

Cover photo: The "Thousand Buddhas" statues at Sanbangulsa Temple, on Cheju Island, South Korea. Photo: PPS

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Vol. 32

# DHARMA WORLD

## For Living Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue

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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 suffering. It tries to show how religious principles help solve problems in daily life and how the least application of such principles has wholesome effects on the world around us. It seeks to demonstrate truths that are fundamental to all religions, truths on which all people can act.

**Publisher:** Yukio Yokota

**Advisors:**

Kinzo Takemura, Yoshiaki Sanada,  
Michio Matsubara, Kinjiro Niwano,  
Michio T. Shinozaki

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**Editorial Staff:**

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<http://www.rk-world.org/>

Readers can also learn about the organization directly from the branches, liaison offices, and sister organizations at the addresses listed below.

**Rissho Kosei-kai Genève**

14 Chemin Auguste-Vilbert  
1218 Grand-Saconnex, Geneva, Switzerland  
Tel: 41-22-798-5162 Fax: 41-22-791-0034  
rkkgva@bluewin.ch

**Rissho Kosei-kai of the UK**

c/o IARF, 2 Market Street, Oxford  
OX1 3EF, United Kingdom  
Tel: 44-1865-241-131 Fax: 44-1865-202-746  
rkk-uk@jais.co.uk

**Rissho Kosei-kai of New York**

320 East 39th St., New York, NY 10016, U.S.A.  
Tel: 1-212-867-5677 Fax: 1-212-697-6499  
koseiny@aol.net

**Rissho Kosei-kai of Chicago**

1 West Euclid Ave., Mt. Prospect, IL 60056  
U.S.A.  
Tel & Fax: 1-847-394-0809  
rkchi@earthlink.net

**Rissho Kosei-kai of Boston**

64 Hemenway Street #5, Boston, MA 02115  
U.S.A.  
Tel & Fax: 1-617-859-0809  
info@rkk-boston.org  
www.rkk-boston.org

**Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco**

1031 Valencia Way, Pacifica, CA 94044, U.S.A.  
Tel: 1-650-359-6951 Fax: 1-650-359-5569  
rksf@earthlink.net

**Rissho Kosei-kai of Seattle's**

**Buddhist Learning Center**  
28621 Pacific Hwy. S.  
Federal Way, WA 98003, U.S.A.  
Tel: 1-253-945-0024 Fax: 1-253-945-0261  
rkseattle@juno.com

**Rissho Kosei-kai of Los Angeles**

2707 E. First Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90033, U.S.A.  
Tel: 1-323-269-4741 Fax: 1-323-269-4567  
nori@cox.net  
www.rk-la.com

**Rissho Kosei-kai of San Antonio**

6083 Babcock Rd., San Antonio, TX 78240  
U.S.A.  
Tel: 1-210-561-7991 Fax: 1-210-696-7745  
trina\_ozuna@juno.com

**Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center  
of Oklahoma**

2745 N.W. 40th Street  
Oklahoma City, OK 73112, U.S.A.  
Tel: 1-405-943-5030 Fax: 1-405-943-5303  
Kladusau@cox.net  
www.rkok-dharmacenter.org

**Rissho Kosei-kai of Hawaii**

2280 Auhuhu Street, Pearl City, HI 96782  
U.S.A.  
Tel: 1-808-455-3212 Fax: 1-808-455-4633  
info@mail.rkhawaii.org  
www.rkhawaii.org

**Rissho Kosei-kai**

**Maui Dharma Center**  
1817 Nani Street, Wailuku  
Maui, HI 96793, U.S.A.  
Tel: 1-808-242-6175 Fax: 1-808-244-4625

**Rissho Kosei-kai of Kona**

73-4592 Mamalahoa Highway  
Kailua, Kona, HI 96750, U.S.A.  
Tel & Fax: 1-808-325-0015

**Rissho Kosei-kai of Hong Kong**

Flat D, 5/F, Kiu Hing Mansion  
14 King's Road, North Point  
Hong Kong, China  
Tel: 852-2-369-1836 Fax: 852-2-368-3730

**Thai Rissho Friendship Foundation**

201 Soi 15/1, Praram 9 Road  
Bangkapi, Huaykhwang  
Bangkok 10310, Thailand  
Tel: 66-2-716-8141 Fax: 66-2-716-8218  
mshima@loxinfo.co.th

**Rissho Kosei-kai of Nepal**

Shree Marg, 3 Pulchowk, Lalitpur,  
Kathmandu, Nepal  
Tel: 977-1-5529-464 Fax: 977-1-5539-832  
nepalrkk@mail.com.np

**Rissho Kosei-kai of Sri Lanka**

No. 18 Anura Mawatha, Off Anderson Road  
Kalubovila, Dehiwala, Sri Lanka  
Tel & Fax: 94-11-420-5632  
rkkirilanka@visualnet.lk

**Delhi Dharma Center**

B-117 (Top & Basement Floors) Kalka Ji  
New Delhi-110019, India  
Tel: 91-11-2623-5060  
sakusena@hotmail.com

**Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangladesh**

79 Chanmari Road, Lalkhan Bazar  
Chittagong, Bangladesh  
Tel: 880-31-611871 Fax: 880-31-710572  
bkbrkk@spctnet.com

**Rissho Kosei-kai of Mongolia**

Russia Airways Build, 3 Floor, Seoul Street 15  
Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia  
Tel: 976-11-310147

**Rissho Kosei-kai do Brasil**

Rua Dr. José Estefno, 40, Vila Mariana  
São Paulo-SP, CEP 04116-060, Brasil  
Tel: 55-11-5549-4446 Fax: 55-11-5549-4304  
hiromi\_mat@yahoo.com  
geocities.yahoo.com.br/rkkbr

**Rissho Kosei-kai do Mogi**

Av. Ipiranga 1575 AP 1, Mogi das Cruzes-SP  
CEP 08730-000, Brasil  
Tel: 55-11-4724-8862

**Rissho Kosei-kai of Taipei**

Fuqunzixun Bld. 4F, 10 Hengyang Road  
Chungcheng District, Taipei  
Taiwan R.O.C.  
Tel: 886-2-2381-1632 Fax: 886-2-2331-3433

**Rissho Kosei-kai of Tainan**

No. 45, 23d Street, Chungming  
Tainan, Taiwan R.O.C.  
Tel: 886-6-289-1478 Fax: 886-6-289-1488

**Rissho Kosei-kai  
of Kaohsiung-Pingtung**

4, Lane 60, Min Chan Road  
Ping Tung, Taiwan R.O.C.  
Tel: 886-8-732-1241 Fax: 886-8-733-8037

**Korean Rissho Kosei-kai**

423, Han-nam-dong  
Young-San-ku, Seoul, Republic of Korea  
Tel: 82-2-796-5571 Fax: 82-2-796-1696

# Heeding the Voices in Our Hearts

by Kinzo Takemura

People throughout the world were deeply shocked by news of the giant tsunami generated by a powerful earthquake off Indonesia's Sumatran coast last December 26. The disaster wreaked terrible death and destruction on some ten countries. Even at the time of this writing, when the number of dead is reported to have surpassed 225,000, the actual number of those who perished is still unknown. In addition to the citizens of those countries, vacationers and people working in the area from fifty-three other nations also died in the disaster. Enormous numbers are reported still missing. Although it may seem like simplistic thinking, I believe that through the global impact of this calamity the force of nature has given humanity reason to pause and take stock.

When the manned U.S. spacecraft *Apollo 11* made the first landing on the moon in 1969, people everywhere felt as though we were all brothers and sisters on Spaceship Earth. We told one another we would work together to help steer our planet toward a brighter future. The true situation, however, is that we have so far failed to accomplish that. Religious and ethnic prejudices still instigate conflict and human blood is being shed all over the globe.

Many countries and many individuals have contributed money and relief goods for the tsunami victims. Some nations sent troops to assist in rescue and relief operations and in rebuilding efforts. At times of great natural disasters and subsequent disorder, the assistance of well-trained military forces can be invaluable. It is deeply moving to see the television images of soldiers sent not for purposes of war, but to cooperate in relief and rebuilding.

Fears have arisen in the affected areas of the threat of widespread infectious diseases. If contagion should become rampant, it is estimated that five million or more people could fall victim. When then-U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, a former general who has seen many battlefields, viewed the stricken region he was greatly moved by the horror and said he had never seen anything like it.

The tragedy is ongoing in many ways. A great many children, especially in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, have lost one or both parents. Some have other family members to help them, but many do not and risk falling into the hands of child traffickers who will sell them into sexual slavery or as unpaid workers. The Indonesian government is reported to have placed a temporary ban on the adoption of tsunami orphans, which seems appropriate under the circumstances.

Terrible situations involving children exist elsewhere, as well. On the outskirts of Quezon City in the Philippines there is a huge garbage dump known locally as Smoky Mountain because the garbage is always burning. Poor children living in the area survive by scrounging for cans, bottles, and other recyclable items. When one small local girl was asked by a Japanese member of a nongovernmental organization what her greatest dream was, she answered that she hoped she would live to become an adult.

In Africa, the number of children who die before they reach the age of five is staggering. South Africa has the world's largest number of people living with HIV/AIDS, some 5.3 million, and the number of infants born infected through their mothers is astonishingly large. Today's global population has passed the 6.3 billion mark and, of that number, some 80 percent live in the developing world. The number of starving poor who die each day is reported to be about 40,000, which means that one person dies every two seconds. The greatest number of these are believed to be children.

That so many children lost their lives in the tsunami disaster is heart-breaking, but in places away from the eyes of the public and the mass media, large numbers of children continue to die daily. Surely we can hear in our hearts the voices of the gods and the buddhas telling us to share what we have, even if it is only a little, with these unfortunate children. If we put out minds—and our hearts—to the task, we will see there are many things we can begin to do to ensure a future for the helpless children of the world. □

# Striving and Good Habits

by Nichiko Niwano

*“All phenomena are constantly changing. Strive to practice my teachings diligently.” These are said to have been Shakyamuni Buddha’s last words. They indicate that recognizing impermanence and striving to advance spiritually are the keys to the practice of Buddhism.*

*The following is a translation of a recent interview with Rev. Nichiko Niwano that originally appeared in Rissho Kosei-kai’s Japanese periodical Yakushin.*

*“Endeavor” or “striving” is one of the six kinds of practices that we undertake to attain enlightenment or buddhahood. When we hear those terms, we tend to take them as an exhortation to persevere and continue working hard. We also hear people say, “I don’t have time to keep striving” or “I haven’t been able to really strive since I stopped carrying out our special duties.” Does this mean that we cannot strive for spiritual development unless we just persevere? Are we not able to strive unless we are assigned special duties or somehow have extra time?*

Put briefly, “striving” means living with the heartfelt realization of, and gratitude for, the fact that we have been

given life. Therefore not having an assigned duty or being busy is no impediment to striving. Apparently some people interpret “Let’s continue to strive” as “Let’s keep persevering.” But I feel that just persevering carries a strong connotation of being self-centered, of living by one’s own power and aiming for success. It seems to me that this opens the way to being self-willed and to devaluing the present, deferring the making of any sustained effort until one thinks one has the time.

Buddhism teaches us to live in the here and now. Valuing our present situation and condition, which will never be repeated, is an important theme of Buddhism. In that regard, how we think about the word “hope” presents problems similar to those posed by “striving.” We use the word “hope” casually, but if we think about it carefully we will see that we easily delude ourselves that hope is somehow involved with the future, something that has nothing to do with the present. We often talk about aspiring to world peace, but that is an idea that calls for the greatest care, since we can end up falling into a way of thinking that in effect denies the strife-torn world of today as we focus on creating a future peace.

If we look at things with the Buddha’s eyes, we realize that this *saha* world, the world in which we live, is the very same as the realm of tranquillity. The Buddha proclaims as much in chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, “Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata”: “Tranquil is this realm of mine, / Ever filled with heavenly beings.” The Buddha teaches us that this world is already the realm of tranquillity, ever filled with beings of the heavenly realm and the human realm living in joyous harmony. We cannot see this because, error-prone beings that we are, we do not perceive things correctly.

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*Nichiko Niwano is president of Rissho Kosei-kai and the Niwano Peace Foundation, a president of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), and chairman of the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations.*



The reason that the need for religion arose lies in humanity's realization of death. The true realization of life emerges from a perception of life colored by our recognition of the stark fact that all human beings must die and our consequent sense of impermanence. This inspired the birth of religion. The Zen master Dogen (1200–1253) said that clarifying the distinction between life and death is the one great purpose of all Buddhists. All human beings are bound to die. It is when we are prepared for this inevitability that we can live fully in the here and now, valuing the life we possess.

The Dhammapada says: "Rare it is to be born as a human being." Birth as a human being, receiving the gift of life, is truly a rare thing. However, death is an integral part of life in this world of impermanence. We must live in such a way that we value our lives in the present. It seems to me that striving to advance spiritually is a manifestation of our gratitude for this rare gift of life.

Of course, our lives are the gift of the Buddha. If that is so, death is also the gift of the Buddha. In short, to live in the knowledge of having been granted life is the main goal of our striving. A desire to strive is aroused naturally by the feeling that we must not waste the rare and precious life that has been granted to us. While I can understand people feeling that they cannot really strive for spiritual advancement unless they are assigned a special duty or are not genuinely striving unless they take part in activities at their branch, I hope they will grasp the true sense of what such striving means.

### The Joy of Striving

*In other words, striving is not a matter of undertaking some kind of action or practice. First and foremost, it involves a state of mind. So far, we have thought of striving in terms of working toward a goal and attaining a sense of achievement, but that actually may be far removed from the true joy of striving.*

Buddhist discipline entails being saved through wisdom and living with compassion. It deals with the spiritual realm. Essentially then it does not involve the kind of focus on objectives and performance that play a part in the production of things. If we set relative goals, faith dissemination and related activities become a competition for quantifiable results, which leads naturally to comparisons as to superior and inferior and the like.

It is said that in all he did Shakyamuni Buddha acted in a state of perfect freedom, unfettered by delusion and worry. We tend to have an image of the practice of Buddhist discipline as somehow painful, but since it is said to have been effortless for the Buddha after he attained

enlightenment, it may actually have been enjoyable. Joyful play has no set goals, nor is it tiring. Adults, however, set goals whenever we undertake to do something, so in the course of whatever the activity is we sometimes come to feel that we are being forced to do it.

It is not easy for ordinary people to attain the state of mind of Shakyamuni Buddha, however. So when we undertake an activity, repeated practice is important. In the Japanese martial art of kendo, for example, we begin by learning basic techniques like the sliding step used in advancing and retreating. At the beginning we are not allowed to wear helmets, gauntlets, and other protective gear. That is because we cannot appreciate the true worth of kendo until we have

*Rev. Niwano, practicing the Japanese martial art of kendo in 1980.*

mastered its basics. In judo, too, we begin by learning how to take a fall. We repeat the same movements again and again until they become like second nature. We cause our body to remember them, so that they become routine.

Making such religious disciplines as sutra chanting or meditation a daily practice may be painful at first. It takes time, too, for many of us to acquire the daily habits of greeting family members in the morning and responding politely when addressed. But when we manage to break down the barriers that we have erected, we are able to feel pleasure in these practices. We gain nothing if we give up partway. When I undertake a new activity, I set myself a rough goal of persevering for ten years.

Buddhist disciplines are generally considered painful and difficult, but the late Soen Nakagawa Roshi (1907–84), who was the chief priest at Ryutakuji, used to say that although we tend to have such a view, we persist because eventually we gain joy through such disciplines. These disciplines enable us to bring mind and body into balance through the Buddha’s teachings, which allows us in turn to overcome suffering and lead a harmonious life.

The main discipline for us to develop as Buddhists is an awareness of impermanence and selflessness. It is because in our everyday lives we tend to think of things in a self-centered way and make ego-based judgments—such as, I don’t care for this person, or I cannot bring myself to like that person—that worry arises. We are taught that if one changes oneself, others will change. If we are able to simply stop thinking in a self-centered manner, our worries will vanish regardless of other people or our surroundings.

Changing one’s self-centered thinking means becoming selfless. Both we and other people are part of the great life of the Buddha, and our lives are intertwined. Our existence involves give and take, interrelationships, karmic connections. If we understand this truth of nonself, we can no longer simply assert ourselves. When we insist on having our own way, we are beset by suffering, but when we become selfless we find ourselves free of hindrances and feel at ease. Discipline does this, it puts us at ease.

If we can take even one step toward reaching the realm of impermanence and nonself, which is our true home, other people and our surroundings will change in response. Realizing that we have already been granted the rare and precious gift of life, we are able to live in radiant happiness, rejoicing in the here and now. Living in this way requires striving. What is important is that this radiance will influence our surroundings and open up a world in which we live happily together with others. The realization that this is the true goal of our striving as Buddhists is the key to leading a life that is filled with gratitude, value, and joy. □

*Kensu Osho-zu, an ink brush painting by the Kamakura-period Japanese painter Kao. Kensu (Ch. Hsien-tzu; meaning “clam”) was the Tang-period Chan (Zen) monk. He was famous for his lifestyle, which was free from all attachment, wearing the same clothing all year round, catching shrimps and clams, and sleeping in small shrines. 87.0 cm x 34.5 cm. Important Cultural Property. Tokyo National Museum.*

## Ceremony Held to Present Funds to UNICEF

On November 20 a ceremony for presenting the donations Rissho Kosei-kai had collected in 2004 for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was held at the Great Sacred Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai's Tokyo headquarters during a gathering of youth leaders. A letter detailing the total contributions was handed by a youth member representing Rissho Kosei-kai members to Mr. Yoshihisa Togo, executive director of the Japan Committee for UNICEF in Tokyo.

A total of 107,033,660 Japanese yen was donated by members and well-wishers from July 2003 through September 2004, during an annual campaign which this year was extended to the end of September. The total includes donations received during a special fund-raising effort for children in Afghanistan. The private contributions are to be transferred to UNICEF headquarters in New York for various projects specified by the fund-raiser. For years Rissho Kosei-kai has designated programs to improve education for children in Asian countries. Cambodia, the Philippines, India, Myanmar, and Laos have been chosen as recipients for this year's funds, and the funds for Afghan children will also be utilized in UN projects to support them.

Mr. Togo remarked on the significance of Rissho Kosei-kai youth members' special fund-raising campaign throughout Japan for children in Afghanistan. He emphasized the importance of improving education for children, especially for girls in Afghanistan, since reforming the country's educational system, which in the past excluded girls, would awaken Afghan women to the importance of educa-

tion, thus creating through the family a new generation of human resources for building harmony in Afghanistan and throughout the world. Mr. Togo also expressed his gratitude for Rissho Kosei-kai's continuing assistance to UNICEF. □

## International Executive Committee of WCRP Convened in Amman

On December 1-3 a meeting of the International Executive Committee of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) was held in Amman, Jordan. Some thirty people, including the committee members from Europe, the United States, and the Middle East, and members of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), took part. Rev. Norio Sakai, an honorary executive board member of Rissho Kosei-kai, also took part in the meeting.

