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**Cover photo:** The Oeshiki-Ichijo Festival was held October 4–5 at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters in Tokyo. It was an occasion for members to honor the memory of the thirteenth-century priest Nichiren and Rissho Kosei-kai's late founder, Nikkyo Niwano, who dedicated their lives to saving people through the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Participation in the festival helped members identify themselves as torchbearers of the Lotus Sutra's message in today's world.

Photo: AP / WWP

**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.

Photo: Kozo Ogawa

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

## The Role of Religions in Today's World

Religion is usually considered to be synonymous with peace, but the history of the world's religions has certainly not been one of continual peace. Indeed, when religion becomes involved in wars, the fighting can be even more violent and more bent on total destruction—we must never forget this. As a rule, when war seems not to be leading to victory for either side, plans arise to stop the fighting and compromise. In religious wars, however, that is not the case. Rather, the battles become more brutal and the hatred goes on.

With this history of world religion as a backdrop, the Niwano Peace Forum 2003 was held in Tokyo in October of last year. The fact that the participants were people of religion from areas that have seen, and are continuing to see, much conflict, such as the Korean Peninsula, Sri Lanka, Israel and Palestine, Northern Ireland, and Mexico, represented some of the first steps that the religious world has taken in moving in a new direction, albeit slowly.

In this new century, some say that a new religion should appear to answer the needs of the times, but I do not agree. If the existing religions, which have remained closed, would open up and begin to take the stance of cooperating for peace, that would be the form of religion that demonstrates a true desire for world harmony.

It has often been said that people understand many things in the world around them—except themselves. If that is the case, I believe that the role of religion is to teach us our shortcomings. During last autumn's Peace Forum, a discussion took place on the Israel-Palestine problem and the participants referred to the value of life and human dignity, universal to all people regardless of race or religion, and stressed the importance of becoming more open-hearted toward one another. If I may be forgiven for interjecting my own opinion, I believe that we have to look directly at the ugliness that lies hidden in the depths of the human heart.

When we think of peace these days, the first thing that comes to mind is the United Nations. Today, however, the UN seems so weak that, out of desperation, some have even voiced the thought that it is no longer needed. Of course, the UN is not all-powerful, but if it had not existed there can be no doubt that the world would be a far worse place. At a time when the governments of various nations are unable to solve the many problems that have global repercussions, just the fact that the UN offers a forum in which to strive together for peace indicates that there is still a great need for its existence.

Mr. Yasushi Akashi, former UN under-secretary-general, once said, "The UN, which has many faults, is like a mirror that reflects international society. But surely there are no adults who would destroy a mirror just because the image it reflects is not to their liking." The UN is not a utopia. It is a place where many different egos clash. Mr. Akashi has also pointed out that it is necessary for everyone concerned with the state of the world to reflect upon their own ugliness.

A friend who recently returned from a visit to Europe described to me a curious experience that he had at a zoo there. He came upon a completely boarded up cage that had this sign on it: "The World's Most Dangerous Animal." There was a single viewing hole and when he looked into it, he saw his own face reflected in a mirror! The message could not be mistaken. The animal whose actions cannot be predicted, especially in an emergency, is ourselves, the most dangerous animal. Until we can begin to dispel the delusions that cloud our hearts, we cannot begin to genuinely work for peace.



Kinzo Takemura

We would like to share readers' thoughts and experiences of faith. 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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# Religious Figures Play Vital Roles in Resolving Conflict Situations

by Jiho Sargent

The Niwano Peace Forum 2003, held in Tokyo October 18–20, presented steps toward peace taken by religious figures and organizations in five areas of recent conflicts. Teams from the Korean Peninsula, Sri Lanka, Israel and Palestine, Northern Ireland, and Mexico were joined by conflict resolution workers from six other nations, including six individual recipients and representatives of two group recipients of the Niwano Peace Prize, in discussions of the history, present status, ongoing efforts, and possible future steps toward resolution.

The forum was convened by the Niwano Peace Foundation, sponsored by Rissho Kosei-kai, to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Niwano Peace Prize. Dr. Philip Potter, fourth recipient of the prize and forum chair, and Rev. Kinjiro Niwano, Niwano Peace Foundation chair, opened the forum speaking of the necessity for efforts by religious individuals and by cooperative groups in establishing conditions in which peace can be restored.

Two keynote speakers addressed the forum. Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, president of the Sarvodaya Movement of Sri Lanka and recipient of the ninth Niwano Peace Prize, focused on the interrelationships between the personal or local and the structural or governmental in both peace and violence. "We cannot successfully intervene to resolve any conflict anywhere," he said, "unless we have firmly established inner peace within ourselves." Meditation on inner peace is thus a major factor. He cited a local politician who brought

*Participants stand for a moment of silent prayer during the opening ceremony.*

four soldiers armed with machine guns to break up a meditation gathering; the uninterrupted meditation of five thousand unarmed, unprotected people who simply ignored them caused the politician and soldiers to depart peacefully, showing the power of inner peace. Having trained our minds to reject destructive thoughts and emotions, he explained, is a basis for learning to respect all life. That sows the seeds of nonviolence in the human consciousness. With consciousness transformed at the individual level, the economy and power relationships can be transformed at the structural level for lasting peace.

Professor Mari Fitzduff, director of a graduate program in coexistence and conflict at Brandeis University and previously director of a United Nations

University center based in Northern Ireland, asked, "Whose side are we on?" She cited rapidly increasing globalization as a force that has led to conflict rather than cooperation. Other factors cited as promoting conflict include a fragmentation of the world's states, increasing from fifty to two hundred in the past fifty years, and proliferation of multiethnic states with their potential for internal division. In the face of such widespread violence, both actual and potential, she said, many people feel helpless.

Individuals *can* make a difference, though, in her experience. She outlined six roles that can be played in search of peacebuilding. Providers help people meet their human and societal needs without turning to violence. Teachers help people develop skills in

traditional paint for restoring temples in North Korea; the provision, by noodle factories, of meals given freely to local people each day to alleviate food shortages; and the provision of such necessary items as bicycles, milk, cloth, seeds, fertilizer, and medical supplies to North Koreans. Christian ties with the World Council of Churches have brought emergency assistance in response to a record flood and continuing food supplies, not only from South Korean church organizations but from churches throughout the world.

In this way, the team urged, cooperation and good will may be built even while formal reunification is difficult. In fact they expressed a wish that South Korea's Ministry of Reunification be renamed the Ministry of Cooperation.

*The first panel, presenting the conflict on the Korean Peninsula.*

constructive handling of conflict. Bridgebuilders promote communication among parties to a conflict through dialogue and common projects that increase trust across divides. Witnesses watch for oncoming conflict and alert those with the power to avert it. Equalizers help those who feel powerless to find power in a nonviolent way. Healers help mend the mental and emotional needs, as well as the physical needs, of people and communities scarred by conflict. Each of us can perform at least one of these roles.

## Korean Peninsula

The first panel, presenting the conflict on the Korean Peninsula, consisted entirely of South Koreans, who regretted their inability to be joined by members from North Korea.

This is the only conflict among the five discussed that originated in actions by external powers. For thirteen centuries, the peninsula was home to a single nation, despite repeated invasions, subjugations, and forced alliances. Di-

vision came in 1945 not by the will of Koreans but by an agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union, each fearing establishment of the other throughout the entire peninsula at the end of the Japanese annexation that had lasted thirty-five years.

Panelist Dr. Lee Jahng Ho noted that the Korean War (1950–53) was in reality a proxy war between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. It is important, he said, that both Koreas “realize that the Korean War was not a conflict between North and South Korean people, . . . but merely [a consequence] of larger Cold War ideological struggles.”

Ven. Bubta Shin and Dr. Kim Heung Soo presented Buddhist and Christian efforts toward North-South cooperation by the two major religions of both nations. Although religious activities were initially banned in North Korea, efforts were made from the start to preserve thousand-year-old temples as symbols of national pride and prestige. From 1974 onward, religion was once more allowed. Joint religious activities are conducted and cooperative efforts are in process, such as the provision of

## Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, as in Northern Ireland and in Mexico, conflict arose between groups in a single country that established identities opposed to each other. It was ethnic and language identity in the case of Sri Lanka. As outlined by team coordinator Dr. Kingsley Rodrigo, the island nation was shared by the Sinhalese and a smaller population of Tamils in a way that political elites on both sides came to view as inequitable. Demands for a separate Tamil state began in the 1970s. From 1990 to 1995, the hardline Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) governed the Jaffna Peninsula as a de facto Tamil state. Following seven years of escalating military conflict, a new Sri Lankan government at last was able to bring about a ceasefire agreement in February 2002 and to initiate a peace process including external mediators from Norway.

The Sri Lanka conflict is often viewed as opposition between two religions: the Buddhism of the Sinhalese and

the Hinduism of the Tamils. Actually, though, the religious element is not a primary basis of the conflict. There are four major religions in Sri Lanka, and both Christianity and Islam are present among Tamils and Sinhalese alike. Muslims, as noted by panelist Jezima Ismail, now constitute 8.2 percent of the total population. Living mainly in the northern area of the island, Muslims also have been traumatized by abductions of family members.

Christians of both peoples have come together to use their international links for peace building. Education has been interrupted, religious fundamentalism is increasing, and small conflicts (between two traders, for example) easily explode into large ones. These problems can be most immediately addressed by the clergy of the four religions, acting primarily with their own populations.

A "bridge" program initiated by Christians now seeks to bring the two peoples together by visits of Tamils to Sinhalese homes and of Sinhalese to Tamil homes. A similar program started by Hindus brings together youths of both groups at senior schools. All four of Sri Lanka's religions are working toward an enduring peace with unity in diversity and respect for the human rights of all.

## Israel/Palestine

Introducing the team for the conflict between the two major peoples living in the land that is now the state of Israel, was coordinator Bob Mark from Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, the sole village where Arabs and Jews have chosen to live together in amity. He posed the question, "What is it that makes people become defined as members of a group?" He noted that this land has symbolic and religious significance for three world religions. The city of Jerusalem, for example, is to Judaism the site of the Temple and symbol of unity

of the Hebrew people; to Christianity, it is the site of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ; and to Islam, the al-Aksa mosque commemorates the site of the ascension of the prophet Muhammad. This land has been claimed by many peoples over the centuries. At present, the state of Israel has approximately six million citizens, of whom more than one million are Palestinians and the remainder Jewish. The Palestinians consist of Muslims (more than 80 percent) and Christians, Druze, and others (totaling almost 20 percent). Three million

*Participants from Israel and Palestine promoting exchange during the forum.*

more Palestinians live in the territories occupied by Israel since the 1967 war.

The first panelist, Rev. Elias Chacour, took up the question of identity. He described himself as a "Palestinian Arab Christian citizen of Israel," who was none of these at birth. At birth, he was a baby. As an adult, he wishes to be recognized as a person. Born in a land that was then Palestine, Chacour spoke Arabic as his first language, was a child of Melkite Catholic church members, and, having remained in the land of his forefathers, was granted Israeli citizenship in 1948.

As a young priest, Chacour saw a lack of opportunity for secondary education of Palestinians and determined to create a school. Today that school has become Mar Elias Educational Institutions with 4,500 students (25 are Jewish, and the rest are Muslims and

Druze) in coeducational schools that include a high school, high-tech college, kindergarten and three years of elementary school (expanding to a complete primary school), and an Arab Christian university. The university recently held its opening ceremony. It is open to all people regardless of ethnic or religious difference, giving hope that its students will identify themselves as recipients of high-quality tertiary education and as proud citizens of Israel with its two peoples.

Representing another facet of the multicultural land, Amal el-Sana al-H'joj also dreamed of bringing education to people without schools. Triply discriminated against as a female, as a Bedouin, and as an Arab, she used the traditions of her own people, especially Arab hospitality, to gain a hearing. At the age of fourteen, she started teaching her mother and aunts to read; they had been among the 80 percent of Bedouin women who are illiterate. This grew to cover the people of her village, and then the people of other villages, both Arabs and Jews. To replace women's employment and income as nomadic herders, al-H'joj has created a nonprofit association that now employs women within and outside the village. In such ways she has made a difference for her people through her own dedicated efforts, showing the power of the determined individual.

Ishay Rosen-Zvi, the third panelist, presented another facet of the conflict. As a student and teacher of the Talmud, he seeks openings to new ways of thought and peace through a refocusing of religious priorities. Judaism, like other religions, has many teachings and many points of possible focus. Now the focus in Israel is on land, but that focus has led to oppressive acts on one side leading to violence on the other side, progressing in a vicious circle. As a young soldier, Rosen-Zvi was given total power over the poor inhabitants of an area in Gaza controlled by a road-

block. By letting people through or by refusing them passage or delaying their passage, the soldier at the roadblock controlled their ability to work or to obtain goods within the state of Israel. This so strongly went against his sense of human rights that he became part of a movement to refuse to serve in the occupied territories.

Now the objective of his work is on shifting Israeli Judaism's focus from land to people and culture, opening a new way of thinking and a new means of peace.

## Northern Ireland

On the day after the forum closed, news media announced that elections aimed at restoring power-sharing institutions were to be held on November 26. A landmark accord between Northern Ireland's Roman Catholic and Protestant leaders will thus restore the legislative and executive arms of the government a year after they were suspended. Hope for that announcement had lent an almost breathless anticipation to the Northern Ireland team, and indeed to everyone attending, during the forum.

The peace process still is fragile, but it is alive, said team members, all of whom are members of the Corrymeela Community. Founded in 1965, Corrymeela ("hill of harmony") seeks to do away with fear, prejudice, and ignorance between Northern Ireland's majority Protestants and minority Roman Catholics, and in their place to build relationships of trust and mutual respect. Members include both parties in the divided society.

As discussed by youth worker John Doherty, in Northern Ireland "religion" effectively means Christianity, but it is a fragmented Christianity. As early as the 1970s, Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians began to meet and discuss points of agreement

and those of conflict. Members of ordinary congregations, however, did not hear about such discourses.

Large-scale agreements for conflict resolution, such as ceasefires, he continued, must be grounded in individual encounters and understanding. Corrymeela's role is the building of this understanding. At first there was a concentration on large groups of young people, said panelist Shelagh Livingstone. This was found to be ineffective, however; in a group of forty, only four or five had meaningful encounters during the meeting, and contact failed even for those few after they returned home.

After twenty years, a new approach was adopted: supporting discussion of the participants' stories, exchanging information (they lived in segregated communities and rarely encountered each other), and exploration of their identities, which are often based only on politics and religion. In addition, Corrymeela tries to explore prejudice, work on conflict resolution, and look at justice and human rights.

Corrymeela's Ballycastle center provides a refuge for victims of violence and is a site for frequent symposiums, conferences, and meetings on reconciliation, accommodating more than six thousand participants each year from

conflict areas around the world. In addition to the centuries-long conflict between people of Northern Ireland's two religions, recent immigration by refugees from around the world has added the problem of racism.

In conclusion, this panel stated that it is important to speak personally, illustrating the point with a puppet play called *"That Can of Worms."*

## Mexico

Team coordinator Dr. Miguel Alvarez Gandara introduced Mexico's current Chiapas conflict by observing that it reflects other conflicts throughout the five hundred years since Latin America was conquered by Spain and Portugal. In the 1992 celebration of five centuries since the formation of resulting states, indigenous peoples of today's independent nations throughout Latin America rose to demand their human rights. Peace now requires not just nonwar, but democracy, justice, and multilingual nations.

Mexico's internal conflicts, like those of its neighbors, are primarily related to indigenous peoples and their roles, according to Rev. Pablo Romo Cedano. The religion of the overwhelming majority is Roman Catholicism, but that

*Questions from the floor followed the panel presentations.*

tical exercise. They have renounced armed struggle and put their rifles aside in order "to invite everyone into the search and dialogue for peace."

## Interconnections among Five Conflicts

Following presentations by the five panels separately, a representative of each team joined in consideration of the elements common to the various conflicts. Yvonne Naylor (Northern Ireland team) started the discussion by commenting that while she listened to Evi Guggenheim (Israel/Palestine team) speak of conflict resolution as a journey, she thought the process may require a generational change before the goal is reached, but urges everyone to stay on the journey. Guggenheim responded by positing three main common elements in conflicts:

- Just as in psychosis, a person may *dis-integrate* and identify with one piece that has split off from the total self and cannot be reintegrated, a society in conflict splits into parts and each part claims to be the main element. The greater the violence of this *dis-integration* of a society becomes, the longer the conflict will endure.

- When outside interests interfere in the conflict, the entire peace process may be defeated. The United States, as the state most strongly involved with Mexico, has been perceived as lacking interest in the resolution of its neighbor's conflicts.

- Conflicts often occur not between separate groups but between the rich and poor of the same society.

Dr. Jehan Perera (Sri Lanka) observed that sometimes the time is not right for an official solution (such as a ceasefire). In such times, peace workers need to keep talking, keep building for the future, and making a new vision. In fact, he said, "do whatever good can be done."

*Representatives discussing the elements common to the world's conflicts.*

church is itself divided. Some leaders, like Bishop Samuel Ruiz García (a Niwano Peace Prize recipient), view indigenous people as adults who know truth and do not need instruction in it. They give platforms where the poor, the indigenous people, and women can speak for themselves. Others seek only to put the awakened people back to sleep, he said.

Panelist Blanca Isabel Martínez Bustos, director of the Chiapas Center of Human Rights, began with remembering. Two years ago, she said, Digna Ochoa was murdered; the Mexican government, after a long investigation, claims she committed suicide while insane. In the last few months, she said, that government has assassinated another twelve defenders of human rights. In 2000 a new government brought hopes for a renewed peace process and democratization. Nothing happened. "Three years later," she said, "we see that this has just been a change in power. The peace process is stagnant and paramilitaries or lawyers of paramilitaries have now become deputy mayors in local government. Persecution of local leaders continues. Indigenous people who in 1994 chose armed revolt (with more dignity than arms) are now talking about a multicultural

society. The government sees such talk as dangerous. It claims there is no conflict between indigenous people and the government, but only conflicts among various indigenous peoples. Dialogue that began in 1994 and continued to 1996 is now blocked. Instead, though, those peoples are becoming actors in their own process, demanding recognition of their rights instead of mere handouts to ease their needs. Communities are acting on their own to build a context of justice and dignity.

Panelist Estela Barco reminded the forum that indigenous women "suffer a triple layer of oppression: that of being poor and indigenous and women." With the support of an organization founded by Bishop Ruiz and supported by the diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, though, they are seeking to develop an equality of circumstances. These women, she said, have become aware of their rights and begun to generate their own different ways forward in economic, social, and political development. The Sabatista community made a new proposal last August 8 for new committees of local government to bring autonomous self-determination to indigenous people as their right and to build autonomy through prac-

Dr. Martin Hernandez Linares (Mexico) commented that conflicts now are taking place all over the world and urged that the discussions of this forum, which had brought so many insights to the participants, be made a continuing connection for exchange of ideas and support.

