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Cover photo: In December 2003 Rev Nichiko Niwano, president of Rissho Kosei-kai, went to Sri Lanka to reciprocate the Theravadin leaders' visit to the organization's Tokyo headquarters in June 2002. He met with prelates of the Siam Sect, the Ramanna Sect, and the Amarapura Sect and discussed interreligious endeavors to help ensure the peace in Sri Lanka. After taking part in a welcoming ceremony in Colombo, he also visited Rissho Kosei-kai of Sri Lanka in the city.

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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

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.

AP

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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.

## Buddhism as a Bridge to Peace

As a religionist, I first started to become aware of the importance of world peace in 1970, when I was thirty years old. Prominent religious leaders from all over the world had convened in Kyoto for the first assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), which was an epoch-making event in the religious world that had a great impact upon me personally.

Until that time, I had always thought that the role and *raison d'être* of religion was to help save people on an individual level. However, the first World Conference of Religions for Peace (which was formerly called the World Conference on Religion and Peace) opened my eyes to the idea that the essential mission of religion is to save not only the individual, but all of humanity. Since that time, I have strongly felt that I myself want to make a contribution to world peace.

When people have a strong desire, they often have some encounter that is most suited to their needs. In my case, I experienced meeting various people who were well-acquainted with the situation in Southeast Asia. As a result of those encounters, I visited Cambodia and the Philippines, and I was able to personally learn about the poverty and human-rights problems that directly confront the people of Asia.

One thing that I especially cannot forget is that, in the midst of my cultural exchange activities, we erected a "friendship tower" in the Philippines in order to pray for peace and for the friendship of the people of our two countries.

The first time I visited the Philippines, the only thing that had been on my mind was to pray for the repose of the souls of the Japanese soldiers who had died there in the Pacific War, but through meeting the Philippine people, we were made to become aware of our error.

As proof of our contrition, we initiated within the Youth Division of Rissho Kosei-kai the "Donate a Meal" campaign that was being carried out at that time by a religious organization known as Shoroku Shinto Yamatoyama, a member of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan). This is a movement to experience first-hand the pain suffered by the starving around the world by giving up a meal a few times a month and donating the cost of the meal toward helping them alleviate their suffering.

In 1975, with part of the funds collected through that campaign from all the members of Rissho Kosei-kai, we erected a friendship tower on Bataan peninsula in the Philippines in a prayer for the renunciation of war and friendship. Since then, we have continued to carry out an exchange of activities with the people of Bataan. We were thus able to build a bridge of unchanging friendship and trust between the Christians of the Philippines and the Buddhists of Japan.

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in the U.S., the situation in the world has been thrown into confusion, and in Iraq and Afghanistan a state of war continues. Just as pointed out in Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*, it seems that Islamic culture and Christian culture are headed for a violent confrontation.

But I believe that it will not do to allow ourselves to lose hope. It goes without saying that, properly speaking, all religions are essentially praying for world peace and human happiness. It is my hope that it will be Buddhism, which has been called a tolerant religion, that will provide a bridge linking the Islamic and Christian cultures. □

Kinjiro Niwano  
Chairman, Niwano Peace Foundation

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# Spiritual Friendship across Faiths

by Elizabeth J. Harris

*"In an unusual inter-faith venture, a local vicar and an imam in Burnley 'job-swapped' for a day earlier this year to gain a better understanding of each other's faiths and were recorded by BBC local radio as part of a 'Voices in Burnley' feature. Each took on some of the appointments of the other. The vicar went and talked to children at the Brougham Street mosque and the imam took an assembly at Calder View School."*<sup>1</sup>

*"My greatest reward for arranging the service was the look of joy and delight on so many of the Muslim and Christian faces afterwards as we shared a halal lunch and chatted with one another. It was a deeply moving experience following which many people of both faiths voiced the hope that this will only be the beginning of a deepening relationship between mosque and church."*<sup>2</sup>

The first of the quotations above is from a new report about local interfaith activity in Britain compiled by the Inter Faith Network for the UK.<sup>3</sup> The report gives many inspiring illustrations of how people of different faiths are working together. The second is part of an e-mail that was sent to me by a Methodist clergyman in Horwich, near Manchester in the northwest of England, just after the events of September 11, 2001. His church had invited the worshipers at the local mosque to attend the Sunday service on October 14, 2001, World Peace Day. As the writer suggests, what happened as a result was a tremendous success. I ask myself whether either of these events would have happened without the trauma of September 11.

In Britain, and in other countries, the horrific act of terrorism on that day of September 2001 was a defining moment in interfaith relations. Among Muslims and Christians in Britain, there were two main reactions. The first was a negative one. It took this form: "Enough! No more building good relationships between faiths. There is no point to it." It was said by the Christians, who concluded that the terrorist act on September 11 revealed the true face of Islam, and by the Muslims, who heard U.S. President George W. Bush use the word "crusade" and decided that they could not trust Christians to treat Islam with justice.

The other reaction was positive: "We must do more to bring faiths together. We must do more to create understanding." The Muslims who came to this conclusion were filled with a determination to explain what Islam really is in the face of the popular accusation that Islam and terror-

*Elizabeth J. Harris is the secretary for interfaith relations for the Methodist Church in Britain, based in London. From 1986 to 1993 she lived in Sri Lanka, where she completed her doctorate in Buddhist studies.*



ism were the same. It was seen in the statement made by the Muslim Council of Britain immediately after the event, which included these words, "Whoever is responsible for these dreadful, wanton attacks, we condemn them utterly. These are senseless and evil acts that appall all people of conscience." It was seen on September 13 in the letter signed by a group of prominent Muslims that appeared in the *Guardian* containing these words: "Such indiscriminate acts of terror are an affront to humanity at large. Islam condemns such abhorrent behaviour and the Holy Qur'an equates the murder of one innocent person with the murder of the whole of humanity."

I personally witnessed this response when I attended an evening at the London Central Mosque in November 2001. Organized by the Muslim Council of Britain and the East London Mosque, its aim was to thank non-Muslims who had shown support to Muslims after September 11 by teaching them about the beauty and openness at the heart of Islam. First of all, we were taken around the Islamic world with a wonderful slide show. This was followed by a tasty meal and a question-and-answer session.

The positive response among Christians was shown in many individual and community approaches to mosques and other places of worship. For instance, a layperson on the Isle of Wight wrote to me of the contact he had made with his Muslim neighbors and his delight at the warmth of their response. A Methodist church in Edinburgh arranged a series of shared times of prayer with the adjacent mosque for the six weeks following September 11. Then there was the story from Horwich with which I prefaced this article.

Both these responses, withdrawal from interfaith dialogue and an embracing of it, grew from what had already been present in Britain before September 11. Many Muslims, well before September 11, were aware that distrust and even hatred of Islam could quickly surface in the media and in society in general. In 1998, the Runnymede Trust published a report on this very topic.<sup>4</sup> On the positive side, interfaith activity progressed in leaps and bounds in the years up to 2001 with the formation of many new local Councils of Faiths and interfaith groups. In some cases, this was in response to government legislation such as the Local Government Act of 2000, which encouraged local authorities in England and Wales to consult with faith communities and other underrepresented groups when preparing their community strategies.

In 2004, these two responses still exist, within the Christian community as well as other religious communities. Just as there are people who have risen to the challenge of building good interfaith relations, so there are many who have not—sometimes because of fear or hostility, some-

times because of apathy. In my work, I meet all types and seek to widen the horizons of those who are afraid or apathetic.

In this article I would like to reflect on why we should build friendships with people of other faiths, using three headings that I have found helpful when speaking to Christian groups. Let me first, however, say a word about friendship. Buddhism has always emphasized the importance of spiritual friendship. There is a Pali term that is particularly meaningful, *kalyāṇa mitta*. *Kalyāṇa* means "beautiful" in the sense of morally good. *Mitta* means friend. A *kalyāṇa mitta* is a spiritual friend who can exhort, encourage, and help us in our spiritual lives. He or she is one with whom we can share wisdoms and travel toward new insights into truth. There is a verse in the Dhammapada in the Theravada Buddhist tradition that says this:

Do not associate with evil companions, do not seek the friendship of the vile. Associate with good friends. Seek the fellowship of noble people. (verse 78)

A true *kalyāṇa mitta* can be life's most precious gift, and it is this kind of friendship that I would like to see between people of different faiths. It is not something that can happen overnight. It may take many years to develop, and most people will operate one or two levels below this. But I believe it is possible.

So let me turn to the three headings that I have found helpful when speaking to Christians about reasons for building friendships across faiths: theological or doctrinal; personal; and practical.

### Theological or Doctrinal Reasons

Most religious traditions possess holy texts that have been interpreted exclusively. Christianity has several. One of them is this: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.'" (John 14:6) There are many Christians who believe that this means that only Christians who accept Jesus as their Savior can gain liberation or be saved. Such Christians can feel that they are compromising their faith and betraying the teaching of Jesus if they do not, at some point in interfaith dialogue, tell their partners of other faiths that they are wrong in what they believe. Buddhism also has one or two similar texts. The Satipatthāna Sutta (Discourse on the Applications of Mindfulness) of the Majjhima Nikāya in the Theravada Pali canon, for instance, contains these words quite close to the beginning: "There is this one (or single) way, monks, to the liberation of sentient beings."<sup>5</sup> It then proceeds to outline the fourfold practice of mindfulness: mindfulness of the body, the feelings, the mind, and

mental objects. As Ven. Mahinda Deegalle, a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk, pointed out in a presentation to the World Council of Churches, both John 14:6 and the passage from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta are texts that “may hinder the positive encounter of diverse faiths and genuine religious dialogue among various faith traditions.”<sup>6</sup>

These texts cannot be brushed into a corner and forgotten about. However, to draw such texts out of their context and to use them to condemn other faiths as invalid ways to liberation or salvation is to misuse them. One way of encouraging people to look critically at texts such as these is to point to others that are obviously non-exclusivist. The Bible contains a number of these. Let me give one example. At the beginning of what Christians call “The Sermon on the Mount,” a teaching given by Jesus, are the Beatitudes:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

(Matthew 5:3–10)

These statements have no conditions attached to them. They imply that anyone who is pure in heart, anyone who works for peace or anyone who hungers and thirsts after righteousness (a word similar to the Theravada Buddhist concept of *sacca*, or truth) is, in Christian terminology, close to God, from whatever faith they come from. I encourage Christians to balance this against the exclusivist reading of a text such as John 14:6 and to ask themselves: “What kind of God do we believe in?” Is it a God who condemns people of religions other than Christianity or one who affirms goodness wherever it is found? It is, of course, the second view that I encourage Christians to affirm. The next step is to affirm that Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and people of other faiths who strive after the kinds of values seen in the Beatitudes are potentially their brothers and sisters.

There are many texts within the Buddhist tradition that could be quoted. Readers of DHARMA WORLD will be able to quote from the Lotus Sutra. I can quote from the Thera-

vada texts. Here are a few verses from the Dhammapada, all from the section on “The Brahman,” or the one who follows the path of holiness. They bear a striking likeness to the Beatitudes:

Whoever, having laid aside violence with regard to creatures moving and still, neither kills nor causes to kill, him I call a brahman. (verse 405)

Whoever is not hostile among the hostile, at rest among those who are violent, not clinging among those who are clinging, him I call a brahman. (verse 406)

Whoever would utter speech which is not harsh, informative, pleasant, by which he would offend no one, him I call a brahman. (verse 408)<sup>7</sup>

The main point here is that it is important that we look critically at our holy texts to ask whether they foster understanding or division.

### Personal Reasons

In a presentation titled, “What Do I Expect Buddhists to Discover in Jesus?” at a conference organized by the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies, Michael von Brück, a German Christian theologian, said:

Dialogical communion with the other is possible only when I recognize the partner as a possible *source* for my truth and salvation, or at least of my understanding of my truth and salvation. The other must be taken as a possible medium for my transformation (*metanoia*) or the conversion of my life to God and the Buddha-Dharma.<sup>8</sup>

When I first heard these words, I immediately agreed with them. Interreligious friendship or dialogue is not simply about understanding or learning about “the other,” although both of these are important. It is about being changed, challenged, and perhaps transformed by the other. Speaking personally, I have been transformed by my encounter with Buddhism over the past twenty years. Buddhism has taught me more than I can possibly express in an article such as this. It has also helped me to know better what I believe as a Christian. “The one who knows one faith knows none,” is a much-used phrase. I know it to be true.

Not all people of faith, however, find that their encounters with other religions are life-enhancing. Some Buddhists in Korea have had their temples attacked by evangelical Christians who are convinced that Buddhism is false. Some Christians in Pakistan have had their villages burnt by Muslims, as happened in 1998 in Bahawalpur. Recently, in Britain, two Christians broke into a Hindu temple when

devotions were taking place and damaged the images, speaking blasphemous words against the Hindu god, Rama. At a different level, some people who visit a place of worship of another religion find that the signs and symbols present are so alien that they cannot feel empathy for that religion.

We must be wary, therefore, of glib words about personal enrichment through interreligious encounter. Certain shared values have to be present before this can happen. At the very least, both partners to the encounter need to have respect for each other and an ability to listen. The Methodist Church in Britain has adopted a Code of Conduct that came out of the Inter Faith Network for the U.K. It stresses respect, courtesy, honesty, avoidance of violence, and sensitivity.

If these basic values are not respected, friendship between people of different faiths can be difficult to develop and personal enrichment hard to find. Where there is respect for these premises, enrichment is possible. However, I be-

lieve we can go further than the Inter Faith Network's Code. In line with von Brück, I would like to suggest that the challenge to all of us, whatever religion we belong to, is that we should see the person of another faith as someone who can help us in our spiritual path by sharing wisdom with us. This is not always an easy process. For the religions of the world are not the same. They touch each other, particularly when it comes to ethics. The growing importance of the movement for a Global Ethic is testimony to this. But they also diverge. Christians and Muslims, for example, diverge radically in the way that they see the person of Jesus. Many Buddhists and Christians diverge when it comes to rebirth, the law of karma, and the existence of a creating God. Hearing wisdom from "the other" can be to encounter what may be very different from our own wisdom. My conviction, however, is that creative results can come from allowing what is different to enter one's own way of seeing; in other words from attempting to see the world through the eyes of the other. To speak in terms that

*World religious leaders exchange warm greetings after a prayer ceremony that was held on the last day of the religious summit meeting at Enryakuji temple on Mount Hiei in 1987.*

are more Buddhist than Christian, this can help to break down any views that may have more to do with clinging to the self than religion. It can help us to see more clearly.

This kind of interreligious encounter does not lead to our losing the convictions of our faith or agreeing with all that we hear from people of other faiths. What it does is to help us to see what is peripheral and what is central to our faith, and what needs to change if we are to grow spiritually. It can also help us to be more humble in the face of ultimate truth.

### Practical Reasons

When we come to the practical reasons for the building of friendship across faiths, the most important question, I believe, is, "What kind of society do we want?" Do we want a society divided on religious and ethnic lines, or a society in which people of different faiths and ethnic groups co-exist peacefully and cooperate where possible for the social good? I cannot speak for Japan. In Britain, these questions are crucially important because of the tensions that are already present. Let me give one example. Some northern British towns are geographically divided into Asian and white areas. The Asian areas are predominantly Muslim. The white areas cannot be called Christian but contain some committed Christians. Both areas are economically deprived. In the summer of 2001, there were riots in three of these towns, Bradford, Bolton, and Burnley. White and Asian youth pitted themselves against each other with violence that the police found difficult to contain. It was a crisis that led to change, in a way similar to the aftermath of September 11. For, in all the places where riots happened, faith leaders came together to discuss what could be done to prevent a recurrence. Some of the problems, however, have not gone away, and the British National Party, an extremist political party, is cashing in on this, hoping to gain support by stirring up fear of Islam and a rising level of asylum seekers.

In such a situation, it is essential that people of different faiths come to know one another at all levels, not just the faith leader level. The health of British society depends on it. Young people from different faith and ethnic groups need to come together. Women across faiths need to talk with one another. One remarkable example of young people coming together was a Young People's Faith Forum arranged in 2002, as part of the official events to mark Queen Elizabeth's Golden Jubilee. Eighty young people between the ages of 16 and 24 from England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland came together to explore what it is to be a young person of faith living in the United Kingdom today. More such meetings may be planned at a regional level.

In the eight years that I have worked for the Methodist

Church as their advisor on interfaith relations, I have seen a remarkable increase in the level of local and national interfaith activity in Britain. But more can and must be done. The same, I believe, can be said for other countries. There is no room for complacency. Some of the tensions in Britain and in our world are rooted in economic and social causes, rather than religious ones. Yet religion often plays a part. It is not entirely innocent, whether we look at the violence that has occurred in Bosnia, Chechnya, Nigeria, Israel/Palestine, or Sri Lanka. People of all faiths can help to create a better world.

### Conclusion

The building of interfaith friendships is ultimately about the building of spiritual communities, rooted in a common concern for a more just and peaceful world. I would like to end with the words of a Western Buddhist nun in the Zen tradition. At a Buddhist women's conference in Cambodia, which stretched from December 1997 into the beginning of 1998, she said in a panel discussion on interfaith relations, "When I look for spiritual community, I need to find it in a wider context than simply the Buddhist community." She was an engaged Buddhist nun working alongside Christians and other Buddhists to help the poor of Cambodian society. An insular religion that raises barriers against other religions had no meaning for her. My prayer for 2004 is that more and more people of faith will reject insularity and embrace the search for inclusive spiritual communities rooted in friendship. □

### Notes

1. *Local Inter Faith Activity in the UK: A Survey* (London: The Inter Faith Network for the UK, 2003), p. 66.
2. From an e-mail sent to the author from Rev. John Howard-Norman, reprinted in *Inter Faith Issues*, a resource sheet for Methodists, March 2002.
3. See note 1.
4. *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All. A Report of the Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia* (London: The Runnymede Trust, 1997).
5. Majjhima Nikāya, Vol. 1, Discourse No. 10.
6. "Soteriological Fundamentalism and Interreligious Dialogue" by Mahinda Deegalle, in *Current Dialogue*, No. 37 (June 2001), pp. 9–12, here p. 11.
7. Translation taken from *The Word of the Doctrine (Dhammapadam)*, trans. K. R. Norman (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1997), p. 57.
8. Michael von Brück, "What Do I Expect Buddhists to Discover in Jesus? Christ and Buddha Embracing Each Other," in *Buddhist Perceptions of Jesus*, eds. Perry Schmidt Leukel in cooperation with Thomas Joseph Gotz and Gerhard Koberlin (St. Ottilien: Eos Verlag), pp. 158–175, here p. 160.



# Religious Dimension in Sri Lanka's Peace Process

by Jehan Perera

*An active worker for domestic peace in his country explains that the civil conflict there is primarily the result of ethnic, not religious, differences.*

Questions of war and peace have a profoundly moral dimension that responsible, religiously motivated people cannot ignore. They are questions of life and death to many. The fact that they are also political is no reason for denying religion's obligation to provide people with the help they need in forming their opinions. Any religiously motivated community must learn together to make responsible moral judgments based on an accurate assessment of situations.