The participants studied the current status of various projects organized by the WCRP. They focused especially on the plight of Palestinian refugees in Jordan and the peace process in Iraq. They made an onsite inspection of Jordan's largest Palestinian refugee camp, in Al-Baqa'a, and visited an elementary school built with the support of the Japanese government. They also heard a report on the current situation in Iraq from Dr. Hayder Abdul Amir, coordinator of the Iraqi Inter-religious Council for Peace (Iq-IRC). Dr. Amir explained the activities conducted by the Iq-IRC, which was established by the WCRP. During the meeting, Prince Rashid El-Hassan, a son of H.R.H. Prince El-Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, moderator of the WCRP, addressed the theme of humanitarian aid. □

## President Niwano Visits Brazil

On December 11-12, President Nichiko Niwano visited Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil, São Paulo, as part of his dissemination tour in preparation for the centenary of Founder Nikkyo Niwano's birth in 2006 and as an opportunity to confer with the organization's members directly about "awakening in the faith" and "disseminating the teachings." It was his fifth visit to Brazil since 1987.

Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil was founded in 1971 as a community of Buddhist believers who mainly comprised Japanese immigrants. With the birth of new Japanese-Brazilian generations, it has disseminated the teachings of Buddhism more widely among Portuguese-speaking people in their own language.

On December 11, President Niwano gave special guidance to 10 leaders of Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil at a hotel in São Paulo. When asked about how to spread the teachings in a society with such a wide gap between rich and poor, he replied that poverty does not necessarily cause unhappiness, nor does prosperity guarantee it. Happiness is possible if family members help one another rise above their poverty. If we lead sober lives and are thankful for the gift of life, we can find true happiness and salvation, President Niwano said.

On December 12, he attended a ceremony with 255 participants at Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil. Following an offering of flowers by nine families, there were speeches of testimony to the faith by two members and a speech by Dr. Michio T. Shinozaki, president of the organization's Gakurin Seminary at the Tokyo headquarters. President Niwano then delivered



a sermon in which he stressed that our mission as Buddhists is to make every effort to improve ourselves by endeavoring to study and practice the Buddha's teachings all our lives.

Following his visit to Brazil, President Niwano was to undertake a nationwide dissemination tour in Japan throughout 2005 starting in January in preparation for the centenary of Founder Niwano's birth. □

## Rissho Kosei-kai Offers Support for Tsunami Victims

To aid relief efforts in countries affected by the giant tsunami generated by the massive earthquake that took place on December 26 off Indonesia's Sumatran coast, Rissho Kosei-kai donated from its Peace Fund a total of 52 million Japanese yen (approximately US\$500,000) to nine government and international agencies as well as nongovernmental organizations. The recipients of the financial assistance included the Embassy of Sri Lanka, JEN, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Program, the Japan International Volunteer Center, the Shanti Volunteer Association, and the Japan Center for Conflict Prevention.

On December 28, Rev. Michio Matsubara, chairman of the Executive Committee of the Peace Fund, visited the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Tokyo and presented 5 million yen to H.E. Mr. Karunatilaka Amunugama, Sri Lankan ambassador to Japan. On January 12, Rev. Katsunori Yamanoi, chairman of the board of directors of Rissho Kosei-kai, visited the Regional Office for Japan and the Republic of Korea of the UNHCR and donated 10 million yen to the regional representative, Ms. Pirkko Kourula. Because of the

enormity of the tsunami disaster, and given its decades of experience in responding to global calamities, the UNHCR launched a six-month, \$75-million emergency relief operation for tsunami victims in the Indonesian province of Aceh, in Sri Lanka, and in Somalia. Its humanitarian assistance focuses on providing shelter, non-food relief supplies, and logistical support. Rissho Kosei-kai was the first private organization in Japan that donated to the UNHCR's relief operation for tsunami victims. On presenting the donation, Rev. Yamanoi explained that the Peace Fund is supported by the Donate-a-Meal Campaign, one of Rissho Kosei-kai's peace activities in which members forgo a few meals a month and donate the equivalent sum to the fund to be used for the promotion of peace and the relief of suffering people.

JEN, a Japanese NGO engaged in international relief and rehabilitation work, of which Rissho Kosei-kai is a founding member, began its relief operations in Sri Lanka soon after the disaster. JEN has chosen Sri Lanka as the site of its emergency relief operation, in view of the country's circumstances, which are conducive for the group to make quick and effective operations, in addition to the enormity of the damage there. Ms. Keiko Kiyama, secretary-general of JEN, visited the northeastern towns of Trincomalee and Mullaittivu and the southern town of Hambantota from December 30 to January 8, surveying the damage in the areas. In cooperation with local NGOs, JEN began assistance with food, water, and daily necessities, mainly at Hambantota, one of the worst hit areas in the country. Ms. Kiyama stressed the need to offer mental care to the tsunami survivors who had experienced immense suffering through the loss of their families, homes, and jobs, along with all other means to rehabilitate their lives.

From January 5 to 8, Rissho Kosei-kai sent two headquarters staff members, Mr. Yukimasa Hagiwara and Mr. Lee Saho of the International Faith Dissemination Group, to Sri Lanka. They visited Rissho Kosei-kai of Sri Lanka in Colombo and learned about the effects of the disaster among members from its director, Mr. Edward Gamini Chandrasekera. They visited a member's house, 60 kilometers south of Colombo, which had been damaged by the tsunami, together with eight members of the youth division. Two more members also had their houses damaged, but there were no casualties among members. The youth members had helped the first affected member by removing debris soon after the disaster. Mr. Hagiwara and Mr. Lee also visited a Buddhist temple south of Colombo that had served as a shelter for victims as well as a national broadcasting station that had been promoting relief assistance, to which they donated medicine.

In Japan, during the midwinter sutra-chanting training, which was held from January 20 through February 3 at the Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo and at local branches as an annual early morning discipline for Rissho Kosei-kai members, participants prayed for the repose of the souls of the tsunami victims and for an early return to normal lives for the people in the affected areas. Young members at local branches took the initiative in developing fund-raising campaigns, appealing for cooperation within their branches as well as in busy streets and in front of railway stations. Mr. Norihisa Kobayakawa, a Chiba branch member who led the fund-raising campaign, said, "Although it is important to try to support the affected people through a fund-raising campaign, it is no less important for people of faith to direct our loving care to those who suffer and to deepen our prayers." □



# Bodhisattvas of the Earth

by Gene Reeves

*Chapter 15 tells of the enormous number of bodhisattvas who sprang up out of the earth, whom the Buddha explains he himself has been teaching and leading from the most remote past.*

Chapter 14 of the Lotus Sutra ends on the subject of dreams, saying that those who behave well will not only enjoy happy lives while awake, but also have wonderful dreams as well. The story of bodhisattvas springing up from below the earth in chapter 15 is a bit like such a wonderful dream.

We should also remember that in chapter 11, millions

and millions of buddhas came from all over the universe to this world to see Abundant Treasures Buddha in his magnificent stupa, and that each of those buddhas was accompanied by a great many bodhisattvas.

## The Story

Chapter 15 begins with those bodhisattvas who have come from all over the universe asking Shakyamuni Buddha to allow them to help him by staying here to preach the Lotus Sutra in this world. But the Buddha promptly declines their offer on the grounds that he does not need their help because there are many bodhisattvas already in this world who can protect and embrace, read and recite and teach the Lotus Sutra after the death of the Buddha. “There is no need,” he says, “for you to protect and embrace this sutra. Why? Because in my world of suffering itself there are as many bodhisattva great-ones as there are sands in sixty thousand Ganges.”<sup>1</sup>

At this point the ground quaked and split open and a fantastically enormous number of bodhisattvas and their attendants sprang up from the earth, where they had been living in the empty space below the earth. They went before the two buddhas in the stupa in the air, Abundant Treasures and Shakyamuni, paid respects to them, then went to all the other buddhas seated on lion seats to pay respects to them, and then returned to the two buddhas sitting in the stupa in the air.

These bodhisattvas were led by four great bodhisattvas—Superior Practice, Unlimited Practice, Pure Practice,

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*Gene Reeves is currently studying, teaching, and writing on Buddhism in Tokyo. A consultant and teacher at Rissho Kosei-kai, he was recently a research fellow at Rikkyo University. Before coming to Japan in 1989, Dr. Reeves was the dean of Meadville/Lombard Theological School and professorial lecturer in the Divinity School of the University of Chicago.*

and Firm Practice<sup>2</sup>—who inquired about the health of Shakyamuni Buddha. Is the World-honored One at ease, they ask,

With few ailments and troubles?  
Are you not weary  
From teaching all the living?

Are all the living  
Readily accepting your teaching?  
Do they not wear you out?

Then Maitreya, who in stories in the Lotus Sutra is often surprised and confused, asks the Buddha, “Who are all these bodhisattvas that I have never seen before, and where have they come from, and who taught them the Dharma? In all of this multitude there is not one that I know.” And the bodhisattvas who had accompanied the buddhas from all of the other worlds ask their buddhas the same question and are told by them to be quiet and listen to Shakyamuni Buddha’s response to Maitreya.

Shakyamuni then explained that he himself has been teaching and leading these bodhisattvas from the most remote past. But, protests Maitreya, it has only been forty years since you became an awakened buddha. How could you have taught these innumerable bodhisattvas in such a short period of time? It is as impossible to believe as a twenty-five-year-old man claiming to have a hundred-year-old son! No one can believe this. “The whole world would not believe it.”

### The Empty Space Below

The bodhisattvas are said to spring up from the sky or empty space that is below the earth. Exactly what is meant by the empty space below the earth is unclear. Probably this was simply the most convenient way to have this huge number of bodhisattvas be hidden from view, yet not be in the less than human regions, nor be among the heavenly beings, yet still be in this world. The dramatic effect of the story is dependent on the existence of these bodhisattvas being unknown to all but Shakyamuni, so they have to be in a hidden place somewhere. But it is also important for the thrust of the story that they not be from some other world, or even from one of the heavens or hells associated with this world. In other words, both for the sake of the story and for the sake of the central message of the Lotus Sutra, it is important that these bodhisattvas be both hidden and somehow of this world.

Indian people at the time of the Buddha had a complex cosmology in which there are heavens above the earth and hells below, but the earth itself, though dominated by a

mountain in the middle, is relatively flat; that is, it is not a globe. There could be a sky below the earth, just as there is above it. It is apparently from such a sky, a sky that cannot be seen, that this great multitude of bodhisattvas emerge.

Some interpreters of the Lotus Sutra may prefer to think that this use of the idea of a space below the earth is really a symbolic reference to the popular Mahayana Buddhist idea of emptiness. These bodhisattvas, they claim, emerge from emptiness. They could be right about this. But the Lotus Sutra is not much concerned with the term “emptiness,” using it in a positive sense only very few times. So it seems to me to be unlikely that it is what is behind this story. What this story wants to affirm, I believe, is not the reality of emptiness, but the reality and importance of this world, this world of suffering, a world that is, after all, Shakyamuni Buddha’s world.

How long have these bodhisattvas been living in this space below the earth? It is not clear to me whether in ancient India there was a modern idea of infinity or infinite time. In this story we are expected to imagine that the numbers are staggering, both the number of bodhisattvas and the number of eons in which Shakyamuni Buddha has been teaching them. The bodhisattvas, in other words, have been around for a very long time, for more years and more centuries and more ages than anyone can count.

### World-affirmation

That the bodhisattvas are from the earth has traditionally been taken to be an affirmation of this world, usually called the “*saha* world” in the Lotus Sutra, which means the world in which suffering has to be endured. There is a pattern in the Lotus Sutra in which some great cosmic and supernatural event demonstrates or testifies to the cosmic importance of Shakyamuni Buddha, and, since Shakyamuni is uniquely associated with this world, its reality and importance is also affirmed in this way; and, since what Shakyamuni primarily gives to this world is the Lotus Sutra, it too is seen as very special and important; and, since the Lotus Sutra is not the Lotus Sutra unless it is read and embraced by someone, the importance of the life of the hearer or reader of the sutra is also affirmed; and, since the most appropriate way of life for a follower of the Lotus Sutra is the bodhisattva way, it too is elevated and affirmed. These five—Shakyamuni Buddha, this world, the Lotus Sutra, the hearer or reader of the sutra, and the bodhisattva way—do not have to appear in this particular order. Any one of them leads to an affirmation of the others. But there is a pattern in the Lotus Sutra, wherein there is a radical affirmation of this world, this world of suffering, but an affirmation that is necessarily linked to the importance of Shakyamuni

Buddha and the Lotus Sutra on the one hand and to the lives and bodhisattva practices of those who embrace the Lotus Sutra on the other.

Thus, we can say that to truly love and follow the Buddha is also to love and care for the world, which is also to love and care for other living beings. And the reverse is equally true: to really care for others is at the same time devotion to the Buddha. To be devoted to the Lotus Sutra and to Shakyamuni Buddha is to be vitally concerned about the welfare of others and therefore of our home, the earth.

None of these five items radically affirmed by the Lotus Sutra—Shakyamuni Buddha, this world, the Lotus Sutra itself, those who embrace and follow the sutra, and the bodhisattva way—should be understood as being static or unchanging. All are alive or they are nothing. All are in processes of learning and growth and change, often through enduring trials and suffering. This can be seen as an extension of the very basic Buddhist idea that all things are related and interdependent.

It may seem strange to say that the Lotus Sutra is alive, but what we mean by that is that unless the sutra is somehow embodied and brought to life in the actual lives of someone, unless it makes a real difference in the actual lives of people, it amounts to nothing at all, or at least to no more than a dead book on some shelves. The Lotus Sutra does not spread itself. Its spread depends upon Dharma teachers, on human beings.

It is quite revealing that the Buddha declines the offer of bodhisattvas from other worlds to help in this world. It indicates that we who live in this world have to be responsible for our own world. We can rely neither on gods nor on extraterrestrials of other kinds to fulfill our responsibilities. During the past year we experienced extremely severe “natural calamities” all over the world. No doubt some of these were unavoidable, but almost certainly some were related to the warming trend of the earth’s climate, which results directly from human activity, from releasing greater and greater quantities of carbon dioxide into the earth’s atmosphere. Some potential disasters can be avoided if we realize that this is the only home we or our descendants will ever have and begin to take better care of it.

Of course, the compilers of the Lotus Sutra had no idea of modern environmental issues. Still, they did have a very keen sense of the importance of this world as the home both of Shakyamuni and of themselves. They too thought that what we human beings do with our lives, how we live on this earth, is of the utmost importance.

Thus, this story is not only about affirmation of the earth. As is always the case when a text is read religiously, it is

also about ourselves, in this case, the hearers or readers of the Lotus Sutra. It tells us who we are—namely, people with responsibilities for this world and what it will become, people who are encouraged to follow the bodhisattva way toward being a buddha, people for whom, like Shakyamuni Buddha, this world of suffering is our world, our field of bodhisattva practice.

### Humanistic Buddhism

Nikkyo Niwano, founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, connects this story and its message of world-affirmation with the idea that Shakyamuni Buddha became awakened not as someone sent to earth by a god or as one who received a divine revelation from a transcendent realm, but through his own efforts as a human being. In this respect, Buddhism, he said, is quite different from most, perhaps all, other religions.<sup>3</sup>

It is appropriate, therefore, that Master Hsing Yun, founder of Fo Guang Shan, a great monastery in Taiwan—with branches all over the world—that is strongly oriented to serving people in this world and in this time, calls his teaching “Humanistic Buddhism.”<sup>4</sup>

In this story, too, there is an affirmation of human life in this world, reflecting a humanistic, positive regard for human life in this world. In greeting him, the bodhisattvas from below ask the Buddha whether he is in good health and peaceful, whether the living beings here are ready to receive the Dharma, and whether they are exhausting him. His reply is that he is in good health, that the living beings of this world are ready to receive the Dharma, and that they do not wear him out because they have already learned some important things in previous lives, where they have planted roots of goodness. Thus, a positive regard for human beings is affirmed: just as in the story of the gem in the hair, the treasure, the Lotus Sutra, is given because there are many of great merit; here too there is a positive regard for human beings.

### The Bodhisattva Way

The bodhisattva way is affirmed throughout the Lotus Sutra. The sutra does not reject other ways, neither the shravaka way nor the pratyekabuddha way, but it does make them subordinate to the way of bodhisattvas, which, revealingly, can also be called “the Buddha Way.” This is because the bodhisattva way is understood to be a path leading one to becoming a buddha, that is, to embodying the Buddha in one’s life. Lesser goals may be useful and effective in leading one to the bodhisattva way, but they should be regarded as temporary, like entrances to the way, or resting places along the way.



Thus it is that the four great bodhisattvas—Superior Practice, Unlimited Practice, Pure Practice, and Firm Practice—who lead the great horde of bodhisattvas who emerge from the earth are said to display, or correspond to, the four great bodhisattva vows:

*Firm Practice:* However innumerable living beings are, I vow to save them;

*Pure Practice:* However inexhaustible afflictions or evil passions are, I vow to extinguish them;

*Unlimited Practice:* However unlimited the Buddha’s teachings are, I vow to study them;

*Superior Practice:* However supreme the Buddha Way is, I vow to reach it.

These four vows make clear what the way of the bodhisattva is: It is devotion to the goal of helping everyone to attain the potential they have within themselves to be a buddha.

It is important to recognize that the bodhisattvas who spring up from the earth are not merely historical beings of the past. They include ourselves. Shakyamuni Buddha was a historical person. He was born, lived, and died on earth. So too were the leading shravakas who appear in the Lotus Sutra—Shariputra, Ananda, Subhuti, Katyayana, Kashyapa, Maudgalyayana, and others. These are the names of historical people. But the famous, and not so famous, bodhisattvas are not historical, at least not in the same sense. Manjushri, Maitreya, Universal Sage (Fugen), Earth Store (Jizo), and Guanyin (Kannon) are the five most prominent bodhisattvas in East Asian religion and art. Though all, especially Manjushri, Maitreya, and Guanyin, are believed to have been embodied in a variety of historical figures, none is an actual historical figure. The same is true of other bodhisattvas who have important roles in the Lotus Sutra, bodhisattvas such as Never Disrespectful, Medicine King, and Wonderful Voice and the four leading bodhisattvas who emerge from the earth in chapter 15. Though some are believed to have been embodied in one or more historical figures, none is historical in the sense that Shakyamuni, Shariputra, and you and I are historical. Rather, they are models for us, setting examples of bodhisattva practices that we can follow.

