

Cover photo: Participants at the Third World Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) read the Princeton Declaration during the closing Multireligious Service held in Nassau Presbyterian Church, Princeton, New Jersey, on September 7, 1979.

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# 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.

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# The Realization of True Wealth

by Nichiko Niwano

*Knowing what is sufficient and being satisfied with it means exercising control over the impulse to give in to our desires, thereby recognizing what is enough for our needs.*

In these confusing and unpredictable times, when the falling birthrate and the rapidly aging population have led to public anxiety over the adequacy of national pensions and the growing income gap between a few and the rest, many of us are now reexamining our lifestyles and asking what really does constitute wealth.

During my dissemination tours last year, many questions related to lifestyle were put to me, reflecting concern about these social issues. On those occasions, I replied that possessing true wealth means “knowing what is sufficient and being satisfied with it.”

Knowing what is sufficient and being satisfied with it means exercising control over the impulse to give in to our desires, and thereby recognizing what is enough for our needs. When we know what is sufficient, we realize to what extent we have been engaging in seeking things that we do not really need. Our lifestyles then automatically become simplified, we reduce the amount of waste for which we are responsible, and make better use of things, recognizing their

true values. Then, released from the urge to always have more, unswayed by influences in our surroundings, we can lead peaceful, free lifestyles experiencing the wealth that is spiritual richness.

The words of the Japanese thinker Masahiro Yasuoka (1898–1983), “If one knows what is sufficient, then even if one’s home is poor, one’s heart is happy,” teach us the importance of knowing what is sufficient and being satisfied with it.

Just before entering nirvana, Shakyamuni, who was continuing his travels to disseminate his teachings, wrapped himself in a robe said to have been made from the shrouds that had covered the dead in burial places and were then washed in the river and sewn into a garment.

From this we can see the elements of the simple lifestyle of Shakyamuni who, removed from all attachments, could determine what was truly necessary for human life.

## *Mottainai*

The spirit expressed by the Japanese term *mottainai* (What a waste) made it a key word for the environmental protection movement. The term is a compound of *mottai* (having an entity) and *nai*, which negates it. It expresses our awareness of the Buddhist worldview that all things have a worthwhile entity which is constantly changing, change that never stops even for a moment, and that we feel gratitude for being sustained to live in the here and now. In other words, *mottainai* can be called a term admonishing us for wasting things, not appreciating their true value and not realizing the debt we owe for being caused to live.

A Japanese phrase meaning “Do not treat things in a careless way,” if interpreted from a Buddhist viewpoint, reminds us that we should not think that anything will exist forever, since all things are constantly changing.

I hope that we adults can keep these lessons in mind and put them into practice, passing on to younger generations the benefit of a lifestyle that makes good use of things through understanding their true value in our lives. □

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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 Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan).*

# Religions Working for Peace

The Eighth World Assembly of the WCRP, Kyoto, August 26–29

The World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), the largest international organization of representatives from the world's religions, will convene its Eighth World Assembly in Kyoto August 26–29, under the main theme of "Religions for Peace: Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security." An estimated five hundred senior religious leaders from eighty countries around the world are expected to attend. At plenary sessions and special commission sessions, the leaders will discuss the building of a global moral consensus on the forms of violence and the advancing of shared security through conflict transformation, peace building, sustainable development, and the mobilizing of action for that goal.

In the 1960s a handful of foresighted religious leaders first conceived of a world religionists' conference for peace. After several preparatory interreligious meetings, the project came closer to fruition with the establishment of the WCRP. Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the late founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, was one of the founding fathers of the WCRP. The first World Assembly of the WCRP was convened in Kyoto in October 1970, sponsored by the Committee for International Affairs of the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations, of which Rev. Niwano was chairman. The assembly drew the participation of some three hundred representatives of the world's leading religions from thirty-nine nations, who dis-

cussed three major issues—disarmament, development, and human rights—and called for an end to the war then raging in Vietnam. Since that time, the WCRP has held world assemblies in Belgium, the United States, Kenya, Australia, Italy, and Jordan.

Throughout its thirty-six-year history, the WCRP has helped religious communities from all continents and diverse traditions work together for peace, proving that religions can work to eradicate the prevalent violence and denial of human rights, rather than themselves contributing to the causes of conflicts. The WCRP has been involved in the reconciliation of ethnic rivalries in the former Yugoslavia and has mediated talks between the government and rebel groups in Sierra Leone, negotiating with the rebels to release captive children.

During the upcoming Eighth World Assembly, religious leaders from areas where conflicts continue to take many human lives will come together in special working groups to cooperate for achieving peace. Senior religious leaders from WCRP-affiliated regional and national Inter-Religious Councils will share experiences and develop action programs for the next five years.