Dr. Hildegard Goss-Mayr, a Niwano Peace Prize recipient and chair of this final panel, then summarized the major points revealed by the forum discussions. She began by urging that we always remember "that these conflicts come with their own histories and their own backgrounds." Also, that they are taking place in a specific world, after September 11, 2001, "with an increase in the possibility of military preemptive intervention; of terrorism, antiterrorism, and escalation of the spiral of violence; of repression of civil rights; and of the diminution in importance of international law." In addition, today's world situation is characterized by globalization, which increases poverty and migration.

Another point that came out quite clearly, she said, is the need in all five conflicts for analysis "to discover the injustices that exist and the needs of those that are involved on all sides." Such analysis has been made and is still being made in the five examples considered. From analysis, it is possible to develop action plans.

To work for peace, we prepare ourselves for peace work, converting ourselves further to an attitude of nonviolence, being able to live nonviolence both personally and in the conflict in which we are placed, Goss-Mayr continued. It had already been mentioned by the panel members that political agreements do not necessarily bring a solution. A true solution occurs only "with deep-going changes of attitudes, from self-interest to service of the community, from discrimination to accepting the other." Although leadership

attitudes are essential in this sense, all the peace workers must bring about such changes step-by-step.

"We have also seen," she added, "that the religious institutions and churches sometimes—I should say quite often—show a history linked to the status quo and are quite often on the side of those in power politics and domination." There are also, fortunately, those who understand that people of faith have to stand on the side of the poor, the discriminated against, the suffering, the women. Peace workers thus have a double responsibility. One part is motivating changes within our religious bodies to take an important and decisive stand on resolving conflict *through peaceful means*. "Sometimes it is very difficult for us to believe that this is possible," but it is essential never to believe that change is impossible. "There is a possibility for change in every person and in every conflict," she continued. The second responsibility is to take initiatives. Even small initiatives sometimes lead to such pioneer actions as we heard about concerning dialogue between North and South Korea.

In conclusion, Goss-Mayr said, "I believe that believers have to be the first ones to think and not the last ones, as we sometimes experience." Small initiatives can be the seeds of a possibility of change; unless such seeds are sown, change cannot take place. Listening to the five examples, we have heard the links between justice and peace. "Let us not forget this," she urged; "there cannot be peace unless there is also greater justice and that justice must be obtained by peaceful means."

### A Prayer for Success

Closing the forum, Rev. Nichiko Niwano, president of both the Niwano Peace Foundation and Rissho Kosei-kai, expressed the hope that the

success of the forum would serve as an irreplaceable ray of hope for the future of humanity.

Summarizing the prevalence of conflict in today's world, he stated, "When we look back upon the circumstances of the world in recent years, we see that, despite the fact that the Cold War between East and West has come to an end, all over the world, civil strife and ethnic conflicts are becoming more intense. As a result, the number of victims of such conflicts in the 1980s had doubled in the 1990s, and each year about another million people's lives are lost. But of late, nearly 80 percent of the victims of such conflicts are the common people. Indeed, the lives of a great number of people who do not wield weapons—women, children, and the elderly—are even at this very instant being threatened with grave danger. . . . Now that the twentieth century, which is called 'the century of war,' has ended, we have expressed our hope and prayer that the twenty-first century will be a 'century of cooperation.' But in reality, we are still acting as inheritors of the losses of the previous century."

In conclusion, he said, "Based upon that common wisdom that is the essence of religion, I fervently hope that from now on the discussions of all the participants in the Niwano Peace Forum will become widely disseminated around the globe. I, too, . . . would like to vow that, while learning together with all of you, as people of the religions of the world, hand in hand, I will devote myself to working toward the fulfillment of our true goal—world peace." □

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*Jiho Sargent moved from California to Japan in 1978 and entered the Soto priesthood a year later. Now an assistant priest at Taisoji, a neighborhood temple in Tokyo, she is also the author of Asking About Zen (New York: Weatherhill, 2001).*

# Ending Religious Violence

by Robert Traer

*There are many throughout the world who look to the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptures for justification for their own violence, which they wage in the name of God. But what they fail to recognize is that it is their own thirst for justice that guarantees God's violence, and that the responsibility to put an end to religious violence is our own.*

The greatest religious problem today has to do with the violence of God in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptures. For centuries Jews, Christians, and Muslims have looked to their scriptures to justify violence and war. Recently these stories of God have had an enormous impact on world events, for violence in the name of God is on the rise. Thus, we might well conclude that the God of these three scriptures is implicated in the terror and tragedy of our time.

Nevertheless, when we talk with Jews, Christians, and Muslims, we carefully refrain from drawing such a conclusion. Instead, we celebrate the teachings in each scripture that affirm peace and reconciliation. In discussing the world's problems, we speak of the misuse of religion by those who simply hope to gain economic and political advantages. Our strategy for promoting peace is cooperation among religious people, and the price of this cooperation is keeping silent about religious beliefs that claim to justify the violence of God.

Yet we cannot ignore the violence of God in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptures. For those who worship a violent God are, not surprisingly, often violent in the name of God.

## God in Three Scriptures

The story of God in the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible), the Christian Bible, and the Qur'an begins in the Bible with God creating the universe and fashioning human beings in "God's image." When Adam and Eve use their freedom to do what they like, rather than choosing what God commands, God punishes them for their disobedience and expels them from

Paradise. Moreover, God punishes the descendants of Adam and Eve for living sinfully by sending a flood to kill everyone on earth, sparing only the family of Noah, because he is a righteous man.

In the Bible story, a rainbow is said to be a sign of God's repentance for the devastation of the flood, but God does

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not renounce the use of violence on earth. Instead, God chooses to make a covenant with the Israelites and frees them from slavery by slaughtering the armies of Pharaoh. In the biblical narrative, God kills rebels among the Israelites, who resist the leadership of Moses, and then God commits genocide, eliminating the tribes of Canaan to make room on the land for the people of the covenant.

Later in the Tanakh, God uses violence to judge the descendants of the Israelites for failing to keep the covenant. When Assyrian and Babylonian armies invade the land, kill and rape, take slaves, and burn cities, prophets in the Bible proclaim that God has sent these conquering armies against the people as their punishment for breaking the covenant. If the people repent, the prophets say, God will defeat their enemies and renew their sovereign nation. Yet five centuries after the end of their exile in Babylon, the Israelites continue to suffer under harsh foreign rule.

Therefore the story in Jewish scripture ends with agonizing reflections about why God has not returned to earth to free the people of the covenant. Hoping by their faith and courage to stir God to save them, as the Tanakh relates that God saved their ancestors, the Jews revolt against Roman rule in 66 C.E. and again in 132 C.E. These rebellions, however, are crushed by Roman legions, and Jews are crucified by the thousands and finally expelled from Jerusalem. With the Jews, we can only wonder why the God of the Tanakh, who frees the people of the covenant from slavery in ancient Egypt, does not free the Jewish people from oppression under Roman rule.

At the time of the Jewish rebellions, other Jews are engaged in nonviolent resistance against Roman imperial power. Jesus of Nazareth and his followers discern in Jewish scripture that God has chosen to renounce violence for the sake of humanity.

The Jesus movement inspires a new chapter in the story of God, which is related in the New Testament of the Christian Bible. In the crucifixion of Jesus by Roman soldiers, the church finds confirmation that God has renounced violence in history. For God does not come to earth to slaughter the Romans and save Jesus. Instead, God resists evil by dying as a Jew who urged his followers to love their enemies in order to be like God, who “causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.” In this story, there is hope that even those who kill in the name of God may be forgiven.

Yet Christians also revise and expand the vision in Jewish scripture of God’s final and everlasting judgment. The gospels, Paul’s letters, and Revelation in the New Testament all include passages proclaiming that God will bring history to an end in order to provide heavenly rewards for the righteous and hellish punishments for the unrighteous. It is both

tragic and ironic that Christians, who proclaim salvation through the self-sacrificing “death of God” as Christ, also promise that at the end of time God will punish evildoers with everlasting violence.

The courage of Christian martyrs, who are slaughtered for refusing to recognize the Roman emperor as God, strengthens the witness of the church, and early in the fourth century the emperor joins those he is unable to defeat and converts to Christianity. With access to imperial power, bishops put aside their nonviolent witness and violently suppress Christians opposing the authority of the imperial church. As Jews believed the God of the covenant used violence to punish them, Christians believe the God of the Roman Empire uses violence to enforce allegiance to church and state.

Yet the story of God does not end with these imperial “justifications” for religious violence. In Arabia, Muhammad hears the angel Gabriel speaking for God to the world. The words of Muhammad inspire a religious movement and, when written down after Muhammad’s death, these words are read as scripture. The story of God in the Qur’an seeks to correct and complete the prior revelations of God in the Jewish and Christian scriptures.

In the Qur’an, God reaffirms the commandment given to Jews and Christians to worship only God and also the God-given freedom of each person to respond to God’s call by choosing the right path. But in the Qur’an, God sees as idolatrous the devotion of Jews and Christians to their separate scriptures and religions. Moreover, in the Qur’an, God rejects every use of religious and political power that restricts our freedom to respond to God’s call.

The Qur’an proclaims that all of God’s messengers, including those in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, have called for repentance in the name of the one God, who forgives every person who repents. But like the New Testament, the Qur’an also promises that God will judge everyone at the end of time, bringing to a heavenly paradise those who are just and condemning to a fiery hell those who are not. The God of the Qur’an is full of compassion for everyone who repents, but will be violent on the last day with everyone who has turned from the straight path.

### Divine Judgment

In the following centuries, Jews, Christians, and Muslims look to their scriptures to justify the ruthless use of their own religious and political power. There is, however, more in this history than human error and religious terror. There is also a fundamental flaw in the story of God.

In the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptures, God is violent because humans expect God to be just. We want to believe that living a good life will be rewarded, if not in this

life, then in some other life or at the end of all life. Furthermore, we want to believe that evildoers will be punished for the harm they have done. When history does not yield the justice we believe we ought to receive, then we find beliefs about God's judgment almost irresistible.

What we fail to understand is that our desire for justice guarantees God's violence. Not only is this so in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim stories of God; it is also a problem with the very idea of God. We attribute both power and goodness to God, because this is what God means to us. But if God is both almighty and good, then God cannot ignore evil. We cannot believe in a God who watches evil happening but does nothing about it. If God is to be God, we believe God must in some way judge those who have done what is wrong.

In scripture and history, therefore, God is usually identified with some punishing earthly power, either religious or political or both. This is the way of holy war, crusades, inquisitions, religious wars, the Christian and Muslim conquests and colonization of other peoples, the American myth of "manifest destiny," and violent *jihad*. Yet we know that religious and political claims to speak and act for God are for human glory, rather than the glory of God. And we know that those who claim to find justification in scripture for violence against their enemies also ignore God's call to be compassionate and merciful.

When it seems there is no justice in history, then Jews, Christians, and Muslims have looked for God's judgment of good and evil in another realm or at the end of time. This religious belief is less dangerous than the self-righteous claim to be God's instrument of wrath on earth. The idea that judgment should be left to God alone, and that God has chosen to delay justice perhaps even until the history is over, should free us to have more reasonable expectations about the use of religious and political power. By leaving judgment to God, we need not assume ultimate responsibility for defeating evil and for righting every wrong.

Nonetheless, this hope in God's final reckoning continues to affirm that God's justice involves violent punishment. Today there are Jews, Christians, and Muslims who believe they can discern in scripture what needs to happen before God will judge the nations. These religious fanatics are so eager to bring about God's final reckoning that they condone violence in the name of God. Their turn to terror reveals that we cannot rely on belief in God's ultimate judgment to put an end to religious violence on earth.

History and scripture, however, offer at least three alternatives. We might practice a religious discipline that does not involve God. We might embrace humanist ideals and a more pluralistic way of life. We might read scripture as in-

spired literature, rather than as God's revealed will. Each of these options offers a choice for many of us today.

### Our Choices

Buddhist practice is the most prominent example of a non-theistic religious alternative. The historical Buddha offered a path that does not require any belief in God, and Buddhist teachings focus on the impermanence of all that is. Being a Buddhist seems to be the ideal answer to the problem of God's violence. For if there is no belief in or relationship to God, there cannot be any expectation of God's violent judgment on those who have done evil.

Yet Buddhist literature and art are filled with images of "pure" lands and places of torment, which remind a Westerner of heaven and hell in the story of God. Moreover, Buddhists have not always resisted the use of violence by governments and empires. Attempts today in Japan to revive the imperial cult confront Japanese Buddhists with an important challenge. And impatience among younger Tibetans with the Dalai Lama's nonviolent resistance to Chinese imperialism poses a difficult test for Tibetan Buddhist leaders.

Buddhist practice is no guarantee, but offers a powerful alternative to the story of God, which has been used to justify so much violence in the past three millennia. Therefore, the Buddhist witness to nonviolence today is of enormous importance for the world, and we may hope that more people will embrace this way of life.

We may hope as well for a renewal of humanist ideals. With deep roots in both Eastern and Western cultures, humanist writings have long advocated the just use of political and economic power. Confucian and Taoist teachings continue to have influence not only in China, but also among Koreans and Japanese. And the remarkable story of Confucius relating how he traveled and taught the principles of good government and honorable life throughout China has gained an admiring audience in the West.

Some characterize these humanist traditions as "religious," but, in contrast to theistic traditions, these humanist teachings emphasize harmony in human life rather than submitting to God's will and hoping for divine justice. Whether "religious" or not, these Eastern teachings offer a striking contrast to the story of God that has flourished in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim cultures and now dominates much of the world.

In the West, Greek ideas about truth and human tragedy, as well as the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, and Roman writers who reflected on Greek thought, continue to be the core of humanist education. Socrates is celebrated as a model citizen for acknowledging the sovereignty of the Athenian Senate, although he believed its decision to put him to death

was unjust. God or the gods are often acknowledged in this tradition, but the emphasis of humanist thought is on understanding human life and promoting civil society.

We must acknowledge that the Hellenistic Greek and Roman empires employed brutal violence to gain and maintain control over subject peoples. As with Buddhist teachings and practice, humanist ideals do not necessarily end, or even reduce, human violence. Nonetheless, humanist teachings about religious freedom and a secular state have helped to secure the political freedoms that today in our pluralistic societies are the foundation of democratic government. Surely these humanist ideals are worthy of our continued support.

Yet even as pluralistic societies have flourished, so have Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities of faith. And some of these condemn other religious groups, teaching that God will judge all those who resist the truth they claim to have received.

In America, Christian political leaders openly affirm God's blessing as they kill terrorists and deny the human rights of those believed to threaten American security. Moreover, evangelists on radio and television spread fear by proclaiming that God's final judgment is close at hand. In the Middle East, both Jews and Muslims justify killing and maiming in the name of God.

Therefore to end religious violence we may need to read the story of God in scripture as revered literature, rather than as God's revelation. This would mean reading the story of God as our story. It would mean accepting that human interpretation and the limitations of knowledge shape religious language, like all human language. It would mean admitting that we cannot know God's will with certainty but have learned from history and scripture that violence in the name of God does not lead to peace and justice.

Reading Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptures as revered literature need not mean ignoring the religious traditions that have preserved these scriptures. But as such a reading of scripture encourages freedom as we engage the story of God, we may see new meanings and not merely find texts that seem to verify our convictions. Interpreting scripture as inspired and inspiring literature may contribute to the ongoing debate within each religious community of faith concerning the meaning of these writings for our life together today.

Such a reading of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptures will allow us to see scripture as the story of one God. We will see that this story reaffirms God's freedom as well as God's hope that all people will use their freedom wisely. The God who is free and who chooses to be good can be known by us, because God makes us free to know God and also free to live with faith and righteousness. In the story of

God, it is our freedom that gives us the responsibility to resolve God's problem and also the possibility of doing so.

### For All of Us

The problem of violence in the story of God cannot be left to God. For Jews, for Christians, and for Muslims this means having sufficient faith in God to allow God to renounce violence for our sake. The God who has used violence in scripture must be understood as free to choose nonviolence in seeking justice for us all.

The story of God proclaims that God has made us free in the image of God, and in our freedom we are able to discern that our hope for divine judgment is self-serving. We seek divine justice not simply because we want God's will to be done, but because we want vengeance. We would justify ourselves through the violence of God against our enemies.

For God to renounce violence, we must renounce violence in the name of God. Jews, Christians, and Muslims are called now by the God of their scriptures to live together in peace so that wars may cease and violence may be limited by the rule of law.

Those who embrace the story of God must persuade members of their own religious faith that God has renounced violence on earth and that being faithful means renouncing violence in the name of God. Jews, Christians, and Muslims should proclaim that the one free God is doing something new for the sake of all humanity. Men and women of diverse religious and cultural traditions are called now to work for peace and justice on earth.

This may mean that dialogue among Jews, and among Christians, and among Muslims is more important than interfaith dialogue involving them all, as well as members of other religious traditions. Most likely this will be the case in countries where people have strong memories of religious conflict, or where political power supports a religious agenda.

I recall several years ago speaking privately with a Muslim religious leader in Pakistan, who agreed that his country's law making blasphemy a capital offense was not supported by the Qur'an, and also that this law was the cause of much injustice. He told me he was working to persuade other Muslims that they could support a change in the law, as good Muslims. But he said that for this reason he could not participate in any form of interfaith activity, because this sort of cooperation with non-Muslims would undermine his credibility among his own people.

Those of us who live in more pluralistic societies need to understand that the Western style of international interfaith activities is often resented and resisted in more conservative countries, especially where there is an established religious

community. In these cultures, for religious leaders to be involved in interfaith activities may undermine their ability to moderate the more aggressive teachings of their religious traditions. Therefore we should expect only that these religious leaders work within their own communities to discourage the use of violence in the name of God.

### Contributing to Peace

There are, of course, innumerable ways of contributing to peace in the world. People of all religious traditions and humanists contribute greatly by supporting the rule of law at home and abroad. But what can we do? Urging governments to strengthen the United Nations is a significant choice that each of us can make. Supporting international human-rights laws is another way people with diverse beliefs can collaborate to secure greater respect for the human dignity of every person.

If we live in pluralistic societies, it may be that supporting interfaith activities will be an effective way of making our contribution. If we live in more traditional or conservative societies, we will probably be more successful by working with civic organizations or by supporting the human-rights

programs or peace activities of our own religious communities.

All of us, however, have choices, and among these choices are ways of using our freedom to reduce the violence in our world.

Certainly, there is no one understanding of religion or God, or no one set of beliefs or actions, that will resolve the problem of violence in the human story of God. The violence attributed to God is reflected in the violence of human civilizations, even as the human desire for vengeance and justice is projected onto God. Yet, a new reading of the story of God in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scripture may free us to see that God has renounced violence for the sake of humanity. And if God has renounced violence, then we should end all violence in the name of God.