But the enormous horde of bodhisattvas who well up from the earth with the four leaders are perhaps a little different. They appear, not in historical time, but in a powerful story. The text says that the four groups, the monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen, could see these bodhisattvas “by the divine power of the Buddha.” This is another way of referring to the human imagination, to the power that

we all have to transcend everyday life, the power to see the Buddha in others. The bodhisattvas are nameless, and, except for greeting and showing respect to all of the buddhas, in this story and in subsequent chapters of the sutra they do nothing. We can understand this to mean that the emergence of bodhisattvas from the earth is not a one-time event in ordinary time, but an ongoing process. Bodhisattvas are emerging from the earth still. And not only, of course, in India, but virtually everywhere there are human beings. If we use our own powers of imagination, we can see bodhisattvas emerging from the earth all around us! We ourselves can be among them.

Much of the time the bodhisattva in us is hidden, but from time to time it emerges out of the ground of everyday life of both suffering and joy. One way to understand the Lotus Sutra, which usually calls itself the “Dharma Flower Sutra,” is to see it encouraging the emergence of bodhisattvas from the earth.

Such bodhisattvas are like lotus flowers.

These children of the Buddha,  
 . . . . .  
 Have learned the bodhisattva way well,  
 And are untainted by worldly things,  
 Like the lotus flower in the water  
 that emerges from the earth.

They are of the earth. They have their roots in the mud, but they also rise above the mud to blossom, bringing beauty to the world. The Lotus Sutra teaches us to believe that each and every one of us can be such a bodhisattva, a gift of beauty to the world.

### The Universal Buddha

Taken together, chapters 11, 15, and 16 of the Lotus Sutra teach the important idea of the universal Buddha—the Buddha of every place (chapter 11) and every time (chapters 15 and 16). You will remember that in chapter 11 buddhas from all over the universe are brought together by Shakyamuni Buddha in a purified and expanded version of this world to see Abundant Treasures Buddha in his stupa. These many buddhas from all over the universe are said to embody Shakyamuni Buddha. They are, thus, a powerful expression of the idea that Shakyamuni Buddha is everywhere, in all places. Now, in chapters 15 and 16 we learn that Shakyamuni Buddha is also in infinitely extended time, or at least something approaching infinite time, stretching back through countless ages and forward into equally countless ages.

The universality of the Buddha will receive further atten-



tion when chapter 16 is discussed, but here I want to point out that this chapter 15 is an important part of one of the central teachings of the Lotus Sutra—that Shakyamuni Buddha is both a historical person and the one universal Buddha, the Buddha of all times and places, one who is infinite both spatially and temporally, from the infinite past into the infinite future and in all parts of an infinite universe. Perhaps the main purpose of the story in chapter 15 is to set up, or provide a reason in the story for, the “revelation” of the everlasting life of the Buddha that is found primarily in chapter 16, and to be discussed in the next installment of this series. How can we believe that so many bodhisattvas have been taught by Shakyamuni Bud-

dha over such a long period of time? Because even though everyone thinks he became enlightened not long ago near Gaya, in reality it was a very long time ago. □

#### Notes

1. Here and throughout this series, unless indicated otherwise, quoted passages from the Lotus Sutra are from my not-yet-published translation from Chinese.

2. Viśiṣṭacāritra (Jōgyō), Anantacāritra (Muhengyō), Viśuddhacāritra (Jōgyō), and Supratiṣṭhitacāritra (Anryūgyō)

3. See *Buddhism for Today* (Kosei Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 177–78.

4. Master Hsing Yun wrote about “Oneness and Coexistence” emphasizing the importance of equality in Buddhism for *DHARMA WORLD* (May/June 2000) pp. 25–27.

Photo: PPS

*The “Thousand Buddhas” statues at Sanbangulsa Temple, on Cheju Island, South Korea.*

# Buddhist Ecological Ideas and Practices

by Wei Dedong

*Buddhism itself is not ecology, but it contains extremely profound ecological ideas and practices. Their philosophical basis can be found in the teaching of “dependent origination.”*

Ecology involves relationships between living things and their surroundings, as well as the science dealing with these relationships. In 1866, German biologist Ernst Haeckel developed the term “ecology,” but it was not until 1920 that ecology began to be regarded as a separate discipline. With man’s realization of environmental crisis in the 1960s, ecology suddenly found itself on the public stage, playing a significant role in guiding people toward preserving the global ecological equilibrium.

From the 1970s, some monographs about the relationship between Buddhism and ecology began to appear in

English. In 1999, Harvard University published *Buddhism and Ecology*. Within Chinese academic societies, too, there has been a mass of monographs since 1990, including my “Fojiao De Shengtai Guan (The Ecological View of Buddhism),” in *Zhongguo Shehui Kexue* (Social Science of China, Vol. 5, 1999).

Although Buddhism itself is not ecology, it contains extremely profound ecological ideas and practices when viewed from an ecological standpoint. And some traditional Buddhist practices embody something of, and ultimately spring forth from, ecological practices.

## Theory of Dependent Origination: The Philosophical Basis of Buddhist Ecological Ideas

“Dependent origination” means that all that exists within the universe arises from various conditions, rather than being independent. Asvajit, one of the Buddha’s earliest disciples, once detailed this basic doctrine: “All phenomena arising in conditions will cease as the conditions do, and there would appear the Truth, . . . after all conditions have ceased.” Every phenomenon has to exist in a condition and will cease due to a condition; and the transcending of conditions implies nirvana, the achievement of ultimate truth.

Primitive Buddhism expresses this thought thus: “This exists just because that does. . . . The nonexistence of this represents the nonexistence of that.” Here, the “this” and “that” constitute an inseparable unity, and each “this” depends upon each “that” for its existence. Only within a unity, that is, under a variety of conditions, can existence be possible. Things do not exist independently.

Based on this theory, Mahayana proposes the concept of emptiness (*sunya*), which means lack of self-nature (*asva-*

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*Wei Dedong is an associate professor at the Renmin University of China in Beijing, specializing in Buddhist philosophy and the sociology of religion. His major works include Fojiao Weishi Zhexue Yaoyi (The Essence of Yogacara Philosophy) and Fojiao De Shengtai Guan (The Ecological View of Buddhism).*

*bhava*). All things emerge due to dependent origination, obtaining their existence through relationships; hence, they themselves are not reality.

Thus, the doctrine of dependent origination illustrates the truth in a simple way, which is one of the great contributions of Buddhism to the thinking of mankind. Ananda, one of Shakymuni's greatest disciples, once casually remarked that the doctrine of dependent origination is simple and easy to understand; immediately, the Buddha reminded him that "This doctrine of dependent origination is extremely profound and obscure." Differentiated from such theories as fatalism, this theory gives a comparatively reasonable account of the real appearance of the world, displaying a strong rationality even in modern society: "The doctrine of dependent origination . . . has gradually become a basic principle for the establishment of ethical rules of ecology in the modern world."<sup>1</sup>

## The Essential Character of Buddhist Ecological Ideas

### *Theory of Unity*

According to the doctrine of dependent origination, the entire world is both a net of relationships and an inseparable unity itself. The theory of unity is the most outstanding characteristic of Buddhist ecology, according to which the whole world is a unity whose parts coexist with one another and cannot be divided. And mankind's relation to nature is like a bundle of reeds—it cannot stand unless all the reeds support one another.

According to Buddhism, even a mustard seed contains Mount Sumeru, and a single pore contains continents and oceans. That these small things can contain the infinite universe shows the correlativity of everything in all worlds. Among the Chinese Buddhist sects, the Tiantai (T'ien-t'ai) and the Huayan (Hua-yen) schools developed this idea to its utmost from the doctrine of *yuan-rong* (*yuan-jung*; the concept that things remain their perfect selves in unity, and yet contain each other without contradictions).

The Tiantai School was the earliest sect of Chinese Buddhism that specifically expressed a holographic idea about the world in the concept of *xing-ju* (*hsing-chu*), which holds that everything in the universe contains everything in the infinite universes. Zhiyi (Chih-i), founder of the Tiantai School, proposed the idea as "The universes of the ten realms respectively contain one another" and "Three thousand worlds are present in a single thought."

The Huayan School reckons that the world of phenomena exists in such a way that one phenomenon constitutes all phenomena and from all phenomena arises one: The one contains everything in the universe, and everything is contained within the one. Taking the images of "a pore" and "a grain of dust," the scholars of the Huayan School

expounded the relationship between "one" and "all," showing their profound grasp of the world's holographic character. A pore is small, but it holds all living creatures in all worlds. A tiny grain of dust contains all the creatures of the past, present, and future worlds.

The Huayan School also employs Indra's Net to illustrate the holographic character of the world. Indra's Net is the wonderful net of the deity Indra. Every knot in the net is tied with a pearl, and there is an infinitude of them. Each pearl reflects all the others, and in this way all the pearls reflect one another. The Flower Adornment Sutra (*Avatamsaka Sutra*) takes Indra's Net as an example to explain that all the things in the world reflect and contain one another.

To look at today's ecological practices from this point of view, one must not confine oneself to the limited sphere of a person, a small group, a country, or even a continent, but must think at least globally. The only way to act is for the benefit both of oneself and all others.

### *Theory of Nonself*

Buddhism regards all things in the world as conditional existences with no permanent qualities, and it refers to this phenomenon as emptiness. In Mahayana, the concept of two kinds of emptiness is most popular. These are the emptiness of the self, which means that no individual living beings have a real self-essence, and the emptiness of the *dharma*s, which means that no non-living beings possess their own bodies.

With its denial of the selves of living beings, Buddhism denies the reality of all living beings, hence rejecting mankind's superiority in the world. It is a reaction against the bigotry of anthropocentrism. Thus, the Buddhist idea of nirvana is based upon the concept of nonself and is thereby cosmocentric. The Buddhist view of the relationship between mankind and nature offers a spiritual basis for a possible solution of one of the most pressing problems that we are facing—the destruction of the environment. This is an attitude in which people regard nature as a mere hindrance, or as a treasure-house to plunder in order to satisfy their selfish desires, and people consistently seek ways to exploit or conquer it. The fundamental cosmology of Buddhism does not regard nature as something belonging to man; rather, it asserts that man belongs to nature—which not only helps overcome man's alienation from nature, but also harmonizes man and nature without the abolition of their own individualities.

One of the significant characteristics of modern ecology is its opposition to anthropocentrism, which has led to problems in modern society, inducing the antipathy between man and nature. Ecology does not perceive man as an entity, but as a correlativity. According to the view of

inherent correlativity, man is no more special than anything else. Mankind's arrogant sense of self-importance has resulted in massive damage to the ecological order in which both human beings and all other species have to live. Thus, ecology advocates a kind of global ethics. Buddhism also has as equally satisfactory a mode of thinking as modern ecology and postmodernism, which displays the value of Buddhism to the modern age.

### Detailed Buddhist Ecological Ideas

#### *Buddhist Opinion of Nature*

Mahayana views all things that exist as incarnations of the nature of the Buddha, and so all things that exist contain the very essence of the Buddha. Zhanran (Ts'an Jen, 711–782), a Tiantai master, specified that even non-sentient beings have the potential to become a buddha. Furthermore, the Chan (Jpn. Zen) School claims that every flower indicates the Great Wisdom (*prajna*), and that every stalk of bamboo is the Law Body of the Buddha (*dharma-kaya*). In this it suggests that every piece of grass and every tree is a manifestation of the buddha-nature. And thereby it is naturally a vocation of Mahayanists to clean the lands belonging to the Buddha and to care for nature.

The affirmation that all non-sentient beings have the buddha-nature and the emphasis upon the value of things other than human beings are both based on the concept that everything arises from Thusness, which means that the buddha-nature is itself unchangeable, and that it is only embodied conditionally in various things; and all matter shares the essence of the Buddha, and hence has a value equal to that of the Buddha. Now the universality of the essence of the Buddha does not distinguish between what is sentient and what is not.

Looking into the statement that non-sentient beings contain the buddha-nature, we come to realize that it carries almost the same meaning as land ethics, an important branch of modern ecology.

The founder of land ethics was an American named Aldo Leopold (1886–1948), whose representative work is *A Sand County Almanac*. From the point of view of ecology, he looked upon the earth as an organism, developing a concept of land ethics. He conceived of every part of the earth as one of its organs, and saw man as just another part of nature.

According to land ethics, man's relation to nature should be a kind of fellowship. Land ethics teaches that mankind will have to respect all other living beings and the land. When human beings begin to look upon the land as a fellow member of the same community to which they belong, they will begin to treat it with love and respect. And there is no other way to preserve the land under the impact

of human beings equipped with machinery. Leopold emphasized that there could not be any relationship between ethics and the land if we had no love, respect, or reverence for the land, or if we did not pay much attention to the land's value.

#### *The Buddhist Concept of the Value of Life*

Buddhism teaches the equality of all living beings in all universes. Buddhism teaches that all beings reincarnate in the six realms of the heavenly deities, human beings, *asura* (demigods having the same powers as the heavenly deities), animals, hungry ghosts, and the demons of hell (*niraya*). Each type of being achieves its own return in a future life in terms of the effect of its own actions (*karma*). He who does good may transmigrate from the realm of hungry ghosts to that of human beings, and vice versa. Lives take on different forms, some of which are lower, and some of which are higher, but they all share the same quality as their nature—they are all beings that can either progress or fall back. Each life, therefore, is neither inferior nor superior to any other. Thus, the ultimate goal is to transcend this realm of ordinariness and become a buddha.

It is a fundamental Buddhist precept to respect and value all life. Indeed, the taking of life is considered the worst type of evil by Buddhism. Those who take the lives of sentient beings, no matter whether they kill by themselves or have others perform the killing, thus commit a sin and fall into the three bad paths of hell, hungry ghosts, and animals after they die; and even if they were reincarnated as human beings, they would suffer the two evil returns of many illnesses and short lives.

In the age of Shakyamuni, Buddhist disciples had to utter the oath that "From today unto the end of my days, I will protect lives." This is reminiscent of the saying of Confucius: "Do not force upon others what you are reluctant to accept."

There are two reasons not to destroy lives: one is compassion, and the other is the avoidance of evil karma arising from the destruction. Many kings in ancient India undertook the Buddhist practice of not taking life. Many Chinese monarchs of benevolent reigns issued edicts to forbid the taking of lives.

Ever since the middle of the twentieth century, life ethics has been attracting more and more attention in the West, and its theoretical basis is a deep reverence for all life. Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965), the founder of this ethical theory and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize (1952), has greatly influenced the peace campaigns and the environmental protection movements in the modern world.

"Reverence for life" is the foundation of Schweitzer's worldview, which is essentially to have reverence for the



*A bird sits on the head of a monk as he prays at a Buddhist temple in Bodh Gaya, India, during a monastic gathering.*

lives of all living beings. It is good to protect and enhance lives, and it is bad to destroy or suppress them. This is the ultimate principle of morality. The fundamental cause of being responsible for all lives begins with taking responsibility for one's own life. Without respect for our own lives, we cannot begin to revere all life. Every life has its own value and right to exist.

Against the background of two world wars in the twentieth century and the worsening global environment, Schweitzer came to the conclusion that man can be arrogant no more, proposing the need for all to have reverence for all life. The problems Schweitzer pointed out have not been solved yet; on the contrary, they are worsening in some aspects. Compared with Buddhist concepts, we can see that reverence for life is a universal value that displays the nature of compassion to a certain degree.

### ***Buddhist Ideals***

A Pure Land, also known as a Buddha Land, or a Land of Ultimate Bliss, is the domicile of a buddha. The most representative type of Pure Land is that of Amitabha, also

known as the Western Paradise. Many Buddhist sutras embody this thought, but here I shall explain the ecological ideals of Buddhists mainly on the basis of the Amitabha Sutra translated by Kumarajiva and another version by Xuanzang (Hsuan Tsang; the *Cheng Fo Jing Tu Fo She Shou Jing*).

The Land of Ultimate Bliss is a pleasant world with no hardship. As the Amitabha Sutra says, "Why is this land named Ultimate Bliss? The very reason is that all living beings therein indulge in pleasures without suffering (*duhkha*). That is why it is so named." Then what is the Land of Ultimate Bliss like?

First, this land is in perfect order. Everywhere there are wonderful railings, trees, and nets; and around them are four kinds of treasures, particularly gold, silver, and gems.

Second, the land is rich in water, the fundamental element of life. Everywhere there are pools that are filled with water of the eight virtues: cleanness; coolness; sweetness; lightness and softness; smoothness; peacefulness; the solution of numerous problems, such as thirst and hunger, when it is drunk; and the cultivation of various virtues after a drink of it.

Third, around the pools there are wonderful trees, and in the pools there are colorful lotus flowers.

Fourth, everywhere sweet, peaceful, elegant, and lovely music resounds. Hearing this music, all sentient beings can eliminate their karmic obscurations, cultivate virtue, and gain wisdom.

Fifth, every day it rains bright, fragrant, soft, and colorful flowers that make it possible for all sentient beings to foster unbelievable virtues.

Sixth, there are numberless species of birds, many of which are unknown in our world, that utter beautiful sounds, preaching the wisdom of Buddhism.

Seventh, there is wonderful air, and breezes in the precious trees carry beautiful sounds.

In a word, the Pure Land is a world filled with joy without suffering, and it is a goal for all Buddhists. The Pure Land is a karmic reward for bodhisattva-like actions, whose realization fundamentally depends upon the common efforts of all living beings. Chinese Buddhism lays special emphasis on self-enlightenment in achieving self-morality and the creation of a Pure Land among human beings. Indeed, the Chan School asserted that the only Pure Land is that which already exists in the human realm.

### **Buddhist Ecological Practices**

#### ***The View of Karma***

The theory of karma and its effect is the basis for Buddhist practices. Karma is a Sanskrit word that refers to all actions such as physical activities, speech, and thoughts. And the

effect created by karma is a kind of retribution. According to Buddhism, karmic retribution, which always occurs sooner or later, is the effect of all the karmic activities of a sentient being. Karma is one of the most important concepts in Indian philosophy, and Buddhism incorporated it as the basis for inspiring all mankind to choose the good and abandon the bad.

Different types of karma cause different types of retribution. Individual retribution consists of the effect of karmic activities upon the individuals who performed the karmic activities, and common retribution consists of the effect upon the environment in which those who performed the karmic activities live. So the activities of human beings influence not only themselves, but also the environment. Therefore, the Buddhist concept of common retribution highlights a concern for an ecological environment.

### *Ecological Practices of Traditional Buddhism*

To deal with the evil results brought on by bad karma, what is needed is not intellectual activity, but moral activity. Yet in the so-called developed countries, greed seems to be appraised as a virtue; and I believe that uncontrolled greed can only lead to self-destruction. However, as Mahayana teaches, the altruism of Buddhist compassion can change an individual's greed into compassion for other creatures.

During its long history, Buddhism has developed a series of unique practices, including vegetarianism, the releasing of captive animals (not taking life), purification of the environment, and so forth. In terms of environmental protection, these practices are still valuable. Vegetarianism is the consumption of edible plants, which effectively guarantees the practice of not taking animal life. According to the Lankavatara Sutra, "If one did not eat meat, there would be no slaughter of animals. So those who eat animals commit the same sin as those who slaughter them." In terms of ecological problems, vegetarianism may play a positive role. At present, the resources of wild animals are being increasingly destroyed, and several species are becoming extinct at an unprecedented rate. One of the most urgent reasons is that mankind is eating them up. This is most striking in China, where it is often reported in the media that protected rare animals are being eaten in restaurants.