Peacemaking is not an optional commitment for people of religion. It is a requirement of their faith. They are called to be peacemakers, not by some movement of the moment,

but by the great religious teachings. The content and context of our peacemaking is set not by some political agenda or ideological program, but by the teachings that are written in the sacred scriptures and contained in the traditions of the great religions.

Experience in both Sri Lanka and elsewhere in the world makes it evident that when the path of violence is taken there is no natural end—only constant escalation. Stopping the spiral of violence requires a conscious act of will and a strategy for de-escalation. It requires rationality to see that the course of violence is hurting everyone, including one's own side. It requires a vision that the peace process will lead to the good of everyone. And it calls for faith that people and institutions, once thought to be given and unchangeable, will in fact change. The primary wellspring of this type of belief system comes from religion.

Sri Lanka is home to four great world religions. The largest religious community is composed of Buddhists, who make up close to 70 percent of the 18 million strong population of the country. The next is the Hindus with about 15 percent, followed by the Muslims and Christians, with about 8 percent each. Most of the Sinhalese are Buddhists, while most Tamils are Hindus. But a minority of Sinhalese and Tamils are Christians, which has created a bridge between these two peoples, even in the time of civil war that saw a Sinhalese-dominated government battling against a Tamil separatist movement.

## Background

Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict and the separatist war it gave rise to can be described as the country's most intractable and destructive problem. The war that steadily escalated between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is generally counted as having

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started in 1983. It has caused around 65,000 deaths over the past two decades and major damage to personal and public property. A total of some one million people have been uprooted and displaced internally as a result at some time or another, with another half million leaving the country to claim refugee status abroad.

Ironically, Sri Lanka has had a relatively long tradition of modern democracy, stretching back to the British colonial period. The nation was one of the first countries in the world to enjoy universal suffrage, in 1931. But the inability of the political elite of the different ethnic communities to share power equitably among themselves led to a series of broken agreements and to acute mistrust between the communities. The difficulty of protecting minority interests in a parliamentary system in which majority-minority relations are strained is exemplified by Sri Lanka's modern political history. The enshrining of Buddhism as the religion with the foremost place in Sri Lanka's constitution in 1972 was opposed by the non-Buddhist sections of the population, and in particular by the Tamil political leadership.

The difficulty of a negotiated peace has been compounded by the inability of the political elite representing the country's distinct ethnic communities to agree on a power-sharing formula over the past five decades. In Sri Lanka the democratic principle of "one person, one vote" has led to the domination of the numerically smaller Tamil population by the numerically much larger Sinhalese. But while the Sinhalese are a majority in the country taken as a whole, the Tamils are a majority in the northern and eastern parts of the country. If Sri Lanka had been provided with a federal constitution at the time of independence

from the British, the Sinhalese and Tamil leaders might have been able to bargain politically with each other from their respective power bases. Instead Sri Lanka was provided with a unitary form of government that vested all power at the center, and therefore in the hands of the Sinhalese.

Political efforts to restructure the polity have so far failed, partly due to strong opposition from the influential Buddhist clergy, who see themselves as guardians of the Sinhalese people and of the foremost place of Buddhism in the Sri Lankan constitution. They have been opposed to a federal type of solution that creates an autonomous Tamil-dominated region in the northeast of the country, fearing that it would lead to the breakup of Sri Lanka, and therefore the erosion of Buddhism in the country. On the other hand, the Christian churches in the Tamil-dominated parts of the country have been supportive of the Tamil struggle for self-determination, and have used their international networks to strengthen the Tamil cause. By way of contrast, the Hindu and Muslim religious communities have not played an organized role in the civil war.

In February 2002, following a general election that saw a change of government, the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE signed a ceasefire agreement under Norwegian government auspices that appears to offer the real prospect of a final end to violence as a means of conflict resolution. The question is whether a negotiated peace settlement that is lasting is possible in Sri Lanka. On the one hand, the LTTE's highly military nature, a fragmented Sinhalese polity, and economic vested interests put roadblocks on the path to political reforms and compromise. On the other hand, a general war-weariness among the general population, economic debilitation, and the threat of the U.S.-led war

*Left: Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, right, shakes hands with Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen after negotiations in Colombo on November 11, 2003. Right: A Sinhalese Sri Lankan soldier looks at a remembrance wall where the names of soldiers killed in the fighting with the LTTE are engraved, along the road from Colombo to Jaffna.*

against terrorism put pressure on the conflicting parties to compromise and resolve their disputes through political negotiations.

#### Address at the Niwano Peace Forum

At the Niwano Peace Forum on the roles of religious people and organizations in situations of conflict held in Tokyo in October 2003, Sri Lankan civic leader Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, himself a Buddhist, who was a winner of the Niwano Peace Prize a decade earlier, delivered a keynote lecture. In a speech that had special relevance to the solution of intractable conflicts worldwide, he said: "Religions help people to find meaning in life. Many fall short of this ideal because they mistake a sectarian goal, even if it is based on religion, as an ideal. True ideals are always for universal good."

On the other hand, those with a fundamentalist orientation, who believe that they hold the truth, have the poten-

tial to cause immense suffering. They can become suicide bombers or can deploy them in the belief that it is for a just cause greater than themselves. They can be leaders of countries who believe that war and violence are necessary to rid the world of enemies of a way of life they deem to be the best. There is no universalism in those who hold that they have the best truth or a monopoly on what is true.

One of the greatest challenges in peacemaking is to see the opponent in a new light, as having part of the truth, a part that is necessary to bring wholeness and peace, where before there was division and enmity. There can be no peaceful solution without engaging with the opponents and making them a positive part of the solution. Two years ago when Sri Lanka appeared to have reached an abyss into which it would fall and from which it would never emerge, a great change took place. The new approach to conflict resolution has drawn deeply on the religious resources of the country, home to four great world religions.

In Sri Lanka, the thought forms and values of reconciliation, compassion, and forgiveness are rooted deep in the psyches of the people. Even in the midst of military battles with high casualties, the great majority of people were able to coexist peacefully with one another. It is necessary to give religion in Sri Lanka its due place in containing the emotions and actions of the people to those of civilized norms even in the midst of war. The remarkable fact is that despite two decades of civil war, in which those who professed different religions were on opposing sides, there was no religious war or hatred among the people. The civil war was primarily a battle between the ethnic communities, comprising Sinhalese and Tamil people, and was not fought on the basis of their religion.

Most Sinhalese are Buddhist and most Tamils are Hindus, yet there is no Buddhist-Hindu conflict in Sri Lanka. One reason for this is that Buddhists and Hindus do not see each other as religious rivals. Neither has sought to actively convert the other. Instead they worship at commonly venerated religious sites and have commonly revered religious deities. A second reason is the common religion of Christianity that a minority on both the Sinhalese and Tamil sides profess. The Christians have fought as leaders and foot soldiers in the armies of both the government and Tamil militants. They also engaged in peace building, both

by working in community-level peace programs, and also by serving as messengers between the Sinhalese and Tamil leaders, who could no longer directly communicate with each other due to the war. In particular, the Christian bishops acted as facilitators, carrying messages between the Sri Lankan government leaders and leaders of the LTTE.

### **Vindicating the People's Human Rights**

One of the most important messages of religion is that we should treat others as ourselves, reflecting the scriptural truths that we are all members of one family and that we are all branches of one tree. "The whole world is one family to the wise." "I am the vine, you are the branches." The destination to which the conflicting parties are traveling has to be a lasting political solution that benefits all the people of the country. If vindicating the human rights of people is the goal, then human rights have to be embedded in the process as well. Unfortunately, as with any concept, human rights can also be used as weapons for division, put forward selectively by each side. They need to be used within the context of long-term and sustained dialogue between the communities in conflict, and this remains the primary task of civic groups that seek conflict resolution.

The present ceasefire has seen a renewed articulation of human-rights sentiment in the country. There is no doubt



that in an overall context, the human-rights situation in the country as a whole has significantly improved after the ceasefire between the government and the LTTE. The war and the deaths, destruction of property, and searches that flowed from it no longer haunt life in the northeast and the border areas. Even outside the north and east, there is no more apprehension of bomb blasts and checkpoints. All such direct threats to human security have virtually ended since the ceasefire. For the past two years, government forces and the LTTE have been diligent in avoiding military confrontation with each other.

Despite the significant improvement in the overall human-rights situation, there is, however, an increased sense of disenchantment among many civil society groups about the prevailing human-rights situation, particularly in the northeast. Even groups (including sectors of the media) which did not show much interest in human-rights issues when the fighting was happening are now showing a keen interest in the human rights of the people of the north and east. A new voice emerging from the northeast is that of the Muslim minority, who fear that they are being railroaded into a solution being crafted by others, and in which their interests will be neglected.

During the long drawn-out ethnic conflict, members of the clergy often played an important role in protecting the human rights of the people. Being close to the people, they witnessed at first hand their suffering. When people were killed, they buried them, and gave their grieving relatives some consolation, both in the form of the afterlife and

sometimes in material terms, by offering them some means of economic sustenance. Being part of a well-established institution, the religious clergy also reported on human-rights violations to international agencies. Not being content with merely seeking to repair the damage, or minimize it, they also acted as intermediaries between the government and the LTTE.

Complex and difficult though it might be in a time of peace when the guns are still loaded, Sri Lankan society needs to take the challenge of human rights seriously. A political solution that vindicates the rights of the Tamil people will need to be one that is based on a bedrock of human rights within the context of a united Sri Lanka, as the Norwegian mediators and the international community have assured.

Whatever their motivations may be, it is appropriate that civil society groups representing different constituencies should do their utmost to hold the conflicting parties accountable on the basis of human-rights standards. Human-rights standards provide a basis for separating legitimate negotiating demands, such as those for equality, from illegitimate demands for domination. Because they are universal and transcend the parties to the conflict, human-rights standards provide an important baseline for what is just.

There is a long list of problems that must be dealt with before the peace process in Sri Lanka can be expected to come to a satisfactory conclusion. Many problems seem to have been untouched at these first peace talks. It is important

to guarantee human-rights standards and humanitarian norms from the very beginning of a peace process. This would increase the likelihood that people are able to enjoy the fruits of peace in their full measure in the future. It is unfortunate that there was no mention of the role for civil society in the ongoing peace process. But clearly the peace process needs to be founded on social acceptance as much as on political will.

Peace in Sri Lanka will have to be built up day by day. Peacemaking is not a monopoly of the government or politicians. Religious and other civic leaders have their own contributions to make, together with the citizenry at large in which there is a change in attitudes. In particular, the Christian community is uniquely placed to understand the ethnic conflict and share their awareness with the larger community. This is because they are on both sides of the Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic divide, both in terms of ethnicity and geography. But a new problem is coming up, threatening to sunder again the unity of the people.

### The Root of the Conflict

The root of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict is the unequal treatment of communities on the basis of being a numerical majority or minority. In the past, Sinhalese leaders who formed governments by virtue of being in the numerical majority, did not deal equitably with the claims of the Tamils, who were a numerical minority. The Tamil language and culture and the Tamils' desire to share decision-making power in the government were treated neither with respect nor equitably. When Tamil grievances in this respect were not addressed satisfactorily through the democratic process, the Tamils took to arms.

Today there is a danger of a repetition of this problem in the northeast of the country, where the Tamils form an overall majority. There is a Muslim and Sinhalese minority living there who are fearful of being dominated by the Tamils in the event of a federal unit being created as a result of the peace process. There have been serious Tamil-Muslim clashes in the east of the country. While these are not religiously motivated clashes, they are due to the insensitivity of the majority community in the northeast to the fears and apprehensions of those who are minorities in that region.

However, at present there is another problem that is emerging and that can lead to religious conflict and to the undermining of the peace process. This is the issue of conversions to Christianity practiced mostly by small evangelical churches. These Christian sects are targeting not only Buddhists and Hindus, but also the mainstream Christian churches as well. The manner of these conversions, in which both spiritual and material resources are being used, is

resented as being unethical. Some of those who oppose these conversions are linking them to the peace process, as being part of a grand design to undermine Buddhism in the country. The fact that the third-party facilitator Norway is a Christian country, and many of those in the peace movement are also Christian, is adding to these suspicions.

There is a danger that if the problem of Christian conversions is not speedily addressed, it might become the focus of attention for those who are anxious about the peace process and the changes it is bringing to the country. Those who are unhappy about the restructuring of the Sri Lankan polity into a federal system might seek to link the religious issue to the peace process. Professor Yoshiro Ashiwa of Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo has warned that even Buddhist monks who have been moderate on the ethnic conflict are feeling uneasy about the entire situation as it unfolds. Further, Professor Ashiwa, who is an expert on Sri Lanka, and has conducted several public-opinion surveys in the country regarding the peace process, expressed concern that if religious conflict is institutionalized, it will become very hard to overcome.

A recent national peace audit has indicated that people all over the country are conscious of the fragile nature of the prevailing peaceful situation. They are also conscious of the need for preserving peace with their neighbors and with other communities. The creation of yet another major conflict in the country would certainly not be the desire of the vast majority of Sri Lankans. Therefore, if asked, most of them would deny that they have any major problems with their co-religionists. But beneath the calm there is fissionable material that can bring the country to the edge of religious conflict.

There are sections of the polity that see political benefits that could accrue to themselves if a religious conflict were to get underway. At present they are at the edges and not at the center of decision-making in the polity. These are sections that the people, in their wisdom, have chosen not to vote for in the past, on account of their role as problem-makers and not problem-solvers. Therefore it is very important that there should be interreligious dialogue on contentious issues relating to the peace process and to the issue of religious conversions.

There is a need to reassure the Buddhist majority, who has a strong historical memory of Western Christian and colonial domination. They need to feel more secure that the peace process will not lead to the undermining of the Buddhist religion and culture in the country. A country like Japan, which is non-Western and Buddhist, could help a great deal in directing a part of the peace dividend to strengthen Buddhist institutions in this time of transition to a new system of governance in the country. □

# My Way to Refusal

by Ishay Rosen-Zvi

*In August 2001, Ishay Rosen-Zvi served time in an Israeli military prison for refusing to report for military reserve duty in the occupied territories. Soon after, he joined a group called Courage to Refuse, which is composed of Israeli reserve officers and soldiers, most of whom have already refused military service in the occupied territories and who were sent to prison for various periods. What he witnessed in the occupied territories sheds some light on the complexity of conscientious objection in a democracy and the ordeal of being in opposition with his own faith community.*

I was born into the Israeli occupation. We didn't call it that way back then, of course, but every discussion about refusal and resistance must begin with this fact: my generation was born into this reality; it was the most natural thing in the world for us. This can explain something about the long way I and others had to go until we were able to confront our army, our society, and say: No.

I was raised in a rather leftist "National Religious" family. Politics was in the air, and criticism of the government was very common, but the army was out of the range of criticism. Not serving in the army was simply unthinkable in this context; it was just not one of the options I had, or indeed, knew about. Now I know that there were already

refuseniks before the Lebanon war, in 1982, but back then it didn't reach my ears. I had never met one of them, not in my community.

## Gaza, 1990

In 1990 I joined the army and very soon found myself in Gaza, a major city in the occupied territories and one of the most populated ones. It is there that I suddenly saw what was until then totally hidden from me. I saw people—men, women, elders, children—without any rights whatsoever, people to whom you could do whatever you wished: give orders, shout at them, arrest them, enter their houses at any time, or just prevent their movement. Their privacy, time, property, and dignity were totally in your hands, depending only on the "good will" of the all-powerful soldier. But in this case the soldier was me. Most of these people were poor peasants and daily workers, whose only wish was to bring bread home. Watching them standing there in the endless lines was a heart-rending sight. Very soon, however, I understood that I was actually on the other side: I was their prison guard, the one who took away their liberties.

In my memories of those days the most vivid picture is that of the roadblock at quarter to five in the morning, with dozens, sometimes hundreds, of people standing in lines, waiting for the almighty commander to let them pass, so they could hopefully go and earn a living (in building our houses and cleaning our streets in Tel Aviv—but this is another story). Some of them could have been my grandfathers, but their fate now depended totally upon me and my friends, 18- or 19-year-old soldiers. We could deny their passage, check every person for an hour, or simply close the checkpoint for an unlimited time because the line

was not straight enough. Adults, even the elders, were humiliated, treated like unruly kids, indeed, like prisoners.

And then there were their eyes, looking at you with hope, fear, frustration, hatred. And you wanted to take them to the side, to tell them that you have nothing against them, that you're a good guy, and that anybody in Tel Aviv will confirm that. But the truth is that it makes no difference for them how good a guy you are—you are their prison guard. It is not a question of manners or politeness—your whole mission is to take away their liberty. And please make no mistake, nobody gives you his liberty for free—you have to take it by force. The force, the violence, can at times be less evident, but it is there, in every roadblock, no matter how orderly things seem to run.

Right there at the roadblock in Gaza the occupation was revealed to me in all its nakedness: an awful apartheid. What did I do when I understood this? Nothing really. I was ashamed, I never did more than I was asked, but I didn't resist either. Why? It was simply not an option. I remember very well, though, the embarrassment during my vacations home, the feelings of being both Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. I didn't talk a lot about Gaza in Tel Aviv because I was ashamed.

Many things have happened since then: agreements have been signed, settlements have been built, terrorist attacks began, governments came and went, but the occupation did not cease for even one single day, it was always there.

I served a few more times after that as a reserve soldier in the occupied territories, until I was able to say: no more. I cannot mark a single moment that led to this decision. You grow up, you know people, new options become possible, you have Palestinian friends, your eyes open. It's a process of becoming an active citizen. In my case it didn't happen until the current Palestinian uprising and the new deadly reactions it brought: new military edicts and decrees that spread misery, poverty, frustration, and death everywhere. Only then did I wake up and refuse to take part in all this.

### Refusal and Religious Commitments

One of the main issues that I find myself engaging with regard to my refusal has to do with its complex connections to my religious commitment. Is the refusal a religious act? Does it stem from my religious education? Does it stand in contrast to it? Or is it simply a civil secular act that has nothing to do with religious affiliation? These questions become much more relevant when acknowledging the almost automatic affiliation of Jewish religious people in Israel with the right wing (many times, even with the extreme right) on the political map. Over the past three

decades the Jewish religious communities have become the most extreme and persistent opponents of every attempt to negotiate compromise and peace between Israel and its neighbors. Most of the Jewish settlers on the West Bank are religious and the "National Religious" party has adopted one of the most nationalistic and chauvinistic positions in the political arena. From this perspective my act was indeed quite exceptional (to say the least) in my own religious community, which reacted, by and large, with surprise and anger (which was even translated, in one extreme case, into a kind of religious ban). On this ground I was required time and again to address the issue of the connection between my act and my religious background, identity, or affiliation.