Prior to the assembly, youth leaders will also meet in Hiroshima and Kyoto and women leaders will meet in Kyoto for international interreligious conferences.

# Interreligious Cooperation among Youth

by Koichi Matsumoto

The Eighth World Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP VIII) is fast approaching. For the first time in the WCRP's history, in addition to the plenary and workshop sessions to be held in Kyoto, a World Youth Assembly of the WCRP will also be held in Hiroshima and Kyoto. In preparation for this, the Youth Board of the Japanese Committee of the WCRP, in cooperation with the WCRP's International Youth Committee, encouraged the WCRP to organize youth preparatory meetings around the world and provided them with comprehensive support.

Starting last year, the meetings have been held in six regions—Asia, North America, South America, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Many top leaders of the youth movements in these regions attended.

Though the young participants belonged to different nations and religions and spoke different languages, the harmonious atmosphere surrounding the discussions made it seem as if they were all old acquaintances. Many of them came from areas of continuing conflict. I was often struck by the sight of young people sincerely talking together about their hopes for peace. Given this kind of sincerity, I am sure that interreligious cooperation undertaken by these young people will have a bright future.

The twentieth century has been called the "Century of War," and some have said that the twenty-first century will become the "Century of Terrorism." Looking only at the surface of current events, one might easily reach that conclusion. However, my view is that the twentieth century was also the "Century of the Birth of Interreligious Cooperation," a near-miraculous event. I also think that we must work to make the twenty-first century the "Century of Further Progress in Interreligious Cooperation and the Achievement of World Peace."

The present youth leaders of the world's religions will be the ones responsible for promoting interreligious cooperation in the future. I have no doubt that in twenty or thirty years' time these young people will be at the forefront of these movements in their respective regions, and that they are growing into leaders who will exhibit greatly heightened abilities in the pursuit of world peace and interreligious cooperation.

To help realize this future, I think it is important that we should not allow this year's World Youth Assembly to be a one-time event; more meetings should be convened in its

*A youth preparatory meeting held in April 2006 in Bakuriani, Georgia's southeast resort town. Some thirty religious youth leaders from fifteen countries in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union discussed their roles in achieving peace.*

*The author (left) leads a prayer session during a youth preparatory meeting held in February 2006 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.*

wake. In fact, plans are already under consideration for fostering a system of networking among religious youth structures at the national and regional levels, and for launching other projects from 2007 on.

At WCRP I in Kyoto in 1970, Founder Nikkyo Niwano said to the young volunteers who were helping in the work of holding the assembly: "I have put together the WCRP for you, the young people. I would like to see interreligious cooperation develop around the world with young people at its core." As WCRP VIII will also be convened in Kyoto, I think that it affords us the best opportunity for the realization of Founder Niwano's hopes for young people.

My most sincere wish is that the efforts of young people at this year's World Youth Assembly will usher in a significant new era in interreligious cooperation. □

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*Koichi Matsumoto, director of the Youth Division of Rissho Koseikai, serves as a vice president of the International Youth Committee of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP).*

# Confronting Obstacles to Peace

Interview with Dr. William F. Vendley  
Secretary-General, World Conference of Religions for Peace

*The Eighth World Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace will be convened in Kyoto August 26–29, under the main theme of “Religions for Peace: Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security.” DHARMA WORLD interviewed the secretary-general of the WCRP, Dr. William F. Vendley, who was recently in Tokyo for the preparation of WCRP VIII, about the significance of the forthcoming World Assembly.*

*What is the basic spirit behind the main theme of the WCRP’s Eighth World Assembly to be held in Kyoto?*

The theme’s spirit is profoundly religious. There are many different religious traditions—Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Shinto, many indigenous religions, and others. But each of these religions asks at least two profound questions, and these two questions are directly related to the theme.

First, how do we make sense of the manifest disorder of our world—the innocent suffering of people, the experience of tragedy, the facts of “evil,” and the experience of people hurting one another? This is a “question of pathology.” It asks how we can make sense of what has gone wrong and how we might fathom the origins of having gone astray.

But religions do not stop with the question of pathology. If they ask about how things have gone wrong, they also ask about how they can be made right. They ask by what means we, in cooperation with the Mysterious Ground of existence, can transform ourselves, our communities, and our earth to heal the disorder exposed in the first question. This is a “question of salvation.” If the drive of the first question pushes down to the root causes of pathology, so the second question pushes toward some ultimate notion of salvation. Each religion typically offers positive images of what the shape of our experience would be like if, as persons and communities, we were healed from pathological damage.