In the story of God in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptures, God calls upon us to repent. In all three versions of this story, God offers forgiveness to those who work for reconciliation on earth. The God who offers justice and peace to humanity is a God who trusts us to use our freedom wisely. May we now accept our responsibility to put an end to religious violence. □

Photo: AP / WWP

*An Orthodox Jew looks on as peace activists hold signs and fly balloons on June 14, 2003, next to Jerusalem's Old City.*

# Making Our Deeds Agree with Our Words

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.*

I originally wrote "The Threefold Lotus Sutra: A Modern Commentary" in order to try to explain every word of the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law, and the Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue. This collection of interpretations of the sutras can be considered one of the main supporting pillars of my faith, as well as of Rissho Kosei-kai as a whole. Since it is a sutra commentary, it is useful for deepening one's understanding of the Lotus Sutra. Unless that understanding is put into practice, however, we cannot be said to have read the Lotus Sutra properly.

There is no doubt that there are people to whom the truth of existence in this world has been revealed, who understand how to think and live based on that truth, but who remain satisfied with that. Sutra commentaries are like a nation's constitution or explanations of difficult codes of law. They are not like books that you sit down and read from cover to cover, but are something you refer to when you want to have some point clarified. They can be considered basic tools that form the foundation of daily life and work.

Pai-chang Huai-hai (720–814), one of the great Chinese Ch'an (Zen) masters of the T'ang dynasty, is known for creating regulations and monastic institutions for Zen practice. Once someone asked him, "Do you engage in any special practice?" Huai-hai replied, "Yes, I do." "What is it?" asked

his questioner. "When I am hungry, I eat, and when I am tired, I sleep." Most people would probably think doing so was obvious. However, if we think this through, the matter is not quite so simple.

We sometimes doze off during lectures or at work when we should not do so, and stay up late at night when we should be asleep. When we are supposed to be concerned about our health, we eat rich foods. How many people are there who find themselves suffering from illness as a result? Sixty percent of the outpatients who go to hospitals regularly are said to have become ill through their own fault. The significance of Huai-hai's simple words will be apparent to us when we are able to compare them with exactly what it is that we do.

What motivates people to put the teachings into actual practice is human virtue, the sense of trustworthiness of those who have made the spirit of the teachings their own. The kanji ideogram used to signify "trust" is made up of two characters, those for "person" and "word." What people do should be the same as what they say; it is only when there is no discrepancy between people's words and deeds that they will be trusted by those around them.

The Chinese philosopher Wang Yang-ming (1472–1529), when asked the same question as Pai-chang Huai-hai, replied in verse in very much the same way that when he was hungry he ate and when tired he slept, but he added, "What is crucial about being able to do simple things properly is that people tend to look down on what seems to them to be too easy, and rather become absorbed in Taoist beliefs on immortality, divorced from real life. This is truly regrettable."

The habit of making light of the ordinary, of not being

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

Japanese translation of *upaya* is *hoben*, where *ho* indicates “that which is true” and *ben* is “means” or “expedient.” Therefore skillful means must be, in all places, at all times, and for all people, the best and truest way.

When we plan to climb Mount Fuji, we can reach the same destination by whatever route we take. We may think, therefore, that whatever way we take in our religious practice, we will have no problem in reaching the summit. According to how skillful means are used, however, we could easily become lost halfway up the mountain.

As I said in a previous installment, chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra, “Tactfulness” (an alternative translation of *upaya*) could just as well be called “Truth.” For one of the most significant chapters of the Lotus Sutra to be given the title of “Tactfulness” shows how important skillful means are. If we do not use skillful means, people will not be able to approach the truth, or even to know it. It is very difficult to comprehend the truth unless it is done through parables and skillful means.

Skillful means must derive from wisdom. Wisdom may sound like something cold and bloodless, but it is what reveals to us the roots of our suffering. Nevertheless, what gives it shape to be able to actually help those who are suffering here and now is skillful means. In other words, skillful means are what put wisdom into effect; wisdom and skillful means are not two separate things.

I have heard that there was once a young woman who had to look after her small brothers and sisters after their parents died. In the role of a substitute parent, she not only had to work to get money to support the family, but also had to prepare the meals and do their laundry. Although she was a deeply faithful Christian, she could not go to church, and working all the time without a break, she eventually collapsed from exhaustion. As her condition worsened, a priest heard about her situation and hurried to see her. She was barely able to speak and asked him, “Father, will I go to heaven, even though I haven’t been able to attend church?” The priest held her hand tightly. It was red and rough from all her household chores. Gently rubbing her hand, he made a firm promise. “You do not have to worry. When God sees your hands, he will welcome you joyfully into heaven.”

I do not think there is anywhere in the Bible that mentions chapped hands. Yet the words of the priest, which stemmed from both wisdom and love, while being skillful means, were also the words of truth itself.

There are many people around us who are disheartened and who have lost hope, or who are stricken by grief. Whatever way you take to encourage them with heartfelt sincerity and to say that everything will be all right, it will be a manifestation of wisdom. This is the perfection of skillful means. It cannot take place without sympathy. □

*Founder Nikkyo Niwano addresses Rissho Kosei-kai members during a talk at a local branch in 1981.*

interested in what is usual, is found at all times and in all places. The first step of faith, as well as our ultimate goal, is doing as a matter of course the things that are usual for human beings.

### The Power of Skillful Means

Religious practice necessitates various forms that are best characterized as the power of skillful means. You may already be well aware of esoteric purification based on nine mudras and mantras, Chinese directional divination, and divination on the aspects of a house through its location. In the end, however, these are one aspect of skillful means, which actually include innumerable billions of methods. “Skillful means” is a translation of the Sanskrit term *upaya*, which originally meant “to approach.”

Skillful means are ultimately a way to bring people closer to the other shore of enlightenment. We must constantly consider, though, whether through their use we can arouse in people a desire to come closer to the teachings of Buddhism, or whether they can be instrumental in revealing to them the truth of their buddha-nature. The original meaning of skillful means is lost if they are not a device to guide people toward the true way of life they should be leading. If they do not do this, they are not truly skillful means. The

## Chinese, South Korean, and Japanese Buddhist Leaders Hold Sixth Conference in Kyoto for World Peace

From October 28 to 29, the Sixth China–South Korea–Japan Buddhist Friendly Interaction Conference was convened at Kiyomizu Temple and then moved to Rissho Kosei-kai's Kyoto Fumon Hall. Under the auspices of the Japan–China–South Korea International Buddhist Exchange Council, some 300 priests, representing various Buddhist sects, and their lay followers from three countries took part in the conference to strengthen their ties in the light of Buddhist truth. Representing Rissho Kosei-kai were President Nichiko Niwano; Rev. Michio Matsubara, director of the External Affairs Department; and Rev. Keiichi Takise, head of the Kyoto Branch. Under the theme “Buddhism and Peace—Everyday Life and Buddhist Precepts,” the conference advocated the introduction of the Buddhist precepts into people's daily lives and also presented them as vital guiding principles for all humanity in this time of terrorism and conflict around the world.

On October 29, the participants gathered in the main hall of Kiyomizu Temple to hold a religious service of prayers for world peace. After the temple's head priest, Rev. Seihan Mori, and representatives of Japanese Buddhist sects officiated at a Buddhist service according to Japanese ritual, Rev. Mori read out a statement of the ceremony's significance. Then the representatives of Chinese and Korean Buddhists chanted sutras according to their own traditions and read out messages for world peace. In his message, the Most Ven. Bub Jang, president of the Korean Buddhist Association and chairman of the Korean Buddhist Chogyue order, said, “Peace begins in the heart and mind of every individual.” He added, “If we

*Participants holding a religious service of prayers for world peace at Kiyomizu Temple.*

close our eyes and think of the sadness caused by war and the happiness brought by peace, and if we contemplate the three defilements of greed, anger, and ignorance lying at the bottom of our hearts, we will understand why we should be tolerant of and compassionate toward one another. It is this awareness that is necessary for us to take the first step toward world peace and happiness.”

That afternoon, in response to an appeal by Rev. Matsubara, the participants joined in the Donate-a-Meal Campaign, one of Rissho Kosei-kai's peace activities, by forgoing lunch and donating what they would have otherwise spent on food to UNICEF. Then the participants walked in procession three kilometers to the Kyoto Fumon Hall, the other venue of the conference, carrying a banner appealing to onlookers' desire for world peace.

At that meeting, three representative Buddhists from the three countries, including Rev. Ryusho Kobayashi, head of the study division of the Tendai Buddhist denomination in Shiga Prefecture, and Rev. Sheng Hui, vice pres-

ident of the Buddhist Association of China, made keynote addresses, and eight participants made supplementary addresses. At the end of the two-day conference, the participants signed a joint statement summarizing the results of their discussions. The statement regrets that although world peace is a common hope of all humanity, intolerance of others has resulted in conflicts all over the world. The statement expresses the participants' vow to advocate a positive way of life based upon the universal Buddhist precepts of having respect for all life, of giving freely to others, and of always speaking the truth.

The annual conference, originated at the initiative of the late Mr. Zhao Puchu, president of the Buddhist Association of China, who shared with other Buddhist leaders in the three neighboring East Asian nations the hope of forging “golden ties” among Buddhists in South Korea, China, and Japan by applying the spirit of Mahayana Buddhism to confirm their mission and future activities for the common goal of world peace. □

# Theology and Dialogue in the Arena of History

An interview with Roman Catholic theologian Rosino Gibellini

*Rosino Gibellini is the author of La teologia del XX secolo (The Theology of the Twentieth Century), Frontiers of Theology in Latin America, and The Liberation Theology Debate, among other works on the figures and movements in contemporary theology. He is a director of Queriniana, publisher of the Italian edition of the Roman Catholic journal Concilium. In a recent interview with DHARMA WORLD, Dr. Gibellini described his encounter with Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the late founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, which prompted his pursuit of Catholic-Buddhist dialogue, and discussed prospects for Christian theology in the world in the twenty-first century.*

## **How did you come to meet Rev. Niwano?**

We met in 1979 at the third assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) held in Princeton, New Jersey. The event was important, because it anticipated the World Day of Prayer for Peace seven years later, which Pope John Paul II organized in Assisi. The first WCRP was in Kyoto in 1970, and the second in Leuven, Belgium, in 1974. I first learned about the WCRP through Father Enrico Manca of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME), which at the time was working to disseminate WCRP initiatives. Father Manca invited me to Princeton, and it was there that I met Rev. Niwano. I was immediately struck by the energy he seemed to emanate. He was someone who personified interreligious dialogue. From a theological point of view, this was significant, even groundbreaking, because people then were barely aware of such a thing as interreligious dialogue. Today, of course, it is widely recognized as something we all need to strive for.

I remember that as part of the Princeton event we went to New York and visited St. Patrick's Cathedral, and then to Washington, D.C., where we went to the White House. In our meetings, Rev. Niwano constantly invoked the word "peace," which in Japanese is *heiwa*. The word echoed everywhere we went. That was the feeling I got. Back in Princeton, as we sat drinking coffee in cafes, our friendship developed. And we said to each other: "We need to construct something." Which is exactly what happened.

As a Catholic theologian, I had discovered a new world and a new dialogue. True, ecumenism existed in the seventies, emerging in the Catholic Church toward the end of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, but it was not yet interreligious dialogue. In the WCRP, however, signs of this new dialogue were already evident. Later, it exploded throughout the world on many levels.

## **And later, how did the relationship develop between your publishing house, Queriniana, and Rissho Kosei-kai?**

By 1979, there had already been a few meetings at the international book fair in Frankfurt, which is where we discovered Kosei Publishing. But that year we obtained a copy of *Shakyamuni Buddha: A Narrative Biography*, which Rev. Niwano had written. The book had just been published in Japanese, and the English translation was to be issued in 1980. Our Italian edition came out in 1982.

On that occasion Queriniana organized our first visit to Japan. There were thirty of us—priests, religious teachers, and lay people. We wanted to learn something about Japanese culture and religion, especially Buddhism, and to see how Buddhism was lived in the people's daily lives. But the focus of the trip was the official delivery of the Italian translation of the biography of Shakyamuni Buddha to Rev. Niwano.

In Princeton I had seen him as a man of interreligious dialogue, but on this trip to Japan we got to know him as a

*Dr. Gibellini talking with Founder Nikkyo Niwano and Chairman Motoyuki Naganuma during his second visit with other Catholic theologians to Rissho Kosei-kai's Tokyo headquarters in 1992.*

man of hospitality. I remember thinking that Buddhism was tied to monastic life; instead we found ourselves in a community of lay people. This was an example of the ingenuity of Rev. Niwano. In the Catholic Church, after the Second Vatican Council, there was an evolution from a clerical to a more lay-oriented church. Here in Japan we found a lay Buddhism centered on the values of dialogue, peace, and also ecology. We were surprised to find Japanese Buddhists so familiar with the teachings of Saint Francis.

We were given the perfect audience. And in turn we got to observe the tremendous efforts of Rev. Niwano and his community and, as I said, to experience their great hospitality. I came to understand that the dialogue that I had tapped into in Princeton was guided by a strong spiritual component: it was Buddhist spirituality, with the element of dialogue. One thing I remember about the trip was how astonished we were at the absence of furniture in our rooms. Westerners tend to think of large, packed Japanese buildings. Instead, our rooms were empty and we slept on mats, and we were enriched by this. There really was the feeling of true dialogue taking place.

Our meetings continued annually at the Frankfurt Book Fair. There as well we learned something from our Japanese counterparts: the culture of the gift. The Japanese always had a gift for us, usually something technological. We, on the other hand, always arrived empty-handed, because our purpose, we thought, was an exchange of ideas, not gifts. But our meetings would be very programmed and methodical

and last just a moment. And so from the Japanese we learned the value of a gift. Soon we started to bring a gift for them—monk's wine from our cellar.

When we again traveled to Japan in 1992, each of us brought small gifts with us. Gifts were received, and gifts were given. "Spirit and Technology" was the theme of this second trip. There were seventy-five of us, including journalists, the Citadel of Assisi, and Bishop Michael Fitzgerald, who headed the delegation and who had recently been named an archbishop by the pope.

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano met us upon our arrival; when we left, his son Rev. Nichiko Niwano saw us off. I was so impressed by both of them; they seemed to be men of great spirituality.

***At that meeting Nikkyo Niwano urged Archbishop Fitzgerald to encourage the pope to participate in the World Assembly of the WCRP. . . .***

And instead the Holy See continued to send a delegation. But while that was the case, I have always believed that the WCRP was the inspiration for the World Day of Prayer for Peace. John Paul II may have called for it, but who suggested it? It had to have been the WCRP. The first WCRP preceded Assisi by sixteen years, when the Catholic Church was involved only in ecumenical dialogue. The Holy See certainly was not unaware of the activities of this international interreligious organization. Assisi does represent the

official commencement of interreligious dialogue, however, and for this reason I call it "the icon of Assisi," because it was the activities of the WCRP that helped bring it into existence.

***In the dialogue between Buddhism and Catholicism, what is there left to do?***

I could cite the Italian-German theologian Romano Guardini, who said that "a great encounter and confrontation with the figure of the Buddha awaits us." The Buddha, whom Guardini calls "that tempest that rose on the banks of the Ganges," is in fact a very suggestive figure for Westerners as much as Easterners. I might also cite the Trappist monk Thomas Merton, who in his *Asian Journal* wrote of the profound influence of the Buddha on his spiritual path.

In France, in his recent book *The Lotus and the Cross*, the Christian thinker Ravi Zacharias compares the two great ways of spirituality: the Catholic path of solidarity and the Buddhist path of purification of the soul. The book suggests attitudes and insights of Buddhism that could be valuable to Christianity. The Buddhist faith, for example, has always been pacifist, while with Christianity, especially in early times, that definitely has not been the case; Asian culture has had a mentality of *et, et* (and, and), while Greco-Roman and Western society has demonstrated something more akin to *aut, aut* (either, or). In terms of symbol, there is resonance between the two: the cross expresses pain and the victory over pain; the lotus signifies life's suffering and a way to transcend suffering through purification of the heart and the mind. It occurs to me that Rev. Niwano was a man whose life reflected the practice of such purification.

So the point of interreligious dialogue is to seek points of convergence between the faiths with which we can enrich ourselves. I can see, for example, how a deeper understanding of the Buddhist emphasis on tolerance could help to circumvent the clash of civilizations that seems to be everywhere today. Buddhism could also suggest ways for Christianity to get past negative theology: Buddhism does not speculate as Christian theology does. Christian theology claims to know a certain side of God, but what is greater is unknowable.

***What can you tell us about your latest book, Theological Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century?***

The Second Vatican Council was one of the biggest religious events in the Christian environment—and certainly in the twentieth century. The three years of the council marked a

movement away from an abstract theology to an encounter with history and a theology of hope. This was a hope for salvation, but also a hope that would exist within the arena of history, because the Christian community must not only play a role in the church, but also have social, public, and political relevance.

In the dramatic case of Auschwitz, Christianity was silent. Today everyone asks, "Where were we? Why wasn't there more outcry?" To keep such horrors from happening again, theology must begin to play a role in society and in history: specifically, my concern is with the everyday history of people, the bare circumstances of the lives they lead. So ours must be a theology of liberation—liberation from poverty in Latin America, and liberation from marginalization for blacks in the United States.

The twentieth century was also witness to the welcome process of decolonization, particularly in Africa. We imported Christianity there, but it has evolved into a local Christianity, flourishing within communities. In Asia, Christianity has had a more difficult journey, because outside of the Philippines, the Christian presence on the continent is only two percent. In Asia there are some very active Christian communities, but the number of faithful is small.

Another positive development of the last century was the movement for the emancipation of women, which originated in the United States and struck a strong chord in Europe. Alongside a feminist theology, the emancipation of women is also spoken of in the documents of the church and in an encyclical of the pope. Woman becomes a subject for reflection, and a totally new discovery of feminist thought occurs.

These would seem to be the most important developments at the end of the twentieth century. But my book departs from observations of the past, using them instead to analyze prospects for theology in this new century. The most significant of these prospects is, to my mind, interreligious dialogue.

In my book, I have tried to demonstrate the importance of religion. The twentieth century is often said to have been an era of secularism, but I do not believe that is true. Religion, first of all, should not be confused with fundamentalism—which is at the basis of this feared clash of civilizations. A war between nations lasts a month, a year, and then it finishes, but a clash between civilizations, between religious fundamentalisms, would amount to an infinite war. Interreligious dialogue does not aspire to become a megareligion, as someone has said, because each religion has its own identity. But this identity must be understood in relation to others in order that the world may have civil coexistence. The point is to preserve a social, cultural,

religious identity in the name of the unique human identity.

The twentieth century has been called a brief century, beginning in 1914 with World War I and the Russian Revolution in 1917, and concluding in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall and, in 1991, the dissolution of the Soviet Union. While the fall of the Berlin Wall marked a great opening, this period came to an abrupt end in 2001 with the September 11th terrorist attacks in the United States. So there was a twelve-year interval between the two centuries. The twenty-first century began with fear and uncertainty, which the current theology reflects. Today it is necessary to construct peace around justice, but in Pax Americana the elements for enduring peace are absent. Pax Americana cannot work because it is an imposed peace, moving things further toward the clash of civilizations. Instead, we need to stimulate the patrimony of peace that religions, being religions, must necessarily have. There is need to stimulate—and foster—interreligious dialogue.