Buddhism also has a tradition of releasing captive animals. To perform such a release, one simply buys some captive animals, such as fishes and birds, and then sets them free. To satisfy followers who wish to release captive prey, some temples set up a special "life-releasing facility," known as a "life-releasing pool," which is usually built before or

near the gate of a temple, and in some larger ones there are even artificial hills, pavilions, and flowers and grasses for animals to live on. Buddhism also holds religious gatherings especially to release animals, and these are known as "life-releasing gatherings." The Brahmajala Sutra says that a Buddhist should practice the releasing of lives with compassion, since all the living beings in the six realms of existence were once his or her parents. The Samyukta-ratnapitaka Sutra tells about a monk who enjoyed longevity just because he once saved an ant from drowning. Zhiyi tried to dissuade the fishermen along the coast from living on fishery and built some life-releasing pools. Sometimes, some governments even undertook such actions. Emperor Su in 759 and Emperor Zhen in 1017 ordered the building of life-releasing pools; and in 1019, the Tiantai School asked the Court to declare West Lake (in Hangzhou) a life-releasing pool. Also, this school held life-releasing gatherings every April 8 by the lunar calendar.

Also, even in the time of Shakyamuni, there were some devices that were used to protect lives, and one was known as the "life-releasing filter." In the area where the Buddha lived, it was very hot and life flourished, so drinking water contained many living beings. To prevent people from killing them, Buddhists prepared special bags with which they filtered their drinking water, and then returned the small creatures to rivers or pools. The use of life-releasing filters offers a practical way for Buddhists to protect living creatures in their daily lives.

With the goal of final release (nirvana), Buddhists tend to build temples in beautiful mountains and near clean waters, so as to create an ideal environment for religious practices. They plant trees and flowers, enhancing the temples and the environment surrounding them. Whether deep in the mountains or in crowded urban areas, Buddhist sites are fully surrounded by trees, singing birds, and fragrant flowers. With an eye to today's increasingly polluted environment, many Buddhist temples seem like lush, green oases. From the people's adoration of such religious sites, we may conclude that the Buddhist ideal of living in harmony with the environment reflects a universal requirement of human beings.

### *Ecological Practices of Modern Buddhism*

Based on the fundamental Buddhist doctrine of not taking life, one of the objectives for the twentieth century was peace. The two world wars and the cold war, which was marked by a nuclear arms race, were like a suicide attempt by mankind. Because of all of these conflicts, the Buddhist concept of reverence for life has an extremely high value, which has been recognized by all human beings.

*Participants in a "life-releasing gathering," a Buddhist ritual held annually on April 17 at the temple Kofukuji, Nara, releasing carp into Sarusawa Pond after a ceremony performed by Buddhist priests.*

In the 1990s, Buddhists from China, South Korea, and Japan began to work together for the common goal of world peace. In 1996, they held a meeting in South Korea and published a common declaration stating that: 1) the Buddhists of the three countries should insist on coexistence based on the doctrine of dependent origination; 2) they should intensify their ties and gain a better understanding of the principle of the universe as a community; and 3) they will have to devote more efforts toward saving our forests and beautifying the earth in order to purify human minds to protect all life, to eliminate the nuclear weapons threatening the survival of life on earth, to protect and restore the ecological balance of the earth, to maintain the thought of valuing lives, and to restore morality.

In terms of the idea of the Pure Land, modern Buddhists view the protection of the environment as an important way in which they might contribute to society. For half a century, many Buddhist temples on the mainland of China have done much positive work. At the end of the 1950s, the teachers and students at the Chinese Buddhist Academy of

the Fayuan Temple in Beijing took part in the construction of the Thirteen-Mausoleum Reservoir, working hard to improve the ecological environment of Beijing. And for years, the Yonghe Palace at Beijing has been an "advanced unit for the afforestation of Beijing City," offering its own contribution to the ecological balance in the Beijing area.

Mount Fagu in Taiwan has also set an example for the public in protecting the environment; innovatively integrating the concept of environmental protection into the daily lives of Buddhists. Master Shengyan, a leader on Mount Fagu, divides their environmental protection activities into environmental protection in terms of materials and in terms of the mind. The former means to fulfill the task of environmental protection at every level of material life, changing people's daily actions into those that enhance environmental protection; the latter means to help the human mind to develop an awareness of environmental protection and then to consciously transform it into action. According to Master Shengyan, material protection is rooted in spiritual protection, and the two enhance each other.

The ways of environmental protection vary at Mount Fagu. In terms of life, they advocate the use of stainless steel bowls and self-prepared drinking containers instead of plastic bowls, chopsticks, and paper cups. This means more chores in terms of cleaning, but in the long run, the amount of waste will be greatly reduced if everyone cooperates. In physical terms, the principle of revering, protecting, and enhancing life is followed by advocating vegetarianism. In terms of rituals, it is advocated not to burn incense for the divine or paper products for the dead, and to replace such offerings with flowers, fruits, and fresh water. In terms of society, they often organize social activities to spread their ideas on environmental protection.

According to Master Shengyan, "The point of how to construct a Pure Land among human beings is how to enhance the mind. The Pure Land already exists in the mind of each human being. Since we have a Pure Land in our minds, we have a Pure Land in reality."<sup>2</sup> If we clean the environment conscientiously, the environment we live in will become better and eventually become a Pure Land.

The practices of Mount Fagu not only offer modern ways for Buddhists to perfect themselves, but also point out a significant direction in which Buddhism can engage in the improvement of the global ecological balance.

### Leading in a New Direction

At a time when modern progress threatens the survival not only of the human race, but also of the very earth itself, the ecological ideas and practices of Buddhism should be beneficially inspiring to us.

In 1993, the Parliament of the World's Religions was held in Chicago, and its declaration deplored the lack of world peace and condemned our abuse of the global ecological system. The statement also said that religions cannot solve all environmental, economic, political, and social problems in the world, but that they can offer what is not available through economic planning, political creeds, or legal terms: the ability to change inherent trends, to change ways of thinking, and to lead us in a new direction toward enhanced lives.

Buddhism plays the same role for ecological problems. Buddhism alone cannot solve all ecological crises, but it can indeed offer us useful concepts that will help lead toward the solution. □

### Notes

1. Monk Zhao Hui, *Fojiao Lunlixue* (The Ethics of Buddhism) (Taipei: Buddhist Press, 1995), p. 17.

2. Master Shengyan, "Ruhe Jianshe Renjian Jingtū (How to Construct the Pure Land in the Human World)," *The Central Daily News* (Taiwan), Aug. 31, 1997.

*A wooden statue of a bodhisattva with inset crystal eyes. Traces of pigment remain on the surface, on which cut gold leaf was also applied. Height: 163 cm. Kamakura period. Important Cultural Property. Tokyo National Museum.*



# God and the Garden

by Kenneth J. Dale

*In this essay, the author shares some of his musings and discoveries regarding the questions: Who is God? What is God? Where is God? How do we talk about God?*

The subject of this article focuses on the most basic and important concept of nearly all religions. Our focus will be on God. Who—or what—is God anyway? Now you might say that it is foolish to get caught up in such thoughts, because nobody can describe God accurately, and we are supposed to just accept God in simple faith. Maybe, when I become more mature, I will be able to do that. I am well aware that there are thousands of books on this subject, written by great theologians through the centuries. But in spite of that, I believe that the quest for God is a road that each one of us must travel for ourselves.

When it comes to the very bottom of the bottom line, this is what all theistic religions are all about—*knowing God*, and living in some kind of a relationship with God. I like the passage in Psalm 27 that reads: “‘Come,’ my heart says, ‘seek God’s face.’ Your face, Lord, do I seek.” In the Gospel of John are these words: “This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God.”

I recall the thrust of a talk given by a Jesuit missionary priest, Father Hand. He said that for the first years of his ministry in Japan, he was so busy doing the work of the church that he almost lost his soul in the process. Then, at a certain point, he quieted his heart, through meditation, and had a transforming experience that made him realize that in the long run nothing is more important than simply knowing God in one’s innermost being.

In the first book of the Bible, Genesis, there is a wonderful story about the patriarch Jacob. During an anxiety-filled night when he was returning from his uncle Laban’s territory to his homeland, we read that “A man wrestled with him till daybreak,” and Jacob told him “I will not let

you go unless you bless me. . . . I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.” We too need to wrestle—we need not just to receive and accept a religious tradition, but to wrestle with the basics of our faith, and the first basic is constantly to check our experience of the reality of God in our lives, and of God’s working among us.

So will you go with me for a few minutes along this path that beckons us, and let me share with you a few of my

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*Kenneth J. Dale retired in Claremont, California in 1996, after spending forty-five years as a missionary and professor at the Japan Lutheran College and Seminary in Mitaka, Tokyo. He founded and directed the Personal Growth and Counseling Center of that college. He is the author of Circle of Harmony and A Seeker’s Journal: Questioning Tradition—Strengthening Faith.*

own musings and discoveries regarding these vital questions: Who is God? What is God? Where is God? How do we talk about God?

### The Bible and Misunderstandings

There are all kinds of approaches to answering these questions. First of all, there is the choice of a philosophical approach or a biblical approach. You may say, "It's the philosophical quest for God that gets us into an endless maze of speculation, so just stick with the biblical testimony of God." We recall the famous French philosopher Pascal's famous phrase, "I believe not in the God of the philosophers, but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Many of us might say that for a Christian, the end of the trail in this quest might simply be to say that God is the one whom Jesus Christ called his father. However, that simple sentence doesn't really answer the question about the nature of that "father."

There is no doubt that the Bible, especially the Old Testament, speaks of God as a powerful, personal being who acts in the world. As a typical example, take Psalm 11: "The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord is on his heavenly throne; He observes the sons of men." But we must not succumb to a simplistic approach that sees God as some masculine monarch, sometimes kind, sometimes cruel, residing in some corner of the universe waving his wand to do miracles, creating worlds, or causing accidents and earthquakes at will, and waiting for our petitions to decide whether or not he is going to make the sick well. Listening to some prayers in the church, there still is much of this kind of imaging of God. Frankly, I think it is blasphemous, because it sees God in such anthropomorphic terms that God becomes like another person, sitting "out there," whom we manipulate by our prayers.

And a major problem for the church today is that so many who grew up with a simplistic "Sunday School faith" now say, "I am a reasonable adult, in touch with the scientific age. I have no more use for those naive, unscientific ideas about God; the church where I hear that kind of talk is not for me!"

But if God is not the Lord sitting on a heavenly throne observing humankind, then what is God? How should we image God? Do we not have a responsibility to our secular society, and to ourselves, to present a more viable concept of God that will not automatically turn people away from the church?

### Contemporary Approaches to God

#### *Nature as the Body of God*

I would like to share with you a theme, taken from the writings of a contemporary American theologian, Sally McFague,

that has made a profound impression on me. She focuses on the idea of nature as being "*the body of God*." She talks about the whole universe as constituting the body of God. I am very much intrigued by this idea. She writes: "Were we to speak of the universe as God's body, it would be *all* the bodies that have ever been or ever will be, from quarks and exploding stars to microorganisms and centipedes, rocks, mountains, and water, but not forgetting tortoises, pine trees, buttercups, giraffes, and, of course, human beings in all their various shapes, conditions, and colors." (*Body of God*, p. 38) According to this view, wherever we look, we are seeing God. God is very real! God is all around us, God is in us!

Of course, we are not advocating a pantheistic view wherein God is equated with or confined to objects of nature. Just as our human body has a spirit inseparable from the body, so there is a spirit in this divine body of nature, and defining that spirit still eludes us. But is it any less biblical to think of God as the entirety of everything, than to think of God as a super-man or super-woman sitting in a far corner of the sky?

Since retirement, I have become a volunteer and guide at the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Gardens in Claremont. As I have begun to learn something about botany—a new endeavor for me—and about the plants in this wonderful 80 acres of California native trees, shrubs, and flowers, I have experienced a new dimension in perceiving God in nature.

In the garden, I frequently muse, "This majestic oak is part of the body of God. This delicate flower is a part of the body of God. I must show profound respect for this piece of nature." Furthermore, I consider it my duty and privilege to pass on this attitude of respect for nature and the environment to the busloads of students for whom we lead tours of the Gardens.

I am constantly amazed at the diversity within the plant kingdom. I know it sounds naive, but I cannot help asking, "How does this little seed know how to develop into this fantastic blue California lilac bush?" and "How does this other little dry seed know that it should become the smooth green trunk and branches of a paloverde tree?" Stupid questions? Then give me the answers, please. I cannot help but see divine miracles all around me in these gardens. Something, someone is at work there.

You may say, "Those phenomena of nature are not miracles of God. Don't you know about the recent discoveries of the genome? That diversity is simply the result of different DNA in the genomes of the chromosomes in the nuclei of the cells of the plant." *Simply* the result of DNA?! The more I know about DNA and genomes, the more I stand in awe at the unbelievable intricacy of the structures that produce and support life—both plant life and human life. I

the highest fulfillment of its potential. One result of this line of thought is that we can image God as being always around us and within us as a loving Energy.

### *The Perspective of Physics*

Some scientists have recently talked about the near discovery of the ultimate stuff of the universe, which they call the “*god-particle*.” This particle is thought to be a vibrating chunk of the unseen vacuum that underlies everything in the universe. These particles are the unimaginably small subatomic particles that, according to theoretical physics, are the ultimate building blocks of the universe. As such, the only nickname scientists could give them is the “*god-particle*,” because here we are dealing with the most basic stuff of the universe, and that material *must* have something to do with what we call God. Perhaps this is similar to Paul Tillich’s notion of God as not a Being, but as the very Ground of all being—Being itself.

Along the same line is the recent so-called “string theory” of the universe in which the very concepts of *time* and *space* would become obsolete. String theory offers a universe bizarre beyond imagining: Every known particle in the universe would consist of not three dimensions, but eleven dimensions, one of them being time, suggesting that space and time as fundamental concepts may be about to disappear altogether. Does this not point to a Creator who indeed transcends all our imagination?

The Hebrew word for “spirit” is *ruach*. Very significantly, *ruach* can mean several things—breath, and wind, and spirit. I cannot help but believe that these multiple meanings are not accidental, but that these words—breath and air—were also used for “spirit” because for the people of that time, the air we breathe, which is absolutely invisible, but without which we would die in a few seconds, that breath of air was the most mysterious natural phenomenon they could conceive of. So they used the word *ruach* to describe the mysterious Spirit of God. In our day science has allowed us to conceive of natural phenomena far more incredibly mysterious than air—such as the atom and subatomic particles, and the “mass equals energy” concept. I think we are honoring God when we thus use science to broaden and deepen our thinking about God.

### *My Own Belief*

In conclusion, I want to share with my readers how I am learning to discover a home base, after struggling with these and other abstract images of God offered by modern worldviews. I come back to another garden, a little hidden meditation garden in our community. This garden for me is a little bit like still another garden well-known to us—the Garden of Eden. For in moments of meditation in that

*The diversity of the plant kingdom enables one to experience a new dimension in perceiving God in nature.*

stand in awe of the Creator and the creative processes in our world.

### *The Perspective of Process Philosophy*

I am indebted to my colleague John Cobb for his attempt to incorporate the scientific worldview of our age into the concept of God. I understand him to say something like this: Since the time of Albert Einstein, we have come to see that matter is not just solid unchangeable matter. Rather, we see matter as defined by the Einsteinian theory of relativity, which states: “Mass, or matter, equals energy.” Cobb asks, from the perspective of process philosophy, whether modern people would be less turned off by religion and belief in God if we thought of God as an “energy event” that is constantly in process along with all the rest of the energy events of the universe. He suggests that the whole universe is a vast field of events. He proposes that God should be thought of not as an external force interrupting the course of natural law, but as one of the influences in each energy event or experience, calling the organism to

beautiful, quiet space, I too sometimes hear a mysterious voice, as if God were walking in the garden in the cool of the day. Were it not for my own experience of that voice, I am sure that I would end up as a skeptic.

But in those moments I instinctively slip back to the prayer Jesus taught his disciples. In that prayer, how did Jesus image God? He taught them to say, “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.”

I would like to add a few comments about what that sentence means to me. First, “Father” for me implies three things. By the way, to me it does not imply that God is a male. First of all, a father or mother, as parent, bestows life on us, the children. To me, either father or mother means creator, source, and “progenitor.” I did not create my own life; life was mysteriously *given* to me.

Second, a parent is necessarily *personal*. But can we think of nature as the divine body being personal? Can we think of “energy events,” or the “god-particle” as being personal? Perhaps we can think of them as being not persons, but in a deeply mysterious sense, personal, able to communicate with persons.

Third, a mother and father are loving; they are concerned about and nurture their children. It is a matter of faith, but I do believe that God loves the whole created world, and loves even me, with an unfathomable love.

Further, this loving person is *in heaven*. Where and what heaven is I have no idea, but it must refer to something that is qualitatively and utterly different from earth. I am pretty sure that it is not one of the “black holes” of outer space. Maybe it is a state of pure, ecstatic energy. Maybe it is that place where the time and space dimensions have both lost their meaning. Maybe it is in my own consciousness—where at least there is no space—or in the collective consciousness of the human race. “Heaven” is also a mystery!

### A Final Challenge

And now a challenge comes to each of us. What is the appropriate response to what we call God? In that same prayer mentioned above, Jesus taught us to say, “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” That is, God is a holy God; our response is to worship God. I pray that I might live with a knee constantly bowed in reverence before the holiness of this incomprehensible Other, and constantly hold in awe this ineffable Mystery we call “God.”

In closing, let me ask, what is God to you? Do you struggle with the mysterious Presence, as Jacob did throughout the night? It is my wish that all of us might grow in the experience of the ever-present, everywhere-present Spirit of God. □

*A gilt bronze statue of Shakyamuni Buddha sculpted during the Unified Silla period (676–935) of Korea, which is said to have been discovered inside of a stone pagoda at the site of an ancient temple in Gangwon-do, Korea. Height: 13.9 cm. Tokyo National Museum.*



# Meditation and Compassion in Action

by Bhikkhu Sanghasena

*We must make meditation and compassion part of our daily lives, like our breathing. True compassion, true love is to serve others, to share all good things with others, to share the pain and sufferings of all fellow beings.*

Thanks to great scientists and engineers—who have created and applied fantastic technology in the field of transportation and communication—it has become possible for us to travel anywhere in the world. To my mind, together with this great stride in the development of science and technology, the time has now come for all human beings to have a new attitude and new vision for a new world in which all human beings can live together in peace with love, respect, and dignity for all. If we are to save this beautiful earth and all of our precious lives from nuclear catastrophe, and if we are to live in peace with our fellow living beings and with nature, we will have to outgrow our narrow-mindedness. We will have to outgrow our self-centered mentality of “I-ness” or “my-ness”—my ideology, my religion, my race, my nation, my tradition, and my culture—or more significantly such false ideas as, “only my ideology is right; all others are wrong.”