So these two questions—the one of pathology and the other of salvation—are two questions that can be found in some form in every religion. Surely these two questions are posed and answered by each religion in its own unique fashion, and attending to these two questions can take us to the heart of each religious community’s experience. Our assembly, too, will be driven by these two questions. Because the assembly is multireligious, it cannot be occupied by any single religious interpretation of the root causes of pathology. Each religion has its own understanding of the

root causes of pathology. However, the assembly will be seized by the *concrete* shape of pathology today, the shape of our shared suffering.

Our world is marked by wars, vast expenditures on arms, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, the absence of peace, outdated and inadequate notions of security, the scandal that half the human family is living on less than two U.S. dollars per day, major disease pandemics, and an increasingly fragile environment. These painful facts are part

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*William F. Vendley has served as secretary-general of the World Conference of Religions for Peace/International since 1994. Dr. Vendley holds an M.A. in Religious Studies from the Maryknoll School of Theology and a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Fordham University.*

of the concrete shape of pathology that we all, directly or indirectly, experience.

When we in the WCRP looked at these diverse forms of suffering, we wanted to find a useful name for a “common factor” present in all these diverse forms of disorder. We found that “violence” cuts across all of these manifestations. Violence takes many forms. It is present in a violent act among people, but it is also present in political, economic, and social structures that regularly—and needlessly—deny large numbers of people what they need to live. Thus, we recognized that violence is present in the concrete shape of contemporary pathology and as religious people we need to “confront violence” together. The first part of the assembly theme is captured in the words: “confronting violence,” and it corresponds to our need to recognize and address the concrete shape of pathology today.

But what about the second question, the “question of salvation”? Is there a principled way by which multireligious cooperation can relate to this second question? First, I must hasten to say that in the WCRP we respect that each religious tradition raises the question of salvation in its own terms. We do not mix up one another’s doctrines on salvation. In fact, we do not even debate our respective doctrines on salvation. But we do something else that is tremendously important: each different religious group translates its doctrines of salvation into a language of moral caring. Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Shintoists, and others together map out areas of “shared care.” It is our shared moral care, not our different doctrines, that provides us a base from which to respond together to many of the concrete manifestations of pathological disorder.

We are content in the WCRP to allow each religious tradition to understand for itself the religious significance of cooperating together on common problems. We do, however, need terms to describe what we are working for in a positive sense when we cooperate. Moreover, we do not work in a vacuum, and so we need terms that can be useful even for those working in other than religious fields. So, we in the WCRP came up with the term “shared security” to help us focus on what, in a positive sense, we are working for together.

Now, religious people know that the word “security” is unique, and in religious terms it can have very special meanings. We cannot deal with all of those meanings in our assembly, but we do need a public term that can help us to focus our shared “positive” multireligious commitments. The term “shared security” builds on recent discussions in the United Nations about “human security” that have emphasized that basic needs and rights have to be addressed for each person in order for them to be “secure.” We want to take a small, but important next step. We want to focus on the notion of “shared security.” Why “shared security”? Because we are convinced as religious people that we need to work together to overcome our common problems. To

think that I can be secure, while others are not, is a kind of illusion. This is simply not true in practical terms. We are profoundly interdependent, and in practical terms our walls can never be high enough to insulate us from the impacts of the genuine needs and vulnerabilities of others. War, poverty, disease, and the destruction of the environment have direct or indirect impacts on all of us. Practically, we increasingly recognize there can be no real security unless we help one another to face our common challenges. Moreover, each religion has its own grounds from which to understand this point from a religious perspective. I have observed that sincere believers of the world’s diverse religious communities know, from their respective religious perspectives, that we need the notion of “shared security.”

So our assembly will be religious in spirit, asking the two main questions of religion—what is the concrete shape of pathology today, and by what means can we work together to mend what is broken and to advance what we agree is good for all of us. We will, of course, examine both of these questions in a fashion that fully respects the principles of multireligious dialogue and cooperation. Our assembly theme, “Religions for Peace: Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security,” is intended to be a modern, contemporary, relevant theme, but, at the same time, one that is sensitive to the two ancient questions that are so profoundly important to the world’s religious traditions.

*Could you elaborate more on the definition of the word “violence?”*

Violence has an obvious meaning. We all know that war is violent, or that forms of aggression can be violent. But is not poverty also violent? When 12 million children die for reasons that are largely preventable, is that not also violent? Poverty kills—and it can thwart the development and stunt the growth of a vast number of members of our human family. It is violent.