*Regarding the clash of civilizations, how do you view the response of the American Catholic Church to the war against Iraq?*

America sustained a large wound from the September 11th attacks, but theology cannot support President Bush's politics in Iraq. American bishops distanced themselves from the stance taken by Bush, but the fact is, the American Catholic Church at the moment is dealing with the internal problem of pedophile priests. This is a big problem, and it has diminished the authoritative voice of the American bishops.

In particular, the American bishops were asking, what happened to the Democratic Party?

And the question in Europe was, what happened to Blair's Labor Party?

In the Catholic community, in consonance with the word of the pope, there has been a clear, decisive voice heard from the American bishops: peace.

*And the future of theology in other parts of the world?*

One can see a difference between Latin America and Asia. In Latin America there are ecclesiastical communities at the foundation. This is very important, as these communities provide an option for the poor. But in Asia, such ecclesiastical communities cannot exist because the number of faithful is too small and too uncertain. A consistent, large-enough number of Christians is necessary if they are to meet and know the solidarity of faith. There do exist, however, what may be called human communities in Asia that comprise a network of Catholics, Buddhists, and Hindus, and have as their goal the humanization of all people. □

*A landscape painting in ink on paper, dated 1445, and attributed to Shubun, a renowned painter-priest at Shokokuji temple in Kyoto. Three Zen priests wrote legends on the painting. Nara National Museum. National Treasure. 108 x 32.7 cm.*

# Religious Education and Global Responsibility

Can globalization become a tool that will allow the world's various cultures and religions to overcome reciprocal mistrust and see one another as part of a "whole"? Must we accept the fact that in many parts of the world religious thought and action still seem to embody Samuel P. Huntington's "clash of civilizations"?

These issues provided the broad background of speeches and workshops delivered by over fifty scholars of the world's religions at the eighth Forum of Nuremberg, Germany, held September 23–26 on the topic "Religious Education and Global Responsibility," and sponsored by the University of Nuremberg in cooperation with the Peace Education Standing Committee of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) and the European Association for World Religions in Education. The guidelines for the entire forum were these three main concepts: "Preservation—not exploitation and destruction," "Development—not stagnation and looking backwards," and "Reconciliation—not revenge and the spiral of violence and retaliation."

Though unable to attend personally, the keynote speaker, His Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, moderator of the WCRP's International Governing Board, sent a message that was read by Norbert Klaes, one of WCRP's international presidents. His Highness said that emotions are hard to control and thus in the sought-for explanation to a sad event that touched us deeply we want nothing more than to exact vengeance and try to find some justification for it in religious teachings. "Religious belief," the prince said, "is a powerful form of human energy that may be used for good or for ill." He added that the key to peace and

stability in the Middle East is an equitable negotiated settlement between Israelis and Palestinians and appealed to the international community to "commit itself to helping both parties to make difficult, but necessary, choices."

An optimistic outlook on the Middle Eastern crisis was given by Dr. Jacobus Schoeneveld, a Dutch theologian, and Faud Giacaman, director of the Arab Education Institute in Bethlehem. They presented an educational curriculum, teacher-training, and an in-school implementation project developed in cooperation with leading Palestinian and Israeli educators with the aim of promoting understanding and tolerance among Muslim, Christian, and Jewish youth in the Holy Land (Palestine and Israel) by concentrating on their religious heritage. There is also an interactive website that serves as an English, Arabic, and Hebrew forum for the exchange of information, experience, opinions, and general dialogue.

Ophir Yarden, from Israel's Interreligious Coordinating Council, presented two frameworks that brought together Jewish-Israeli and Arab-Palestinian-Israeli educators. One, an in-service training course for high-school teachers, had as its theme "Common Values from Our Different Religious Traditions," while the second group studied and discussed texts dealing with "The Land." In both frameworks the teachers studied texts taken from the various religious traditions.

The Rissho Kosei-kai delegate, Dr. Koichi Kawamoto, spoke of the *hoza* sessions of Rissho Kosei-kai. "*Hoza* is a kind of dialogue circle," said Dr. Kawamoto, "that takes place daily at the branches of the movement or at the believers' homes. *Hoza* is intended to give the group members an opportunity to share one another's suffering and joy.

We can find therefore that *hoza* plays an important role in people's everyday lives, thus appearing to be an effective method for solving their problems."

Dr. John Taylor, formerly secretary general of WCRP International and presently representative to the UN (Geneva) of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), spoke about the main problems in the history of the encounters of religions. Dr. Taylor said that in the context of religious education, it is necessary to learn about all religions and beliefs in a spirit of fairness and balance. He concluded that it is therefore important to train teachers in this field, since "inculcation of religious teachings is likely to be counterproductive. . . . We need a type of education that affirms true identity, that empowers freedom of choice, and that motivates respect for and activation of the ideal teachings of all religions and beliefs."

Lisa Billig, vice-moderator of WCRP Europe, emphasized that the media have the power to shape reality. "International media coverage of Muslim and Arab societies has helped produce Islamophobia," she said, "and much of the reporting from the Middle East has inflamed the cinders of anti-Semitism worldwide. Thus our aim is to achieve better communication between the media and religious communities in Europe."

Dr. Vinu Aram, another international president of the WCRP, described the rich cultural diversity of India today, and analyzed the ways in which spirituality among India's youth can be touched. Young people today, she felt, shy away from being defined as "religious," but if one can get beyond this word and talk of substance, they are more than ready to respond. □

Eva Ruth Palmieri

# A Wish-Fulfilling Kannon Beloved by Local Villagers

by Takeshi Kuno

*In the mountains of Niigata is a wonderful statue depicting the Wish-Fulfilling Kannon that was carved by the eighteenth-century itinerant priest and master sculptor Mokujiki Myoman.*

This seated statue of Nyoirin Kannon (Skt., Cintamanicakra Avalokitesvara; Nyoirin means “wish-fulfilling gem”) is enshrined in the Kannon Hall of the temple Shofukuji, located near Mount Oguri in Niigata Prefecture. This 74.1-cm statue was made by Mokujiki Myoman, a wandering Buddhist priest-sculptor. It is one of thirty-three statues of Kannon (one for each of the bodhisattva’s manifestations) in the hall. In 1803, just before Myoman set off for his second visit to disseminate Buddhist teachings in the Echigo region on the Japan Sea coast, the hall had burned down, and the villagers looked to him to carve its statues anew. Taking on the task, Myoman completed all the statues in the first twenty days of the eighth month. Tradition says that the statues were carved from a giant ginkgo tree that had stood high in the region and that the villagers had dragged up the mountain for that purpose. An inscription in black ink on the back of the statue says, “One of the thousand statues in Japan [made] for the tranquillity of the nation in my 86th year, while traveling around the country, [in] the eighth month of the third year of the Kyowa era [1803].”

Mokujiki Myoman was born in 1718 in the village of Furuseki (now part of Shimobe town) in the district of Nishi-Yatsushiro in Yamanashi Prefecture, and died on the fifth day of the sixth month, 1810. He was also known as Mokujiki Gogyo Myoman and as Gyodo Shonin, though he was generally called simply Mokujiki Shonin. “Mokujiki” (literally, “tree-eater”) was a term used from ancient times to refer to a priest who strictly observed the precept of never eating anything that had been cooked. The title Mokujiki Shonin does not necessarily refer to a particular individual; in actual fact, his name is more properly given as Mokujiki Myoman. He received the precepts at the age of forty-five from a priest called Mokujiki Kankai.

In 1773, Myoman made a vow to visit every part of Japan, and from then on he traveled the country from Hokkaido to Kyushu, and in compliance with the requests of the people he carved a great number of Buddhist statues. In 1779 and 1780 he traveled to Hokkaido, the northernmost island of Japan, which was then still largely unexplored, and carved many statues there. These continue to be cared for by villagers today, and the statue of Jizo Bosatsu (Bodhisattva Kshitigarbha) of Kannonji in the village of Tomari, for example, is thought by the villagers to be very fond of saké. Until very recently, it was said that whenever a certain youth of the village went drinking, he would carry the statue on his back. Having drunk his fill, he would take up the statue again and walk, but then he would start drinking again, saying that Jizo had not yet had enough. The names of all those who contributed to the carving of the statue of Jizo at Hozoji in Kumaishi village are inscribed on its back. These include Chokichi of Tsugaru, Matsutaro of Nanbu, Yahei of Tsugaru, and Nenosuke of Nanbu, who assisted Myoman in his work.

Around 1780 he constructed the Tochikubo Yakushi Hall and carved a Yakushi (Bhaishajya-guru) triad for it. Behind the hall is a river, and it was said that, until very recently, the statues were used as floats by children playing there. Between 1792 and 1797, Myoman carved large-scale statues of the Five Wisdom Buddhas (Gochi Nyorai) for the Hyuga Kokubunji, now in Miyazaki Prefecture. Around 1800 he returned to his native village, where the Five Wisdom Buddhas belonging to the temple Eijuan and a number of other Buddhist statues carved by him remain.

The statues made by Mokujiki Myoman are similar to those of Enku in that they are depicted with smiling faces, but they are quite different in terms of style (see the July/August, 2003 issue of DHARMA WORLD). Whereas Enku’s statues tend to be rather flat, a distinguishing feature of Myoman’s work is a rounded fullness of head and torso. □

*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.*

*(This article is the final installment in this series.)*



# Ananda and Rahula

by Gene Reeves

*All of the Buddha's closest disciples were the first, or greatest, at doing something. Ananda was first in "listening," and it is due to his memory that we have the sutras. Rahula was first in "quietly doing good." If we follow their example and be the best we can be, we can help to bring about world peace and human happiness.*

For anyone who is interested in the stories of the Lotus Sutra, chapter 9 ("Assurance for Arhats, Trained and in Training") is not at first as interesting as some other chapters in the sutra. The first time I taught a course on stories in the Lotus Sutra, I almost passed over it completely, thinking it to be not especially interesting. But whenever I look carefully in the Lotus Sutra, I find small gems of great wisdom. This can also be said of chapter 9.

## Ananda

The main characters in this story, Ananda and Rahula, are historical figures, people about whom we know a great deal. This does not, of course, mean that we should accept all of the stories about them as being true. There is a story in the Pali canon, for example, that Ananda came to earth from the Tushita heaven and was born on the same day as the Buddha. His father was the brother of the Buddha's father, Suddhodana.

The Buddha's early disciples were usually known for being first, or greatest, in something. Ananda was first in listening, particularly in listening to the teachings and sermons of the Buddha. For this reason he probably is the most famous of the disciples, as he is known for having remembered all of the teachings of Shakyamuni that later became the sutras.

Buddhist sutras begin with the words, "This is what I heard." We are to understand that this is Ananda speaking and that the sutra that follows is what he heard, and what he recited from memory at the First Buddhist Council shortly after the death of the Buddha. If this is true, or even close to being true, it is a truly remarkable accomplishment, as the Buddha taught for some forty-five years, during which he preached a great many sermons. Apparently there was no

writing in India at that time, and it was not until centuries after the Buddha's death that Buddhist texts were recorded in written form. Thus it may be that the vast bulk of Buddhist sutras were memorized by Ananda.

A cousin of Shakyamuni and a brother of the infamous Devadatta, Ananda joined the Sangha when he was about twenty, along with six other young nobles. At first, the request by Ananda and his brother to be allowed to join the Buddha's following was refused. So they became disciples of

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another religious teacher, but later, when they approached Shakyamuni a second time, permission was granted for them to join the group and become Buddhist monks. Five years later, at age twenty-five or so, Ananda was surprised by his selection to be Shakyamuni's personal attendant—a position he kept for about twenty-five years.

In the Jataka stories there are many tales about the relationship between Shakyamuni and Ananda in earlier lives, when Shakyamuni was a bodhisattva. Usually, Ananda is a brother, son, father, friend, or assistant to the future Buddha. Very often, either Ananda or the future Buddha is a king.

According to legend, Ananda was not able to achieve the awakening of an arhat during the Buddha's lifetime. Right up to the night before the Council at which he would recite the Buddha's teachings, he was unable to reach that highly sought stage. But late that night, before the dawn, as he was in the process of lying down to sleep, he suddenly became fully awakened, thus becoming eligible to participate in the Council along with all of the other fully awakened arhats.

Like Shakyamuni, Ananda was a Shakya noble. There are many stories about him and about his kindness toward women, and attractiveness to them. It was he, more than any other, who persuaded Shakyamuni to admit women into the Sangha, in particular, Shakyamuni's aunt and stepmother Maha-prajapati, thus creating the first Buddhist Sangha for nuns.

At the beginning of the fifth century, the Chinese monk Fa-hsien traveled to India, reporting extensively on what he saw and heard. At Vaishali, where it is said that the Buddha gave his last sermon, Fa-hsien found two stupas on opposite sides of the river, each containing half of the remains of Ananda. This was said to be a consequence of Ananda's body being cremated on a raft in the middle of the Ganges River. Nuns worshiped at the stupa of Ananda, since it was through his help that the community of nuns had been established.

It is written that Ananda lived to be a hundred and twenty years old. After he died, the following verses were added to the Pali canon:

Of great learning, bearer of the Dhamma,  
The guardian of the Great Seer's treasure,  
Ananda, the eye of the entire world,  
Has attained final Nibbana.

Of great learning, bearer of the Dhamma,  
The guardian of the Great Seer's treasure,  
Ananda, the eye of the entire world,  
Was a dispeller of gloom in the darkness.

The seer who was so retentive,  
Of keen memory and resolute,  
The elder sustaining the true Dhamma,  
Ananda was a mine of gems.  
(Theragatha, verses 1047–49, Pali Text Society, 1913)

The second of these verses might very well remind us of the passage at the end of chapter 21 of the Lotus Sutra, which says about anyone who can teach the truth:

Just as the light of the sun and the moon  
Can dispel darkness,  
Such a person, working in the world,  
Can dispel the gloom of living beings.

Perhaps the story of Ananda can remind us that we too can become dispellers of gloom!

### Rahula

Rahula was also known as a first, first in quietly doing good. It is said that this means that he followed the precepts, the rules for monks, very strictly.

As he was Shakyamuni's only son, it was only natural that Shakyamuni Buddha would make an extra effort not to show any favoritism toward him. Thus there are many stories of Rahula being treated by his father just like any other of the followers.

The name "Rahula" means "hindrance" or "obstruction." Thus his name is sometimes translated into Japanese as *Fusho*, meaning covering and obstructing. He is also sometimes known as *Shogatsu* in Japanese, meaning obstructing the moon, clearly associating him, or perhaps even identifying him, with the Hindu titan Rahu, who in mythology swallows the moon during an eclipse.

Born just days before the future Buddha left home, it is said that he was named Rahula by his grandfather after the future Shakyamuni announced immediately after the birth of his son that a "bond" (*rahula*) had been born. Like many sons of noble Shakya families of the time, the future Buddha apparently had been thinking of leaving home from a fairly young age. It is said that his father, the king, had arranged for his marriage to Yashodhara when he was nineteen in order to discourage him from leaving home. Ten years later, Rahula was born, and it was said that Shakyamuni called him Rahula because he created "bonds" of affection. This story would later be used to show how a bond of love can be an impediment or hindrance to one who wants to follow the life of a monk.

Though the date is far from certain, when Rahula was about nine, Shakyamuni returned to his home in Kapilavasthu with many of his followers and stayed in a bamboo

grove outside the city. Yashodhara pointed his father out to the boy, but Shakyamuni paid no attention to him at first. When they were about to leave, Yashodhara told Rahula to ask for his father's blessing. He did so, and Shakyamuni beckoned to him to follow him. When they reached the forest, Shakyamuni told Shariputra to shave the boy's head, put him in monk's robes, and make him a novice monk. In some accounts, Yashodhara tells Rahula to ask his father for his inheritance and his wealth, and the Buddha instead makes him the inheritor of his spiritual wealth.

Just as, according to Fa-hsien, nuns worshiped at the stupa of Ananda, novice monks worshiped at the stupa of Rahula.

### The Lotus Sutra Story

In previous chapters, the Buddha has assured various shravakas that in the future, perhaps in the very distant future, they will become buddhas. This includes the five hundred arhats in the previous chapter, chapter 8. At the beginning of this story, Ananda and Rahula go up to the Buddha and say that they think that they too are qualified to be assured of becoming buddhas. Then two thousand other disciples also get up and go to the Buddha and beg him to assure them of buddhahood.

The Buddha then assured Ananda that, after making offerings to six billion buddhas, he would become a buddha known as King of the Wisdom of Mountains and Seas Who Is Unlimited in Power and would be responsible for a buddha-land called Never Lowered Victory Banner, where he would teach countless bodhisattvas and be praised by an equally large number of buddhas. Of course Ananda was extremely happy. He suddenly remembered the teachings of billions of past buddhas, and he recalled his own original vow to teach and transform countless bodhisattvas.

There were some eight thousand bodhisattvas sitting in the congregation at that time. And they wondered why so many shravakas were being assured of supreme enlightenment, but not a single bodhisattva. Understanding what was on their minds, the Buddha explained that in a previous life Ananda and he had together aspired to become buddhas. But since Ananda had followed a way of listening while Shakyamuni had vigorously practiced, Shakyamuni had attained supreme awakening and Ananda had not. Since Ananda is now protecting the teachings and will protect the teachings of future buddhas, and will teach and transform bodhisattvas, causing them to achieve supreme awakening, he has been assured of becoming a buddha.

Then the Buddha spoke to Rahula, telling him that in the future he would become the eldest son of as many buddhas as there are specks of dust in the ten worlds, includ-

*Ananda, a thirteenth-century wooden statue from the workshop of Kaikei. Daihoonji in Kyoto. Important Cultural Property.*

ing finally the buddha who is Ananda in a future life. Then he himself would become fully awakened as a buddha named One Who Walks on the Flowers of the Seven Treasures. And then the Buddha explained that while others see Rahula only as the Buddha's son, he knew his hidden or quiet practices.

The Buddha then spoke to Ananda about the two thousand other disciples present, and explained that they would make offerings to as many buddhas as there are specks of dust in fifty buddha-worlds, honor those buddhas, and protect their teachings. Eventually these disciples will go to the worlds of the ten directions and become buddhas all at the same time, and all of them will be called Jewel Sign. Then the hearts and bodies of these two thousand were filled with joy.

World-honored One! Bright Lamp of Wisdom!  
 Hearing this voice of assurance,  
 We are filled with joy,  
 As though sprinkled with sweet dew!

### Teaching and Transforming Bodhisattvas

In this story we are told that Ananda will teach and transform innumerable bodhisattvas. The idea of transforming, or converting, bodhisattvas occurs quite often in the Lotus Sutra. In many variations, it is a central idea of the Lotus Sutra, but it is a concept that is a bit complicated, in part because two somewhat different things are being taught.