Now, I could, and maybe even expected to, claim that it is exactly my religious commitment that brought me to this act, and that this is indeed what the true Judaism is about: standing on the side of the weak and the needy. Isn't that what the great biblical prophets taught us? Indeed, the Hebrew Bible presents God as the one who hears the cry of the poor, the widow, and orphans, and we can find in the course of history many struggles against oppression that were based on these values (the most famous of which is the struggle for the abolishment of slavery in nineteenth-century North America).

But I cannot adopt such a straightforward answer, for the simple reason that I do not believe that such a thing as "the original or true Judaism" (or any other religion, for that matter) exists at all. There is no one true Jewish attitude. Judaism, like every other religion and culture, offers a variety of attitudes and values, and the decision to highlight one and make it into our guideline is never dictated by tradition itself alone.

The theoretical framework of my claim is a historical pragmatic attitude toward religions. Religions are not historical essences. At each given time traditions offer a variety of options, and the choice to emphasize one and marginalize others is up to the community itself. The Jewish tradition allows, of course, for conscientious objection to exist, and such an act could even be backed by many important Jewish sources, but in no way can we say that this is the one true Jewish way, or the only valid conclusion from its tradition. I could bring dozens of beautiful quotes from Jewish sources—ancient and modern—that would support my act, but so could my critics. The choice remains ours to make.

Since this selection process works, in the Jewish context, mainly through interpretive acts that highlight particular texts, change can come by finding other options within our tradition that were marginalized or silenced by former generations or other communities. But the selection process is



in no way just a personal voluntary act or the result of pure textual engagement; rather, strong historical and sociological facts help to create these attitudes in any given period. We must therefore identify the forces that cause one approach from the tradition to dominate over others in a specific era. In the Israeli context we can place the rise of the national anti-compromise attitude in religious communities mainly to a transition occurring after the Six-Day War in 1967. While religious parties functioned as important mitigating forces in the early stages of the national Zionist movement, this was changed following the 1967 war, when the land became the new locus of the fulfillment of the Jewish religious wishes and dreams. Since 1967 we can identify a clear shift in focus of religious Zionism from the nation to the land. The land, and not the people, state, or culture, became the new focal point of the Zionist revolution from a religious perspective.

Indeed, this discourse that consecrates the land and raises it into a messianic sphere has deep roots in (some) Jewish

traditions, but this has nothing to do with the essence of Judaism. It is a result of historical process, it has a definite beginning, and so it can also have an end. One may add that, from this perspective, the question is not only how religion can contribute to the achievement of peace, but how the peace agreement can contribute to contemporary Jewish religion. A peace agreement with the Palestinian people will necessarily bring an end to the dream of controlling all of the biblical land of Israel, and could then return the religious focus from the land to the people and the culture.

This is a dark hour, not only for the state of Israel, but also for the Jewish tradition. Religious Jews in Israel stand at the forefront of the fight for this awful apartheid and oppose any peace process. I pray that the time will soon come when the Jewish tradition will be once again a force that demands compassion, justice, and equality for every human being. I believe with all my heart that this is possible and that it depends on us. □

# The True Meaning of Happiness

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 am often asked to differentiate between the Age of Tactful Teaching (1938–57) and the Age of the Manifestation of the Truth (1958–77) in the history of Rissho Kosei-kai. I always reply to my questioners in the following way.

The parable of the burning house in the Lotus Sutra tells of a father whose children were playing in a house that was on fire and how he was able to make them flee by telling them, “Hurry and come outside. You will find goat carts, deer carts, and bullock carts all waiting for you.” Superficially, there may seem to be no difference between their fleeing after hearing their father’s warning and after recognizing the danger on their own. But fleeing from the burning house because of their own self-awareness—that is the difference in attitude between the two reactions.

In the first case, it could be said that the children fled from the burning house because they wanted the playthings their father had promised them. At that point, their thoughts did not follow the true intention of their father. In the second case, it could be said that they escaped and saved themselves because they recognized the deeper meaning in their father’s heart. That helps to explain how the Age of Tactful Teaching differs from the Age of the Manifestation of the Truth, as demonstrated through religious practice.

## Finding the Way through Happiness

“I sometimes think I am the greediest person in all of Rissho Kosei-kai,” I often say. That is because I am filled with the great longing, the great hope that through the Lotus Sutra

all of humanity will gain happiness and the entire world will embrace peace. No one wants this more than I do.

Anuruddha was a disciple of the Buddha who lost his sight as a result of practicing the severe discipline of staying awake at all times. One day he was trying to repair his torn robe but could not insert the thread into the eye of the needle. “Is there anyone who would like to gain merit by helping me?” he called out. A voice immediately replied, “I would like to gain such merit.” It was the Buddha himself. Anuruddha was surprised and asked, “Why would the World-honored One want to seek happiness by gaining further merit?” Quietly came this answer: “No one in all the world wants more than I do to gain merit and find happiness.”

Those are truly heartwarming words, full of true humane sentiment. There can be no denying that when we speak of practicing the Buddha Way, we are reminded that only some people would do it, rejecting worldly happiness. For the Buddha, however, it meant continuing always to seek happiness for all people. He said, “There are all kinds of power in the world, but the greatest is the power of happiness. Whatever power we may proceed to obtain, none can surpass the power of happiness. We can attain the Buddha Way through happiness.”

I have visited Rissho Kosei-kai branches here and there and have met many members of their men’s groups who tell me with gratitude from the bottom of their hearts, “My work is going well and my son will be able to take over the business. I have no worries, so I can devote myself to my duties here.” When I meet such people I fully understand the Buddha’s message about attaining the Buddha Way through happiness.

Of course, the kind of happiness the Buddha was speaking of is not the happiness that comes from gaining material benefits through the accumulation of merit. The Buddha him-

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

self renounced his rank and fortune as prince of the Shakyas to become a religious mendicant. Therefore we have to ask what is the nature of the happiness about which he spoke.

In the Dhammapada we can find the following verse:

One who does good causes pleasure both in this world and in the hereafter; such a person causes pleasure in each of the worlds.

The thought “I have done good” pleases such a one, who is pleased even further after entering the heavenly realm.

(verse 18)

I want you all to know that the greatest of all joys is the realization that a person like yourself can be of help to others. Status and wealth eventually fade. If you think those things are a source of happiness, you will find that such happiness fades, as well.

The joy within that results from doing good never fades. Storing up reserves of such joy is a condition for attaining the happiness that does not alter no matter how our circumstances may change.

It has been said that wealth and fame can only be achieved by doing away with the kind of thinking that seeks them. If we can do that, I think it will be an easy task for us to understand that human life can spontaneously become more rewarding.

I sometimes come across people who are obstinate in the

belief that it is impossible to succeed in the practice of Buddhism unless they give up all thought of happiness, arguing that Shakyamuni had to abandon all pleasures and to practice austerities in his search for enlightenment. Such people could not be more in error.

Honen, the twelfth-century founder of the Jodo sect of Japanese Buddhism, said, “If you can devote yourself to practicing the *nembutsu* (chanting Amida’s name) with a wife, then it is fine to have a wife. On the other hand, if you can single-mindedly practice the *nembutsu* without a wife, then it is fine to remain unmarried.” His follower Shinran, who became the founder of the Jodo Shin sect, deferred to Honen’s advice, saying, “I am an ordinary, ignorant person who is unable to focus on the practice of the *nembutsu* without a wife.” His advocacy of the married state as the religious basis for mastering the Buddha Way is widely known in Japan. The practice of Buddhism does not mean you must turn your back on happiness in attaining the Way. We must give deep thought to the meaning of Shakyamuni’s words about attaining the Buddha Way through happiness.

An attempt at rational persuasion such as saying to people who are crying out in sorrow, who have fallen into profound sadness, that what they are experiencing is simply a normal condition of human existence and that there is no choice but to simply accept it, would not succeed in fully convincing them. □

# The WCRP Gives New Impetus to Peace in the Middle East

by Eva Ruth Palmieri

A meeting of the International Council of Trustees of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) held in December in Rome was the springboard for a new movement toward peace in the Middle East.

At the invitation of the WCRP, Israeli and Palestinian civil society representatives of the Geneva Accord for Peace in the Middle East briefed WCRP Trustees on this nonofficial proposal for peace, which had taken shape in recent months. The Geneva Accord is the outcome of the commitment of two participants in the 2001 Taba Israeli-Palestinian negotiations: Dr. Yossi Beilin, former Israeli Justice Minister, and Dr. Yasser Abed Rabbo, former Minister of Information of the Palestinian Authority. The accord carries no official standing, and it is not backed up by the governments involved—it is intended to serve as a model for a final-status agreement between the parties. Dr. Beilin said that the Geneva Accord is not a real peace process, but a “virtual peace process,” as it does not involve the official elected representatives of the two peoples. The 50-page document was signed in Geneva on December 1 in the city’s Congress Hall and its text was widely distributed among the Israeli and Palestinian populations. The initiative is supported by Nobel Peace Prize winners Nelson Mandela, Jimmy Carter, and Lech Walesa, among several other notable figures. The plan is strongly criticized by the current Israeli government and is not recognized by the European Union or by the United States. Nonetheless, the resolved determination of its promoters and the support of various nongovernmental peace organizations such as the Prague Appeal for Peace and the United States Institute of Peace,

as well as nonestablishment religious movements such as Rabbis for Human Rights (founded by Rabbi David Rosen, an international president of the WCRP), which involves over a hundred rabbis of different denominations, have led a great part of the public opinion both in the Middle East—in Israel and the Palestinian Authority alike—and in the Western world to consider the Geneva Accord as the possible basis for a definitive peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians.

As is the case in many conflict areas, religions can help in providing the right climate for the concrete realization of such proposals. We asked Rabbi Rosen, present during the WCRP meeting, to what extent religion can further the implementation of such a peace accord. He told us that although “religion does not have the capacity to be the source of political breakthrough,” it has to play “an essential role in support for such peace processes, for without it, these processes will not succeed.” Indeed, according to Rabbi Rosen, the “easy abuse of religion around the world poses some very tough moral questions for the adherents of different faiths.” Rabbi Rosen believes that a large part of the problem “has to do with the inextricable relationship between religion and identity.” This is due to the fact that “as religion seeks to give meaning to who we are, it is bound up with all the circles of human identity,” and when “the smallest components of these circles—individuals and families—feel insecure and threatened “they tend to shut out the wider circle,” namely, communities, peoples, etc., “out of a sense of self-preservation, all too often demonizing those outside.” It is in such situations that “religion itself all too often becomes part of the problem, nurturing isolation and

demonization of the other.” Rabbi Rosen explained that “in the Middle East this problem is accentuated first and foremost by an environment that is usually foreign to a pluralistic acceptance of diversity.” He added that those who have pursued a political agenda of reconciliation have tended to “avoid religious institutions and their representatives, viewing them as detrimental to the process.” This, Rabbi Rosen said, “is a tragic mistake that has actually played into the problem and compounded it,” for religion “is inextricably bound with human identities, especially in the Middle East.” Rabbi Rosen believes that the only way to “prevent it from becoming more and more of a problem is to make it part of the solution.” Ignoring it, he said, “will only make it all the more part of the former.” Thus “without the psycho-spiritual glue provided by the voice of a religion that is inextricably bound up with local identities, no political peace process will succeed in holding together,” he said.

Referring to the Geneva Accord, Rabbi Rosen said that despite the nonofficial character of the proposal, “it is a most important testimony and sign of hope.”

According to H.R.H. Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, co-chair of the WCRP Council of Trustees and moderator of the Executive Committee, the Accord is “a rejuvenation of a process of peacemaking and peacefulness.” He praised the involvement of non-state players. “I believe in a coalition of the sane,” Hassan said. “I believe in a citizen’s assembly, a cosmopolitan network, cooperating to build a multi-layer civil society.” Richard Blum from the United States, co-chair of the WCRP Council, believes that “it will be very difficult for both the Israeli



government and the Palestinian Authority to ignore the Geneva Accord." "What the Accord proposes is an approach to solving the unsolvable issue of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict," Blum said.

The Vatican expressed its support of the Accord through the pages of its daily newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*. "When facing the many acts of violence that upset the world and that at times seem to be relentless, we must not become accustomed to clashes as a method of crisis resolution. We can and must continue believing in the force of dialogue, as was reaffirmed these days by the promoters of the Geneva Accord," read the article.

Other WCRP Council participants included Dr. William Vendley, secretary general of the WCRP, the Most Rev. John Onaiyekan, president of the Catholic Episcopal Conference of Africa (SECAM), and Rev. Chung Ok Lee, Won Buddhism representative to the UN. The Trustees reported on recent historic developments in WCRP interreligious work for peace that parallels, and at times precedes, political efforts. Special project areas include: Iraq, where the WCRP Interreligious Council (which constitutes a local WCRP chapter) is directing humanitarian assistance and has made a commitment to a just and democratic government based on the rules of law; West Africa, where the WCRP continues work as peace-broker for Sierra Leone and is at the forefront in halting a civil war in Liberia; and East Africa, where leaders of the different religious communities forming the 18 WCRP national chapters are working together with other international relief agencies providing badly needed services for children and orphans living with HIV-AIDS-related problems. □

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## Rissho Kosei-kai President Visits Sri Lanka

In June 2002 the four most senior Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhist leaders held a press conference in Tokyo and issued "The Tokyo Statement" to urge conflict resolution in the country. The event was organized by Rissho Kosei-kai in cooperation with the Japanese Committee of the World Conference of Religions for Peace and the Japan Buddhist Federation. Rev. Nichiko Niwano, president of Rissho Kosei-kai, visited Sri Lanka from December 10 to 15 to reciprocate the Theravadin leaders' visit to Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters during their stay in Tokyo. In Sri Lanka, where there has been prolonged conflict between the majority Buddhist Sinhalese and minority Tamils, peace negotiations are continuing under a cease-fire. President Niwano took this opportunity to actively promote, especially among Buddhists, interfaith dialogue for world peace between religionists in Sri Lanka and Japan. He met with prelates of the Asgiriya and Malwatta chapters of the Siam Sect, the Ramanna Sect, and the Amarapura Sect. After taking part in a welcoming ceremony in Colombo, President Niwano visited Rissho Kosei-kai of Sri Lanka and met the local members. □

## Fund for Peace Donates Emergency Aid to Iran's Earthquake Victims

The Executive Committee of the Rissho Kosei-kai Fund for Peace donated 8 million Japanese yen in emergency aid to victims of the earthquake that devastated the historic city of Bam in Kerman, Iran, on December 26. Some 120,000 people were victims of a 6.3 magnitude earthquake. About

30,000 were killed, 12,000 injured, and 100,000 left homeless. The search for the missing continues in Bam, and many relief materials have been contributed from inside and outside the country. On December 29 Rissho Kosei-kai Chairman Katsunori Yamanoi met Iran's ambassador to Japan, Ali Majedi, at the Iranian Embassy in Tokyo and handed him a letter detailing contributions totaling 4 million yen. Mr. Majedi explained the situation in Bam and emphasized the need for more emergency support. Referring to Japan's long history of devastation caused by frequent earthquakes, Rev. Yamanoi said all Rissho Kosei-kai members shared the Iranian victims' grief. On the same day, Rev. Michio Matsubara, director of Rissho Kosei-kai's External Affairs Department, visited the Japanese Red Cross Society and presented a letter notifying it of a contribution of 3 million yen mainly for use by the Iranian Red Crescent for relief activities to improve sanitary and health conditions in disaster areas. Furthermore, the committee gave 1 million yen to JEN to ascertain the Iranians' need of help for reconstruction. □

On October 18–20, 2003, the Niwano Peace Foundation held an international peace forum in Tokyo under the theme "The Roles of Religious People and Organizations in Conflict Situations." The Niwano Peace Forum 2003 marked the 20th anniversary of the annual awarding of the Niwano Peace Prize. Delegates from five areas of recent conflict—the Korean peninsula, Sri Lanka, Israel and Palestine, Northern Ireland, and Mexico—reported on their involvement in conflict resolution based on religious principles. The report of the forum is available from the Niwano Peace Foundation. Readers who wish to obtain a copy of the forum report, please contact the Niwano Peace Foundation at:

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# A Religious Approach to Peace through Liberation of Our Hearts and Minds

by Deshabandu Bogoda Premaratne

*It is impossible to construct any permanent, everlasting "self" out of the impermanent conditions that are continually arising and dying. Whether we commit ourselves to becoming arahats or bodhisattvas, may we gain the wisdom that leads to peace. This article was originally an address delivered by Deshabandu Bogoda Premaratne at the Rev. Nikkya Niwano Commemorative Seminar held by the Inter-faith Foundation of Sri Lanka on October 5, 2003.*

Rev. Nikkya Niwano was a perfect exemplar of the ideals of a bodhisattva, one who aspires to be enlightened. He demonstrated these ideals in the way he lived his life and practiced charity, in what he taught over the years through his profuse writings, and above all in his total commitment to world peace. His approach to world peace was unique in that it was totally dictated by

his personal commitment to the virtues of a bodhisattva. All his lifework can be taken as a model of the religious approach to world peace.

We Buddhists in the Theravada tradition or the tradition of the arahats seem to think that the bodhisattva ideal is not for us. It is because we take it to mean aspiring to become a buddha, some day in some era of an unknown future. Realization of such an aspiration must necessarily seem to be beyond the imagination of the common run of mankind. We are of this view because we have restricted the meaning of *bodhi* to the arising of an enlightened buddha. To be enlightened also means to be an arahat. Buddha was the foremost of the arahats, but with the distinction that he attained that state unaided and unguided by any teacher and, moreover, he had the unique gift of being able to instruct others on the path he so successfully followed in attaining enlightenment. Thus he became the Perfectly Enlightened Buddha, *sammyak-sambuddha*, the incomparable teacher.

*Bodhi* is the highest level of intelligence, or *buddhi*, that any human mind has the capacity to reach. It is to be reached not so much through a process of acquisition or accumulation of knowledge, development, or cultivation but through a process of purification, a process of abandonment of all the defilements and latent tendencies headed by conceit of self, accumulated and deposited deep within our minds. The destruction of this garbage has to be, should be, and can be accomplished here and now, in this lifetime, without waiting for an unknown future birth when,

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perhaps by that time the mountain of garbage would have been solidified, compelling one to remain buried underneath it for evermore.

Now, this line of reasoning leads us to understand that once these layers of garbage are cleared and disposed of there will come to light that purity of being that had been there all that time, unknown and hidden from our own view. When that "purity of being" within oneself is revealed, that is what enlightenment is. That is *arahatship*, which is the birthright of every being fortunate enough to be born into the human domain. Every human being, whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist, Mahayanist or Theravadin, is a potential arahat and is thus entitled to be called a bodhisattva as long as there is some aspiration to rise above the existential state that all of us are sharing with the animal fraternity on earth.