I believe that the messages of love, peace, and wisdom taught by Lord Buddha are now read more widely in Western countries. I would like to stress here that material development alone will not bring the fulfillment of human life. That is a fact we can see in the materially prosperous countries. Scientific and spiritual development must go together.

The most dynamic force in the world is the mind. A single thought appearing in this invisible mind can either save or destroy the world. This mind is a gold mine, but people pollute it. Therefore, it is important that the mind be properly guided by discipline. The Buddha said, “No

enemy can harm one so much as one’s thought of craving, thought of hatred, thought of jealousy.” When we master the mind, we can overcome such negative thoughts, which can make life a nuisance to ourselves as well as to others.

The Buddha said in the first chapter of the Dhammapada: “Mind is the forerunner of all mental states, mind is their chief, and of mind are they made. If one speaks or acts with wicked mind, because of that, suffering follows one, as the wheel follows the hoof of the ox. If one speaks or acts

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

passion is the sharing of the spiritual excellence acquired through the practice of meditation with all other fellow beings. The development of wisdom must come with both meditation and compassion.

First, let me say a few words about meditation. Meditation practice constitutes the heart of Buddhism. Buddhist meditation has been one of the most decisive factors in molding Asian religious life during the past two millennia. Meditation is an integral part of Buddhist religious doctrine and practice because it is directed entirely and exclusively toward mental purification and liberation. We can find many kinds of meditation and concentration in all religions. Since earliest times, men have recognized the vast benefit that can be gained through meditation. But it was the Buddha who gave meditation a central place as a tool to be used in gaining real peace, happiness, and finally enlightenment. Many religious believers used meditation in order to communicate with Almighty God and gain external powers, but the Buddha taught us to use meditation to look within ourselves and gain insight without depending on any external powers.

The Buddha brought about a spiritual revolution. The Buddha's approach to peace and enlightenment was one of the most phenomenal events in religious history. Before the Buddha, all religions were god-centered. The Buddha made his teaching man-centered. The Buddha made a unique declaration: "In this very body, six feet in length, with its sense impressions and its thoughts and ideas, are the world, the origin of the world, and likewise the way that leads to the ceasing thereof." Everybody wants to be happy and peaceful. Why? Because in our search for happiness, we move in the wrong direction—not knowing that real happiness comes from our own rightly trained mind, we go on searching for it in all directions of the world, which is a waste of time and energy; it is like trying to squeeze oil from sand.

*Anapanasati*, or mindfulness of breathing, is among the *samatha* methods of mind training, and it has been given great emphasis in the Pali canon. To get the full benefit of *samatha* meditation, one should learn and practice regularly under the guidance of an experienced teacher.

*Vipassana* literally means the type of insight that penetrates into the reality of mental and physical phenomena. *Vipassana* meditation is meant to help us develop intuitive wisdom, learn to transform our consciousness from the mundane to the supramundane state, and thereby bring about spiritual liberation or enlightenment. The Four Noble Truths constitute the essence of the Buddha's teachings. *Vipassana* is designed to actualize the Four Noble Truths through the day-to-day activities of life. The ways of *vipas-*

*Shakyamuni Buddha preaching the Dharma. A stone image excavated in Gandhara. Height: 77.3 cm. Tokyo National Museum.*

with pure mind, because of that, happiness follows one, as one's shadow never leaves one." It is very rightly embodied in the preamble of the Constitution of UNESCO, which declares, "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." Meditation can give us that which nothing else can give us.

Lord Buddha invented several meditation techniques to suit different mental levels of individuals. However, all the various meditation techniques come under two distinct types of meditation: *samatha bhavana* and *vipassana bhavana*. *Samatha* literally means tranquillity, and *bhavana* means mental development. Thus, *samatha* meditation is meant to calm the mind, leading to various stages of concentration and ecstatic absorption known as *jhanas* or *samadhis*. *Samatha* meditation is absolutely necessary for all those who seek liberation as well as peaceful understanding of oneself, in order that they might develop spiritual excellence and explore buddhahood within themselves. Com-

*sana* meditation are not cut off from life, nor do they avoid life; on the contrary, they are all connected with our lives, our daily activities, our sorrows and joys, our words and thoughts, and our moral and intellectual occupations. *Vipassana* is, of course, serious observation of the subtlest phenomena of the inner consciousness and philosophy. It is, therefore, a process of self-purification through self-observation and introspection. You have to tread the path yourself. No one else can do it for you. *Vipassana* is a technique that has a very practical approach. It not only helps us to pass through the vicissitudes of life in a detached way, but it also promotes social well-being. It is, therefore, a science not only of self-development, but also of social development. It is an art of living whereby we learn to live in peace and harmony with ourselves and with others. It is a universal technique that can be practiced by anyone belonging to any country, caste, or creed. It strikes at the roots of our defilement in the unconscious mind and breaks the barrier between the conscious and the unconscious layers of the mind. The path of Buddhist meditation and spirituality is not a withdrawal from the world based on frustration or fear, but a skillful process of learning to be *in* the world and yet not *of* the world. Compassion and love are the very foundation of religion and humanity, and it is compassion and love that makes human beings different and nobler than animals. Precepts are one thing, but practice is quite another. When it comes to practice, for many,

love stops at the family level, or at the level of friends and relatives. At the most, it reaches the boundary of one's professed religion.

The compassion of very few people crosses national and religious boundaries, goes beyond the barriers of race and color, and reaches the level of universality, wherein there is unconditional "love for all, and hatred for none."

We must make compassion and meditation a part and parcel of our daily lives, like our breathing, like the beating of our hearts. Just talking and writing about love and meditation will not bring the result of true love and compassion. True compassion, true love is to serve others, to share all good things with others, to share the pain and sufferings of all fellow beings. Mother Teresa said, "Charity and love are the same, with charity you give love. So don't just give money, but [also] reach out your hand." The greatest disease in the West is not TB or leprosy any more; it is the disease of being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. If everyone starts looking at all living beings with the eyes of genuine compassion and love, we can eliminate much unwanted suffering and we can offer the new century a more beautiful world and a clearer path. Please hear the Buddha's own words: "Do not close your eyes before suffering. Find ways to be with those who are suffering by all means, including personal contacts and visits, images, sound. By such means, awaken yourself and others to the reality of suffering in the world." □

*Local women receiving literacy education at a village facility promoted by the Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre, which offers spiritual instruction based on the teaching of the Buddha as well as humanitarian services to impoverished people in the remote land of Ladakh.*

# The Historicity of Gotama Buddha

by Hajime Nakamura

*Buddhists in southern Asia and those in northern Asia disagree on the most likely dates for the Buddha's birth and death. Scholars around the world still debate the issue, but seem agreed that he usually displayed warm affection for his followers.*

In volume 1 of *Gotama Buddha* I examined the problems related to the date of the Buddha's birth. Here I would like to expand the discussion by quoting material covered in a relevant section of my *Indian Buddhism: A Survey with Biographical Notes*:

We will now give our attention to studies in Indian Buddhism, in particular those by Japanese scholars. The questions of how long Buddhism has existed and of Gotama Buddha's dates have been discussed from a variety of viewpoints, and there are different opinions even among Buddhists themselves. All southern Buddhists celebrated the twenty-five hundredth anniversary of Sakyamuni's *nibbāna* in 1956; various festivals and celebrations were held in Sri Lanka, India, Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, and other countries of the region. Many of them were sponsored by the respective governments; members of the Saṅgha officiated formally at the events. There is no such agreement in the Buddhist countries of northern Asia. Most Western scholars reject the Sri Lankan tradition that the Buddha died in the year 544 B.C.E. (the date by which the anniversary of 1956 was calculated), since the attribution cannot be traced much beyond the middle of the eleventh century. This date is also incompatible with the chronology of the kings of Magadha. Southern Buddhists claim the authenticity of their dating by referring to the tradition that the *bhikkhus* placed a dot in the *vinaya* at the end of each rainy-season retreat (*vassa*); they assert that this was done without fail each year and so constitutes a reliable chronological record, free from error.

Nevertheless, there remains ample room for doubt. A similar tradition was brought to China by Saṅghabhadra in 489; he, too, claimed that *bhikkhus* in India had added a dot to the record in the *Vinaya* following the annual rainy-season retreat, but the number that he transmitted was 975—which would mean that the Buddha died in the year 486 B.C.E. (and was born in 566 B.C.E.). W. Pachow's studies of the *chung-sheng-tien-chi* (dotted record) indicate that the Buddha died in 483 B.C.E.; this dating agrees with the calculations of W. Geiger based on the Pāli chronicles.

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



*A stone relief panel excavated at Gandhara, the lowest layer of which narrates the legend of the Buddha. Topped by the layers depicting the seated Buddha flanked by two attendants and an arabesque design symbolizing Bodhi leaves, the right portion of the lowest layer depicts Queen Maya giving birth to the Buddha from her right armpit, while the left portion illustrates the legend that deities are pouring warm and cool water on the infant Buddha in veneration soon after his birth. Tokyo National Museum.*

The tradition brought by Saṅghabhadra is considered much more reliable than that of the southern Buddhists because of its comparative antiquity. Thus a large number of Japanese Buddhists followed the scholar Junjirō Takakusu in adopting the Saṅghabhadra tradition, and celebrated the twenty-five hundredth anniversary of the Buddha in 1932. The Jōdo, Jōdo Shin, and Nichiren sects did not, however, join in these celebrations officially, because their founders Hōnen, Shinran, and Nichiren had all accepted the tradition that the Buddha had died in 949 B.C.E. (a date determined by the Chinese priest Fo-lin [572–640]). Today, though, almost no one, even members of those sects, takes seriously the traditional dating.

Hakuju Ui determined that the Buddha's dates were 466–386 B.C.E., based on a study of traditions contained in Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese texts (for example, the *Samayabheda-uparacana-cakra*). His calculations centered on the dates of Aśoka's reign; because recent research has altered those dates slightly, I have revised the Buddha's dates to 463–383, following Ui's thesis and incorporating new evidence about Aśoka's dates derived from Hellenic studies.

The research of Genmyō Ono and Hakuju Ui has influenced the work of Chinese scholars. Yin-shun, a Taiwanese scholar and priest, has criticized the dates adopted by Western and South Asian scholars and has set the date of the Buddha's death at 390 B.C.E. His thesis is very similar to Ui's.

Maurice Winternitz represents the more moderate strand of European scholarship when he states: "When we take into consideration that there is sufficient evidence to show that the Buddha was a contemporary of King[s] Bimbisāra

and Ajātaśatru, whom we can place with a fair degree of certainty in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., then we are at least justified in saying that the best working hypothesis is to place the life of Buddha into this period also." However, here we find ourselves in the awkward position of being unable to calculate the dates of the various kings unless we know the dates of the Buddha.

H. Jacobi gave weight to the southern tradition in determining 484 B.C.E. as the year of the Buddha's death, and his views were accepted by the Japanese scholar Yenshō Kanakura. Kōgen Mizuno, too, doubting the reliability of the northern legend that Aśoka was born about one hundred years after the Buddha's death, also adopted the southern tradition.

All the same, representatives of Japanese Buddhists took part in the anniversary celebrations of 1956. A second anniversary, sponsored by the Japanese government, was held in Japan in 1959 to promote friendship with Asian Buddhists. This does not mean, however, that the Japanese have adopted the Sri Lankan chronology. Sri Lanka possesses a number of chronicles important for the study of Indian history and Indian Buddhist history. Japanese scholars have also studied Jain sources and other non-Buddhist material and compared them closely with Buddhist texts to highlight the social and historical background of early Buddhism. Such studies have shown the importance of merchants and craftsmen in the rise of Buddhism (as indeed they were also in early Christianity) and have clarified their actual roles. Important among those roles were the *gahapati*, a property owner and community leader, and

the *śreṣṭhin*, the head of a guild (somewhat similar to the English alderman). Another important point of consideration here is that Buddhism was transmitted along trade routes.

In recent years widespread interest in the question of the Buddha's dates inspired an international conference on the subject; the proceedings of this conference have been published.

### The Character of Gotama

Nothing in the sutras tells us what the Buddha looked like. Was he tall or short? Did he shave his head or wear his hair close-cropped? What was the color of his skin? What color were his eyes? There are no answers to these questions. The figure we see in statues was the conception of people of a much later period. Although we know nothing about the Buddha's appearance, we can glean a good deal about his character from the sutras.

Throughout his life, Gotama neither bewitched people by his words nor forced them to adopt his beliefs. He did not inflate his own importance by saying that unless people followed him they could not be saved. Indeed, it is difficult to see in him the characteristics traditionally ascribed to the founder of a religion. He did not become angry in the face of heresy, but maintained a tranquillity of mind almost to the point of monotony, and taught people quietly and charitably. His was an engaging and accessible personality. The *Dīgha-Nikāya* tells us, "The *samaṇa* Gotama is truly a man who says, 'Come with me,' and 'I am glad you have come.' He speaks with affectionate words, he approaches others with joy, he does not scowl, his visage is always bright, and he is always the first to offer greetings." He spoke clearly and could be heard easily. His attitude was the same, whether what he had to say was trivial or very important. Open-minded, he could even accept heresy calmly.

The warmth of Sakyamuni's personality is described vividly in the *Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta*, as well as in many sutras. Unlike many other founders of universal religions, he neither harmed others for their beliefs nor suffered persecution for his own. In political terms he was an onlooker, one who delighted in the quietness of a transcendently indifferent mind (*upekṣā*).

A later text says that Gotama was born into the *khattiya* caste, and praised his refinement: "Friend, the Tathāgata is adorned with the refinement of one born into the warrior caste [*khattiyasukhumāla*], he is adorned with the refinement of a Buddha, he is adorned with great supranatural power. When he was invited by the Brahmin Verañjā and stayed [with him] three months, he was tempted by Māra and did not receive food any day. However, having aban-

doned all greed, he survived for three months on the dust of a root and on water, and went nowhere else. This shows how small are the desires of the Tathāgata." It is worth noting that the *Khattiyas* were considered not merely warriors but also highly educated administrators. Perhaps there is a parallel here with the early samurai warriors of Japan and their descendants of later centuries who made up an educated administrative class.

Occasionally the historical Gotama Buddha caused friction through his impetuosity. A rare example is when he entered the meeting hall from the front door and thereby evoked much criticism. When he was approaching death, he showed irritation when something did not please him. The *bhikkhu* Upavāṇa was standing in front of him, fanning him, but Sakaymuni had him move, saying: "Move aside, *bhikkhu*, do not stand in front of me." Whether the Buddha would exhibit the short temper of an ordinary being became a much discussed topic among scholars; indeed, the sutra itself added an explanatory passage. If we consider his action to be a reflection of Gotama the man, however, there can be no problem about interpretation; here we simply see his human face.

Gotama was gentle with his followers, full of warmth and affection for them. We hear no instance of his reprimanding a disciple and sending him away. He nursed his followers when they were ill. There is no legend about any of the disciples betraying the Master. He was on terms of friendship with them all. Nor did Gotama strive to increase his following. He tried rather to teach those who loved and respected him to attain enlightenment. That Buddhism was able in later times to reach across the world and warm people's hearts was due largely to the personality and character of its founder. The Buddha's personality has, I feel, remained a characteristic of Buddhism throughout its history.

Although some scholars think that the life of Gotama Buddha should be understood as an extension of the social custom of the four periods of human life laid down in Brahmanism, I think rather that in Buddhism it was the period of wandering (*parivrājaka*) that was universalized and expanded to form the later monastic system by which Buddhism has come to be known.

*To be continued*

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The photo caption on page 39 in the January/February issue, "A soapstone urn containing the Buddha's relics, which was discovered at a Buddhist stupa in Vaiśālī in 1957," should correctly read, "A soapstone relic urn discovered in 1957 at a Buddhist stupa in Vaiśālī, which is thought to have been made during the time of Sakyamuni." We apologize for the error. —Ed.

# Coming Home

by Carol J. Ewer

*An American member of Rissho Kosei-kai describes how her introduction to Buddhist teachings and experience in hoza counseling sessions allowed her to confront the truth about her life.*

It is difficult to write about coming home when you are not really lost. And yet, I found a home when I began attending Rissho Kosei-kai. I was first introduced to Buddhism when Kris Ladusau [a friend of the writer and a member of Rissho Kosei-kai—Ed.] asked a friend and me if we would like to visit on a Friday evening when Rev. Nakamura from San Antonio, Texas, was going to be in Oklahoma City. I remember going to the dojo, where Kris practiced martial arts, and listening to this remarkable man talk about lessons in living life.

Once the Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Oklahoma was built in 2001, I began attending every Sunday and joined the group within a short period of time. It was as though I had found a special place that would help me discover the goodness inside of me. Through having faith in the Three Treasures, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, I was introduced to the universal truth that is available to everyone.

Although I did not understand the cultural background of the Lotus Sutra, I was able to begin to understand the teachings. There was a longing in

my heart that wanted to find a way to surface. Suffering, the result of cause and effect, provided me with a method of looking at myself and learning what my part in any situation was. This was a more powerful way to look at my behavior and myself than I had ever used before. It challenged me to meditate, improve myself, and carry the message to others. After attending the Dharma Center for a while, others began to notice the changes in me, so I shared the teachings with them. I began sharing with them how I was learning to be less angry, less judgmental, and much more compassionate. One by one they started to attend along with me and find the way into their own hearts.

I was born into an alcoholic family. My mother suffered from mental illness and spent months in the hospital several different times. I rarely remember my childhood. What I remember the most is always being afraid of my father, especially when he had been drinking. He was strict and stern, and he seemed angry most of the time. He was also a hard worker and often worked at more than one job. He worked in a jelly factory, pumped gas, and served as a custodian at our family church. Finally, he found a job with the public schools as a janitor, where

he made enough money to support us. He worked there until he retired for medical reasons.

He was the disciplinarian, and my mother would say, "Just wait until your father gets home." I stayed away from the house most of the time, especially if he was home. Our neighborhood had a swimming pool and an ice-skating rink within walking distance, so, no matter what season it was, I would go there, sometimes even twice a day.

After I moved away from home, I also became an alcoholic, drinking just like my father. I remember thinking that I was never going to grow up and have a family like I grew up in or be like either my father or mother. I had a sense of being angry with them for as long as I could remember. One time I was so angry with him because of the way he was treating my mother, I told him he could not come to my house if he was going to speak to her that way. For several months, he stayed away, just as I requested. Then one day, I invited them over and he came, never saying a mean word to my mother while they were at my house.

The teachings and hoza sessions provided me with a way to look at ancestor veneration and discover the truth about my family. I had not been close to my family and had moved

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*Carol J. Ewer is a member of Rissho Kosei-kai of Oklahoma.*

*Members of Rissho Kosei-kai of Oklahoma before the altar in the Dharma Center.*

away from them many years ago. My father and mother are both deceased now.