One is the idea that teaching or preaching is not teaching or preaching if no one is affected or changed by the teaching. In the Lotus Sutra, teaching is a relational activity, involving two sides. And it is not that one side is active and the other passive. Teaching goes on only when both sides are active. That is why the Lotus Sutra often speaks of the importance of receiving the sutra, and of making it a part of one's life. It is not enough to learn teachings merely as ideas in one's head, or as doctrines that can be recited. Real learning, transformative learning, only takes place when the teaching is integrated into one's very life and everyday actions. That is why teaching and transforming appear together so often, virtually as one word, in the Chinese version of the Lotus Sutra.

The second thing being taught here is the basic idea that human beings, especially shravakas, should be transformed into bodhisattvas. It is a fundamental tenet of Mahayana Buddhism that we should live a life of helping others; indeed, that our very salvation is a matter of helping others. This is the bodhisattva way of being active in the world.

What makes this idea complicated is that, according to the Lotus Sutra, everyone already is, at least to some degree, a bodhisattva. Everyone is already becoming a buddha.

So why is there a need to teach and transform people who are already bodhisattvas into bodhisattvas? Here, I believe, the sutra holds to two teachings that, if reduced to merely intellectual ideas, create a puzzle. It is a truth that has to be grasped imaginatively and existentially. Even though we are already practicing the bodhisattva way to some degree, all of us are also in continual need of being transformed, both by our own practice itself and by following the example of others, whose practice can inspire and teach us. Such transformation, such life-changing teaching and learning, is not something that happens once and then is over and done with; it is needed over and over again.

This should not, I believe, seem at all strange to Christians or to people of Christian background. There too, non-Christians are said to be in need of conversion. But that obviously is not the end of the matter, as one is invited to

*Rahula, a dry-lacquer statue sculpted in 734. Kofukuji in Nara, National Treasure.*

be converted to Christ over and over again, with every altar call. This is because such conversion experience involves dedication and rededication of one's life to Christ.

So, too, even Buddhist bodhisattvas, those who are on the way to becoming buddhas, are always in need of transformation, of rededication to the three treasures: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the community. In this story we find eight thousand bodhisattvas in the great assembly grumbling to themselves about the fact that while many shravakas were being reassured by the Buddha of their eventually becoming a buddha they themselves had received no such assurance. They are bodhisattvas! They know very well that they are to become buddhas. But they are still capable of petty jealousy and need to be reassured.

If bodhisattvas such as these who had learned directly

from the Buddha are capable of being jealous and petty at times, it should not be surprising that ordinary human beings are also quite capable of such attitudes and behavior.

### Why Are Ananda and Rahula Last?

Why were Ananda and Rahula the last of the disciples to receive assurance from the Buddha of becoming buddhas? Is it because they were closest to the Buddha?

Surely being so close to a buddha, or to any other great person, creates both special opportunities and special problems or temptations, especially perhaps the problem of favoritism and the temptation to inflated self-importance.

There are signs that favoritism, or the appearance of favoritism, may have been a worry for Shakyamuni Buddha and a problem and danger for both Ananda and Rahula. All three would have wanted to avoid creating jealousy among the monks, and, more positively, to be fair to all.

This points as well to the difficulty of leading those closest to us. Throughout the stories in the Lotus Sutra we find that characters who represent the Buddha have problems leading their children. In the early parable of the burning house, for example, the children in the burning house initially refuse to pay any attention to their father. We also often find sympathy being expressed for Shakyamuni Buddha because he is responsible for this world of suffering.

Collectively, both of these elements, and many other things, point to the closeness of the Buddha to ordinary human beings. Some might think of God or the Buddha as being extremely distant and different from ourselves. The famous Christian theologian, Karl Barth, used to describe God as "totally other." But in the Lotus Sutra it is the opposite: the Buddha is very close to us, concerned about us, and affected by us. That is why the Buddha's work, so to speak, is difficult. It is only because he cares about this world that his job is difficult.

It can be the same with us. We will often have the most difficulty leading those who are closest to us, our own children, or parents, or wives, or husbands. Often this should be a sign that things are as they should be. If life is difficult for the Buddha because he is close to the world, we should expect to have special difficulties with those who are closest to us. Those difficulties should be taken as a sign that we should strive to improve our relationships with those closest to us, even though we can expect this to be difficult at times.

The Buddha says that only he knows the hidden or quiet practices of Rahula. We cannot be certain about what this means, but it may be an indication of Rahula's modesty. We can imagine that, as the Buddha's only son, after becoming a monk, he would have been especially careful to try not to draw attention to himself. This would be in order to prevent the Buddha from being accused of favoritism. But

it might also have been an effort on the part of Rahula to avoid a false sense of his own self-importance.

The Lotus Sutra does not say that we can become totally selfless, completely pure in our dedication to others. It takes a more realistic approach of assuming that all of our intentions are to some extent self-serving. But it does teach, at least by example, that we should not seek acclaim for our own good deeds, thus creating an artificially inflated sense of self-importance or ego. It is better to do good quietly, without drawing attention to ourselves. We can imagine that Rahula was careful not to draw attention to himself, going about doing good quietly, doing good about which only the Buddha would know.

### Ananda's Original Vow

Like Shariputra in an earlier story, in this story Ananda recollects his original vow to teach and transform countless bodhisattvas. This is basically the vow of buddhas and especially bodhisattvas to save all living beings. Much earlier, in chapter 2, the Buddha said:

You should know, Shariputra,  
I originally took a vow,  
Wanting to enable all living beings  
To be equal to me.

In other words, buddhas and bodhisattvas dedicate their entire lives to saving others.

There are two kinds of vows, general vows (*sogan* in Japanese) and special vows (*betsugan*). Special vows, which might be termed "resolutions," are relative to time and circumstance, individual ability, and so on. They may change. Here, however, we are talking of the Buddha's original general vow, a vow that is said to be good for all. It is a four-part vow to study the teachings, eliminate evil passions, help others, and attain the Buddha Way, the supreme awakening. These four are sometimes known as the four great vows of followers of the bodhisattva way.

The idea of making a vow that will last for uncountable eons, a vow that is to be the very basis of one's life, stresses the importance of perseverance, persistence, or diligence. It is a fundamental teaching of the Lotus Sutra that we should set goals for ourselves, such as saving all the living, or world peace, goals that we know very well may never be fully realized. And having set such a goal, we should be devoted to pursuing it. This is why perseverance in the face of difficulties is one of the six bodhisattva practices or perfections. Following this way, we will not easily become completely discouraged, want to give up, or turn back. Defeats and losses can be expected, but even small victories in the struggle for world peace and human happiness will be a cause for joy. □

# The Joy of Faith

by Nichiko Niwano

*Meeting the Buddha through the medium of his teaching and emulating him is essential for cultivating the field of the heart and mind.*

When we cultivate the field of the heart and mind, what seed do we sow there? The most important thing in human life is to sow the seed of happiness. We can also call it the seed of life. Or we can call it the spiritual seed, the seed of the innermost human wish.

Shakyamuni told the brahmin Kasibharadvaja, "I too plow the soil, sow seed, and obtain food." He also said, "Faith is the seed." The seed we should sow in the field of the heart and mind to gain true happiness is the seed of faith in the Buddha Dharma.

In the *Senjisho* (The Selection of the Time) Nichiren wrote, "How fortunate, how joyous, to think that, with this unworthy body, I have received in my heart the seed of Buddhahood!"<sup>1</sup> The seed of buddhahood can also be termed the buddha-knowledge or the buddha-nature. It is, in short, the potential (the seed) to become a buddha. Sowing the

seed of buddhahood within oneself means sowing the seed of faith in the Buddha Dharma. The Buddha used the word *seed* as a metaphor for faith. We cultivate the soil of the field of the heart and mind and sow the seed of faith. That seed is the very source of life.

The Flower Garland Sutra describes the human condition as follows: "Making their karma the field of an ego, using the activities of the mind as seed, beclouding the mind by ignorance, fertilizing it with the rain of impure desires, irrigating it by the willfulness of an ego, they add the conception of evil, and carry this incarnation of delusion about with them."<sup>2</sup> Ignorance, impure desires, ego, and the conception of evil (misconstruing right as wrong and vice versa) are sources of delusion. Without realizing it, we accumulate these within ourselves. No doubt there are other sources of delusion, too. Suffice it to say that before encountering the Buddha Dharma we are a veritable mass of delusions. For this very reason, it is important that we cultivate the field of the heart and mind, expose delusion to the light of wisdom, and sow the seed of correct faith.

When self-centered people with no faith in the Buddha Dharma gain great ease, it soon turns to suffering; whenever they obtain what they want, they want still more, and as a result they lose a great deal. In responding to Kasibharadvaja's challenge, Shakyamuni ended his verse with these words: "Thus is this plowing of mine plowed. What one reaps from it is freedom from death. Having plowed this plowing, one is freed from all misery." "Freedom from death" means transcendence of birth and death, release from all suffering.

Because people focus their gaze on what is outside themselves, they tend to believe that poverty, sickness, strife, and other sufferings will be alleviated if something external changes. In regard to peace, for example, people focus all their attention on resolving the various outward problems that stand in its way. Until we resolve our own internal problems, however, we cannot resolve external problems.

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Realization of this—that is, a major transformation of all people—is the priority. To achieve this, too, our major task is to sow the seed of faith in the Buddha Dharma in our own field of the heart and mind and nurture it.

### Meeting the Buddha

Despite seeking what makes life truly worthwhile, we feel unsatisfied with our daily lives. This is because we have not yet met the one who has sought what makes life in this world most worthwhile. There are many people in the world, but we honor the Buddha above all others.

The Buddha indeed sought what makes life in this world most worthwhile. Therefore meeting and emulating the Buddha is the essential condition for cultivating the field of the heart and mind and sowing the seed of faith. Of course, we cannot actually meet the Buddha, so we do so through the medium of his teaching. To recognize the Truth and the Dharma to which Shakyamuni was enlightened and live in accordance with them are to meet and emulate the Buddha.

To encounter the Truth and the Dharma is to live earnestly and honestly, and to value our encounters with other people. Doing so deepens our awareness of the Truth and the Dharma. It is in this way that we can encounter the Buddha. For example, one spring day the wind scatters the petals of the cherry blossoms that have been in such glorious bloom. Surely we can see and feel the Buddha in this. Sometimes a casual comment by someone we have run

into jolts us into taking another look at ourselves. Surely that person is the Buddha, and those words are the teaching of the Buddha.

There are many people who live cheerfully in happy times, of course, but also in times of discouragement and suffering, seeing these as trials sent by the Buddha for their benefit. These people, I suspect, have encountered the Buddha and the Buddha's Law at a crossroads of life and have been reborn.

In chapter 16, "Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata," the Lotus Sutra teaches that the Buddha is "forever here preaching the Law." If we accept that the Buddha is always nearby, teaching the Law, we will meet the Buddha every day. Indeed, we are meeting the Buddha here and now.

### No Greater Joy Than Faith

To meet the Buddha, encounter the Buddha's Law, live earnestly and honestly, and value one's encounters—this is true happiness. According to legend, soon after his birth, Shakyamuni declared that, in effect, "I was born so that people the world over may find the path to happiness. I save all in heaven and on earth. I bring ease to all." If we can truly understand these words, we will have been able to meet the Buddha. Let us gratefully receive the Buddha's message that in all of heaven and earth, he alone can bring true happiness to all, help one another deepen our faith, and spread the faith widely.

Meeting the Buddha can be summed up as realizing the law of transience. This is the greatest aim of birth into this world. It releases us from all problems and enables us to live freely. To encounter the Buddha, recognize the Truth and the Dharma, awaken to the preciousness of life, share others' sorrow and suffering and make their joys our own, transmit the Truth and the Dharma to others so that they may awaken to the blessing of having been granted life—for a person of faith there can be nothing that makes life more worthwhile.

Talk of the Truth, the Dharma, and the law of transience sounds rather forbidding. But to encounter the Truth and the Dharma is to encounter Shakyamuni, to encounter the Buddha and his Law. It is to take refuge in the Buddha and in the Law and to live seriously, together with others. Herein are found faith and the essence of cultivation of the field of the heart and mind. □

### Notes

1. Philip Yampolsky, ed., *Selected Writings of Nichiren* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 239.
2. *The Teaching of Buddha* (Tokyo: Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, 1985), p. 64.

# Meeting the Buddha through Experience

by Yasuhiro Inoue

*A man who took inordinate pride in himself for starting a successful advertising agency learned humility in a painful way when business began to fail. This article is based on the speech he made in the Great Sacred Hall in September 2000.*

Let me not forget to be modest again today." Every morning I kneel before the Buddhist altar at home to set myself straight for the day before I go to work. Whenever something comes up, I stop to take a good look at myself, and ask myself if I am not becoming self-centered and forgetting to be grateful.

Six months ago, such a thing would have been unimaginable for me. I have always had more pride than most people and hated to be told what to do by anyone. When I was twenty-nine years old, I quit the English conversation school I had been working at and decided to set up an advertising agency. I did this on my own, starting from nothing.

At first, the company produced advertising and educational videos, but we went on to expand our business to include producing television and radio shows, events, and web pages for the Internet. My only goal was to increase our profits as quickly as possible and enlarge the company. Every day I threw myself completely into my work.

No matter what type of work, the one thing all jobs have in common is the importance of quality planning. Success or failure depends on whether we can produce better plans than our competitors. I avariciously scouted around for business because I wanted to survive in the advertising world. I schemed to get even one more job away from our competitors and bid for as many orders as possible in order to build up our track record. However, even if we landed a good order, if our product did not meet the client's expectations, there would be no more jobs forthcoming. Employees that did not add to our reputation were severely scolded: "Why do you think we're paying you a salary? You're welcome to quit any time!"

Seventeen years after the company's formation, we had grown so far as to secure most of the work originating from

all of the local governments in Ibaraki Prefecture. Newspapers and magazines around the country interviewed me as a rising young star in the business, and the leaders of various local clubs and organizations often asked me to speak at their events or to be one of their trustees or board members. "I have realized my dream. I fear nothing," is how I felt. I now mixed every day with others who were also considered successful, taking part in golf tournaments and banquets. I was full of my own achievements and a sense of superiority.

## The Downfall Begins

At the peak of my happiness, I had a telephone call from Mrs. Kiyo Endo, chapter leader of the Tsuchiura Branch, who is responsible for my district. "We would be very pleased if you could talk about your personal experiences during the men's groups' pilgrimage to the Great Sacred Hall at Risho Kosei-kai headquarters. How about it?"

I answered without hesitation that I would be delighted. I belong to the second generation of faithful in my family, and when I was about twenty years old, I served as chapter leader for the youth group. However, when I became much busier in my job, I also became distanced from religious activities. Both my work and my personal life were going well, and as I had no particular problems, I felt I had no real reason to engage in religious activities. I personally had a lot of titles, however, and had taken on the task of helping revitalize the Tsuchiura area. So I decided to make a special appeal on the group pilgrimage to the effect that it would be a good thing if Risho Kosei-kai produced more people like myself. I communicated this idea to Rev. Hiroyo Torii, head of the Tsuchiura Branch, who smiled at my arrogant attitude, and said, "Your work is certainly on the

cutting edge of the times. I'll get in touch with you if we formally decide to invite you to speak."

I was a little annoyed, thinking to myself, "Well! I usually get a hundred thousand or two hundred thousand yen to speak, and here I am offering to speak for free, and now they're putting off their final decision? That's pretty rude," and I immediately left.

A few days after that, we received a complaint about a web page on which we had staked our company's reputation. The client called to say it was not working properly. This was a major job we had spent several years working on, and we had put a lot of money, time, and effort into it. And now, a lot of people were being inconvenienced, and I feared that trust in our company was also being quickly eroded.

That was only the beginning. Complaints about our work started coming in one after the other from various clients. And even before we had succeeded in clearing up the first problem, we found mistakes and defects in a variety of our other products. We also started to experience a rash of other problems, including soured relationships with clients.

Within the company, employees started trying to lay the blame on each other. Moreover, their dissatisfaction with my despotic business style and unreasonable company rules started to boil over, and the result was chaos.

This was too sudden a downfall from the peak of success, and my self-confidence as a manager deserted me. I was completely isolated within the company, and every time the telephone rang my heart jumped at the thought that this was another complaint. I could not work.

I could not relax even at home, but just sat around smoking and drinking, unable to sleep for days on end, thinking, "Why did this have to happen to me?" While I was sitting there sighing over my troubles, I could hear my wife and children chattering and laughing happily. To me, it sounded like even my family was laughing at me. I thought, "How can they laugh when I am suffering like this? They should be encouraging me."

I learned later that my wife was trying to cheer me up by making our home, at least, a happy place for me. But at that time I could not imagine that my wife was being kind.

"Maybe I should just give up and kill myself." At about the time when I started brooding over this idea, for some reason the image of the Buddha, whom I had long forgotten, rose up in my mind. "I wonder if the Buddha would reach out even to someone like me," I thought.

### Being Thoughtful of Others

When I went to the branch to seek guidance, Rev. Torii spoke to me as if she could read my thoughts. "It's hard for you, I know. But you might consider it an opportunity to

look back on how you have been acting up until now. Why don't you try being thoughtful of other people?" When she said, "being thoughtful of other people," the words struck me hard, right in the chest.

Ever since that moment, I have dedicated myself to understanding the meaning of her words by bending my mind toward the Buddha and chanting the sutra every day. Each day continued to be filled with problems and trouble, but one day I realized with a start what Rev. Torii meant. I realized that through the compassion of the Buddha, I had been given this whole series of problems as a way of correcting my approach to life.

When I thought about it, I realized that I always gave first preference to my own feelings. I thought of nothing but getting profit for myself, ruthlessly attacking my competitors' companies and slighting my employees. Without rivals, however, our company would never have grown to its present level, and unless our employees produced the work, I would never have been able to secure further orders.

"I thought I had done everything all by myself. But by myself I could have done nothing. That is what the reverend was saying." When this realization came to me, I was aghast at my own arrogance.

Ever since this realization, I have persuaded myself that I must become someone who can easily bow in thanks to others, and I have gone around to apologize to every one of our clients who was inconvenienced. At the company, we have instituted a monthly breakfast meeting where we can exchange views, and company rules have been made more flexible.

When I used to get "psyched up" to win, the truth was that this backed my spirit into a corner, tormenting me. Now, however, I have become able to accept orders with real gratitude and can pursue my work with modesty. This makes me feel happy and relaxed.

By putting me through a trial, the Buddha taught me what my weak point was. A person's success does not lie in position or honors, but rather in the possession of a heart that can feel true gratitude to other people. From now on, I hope I can make my customers happy and make my company a pleasant place to work for my employees.

When I started to feel this way from the heart, I had a telephone call from Rev. Torii asking me if I would give that talk. "I'm willing, even if only one person is there to listen. I hope what I have to say will be helpful to somebody."

On the day of my speech about my personal experience, I headed for the Great Sacred Hall feeling as if I had been reborn. □

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# The Updating of the Vinaya

by George A. Sioris

*A conclusion is growing in some circles that the time has come to adapt the traditional rules of Buddhist discipline to the needs of the modern world. This article examines the concept of "rules" both Eastern and Western in order to help Buddhism renew itself yet keep its traditions.*

Thanks to the guidance of Professor H. Durt, I have been introduced, together with sources, to a short but very interesting work entitled *A Critical Study of the Vinaya*, by an author identified only by his initials, "S. J."