### Social Reform Is Possible Only through Individual Freedom

The Buddha in his wisdom saw that social revolution or political revolution or legislation for "social morality" was no answer to man's inhumanity to man. He saw that it is only through rehabilitation of the individual that social evil can be averted.

The only qualification the Buddha required of those wanting to be taught his doctrine was that they must have the capacity to feel; and human beings are the highest among all sentient beings having the capacity to feel. Of course, all human beings feel their own private sorrows, such as the pain of sickness and death, or the despair and frustration of daily life. That is all that most people are capable of feeling. But to be able to realize the universality of that pain, sorrow, and suffering does not come that easily. That is why you see very few people working for peace or the abolition of conflict and violence within human societies. Compassion is very rare among human beings, and if anyone is inclined to develop it within oneself, then that

means that one's bodhisattva qualities are expressing themselves.

### What Do We Mean by "Heart" and "Head"?

We divide the physical territory of our living experience into two regions, to begin with, as the "heart" and the "head."

Literally, heart refers to "the hollow organ that keeps up circulation of blood by contracting and dilating." But figuratively the term heart, universally in all languages, has been used to mean "the seat of all emotions," especially of love and affection. On the negative side, the heart is the center for a whole host of negative feelings labeled as craving, desire, greed and lust, aversion, anger, hatred and vengeance, envy, jealousy, sorrow, and, worst of all, an obsession to destroy and annihilate.

On the positive side, the heart is capable of generating love, affection, kindness, sympathy, compassion, joy at the happiness of others, equanimity, and feelings of nonviolence.

The term "head" literally refers to "the upper part of our body"

containing the mouth and five out of the six sense organs, including the brain. Figuratively, the head is recognized as "the seat of the intellect and imagination." All our data—the raw material required for our thinking, imagining, interpreting, and understanding the world of things and men—are collected through the channels of the senses.

### In This Union of "Heart" and "Head," Where Does the "Mind" Come in?

Mind is regarded as the seat of consciousness that brings to light all perceptions of things, feelings, thoughts, and volitions. The Buddha taught that what we call mind or *citta*, is only the union between a perception gained through the senses and a feeling generated in the heart (*sañña ca vedana*). Thus the mind is what coordinates the functions of the heart and the head. Mind prepares all programs out of the raw data brought in by the sense organs of the head

and the body, always, invariably, mixed with a component of feeling generated by the heart. It is the mind that thinks, imagines, and forms concepts, ideas, ideologies, opinions, and views. The intelligence of the mind can be employed both for good and evil.

### From What Is It That We Have to Liberate Our Hearts, Heads, and Minds?

I said that we have to liberate our hearts and minds. From what is it that we have to liberate them?

*Feeling* plays the most dominant role in our living experience. Every living creature is perpetually running after some pleasurable feeling or running away from some unpleasurable feeling. If you carefully watch your behavior, you will notice that, for the most part, what you think you are doing for pleasure is actually your trying to avoid some unpleasant experience. It may be an unpleasant feeling actually felt at the moment or an anticipated unpleasure. You consume food not so much for the pleasure of eating, but to overcome the pain of hunger; you drink water not for the pleasure of drinking water, but to overcome the pain of thirst. Pain and pleasure are the guidelines for almost all of man's actions. If you think this out to its logical conclusion, you will realize that there really is no feeling whatsoever that can be counted as pleasurable. But to come to that realization, we need a fairly high level of wisdom to open our minds to the reality of impermanence inherent in all components or ingredients out of which we construct our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions; in other words the totality of our living experience.

Whether man realizes it or not, the fact is that man goes through perpetual pain of mind caused by the impermanence of everything he regards as near and dear to him, including himself, manifesting as arising, changing while in existence, and then passing away. In order to overcome and avoid this lack of pleasure, the human mind has conceived and concocted a concept of an indestructible, permanent entity, *atma*, residing within it. From this concept of a permanent and pleasurable entity, the human mind has derived other notions variously labeled as self, ego, personality, and even the conceit that "I am." In our daily living experience this notion works itself out as "I, myself, and mine."

This notion has been constructed by the mind's craving for pleasure out of all feelings of the heart, and for that purpose it grasps and holds the entire living experience as "mine" and takes "I" as the subject before whom all objects appear, and my "self" standing out as a permanent, immortal entity independent even of all living experience. This self sustains itself by identifying with all the resources of the heart and the head; such as material forms, feelings,

perceptions, thought constructions, and consciousness—all constituents of living experience.

But the strange character of this phenomenon is that it exercises dictatorial supremacy over heart, head, and the mind. The self, the pretender, has taken over full command of the totality of our living experience. Like the stilt-walker who mounts himself on a pair of stilts and struts pompously high above the crowd in the procession, this self has climbed on to the two limbs of heart and head and is manipulating them according to its own will and pleasure. Like the parasite plant that grows by splitting and choking the original tree, this self grows in and up over both heart and mind, preventing the entry of any wisdom into that mind.

### What Are the Consequences of This Unfortunate Development?

This egotism or self-conceit is structured out of all contents of my consciousness that become identified with "I, myself, and mine." The ego, for example, identifies itself with thoughts, ideas, ideologies, points of view, opinions, and beliefs, etc., and they are as precious as the lifeblood of the individual ego; because they and the ego are one and the same. They are as important as power, rank, status, and wealth, which are the necessary ingredients for self-seeking.

I think that those who are in sympathy with my ideas, views, opinions, ideologies, and beliefs are on my side; they are my friends and allies; they are my relations; they are my people. In this manner, ego, for the sake of its own security in continuity, identifies itself with family, caste, clan, tribe, culture, religion, country, race, etc.

The other strange character of my ego is that it just cannot understand why other egos should crave for identically the same things that I am after. The reason for this is that the way my heart and head are structured, I can have very little in common with other egos; my heart can feel only my own pain and pleasure. My heart has no direct access to other people's pains and pleasures. The way my brain is structured, it can only think for itself. My brain has no direct access to other people's thoughts, ideas, and imaginings.

The nature of life in human society is such that there is constant opposition from other selves who crave the identical things that I crave. The result is frustration, pain, and suffering. I must annihilate this painful state of being, regardless of what it may cost me and my people. The only practical way of doing that, according to the deluded thinking of the self, is to annihilate those who appear to be responsible for causing me that displeasure. They have no right to live; they must be wiped off the face of this earth. Self-seeking desire will manipulate the brain to come up



with designs for the most sophisticated weapons to get the job done as speedily as possible. It is that egoistic craving to annihilate one's own pain and displeasure with the belief that I and my people will be able to live peacefully and comfortably ever after we produce weapons of mass destruction. The ego in its ignorance refuses to see that the final conclusion of this competitive craving is nothing but mutual annihilation.

### Who Can Save Our Hearts and Minds from the Tyranny of the Self?

The structure of our living experience comprises two segments: the heart and the head, with the mind coordinating the two; but that is prior to the capture of the whole setup by the self. Heart and head are like two sides of a triangle. To complete the triangle and make it a harmoniously balanced structure, we need to support the two sides with a base line; and that has to be wisdom. It has been the historic mission of every religion that arose on this earth to instill this wisdom into the hearts and minds of humanity in order that the disastrous influences of the self can be undermined.

The Buddha's message of wisdom, very briefly, means: "Your self has been conditioned and determined by grasping the elements of existence such as matter, feelings, perceptions, conceptions, and consciousness. Understand that these are all impermanent, impersonal conditions that are perpetually arising and dying. You cannot construct out of these impermanent, dead, and dying elements any permanent, everlasting entity as a self, or any "personality" or anything that belongs to a self. Such effort will only make you suffer."

It is this impossible and foolish task that we are indulging in when we take ourselves to be personalities (*sakkaya ditthi*) and entertain the conceit that "I am." However, you can realize how difficult it is to have them dissolved, when you are told that if you dissolve the personality view you will enter the stream of nirvana, and when you move on further and give up completely your notion of "I, myself, and mine" realize nirvana as a full-fledged arahat. The character of the arahat, the most noble among humans, is that there are absolutely no boundaries to his or her compassion. The arahat will continue to serve humanity guiding people to come out of their ignorance of self, and finally pass away, with no craving left to come into any further existence.

Whether you profess to be Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, or Christian, may you be inspired to commit yourself to peace as bodhisattvas, aspiring to gain that enlightenment of perfect selflessness lying hidden within the recesses of your own heart and mind! □

# Dharma Teachers

by Gene Reeves

*Anyone who explains even one word contained in the Lotus Sutra to another is doing the Buddha's work, and is considered a Dharma teacher. Not only can we all be Dharma teachers, we can also all become bodhisattvas with the good fortune to one day attain buddhahood.*

Except for a brief interesting parable toward the end, chapter 10 does not have a dramatic story with characters and activities. Still, the core message of chapter 10 is dramatic in its own way. It can be used as an extremely important type of skillful means to open our understanding of the profound meaning of the Lotus Sutra.

## The Story

Here in chapter 10, for the first time in the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha addresses the Bodhisattva Medicine King. He points to the great multitude of creatures of every kind assembled before them and tells Medicine King that if any of them rejoices for even a single moment on hearing even a single verse of the Lotus Sutra, he will assure them of achieving supreme awakening. Further, he says, if anyone does this after he has passed away, that individual too will be assured of achieving supreme awakening, of becoming a buddha.

If anyone receives and keeps, reads, recites, explains, or copies even a single verse of the sutra, respects it as the Buddha is respected, or makes offerings of any kind to it, or just puts hands together respectfully toward it, such a person should be considered to be a great bodhisattva, one who is to become a buddha in a future life, and he or she should be respected and given presents and offerings by all. Such a person, having achieved supreme awakening in a former life, has appeared in this world out of great compassion in order to preach the Dharma.

Any good man or woman who privately explains even a phrase of the sutra to a single person is a messenger of the Buddha, one who does the Buddha's work. How much more

so, anyone who explains the whole sutra to a lot of people. When anyone hears such a person teaching the sutra, they will immediately become fully enlightened.

Someone who speaks ill of the Buddha for a whole eon is not as bad as someone who, with only a single word, speaks ill of someone for reading and reciting the Dharma. Similarly, one who praises the Buddha is meritorious, but one who keeps the sutra even more so. Though this sutra is the most difficult to believe and understand, the Buddha

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tells Medicine King, it is the most excellent he has ever taught. It contains the hidden core of all the teachings.

All those who are able to copy, embrace, read, recite, worship, and teach this sutra for the sake of others after the Tathagata's extinction will be covered by the Buddha's robe and protected by buddhas of the other worlds as well; they will have the powers of faith, of will, and of virtue, and live with the Buddha and have their heads patted or caressed by the Buddha.

Medicine King is then told that stupas should be erected, decorated, praised, and respected wherever the sutra is taught, read and recited, or copied, or wherever there is a copy of the sutra. But it is not necessary to place any relics of the Buddha in the stupa because it will already contain the Buddha's whole body. Anyone making offerings to such a stupa will thereby approach supreme awakening. Similarly, anyone who sees or hears the sutra, understands and keeps it, will approach supreme awakening.

A bodhisattva who has not heard or practiced this sutra is like an extremely thirsty man digging for water in the earth. If he sees only dry ground he is a long way from supreme awakening. But if he keeps digging and eventually sees damp earth and then mud, he knows that he is getting closer to water and will be encouraged to go on until he reaches water.

After the Buddha has passed away, those who would explain this sutra should enter the room of the Tathagata, which means having great compassion; wear the robe of the Tathagata, which means being gentle and patient; and sit on the seat of the Tathagata, which means seeing the emptiness or interdependence of all things.

Though the Buddha will be in another land after passing away, he will conjure up and dispatch various people and other creatures to hear the Lotus Sutra taught, to enable the teacher to see the Buddha from time to time, and to help the teacher if he forgets a phrase of the sutra. Those who follow such a teacher will be able to see many buddhas.

#### Emphasis on Dharma Teachers

The most important thing about this chapter is its obvious emphasis on the Dharma teacher (Skt., *dharmabhanaka*). Here we can say that the Lotus Sutra attempts to break through the limitations of the threefold *shravaka-pratyekabuddha*–bodhisattva distinction that had been prominent in earlier chapters and elsewhere in Mahayana Buddhism. According to chapter 10, anyone—bodhisattva, *pratyekabuddha*, *shravaka*, or even a layperson—can be a Dharma teacher.

This important point is certainly not unique to this chapter, but it is emphasized here in a special way: it is not

only great bodhisattvas, great leaders, or great people who can teach the Dharma and do the Buddha's work, but also ourselves. Very ordinary people of limited understanding and even of limited faith can join in the Buddha's work, if only by understanding and teaching a little.

Thus the Buddha tells the Bodhisattva Medicine King that if anyone wants to know what sort of living beings will become buddhas in the future, he should tell them that the very people before him, that is, all sorts of people, including very ordinary people, like themselves, will become buddhas.

Up to this point in the sutra the term "bodhisattva" has been used in at least two distinctly different ways. On the one hand, it is used as a kind of title or rank for great, well-known bodhisattvas such as the Bodhisattva Maitreya and the Bodhisattva Manjushri. Such great bodhisattvas are very important in Buddhism, as they can symbolize great virtues such as wisdom and compassion and serve as ideal models of what we can be.

Additionally, we have seen in earlier chapters that *shravakas*, beginning with Shariputra, are actually bodhisattvas. They are, in other words, on the way to becoming buddhas. But we never find the expression "Bodhisattva Shariputra." A somewhat different use of "bodhisattva" is being made, one in which the term does not so much represent a rank and status as it does a kind of relational activity. Accordingly, anyone can be a bodhisattva for someone else. The primary meaning of this is, of course, that we ourselves, the hearers or readers of the Lotus Sutra, can be bodhisattvas.

But with "bodhisattva" being associated in our minds with such great ones as Maitreya and Manjushri, it may be very difficult for us to believe that we are capable of becoming bodhisattvas. We are too young or too old or too stupid or too tired or too lazy or too selfish or too something else to be a bodhisattva! It's impossible, we may feel.

This is where chapter 10, and the idea of the teacher of the Dharma, comes in. It may be hard for me to believe that I can be a bodhisattva, but not as difficult to believe that I might be a "good man or woman who privately explains even a phrase of the sutra to a single person" and, therefore, be "a messenger of the Buddha, one who does the Buddha's work."

What's more, the gender gap so often prevalent in Buddhist texts is broken through here. "Any good man or woman," the text says—"Any good man or woman who privately explains even a phrase of the sutra to a single person is a messenger of the Buddha, one who does the Buddha's work." It is not irrelevant that not one of the famous, great bodhisattvas is a woman. Later we will learn

that the stepmother and wife of the Buddha are to become buddhas and therefore are to be considered bodhisattvas. And it is true that the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World (known in Japan as Kannon) of chapter 25 will, in China as Kuan-yin, take on female forms and often be regarded as female, even as the "Goddess of Mercy." And we are told later in the Lotus Sutra that such great bodhisattvas as the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World and the Bodhisattva Wonderful Voice are quite capable of taking on any form in order to help someone, including a great variety of female forms. Still, in the Lotus Sutra and elsewhere, nowhere do we find a female with the title "bodhisattva."

I believe it is no accident that chapter 10 repeatedly uses the expression "good man or good woman." It wants us to understand, not just understand mentally, but to actually embrace the teaching that we, whoever we are, can teach the Dharma. Even if only a little, we can teach the Dharma, and to that degree be a Dharma teacher.

And, if we can realize that we can be a teacher of the Dharma, it is only a short step, perhaps not even a step at all, to realize that anyone else can be a Dharma teacher for us. And when we have reached that double realization, we have truly, I believe, entered into the wonderful flowering of the Dharma known as the Lotus Sutra.

#### An Easy Way?

It is sometimes said that the Lotus Sutra offers an easy way to awakening, and that this is why it has been so popular throughout the history of East Asia, and, judging by the large number of fragments that continue to be found, probably in India and Central Asia as well. But is the way of the Lotus Sutra so easy?

This matter is a little complicated, because, as is so often the case with this sutra, two things are asserted that seem incompatible on the surface. On the one hand, anyone and everyone can be, and to some degree, no doubt, has already been, a Dharma teacher and bodhisattva for someone else. We can say that all have planted seeds of becoming a buddha, or that they have entered the Way of becoming a buddha. In chapter 10 we are told that if anyone rejoices even for a single moment from hearing even a single verse of the sutra, he or she will be assured of attaining supreme awakening.

Please notice, however, that it does not say "has" attained supreme awakening, but "will." What is between the hearing of a single verse and the attainment of awakening is, at least normally, a great deal of effort and practice. As we have seen before, the treasure we seek is at once both very near and very distant. What is being pointed to here is

that hearing even a single verse can plant a seed, a starting point for entering the Way. Like any seed, the seed and the bud that springs from it have to be watered and nourished in order to grow, flower, and bear fruit.

#### Sixteen Simple Practices

Traditionally, from T'ien-t'ai Chih-i I think, five kinds of Lotus Sutra practices and Dharma teachers are said to be taught here: (1) receiving and embracing (or upholding) the sutra; (2) reading and (3) reciting (or chanting) it; (4) explaining (or teaching or preaching) it; and (5) copying it.

"Receiving and embracing" involves really hearing and following the sutra, giving yourself to it so to speak. It is not merely a matter of hearing with one's ears and mind, but also with one's body. That is, it is a matter of making the sutra an extremely significant part of one's life by putting its teachings into practice in one's everyday life.

By reading the sutra, whether alone or with others, aloud or to oneself, and by reciting or chanting the sutra, the teachings may become more deeply rooted in our minds and hearts. But it is doubtful, I believe, that merely repeating the sutra, with no understanding of it, will in some magical way benefit oneself or others.

Reciting sutras once meant reciting them from memory. Memorizing sutras was once an extremely important responsibility of monks. For centuries it was the only way they had to store them, as writing had not yet been invented in India. Ananda, we are told, memorized all of the sutras taught during the Buddha's lifetime. Even after the invention of writing, without printing presses, copies of a sutra, especially copies of a sutra as long as the Lotus Sutra, would have been relatively rare.

Explaining the sutra to others is good not only for learners, but also for teachers. All good teachers know that, in the process of teaching, they almost always learn more than their students. Just the other day I received a message from one of my former students at the University of Tsukuba who has now received a Ph.D. and is in his first year as a full-time professor. He wrote that he had never before learned so much in one year as he had in teaching. I could understand this very well, as the same thing was true for me. Even now I always feel that in a classroom we are all learners and that I am being blessed with the greatest learning of all. That is why I am grateful for opportunities to teach about the Lotus Sutra—I learn from such opportunities.

Copying originally meant writing by hand, of course. With such a large quantity of sutras, this was a very important practice, the principal way of storing sutras for subse-

quent use. With written copies there could be much less reliance on memorized versions. But I'm not at all sure that copying by hand is so important today. What is important is looking at every character or word in the text, not quickly skipping over parts that are boring or difficult. Translating as well, I believe, can well serve this purpose of concentrating one's focus on every part of the text. Such practice, too, can be beneficial both to the reader of the copy and to the one who copies it.

