanci, in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, depicts Maras trying to interrupt and interfere with Shakyamuni's determined effort to attain enlightenment. Photo by Isamu Maruyama.

realm of delusion but is transformed into a positive strength for one who has realized the true Way. We must therefore consider this matter not as an occurrence in an ideal realm in the far future but as a spiritual issue that confronts us at this very moment, an issue of the actual society in which we live. By learning the Buddha Law we have to drive away the "internal Mara," and by spreading the Buddha Law we must endeavor to instruct the "external Mara," do away with "Mara deeds," and change "Mara and Mara's people" into a force for good.

We cannot overcome the violence of Mara with our own violence. However much we think we can destroy one delusion with another delusion, it is impossible, because even if one delusion disappears, another rises to take its place. The true Dharma alone can overcome Mara. When the light of the true Dharma shines into our hearts Mara is instantly destroyed. This is like the moment when a light shining in the darkness dispels that darkness.

Since ancient times people have used spells, the word for which in Japanese (*majinai*) literally means "no Mara deeds." It originally refers to the use of incantation and prayers to sweep away everything obstructing the true Way by the power of the Buddha Law. As *majinai* became more and more formalistic, they came to be performed only for narrow, limited purposes, such as curing illness, and eventually degenerated into superstition. The true *majinai* is to believe correctly in the Buddha's teaching and in turn practice it correctly. If we do so, "Mara deeds" will invariably disappear. Those "Mara deeds" that have adhered to our mind and body will disappear like the mist before the morning sun, allowing our original self (the buddha-nature) to shine forth.

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

"I say to you bhikshus / That with my Buddha eyes / I see that this Kashyapa / In the world to come, / After innumerable kalpas, / Will become a buddha, / And that in the world to come / He will serve and pay homage to / Three hundred myriad kotis / Of world-honored buddhas; / For the sake of the Buddha wisdom / He will purely practice the brahma life, / Serving the highest / And most honored of men, / Putting into practice all / The peerless wisdom, / And in his final bodily state / Become a buddha.

COMMENTARY *My Buddha eyes.* (See the May/June 2002 issue.)

• *The brahma life.* This is pure conduct, or the practice of purity; occasionally it refers to the Eightfold Path (the Hinayana brahma life) or to the Six Perfections, or Six Paramitas (the Mahayana brahma life). Here it refers to the Six Perfections (see the March/April 1994 issue).

TEXT His land will be pure, / With lapis lazuli for ground, / Abundance of jewel trees / Lining the roadsides, / Golden cords to bound the ways, / Rejoicing the beholders, / Ever-pervading fragrance, / Rare flowers strewn everywhere, / Every kind of rarity / Adding to its splendor; / Its land will be level, / Free from mounds and hollows.

COMMENTARY *Every kind of rarity.* "Rarity" means an inexpressibly wonderful, unusual, precious beauty.

• *Adding to its splendor.* "Splendor" refers to the decking of the Buddha's statue and the temple hall enshrining the Buddha's image with canopies, banners, and necklaces. Thus it means to adorn the Buddha's surroundings in order to extol his virtues.

TEXT Many bodhisattvas, / Of untold number / And gentle mind, / Will attain great transcendent powers / And reverently keep the buddhas' / Great Vehicle sutras. / His multitude of shravakas, / Of faultless final form, / Sons of the Law king, / Will also be beyond count; / Even the eyes of the gods / Cannot know their number. / That buddha's lifetime will be / Twelve minor kalpas; / His Righteous Law will abide in the world / For twenty minor kalpas; / The Counterfeit Law will abide / For twenty minor kalpas. / Such will be the history of / The Radiance World-honored One."

COMMENTARY *Gentle mind.* The word *gentle* translates a Chinese compound made up of two ideographs. The first means that the mind is well regulated. It is the state in which the mind does not have an extraordinarily excellent quality in only one aspect but is perfectly balanced in all respects. The second ideograph means to be gentle, tender, soft, that is, to have both compassion and tolerance, and to be affable. Having a gentle mind is very important for leading large numbers of people. Though a sharp, severe person may be successful in converting some people through strongly persuasive means, such a person will not be able to inspire and convince the majority. We have to be careful in this regard not only in spreading the Buddha Way but also in leading people in everyday life.

• *Final form.* This term refers to the phrase "final bodily state" (see the September/October 2002 issue).

• *Sons of the Law king.* These are the Buddha's children or followers (see the July/August 2002 and September/October 2002 issues).

• *The eyes of the gods.* This phrase corresponds to the divine eye, the ability to see beyond the limitation of the physical eye, that is, ordinary people's way of seeing things (see the May/June 2002 issue).

To be continued

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