The 52-page-long study argues for the need "to bring Vinaya into accord with modern times." This is the gist of the effort.

At first glance, everything seems logical, legitimate, and

perhaps justifiable. Besides, this line of thinking cannot be considered a subjective extravaganza; it is to be assumed that similar ideas must have crossed the minds not only of enemies, but also of many friends of the Buddhist doctrine. (Christmas Humphreys, for instance, argues along the same line of thinking [p. 137], writing that "rules devised 2,500 years ago may have to be modified for the benefit of Western Buddhists.")

The approach of the author is very considerate, humble, articulate, and obviously emanates from a genuine and sincere wish to uplift the Doctrine through long overdue adjustments of its Discipline, for the benefit of Buddhism in general and in every corner of the earth where it is present. So it is clear from the beginning that we are not dealing with a text of polemics, but with an effort for constructive criticism. What is the main point of the argument? "That which refuses to move with the times is left behind to die."

If the Buddha were alive today, he would "immediately refrain or abolish many of the rules." The alternatives to overhauling the Vinaya are the following:

1. to ignore change in world circumstances (something possible only in Buddhist countries and even there with many difficulties);
2. to resort to subterfuge and hypocrisy, "observing the letter but not the spirit of the Law"; and
3. to ignore fossilized rules and to modify them (in non-Buddhist countries, particularly in the West).

The author does not, of course, take upon himself the onus of review, but he calls for instituting a "commission of senior members" of the Sangha.

In continuing, the author summarizes the rules of the *Patimokkha* (code of precepts) and draws attention to specific cases where adherence to them is today either

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impossible or has been turned into a parody. His comments appear to have covered every corner, every contradiction, and to give special emphasis on the need to adjust the Vinaya in accordance with concepts in the West in particular.

The final conclusion is the following: "The need for revision is long overdue and becomes more pressing every day. The points here are offered tentatively as groundwork for discussion, but the urgent need for discussion has to be seen. It cannot be forced on the Sangha. One can only point to the urgency."

I hope that I have given a truthful summary of the interesting argument without doing too much injustice to the author. But as he calls for "discussion," I would like to put forward a few thoughts of criticism on his critical views. This refutation may be criticized as a rather rigid and conservative approach, but, at least in my mind, it is anchored in other "realities on the ground" and strives to maintain a genuine disposition of objectivity as much as possible.

A more concrete formulation of the counter-arguments becomes appropriate at this point.

1. Nowhere in this study can we find any reference to the "golden legacy" of the Buddha, the Mahapadesa, the famous "great standards" for the future, which discuss the "spirit of Vinaya." This seems an essential omission, since the Buddha has indicated how he saw his whole disciplinary system evolving in the future centuries. If we ponder the spirit of those standards, we can trace a very wide framework, a very clear spiritual compass, with no possible indications for institutionalized periodic revisions of his "legislation." This does not mean "fossilization"; such an assumption runs counter to the whole spirit of the Buddha, who has consistently shown moderation, tolerance, and leniency in terms of both Doctrine and Discipline.

2. The institution of "a commission of senior members of the Sangha" may sound reasonable, but in reality it is nothing but a transplant from the domain of civil practices. How would these members be elected? How would they decide? (Just by majority, even though "unanimity" is the ideal situation in Buddhism?) How could the balance between Mahayana and Theravada communities be guaranteed? Of course, some "elders" in early Buddhism had also modified clauses, but those were very different times, perhaps even before the great split of the traditional and the Mahayanic school and in a general climate of *samavayo* (concord).

Where in our days and times could we possibly find someone with the stature of King Asoka, who convened a council for the revision of the Tripitaka? Or, later, his counterpart in Sri Lanka, King Parakramabahu (1153–86) who purified the Sinhalese order? Or the Burmese king Dhammazedi (1472–92), who invited all senior and learned

*bhikkhus* to consult with him in order to stop schisms and the disintegration of the order? (Prince Damrong, pp. 61–62).

3. Adjustments following the habits of the country in which Buddhism is practiced are not to be dismissed *prima facie*. Indeed, there is benefit to be drawn from such accommodation regarding not only Buddhism, but any religion with a missionary drive. (This encompasses a whole chapter in the history of Christianity in Japan, or in China, to mention just two examples.) But adjustments cannot prejudice the basic tenets of the *sasana* (teaching), yielding all the way to cultural and other "requirements" in other countries.

The Doctrine and Discipline cannot be diluted beyond certain limits. What the Buddha himself proclaimed should not be forgotten: The welfare of the Order (Sangha) will be kept "so long as the brethren shall not come to a stop on their way [to Nirvana] because they have attained to any lesser thing" (Mahaparinibbana-suttanta). In our times, a *bhikkhu* (Ariyesako, p. 6), formulated very succinctly the same ideas: "While the particulars may have changed, the fundamentals remain the same." It is to be noted that while we are talking of adjustments, we are at the same time conscious that the basic tenets of Buddhist monasticism are still relevant, that they have withstood the test of time. What could be the reasons? The answer is evident, but once again I find Bhikkhu Ariyesako's formulation most pertinent: "Perhaps it is because the Lord Buddha understood the basic human condition of *every time and place* [my emphasis]; he knew our predicament and failings, and he could show the way out to those of us who follow so long after him." In a nutshell, the core of the matter is one of diachronic values.

4. There is too much emphasis on the need to make adjustments "in the West," as if the whole exercise were aimed at facilitating the propagation of Buddhism in the West. But Buddhism has historically flourished mainly in the East. No one would object to—in fact, everybody would welcome—its spreading to the West, but we should not lose sight of facts in the East: there, over the course of centuries, adjustments did take place, gradually and naturally. Even some "reverse" evidence may be found in contemporary Japan: the Ritsu sect—granted, a very small school—demands adherence to old Vinaya rules, with 250 precepts for monks and 348 for nuns, with weekly convocations concerned with confession. In my talks with practicing and dedicated Theravada monks in Thailand, they insist on following their traditions, they are absolutely aware of different "Vinayas" in other Asian countries, but they also accept the inevitability of this differentiation, due to climate, habits, concepts, etc. After all, it is only natural that the

Vinaya had to undergo many and deep changes, as it was progressing from its cradle eastward and northward, to Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan. These are huge places of different climate, topography, customs, mentality, and culture. Even in different contexts, less important than the Vinaya, we witness a similar process. For instance, and simply to illustrate the point, we may refer to the Jataka stories about Prince Visvantara and his consort, Madri, and the former's dramatic offering of his children and wife to a brahmin, as the prince followed his path to become a bodhisattva, renouncing everything most precious to him. Here we have a beautiful story, not a whole monastic codification. But still,

2,500 years. Apart from some changes in a period after the Buddha's extinction, there have been splits, of course, but no major updating of Discipline in the sense urged today. Naturally, our era is monumentally different, at the dawn of the information-technology revolution. But this does not mean that, if we look at these twenty-five centuries as a whole, there have not been other waves of change of similar or equal importance. How is it, then, that no revisions were attempted at these other crucial turning points? Rules were put aside, indeed, as the Doctrine moved eastward, but this was done slowly, progressively, almost naturally, without vociferous debates in various committees. I am conscious

that I may convey here the rather conservative position of the Theravada school, but this happens to be the message of several related discussions I have had with committed monks, especially in northern Thailand. "The Sasana has to proceed as originally taught and let those who wish to, follow it; of course, we are aware of changes in the Discipline, but we do not antagonize them; let each fraternity proceed, keeping the spirit of the Doctrine." This is what I hear in various temples around Chiang Mai. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, a Western monk who has greatly contributed to Vinaya understanding in the West, stresses in this matter a certain pattern "*that has repeated itself* [my emphasis] through the history of the Theravadin tradition: That of returning to the original principles whenever the religion reaches a historic turning point" (Thanissaro, p. 15).

7. Even assuming that the proposed institutional "re-drafting of the Disciplinary constitution" materializes—a very remote possibility indeed—and that there is unity of Vinayas throughout the Buddhist world, this does not mean that other theoretical divergences that emerged during the centuries, some of which created the great schism between the traditional and the Mahayanic school, will automatically disappear. We should bear in mind on this point what Pachow has written (p. 31): "It is clear that indications given in the literature of the schools prove that the cause of the schism was *more on the side of doctrine than on that of disciplinary rules*" [my emphasis].

8. Lord Buddha himself never wished to found a "centralized" religion. There was "no Vatican or Caliphate to regulate its affairs and ensure orthodoxy," writes J. Snelling (p. 91). A considerable latitude was intended that "could be construed as rich diversification—or dangerous deviation;

*Local residents in the North Hollywood section of Los Angeles bow after Thai Buddhist monks accept food from them.*

as Professor Durt remarks, (Durt, *Madri*, p. 156), "as the tale moves from standard Buddhism to Mahayana as well as from India to China, we can see an evolution in the attitudes towards the actions of protagonists and others." Vinaya therefore went through similar processes, without losing for this reason its inner spirit.

5. The author objects to the rule that a *bhikkhu* must never hasten death as something that would "sound strange today." Obviously, he sides with those who preach euthanasia. The observation is valid, but it is equally valid—and this is not mentioned in the text on "overhauling Vinaya"—that even today there is no unanimity on this extremely delicate question. I do not wish to open here this debate, but simply to put on record that the present-day answers to this question are far from final or universal.

6. Buddhism and Vinaya in particular have a history of

even degeneration.” Some may take the latter view; for my part, I opt for the former, although quite conscious that there is no final answer.

9. Snelling, in another passage (p. 101), stresses one more very interesting angle. Noting in early Buddhism a bias in favor of monasticism, he sees in Mahayana a tendency for more emphasis on the side of laity and he concludes: “There have in fact been various attempts to move the focus of Buddhism away from the monastery over the centuries, but these have achieved little success. Buddhism has always gravitated towards the monastic side of the spectrum of orientations.” This is indeed a wider topic at the origin of many scholarly discussions. Even Professor Durt—a dedicated disciple of the great Etienne Lamotte—does not feel comfortable with the latter’s thesis of Mahayana as “a lay movement,” and he insists on the essentially “monastic” characteristic of Buddhism (*Col. de Strash.*, p. 3). In the same way, it seems to us, efforts to modify the Vinaya externally have failed and will also fail; if changes have to appear, they will appear naturally, gradually, and from the inside. As long as the basics are respected, adjustments will occur without jeopardizing the whole system. I may sound repetitious, as if contaminated by the flourished, repetitive style of Vinaya itself, but I may be forgiven for stressing once again that if the Buddha had elevated the case of “claiming a state or quality of furthermen” to the crucial rule of the Parajika (the four most serious offenses leading to expulsion from the Sangha)—a case not encountered, at least in the same form, in any other Christian Rule, Western or Eastern—it was to safeguard the total purity of the Dhamma. The other main pillar of his edifice, Vinaya, he also wished to remain equally pure, with the allowances of the four Mahapadesas (“great standards”) and the possibility of relaxing the “lesser and minor rules.”

Having said all the above, what could be the best solution?

We think that the school of “revisionists” forgets one more alternative: To proceed in a natural and flexible way, as has already happened in other countries of Asia, beyond the apparent Theravada “rigidity.” Many rules have been modified in a sort of natural process and others will continue to be adjusted as our world is not static. A radical revision cannot abolish, as if by a magic stroke, all the accumulated hypocritical attitudes unfortunately inherent in humans of every denomination. A radical revision could lead to something compatible with the times, eventually, but that would not be the Vinaya in essence anymore. The flexible spirit of the Buddha allows certain archaic dispositions to meet their natural death; others will continue to be applied. “When I am gone, Ananda, let the Order, if it should so wish, abolish

all the lesser and minor precepts,” said the Buddha himself, as reported in the Mahaparinibbana-suttanta. After all, the whole Vinaya was not envisaged as a straitjacket “codification,” with no air coming through. “Buddhist followers of all types,” writes Nakamura, (*Buddh. in Comp. Light*, p. 78), “have been comparatively individualistic. They have not on the whole submitted to a rigid outer authority. Indian Buddhism has never known any strong regulative body for enforcing authority. The regulative power of the Buddhist order was rather weak.” Vinaya was and is a spiritual constitution that does not need periodic revisions like the other constitutions of the world. As long as there is a sincere feeling of adhering to the spirit of these old admonitions—in conjunction with their attending commentaries—without too much emphasis on the letter, Vinaya will endure in the future! (Besides, one more point that the revisionist school tends to forget: If new, modern rules are stipulated, what will happen to the valuable accompanying material? Will it be studied by minorities of eccentric “palaeontologists of Vinaya,” as an independent and almost irrelevant body of old commentaries? And will the new rules project the same aura, standing there, in the midst of a materialistic world, alone, in the frigid temperature of a modern legislative terminology?) Besides all the above, we should also take into account two more instances coming straight from Buddhist texts. The Kakacupama Sutta proclaims that in cases of lapses of *bhikkhus*, “it was enough for them to be reminded of it.” This idea, transposed for example in north-east Asia, where practices are very different from those in the Theravada lands—and where, it has also to be added, there is no more separate Vinaya—means that monks should ponder by themselves upon their behavior. After all, the same basic idea prevails in the “conservative” sphere of Buddhism. In Burma, for instance, *Patimokkha* practice, at least until the late eighties, was the following:

“Venerable Sir, may I disclose all my sins.”

“All right, all right, all right.”

“... I confess [these sins] under your kindness and consideration.”

“Do you realise that they are sins?”

“Yes, Venerable [One].”

“Next time you shall restrain well, my fellow.”

(Sao Htun Hmat Win, p. 1)

Once again, we witness the paramount role of self-realization and self-restraint. Whatever the basic legislation, it is up to individual monks to try and conform with the spirit of the Rules. I may be excused if I quote extensively on this point from a text on Buddhism and Thai society, which

applies in a broader sense both to Dhamma and Discipline and to the whole Buddhist world: "Differences in doctrinal interpretation and modes of practice are a common phenomenon in every major religion, including Buddhism. It is natural that living faiths will be subject to investigation and reinterpretation that in some cases lead to differences in opinions and views. If these find sufficient support and a large enough following, the result is often the formation of a new school of thought within that particular religion. New modes of training have also been introduced. Some schools have continued to grow, while others were little more than passing phenomena. We may regard this as a natural manifestation of events, especially since Buddhism is very much a living religion, dynamic and open." These words, in my opinion, de-dramatize the need for legalistic adjustments to ways of behavior that have to follow a more relaxed, but also more responsible, pattern of application.

### Drawing on Orthodox Tradition

I had hinted at the beginning at the possibility of drawing some ideas on these complex matters from the Orthodox tradition. Indeed, the study of Orthodox Christianity, of the series of Rules established for the best possible functioning of monastic fraternities, points to a continuous line of values and principles, firmly based on the Holy Scriptures. Rules have been formulated in the course of time, but to any objective student, there are no enormous contradictions or differences among them, nor is there apparent an agony for periodic revisions, to bring them in line with new social and other conditions. Additions and adjustments have been implemented indeed, but the "roots" of the disciplinary system have always been the same. The history of the various *Typika* of Athos is analogous. The other monasteries, throughout the Orthodox world, keep drawing from the same sources. In a way, one gets the impression that the emphasis is moving somehow from the disciplinary to the "liturgical" aspect and the newer *Typika* reflect this tendency, because the framework of discipline, with some variations, is kept basically the same. Times may change, but the tenets of monasticism are perennial. Perhaps the ultimate impression one gets from a pilgrimage to Athos is of a mental flight to the very heart of Byzantium. Naturally, the Church as a whole has to listen to the pulse of a changing society; but the inner structure of the "angelic state" of her monkhood does not necessarily have to shed the beauty of its beginnings. As Archbishop Stylianos of Australia eloquently reminds us in a different context (p. 602), the best compass is always the wisdom we find in the proverbs of the Bible (Prov. 22:28): "Do not move an an-

cient boundary stone set up by your forefathers." This idea, I may add, is also reflected in the second Epistle to the Thessalonians: "So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thess. 2:15).

Even most recently and today, in the midst of this universal exhilaration over the enormous potential of the information and technology revolution, there are still monastic figures faithful to the old ideas. Whether the world may characterize them as "ultraconservative"—after all, some people dismiss not only the rules, but the whole monastic system, Christian, Buddhist, or Islamic, as "a phenomenon of intellectual decay" (Theoclitos, p. 82)—for many Orthodox monks "backwardness" is not something to be "feared" but something to be "aimed at"! "Going centuries back," writes Abbot Christodoulos (p. 132), "we shall encounter the glory of monasticism and the Church, the Holy Fathers whom we still hold as hope for the world and models for ourselves." Monk Theoclitos once again (Theocl., pp. 259 and 269) eloquently underlines what we have repeatedly mentioned: "No spiritual institution can ignore its times, if it were to survive; [but] the fundamentals of Orthodoxy cannot be adulterated. . . . I do not mean the abolishment of adamantine paternistic pillars but a rejuvenation with some adjustments to the present needs of the Church." In other words a call for distinction between what is "surface" and what is "substance."

Of course, as we said earlier, some adjustments have taken place. St. Theodore of Studium "supplemented the somewhat theoretical rules of St. Basil by specific regulations concerning enclosure, poverty, discipline, study, religious services, fasts and manual labour," as pointed out by Klemens Löffler (p. 1). At the same time, "a great number of decrees of Synods, ordinances of patriarchs, emperors and abbots, further defined and expanded the rule of St. Basil," adds A. Fortescue (*East Monast.*, p. 4). On the other hand, rules have not always been blindly obeyed: Despite St. Basil's firm position on the "enclosure" of monks, "they have travelled about, with the consent of their superiors and with the excuse that they were engaged in business of the *lavra* [monastic community] or of the Church in general," as Fortescue observes in another instance. The same writer goes even to the point of stating that since St. Basil, "that order obtains still. In its inner life Eastern monasticism has been extraordinarily stationary" (*ibid.*, p. 2).

Another observation (Besse, p. 1) points to a basic similarity with the situation of Vinaya, as it obtains throughout the Buddhist world. "This tradition was enriched as time went on by the decisions of councils, by the ordinances of the Emperors of Constantinople, and by the regulations of

a number of revered abbots. Thus there arose a body of law by which the monasteries were regulated. Some of these laws were accepted by all, others were observed in the houses of some one country, while there were regulations which applied only to certain communities. In this regard Oriental monasticism bears much resemblance to that of the West; a great variety of observances is noticeable. The existence of the Rule of St. Basil formed a principle of unity." In the Buddhist world, we do not have, of course, intrusions by "Emperors," that is, of temporal authorities, but, apart from this exception, the rest is more or less the same. One fundamental text prevails, while accretions and modifications are tolerated. The same writer, Besse, goes even further, when discussing the situation in other areas apart from St. Basil's Cappadocia: "The monasteries of Cappadocia were the first to accept the Rule of St. Basil; it afterwards spread gradually to all the monasteries of the East. Those of Armenia, Chaldea, and of the Syrian countries in general preferred instead of the Rule of St. Basil those observances which were known among them as the Rule of St. Anthony. Neither the ecclesiastical nor the imperial authority was exerted to make conformity to the Basilian Rule universal." Consequently, we witness again a gradual and flexible process, not very different from the one in Buddhist areas. Whether we talk about "schismatic Basilians," "Catholic Basilians," or "Latin Basilians," the important part remains the term "Basilians."