Actually there are several variations of the formula for five practices in chapter 10 and many more throughout the sutra, usually with five or six different practices being listed. By my count, at least sixteen such practices are cited in the Lotus Sutra, though never all in one place. Not all of them are entirely different perhaps, but they are different enough to be represented by different Chinese characters in Kumarajiva's translation and therefore in my English translation.

Here are the sixteen: to (1) hear, (2) receive, (3) embrace or uphold, (4) read, (5) recite, and (6) study the sutra; to (7) memorize or learn the sutra by heart; to (8) remember the sutra correctly; to (9) understand the sutra's meaning; to (10) explain the sutra; to (11) teach the sutra for the sake of others; to (12) copy, (13) honor, and (14) worship the sutra; to (15) put the sutra into practice; and to (16) practice the sutra as preached. The reason for mentioning this list of sixteen is not to criticize the standardization into five. After all, it is much easier to remember five than sixteen, and the five can be used to represent the sixteen. What I want to recognize is that the Lotus Sutra is richer and much more complex than our standard formulas sometimes suggest.

Whether the list of such practices be five or seven or sixteen, what needs to be recognized is that these are practices that can be done by anyone, including you and me, and just about anywhere. They certainly are not the end of Buddhist practice, but they can be used as skillful means, as useful and important steps in the direction of the life of a true Dharma teacher or bodhisattva.

Though it is not listed as one of the sixteen, the practice of erecting stupas wherever the Lotus Sutra is taught advocated in chapter 10 is the same sort of thing. One who erects or even makes offerings to such a stupa is approaching supreme awakening.

### The Practices Are a Type of Skillful Means

Since worship is one of the sixteen practices, it may be useful to know the difference between worshipping an idol (or statue) and worshipping with the help of an image, or through an image, or before an image. Among many Prot-

estant Christians, as in the Bible, idolatry is condemned vigorously. Sometimes this has led to unfortunate results, as the destruction in recent years of sacred images in both Buddhist temples and Catholic churches in South Korea by zealous Protestant Christians. Virtually all Buddhists, on the other hand, make a great deal of use of physical objects in both personal and public worship. Most prominent among these, of course, are Buddha statues and statues of famous bodhisattvas, especially Kuan-yin/Kannon, Maitreya, Manjushri, Universal Sage, all of whom are prominent in the Lotus Sutra, and Kshitigarbha/Ti-tsang/Jizo, who does not appear in the Lotus Sutra. But it is not only such statues and paintings that are used in worship—the Lotus Sutra itself, in physical form, has often been treated as an object of worship in East Asia.

To worship an idol itself is to confuse one's ultimate object of worship with some physical thing. One recent morning my wife and I went to the Great Sacred Hall of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo. As Rissho Kosei-kai's main or central object of worship, a wonderful statue of the universal or eternal Shakyamuni Buddha dominates the main hall. Inside of this statue is a copy of the Threefold Lotus Sutra in beautiful calligraphy inscribed by Founder Niwano. But we did not worship either the statue or its contents. Before, or through, or with the help of, the statue that was in front of us, we paid our respects to the Buddha who is everywhere. This does not make the statue any less important, but more, for it can lead us to the truth—and this is something that worshipping the statue itself could never do.

### Digging for Water

What is the meaning of the parable of the extremely thirsty man digging in the soil for water? Unlike other parables, this one is not fully interpreted for us, but it can readily be understood in accordance with the previous discussion.

The man, a bodhisattva, digs for water on a "high plain." We do not know exactly what this "high plain" means, but presumably it means that he is digging in a place where there is at least a reasonable possibility of water being found. If he dug in a rocky place, for example, he might die of thirst before finding any water at all.

Digging, he finds damp earth, then mud, and knows that he is getting closer to water. Actually, the dampness of the damp earth itself is water. That is, seeing damp earth, while he cannot yet drink, he is seeing a promise of water to drink, a promise that he knows is good because the dampness and the water he seeks are the same water.

The text interprets this parable in terms of hearing the Dharma:



Medicine King, you should know  
That this is the way people are.  
Those who do not hear the Dharma Flower Sutra  
Are far from Buddha-wisdom.

But if they hear  
This profound sutra,

And hearing it  
Truly ponder over it,  
You should know that those people  
Are near the wisdom of a buddha.

So too all sixteen simple practices—any of them and many others as well, while not the ultimate goal, can be a kind of taste of the life of a bodhisattva. If we practice one or more of them seriously, we will experience a taste of riches to come and know that we too are nearer to the water after which we thirst: the wisdom of a buddha.

Here, too, we should notice that there is a kind of relational activity going on. On the one hand, the man is using his own effort to dig for water. He is motivated, even driven, by something within himself, namely, his thirst. His very life depends on finding water to drink. So he exerts a great effort. But, on the other hand, the promise of water, the increasingly damp earth, comes to him. As a result of making an effort, he receives a promise. The water is something he finds.

We, too, if we make an effort to follow the bodhisattva way, may receive a promise of riches to come. Along the way we too may receive some help from the Buddha. In chapter 10 we are told that the Buddha will send various people to hear the Dharma taught and to help the teacher when he needs it.

#### The Buddha's Room, Robe, and Seat

Toward the end of chapter 10, we find these words:

If any are to teach this sutra,  
Let them enter the Tathagata's room,  
Put on the Tathagata's robe,  
And sit on the Tathagata's seat.

Facing the multitude without fear,  
Let them teach it clearly everywhere,

With great compassion as their room,  
Gentleness and patience as their robe,  
And the emptiness of all things as their seat.

Here, in this beautiful poetic expression, we have another indication of what it means to follow the bodhisattva way. It means nothing terribly complicated, just the very difficult

matter of being compassionate, gentle, and patient and living from an understanding of the emptiness of all things. To enter the room of the Buddha, wear his robe, and sit on his seat is a wonderful metaphor for living the life of a bodhisattva, living the Dharma in a way that goes beyond our sixteen simple practices.

#### Doing the Buddha's Work

Teachers of the Dharma are called the Buddha's workers. This is a very important idea. Here again we can see that the Buddha depends on human beings to do his work. It is all too easy to think that everything has already been arranged for us in this life. Here in chapter 10 we are told that Dharma teachers, having already attained supreme awakening in some former life, have been born into this world out of compassion in order to teach and preach here. But this does not mean that everything has already been decided for us by our actions in former lives. That would make a joke of present life, reducing it to triviality. What we do with our lives, how we live now, is never merely a function of the karma or causation or choices made in previous lives, important as that is. What doing the Buddha's work requires is an understanding that what we do now makes an important difference, to ourselves, to others, and to the Buddha himself.

By being Dharma teachers doing the Buddha's work, we ourselves can embody the Buddha, enabling the Buddha to live and work in this world, now. To this degree, the very life of the Buddha is affected by what we are and do. The Lotus Sutra teaches that we should never accept a lesser teaching, especially any teaching that makes less of us, that makes human beings anything less than Dharma teachers and bodhisattvas.

#### Buddha-Dharma

There has been much discussion in Buddhism about the relative importance of the Buddha and the Dharma, the first two of the "three treasures" of Buddhism. That controversy is reflected here in chapter 10. Here it is clear that what the Buddha taught, that is, the Dharma, is more important than the Buddha himself. That is the meaning behind both the idea that someone who insults the Buddha is not as bad as someone who insults the sutra and the idea that stupas need not contain physical remains of the Buddha's body because the Dharma contains his whole body.

The teaching that the Buddha has three or four "bodies," of which the highest is the Dharma-kaya, the Dharma-body, is perhaps being alluded to here. But that teaching makes it clear that you cannot have the Dharma-body without the others. To follow, or have faith in, or take refuge in the Bud-

dha is to follow what the Buddha discovered and taught, the Dharma. But equally, to follow the Dharma is to follow what was taught by the Buddha. For a Buddhist, Dharma is always Buddha-Dharma.

Probably this kind of going around in circles is similar in some ways to the ongoing conflict in Christianity between “faith” and “understanding.” Like some Buddhists, Christians have often concluded that faith takes priority over understanding, some rejecting understanding altogether. But in Buddhism this is harder to do, precisely

because Buddhism has this notion of Dharma and because Buddhist scriptures, including the Lotus Sutra, emphasize the Dharma.

This is one reason why the great Dharma teacher Nikkyo Niwano started Rissho Kosei-kai. He not only thought that the Buddha should be revered and the sutra recited, but also that the sutra should be studied.

The sixteen practices that can lead us closer to water, to Buddha-wisdom, are, after all, practices of the Dharma that make it possible for the Buddha to be alive in our time. ■

# The Importance of Character Building

by Nichiko Niwano

*At a time of international anxiety and tension, society's first priority should be the right kind of education for the younger generation.*

Last year the outbreak of the Iraq war enveloped the world in anxiety and tension. Since the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, the tendency to retaliate against hate with hate has strengthened, and violence and disorder continue. This year too, I am sure, there are people whose hearts are troubled.

In my 2002 “principle for the year” message I said that I hoped we would take to heart and learn from this passage from the Dhammapada: “For hate is not conquered by hate: hate is conquered by love.”\* And in 2003 I quoted the opening words of the Seventeen-Article Constitution of Prince Shotoku (574–622), “Harmony is to be valued,” and expressed the wish that we should do our very best to bring about harmony.

These principles are not limited to a particular year, of course; we should always make them our foundation and our objective. We should overcome hate and aim for harmony. I hope we will all strive still harder to this end.

The most important thing for achieving a peaceful world, nation, and society is character building. Unless each and every one of us cultivates the field of the heart and mind, there can be no true peace. Education of the younger generation, in particular, should always be the top priority. As someone has said, “Both politics and the economy exist for the sake of the education of children.” This is because the sound development of children is the key to the future of the nation and the world. In this regard, Japan is now at a major crossroads. In the past several years there has been a succession of sad incidents involving young people. Violent juvenile crime has doubled over the past ten years, growing from about 1,000 cases to some 2,000 cases annually, and has become a big social problem.

Originally, all children are pure and innocent. The Indian poet and thinker Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) once said, “Every child comes with the message that God has not yet despaired of man.” As children grow, they are

affected by their environment, lose their purity and innocence, and go astray. Some turn to crime. Various reasons for this have been advanced, but the weakening of the role and function of the family is said to be one major problem. Another is said to be the priority adults give to merchandise-oriented values and the harmful information and goods they keep uncritically providing children with.

There is a short poem by the Zen master Bankei (1622–93) that can be translated roughly as follows: “It is sad to see a child gradually gain worldly wisdom and grow distant from the Buddha.” The education that adults provide imbues children with the kind of knowledge that neglects their humanity and alienates them from the Buddha. Bankei is telling adults to be deeply aware of their responsibility.

With this in mind, in my 2004 message for the year I said in part: “In Japan today there is a rash of increasingly

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violent juvenile crime. This needs to be addressed first and foremost in the family and by parents. The educator Yoshio Toi (1912–91) said, ‘There may be myriad lights, but there is one light awaiting me.’ Likewise, each family needs to provide a light for its children that is stronger than any temptation.”

The home is meant to be a place of rest and relaxation, a place where one can experience a warmth and kindness not to be found in any other place. Parents who pray wholeheartedly for their children’s happiness and recognize and nurture their individuality give children a sense of absolute peace of mind. It is important that the home be a place to which children are eager to return.

The home is also meant to be the fundamental place where one’s character is cultivated. Through daily contact with other family members and seeing how their parents live, a respect for the deities, and a love of fellow people are instilled and grow in children’s hearts. Home is a place where discipline takes place; there, while the children’s dignity is fully protected, they learn to control self-centeredness and are taught to be able to distinguish good from bad.

Bearing this in mind, the most important thing now is to regulate the family. Regulation of the family is discussed in the Confucian classic *The Great Learning*: “Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy.” This passage does not express a sequence of actions; all take place simultaneously. In the Members’ Vow of Rissho Kosei-kai we pledge “to bring peace to our families, communities, and countries and to the world,” but the meaning is to all as one.

Regulating the family means aiming to create a family that has warmth. What is important is that first parents themselves establish this firm wish in their minds. It is this wish that makes it possible to discover ways of dealing with problems that suit individual families.

I frequently mention the vital importance of three practices that we should aim to make part of our daily routine: first, say “good morning” to other family members; second, reply “yes” crisply and clearly when you are called; and third, always push in your chair when you leave the table and align your shoes neatly when you take them off. These three simple practices make the family peaceful because they enable us to destroy the shell of self-centeredness that encases us.

At the Niwano Peace Forum 2003 I learned the importance of educating children without teaching hate. In some countries, history education teaches children to hate certain other countries. This makes it impossible for those chil-

dren to encounter and interact with people from other countries purely as human beings. The same applies to the family. Words and actions steeped in hatred plant the seeds of discord in children’s hearts. From the broad standpoint of world peace, we must aspire to truly religious education.

Most important for us as Buddhists is to cultivate families centered on the home altar. By studying the Buddha’s teaching we become aware that all that exists in the world is part of one great life-force pervaded by the truth of impermanence and that we human beings, as part of that life-force, are sustained by it. Parents kneel before it, worship, and give thanks to that great, precious force. Nothing is more important for children’s education than to demonstrate this stance through morning and evening sutra chanting and prayer before the home altar.

The Lotus Sutra teaches the “wish for life,” the teaching that we are born into this world through our wish for the salvation and happiness of all living things. The Buddha’s wish and our wish are basically the same. It is something everyone originally possesses. What is important is to become aware of this deep-seated wish that we already possess. With this “wish for life” firmly in mind, I hope we will fix our attention on the problems of youth and address them through regulation of the family.

In this time of many nuclear families, parents feel anxious and confused over child rearing. Fortunately, Rissho Kosei-kai’s nationwide network of branches has many members rich in life experience. I earnestly hope these grandfathers, grandmothers, and younger men and women will share their wisdom with parents caught up in child rearing. In this area, too, the role of branches, of the Sangha, is truly important.

The year 2006 will be the centenary of the birth of Nikkyo Niwano, founder of Rissho Kosei-kai. Renovation of the Great Sacred Hall to commemorate the centenary began last year. This year, too, various preparations for the occasion will proceed. It is thanks to the founder that we have been able to receive the Buddha’s teaching. The best way to repay our debt of gratitude is for each one of us to accept the teaching we have received with true thankfulness, to hold fast to the teaching and lead worthwhile lives, and to pass on that joy to others. This, I think, is what the founder would have wished most.

Leading by example in this way is also the key to regulating the family. Pledging to one another to aspire to create families that have warmth—the vow that is, literally and figuratively, closest to home—let us strive with all our might for self-improvement this year, too. □

\*Juan Mascaró, trans., *The Dhammapadam: The Path of Perfection* (London: Penguin, 1975), p. 35.

# One Day, One Life— Together with the Sangha

by Katsue Hattori

*A member of Rissho Kosei-kai learns from her own painful experience that true salvation involves learning the correct way to view ourselves and others.*

I was born on July 8, 1951, in Haramachi City, Fukushima Prefecture, the eldest daughter of my high-school teacher father and primary school teacher mother. After graduating from high school, I went to work in the local post office and enjoyed a youth free of undue restrictions.

Later I married my husband, whom I had met at an executive training course for post-office employees, and we started our life together in Tokyo, both of us working. However, after the birth of our first two children, I started suffering from the stress of raising the children while continuing to work. Also, in contrast to my pre-marriage days, nothing seemed to turn out as I wished, which led me to suffer from psychological instability. I fought constantly with my husband, and not a day went by when I did not take it out on him or my children. The apartment building in which we were living had a surprisingly large number of members of Rissho Kosei-kai among its residents, so much so that some called it the “Rissho Kosei-kai Apartments.” Seeing how miserable our family was, some of these members invited me to join the organization, but I consistently refused, saying I was busy and had no particular need for religious faith. However, my husband’s father contracted stomach cancer, and as a way of expressing his desire to honor his parents and his wish for a long life for his father, in October 1978 my husband was led to the religious life at the Ota Branch in Tokyo and joined Rissho Kosei-kai. This was all part of my husband’s religious faith, and I viewed the whole thing coldly as having nothing to do with me.

Around that time, I repeatedly indulged in impulse buying as a way of relieving stress, and as a result I found myself 3.5 million yen in debt. Terrified of the debt collector, I left my husband and two small children one cold day in January and ran off by myself to Kyoto. The outside

world was harsh, and I found myself working at a noodle shop, hardly able to distinguish day from night. The loneliness and difficulties of living alone permeated my being, and I cried desolately as I thought about the warmth of the dear family circle. I thought I would never be able to go home again, but in my heart I was continually crying out for someone to come and find me. I dreamed of my children every night.

No longer able to resist the desire to hear their voices, I called home. That day happened to be just three weeks after I had left, and was the last day of a series of devotional services in conjunction with a prayer for me that were being held. Over the phone I could hear the voices of the people of the “Rissho Kosei-kai Apartments” calling out, “Come on home, we’re all waiting for you—no need to bear your troubles alone!”

Gathering my courage, I went home to find my husband grown dreadfully thin and his beard unshaven—I could barely recognize him. My mother had been apologizing to him, blaming herself for the way she had raised me and praying constantly with all her heart for my safe return.

From then on I stopped working, and my religious training began. I received the teaching sincerely, and made efforts to at least put into superficial practice the right way to understand and react to things and events, and the right way to relate to other people.

## The “Child” Given Good Medicine

In 1980, my husband was transferred and we moved to Kokura, on the island of Kyushu, and the son we had been longing for was born. I served as an area leader in the Kokura Branch, and enjoyed running around from morning to night every day, while our Buddhist beliefs came to occupy a central position in our family. However, our

chapter leader began to criticize everything I did, telling me that I was “off the track,” and that I was actually causing my own problems. Now I can look back and realize that these criticisms originated in our chapter leader’s feelings of compassion, as she could see that I was just tripping through lightly, ready to fly off at any moment. However, at the time I gradually began to feel miserable, and the pain of not being appreciated caused me to start staying away from the branch. Looking for some other group where I would be appreciated, for four years I threw myself into the PTA and into activities sponsored by the local community center. Articles about my activities began appearing in the local edition of a newspaper. That was fine as far as it went, and I enjoyed every day, but I still felt there was something missing. What I was really looking for was the teaching of our founder, Nikkyo Niwano.

Suddenly, on October 4, 1999, I heard the news that our founder had passed away. In the midst of my deep sorrow, I felt a strong yearning toward our founder. A desire to follow his teaching pierced my heart, and I embraced the conviction that there was no other path in life for me but the way of the Dharma. Without thinking, I ran to the branch. Looking back, I realize that at that moment I awoke for the first time to the true meaning of the parable of the physician’s sons in chapter 16, “Revelation of the Eternal Life of the Tathagata,” of the Lotus Sutra. This parable deals with the extinction and immortality of Shakyamuni, and illustrates how his extinction functions as a tactful means for expressing his great compassion.