My father died from his alcoholism when I was in my twenties. I had spent much of my adult life trying to please him and avoiding him at the same time. During his final hours, I stayed by his bedside until he took his last breath, waiting and hoping he would tell me he loved me and know that I loved him before he died. He died silent. It took more than twenty years after his death before I was able to visit his grave.

The relationship I had with my mother was filled with hurt. I thought she loved my sister more than me and it seemed like every time I would try to get close to her, she would end up getting offended by something I did or said to her. I spent many years trying to find a way to not have any regrets, like I did with my father, before she died. The last time I saw my mother, different than any other time, we had a wonderful visit, and for one of the few times in my life, I left her

place to go home feeling happy with our relationship. Then, an unusual thing happened after my mother died. I had been attending Rissho Kosei-kai for a while by this time, and I began to see positive things about her and wanted to acknowledge the wonderful person she was during her life. So I planted a tree as a memorial and put lights on it every December 1, the day she died, leaving them lit the entire month in her honor.

In a hoza session one day, a suggestion was made that I might also find a way to acknowledge my father. I slowly opened up and talked about him with the Sangha. "Mean and angry," is what I said. It was hard to be proud of him, because he was a janitor and ashamed of his profession. I grew up being ashamed of being the "janitor's daughter."

As I was practicing the teachings, I began to wonder how could I stop being angry when someone in my life was ill or did something I thought was wrong. I was just like him, mean and angry. I did not understand how to

acknowledge him with a compassionate heart and I became determined to keep trying.

The next winter season, I planted a tree for my father thinking that this would be a way for me to acknowledge him. Unfortunately, the tree died the following spring. "Maybe I didn't pick the right tree to represent him?" I wondered.

In another hoza session, when Rev. Nakamura was visiting our Sangha from San Antonio, I spoke of my shame at being the janitor's daughter. My business was in financial trouble and all I felt was shame and I was filled with thoughts like "Who did I think I was to think I could have a successful business?" We talked about how my father felt about being a janitor and how hard he worked even though he hated his job or was ashamed of being a janitor. As Rev. Nakamura spoke to me about my father, my heart softened and filled with compassion. Through my tears, I saw my father not as "mean and angry," but as strong and determined. He helped me to appreciate



how well my father had provided for me when I was a child. He had worked many years at a job that caused him great suffering, to provide me with a warm home and food. Following that hoza session, I could now begin to appreciate him. My heart was again filled with compassion, and then through the teachings I could also help him, through ancestor veneration. I began mopping at the Dharma Center as a donation, and I could feel him smiling down on me. When the next winter came, I planted another tree, and this time I picked one that stood tall and was strong, representing the father he was for me.

Since both of my parents died in December, I placed strings of lights at the first of the month on each tree. For my mother, I put white lights that remind me of her goodness. On my father's tree, I placed colored lights that danced and twinkled, reminding me of his laughter. Every evening when I got home, I would turn on the lights and, with a heart filled with compassion, I would think of them.

I had my home altar installed and for the first time in many years, I became interested in looking at family pictures and finding out information about my ancestors. For several years, those pictures had sat in my closet and had never been looked at since the time I received them from my brother. On my altar, I placed pictures of my mother, father, sister, and other relatives. Then I began chanting the sutra, transferring any merits I may have earned to them. I hoped their past sufferings would be healed and their future lives would be without suffering. I also wanted my children and grandchildren to benefit through any merits that I had earned. Ancestor veneration is an important part of my faith. I am so grateful that I have found a way to benefit everyone so that any suffering can be healed.

Recently, I was talking in hoza about

how distant my sons are in their relationship with each other. They seldom call, write, or visit one another. It seemed so much like they were repeating the relationship between their father and his brother—until one brother died, after they had not spoken in many months. I did not want that to happen to my sons. I realized as I was talking about them that I do not stay in good communication with my brother and sister, either, and I felt as though I needed to practice the teachings in those relationships. One of the hoza members suggested that I share with my sons what I am doing to help heal those relationships so that, through my healing, their relationship might heal as well.

The other evening as I was driving home from work, I called my brother, but he wasn't home. Then I called my sister, and she said, "Why are you calling me tonight?" I told her I was thinking of her, so I called just to say "Hi" and see how she was doing. She laughed and was very pleased. After I hung up, I too felt very happy to have spent time speaking with her and finding out about her life.

Every day, I light incense and pray for guidance and ask that any merits I may earn be transferred to all my ancestors, especially anyone whose anniversary is that day. This helps me throughout the day to try and see the buddha-nature in everyone and have compassion for those that are suffering. One day when I came home, I was angry and was spouting off about a friend, and my partner said to me, "That is not seeing the buddha-nature in her." Immediately, I stopped what I was saying and looked at the situation differently. As I continue to practice the teachings, my relationships with family and friends, as well as at work, improve. When I find myself upset, angry, or feeling bad because of something I am involved in, I apply the teachings until I understand the whole situation.

I am not the same person that walked through the door of the Dharma Center those many years ago. Or, maybe I am, and that wonderful person inside continues to be set free of all hindrances through the wonderful teachings of the Law-Flower Sutra. □

*Ms. Ewer enjoying a chat with some fellow members at the Dharma Center.*

# Small Trips of Self-Discovery

*Three members of Rissho Kosei-kai relate how their lives have changed through their participation in training sessions at the seminar house in Ome, a western suburb of Tokyo. Within the beauty of nature, various programs—sutra chanting, hoza, lectures on the Lotus Sutra, as well as forest conservation work—were conducted during the two- or three-day sessions. Since the Ome Seminar House was established in 1966, a large number of members, including many youths, have visited it, making friends with fellow participants, discovering their inner selves, and confirming the joy of having faith.*

## A Constructive Lifestyle

by Etsu Sakamoto

I was a somber child who seldom laughed and who avoided others as much as possible. My bleak personality was my mother's fault, I thought. She was always going off to Rissho Kosei-kai functions and leaving me alone. I lived with this resentment always in my mind.

My encounter with T. began when I entered high school and attended a special training session at Ome Seminar House for the first time. T. was the same age as me, but she was cheerful and outgoing. She knew how to go right up to people and open their hearts, and she treated me the same way she treated everyone else. "You know, Ekko, you're not going to make any friends the way you are now. What a waste of your life."

No one had ever spoken to me like that before. How I wanted to change

myself—her words opened up long-suppressed emotions. "I want to be like you!" I blurted. T. smiled, "You can do it, Ekko. I'm sure you can become a cheerful person."

As I continued to participate in the hoza sessions and the chanting of the *o-daimoku* (the title of the Lotus Sutra), I gradually came to realize that it was my mother's fervent prayers for my happiness that had guided me to the special training session. I thought to myself, "I've been all caught up in myself, blaming mother and Rissho Kosei-kai for my depressing personality. I've got to get rid of this mean-spirited self. I'm going to become a cheerful person and lead a cheerful life!"

After I got home, I began by putting on a cheerful face. I worked hard to take the initiative in my encounters with other people, and I did something else that I had been too embarrassed to do before—I tried to be active in helping others. Before I knew it, I had made many friends, and just six months later I was confident enough to become the student group's leader.

If I had not participated in the special training session, I would never have come to understand how my mother really felt, and I would never have embarked on the cheerful and constructive lifestyle that began with my encounter with T. □

## I'm Fine Just the Way I Am: How I Learned to Love Myself

by Hiroe Terauchi

There's nothing good about me. Why was I even born? These dark thoughts filled my mind during my junior and senior high-school years.

I was the middle child sandwiched between an older brother and a younger sister. My brother is only a year older than I am. He was athletic and musical and his talents really shone in school. My sister, four years younger than I, was cute by anyone's standards. She was a contestant in a popular television program for up-and-coming talent and eventually became a singer.

As for me—people only saw me as the younger sister of that talented boy or the older sister of that popular girl. People flocked to my brother and sister. How dull and boring I was compared to them. I hated myself. I took

*Participants in one of the sessions at Ome Seminar House in 2000 share a smile while listening to a lecture that took place in the main hall.*

out my self-hatred on my mother. "You don't care about me," I would taunt.

I was a sophomore in high school when I participated in a special training session at Ome Seminar House. The lecture that was given in the main hall was titled, "The Parable of the Herbs."

"There are small grasses and large trees. Very different, but in the eyes of the Buddha they are equally precious and dear existences." The lecturer's words hit me hard. I had been comparing myself to my siblings and belittling my own existence. I was spending all my energy on envying others without once taking a good close look at myself.

I looked up to see the image of the Buddha smiling at me, as if to say, "You have finally realized the true situation." Why, all this time, I had been considered precious; I had been watched over. My heart was filled with emotion.

Later, during the chanting of the *o-daimoku*, the image of my worried parents passed before my eyes. How I had saddened them with my refusal to

care about myself. I'm fine just the way I am. I vowed that from now on I would work hard to make myself bloom. Ome was where I discovered myself. □

## My First Step in Faith

by Satoe Takahashi

**I**t happened about thirty years ago. My mother had just joined Risho Kosei-kai and she had asked me to participate in one of the special training sessions at Ome Seminar House, which was aimed at young members. I took my son Yoshinori, who was only four at the time, with me, wondering all the while what the point of it was.

"If praying can cure this child, we surely don't need doctors!" I thought to myself.

Yoshinori was a sickly baby and suffered from a severe case of atopic dermatitis. Getting him to sleep was always a trial because, as his body warmed, the itching intensified. Every night he would scream as if he were on fire. Seeing the red welts of scratch marks on his skin, I was frustrated at not being able to do anything to relieve his agony.

This was the situation when I got my mother's urging to participate in the training session. I had my doubts about religious faith, but by this point I was ready to try anything.

I had never attended a hoza session before. When I explained my son's situation, the hoza leader replied: "Serve the Buddha and your ancestors with sincerity and your son will get better."

"You mean he will get well just through faith?" I asked incredulously. I was reminded of how grateful we should be for the life we have been given. "Generation after generation our ancestors have prayed for the happiness of their children. Life has been passed on to us from one generation to the next. Expressing our thanks to our parents and our ancestors is the starting point of our faith."

These words spoke to my heart. I vowed then and there that I would rely on this faith for the rest of my life.

After the hoza session was over, I went to look in on my son, whom I had left sleeping in another room. How quietly he slept! That night he slept through to morning, something he had never done before. This was the same child who used to wake up screaming several times in the night. Everyone rejoiced with me. I was never more grateful for their companionship and support.

Since that time, my son has become quite healthy. That day in Ome marked my first step in the faith. □

# The Role of Faith in a Moral Life

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 daily faith.*

To do no evil,  
To do only good,  
To purify one's mind—  
This is the teaching of the buddhas.

The first two lines of the Verse of the Seven Buddhas of the Past, quoted above, are basic principles regarding how we should lead our lives, and by themselves are simple ethical injunctions. It is the third line that specifies the purification of the mind, and so the entire verse bears a religious dimension. It is not enough that people should simply not commit evil, nor is it sufficient that they should be satisfied simply because they do not act against the moral code. Furthermore, when people do good they tend to be proud of their actions. The first two injunctions cannot come into force unless they are based on the mind being purified, which step indeed is at the root of all spiritual training. In stating that all three acts form a single whole that encompasses the teachings of Buddhism, Shakyamuni revealed his true intent. Thus we must be mindful that our behavior should always be a manifestation of our willingness to have a pure heart.

Acts that are in accord with the truth, that suit our purposes exactly, and that have positive results can be considered good; those that are contrary to these are said to be evil. For example, let us consider a person who is experiencing poverty. From the point of view of common morality it would be considered a good act to give that person some money. What happens, though, if this person starts to depend entirely on the charity of others, becomes unrealis-

tically optimistic, and develops idle habits? In such a case, helping someone in need might be said to have brought about an unfortunate result. Sometimes it might be better to be severe and place more responsibility directly on the person. This might seem cold and unfeeling, but it might just spur the person to look again at his or her situation and perhaps take steps to improve it. This example shows us that when we think things through carefully, it can often be difficult to know if an act is good or not.

Someone whose mind has been truly purified through the Buddha Dharma, however, is able to act correctly according to the occasion and the situation. Just as objects are reflected clearly in an unclouded mirror, the right path shows itself automatically to the purified mind. When we see how Shakyamuni taught his disciples—from Shariputra, the wisest, to Shuddhi-panthaka, the most dull-witted—how to lead people to salvation, we realize how clear his virtual mirror was. As his followers, we too must do our best to follow his example.

When Tetsuji Morohashi, recipient of Japan's Order of Culture and editor of the renowned unabridged dictionary of Chinese characters, the *Dai kanwa jiten*, was interviewed on television by the Japan Broadcasting Corporation in 1976, he presented the interviewer with an example of his calligraphy which read, "Do what you must do; do not do what you should not do." I could not help but appreciate the accuracy of that statement. There is no need to think or say complicated things: we simply have to determine what we must do and what we must not do, and then strive in our daily lives to follow the correct path.

All phenomena in the universe arise through our relationships with others and continue to exist sustained by these relationships. Nothing arises independently of everything else, nothing exists entirely alone. When we consider matters in the light of this truth, that everything is interre-

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



lated and mutually sustaining, it is obvious that even acts we do not perform ourselves can have consequences for us both large and small. What is even more important is the inescapable fact that our own acts inevitably have some influence on others, whether for good or ill.

What develops from this is the question of social responsibility. From the point of view of those performing an act, it hardly needs to be said that before performing any act in our daily lives, we should first consider what influence it may have on others. If we determine that the influence will be positive, only then should we go ahead with it without hesitation. However, if we think the effects may be harmful, we should stop, even if that means harming our own interests. This is the fundamental teaching of the Buddha, which is nothing more than doing no evil and doing only good.

What should we feel about acts in society that have a

certain influence on people? From the standpoint of the principle that all things are devoid of self, we as individual members of society should feel a collective personal responsibility for certain acts undertaken by society as a whole that have a negative influence, even if we have no personal involvement in them. We cannot state categorically that any harm they have caused has no relationship to us at all. In other words, we have to be able to examine our conscience to determine whether our own acts or attitudes may not be indirectly encouraging evil or whether our own failures to be able to do anything positive about preventing evil have not been a factor in its occurrence. If we can examine our motivations in this way, we should be able to decide directly what our right course of action should be.

What is left for us is to take practical steps in society as the Verse of the Seven Buddhas of the Past cites in the first

*An ink painting by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano depicting a conversation on the Dharma between the great T'ang dynasty poet Po Chu-i and a priest of great virtue named Niao-k'e who used to practice meditation in a tree in the mountains. When Po Chu-i inquired of the Zen master, "What is the essence of the teachings of the Buddha?" Niao-k'e replied, "To do no evil, to do only good, to purify one's mind. This is the teaching of all the buddhas." Po Chu-i laughed and said, "Even a child of three can comprehend such a teaching." Niao-k'e replied, "This can be understood even by a child of three, but it is difficult even for an old man of eighty to practice." Po Chu-i was left speechless and on the spot became a disciple of the Zen master.*

two lines. If we do not, our minds will not be truly pure and there will be no visible signs of any good result. What is it then that we should practice, and how should we go about this? For those without faith, it may be enough that they should stop doing what is evil and endeavor to do what is good. This alone, however, is not enough to bring salvation. This is because only the surface mind (consciousness) is purified to some extent; the hidden mind (subconscious) remains unaffected. That is why faith or religion is such an essential factor.

Rissho Kosei-kai members who have faith in the Buddha practice religious discipline such as chanting the sutra before their family Buddhist altar morning and evening. They also show repentance regularly for their acts according to their understanding of the teachings. Many also work to spread their faith among others. Such practices when undertaken wholeheartedly cause the small self to disappear. People then forget to be selfish and self-centered. This is when the hidden subconscious is able to emerge, having been purified. This brings us a feeling of expansiveness: we lose our cares and enter a realm of complete freedom, where whatever acts we perform are in accordance with the truth. This is what is called enlightenment, and it is the true salvation of human beings. If we do not undertake such religious practices, there is no way we can attain this state.

We must continually look strictly at our own acts, train ourselves diligently in our faith, and purify our minds. It is by so doing that we will ourselves attain salvation, and bring countless others to salvation as well. We are often told that the ultimate goal of Buddhism is to know oneself. In order to know oneself it is essential to renounce the self. This means abandoning narrow, self-centered thinking and immersing oneself in the Dharma revealed by Shakyamuni. By abandoning the small self, we reach a state of mind where “we will not love body and life, but only care for the supreme Way.”

If we take cloth as a metaphor, and consider the whole cloth to represent all human beings and society as a whole, the warp represents the Buddha’s teachings. These are the vertical threads that contain the past, present, and future, and the limitlessness of eternity. A cloth cannot be made up of warp threads alone, however. It is only through the function of the weft—our individual selves and our daily acts—that weaving can take place and the cloth that is the world be made. By extension, although the vertical warp that is the Dharma remains forever unchanging, the cloth cannot be woven correctly without the proper insertion of the weft—ourselves. The inclusion of the weft without error to make up the cloth represents the right acts of the individual. It is in this way that a moral society is formed. □

*Bodhisattva Manjushri, mounted on the guardian lion (center), with his four attendants. Polychrome wooden figures sculpted by Koen in 1273. Important Cultural Property. Tokyo National Museum.*

# The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

## Chapter 9

### Prediction of the Destiny of Arhats, Training and Trained

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

In the previous chapter five hundred disciples of the Buddha (twelve hundred if we include those who received the promise of a prediction) were assured of attaining buddhahood. In this chapter another two thousand shravakas, training and trained, including both Ananda and Rahula, are given predictions of buddhahood.

Disciples who still have much to learn and who remain below the arhat stage are termed *shaiksha*, “novice disciples,” so to speak. Disciples who have reached the arhat stage are called *ashaiksha*, those who have exhausted all learning, that is, those who have nothing more to learn. They are full-fledged shravakas. Since it is very likely that the novice disciples included boys still in their teens, it may seem somewhat strange that such youthful monks should have been given predictions of buddhahood. Upon consideration, however, we can see that this is not so. Because all people are equally endowed with the buddha-nature, once someone has clearly realized his or her buddha-nature, that person is able to become a buddha.

There remains another point that may appear puzzling: why Ananda and Rahula, associates of the Buddha’s ten great disciples, received their predictions far later than the other disciples, being included within the group of novice shravakas. If I may be permitted to conjecture about the Buddha’s thinking, I would say that of all the disciples Ananda and Rahula were the closest to him. Ananda, the Buddha’s cousin, served the Buddha as a personal attendant for more than twenty years, and Rahula was the Buddha’s own son. This very closeness may have served as an impediment to their religious practice, and so the Buddha, in order to indicate this, seems to have deliberately delayed his prediction to them.