Characteristically, a similar situation is witnessed even in Western monasticism, where "no changes of importance have taken place since St. Benedict's rule gradually eliminated all local customs" (G. R. Huddleston, *Mon.*, p. 6). The same author observes a certain overlapping of the Rules of St. Benedict and St. Columbanus, a union of two or more Rules as at Luxeuil, Solignac, and elsewhere, and he finally interprets the last chapter of St. Benedict's Rule as pointing "almost to contemplate such an arrangement" (*ibid.*, p. 3). Our own reading of this crucial chapter is nevertheless different and more in tune with the Buddhist concept of the perennial character of Dhamma and Vinaya. St. Benedict refers constantly to the safe anchors of the Holy Scriptures and teachings of the Holy Fathers as an ultimate recourse. But we are in agreement with Huddleston when he talks about the famous Assembly of 817 C.E. at Aix, which passed many resolutions "to decree, even in the minutest details, an absolute uniformity in all the monasteries of the empire," so that it might seem as if "all had been taught by one single master in one single spot" (*ibid.*, p. 3). The result was a complete failure and this has some connection with our present topic, showing the extreme difficulty of trying to impose new uniform concepts, departing from the older established wisdom. As a result, St. Benedict's system pre-

vailed until the famous reform of Cluny, which also provoked intense reactions, as is very well known.

By restricting myself to the study of monastic rules, I should naturally be also conscious of a much larger debate going on in our times, especially focusing on the need for Catholicism—but also Orthodoxy—to abandon rigidity and to listen to the aspirations of the faithful of the twenty-first century. "To survive it is necessary to adapt" is the epitome of lengthy relevant argumentation by Baigent and Leigh (pp. 284, 288) and by scores of other members of the Roman Catholic Church. This chapter is far too large to be examined here, but it is paramount that all similar views, provided they are sincere and not simply polemical, be respected within certain limitations so that "adaptation" does not assume the proportions of "total substitution."

The preceding discourse was of course a slight digression, as we are mainly focusing on the Eastern tradition, but it was still helpful in a broader comparative context.

Coming back once again to the Eastern framework, we notice a trend that bears some similarity with Mahayana's distancing from certain strict Theravada rules: Armenian monks, we are told (A. Fortescue, *East. Mon.*, p. 7), follow St. Basil's Rule, but are much stricter in the matter of fasting. The novitiate lasts eight years. It is a curious contrast to this strictness that the abbot is often not a monk at all, but a married secular priest who passes down his office to his son by "hereditary right." This is very much in existence in present-day Buddhist temples in Japan.

Some additional observations from Eastern Christianity show that despite the overwhelming preponderance of the Rule of St. Basil, the great monastery of St. Catherine in Sinai professes to follow the old Rule of St. Anthony. No one, nevertheless, would place undue emphasis on this fact, as the Monastery of Sinai is clearly included within the parameters of the great Eastern tradition.

A glimpse at the eighth chapter of the Rule of St. Augustine leads to a better understanding of the fundamental philosophy of this Rule, in fact of all similar Rules: "The Lord grant that you may observe all these precepts in a spirit of charity as lovers of spiritual beauty, giving forth the good odour of Christ in the holiness of your lives; not as slaves living under the law but as *men living in freedom under grace*" [my emphasis]. At some points in time, whether in Buddhism or Christianity, some codifications of regulations regarding monks have been considered necessary. But we have to view them rather as moral compasses than legal straitjackets, as texts of a higher, spiritual level, themselves firmly anchored on either the Dhamma or the Bible. They both point to certain directions of behavior, but it would be indeed meaningless to theorize that their application concerns "slaves." In both traditions, entrance to

seclusion is totally voluntary; therefore, "Rules" even apply to "free" consciences. Rules are points of reference, guiding signs, perhaps gradually modified with the passage of time or with missionary expansion, unforeseen at the time of legislating. It is the "world" that feels the need to revise, at times, even constitutions, the basic laws, not to speak of ordinary laws; great religious systems do not have to follow such trends: They stick to their roots, otherwise they become irrelevant.

The expression "living in freedom under grace" in the Augustinian text is firmly anchored at the core of the fundamental teachings of the Eastern Orthodox Church, where

adherence both to articles of faith and rules of discipline. "Any shortcomings in the administration of the Orthodox Church," he writes, "are due to the fact that this Church had no opportunity to convene an ecumenical synod during a period of outside political upheavals and foreign domination. The synod is the only authoritative body that issues new canons of order and eliminates obsolete ones. However, these shortcomings deal with and affect only the external affairs of the Church" (*ibid.*, p. 13). This last statement presents several components. It is connected to "external" elements of disruption, something less important in the Buddhist context under the framework examined

here. It accepts periodical reevaluations of canons, etc., but only by an "ecumenical synod," without any mention of "committees," etc. Finally, while accepting the idea of replacement of obsolete provisions, this process is not considered as affecting the fundamentals of the Church. The bottom line, again, as I try to decode it, is freedom of discussion and adjustment, but without infringing upon what is basic, fundamental, and perennial.

Thus, the conclusion may be as epitomized by Huddleston (*Monast.*, p. 8): Monasticism is a living thing and it has to adapt to its environment. But one thing remains always the same and that is "the motive power which brought it into existence," the love of God. In the Buddhist context, if we supplement these four words by "the love of the Way," we end up at the very same spot. On the other hand, if we wish to go even beyond

monasticism, to the broader area of the Buddhist system as a whole, the answer is given by this eminently inspiring figure of Buddhism in our times, the great Vietnamese monk, writer, and thinker, Thich Nhat Hanh (p. 17): "It was impossible for Source Buddhism to remember everything the Buddha had taught, so it was necessary for Many-Schools Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism to renew teachings that had been forgotten or overlooked. Like all traditions, Buddhism needs to renew itself regularly in order to stay alive and grow. The Buddha always found new ways to express his awakening. Since the Buddha's lifetime, Buddhists have continued to open new Dharma doors to express and share the teachings begun in the Deer Park in Sarnath." The deeper meaning is crystal clear—renewal, yes, as long as it conforms to the original wisdom of Sarnath. □

*A monk examines a digitally preserved manuscript at the Aghiou Dionissiou monastery on Mount Athos.*

"authority with freedom" reflects in just three words the prevailing spirit in matters not only of monasticism, but of the Church as a whole. Theologians are free "to further study various subjects in greater depths," points out Rev. G. Mastrantonis in a paper about the above fundamental teachings (p. 11). And he continues: "These findings of the theologians are not new truths, but the same truths interpreted with greater simplicity and clarity. This freedom of inquiry in the Orthodox Church characterizes its nature of 'authority with freedom.'" In his conclusion, Mastrantonis puts forward some thoughts that have a noteworthy relevance to our own topic of updating the Vinaya. After reiterating that "the conscience of the Church-Ecclesia is the highest authority of appeal in the Orthodox Church" as the "common consent of opinions of faith, hope and love by all communicants of the Church," he stresses the latter's

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*An esoteric-style image of the bodhisattva Maitreya before which sit a monk and a protective deity. Colors on silk, thirteenth century. Kyoto National Museum.*

# All Things Are Impermanent

by Hajime Nakamura

*In this world, everything that has a beginning, even the life of the Buddha, must also have an end. No sooner did the dying Buddha lie down than the sāla trees burst into blossoms that then fell upon his body. The devas gathered around him then realized that "All things that have been made are impermanent."*

Gotama Buddha and his companions next set out for Kusinārā (Skt., Kuśinagarī), today known as Kuśinagar.

"(1) Then the Venerable Master said to the young Ānanda, 'Come, Ānanda, let us go to the Mallas' sāla grove of Upavattana at Kusinārā, on the far bank of the Hiraññavatī [Skt., Hiranyavati] River.'

"Yes, Master,' replied the young Ānanda. Then the Venerable Master went to the Mallas' sāla grove of Upavattana at Kusinārā, on the far bank of the Hiraññavatī River, together with a large company of *bhikkhus*." (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 1)

Even today there is a small river, only a few meters wide, called Hiranyavati, a little over 1.6 kilometers from Kuśinagar. Local people say it was a far larger river long ago.

"(1 *continued*) Having arrived there, he said to Ānanda, 'Now, Ānanda, prepare for me a bed between the two sāla trees, with my head facing north.'

"Yes, Master,' replied Ānanda, and made the bed between the two sāla trees with its head to the north. Then the Venerable Master lay down on his right side in the lion position, with one foot resting on the other, mindful and correctly aware." (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 1)

On the far bank of the Hiraññavatī was a grove (*uyyāna*) of sāla trees. Fertile fields of rice and sugar cane abound near Kuśinagar. They are interspersed with mango and *jambu* trees, and sāla trees are still to be seen, though they do not grow thickly. The climatic environment was probably very similar two thousand five hundred years ago; as in other areas of northern India, we can still see pairs of large sāla trees rising in close proximity out of the shrubs and grasses (though, of course, not the same trees that grew in the Buddha's time).

Regarding the Buddha's recumbent posture with his head to the north, the Yu-hsing-ching says:

"Immediately, he [Ānanda] had his matting laid out with the head to the north. At that time, the World-honored One folded his robe four times, lay down on his right side, and crossed his feet like a lion king."

In Japan, the Indian custom of sleeping with one's head to the north has been adopted as the customary direction in which the dead lie. In India, though, even today it is considered to be the optimum position in which to sleep, with the sleeper facing west, since north is the direction in which paradise lies (see the legend of Uttara-kuru in the Buddhist texts). South, by contrast, was considered to be the direction controlled by death and evil. In Vārāṇasī,

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*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).*

temples line the northern bank of the Ganges; there are none on the southern bank. Pūraṇaḥ Kāśyapaḥ (Skt.; Pūraṇa Kassapa, P), said that good religious actions occurred north of the Ganges, but only bad ones on the southern bank.

The Yu-hsing-ching then adds, in words attributed to Sakyamuni:

“Lay a couch between the twin *sāla* trees for the Tathāgata, so that my head is to the north and I face the west. For my Law will spread to the north and remain long there.”

This represents the knowledge of later editors that Buddhism had spread to Central Asia and China.

One theory says that the Buddha chose to lie with his head to the north because his birthplace was in that direction. Professor Dipak Kumar Barua, however, considers that there is no deeper meaning in the position than just that north was the direction in which the Buddha was lying when he died. He also says that perhaps the idea that he was lying in the direction of his birthplace derives from Japanese sentiments about one's native home.

Legend says that no sooner did the Buddha lie down than the *sāla* trees burst into bloom.

“(2) Then at that time the *sāla* trees gave forth flowers in full bloom out of season. Those flowers fell upon the body of the Tathāgata, sprinkling and scattering over it in veneration. Heavenly *mandārava* flowers fell from the sky upon the body of the Tathāgata, sprinkling and scattering over it in veneration. Heavenly sandalwood powder fell from the sky upon the body of the Tathāgata, sprinkling and scattering over it in veneration. Heavenly music sounded in the sky in veneration of the Tathāgata. Heavenly songs filled the sky in veneration of the Tathāgata.

“(3) Then the Venerable Master said to Ānanda: ‘Ānanda, those *sāla* trees have given forth flowers in full bloom out of season. Those flowers have fallen upon the body of the Tathāgata, sprinkling and scattering over it in veneration. Heavenly *mandārava* flowers have fallen from the sky upon the body of the Tathāgata, sprinkling and scattering over it in veneration. Heavenly sandalwood powder has fallen from the sky upon the body of the Tathāgata, sprinkling and scattering over it in veneration. Heavenly music sounded in the sky in veneration of the Tathāgata. Heavenly songs filled the sky in veneration of the Tathāgata.

“Never, Ānanda, has the Tathāgata received such respect, honor, reverence, and veneration. Nevertheless, whenever a *bhikkhu*, a *bhikkhuni*, a layman, or a laywoman practices according to the Dhamma, practices correctly, and acts in accordance with the Dhamma, that person respects, honors, and reveres the Tathāgata and pays him the greatest veneration. Therefore Ānanda, let your lesson be this: “We will practice according to the Dhamma, practice correctly,

and act in accordance with the Dhamma.”” (Mahāpari-nibbāna-suttanta, V, 2–3)

This episode may be an embellishment added in later times. Next comes an episode difficult for modern people to understand, in which Gotama Buddha dismisses his attendant Upavāṇa.

“(4) At that time the young Upavāṇa was standing in front of the Venerable Master, fanning him. The Venerable Master dismissed him, saying: ‘Leave me, *Bhikkhu*. Do not stand in front of me.’ And the young Ānanda thought: ‘The young Upavāṇa has long been the Venerable Master’s attendant, remaining at his side and looking after his needs. Why then does the Venerable Master at the hour of his death dismiss the young Upavāṇa, saying to him: “Leave me, *Bhikkhu*. Do not stand in front of me”? What is the reason that the Venerable Master has dismissed the young Upavāṇa, saying to him: “Leave me, *Bhikkhu*. Do not stand in front of me”?’

“(5) Then the young Ānanda said to the Venerable Master: ‘Revered One, the young Upavāṇa has long been the Venerable Master’s attendant, remaining at his side and looking after his needs. Why then does the Venerable Master at the hour of his death dismiss the young Upavāṇa, saying to him: “Leave me, *Bhikkhu*. Do not stand in front of me”? What is the reason that the Venerable Master has dismissed the young Upavāṇa, saying to him: “Leave me, *Bhikkhu*. Do not stand in front of me”?’

“Ānanda, devas from all the worlds in the ten directions have gathered in a great multitude to see the Tathāgata. For a distance of twelve *yojanas* around the Mallas’ *sāla* grove of Upavattana at Kusinārā devas have gathered in such great numbers that there is not the space to insert the tip of a rabbit’s hair between them. Those devas, Ānanda, are grumbling, saying: “We have come from afar to see the Tathāgata. It is rare for Tathāgatas, Arahants, those who have attained supreme enlightenment to appear in the world. But tonight, at the last watch, the Tathāgata will pass away, and this powerful *bhikkhu* is standing in front of the Venerable Master, blocking our view, so that we cannot see the Tathāgata for the last time.” Thus are the devas muttering, Ānanda.’

“(6) ‘Revered One, what kind of state are the devas in, do you think?’ Ānanda, there are sky-devas whose thoughts are of the earth. They are tearing their hair and wailing, stretching forth their arms and raising them, weeping, throwing themselves down like rocks, writhing, saying: “The Venerable Master is dying, all too soon. The Blessed One is dying, all too soon. The Eye of the World is hiding himself, all too soon.” Ānanda, there are earth-devas whose thoughts are of the earth. They are tearing their hair and wailing, stretching forth their arms and raising them,

weeping, throwing themselves down like rocks, writhing, saying: "The Venerable Master is dying, all too soon. The Blessed One is dying, all too soon. The Eye of the World is hiding himself, all too soon." However, those devas who have done away with sensuous desires patiently endure, their minds thoughtful and aware, saying: "All things that have been made are impermanent. How can it be that [they are not decayed]?" (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 4–6)

The devas had flocked to see Sakyamuni on his death-bed. Never more would people be able to meet him. What was there to do? The clever solution arrived at by people of later times appears here.

"(7) 'Revered One, formerly *bhikkhus* spending the rainy season at various places would come to see the Tathāgata. We would meet and serve those well-trained *bhikkhus*. However, after the Venerable Master dies, we will not be able to meet those well-trained *bhikkhus*, or serve them, Revered One.'

"(8) 'Ānanda, there are four places at which a faithful person of good family should feel emotion on visiting. What are those four? Here the Tathāgata was born—the place where a faithful person of good family should feel emotion on visiting. Here the Tathāgata attained supreme and perfect enlightenment—the place where a faithful person of good family should feel emotion on visiting. Here the Tathāgata began to teach the Dhamma—the place where a faithful person of good family should feel emotion on visiting. Here the Tathāgata entered *nibbāna* without residue—the place where a faithful person of good family should feel emotion on visiting. Ānanda, these are the four places where a faithful person of good family should feel emotion on visiting. Ānanda, faithful *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*, and laymen and laywomen will visit [these places where] the Tathāgata was born, the Tathāgata attained supreme and perfect enlightenment, the Tathāgata began to teach the Dhamma, and the Tathāgata entered *nibbāna* without residue. Ānanda, any person who should die with a pure heart while making a pilgrimage to those shrines will, after death and the dissolution of the body, be reborn in a good place, in a heavenly realm.'" (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 7–8)

This is apparently a later teaching, borne out by the absence of this passage in the other texts. The Buddha then, as part of his final teachings, forbade the *bhikkhus* to look upon women.

"(9) 'Venerable Master, how should we act toward women?'

"Do not look upon them, Ānanda.'

"But if we look upon them, Revered One, how should we act?'

"Do not speak to them, Ānanda.'

"But if we speak to them, Revered One, how should we act?'

"At such a time, Ānanda, you should act with discretion.'" (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 9)

This too is clearly a later insertion, and is lacking in other texts.

### Ānanda's Lamentation

According to the Sanskrit version, "Ānanda was behind the Venerable Master, leaning heavily against the couch and weeping, the tears coursing [down his cheeks]." The description in the Pāli version is a little different.

"(13) And the young Ānanda entered the dwelling, leaned heavily against the doorpost and wept, thinking: 'Ah, I am one who still has much to learn, and I still have much to do. Yet the master who has compassion for me is passing away.'

"Then the Venerable Master inquired of the *bhikkhu*: 'Bhikkhu, where is Ānanda?'

"Revered One, the young Ānanda is here. He has entered the dwelling and is leaning heavily against the doorpost, weeping: 'Ah, I am one who still has much to learn, and I still have much to do. Yet the master who has compassion for me is passing away.'"

"Then the Venerable Master said to a certain *bhikkhu*: 'Go, *bhikkhu*, and say to Ānanda these words from me, "Friend Ānanda, the Master is calling you.'"

"Yes, Master,' the *bhikkhu* replied, and went to Ānanda. Drawing near, he said to the young Ānanda, 'Friend Ānanda, the Master is calling you.'

"I understand, friend,' replied the young Ānanda, and went to the Venerable Master. Drawing near, he saluted him and sat down to one side. (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 13)

The Southern Buddhist scholars interpreted the fact of Ānanda's weeping to be due to his realization that he still had "much to do," having not yet finished his training. Such an interpretation seems to me to be redolent of the doctrinal scholar, who had to find a logical explanation for Ānanda's tears. Ānanda wept because he was heartbroken about the Buddha's imminent death. Seeing him in such a state, Gotama told him not to "sorrow and grieve" and gave him careful instruction.