[In the parable, the sons of a wise physician take poisonous medicine in their father’s absence and fall into a delirium. On his return, all of them rejoice to see him, but only some of them take the good medicine he offers to cure their affliction. He tells the rest that the time has come for him to die, but that he will leave them with the good medicine to cure themselves. He leaves and sends a messenger back to say he has died, and in their grief the uncured sons take the good medicine and are cured.] I realized that I was unmistakably one of the physician’s children who finally took the good medicine.

In 2001 I was asked to serve as chapter leader. In my life up until that time, I had usually run away from my problems, blaming other people or circumstances, but from this time onward I made up my mind to accept everything as a lesson from the Buddha, and to face my lot in life as my own personal course of religious training.

One day, a woman I’ll call Ms. A came rushing in to the branch. She had racked up a large amount of debt, and in fear of the debt collector, had run away from home, leaving her husband and two children. Listening to her tale, I felt myself grow irritated with her irresponsible behavior and

lifestyle. Not knowing where to begin with her, I looked to the head of our branch for guidance. He said that, in order to get a true picture of our own lifestyle, the first thing we need to do is firmly embrace a basic religious practice. He also provided an introduction to a lawyer. Everyone in the chapter banded together for the benefit of Ms. A’s happiness, giving her the things she needed for daily life, and so on.

One morning at 6 A.M. I saw Ms. A cleaning the lavatory of the branch, very unwillingly. Her figure then seemed to blend into a vision of my own past. I could no longer think of her as a stranger, and began to feel real affection toward her. I knew all too well the loneliness and pain of having run into debt, and we sat and cried together as we confessed our experiences. Thanks to Ms. A, I was able to fully realize how spoiled I had been, and I came to feel the weight of my own sins. I apologized to my husband and daughters from the bottom of my heart for the pain and trouble I had caused them. After that, Ms. A became diligent in her religious training and was able to take on the lavatory cleaning chores with a happy and grateful heart. Seeing the change in her, one of her relatives declared, “The teaching of Rissho Kosei-kai must really be something,” and joined the branch.

Ms. A soon found a job and thus the means to effect a solution to her problems. I was convinced that anyone who believes in the Dharma will always be saved, no matter what kind of trouble they are in. Ms. A and everyone in the chapter were delighted. This sort of thing, however, is a mere “expedient protection.” True salvation involves learning the correct way to view the world, your life, and other people, embracing correct values, and feeling gratitude for those things we normally take for granted, while becoming part of a group in which each person finds his or her life fulfilling, and grateful for the opportunity to serve others. It also means putting the teachings into concrete, everyday practice in intention, word, and deed. We confirmed all this with our chapter members, and as a result our *hoza* counseling group became more cheerful and lively.

### In the Midst of Suffering

The year 2002 was my second as chapter leader. After the seventh anniversary of my father’s death in May, my mother died of cancer in July. A month later, before I had gotten over my grief, I received the news that this time it was I who had cancer, of the stomach. Everything went black before my eyes, and I could not understand what was happening in my body. When I came to I felt, “Why me? Why should I have cancer?” I felt crushed by the cruel force of reality, and the fear of death that my parents had no doubt suffered attacked me now as well, and I could not

sleep for nights on end. In September 2002, with everyone in the chapter praying for me, I underwent seven hours of surgery in which my entire stomach was removed.

I managed to overcome several difficult post-operative hurdles, and the next thing was to start training myself to eat again. Even a tiny bite of food would get stuck in my throat and I couldn't speak or breathe. I could not sleep even for a short time—it was a horrible struggle. With every ounce of strength I called out to the Buddha and to the spirit of our founder and to our president to please help me. But the pain was so great that I came to question the very existence of any god or the Buddha. It was truly a living hell. In the midst of suffering, I found myself again recalling the time when I ran away from home, and my parents and family prayed deeply with all their hearts for me. In repentance for my wrongdoing, I wept, unable to stop the tears.

"I think I would rather die." "No, I want to live!" In the midst of suffering I could not control my own thoughts or feelings. On the telephone, I cried to the head of our branch, "Help me! I can't stand it!" In answer he bellowed, "Get a grip on yourself! We do not have chapter leaders in Kokura ignorant of the gods and the Buddha. You are not dying from your illness, you have been dying since the day you were born. Pull yourself together!"

These severe words of chastisement were imbued with the heat of deep compassion and warm prayer. I had lost hold of myself due to my suffering, but at this I came back to myself with a snap. "What's to come of us if a chapter leader like myself loses sight of the Buddha? Please let me see the Buddha," I prayed unceasingly. As I did so, I came to see the Buddha in my husband and three children, who were working so hard to take care of me during my illness, in the people of the chapter, who were praying for me and sending me encouraging messages, and in the doctor and nurses who were doing their very best for me, and the other people in my hospital room. From the bottom of my heart I felt that the Buddha was indeed protecting me. This sense of gratitude gave me the courage to face my pain.

### A Role for Each of Us

After that I began to recover normally, and in January 2003 I resumed my duties. Thankfully, this experience with illness allowed me to understand for myself the guidance and teaching of our founder and president that all things are arrangements ordered by the compassion of the Buddha. Many people warmly encouraged me during that time, and the more I think about the opportunities I will have to treasure the lives of our faithful and encourage them in the same way, the more grateful I am for my role.

In my life I have run away from what I didn't like and

tried to have things all my own way. Thanks to the cancer, I am now aware of how other people feel. I have made up my mind to fully concur with our president's teachings on impermanence, and to adopt the mental attitude of "One Day, One Life," and hope to live through the rest of my life together with our group of faithful. As we are taught in "Prediction," chapter 6 of the Lotus Sutra, my salvation, my path to becoming a bodhisattva, and the world of complete and perfect peace is here, in this chapter, among this group of faithful.

In 2003, our president led us to seek peace through the practice of bringing our hands together in the thankful and prayerful *gassho* attitude. We accept this guidance and put it into practice at every opportunity, for example, when we are the first to utter a greeting when we meet someone, when we are the first to smile and extend our hand, the first to apologize, the first to perform acts of social kindness, like pushing our chairs back in at the table or arranging the shoes people have taken off before entering a room—that is, when we are the first to do whatever takes a little extra effort. With a thankful and prayerful attitude, we get a firm feeling for the preciousness of our own life and the lives of others, and come to really like people. This indescribable emotion is the virtue I feel I have now been granted.

On September 5, 2004, our Kokura Branch will celebrate its forty-fifth anniversary. Our chapter is working for local neighborhood revitalization based on a consideration of existing area divisions such as school districts and so on, and on the guidance of our president for deepening our compassion. Our key words are "observe, listen, and come together," and "giving priority to our faithful." Every area leader works with five neighborhood group leaders, who in turn each work with three block leaders, making up a system in which each person has his or her own role to play in creating a warm and welcoming Sangha and a group of friends who can talk together about their hopes and dreams. Without hurrying, but also without resting, we are moving together toward this goal.

I have found my greatest salvation in the destiny that allowed me to come into contact with our founder and our president, and in the process of learning to understand and to practice the teaching with the Sangha. I have found my greatest happiness in being blessed with the love of my parents, my husband, and my children. I hope to continue to bring more people to a faith that gives them happiness through the agency of a thankful heart, and to increase my devotion by giving others religious guidance. □

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# The Salutations of the Mallas

by Hajime Nakamura

*Even though weary from illness, the Buddha did not ignore the bonds of friendship and took steps to extend greetings to old acquaintances.*

Gotama Buddha was not wandering aimlessly, going from place to place on impulse; on the contrary, he had followed the trade route from Rājagaha to Sāvattthi and Kapilavatthu, visiting old friends and acquaintances along the way. Now, even though he was weary through illness, he did not forget those people, for to have departed from a place where those he knew lived without greeting them would have been both impolite and a source of regret in his own heart. Gotama did not ignore the bonds of common friendship, and so had greetings sent to the Mallas, in whose republic he was.

“(19) ‘Go, Ānanda, to Kusinara, and say to the Mallas of Kusinārā: “Tonight, Vaseṭṭhas, in the last watch, the Tathāgata will die. Come to him, Vāseṭṭhas. Come to him, Vaseṭṭhas, so that later you may not regret, saying: ‘The Tathāgata died in our territory, but we were unable to see the Tathāgata in the last watch [of the night].’””

“‘Yes, Master,’ replied the young Ānanda, and putting on his inner robe and taking up his outer robe and bowl, went into Kusinārā with a companion.”

Because of its status as a republic, news of the Buddha’s arrival soon spread among the Mallas.

“(20) At that time, however, the Mallas of Kusinārā had gathered in their meeting hall and were discussing [public] affairs. To that place went the young Ānanda, and arriving there, he addressed the Mallas of Kusinārā: ‘Tonight, Vāseṭṭhas, in the last watch, the Tathāgata will die. Come to him, Vāseṭṭhas, come to him, so that later you may not regret, saying: “The Tathāgata died in our territory, but we were unable to see the Tathāgata in the last watch [of the night].’””

Hearing this, the Mallas hastened to Gotama, with whom their long-standing ties were deep.

“(21) Hearing this from the young Ānanda, the Mallas, with their sons, their daughters-in-law, and their wives felt anguish and grief, and their hearts were constricted with pain. Some were tearing their hair and wailing, stretching

forth their arms and raising them, weeping, and 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.’

“Then the Mallas, with their sons, their daughters-in-law, and their wives in anguish and grief, and their hearts constricted with pain, approached the place where the young Ānanda was, within the Mallas’ *sāla* grove of Upavattana.”

Ānanda, realizing that it would be impossible for the great crowd of Mallas to greet the gravely ill Buddha individually, had them pay their respects in groups.

“(22) Then the young Ānanda thought to himself: ‘If I allow the Mallas of Kusinārā to salute the Venerable Master individually, they will not have finished saluting him before daybreak. Let me now therefore group the Mallas of

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Kusinārā by family, and have them salute the Venerable Master in family groups, saying: "Revered One, here is the Malla so-and-so, with his children, his wife, his fellows and stablemates, who all salute the Venerable Master with their heads bowed at his feet."

"Then the young Ānanda grouped the Mallas of Kusinārā by family and had them salute the Venerable Master, saying: 'Revered One, here is the Malla so-and-so, with his children, his wife, his fellows and stablemates, who all salute the Venerable Master with their heads bowed at his feet.'

"By this means did the young Ānanda have the Mallas of Kusinārā salute the Venerable Master in the course of the first watch of the evening." (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 19-22)

We do not know if this episode is historically accurate in all details, but it is very likely that a great number of people would have gathered around the Buddha at this time.

### The Ordination of Subhadda

The final person to meet the dying Gotama was a wandering ascetic called Subhadda (Skt., Subhadra), who had insisted on seeing him.

"(23) At that time a wandering ascetic named Subhadda was living in Kusinārā. The wandering ascetic Subhadda had heard that *samaṇa* Gotama would die in the last watch of that night. Thereupon the wandering ascetic Subhadda thought: 'I have long heard wandering ascetics—elders advanced in years, masters, and teachers—speaking together saying that Tathāgatas, Arahants, those who have attained supreme enlightenment appear [only rarely] in this world. I have now heard it said also that in the last watch of this night the *samaṇa* Gotama will die and a doubt [uneasiness] has arisen in my mind. [But] because I have faith in the *samaṇa* Gotama, I believe that the *samaṇa* Gotama can teach me a doctrine that will be able to dispel that doubt.'

"(24) Then the wandering ascetic Subhadda approached the place where the young Ānanda was, within the Mallas' *sala* grove of Upavattana. Drawing near, he said to the young Ānanda: 'I have long heard wandering ascetics—elders advanced in years, masters, and teachers—speaking together saying that Tathāgatas, Arahants, those who have attained supreme enlightenment appear [only rarely] in this world. I have now heard it said also that in the last watch of this night the *samaṇa* Gotama will die and a doubt [uneasiness] has arisen in my mind. [But] because I have faith in the *samaṇa* Gotama, I believe that the *samaṇa* Gotama can teach me a doctrine that will be able to dispel that doubt. Permit me then, Ānanda, to meet the *samaṇa* Gotama.'" (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 23-24)

The Sanskrit version is even more precise.

"(XL, 1) At that time there lived in Kuśinagarī a wandering ascetic called Subhadra. He was old, advanced in years, and weak with age.

"(XL, 2) His years numbered one hundred and twenty and he was revered by the Mallas of Kuśinagarī, honored, esteemed, and given offerings by them, considered by all a person worthy of veneration.

"(XL, 3) The wandering ascetic Subhadra had heard: 'This night in the middle watch, the *śramaṇa* Gautama will enter the stage of nirvāṇa without any remainder of defilement and will pass away.'

"(XL, 4) [Subhadra said:] 'I have doubts about various matters. However, I nurture the hope that Gautama can dispel those doubts for me.

"(XL, 5) 'Suppose I were to approach the place where the Venerable Master Gautama is. I might, having approached, be able to ask for some instruction if I might be given an opportunity to have a definite answer to my question.'

"(XL, 6) Then [hearing that Gautama had arrived], he left Kuśinagarī and went to the grove with the twin *sala* trees.

"(XL, 7) At that time the young Ānanda was walking in the open ambulatories near the gate of the monastery.

"(XL, 8) The wandering ascetic Subhadra saw the young Ānanda from afar. Having seen him, he went to where the young Ānanda was. Approaching, he spoke to the young Ānanda:

"(XL, 9) 'I have heard, Ānanda, that this night in the middle watch, the *śramaṇa* Gautama will enter the stage of nirvāṇa without any remainder of defilement and will pass away.

"(XL, 10) 'I have doubts about various matters. However, I nurture the hope that Gautama can dispel those doubts for me.

"(XL, 11) 'Suppose I were to approach the place where the Venerable Master Gautama is. I might, having approached, be able to ask for some instruction if I might be given an opportunity to have a definite answer to my question.'

"(XL, 12) Ānanda said: 'Cease, Subhadra. Do not disturb the Venerable Master. The Venerable Master, the Blessed One, is weary and fatigued in body.'

"(XL, 13) The wandering ascetic Subhadra said twice, three times, to the young Ānanda:

"(XL, 14) 'I have long heard from wandering ascetics who were great teachers advanced in years that Arhats, Tathāgatas, and those who have attained the true enlightenment of a buddha appear [only rarely] in this world.

"(XL, 15) '[I have heard] that this night in the middle watch, the Venerable Master Gautama will enter the stage of nirvāṇa without any remainder of defilement and will pass away.

"(XL, 16) 'Still, I have doubts about various matters.



However, I nurture the hope that Gautama can dispel those doubts for me.

“(XL, 17) ‘Suppose I were to approach the place where the Venerable Master Gautama is. I might, having approached, be able to ask for some instruction if I might be given an opportunity to have a definite answer to my question.’

“(XL, 18) Again, the young Ānanda said to the wandering ascetic Subhadda:

“(XL, 19) ‘Cease, Subhadda. Do not disturb the Tathāgata. The Venerable Master, the Blessed One, is weary and fatigued in body.’” (Waldschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, XL, 1–19, p. 366)

Subhadda is very assertive about meeting the Buddha. Ānanda’s reluctance to let him disturb his dying Master was perfectly natural in the circumstances.

“(24 continued) When he [Subhadda] said thus, the young Ānanda said to the wandering ascetic Subhadda: ‘Cease, Subhadda. Do not disturb the Tathāgata. The Teacher is weary.’” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 24)

Three times did Subhadda repeat his request, and three times did Ānanda deny him.

“(24 continued) The wandering ascetic Subhadda said to the young Ānanda twice and three times: ‘I have long heard, Ānanda, wandering ascetics—elders advanced in years, masters and teachers—speaking together, saying that Tathāgatas, Arahants, those who have attained supreme enlightenment appear [only rarely] in this world. I have now heard it said also that this night in the last watch the *samaṇa* Gotama will die and a doubt [uncasiness] has arisen in my mind. Because I have faith in the *samaṇa* Gotama, I believe that the *samaṇa* Gotama can teach me a doctrine that will be able to dispel that doubt. Permit me then, Ānanda, to meet the *samaṇa* Gotama.’ At the third time also the young Ānanda spoke thus to the wandering ascetic Subhadda: ‘Cease, Subhadda. Do not disturb the Tathāgata. The Teacher is weary.’” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 24)

Hearing Subhadda’s persistent demands, the Buddha, though near death, agreed from his sickbed to speak with the ascetic. What a magnificent attitude that revealed!

“Cease, Ānanda. Do not hinder the wandering ascetic Subhadda. Let him come in and ask what he will.”

The Pāli version continues:

“(25) The Venerable Master heard the conversation between the young Ānanda and the wandering ascetic Subhadda. Then the Venerable Master said to the young Ānanda: ‘Cease, Ānanda. Do not refuse the wandering ascetic Subhadda. Have Subhadda see the Tathāgata. Whatever Subhadda asks of me he asks out of the desire for knowledge, not because he wants to cause me distress. I will answer any questions that he asks, and he will quickly comprehend my teaching.’ Then the young Ānanda said to

the wandering ascetic Subhadda: ‘Well, Subhadda, the Master gives you leave [to enter].’” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 25)

The old, ailing *bhikkhu* received Subhadda as an interlocutor with kindness. Coming into the presence of the Buddha, Subhadda asked his estimation of the teachings of the various teachers and philosophers famous at the time.

“(26) Then the wandering ascetic Subhadda approached the Venerable Master, and drawing near, exchanged joyful salutations with him. Having asked after his health, Subhadda sat down to one side. Having sat down to one side, the wandering ascetic Subhadda asked the Venerable Master: ‘Master Gotama, all those *samaṇas* and Brahmins who have followers and students, and who are teachers of students, who are known in the world and have fame, who are venerated by many as the founders of religious schools, like Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhali-Gosāla, Ajita-Kesakambalin, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Sañjaya Belaṭṭhi-putta, and Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, have they all gained knowledge through their own wisdom, or have none of them any knowledge, or do some have knowledge and others do not?’” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 26)

Subhadda’s questions seem almost malicious. Later, after the Buddha’s death, it was Subhadda’s indiscreet words that led to the decision to hold the First Council. These two episodes are linked as a matter of course in the Tibetan Vinaya, the Fo-pan-ni-yüan-ching, and the Pan-ni-yüan-ching, though not in the Pāli Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, indicating that the text was amended by a later hand.

The Buddha replied to Subhadda that no philosophical theory was of any significance and that there was no need to talk about the matter.

“(26 continued) ‘Cease, Subhadda. Never mind whether they have all gained knowledge through their own wisdom, or whether none of them have any knowledge, or whether some have knowledge and others do not. I will teach the Dhamma to you, Subhadda. Listen well, pay close attention, and I will speak.’