To think, however, that the Buddha might have shown more consideration for other members of the community than for Ananda and Rahula is a flawed interpretation of the situation. Shakyamuni was not constrained by such attitudes. Still, it would have been difficult for Ananda, constantly in attendance on Shakyamuni and so closely concerned with his personal needs, getting his meals, rubbing his back, and pouring water over him during his bath, to have had the same pure commitment to the Buddha as the other disciples, since his daily contact with the Buddha as a man obscured his view of the greatness of the Buddha and the value of his teaching. It would have been the same for Shakyamuni’s son. However great a figure his father is, however much he is revered by outsiders, to a son he is first and foremost a father and cannot be seen in the same light as that in which outsiders view him. It is also quite possible that the child will tend to presume on the parent’s love. This suggests indirectly that unless those who are in a close relationship with a religious leader take great care to distinguish clearly between private and public, such a relationship will impede their religious practice.

Perhaps it is most difficult to teach those most closely related to us, such as a husband, wife, child, or parent. We cannot instruct them through verbal persuasion alone; we must show them a living Buddhism within the course of daily life and influence them by our actual behavior. We cannot influence our families or fellow workers if our actions, though occasionally noble, tend on a daily basis to be selfish and unbecoming and do not provide a constant good example.

Though Buddhist traditions relate that Ananda and Rahula gained enlightenment later than the other great

disciples, it is inconceivable that they did so after the five hundred disciples of the previous chapter. The fact that Shakyamuni discussed their buddhahood at this point may be thought of as the result of his deep concern about the problems inherent in being close to a teacher. This, I feel, is the correct attitude to the issue for the Buddha's disciples of later times, such as us.

To deepen our understanding further, let us examine the personalities and deeds of Ananda and Rahula.

Ananda was a son of King Amritodana, the younger brother of Shakyamuni's father, King Shuddhodana. He was, therefore, Shakyamuni's cousin, as well as the younger brother of Devadatta. Ananda became a disciple when Shakyamuni first returned to Kapilavastu after his enlightenment. Later, on the recommendation of Shariputra and Maudgalyayana, Ananda was made the Buddha's personal attendant, in constant service to him. Shakyamuni had had several attendants before Ananda, but none had remained in the position for long. Ananda, however, never left the Buddha's side for over twenty years, devoting himself to his master's care.

Ananda was also noted for his phenomenal memory, which enabled him to memorize Shakyamuni's discourses accurately. Time after time we find in the Buddhist scriptures the phrase "The Buddha addressed Ananda," which is indicative of the many opportunities Ananda had to listen to the Buddha's teachings directly and the extent to which he memorized them. Ananda was present too when the Buddha taught eminent disciples like Shariputra, Mahakashyapa, and Maudgalyayana and when he gave discourses to large numbers of people in assemblies. These teachings he also memorized perfectly. As a result, in the Sangha he was known as the foremost in hearing many teachings and was selected to recite the Dharma at the First Council, following the Buddha's extinction (see the May/June 1991 issue of *DHARMA WORLD*).

Ananda was exceedingly good-natured and gentle, even rather timid. All the same, he was second to none in his loyalty to the Buddha, and when Devadatta, plotting to harm the Buddha, made an elephant intoxicated, only Ananda, of all the disciples, stood his ground before the beast's attack, refusing to leave Shakyamuni's side. He was also kindhearted and deeply compassionate. It is said that while staying at the Purvarama Mrigaramatri-prasada hall in Shravasti he realized, when drying Shakyamuni's back after his bath, that the master was growing old and broke into tears. Another famous episode relating to Ananda took place as the Buddha approached death at Kushinagara. Ananda, overcome by his emotions, ran out of the room and clung to the door in anguish. Aniruddha, a cousin of Shakyamuni and one of the Buddha's ten great disciples,

rebuked him, saying, "A true bhikshu does not lose his composure." Of course it was not the attitude we would expect of a bhikshu, but it certainly makes him very human in our eyes.

As well as being extremely good-natured, Ananda was very handsome. This made him highly popular with women. Trouble sometimes occurred when someone fell in love with him or he was pursued by curiosity seekers. The most famous incident of this sort relates to the violent passion a Matangi (outcaste) woman had for him.

As Ananda was returning to the Jetavana monastery after seeking alms in Shravasti he happened to pass by a certain pond, where a young Matangi woman was drawing water. Ananda asked her for some water. The young woman, her eyes downcast, said to him, "I do not grudge you water, Venerable One, but I belong to an outcaste group." Ananda replied gently, "I am a monk, and in the eyes of such there is no difference between rich and poor, high and low." The young woman gladly and respectfully poured him fresh water, which he drank with thanks and then went on his way.

That instant the young woman fell passionately in love with Ananda, and became feverish in her ardor. All she wished was to become his wife and returned home lost in thought. She pressed her mother, a magician, to use magic to draw Ananda to her. "My magic has no effect on one who has no passion," warned her mother, but all her daughter could reply was that she would die otherwise. Left with no alternative, her mother cast a spell. Ananda, perhaps because he was still in the course of his religious practice, was drawn to the young woman's house. Transported with joy, she invited him in, but Ananda, perceiving her excited mood, understood what she wanted and suddenly regained control of himself. He concentrated deeply upon the World-honored One, and his thoughts reached the Buddha in the Jetavana monastery. The World-honored One employed his supernatural powers, which sped like the wind to envelop Ananda and draw him back to the monastery.

Whenever Ananda subsequently went into Shravasti on his alms round, the young woman would be waiting for him at the gate of the city, dressed in new clothes and wearing necklaces, and with decorative combs in her hair. She would follow him wherever he went, walking when he walked, stopping when he stopped, until he left the city having completed his round. Pitying her despite his embarrassment, Ananda was at a loss and went to seek Shakyamuni's advice. In response, the Buddha called the young woman to him and told her that if she wanted to become Ananda's wife she must be ordained as a bhikshuni first. She agreed, as did her parents, and so her black hair was cut off. Seeing how she had thus gained peace of



mind, the Buddha instructed her, saying, "Daughter, the desires burn you like fire, and burn others. Ignorant ordinary people are like moths attracted to a light, throwing themselves into the midst of the flame." Her innocent mind immediately awoke to the Way and she became an accomplished bhikshuni.

When these events became known, the people of the time, to whom the caste system was an absolute, criticized the Buddha loudly for allowing an outcaste woman to enter the Buddhist community. Shakyamuni, however, had no fear of such criticism and continued to proclaim the teaching of the equality of all. The story of the outcaste woman and Ananda is found in the *Matanga-sutra*, from the Sarvastivadin canon.

Apart from problems related to male-female relationships, the presence of a man like Ananda in the strict and rigorous community of bhikshus was a certain help for lay followers and the community of bhikshunis. In fact the community of bhikshunis owes its very existence to Ananda.

Five years after Shakyamuni's enlightenment, his father, King Shuddhodana, died. Shakyamuni returned to Kapilavastu for the funeral and then went on to Vaishali. The widowed Mahaprajapati, the younger sister of Maya, Shakyamuni's mother, and King Shuddhodana's second wife, who had raised the prince, feeling increasingly the impermanence of worldly things with the ordination of both Nanda, her son, and Rahula, her step-grandson, had gone to Shakyamuni and requested that she be ordained too. Despite her pleas, Shakyamuni had refused her request. Left alone in the palace after Shakyamuni had gone to Vaishali, Mahaprajapati was unable to abandon her purpose and finally decided to follow the Buddha. A number of women of the nobility, whose husbands had joined the Buddhist community and who felt the same way as Mahaprajapati, declared that they would travel with her.

The women had their heads shaved, put on simple robes, took plain wooden bowls in their hands, and set off barefoot from Kapilavastu. For these women, who had lived until now without want in the confines of the palace, the journey was filled with great hardship. Eventually they arrived at the gate of the monastery where Shakyamuni was staying, so tired that they could not even stand. Hearing of their arrival, Ananda went to the gate, to find Mahaprajapati and her group of women entirely changed in appearance. Astounded to see them, he was told that they had come because of their determination to enter the Buddha Way. Hurrying back to Shakyamuni, Ananda reported what had happened. Shakyamuni said to him, "It is difficult beyond all things, Ananda, for a woman to practice the Way regulated by the strict precepts. Urge them to give up their resolution." But Ananda did not immediately

obey. "Forgive me, but is the World-honored One's teaching just for men, and not for women?" "No, not at all. The Buddha Dharma is taught for the sake of all living beings in the human and heavenly realms, and there is no discrimination between men and women. The question of whether women should be ordained is a different matter entirely. The presence of women can only be a bad influence on the community as a whole. Therefore I do not permit their ordination." Various problems might very well arise if men and women, still unperfected in their practice, trained together, and there could be those who would lose the Way completely. It was in this sense that Shakyamuni expressed his concern.

Ananda, his sympathy aroused, could not bear to see the women, who were crouching exhausted at the monastery gate, turned away, and he persevered—he who in all his life had never once before disobeyed the Buddha. "World-honored One, if there is no distinction between men and women in your teaching, you cannot prevent women from being ordained. Mahaprajapati, who raised you and cared for you for many years, has risked her life to come here. World-honored One, I beg that you will allow Mahaprajapati and the women with her to be ordained."

Ananda's plea was not unreasonable. Furthermore, Shakyamuni himself was a man of deep compassion, and finally he assented to female ordination through silence, as was the custom. Mahaprajapati and her group felt inexpressible joy when Ananda transmitted the Buddha's decision to them. The Buddha set out new precepts and regulations for the female ordained practitioners and, after enjoining them sternly to obedience, accepted the women as his disciples. This event signaled the beginning of the community of bhikshunis.

After the Buddha's extinction, at the time of the First Council at Rajagriha, convened to confirm what were the Buddha's teachings and what were not, Ananda was criticized severely by Maha-Kashyapa and others over six points of misconduct. Two items were related to women: that Ananda had forced the Buddha into allowing women into the community and that he had allowed a woman to be the first person to revere the Buddha's relics. Somehow it is not surprising that Ananda should have been associated with women in this way.

Ananda was not only gentle in character but also skilled in knowledge and presentation of the doctrine. Gradually he gained the respect of people within the community of bhikshus, as well as of lay believers and bhikshunis, and on his deathbed Maha-Kashyapa entrusted the care of the Sangha to Ananda. Imperceptibly he had become a powerful force in the Buddhist community. We must remember this when we evaluate Ananda's character.

Ananda is said to have lived until he was 120; tradition says he met his death by the samadhi of emitting flame from the body.

Rahula means “hindrance.” The news of the birth of a son was brought to Prince Siddhartha at the very time he was making secret plans to leave the palace and renounce the world in order to seek the true Dharma. On hearing the news, he murmured, “Rahula [a hindrance] has been born.” When the attendant relayed this to Shuddhodana, the king, unaware of the deeper meaning, took it to be the baby’s name.

There are many traditions concerning the ordination of Rahula. Some sources say that Rahula wanted to follow his father, others that Shakyamuni forced him to become a monk so that he could receive his inheritance of true happiness. Likewise, there are different legends about when he was ordained, but I do not want to go into discussion of them here. Let us look rather at the religious practice and development as a bhikshu of Rahula, raised in the palace as the king’s grandson and still undeniably the son of the Buddha even after his ordination.

Shakyamuni entrusted Rahula’s training to Shariputra, feeling it to be in his son’s best interest to do so. Shariputra treated Rahula as an ordinary novice (*shramanera*) and trained him severely. Rahula, as a newcomer to the community, strictly obeyed the precepts and regulations, as seen in the following episode.

The episode took place when Shakyamuni was staying at Ghositarama in Kaushambi. The monastic regulations of the time forbade two men sleeping in the same room. One day Rahula’s room was assigned to a visiting monk when Rahula was out in the city on his alms round. It was common practice to accommodate and care for such wandering monks. When Rahula returned at nightfall, he found his room occupied by an unknown monk, who, moreover, refused to leave. It was already dark and had begun to rain heavily, but Rahula had nowhere to go. In desperation it occurred to him to spend the night in the lavatory.

Late at night Shakyamuni happened to go to the lavatory, and coughed to make his presence known. To his surprise he was met with an answering cough, and though he waited and waited, there was no sign of the occupant coming out. Therefore he asked, “Who’s there?” “Rahula,” came the reply. Thinking it strange, Shakyamuni asked Rahula why he was there, and thus the situation became clear. He took Rahula to his own room and had him sleep there. As a result the regulations were altered to state that a novice yet to receive the full precepts might be allowed to spend two nights only in the room of a monk. This episode allows us to glimpse Shakyamuni as a father.

Rahula was a boy of great spiritual perseverance, as we

might imagine from the above story. This is demonstrated in a further tale. One morning Rahula had gone into Rajagriha with Shariputra on their alms round when they were suddenly disturbed by a town rowdy, who filled Shariputra’s bowl with sand and struck Rahula, who was following, with a severe blow on the head. Shariputra looked around to find Rahula with blood streaming down his face. Washing his face with water from a nearby pond, Rahula said, “I am not angry, but I think it is a pity that a lawless person like that should be in ignorance of the World-honored One’s compassionate teaching.” On his return he went straight to Shakyamuni and sought his instruction.

Though his perseverance was a great virtue, he was still a youth, a youth moreover who had been brought up in the easy atmosphere of a royal palace and who still possessed a certain mischievousness associated with his former life. In addition, he received a degree of sympathy for his painful monasticism both within and without the Sangha, and this became an obstacle to his religious practice. It is said that Shakyamuni was a severe teacher on this point.

When Rahula was in Rajagriha, he lived in a grove near a hot spring. Lay followers would often come and ask him Shakyamuni’s whereabouts, at which times he would entertain himself by answering “The Bamboo Grove monastery” if the Buddha was on Vulture Peak and “Vulture Peak” if he was at the Bamboo Grove monastery. Shamelessly he would ask the footsore people on their disappointed return, “Did you find the revered Master?”

His tricks came to the ears of Shakyamuni, who took the trouble to visit his son and admonish him seriously, using both logic and compassion. Rahula was truly sorry for his mischief, and the episode was instrumental in helping him outgrow his immaturity. After that Rahula changed completely and never disobeyed the precepts, however minor, whether alone or with others. Nor did he take pride in his birth or rank, but persisted in accumulating meritorious acts done secretly and sitting in silent meditation. He attracted the faith of others, both within and without the Buddhist community, as being the foremost in quietly doing good. He was a distinguished monk.

Let us now read the chapter, keeping in mind what we have read about Ananda and Rahula.

**TEXT** At that time Ananda and Rahula reflected thus: “We have thought to ourselves if [our future] were only foretold, how happy we should be.”

**COMMENTARY** Since Ananda and Rahula were virtually the only disciples left who had not received predictions of buddhahood, they could not help feeling left out and despondent.

*Rahula, a dry-lacquer statue at Kofukuji, Nara. One of the six surviving statues of the Buddha's ten great disciples that were sculpted by Shogun Manpuku in 734. National Treasure.*

TEXT Thereupon they rose from their seats, went before the Buddha, made obeisance at his feet, and together spoke to the Buddha, saying: "World-honored One! Let us in this also have a place. We have only the Tathagata in whom to trust. We are known to and acknowledged by all the worlds, including gods, men, and asuras. Ananda is always [thy] attendant, protecting and keeping the treasury of the Law, and Rahula is the Buddha's son. If the Buddha sees [fit] to predict for us Perfect Enlightenment our desires will be fulfilled and the hopes of many will be satisfied."

COMMENTARY *Let us . . . have a place.* Here, "place" refers to "a part," and means "Do we not have the qualifications to receive a prediction of buddhahood?"

• *In whom to trust.* This phrase refers to the person in whom one takes refuge, the person to whom others give their complete trust as their foundation.

TEXT Thereupon the two thousand shravaka disciples

who were under training and no longer under training all rose from their seats, bared their right shoulders, went before the Buddha, with one mind folded their hands, and gazed upon the World-honored One, wishing as Ananda and Rahula [had wished], and stood there in line.

COMMENTARY *Bared their right shoulders.* This gesture is an Indian custom. Even today monks in India, Sri Lanka, and the countries of Southeast Asia wear yellow or brown robes with the right shoulder bare (see the September/October 2001 issue of DHARMA WORLD).

• *Stood there in line.* "In line" refers to the custom of those listening to the Buddha to stand to one side during his discourses. If you visualize the scene you will gain a vivid impression of this phrase. On one side are the elders, clad in brown robes with their heads shaven, solemn and grave. In another line are the bhikshunis, modest and restrained, and in still others are the bodhisattvas, adorned with crowns and necklaces and clad in robes of every color, and



lay followers, wearing clothes of every imaginable design. Such was the scene at the assemblies before which the Buddha gave his discourses.

TEXT Then the Buddha addressed Ananda, [saying]: “In a future world you will become a buddha with the title of Sovereign Universal King of Wisdom [great as] Mountains and Oceans Tathagata, Worshipful, All Wise, Perfectly Enlightened in Conduct, Well Departed, Understander of the World, Peerless Leader, Controller, Teacher of Gods and Men, Buddha, World-honored One. He shall pay homage to sixty-two kotis of buddhas, protect and keep the treasury of the Law, and afterward accomplish Perfect Enlightenment, instructing twenty thousand myriad kotis of bodhisattvas like the sands of the Ganges, causing them to accomplish Perfect Enlightenment. His domain will be named Never-lowered Victorious Banner. Its land shall be pure, with lapis lazuli for earth. His kalpa will be named World-filling Wonderful Sound. That Buddha’s lifetime will be immeasurable thousand myriad kotis of asamkhyeya kalpas, so that even if a man counts and calculates it for thousands of myriads of kotis of immeasurable asamkhyeya kalpas, it will be impossible to know it. [His] Righteous Law will abide in [his] world twice his lifetime and the Counterfeit Law again abide in [his] world double [the time] of the Righteous Law. Ananda! This buddha, Sovereign Universal King of Wisdom [great as] Mountains and Oceans, will be extolled and his merits praised by universal unlimited thousand myriad kotis of buddha-tathagatas like the sands of the Ganges.”

COMMENTARY *Never-lowered Victorious Banner.* The victorious banner is a flag denoting a win. Before the rise of Buddhism, Brahmanism was prominent in India. It comprised more than sixty schools, whose adherents disputed with one another over matters of doctrine. It was customary for the winner of a religious debate to raise a flag outside the gate of his academy. Since the victorious banner is never lowered, it indicates the guarantee that the teaching of the Sovereign Universal King of Wisdom [great as] Mountains and Oceans Tathagata is supreme throughout the world. Shakyamuni stated that the buddha’s lifetime would be almost immeasurable and far longer, so much so as to be beyond all comparison, than the lifetimes of twelve or twenty minor kalpas earlier predicted for other disciples. This later led, as we shall see, to criticism from others.

• *Righteous Law, Counterfeit Law.* See the March/April 2000 issue.