"(14) When the young Ānanda had sat to one side, the Venerable Master spoke to him thus: 'Desist, Ānanda. Do not sorrow. Do not grieve. I have previously told you that we must separate, part, and change from all our beloved and dear things. Since all things that come into being, exist, and are made must decay, how could they not decay? Such a thing could not be. You, Ānanda, have long served the Tathāgata, acting unstintingly in body, speech, and mind

compassionately, concerned, happily, and wholeheartedly. You have done well, Ānanda. Strive in your training and very soon you will become stainless.” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 14)

The words of a dying man have an acute appeal. Here the Buddha earnestly speaks to Ānanda about the idea of impermanence. It seems very likely that this episode describing the consolation of a grieving person by means of the teaching of impermanence may have had its origins in the actions of the historical Buddha. The same type of realistic touch is found a little later, when Ānanda has the Mallas greet the Buddha in family groups rather than individually (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 22). The Mallas had probably gathered out of sympathy compounded with curiosity at the sickbed of the religious wanderer who had traveled from a distant place. The Pāli version describes how Ānanda had them salute Sakyamuni. The Sanskrit version is more compact, saying only that the Mallas saluted the Buddha. In this we have a suggestion that the authority of the Saṅgha is being emphasized.

#### Dissatisfaction with Kusinārā

Buddhists in later times were concerned that Gotama Buddha should have died in such a remote place as Kusinārā, wondering why he did not enter *nibbāna* in a much grander and imposing milieu. To explain the reason, the legend of King Mahāsudassana is described in great detail in various texts, but in the Pāli text it is described very simply.

“(17) The young Ānanda said thus to the Venerable Master: ‘Revered One, let not the Venerable Master die in such a small town, in the midst of a bamboo grove, so far from everywhere. Revered One, there are other great cities, such as Campā, Rājagaha, Sāvattihī, Sāketa, Kosambī, and Vārāṇasī. In such a place as those should the Venerable Master die. In those places there are wealthy Khattiyas, Brahmins, and householders, who have given their faith to the Tathāgata. They would surely venerate the remains of the Tathāgata.’ “Do not speak thus, Ānanda. Do not say, Ānanda, “a small town, in the midst of a bamboo grove, so far from everywhere.””

To explain why Kusinārā is not to be spoken of thus, the suttanta introduces the tale of King Mahāsudassana.

“(18) ‘Long ago, Ānanda, there was a king called Mahāsudassana. He was a righteous Dhamma king, a world-ruling emperor who had conquered the land in the four directions to bring tranquillity to the people of those realms and who possessed the seven treasures. This very Kusinārā, Ānanda, was King Mahāsudassana’s capital, with the name of Kusāvati. It stretched twelve *yojanas* long from east to west and seven *yojanas* wide from north to south.

“The capital Kusāvati, Ānanda, was prosperous and rich, with a large population, full of people, and plentiful in foodstuffs. Just as the divine city of Ālakamandā, Ānanda, is prosperous and rich, with a large population, full of people, and plentiful in foodstuffs, so was the capital Kusāvati prosperous and rich, with a large population, full of people, and plentiful in foodstuffs.

“Day and night, Ānanda, Kusāvati was never free of the ten sounds: the trumpeting of elephants, the neighing of horses, the rattle of carriages, the sound of great drums, the sound of small drums, the sound of lutes, singing, the sound of gongs, and the sound of cymbals. And the tenth sound is that of voices crying: “Eat, drink, and enjoy yourselves.”” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 17–18)

Buddhists in the period following Sakyamuni’s death must have felt that a lonely, out-of-the-way place was not appropriate for the demise of a great religious figure. Therefore they introduced the tale of King Mahāsudassana to give religious significance to Kusinārā. The early motivation is obvious in the short reference contained in the Pāli text. However, the later Sanskrit version and the Chinese translations—the Pan-ni-yüan-ching, the Fo-pan-ni-yüan-ching, the Yu-hsing-ching, and the Ta-pan-nieh-p’an-ching—elaborate the tale to a considerable degree. The essentially secular image of the Wheel-rolling King (*cakravartī-rāja*) was employed to give significance to Kusinārā as the place where the Buddha died. The tale of King Mahāsudassana probably developed first as a kind of *jātaka*, but was then used to provide authority to attempts to give religious meaning to Kusinārā. This is clearly a later device. The Pan-ni-yüan-ching lists only Śrāvastī, Rājagṛha, Malla, and Vaiśālī as the four great countries; all of these were either “close” to where the Buddha died, or were connected in some way with his last journey. The Fo-pan-ni-yüan-ching states:

“These districts and countries are not far from here: Śrāvastī, Sāketa, Campā, Rājagṛha, Bārāṇasī, and Vaiśālī.”

As in the Sanskrit version, too, the cities mentioned include those in the regions of Bārāṇasī and Bengal, representing a small widening of view. The Yu-hsing-ching adds Kapilavastu to the above list, perhaps because by the time the sutra was compiled that city had acquired a mythical status as the place where the Sakya clan originated. The Ta-pan-nieh-p’an-ching gives in addition Ayodhyā, an important city in Hinduism, as well as Takṣaśilā (Taxila) in Pakistan, and must therefore be considered an even later text. In summary, there was a gradual increase in the additions made to various versions that came about as the teachings spread.

*To be continued*

# The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

## Chapter 7

### The Parable of the Magic City

#### (5)

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

TEXT . . . and he extensively set forth the Law of the Twelve Causes and Conditions, namely: "Ignorance causes actions; actions cause consciousness; consciousness causes name and form; name and form cause the six entrances [or sense organs]; the six entrances cause contact; contact causes feeling; feeling causes craving; craving causes grasping; grasping causes becoming; becoming causes birth; birth causes old age and death, grief and lamentation, suffering and distress.

COMMENTARY *The Law of the Twelve Causes and Conditions.* This is a very important teaching of basic Buddhism, explaining that there are twelve stages of the causal relationships governing the way in which we ordinary beings are born, mature physically, and grow old and die. It also tells us that there is a similar principle of causation in our mental evolution. It teaches us the basic principle of purifying the mind, removing delusion, and bringing both body and mind into a correct state.

The twelve stages are ignorance, actions, consciousness, name and form, the six sense organs, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, becoming, birth, and old age and death. Though I have touched on this doctrine (in my commentary on the "Virtues" chapter of the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings; see the January/February 1992 issue of DHARMA WORLD), I will cover it again, since it is of such vital importance.

As we have seen repeatedly, when things arise there must be causes and conditions determining that rise. What then is the fundamental cause governing the rise of all phenomena at each stage of the Twelve Causes and Conditions? It is ignorance.

Ignorance (*avidya*) literally means "no light," that is, lack

of wisdom. It is the state of not understanding, and not attempting to understand, the way all things are and the meaning of human life. What appears under the condition of ignorance is "actions." Actions (*samskara*) refer not to behavior arising out of clear will but to the unconscious actions of biological beings from the time life emerged in the universe, billions of years ago, long before human beings came into existence. As countless actions are accumulated, a fundamental force capable of distinguishing among things gradually emerges, though this is still vague and indistinct, no more than a working prototype. This hazy ability to distinguish things is called "consciousness."

Consciousness (*vijnana*) thus derives from actions based on ignorance. To put it another way, though consciousness distinguishes among things, it cannot see directly the real aspect of those things. As this faint consciousness gradually develops, it becomes "name and form." Name (*nama*) refers to the mind, in the sense of that which has no form, while form (*rupa*) is the body, in the sense of that which has physical form. Name and form therefore make up the state in which our mental and physical functions begin to grow and so we become conscious of our own existence. Though I say we are conscious of our own existence, we are still in the womb at this stage. This consciousness is the awareness of a hidden mind. Furthermore, it is consciousness of our existence in a form far removed from true, correct awareness of it. In simple terms, though the physical body is originally "empty," through consciousness we begin to be aware of it as if it really existed in a fixed, permanent form.

As name and form develop further, the six functions of body and mind become clear: that is, the five sense organs' sensory faculties—eyes (sight), ears (hearing), nose (smell),

*Juni-innen-emaki, a picture scroll on the Law of the Twelve Causes and Conditions, designed as a means of explaining the Buddhist doctrine in an easy-to-understand way. In this picture scroll, painted in the late Kamakura period (1185–1333), a warrior king is chastizing twelve evil spirits that represent the twelve causes of human suffering, while some of the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac are looking on.*

tongue (taste), body (touch), and mind (perception)—are gradually functionally differentiated. Such functions are called the “six sense organs” (*shad-ayatana*).

Then we gain the ability to distinguish among things, in the same way that a baby learns that something is a flower, or a sweet, or its mother or father. Since such distinction comes from the contact between name and form and the six sense organs, it is called “contact” (*sparsha*).

At this point of development of mind and body, when they become capable of distinguishing among things, emotions, such as like and dislike, joy and sorrow, arise spontaneously. Collectively, these are called “feeling” (*vedana*), the earliest functioning of the mind arising from what it perceives. When such emotions arise, it follows naturally that craving (*trishna*) also occurs. When an object is perceived with liking, the mind becomes attached to it and also becomes captive to its own preferences. So far the functions of the mind have been fundamentally “innocent,” though from them various human delusions begin to take clear shape. The next stage sees such delusions deepening.

Because people feel craving, they are compelled by the desire to pursue the object of their craving, and, once they have attained it, they want to hold on to it and never let it go. Conversely, they want to flee from what they dislike. Such a state of mind is called “grasping” (*upadana*). When grasping arises, different people begin to regard the same object with different feelings and thoughts, and so they come to hold different opinions about it. In other words, one becomes clearly conscious of a difference between oneself and others. This discriminating mind is termed “becoming” (*bhava*). It is from here on that human unhappiness and social discord become serious. Because of this discriminating mind (becoming), confrontations and conflicts

break out among people and the life of suffering takes shape.

The life of suffering sees the same development again in “birth” (*jati*) in the next life. Unless the fundamental ignorance is eliminated, transmigration with suffering is repeated indefinitely. Birth can also be considered not only in terms of one’s own next life but also in terms of the birth of one’s descendants. Again, unless ignorance is annihilated by the Buddha Law, the ignorance of the parents’ generation will be passed on to succeeding generations, growing greater all the time.

Since there is birth, old age approaches in due course and leads finally to death. “Old age and death” (*jara-marana*) cause human beings the greatest terror and repugnance. Such terror and repugnance, however, stem from the delusion that an animate state means only that the physical body is alive, and that we live only this one life. This is not so. If we accumulate correct actions (good karma) in this life according to the Buddha Law, the next life will without doubt be happier and better. Further, we can emancipate ourselves from transmigration and finally attain buddhahood. If only we can realize this, death will no longer hold the slightest fear.

When we contemplate the process by which human beings evolved from the original source of biological life and look back on the way human beings have come to lead a life of suffering, it is quite plain that the fundamental cause is ignorance, and that ignorance has deepened at each stage of the Twelve Causes and Conditions.

We can apply the process from life’s emergence to human evolution to the individual person, as well. (I have already given a few examples above.) Clinical studies by physiologists prove that during the nine months from conception to birth a human baby passes through billions of

years of evolution, reiterating the stages from amoeba to insect, fish, amphibian, and finally mammal. The Law of the Twelve Causes and Conditions explicates both the process of biological development and the process of individual growth from conception to death. Thus what twentieth-century scientists finally elucidated, Shakyamuni perceived intuitively more than 2,500 years earlier. We have to admire what a great person he was. The depth of his understanding was extraordinary.

Since the above explanation observes the twelve stages in the forward order, from the emergence of human existence to its death, it is called the "orderly view." When we come to the question of how we can extinguish the suffering of human life and liberate ourselves from transmigration, we need only consider the twelve stages in the reverse order; this teaching is called the "reverse view," enunciated in the next passage of the text. It is said that Shakyamuni attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Buddhagaya through contemplation of dependent origination in the forward and reverse orders. I need hardly say that the "reverse view" is very important in order to complete the teaching of the Twelve Causes and Conditions.

**TEXT** Ignorance annihilated, then action is annihilated; action annihilated, then consciousness is annihilated; consciousness annihilated, then name and form are annihilated; name and form annihilated, then the six entrances are annihilated; the six entrances annihilated, then contact is annihilated; contact annihilated, then feeling is annihilated; feeling annihilated, then craving is annihilated; craving annihilated, then grasping is annihilated; grasping annihilated, then becoming is annihilated; becoming annihilated, then birth is annihilated; birth being annihilated, then are annihilated old age and death, grief and lamentation, suffering and distress.'

**COMMENTARY** This is an extremely lucid theory. If ignorance, as the fundamental cause, conditions actions, it follows that if ignorance is destroyed actions, too, will perish. The same can be said of all the other conditions.

By "annihilated" the text means the eradication of ignorance as the basic cause. As mentioned earlier, since ignorance is lack of wisdom, to annihilate ignorance is to bring about the condition of wisdom in its place. Therefore we only have to learn the Buddha Law and acquire wisdom through practicing in accordance with his teaching. In other words, if we rid ourselves of all attachments and delusions, the various sufferings inherent in human life will dissolve. Theoretically speaking, therefore, if the condition of ignorance, which is the fundamental cause of all suffering, changes to the condition of wisdom, all suffering will disap-

pear, and we will even gain complete liberation from transmigration. This wisdom is none other than the Buddha wisdom.

The above discussion is all very well in theory, but we cannot realize it unless we attain the same state as the Buddha himself. We must be thankful, therefore, that Shakyamuni did not merely elaborate theoretical doctrines like a scholar but focused all of his teaching on the purpose of releasing everyone from suffering and distress. Thus he first showed his teaching theoretically and attempted to bring us to the realization that human life develops like this and that we can eradicate our sufferings by minimizing the degree of ignorance at each stage of human life.

In this too, since different people have different capacities, Shakyamuni gradually led people in the early stages to the correct way of looking at things and understanding them. In terms of the stages of the Twelve Causes and Conditions this means examining grasping and becoming, that is, the nature of greed, attachment, and discrimination. The more people control and amend their greed, return their minds of attachment to the correct form, and decrease their discriminatory thoughts, the closer their minds will approach a state of harmonious wisdom. All the irritation that comes from greed and attachment will disappear, confrontation and conflict stemming from the wall of discrimination built up between the self and others will diminish, and the world will become peaceful and harmonious.

It should be within anyone's reach to control oneself at this level, for greed and discrimination arose within the human mind comparatively late. When we look back over human history, it seems that ancient people did not suffer from extremes of greed but were satisfied with living from day to day. Theirs was an absolutely communal life; living simply, people did not differentiate between what was theirs and what belonged to others. As culture advanced and life became more complicated, however, such magnanimity of spirit gradually eroded, until eventually greed and discrimination came into being.

It is similar with individual human beings. Babies desire nothing more than the satisfaction of their immediate needs, such as milk, food, and toys. They make no distinction between themselves and others, not even their brothers and sisters. As they gradually begin to take notice, and also as the fabric of their lives grows more complex, they begin to want more, and develop likes and dislikes for certain people.

Since such feelings developed relatively late, they are not too difficult to remove, just as an acute illness whose symptoms have developed rapidly is easier to cure than a chronic disease that has gained ground slowly. Similarly greed, attachment, and the discriminating mind, which contributed relatively late to the illness of the human mind, are fairly

easy to control. That is why Shakyamuni taught us first to rid our minds of such things in order to eradicate suffering to a large degree.

To people of high capacity, though, he taught a more fundamental method: attaining Buddha wisdom by means of the bodhisattva practice, whereby at a single stroke all delusions are destroyed. Thus looking at Shakyamuni's teachings as a whole, we see that he first preached the Four Noble Truths, next taught the Eightfold Path and the Law of the Twelve Causes and Conditions, and then exhorted the practice of the Six Perfections (*paramitas*). The rationality and profound wisdom of the order of his preaching fill us with admiration.

TEXT "When the buddha preached this Law amid the great host of gods and men, six hundred myriad kotis of nayutas of people, without being subject to all the [temporary] laws, had their minds freed from faults, all obtaining the profound, mystic meditations, the three clear [views], and the six transcendent [faculties], and accomplishing the eight emancipations.

COMMENTARY *Without being subject to all the [temporary] laws.* This is a very difficult expression. The words "all the [temporary] laws" indicate all other teachings, but here they refer to mistaken, preconceived ideas. The meaning of the phrase is that countless people received this teaching with an open mind, without criticizing it on the basis of preconceived ideas. This is a crucial attitude when listening to the Buddha's teaching.

• *The three clear [views], the six transcendent [faculties], and the eight emancipations.* See the September/October 2002 issue and the July/August 1992 issue.

TEXT Likewise at a second, a third, and a fourth time of preaching the Law, thousands of myriads of kotis of nayutas of living beings, [numerous] as the sands of the Ganges, without being subject to all the [temporary] laws, had their minds freed from all faults. From this time forth the host of [his] shravakas was immeasurable and boundless, beyond expression in numbers.

"Meanwhile the sixteen royal sons, all being youths, left their home and became shramaneras of keen natural powers, wise and intelligent. They had already served hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of buddhas, purely practiced brahma conduct, and sought Perfect Enlightenment.

COMMENTARY *Shramaneras.* A shramanera is a male novice who is ordained as a candidate for bhikshu and keeps the ten precepts for shramaneras—not to kill, not to steal, not to yield to sensual desire, not to lie, not to drink intoxi-

cants, not to wear adornments or perfume, not to listen to singing or watch dancing, not to sleep on a high bed, not to take meals after midday, and not to hoard gold, silver, or other precious things—but has yet to receive the full precepts (the 250 precepts for bhikshus) after intensive practice. The word *shramanera* therefore usually refers to a young priest, who, as the Chinese translation of the term indicates, forswears all that is evil, practices compassion, and seeks nirvana.

• *Keen.* The Chinese word translated as *keen* literally means "pierce, penetrate, pass through easily." Thus, the teachings that the shramaneras received entered their minds smoothly, without any hindrance.

• *Natural powers.* See the July/August 2002 issue.

• *Wise and intelligent.* Their wisdom was clear and exhaustive, not vague.

• *Brahma conduct.* This signifies the religious practice of purifying the mind and body and society. It refers to the Eightfold Path and the Six Perfections.

TEXT Together they addressed the buddha, saying: "World-honored One! All these innumerable thousand myriad kotis of great virtuous shravakas have already become perfect. World-honored One! Preach also to us the Law of Perfect Enlightenment! And when we have heard it we will all put the lesson into practice. World-honored One! We are longing for the tathagata knowledge. The thought of our inmost hearts thou dost prove and know."

COMMENTARY *Have already become perfect.* This means to have learned a particular teaching thoroughly and to have attained enlightenment, that is, to have arrived at a state of mind detached from all delusions.

• *We are longing for the tathagata knowledge.* Though a strong aspiration for the Buddha knowledge from the depths of the heart is expressed here, we use the words "long for" rather lightly nowadays. It is regrettable that modern people seem to be lacking in the vigor to follow something through with all their attention until it is completed. It is important for all people in all times to have such strength of spirit and single-minded determination. Without them, societies fail to progress. We must strengthen our resolve and, like the sixteen royal sons, learn how to long intensely for something.

*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.