“‘Yes, Master,’ replied the wandering ascetic Subhadda.” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 26)

The Sanskrit version follows a similar course, though in somewhat more detail than the Pāli text.

“(XL, 20) Then the Venerable Master heard with his penetrating, suprahuman powers of hearing the exchange between the young Ānanda and the wandering ascetic Subhadda. Having heard, he instructed the young Ānanda:

“(XL, 21) ‘Cease, Ānanda. Do not obstruct the wandering ascetic Subhadda, but let him come in. Let him ask whatever he wishes. Why is this? It is because it will be the last opportunity for me to speak directly with a wandering ascetic of another religious school [*anyatṛthika*].



Furthermore, this man, this wandering ascetic Subhadra, will be the last of my direct disciples [*sāṅgha*], the last *bhikkhu* to be ordained [with the word] “Come.”

“(XL, 22) Then the wandering ascetic Subhadra, given the opportunity by the Venerable Master, was delighted, satisfied, filled with gladness, encouraged, and, joyfully and happily, approached the place where the Venerable Master was.

“(XL, 23) Drawing near, he exchanged salutations [with the Buddha], and, having asked after [the Buddha’s] health, he sat down to one side.

“(XL, 24) The wandering ascetic Subhadra, having sat down to one side, asked the Venerable Master:

“(XL, 25) ‘Master Gautama, I would ask instruction of you, should you give me the opportunity for receiving conclusive replies to my questions.

“(XL, 26) [Missing]

“(XL, 27) ‘Master Gautama, there are different teachings in the world: [those of] Pūraṇaḥ Kāśyapaḥ, Maskarī Gośālīputraḥ, Saṃjayī Vairūṭīputraḥ, Ajitaḥ Keśakambalaḥ, Kakudāḥ Katyāyanaḥ, and Nirgrantha Jñātiputraḥ. These men all teach their own doctrines.” (Waldschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, XL, 20–27, p. 372)

During the Buddha’s lifetime there was no opposition between Buddhism and the non-Buddhist sects. The Pāli text reflects a confused situation, while the Sanskrit version states clearly that the six influential philosophers mentioned above were “members of non-Buddhist sects.” The Sanskrit text would thus seem to imply a more developed situation.

The teachers of philosophical schools contemporary with the Buddha are generally known as the “six non-Buddhist teachers.” This expression can be found in both the Pāli and the Sanskrit texts. The corresponding section in the Pan-ni-yüan-ching, however, gives the number as eight, and so represents a different line of transmission. If, moreover, the name transliterated as Pai-lu-tze corresponds to Sāriputta, an important issue is raised. Sāriputta had, before he became a disciple of the Buddha, his own following; it is hardly likely that the people in that following merged with the Buddha’s community after their master’s conversion. According to the Jaina *Isibhāṣiyāṇ*, the representative member of a Buddhist-type band was not Sakyamuni, but Sāriputta. Therefore in Subhadda’s eyes, Sāriputta’s followers may have seemed slightly different from those of Sakyamuni.

Sakyamuni did not reply directly to Subhadda’s questions, but more elliptically, in verse:

“(27) When I was twenty-nine, Subhadda,  
I left home to seek the good.

Now more than fifty years have passed, Subhadda,  
Since I renounced the world.

I have walked only the realm of the correct principle and  
the Dhamma.

Outside that, there is no Wayfarer.”

(Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 27)

In this the Buddha was warning Subhadda not to become caught up in metaphysical speculation, but to live within the Truth. The expression “to seek the good” has ancient antecedents and poets in the period of the Rig Veda wrote of wanting to listen to “what is good” (*bhadrām*) with the ears and to see it with the eyes. In the same way, Gotama Buddha also sought “the good.”

The meaning of the verse is explained in the prose section.

“(27 continued) There is no Wayfarer of the second grade, no Wayfarer of the third grade, no Wayfarer of the fourth grade, [for] all other teachings [other sects and philosophies] are empty. They are devoid of Wayfarers. If these *bhikkhus*, Subhadda, were to live correctly, there would be no lack of *arahants* in the world.”

(Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 27)

The Sanskrit text is virtually identical, though there are more details about the nature of the religious training. The Yu-hsing-ching follows the Sanskrit text closely.

“(XL, 28) Then the Venerable Master recited the following verse:

“(XL, 29) When I was twenty-nine, Subhadra,  
I left home to seek the good.

Now more than fifty years have passed, Subhadra,  
Since I renounced the world.

“(XL, 30) I practiced the precepts, *śamādhi*, actions, and wisdom, and the concentration of the mind. I was the one who taught the noble truth. There was no one other who was a Wayfarer.”

(Waldschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, XL, 28–30, p. 376)

The verse appears to be an ancient one incorporated into the text, and is of interest for the way it divides Sakyamuni’s life into periods. Of more importance is that it indicates that Gotama went into homelessness to seek “the good,” not specifically enlightenment, which is beyond both good and evil. He was primarily concerned, it would seem, with how best to live in this world. Perhaps this seeming contradiction can be overcome by suggesting that the quest for enlightenment, which Buddhists tend to regard as the Buddha’s principal motivation, might be subsumed into a broader category of “seeking the good.”

What others do is not to be regarded as important;



rather, said the Buddha, the individual must devote himself or herself to seeking the truth. Each person does what is necessary for himself or herself and should not be deflected by what others might do. The Buddha's reply to Subhadda was firm; his voice may have been weak, but his words were full of conviction. The Pāli text gives one concrete example of how one's life should be led correctly.

"(27) In whatever teachings or Vinaya, Subhadda, where the Noble Eightfold Path cannot be discerned, there is to be found no Wayfarer of the first grade, no Wayfarer of the second grade, no Wayfarer of the third grade, and no Wayfarer of the fourth grade. However, in whatever teachings or Vinaya where the Noble Eightfold Path can be discerned, there is to be found a Wayfarer of the first grade, a Wayfarer of the second grade, a Wayfarer of the third grade, and a Wayfarer of the fourth grade. In my teachings and my Vinaya, the Noble Eightfold Path is to be found. Here are to be found Wayfarers of the first grade, of the second grade, of the third grade, and of the fourth grade. All other teachings are empty; they are devoid of Wayfarers. If these *bhikkhus*, Subhadda, were to live correctly, there would be no lack of *arahants* in the world [*arahants* would appear one after another]." (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 27)

We can discern here an extremely significant intellectual revolution. Even at his death, the historical Gotama did not teach *Buddhism*. What he taught was the Way of Truth that all philosophers and people of religion should follow. The later compilers of the sutra, however, created the specific religion called Buddhism, linking it to the verse above. Even though what Gotama was teaching was comparatively new, it was perhaps because he spoke of seeking the Way of Truth rather than proposing a new religion that he suffered hardly any form of opposition or persecution.

Subhadda was won over by what he heard, and declared his intention to take refuge in the Buddha.

"(28) When he had been taught thus, the wandering ascetic Subhadda said to the Venerable Master: 'It is wonderful, Revered One, wonderful, Revered One. As a person fallen down is set aright, as the hidden is revealed, as the way is shown to one wandering lost, as a lamp is held aloft in the darkness for those who have eyes to see, the Venerable Master has revealed the Dhamma through a variety of ways. Therefore I take refuge in the Venerable Master. I take refuge in the Dhamma and the community of *bhikkhus*. May the Venerable Master receive me as a *bhikkhu* and confer the complete precepts upon me.'" (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 28)

Though a follower of another sect, Subhadda took refuge in Sakyamuni. Because of this particular circumstance, certain conditions were set.

"(28 *continued*) 'Subhadda, if a person who has formerly followed another doctrine wishes to take ordination in these teachings and this Vinaya, and seeks to receive the complete precepts, he must live for four months in another place. After the four months pass, if he receives the permission of the *bhikkhus*, he may be ordained by them as a *bhikkhu* and receive the full precepts. However, in certain cases, where different circumstances pertain, I will decide.'

"(29) 'Revered One, if it be that a person who has formerly followed another doctrine and who wishes to take ordination in these teachings and this Vinaya and seeks to receive the complete precepts must live for four months in another place, after which, on receiving the permission of the *bhikkhus*, he may be ordained by them as a *bhikkhu* and receive the full precepts, then I will live for four months in another place. After the four months pass, if I receive the permission of the *bhikkhus*, let [me] be ordained as a *bhikkhu*. Let [me] receive the full precepts.'

"Then the Venerable Master spoke to the young Ānanda: 'Let Subhadda be ordained, Ānanda.'

"Yes, Master,' replied the young Ānanda.

"(30) Then the wandering ascetic Subhadda said to the young Ānanda: 'Friend Ānanda, you have attained profit and that profit is great, for you have, in the Master's presence, received consecration.'

"The wandering ascetic Subhadda was able to receive ordination in the Master's presence and to be received into the community. Immediately after he had been received into the community, the Venerable Subhadda, alone, living away from the community, strove in his spiritual training, diligently and zealously. Very soon he realized, saw, and attained for himself in this world the ultimate culmination of the supreme pure practice for which people of good family leave home and go into homelessness. And he realized: 'Birth and being are destroyed. The pure practice has been attained. All that has to be done has been accomplished. No more will I return to this condition.'

"The Venerable Subhadda became an *arahant*. He became the last of the Venerable Master's direct disciples." (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, V, 28–30)

Despite the strong possibility that as a newcomer to the community Subhadda still felt attachment to its life and teachings, we are told that "very soon" (*na cirass' eva*) he realized "in this world the ultimate culmination of the supreme pure practice" (*anuttaraṃ brahmacariya-pariyo-sānaṃ*). To attain through training this supreme pure practice was the ultimate aim of all the direct disciples. There was still no concept of the stages of training that were to be so emphasized in later times.

*To be continued*



# The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

## Chapter 7

### The Parable of the Magic City

(6)

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

TEXT “Then amongst the throng whom the holy wheel-rolling king led, eight myriad kotis of people, seeing that the sixteen royal sons had gone forth from their home, also sought to leave their homes, whereupon the king permitted them [to do so].

“Then that buddha, on the entreaty of the shramaneras, when two myriad kalpas had passed, in [the presence of] the four groups preached this Great Vehicle Sutra named the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law, the Law by which bodhisattvas are instructed and which the buddhas watch over and keep in mind.

COMMENTARY *The four groups.* In Mahayana Buddhism “the four groups” usually refers to bhikshus (ordained men), bhikshunis (ordained women), upasakas (laymen), and upasikas (laywomen), but there is another classification, recorded in the *Fa-hua-wen-chü* by T’ien-t’ai Chih-i, referring to the four kinds of people associated with the Buddha’s discourses: (1) *fa-ch’i-chung*, bodhisattvas who request the Buddha on behalf of many people to expound his teaching, asking him questions or answering his questions—that is, bodhisattvas like Manjushri and Maitreya; (2) *ying-hsiang-chung*, those who assist the Buddha’s preaching either directly or indirectly, like the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World and the Bodhisattva Medicine King; (3) *tang-chi-chung*, those who are the object of the Buddha’s discourse—that is, listeners in general, like Shariputra and the other shravakas; and (4) *chieh-yüan-chung*, those who have not been able to hear and accept the Buddha’s discourse without selfpride, but who have nevertheless formed a relationship with the Buddha Law by attending the assembly, like the five thousand proud disciples who left the assembly.

It is very significant that the great assembly to spread the teaching consisted of these four groups. An assembly composed of not only the Buddha who discourses and the listeners (the *tang-chi-chung*), but also the *fa-ch’i-chung*, who provide the opportunity for the discourse, and the *ying-hsiang-chung*, who assist the discourse as the shadow follows the Buddha, is a very logical and splendid one.

Ideally, the *chieh-yüan-chung* would be included in the *tang-chi-chung*, but in actual fact they do constitute a different group. What is crucial is that they have established a relationship with the Buddha Law. The seed planted in their hearts can be expected eventually to sprout. The five thousand disciples who left the assembly later returned to the Buddha Way. We must bring as many people as possible into contact with the Buddha’s teaching, even if they are like members of the *chieh-yüan-chung* group.

• *The Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law, the Law by which bodhisattvas are instructed and which the buddhas watch over and keep in mind.* This formula refers of course to the Lotus Sutra and is precious for its succinct expression of the sutra’s spirit, function, and character. The Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law is the teaching that shows us the Way to perfect our character and establish the ideal realm of perfect peace on earth by living correctly, in accordance with the Buddha’s teaching, not deluded by changing phenomena while living in the secular world. It also reveals that all of us have the essential quality enabling us to attain that Way. In other words, it is the teaching that shows us a powerful and beautiful way of life like the lotus flower, which blooms unsullied in muddy waters.

• *The Law by which bodhisattvas are instructed.* This is of course the teaching that was expounded to instruct bodhisattvas, that is, the teaching that emphasizes the bodhi-



sattva practice in order to realize the human and social ideals mentioned above. In short, it is a teaching for practice.

• *The buddhas watch over and keep in mind.* This refers to the important Law that the buddhas have guarded and thought about from the infinite past. But this passage poses a problem. It seems a little odd that although Shakyamuni is now preaching the Lotus Sutra, and also that the discourse of the “Parable of the Magic City” chapter belongs to the first half of the sutra, Shakyamuni here declares that the ancient Tathagata Universal Surpassing Wisdom preached the Lotus Sutra. To think this strange would be a considerable error, however, derived from looking at the Lotus Sutra in the same terms as a literary work like *Wuthering Heights*, for example, a unique production that does not share its title with any other work before or since. As we have already seen, the Lotus Sutra is the teaching of the truth that shows us how to perfect our character and establish the Land of Tranquil Light in this world while living a secular life untainted by its uncleanness. Since the truth is universal, it existed before Shakyamuni appeared in this world. It is only natural therefore that people in the ages before Shakyamuni also realized the truth and taught it. Of course in this *saha* world Shakyamuni was the first to attain the truth and teach it, yet he did not claim a proprietary right to it, endeavoring instead to bring all people to the realization that this teaching is the consistent and universal truth, existing from the infinite past into the eternal future. Thus Shakyamuni declares that in the remote past and in another domain the truth was taught by the Tathagata Universal Surpassing Wisdom and then by the sixteen shramaneras. Since this “preaching by causality” is taught to convince us that there is but one truth, we should read the passage in this context.

TEXT When he had preached this sutra, the sixteen shramaneras, for the sake of Perfect Enlightenment, all received, kept, recited, and penetrated it.

COMMENTARY *Received, kept, recited, and penetrated it.* These words indicate clearly the process of learning, from whom a teaching is first heard until it is thoroughly understood. Receiving is important; it means accepting with faith. What has been learned must also be retained (kept), however, and not only retained but also studied over and over again (recited). The original meaning of the Chinese compound translated here as “recited” is “repeat from memory”: a text is memorized and chanted. In other words, it is learned through being repeated. Such effort leads in turn to penetration, connoting a thorough knowledge, a complete understanding, of the teaching. This process of learn-

ing can be applied not only to the Buddha’s teaching but to all study.

TEXT “While this sutra was being preached, the sixteen bodhisattva-shramaneras all received it in faith, and amongst the host of shravakas there were also [those who] believed and discerned it, but the other living beings of thousands of myriad kotis of kinds all cherished doubts and perplexities.

COMMENTARY *Doubts and perplexities.* Because of the lofty nature of the teaching, even those of comparatively high capacity doubted it and were puzzled as to whether it was really true, while those of rudimentary capacity were left in confusion. This is a common situation. It is why Shakyamuni did not reveal the teaching earlier but kept it quietly within his mind for more than forty years. We must be ready for the fact that there will always be a variety of reactions when we expound the highest teaching.

TEXT “The buddha preached this sutra for eight thousand kalpas without cessation. When he had finished preaching it, he then entered a quiet room and remained in meditation for eighty-four thousand kalpas.

“Thereupon the sixteen bodhisattva-shramaneras, knowing that the buddha had entered the room and was absorbed in meditation, each ascended a Law throne and also for eighty-four thousand kalpas extensively preached and expounded to the four groups the Sutra of the Flower of the Wonderful Law.

COMMENTARY The sixteen shramaneras, seeing the buddha enter into deep meditation, decided that they themselves had to preach the Law in his stead. This too is of deep significance. If the buddha remained in the midst of his disciples to guide them directly all the time, it is likely that they would become attached to a sense of security. If they thought they could always receive instruction when they were perplexed, they would tend to relax mentally. Knowing this, the buddha entered meditation. This is what is called “compassionate abandonment,” which put some backbone in his disciples’ feelings and led to a lively and spontaneous positiveness in their study and practice. Shakyamuni will expound this matter clearly in chapter 16, “Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata.” Here he just alludes to it, as a premise for the preaching of chapter 16. Similarly, the mention of the preaching of the Lotus Sutra by the Tathagata Universal Surpassing Wisdom in the far distant past paves the way for the teaching, in chapter 16, of the manifestation of the Eternal Original Buddha. I hope therefore that you will commit this passage to memory.



It is also important that the sixteen bodhisattva-shramaneras preached the Law in the buddha's place. They are called bodhisattvas, but in reality they were no more than young shramaneras who had not yet attained the buddha's enlightenment. Yet they knew they must not waste even a day in spreading the buddha's teaching. After the buddha entered meditation, there was no one to take his place; they each had to resolutely ascend a Law throne (or a Dharma seat) and disseminate the Law to the people. There is much we can learn from their spirit and practical strength. This then is the meaning of the buddha's entry into meditation and the sixteen bodhisattva-shramaneras' preaching the Dharma in his place.

**TEXT** Each of them saved six hundred myriad kotis of nayutas of living beings, [as many] as the sands of the Ganges, showing, teaching, benefiting, and gladdening them, and leading them to develop a mind of Perfect Enlightenment.

**COMMENTARY** *Showing, teaching, benefiting, and gladdening them.* Here we have the logical order to follow when we expound the teaching to others and guide them in the teaching. First we give an outline of the teaching (showing). When our listeners have realized the value of the teaching and are moved by it, we can explain more deeply the meaning of the teaching (teaching). Once they have more or less understood it, we can guide them to gain benefits through practicing the teaching (benefiting). Then our listeners will be inspired to follow the teaching and will be filled with a sense of joy and purpose (gladdening). At this point the teaching becomes firmly rooted in their hearts and in normal circumstances there will be no retrogression.

If we follow this order for leading people to the Buddha Law, there will be almost no error. But if we forget it and impatiently follow a course that crams the minds of beginners in faith with the profound meaning of the teaching, we may cause them to be frightened and draw back. Alternatively, if we speak only of the benefits in the present life and neglect to bring them to an understanding of the content of the teaching, their faith in the teaching may become unstable and regress. Of course, skillful means, adapted to person and situation, are also necessary; however, we should always keep in mind that "showing, teaching, benefiting, and gladdening" is the basic order of leading others.

**TEXT** "The Buddha Universal Surpassing Wisdom, after eighty-four thousand kalpas had passed, arose from his meditation, went up to the Law throne, and quietly sat down on it.