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

“I now declare among [you] monks that / Ananda, keeper of the Law, / Shall pay homage to buddhas / And afterward accomplish Perfect Enlightenment. / His title will be Sovereign Universal King of / Wisdom [great as] Mountains and Oceans Buddha. / His domain will be pure, / Named Never-lowered Victorious Banner. / He shall instruct bodhisattvas / As sands of the Ganges in number. / That buddha will have august powers, / His fame filling the universe; / His lifetime will be beyond calculation / Because of his compassion for the living;

COMMENTARY *Keeper of the Law.* This is one who takes great care of the Dharma. “Keeper of the Law” is an eminently suitable epithet for Ananda, who memorized virtually all the Buddha’s teachings. Thus his domain was to be called Never-lowered Victorious Banner.

• *Perfect Enlightenment.* For discussion of this equal and correct enlightenment, the highest perfect enlightenment (*anuttara-samyaksambodhi*), see the March/April 1992 and March/April 2003 issues of DHARMA WORLD.

• *His lifetime will be beyond calculation because of his compassion for the living.* He will remain in this world indefinitely, pouring his compassion upon living beings. A lifetime beyond calculation is not a natural span of life; it is the period of time a buddha decides, of his own volition, to remain in the world.

TEXT His Righteous Law will be twice his lifetime / And the Counterfeit Law double that. / Many as the sands of the Ganges, / Countless living beings / In that Buddha’s Law / Shall cultivate the seed of the Buddha Way.”

COMMENTARY *Shall cultivate the seed of the Buddha Way.* The Buddha Way is the road leading to the Buddha’s enlightenment. It is common today to interpret it as “the teaching of the Buddha,” “a way of living based on the Buddha’s teaching,” or “the path to attaining world peace and happiness through the Buddha’s teaching.” When the expression appears in Buddhist writings, however, it has a more profound meaning, pointing to the ultimate human ideal: “the way of becoming a buddha,” “the way leading to attainment of the Buddha’s enlightenment.” Here, “the Buddha Way” has the latter meaning. To “cultivate the seed” means to create the causes and conditions for achieving it.

TEXT Thereupon the eight thousand bodhisattvas in the assembly who had newly started [on the road] all reflected thus: “We have not yet heard [even] senior bodhisattvas receive such predictions as these; what can be the cause of these shravakas obtaining such predictions as these?”

COMMENTARY *Who had newly started [on the road].* This



phrase means “who had newly aroused the will.” “Will” is the volition to attain the Buddha’s enlightenment.

**TEXT** Then the World-honored One, knowing what the bodhisattvas were thinking in their minds, addressed them, saying: “Good sons! I and Ananda together under the Buddha Firmament King at the same time conceived the thought of Perfect Enlightenment. Ananda took constant pleasure in learning, [while] I was devoted to active progress. For this reason I have already attained Perfect Enlightenment, while Ananda has been taking care of my Law, as he will take care of the Law treasuries of future buddhas, and instruct and bring to perfection the host of bodhisattvas. Such was his original vow, and so he receives this prediction.”

**COMMENTARY** *Good sons.* This phrase indicates both men of faith whose actions are good and sons of good family (*kuruputra*). The fact that the Buddha addressed the bodhisattvas in this way indicates that they were still lay believers, bodhisattvas who had only recently aroused the aspiration for the Buddha’s enlightenment (*bodhicitta*). It was because of their newness to the Way that they felt it strange that a shravaka like Ananda should receive a prediction of an immensity that not even senior bodhisattvas had been given. This may seem a small point, but attention to such details gives a deeper understanding of the sutra.

This passage contains a very important lesson for us, the importance of practice. We read that “Ananda took constant pleasure in learning, [while] I was devoted to active progress.” The bodhisattva who was the former incarnation of Ananda wanted to listen to the Buddha and be taught as many of his teachings as possible, while the bodhisattva who was the former incarnation of Shakyamuni practiced the teachings and persevered in his religious practice. Because of this difference, Shakyamuni was able to attain the Buddha’s enlightenment much earlier than Ananda, despite the fact that as bodhisattvas both had aroused the aspiration for enlightenment at the same time.

Broadly speaking, scholars since ancient times have distinguished three types of practice of the Buddha Way that must be undertaken together: “listening” (study), “thought” (meditation), and “discipline” (practice). “Listening,” it need hardly be said, involves learning the teachings by means of sermons and writings. All people begin in this way, but the practice is necessary not only for beginners but also for those who have made considerable progress along the Buddhist path. If a person stops with listening or study, however, the person’s progress toward attaining the Buddha Way will be greatly slowed. This caution applies equally to all activities, not only those connected with the Buddha

Way, for listening and learning are essentially passive practices. To be satisfied with passive study in anything inhibits progress.

In this connection, “thought” becomes very important. Thought, or meditation, is to seek the truth of the Dharma by giving various things careful consideration. This calls for mental ingenuity and is thus an active practice undertaken through the individual’s own power, unlike passive study. Thought gives rise to a positive spirit, as a result of which progress becomes marked and some people are able to attain sudden enlightenment. Yet most who gain enlightenment in this way have yet to become firmly grounded. There is a strong tendency to practice truth for truth’s sake rather than to apply what has been learned to the reality of human existence and work to bring all people to salvation and liberation. To provide the energy that is lacking, “discipline” (practice) is necessary.

Discipline refers to practice in the broadest sense, incorporating both practice to benefit oneself and practice to benefit others. Our present religious practice includes worship, sutra recitation, and contemplation (*samadhi*), as well as activities to preach the Dharma for the sake of others, to guide them to the Buddhist life, and to relieve people with whom we have connections from the pains and troubles of their lives. Practice to benefit oneself is training that serves to cultivate oneself spiritually. Through such practice, the teachings we have learned and the Dharma we have pondered and realized are deepened and more firmly rooted in our minds. Practice to benefit others is to assist the Buddha in his work. One who has become an assistant to the Buddha is taking the shortest route to attaining buddhahood.

Practice to benefit others represents not just the flowing forth of a compassionate mind but also the cultivation of such a mind. Earlier (in the January/February 1994 issue) I quoted the words of Dr. Kiyoshi Oka: “When we continuously practice good deeds, our own feelings are beautified, which enables us to understand the feelings of others, so that we cannot help wishing to perform more and more good deeds.” A compassionate mind wells forth from the buddha-nature, with which all people are endowed. The constant flow and volume of such compassion must be maintained by one’s own practice. Thus compassion has to be made a spiritual habit. One who possesses such compassion is a great bodhisattva, whose mental state is close to buddhahood.

The act of compassion is the practice of benefiting others, yet at the same time it is a form of religious practice that benefits oneself, fostering wisdom in the true sense of the word. Human beings differ greatly in natural endowments, character, and circumstances; no two people are alike.

Inherent in making contact with all these diverse types of people and striving sincerely to bring each of them to liberation are all kinds of difficulties. The wisdom capable of saving human beings is fostered spontaneously by the effort to overcome such difficulties as they occur. Thus, the more we carry out the practice of benefiting others, the closer our compassion and wisdom become to the Buddha's. This is why practicing the Dharma is the shortest path to buddhahood, and why Shakyamuni attained the Buddha's enlightenment much more quickly than Ananda.

• *Instruct and bring to perfection.* This too is a very important phrase. "Instruct" implies causing a change in people through teaching, and is regarded basically as a transitive kind of activity. Ultimately, this transitive activity comes down to drawing out the inherent buddha-nature of each person. However much power we exert from without to change a person, he or she will not be liberated unless his or her own buddha-nature begins to move. The state in which the buddha-nature has begun completely to move is here called "perfection," and the action of drawing out the person's buddha-nature entirely is called "bring to perfection."

The word *education* comes from the Latin *educare*, "to draw out." To educate is thus to draw out a person's inherent conscientiousness, wisdom, and abilities. The connotations of the word agree closely with the spirit of Buddhism. When we speak of instruction, we tend to think only of causing a change in a person through power from without. This applies only to the first stage of the total process, however; we must not lose sight of the fact that the true working of instruction is the drawing forth of a person's inherent buddha-nature. If we can help a person fully draw out the buddha-nature, we have brought the person to "perfection"; in other words, we have facilitated a buddha's appearance in the world. This is truly a great task, the highest of all human activities. We are not incapable of such activity, and it is the ultimate purpose of the practice of the Buddha Way.

• *Such was his original vow.* In a former life, Ananda vowed that he would seek to listen to the Buddha's teachings as much as possible. This was a personal vow, undertaken in the depths of his mind, so that he might instruct people and bring them to perfection. "Original vow" means an oath taken by buddhas and bodhisattvas in former lives to bring all living beings to salvation. It is said that Shakyamuni made a vow consisting of five hundred items, Amitabha Buddha one of forty-eight items, and the Buddha Medicine Master one of twelve items. Though Ananda had lost all memory of his own vow since his rebirth into this world, he had made a vow in a former life to instruct all

people and bring them to perfection. It was by hearing the discourse of the Lotus Sutra that he recalled and renewed his original vow. It was then that he finally received the prediction of buddhahood.

TEXT Ananda, face to face with the Buddha, hearing his own prediction and the adornment of his domain, and that his vow had been fulfilled, was filled with joy at obtaining such unprecedented [news]. Instantly he remembered the Law treasuries of unlimited thousand myriad kotis of buddhas in the past, and understood them without difficulty as if he were now hearing them, recalling also his original vow.

COMMENTARY *His vow had been fulfilled.* His fervent desire to receive a guarantee of attaining buddhahood had been achieved.

• *Understood them without difficulty.* This phrase signifies the ability to penetrate with absolute freedom ("without difficulty") all the buddhas' teachings and to gain the most profound knowledge of them.

TEXT Then Ananda spoke thus in verse:

"The rare and World-honored One / Recalls to my mind the Law / Of innumerable buddhas in the past / As if I were hearing it today. / I now, having no more doubts, / Peacefully abide in the Buddha Way. / Tactfully will I serve / In caring for the buddhas' Law."

COMMENTARY *Rare.* Literally, this refers to a person who is rarely present in the world. Therefore his presence is a cause for enormous gratitude.

• *I now, having no more doubts, peacefully abide in the Buddha Way. Tactfully will I serve in caring for the buddhas' Law.* This passage should be interpreted as follows: "Though I peacefully abide in the Buddha Way, I will serve as an attendant of the Buddha using skillful means." Ananda's attitude that even though he has attained the Buddha's enlightenment he will continue to protect and hold the Dharma as an attendant of the Buddha is truly admirable. This too is one of the myriad skillful means, and it is because there are buddhas with such a modest outlook that all living beings will be liberated.

TEXT Then the Buddha addressed Rahula: "In the world to come you will become a buddha entitled Treader on Seven-Jeweled Lotuses Tathagata, Worshipful, All Wise, Perfectly Enlightened in Conduct, Well Departed, Understander of the World, Peerless Leader, Controller, Teacher of Gods and Men, Buddha, World-honored One. He shall

pay homage to buddha-tathagatas equal in number to the atoms of ten worlds, always becoming the eldest son of those buddhas, just as he is at present.

**COMMENTARY** *Equal in number to the atoms.* The smallest particle of matter defined in Buddhism is called *paramanu* in Sanskrit. In modern terms it might best be understood as an elementary particle. A group of *paramanus* clustered around a central *paramanu* and occupying three dimensions (the “six directions”: north, south, east, west, up, and down) is termed *rajas* in Sanskrit, what we today would call an atom. The expression “equal in number to the atoms of the ten worlds” signifies a countless amount, equivalent to the number of atoms making up the ten worlds.

**TEXT** The domain of this Treader on Seven-Jeweled Lotuses Buddha will be splendidly adorned; the number of kalpas of his lifetime, the disciples converted by him, the Righteous Law and Counterfeit Law, will be just the same as those of the Sovereign Universal King of Wisdom [great as] Mountains and Oceans; and of this buddha he will also become the eldest son. Afterward he will attain Perfect Enlightenment.”

**COMMENTARY** It may strike us as a little strange that one who had become a buddha should continue to be born the eldest son of a buddha. This reflects the causes and conditions that surround Rahula. However many times he gains rebirth, he will be born as the eldest son of the buddha of that age and, having accumulated religious practice and attained the Buddha’s enlightenment, will continue to work for the salvation of living beings and the world.

**TEXT** Thereupon the World-honored One, desiring to proclaim this meaning over again, spoke thus in verse:  
“When I was a prince royal, / Rahula was my eldest son. / Now that I have accomplished the Buddha Way, / He is the Law heir receiving the Law. / In worlds to come, / Seeing infinite kotis of buddhas, / To all he will be eldest son / And with all his mind seek the Buddha Way.

**COMMENTARY** *He is the Law heir receiving the Law.* This is an impressive phrase. To be born the flesh-and-blood son of a buddha is the result of causes and conditions of great consequence. Yet what is even greater is the spiritual parent-child relationship of the Dharma. The Sanskrit text says, “[Rahula] is a great seer, succeeding to the legacy of the teachings.” The legacy of the teachings is infinite; no matter how many people inherit it, it will never diminish. With the will to do so, anyone can become a Law heir. We

too have to become the heirs to Shakyamuni’s legacy and spread it among as many people as possible. As we seek to make ourselves Law heirs, we must also work to increase infinitely the number of the Law heirs in the world. There are many people who feel lonely because they cannot have children or lament having lost the ones they had. If you are such a person, remember that the children to whom you give birth are not the only children you can have: You can create numerous children as Law heirs through your efforts. By doing so, you will not only be able to overcome your grief and loneliness but will also see a new purpose in life unfolding before your gaze. Creating children of the Dharma is the most worthwhile way of life for human beings.

**TEXT** Of the hidden course of Rahula / Only I am able to know. / At present as my eldest son / He is revealed to all. / Infinite thousand myriad kotis / Are his merits, beyond calculation. / Peacefully abiding in the Buddha Law, / He seeks the supreme Way.”

**COMMENTARY** *The hidden course.* This expression has two meanings. First, it means to keep firmly and meticulously any precept, however minor it seems or however hidden from the sight of others. Second, one who was originally a bodhisattva hides this fact and works as a shravaka. More explicitly, “the hidden course” means to act conscientiously and with the best of intentions even when one is alone, to follow the correct path in even the most trifling matters, and, however high the spiritual stage one has attained, to behave as an ordinary person among others so that one may lead them naturally to the truth. Rahula took no pride whatsoever in the fact that he was the Buddha’s son, but quietly and strictly undertook his religious practice, accumulating hidden merit. Because Shakyamuni was able to perceive exactly what Rahula was doing, he stated, “Of the hidden course of Rahula only I am able to know.” When Rahula heard these words from the Buddha, who was both his father and his teacher of the Law, we can imagine how moved he must have been.

Shakyamuni had perceived Rahula’s secret practice quickly because he possessed the supernormal power of the divine eye, but even ordinary people became aware of his practice, for at some point the merit inherent in it manifested itself. Thus Rahula, eldest son of the Buddha and quiet practitioner of “the hidden course,” serves as an excellent example for people as a whole regarding the great and wordless teaching. This is the true meaning of the sentence “At present as my eldest son he is revealed to all.”

The stupa of the Venerable Rahula, standing beside the



road leading into ancient Rajagriha, is surprisingly small. It seems modest when compared with the stupas of Shari-putra and Maudgalyayana, but in a way it expresses the personality of the Venerable Rahula perfectly.

**TEXT** At that time the World-honored One looked upon the two thousand men under training and no longer under training, gentle in mind, tranquil and pure, who were observing the Buddha with all their mind.

**COMMENTARY** *Gentle in mind.* The mind is unassuming and direct, without pretension, having the flexibility to follow the Buddha's teaching. This is the greatest feature of a follower of the Buddha. In the secular world, too, such a frame of mind is essential for anyone who seeks to penetrate the truth and accomplish a great task. It is difficult to grasp the truth if one clings obstinately to preconceived ideas and defends stubbornly only that which is already known.

**TEXT** The Buddha addressed Ananda, [saying]: "Do you see these two thousand men under training and no longer under training?"

"Yes, I see them."

**COMMENTARY** This exchange is like a Zen koan, an object of meditation for the attainment of enlightenment. "Do you see these?" implies "How do they look to you?" "Yes, I see them" means "Yes, they look excellent." Shakyamuni is here communicating with Ananda essentially from mind to mind.

**TEXT** "Ananda! These men shall pay homage to buddha-tathagatas innumerable as the atoms of fifty worlds, revere and honor them, and care for their treasuries of the Law; and finally, in the same hour, in domains in every direction, each will become a buddha. All will have the same title, namely Jewel Sign Tathagata, Worshipful, All Wise, Perfectly Enlightened in Conduct, Well Departed, Understander of the World, Peerless Leader, Controller, Teacher of Gods and Men, Buddha, World-honored One. Their lifetimes will be one kalpa, and the splendor of their domains, their shravakas and bodhisattvas, their Righteous Law and Counterfeit Law, all will be equal."

**COMMENTARY** *Finally.* This means that as human beings progress spiritually, they become shravakas or bodhisattvas, and in their final bodily state of transformation they will become buddhas.

• *In the same hour, in domains in every direction.* The two thousand (countless) shravakas' becoming buddhas at the same time in domains in all directions is a metaphor for

the fact that the Buddha Law and enlightenment to the truth do not change from place to place. When the Buddha gave the prediction regarding Universal Light Tathagata, he taught that enlightenment to the truth is relayed infinitely. This is also a statement of the timelessness of the Buddha Law and enlightenment to the truth, just as the statement in the above passage that countless Jewel Sign Tathagatas will appear simultaneously in lands in every direction is indicative of the infinity of the Buddha Law and of enlightenment to the truth. Thus the Buddha's teaching expands infinitely on both the warp of time and the weft of space; it is the eternal unchanging truth, both temporal and spatial.

**TEXT** Then the World-honored One, desiring to proclaim this meaning over again, spoke thus in verse:

"These two thousand shravakas / Who are now in my presence, / I give to them the prediction that / In the future they will become buddhas. / The buddhas they worship will be / Numerous as the aforementioned atoms. / After caring for their Law treasuries, / They will reach Perfect Enlightenment. / In domains in all directions / Each will have the same title; / Simultaneously sitting on the wisdom terrace, / They shall prove the supreme wisdom. / The name of all will be Jewel Sign; / Their domains and disciples, / Their Righteous Law and Counterfeit Law, / Will all be equal without difference. / All by transcendent [powers] / Shall everywhere save the living; / And their fame universally spreading, / They shall progress into nirvana."

**COMMENTARY** Here, "progress into nirvana" means not to attain ultimate tranquillity but to die.

**TEXT** Thereupon the two thousand men under training and no longer under training, hearing the Buddha's prediction, became ecstatic with joy and spoke thus in verse:

"World-honored One! Bright Lamp of Wisdom! / We, hearing [his] voice of prediction, / Are filled with joyfulness, / As if sprinkled with sweet dews."

**COMMENTARY** This verse is very short, but it is one of the most famous in the Lotus Sutra, overflowing with vibrant reverence for the Buddha and gratitude for his teaching. I hope that you will recite the verse every day so that its words will penetrate deeply into your heart.

*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.