"Universally addressing the great assembly, [he said]:

'Rare are such bodhisattva-shramaneras as these sixteen, keen in their natural powers and clear in their wisdom, who have paid homage to infinite thousand myriad kotis of buddhas, constantly practiced brahma conduct under those buddhas, received and kept the Buddha wisdom, and revealed it to living beings, leading them to enter into it. Do you all, again and again, draw nigh and worship them.

**COMMENTARY** *Do you all, again and again, draw nigh and worship them.* This passage says, in effect: "Come to them frequently, paying them respect and rendering them service, then listening to their teachings and putting them into practice." Listening, and then putting what has been heard into practice, is of vital importance. Giving respect and service alone is not adequate veneration.

**TEXT** Wherefore? Because if shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas are able to believe the Law of the sutra preached by these sixteen bodhisattvas, and receive and keep it without spoiling it, all those people will attain the Tathagata wisdom of Perfect Enlightenment."

The buddha addressed all the bhikshus, [saying]: "These sixteen bodhisattvas ever take delight in preaching this Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law. The six hundred myriad kotis of nayutas of living beings, like the sands of the Ganges, whom each of these bodhisattvas converted, born generation by generation, all following [these] bodhisattvas, heard the Law from them and all believed and discerned it. For this cause and condition they succeeded in meeting four [hundred] myriad kotis of buddhas, world-honored ones, and at the present time have not ceased [to do so].

**COMMENTARY** *Take delight in preaching.* This is the ideal form of those who disseminate the Buddha Law. They expound it neither out of a sense of duty nor under compulsion. They do so rather with joy and an outpouring of compassion.

• *At the present time have not ceased [to do so].* This is an important phrase. "Present time" refers of course to the time of the Buddha Universal Surpassing Wisdom, but "this cause and condition" applies equally to the present day and will extend unchanging to the eternal future as well. Because we have become able to study the Lotus Sutra through the cause and condition accumulated from former lives, we must continue to accumulate the good cause and condition, and in our next life or the life following it we will become those who embody the ultimate truth.

**TEXT** "Bhikshus! I tell you now: that buddha's disciples, the sixteen shramaneras, have all attained Perfect Enlight-



enment, and in all countries in every direction are at the present time preaching the Law and have infinite hundred thousand myriad kotis of bodhisattvas and shravakas as their followers.

**COMMENTARY** *Followers.* They are attendants to buddhas and bodhisattvas. For example, the Buddha Medicine Master (Bhaishajya-guru) of the eastern realm of Pure Emerald Light is accompanied by the twelve heavenly generals; the fierce protector deity Acalanatha is accompanied by eight boys; and the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World (Avalokiteshvara) with a thousand hands is accompanied by twenty-eight attendant deities. In this case, “followers” are those who are in attendance as disciples.

**TEXT** Two of those shramaneras became buddhas in the eastern quarter, one named Akshobhya in the Kingdom of Joy, the other named Sumeru Peak; of the two buddhas in the southeastern quarter, one is named Lion Voice, the other Lion Ensign; of the two buddhas in the southern quarter, one is named Space Dweller, the other Eternal Extinction; of the two buddhas in the southwestern quarter, one is named Imperial Ensign, the other Brahma Ensign; of the two buddhas in the western quarter one is named Amita, the other He Who Has Passed Through All the Sufferings of the World;

**COMMENTARY** *Amita.* A buddha whose name is very familiar to the Japanese makes an appearance here. In Sanskrit he is also referred to as Amitabha (infinite light) or Amitayus (infinite life). It is believed that he dwells in the western Pure Land called Sukhavati (utmost bliss), where even now he is preaching the Dharma. He is regarded as a reward-body buddha, but his original being, as his names Infinite Life and Infinite Light imply, corresponds to the Eternal Original Buddha.

**TEXT** of the two buddhas in the northwestern quarter, one is named Tamalapattra Spiritually Pervading Sandal Odor, the other Sumeru Sign; of the two buddhas in the northern quarter, one is named Sovereign Cloud, the other named Sovereign Cloud King; the buddha in the northeastern quarter is named Destroyer of All the World's Fear; and the sixteenth is I myself, Shakyamuni Buddha, who have accomplished Perfect Enlightenment in the *saha* domain.

**COMMENTARY** Finally Shakyamuni revealed the particular circumstances since former lives. We should note here that the only Buddha whom we human beings could actually see was Shakyamuni. The fifteen other buddhas—Akshobhya

(unmoving), Sumeru Peak (the highest virtue in this world), and the rest—are all symbolic expressions of virtues, whereas Shakyamuni means the sage born of the Shakya clan, and this Buddha alone was clearly revealed as a human being. The world in which he appeared is our own *saha* world. The Sanskrit *saha* is usually translated as “the land of endurance.” This world in which we live is the land where we can hardly survive unless we endure afflictions from without, such as cold, heat, and natural disasters, and various delusions welling up from within. Because Shakyamuni was born as a human being like us into this world, and after undergoing all sorts of sufferings from both within and without realized the highest Dharma, he is the Buddha whom we should trust as a great leader and look up to as a savior not only of all humankind but of all living things.

Every buddha is a manifestation of the Eternal Original Buddha who gives life to all things, and of one body with the Eternal Original Buddha. Because Shakyamuni through his teaching has enabled us to know of the Eternal Original Buddha (the great life of the universe), he is indispensable to all living beings in this world, and is the only Buddha. We must consider this point very carefully.

**TEXT** “Bhikshus! When we were shramaneras, each of us taught and converted infinite hundred thousand myriad kotis of living beings, [numerous] as the sands of the Ganges; and those who heard the Law from me [attained] Perfect Enlightenment. Amongst these living beings down to the present there are some who [still] remain in the stage of shravakas. I constantly instruct them in Perfect Enlightenment, so that all these people will through this Law gradually enter the Way of the Buddha. Wherefore? Because the Tathagata wisdom is hard to believe and hard to understand.

**COMMENTARY** This is a very difficult passage. A simple reading is unlikely to reveal the true, deeper meaning, especially because the Japanese reading of the Chinese translation has obscured some of the nuances. For example, in the sentence “those who heard the Law from me [attained] Perfect Enlightenment,” the Chinese character translated as “attained” tends to be misleading. If shravakas have attained Perfect Enlightenment, they are already buddhas, excluding the possibility that they can retrogress to shravakas in the present life. We should rather interpret the sentence to mean “they have heard the Law from me in order to attain Perfect Enlightenment.” What it really means is that in a former life the shravakas did not necessarily listen to the Buddha's teaching with the clearly defined purpose of attaining the Buddha's wisdom; but although they were concerned only with removing their delusions and achieving



peace of mind, the Buddha always instructed them for the purpose of having them realize Perfect Enlightenment. Thus the Buddha says that if they hear his discourse on the Lotus Sutra and realize that the ultimate purpose of the Buddha's teaching is to deliver all human beings by having them achieve the Buddha's wisdom, and that if they gradually accumulate religious practices according to that realization, they will at some point be assured of perfecting the Buddha Way (gaining the Buddha's wisdom).

This is not just a problem of textual interpretation; what is important is that the Buddha teaches here the supreme purpose of practicing the Buddha Way. The Buddha's teaching is first and last the teaching for the salvation of all living beings, and also the teaching of the way of life for all human beings. The central point here is what is meant by "human beings." Today we casually use the term as a synonym for "people," but its basic meaning is far deeper. The Chinese compound *jen-chien* (meaning "person" and "between") that is generally translated as "human being" derives originally from Buddhism, especially the Lotus Sutra. The third chapter, "A Parable," says: "He sees . . . even if they are born . . . amongst men [*jen-chien*], there are such various kinds of sufferings as poverty, distress, separation from loved ones, and union with hateful beings," and the tenth chapter, "A Teacher of the Law," says: "These people have already . . . performed their great vows; therefore, out of compassion for all living beings they are born here among men [*jen-chien*]." Thus the way the word *jen-chien* (among men) is used emphasizes the relationship between people rather than the individuality of the particular person. The Sanskrit word for *jen-chien* used in this context is *manushya*, which is invariably used in the plural. A modern Japanese dictionary, defining the Chinese word *jen-chien* (*ningen* in Japanese), gives the first meaning as "the place where people live, society, the world" and the second meaning as "human being, humankind."

It is clear therefore that inherent in the meaning of *jen-chien* is the fundamental Buddhist idea that each person is not isolated but lives in relationship with other people and with nature. This is an important point to remember. That the Buddha's teaching is for human beings, instructing them in the way to live a correct and human life, means that it is the teaching that shows us how we can live building harmony among people, and between people and nature. When we understand this, we will at once realize that the supreme purpose of the Buddha's teaching is not individual release from delusion and attainment of peace of mind but the attainment by all living beings of the Buddha's wisdom, which finds and brings forth the state of nirvana among people. Unfortunately, many people, not knowing this ultimate purpose, practice the Buddha Way merely to

release themselves from defilements and to attain personal peace of mind. This practice of course is necessary as a premise for establishing a beautiful harmony among people, but if one remains in that stage it cannot be said that one has entered the Buddha Way in the true sense. If one hears the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, which is the teaching for all living beings, and practices it, one will be able at some point to truly achieve the Buddha Way. This is the true meaning of the passage under discussion.

Of course, we should not consider that this teaching was for Shakyamuni's direct disciples alone; the teaching is equally relevant for us today. We must firmly engrave on our minds this fundamental meaning of the Lotus Sutra, that it is a teaching showing the proper relationship among people, and between people and nature. We must study and practice the Lotus Sutra on the basis of this understanding.

**TEXT** All those living beings, innumerable as the sands of the Ganges, whom I converted at that time are yourselves, bhikshus, and will be my shravaka disciples in future worlds after my extinction.

**COMMENTARY** *Will be my shravaka disciples in future worlds after my extinction.* This is a phrase worth remembering, for what is meant by "my shravaka disciples" is nothing other than ourselves. Even if we are studying the Buddha's teaching from books, we are still his disciples. This fact is stated definitively in this passage, and is a cause for deep gratitude. It seems strange to consider that we ourselves once, in the distant past, heard the teaching directly from Shakyamuni in his former life as the bodhisattva-shramanera, yet a serious thought will reveal what a reasonable statement it is.

A "condition," or relationship, is not so easily formed. Though there are billions of people in the world, we are lucky enough to have been able to study Mahayana Buddhism, and the Lotus Sutra, the king of all sutras, in particular. To have encountered such a great condition is as difficult as it is welcome. Since we ordinary people have been born into this life after repeated transmigration, it is quite possible that we have met the Buddha's teaching in the previous life, or the life before that, or in a life long past. The teaching we learned then has now disappeared entirely from the surface of our memory, but it remains firmly embedded in our subconsciousness.

I have spoken before (in the November/December 1998 issue of DHARMA WORLD) about how human beings are born in this world according to the good or evil nature of the karma they have accumulated. It follows that people who have to some extent practiced the Buddha's teaching in a



former life will be reborn in a place where the teaching thrives. Though they may not consciously consider that they have any connection with Buddhism, because recollections of their former ties with it remain deep within their subconsciousness, they are drawn toward it again without knowing why, reading Buddhist books or approaching Buddhist organizations.

It is evident therefore that our commitment to Buddhism is not accidental. We are tied to it by an extraordinary condition that we must not disregard. The more we strive along the Buddha Way in this life, the more our condition or relationship with the Buddha Way will deepen. If so, in the next life too we will surely be able to hear the Buddha's teaching and draw ever closer to buddhahood. Such knowledge gives great hope to human life. Let us this very day start out anew, holding that hope in our heart.

**TEXT** "After my extinction there will also be disciples of mine who, not hearing this sutra, nor knowing nor apprehending the course which bodhisattvas pursue, will by their own merits conceive the idea of extinction and enter [what they think is] nirvana. [But] in other domains [wherever they may go] I shall [still] be Buddha though under different names. These people, though they conceive the idea of extinction and enter [what they call] nirvana, yet in those lands will seek after the Buddha wisdom and succeed in hearing this sutra. Only by the Buddha Vehicle will they attain [real] extinction. There is no other vehicle except the tactful teachings of the tathagatas.

**COMMENTARY** *Nor knowing nor apprehending the course which bodhisattvas pursue, will by their own merits conceive the idea of extinction and enter [what they think is] nirvana.* For human beings to achieve true happiness, every person in society must gain happiness as well. Imagine if you alone were a millionaire while everyone else lived in dire poverty. Would your money then buy you a pleasant life? Fine clothing, sumptuous food and drink, useful appliances, and such things are not produced if there is no one to buy them, and plays and films will not be produced if hardly anybody goes to see them. In those conditions a millionaire would live in much the same way as everyone else, extracting his or her enjoyment to the same degree as the rest. That is the way of the world. Culture will not progress unless the standard of living has reached a certain level; it is impossible for one person alone to enjoy cultural benefits and a high standard of living.

The state of a person's mind can be described in similar terms. Even if a very few people have abandoned greed, removed the defilements, and gained purity of mind, if most other people are swayed by what is evil—anger (hell),

greed (hungry spirits), foolishness (animals), and combativeness (asuras)—they cannot live in peace of mind. If they do seek peace of mind, they have no choice but to flee the haunts of people and live as hermits in the mountains. This, however, benefits society not at all; if those of pure mind are isolated from the multitude, the realm of human suffering will remain, and bloody battles will continue unabated as desires clash.

Thus, vital is the existence of the bodhisattva, who, though he or she has been freed of delusion and so possesses a pure mind, throws himself or herself willingly into the multitude of people, sharing their suffering and gradually giving them the true wisdom to turn their desires and pugnacious minds toward good, and striving to make the world brighter and easier to live in. All who eagerly study the Buddha's teaching become, to differing degrees, possessors of a pure and tranquil mind. If they remain in that state, however, not realizing the absolute necessity of the bodhisattvas' activities ("nor knowing nor apprehending the course which bodhisattvas pursue") and being satisfied with having attained their own peace of mind through the teaching they have learned ("will by their own merits conceive the idea of extinction"), they are not yet living up to the Buddha's mind and fall far short of the ideal state of mind.

If so, an unfulfilled feeling should remain somewhere in the mind, though temporary ease may be experienced. The purer and more tranquil the mind grows, the clearer such a feeling of dissatisfaction becomes, and there is a growing urge to pursue ever more perfect enlightenment ("will seek after the Buddha wisdom") by studying the Lotus Sutra, the teaching of perfect enlightenment ("and succeed in hearing this sutra"). Thus, true peace of mind ("[real] extinction") can be achieved only by means of the teaching of the enlightenment that brings all to perfect salvation ("the Buddha Vehicle," that is, the One Buddha Vehicle). The Buddha's teaching is originally none other than this One Buddha Vehicle; there is no other teaching ("Only by the Buddha Vehicle will they attain [real] extinction. There is no other vehicle").

Nevertheless, many people think that the Buddha's teachings are numerous and varied. Thus when they arrive at an intermediate stage on the way to supreme and perfect enlightenment they think they have completely understood the Buddha's teaching, being satisfied with their partial attainment. There are others who give up, thinking all they can do is attain peace of mind and finding it difficult to go on to learn the teaching that will enable them to reach supreme and perfect enlightenment. Both types of people have made the mistake of thinking that there are different teachings ("other vehicles") within the Buddha's



teaching. This is merely illusion; what appears to be a variety of teachings is no more than the various ways the Buddha has imparted the single teaching to suit different people and situations; in other words, he has articulated the one and only teaching in response to the different aspects of human beings. That is skillful means based on the truth.

This is the true meaning of the Buddha's statement "except the tactful teachings of the tathagatas." The word "except" implies here that the "tactful teachings" and the One Buddha Vehicle are one and the same; the "tactful teachings" are by no means to be considered another vehicle. This is an important point, illustrated in the parable of the magic city. Since it is open to misunderstanding, I hope you will consider the meaning of the passage very carefully.

**TEXT** Bhikshus! If the Tathagata himself knows that the time of nirvana has arrived and the assembly is pure, firm in faith and discernment, penetrated with the Law of Emptiness, profound in meditation, then he will gather together all bodhisattvas and shravakas to preach this sutra to them.

**COMMENTARY** When such conditions are fulfilled, the Buddha reveals the state of perfect enlightenment, calling it the highest human stage.

- *Penetrated with the Law of Emptiness.* Since all things in the world exist in accordance with the law of dependent origination, there is no absolute existence; this phrase indicates that the assembly has realized completely the Law of Emptiness, which means that all things are essentially equal and in great harmony despite the apparent diversity of phenomena.

- *Profound in meditation.* This is a state not merely of mental calm and stability but of continuous deep samadhi (one-pointed concentration).

**TEXT** In the world there are not two vehicles to attain extinction; there is only the One Buddha Vehicle for attaining extinction.

**COMMENTARY** *World.* This word translates a Chinese compound, *shih-chien*, meaning "society" and "between," that originates, like the word for "human being," in Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra. There are cases in which it refers to all living things including human beings, as well as the world they occupy (See the January/February 1998 issue). In either case, "world" implies the close connection between mind and body, person and person, human beings and nature, and living beings and nonliving things. So the phrase "in the world" has a meaning of great importance in the present context, for the passage tells us that in

this world the enlightenment of the individual alone is not true enlightenment, since all things in the world have come into being through various connections and relationships among human beings and between human beings and nature.

**TEXT** Know, bhikshus! The tact of the Tathagata reaches deeply into the natures of all living beings and knows that they are bent on the pleasures of trifling things and deeply attached to the five desires. For the sake of these he preaches nirvana. If they hear it, they will receive it in faith.

**COMMENTARY** *Bent on the pleasures of trifling things.* The Chinese text for this phrase reads "aspiring to and desiring low-level teachings." People who aim at such teachings are those who are attached to the five desires (wanting to see beautiful things, to hear pleasant sounds, to smell fragrant odors, to taste delicious things, and to experience physical comfort). Though they may wish for such sensuous pleasures, things of the world are unlikely to turn out as they wish, and from the resultant feelings of dissatisfaction grow loneliness and distress. Untrained ordinary people do not understand that the cause of their dissatisfaction and distress lies in their own minds, and they spend their whole lives laboriously seeking to satisfy their desires.

People of a higher level of understanding realize that the mind will never find satisfaction in material things and are able to think about overcoming their loneliness and distress by seeking to change their attitude to things. Thus they seek after the low-level teachings that the passage mentions, "bent on the pleasures of trifling things." Their intention is good, but since they seek only individual peace of mind, they look to merely a lower stage of the teaching.

Because such people experience suffering arising from attachment to the desires of the five senses, the Buddha teaches them first of all the law of dependent origination to enable them to overcome that attachment and to attain peace of mind (nirvana of the small vehicle). His teaching is based completely on reality. Since this teaching meets the needs of his listeners, they accept it with gratitude ("If they hear it, they will accept it with faith").

The Buddha then explains this truth in a parable, to make it easier to understand and accessible to all. This is the parable of the magic city.

*To be continued*

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