So we extend the examination of violence from the obvious cases of violent conflict to the less obvious ones: the absence of peace, which holds people back and hurts them; crushing poverty; a lack of development; the impact of preventable or treatable illnesses; and the destruction of the environment that is the basis for life.

But if the notion of violence is so extended, it also invites us to similarly extend the notion of “shared security.” It, too, should embrace the same set of issues. Security cannot simply mean the absence of war. Real security requires us to work together to forge a comprehensive notion of peace that includes sustainable development in which all of us in the human family are stakeholders. As religious people, we are quite sober about the roots of pathology, but at the same time we also know we have a growing capacity to change many violent situations. They can be significantly changed with intelligent cooperation guided by humility, wisdom,

love, and compassion. Further, we know as religious people that moral responsibility follows capacity. If we can change something for the good by working together, we have the moral responsibility to do so.

Thus, the assembly is going to focus on the ways that cooperation among the world's religious communities can help to unleash the religious communities' capacity to take action to confront violence and advance shared security. Even non-religious actors, like international governmental and development bodies, are beginning to realize that religious communities have major roles in stopping wars, addressing the poverty that holds us back and protecting our earth. The religious communities have great "spiritualities," cultivated moral heritages, and enormously developed grassroots structures. These are deep reservoirs of powerful energy.

Multireligious cooperation can work to harness these tremendous energies for peace. In practical terms, cooperation is powerful because it: helps religious communities to avoid conflicts; aligns them around common goals; harnesses the complementarities of diverse religious communities' ability to help solve practical problems; allows for an efficient way to equip religious communities for action; and can facilitate the formation of public partnerships. In short, cooperation can help to unleash the tremendous potential of religious communities to transform the concrete shape of pathology. In terms of our assembly, cooperation can assist religious communities to "confront violence and advance shared security" together.

*The concept of an Inter-Religious Council is one of the driving forces to help bring about that goal, isn't it?*

Yes. There is a simple question that helps to organize the WCRP at all levels. We ask ourselves: where are the religious people already organized? The answer to that question tells us where we need to advance multireligious cooperation. In fact, the religious communities are organized everywhere. Religious people are present and organized on local, national, and regional levels. And, of course, religious communities are present on the international level. So the WCRP encourages multireligious action on these same levels: local, national, regional, and international.

The Inter-Religious Council, or the IRC, is an instrument to help religious communities cooperate on the national, regional, and international levels. Thus, there are IRCs that are built and led by the religious communities on each of these levels. Today, we have many national IRCs. These are led by the religious leaders in each particular country. National IRCs are built and led by national religious leaders who already have deeply developed access to their own community's grassroots structures. So national IRCs are designed to utilize the religious structures that religious communities have already built. Ideally, they can reach deeply into the local grassroots communities, and we have brilliant

examples of some of our national IRCs fostering action on the grassroots level. We also have regional IRCs forming in Europe, Africa, and Latin America, and these are led by regional religious leaders. Finally, during our assembly we will elect an international Governing Board. This Governing Board will really function in many ways as a "World Council," or IRC on a global level. So we are developing across the WCRP family more and more representative multireligious structures, the IRCs. They are designed to harness what the religious communities have already built in the work of multireligious cooperation.

Beyond helping religious communities build IRCs for themselves, there are two other key challenges that the WCRP works to address: the need to help equip IRCs for action and the need to keep all of the affiliated IRCs and groups in a network.

First, let me give you a few examples of what I mean by helping to equip IRCs for action. Right now the United Nations is engaged in the Millennium Development Campaign, which is designed to cut poverty in half. Working with the UN, the WCRP has developed training materials that can be used by IRCs to harness their great strengths for advocacy and action. With other partners, including governments, development agencies, and foundations, the WCRP has developed materials to help religious communities train themselves for roles in conflict resolution. We have also assisted IRCs to equip themselves to help thousands and thousands of children orphaned or impacted by HIV/AIDS. These and other examples have taught us that we need to go beyond helping to build IRCs. We also need to provide the training materials and the seed resources necessary to enable them to unleash their real potential to address concrete problems.

Second, there is also the important role of maintaining a "network" among all of the IRCs and other groups that make up the WCRP family. The networking service among IRCs is deeply important. It can help the IRCs to share their experiences and best practices with one another; it can help build action coalitions among the many IRCs when problems require cooperation among religious communities in different countries or across national, regional, and international levels; and it can be the mechanism to build "public partnerships," bringing governments and other sectors of civil society into partnership with our religious communities to solve problems.

In short, part of the work of the WCRP is to help build our growing family of IRCs and other groups, equipping them with programs and networks. Then, together, each IRC, whether on the national, regional, or international level, can work to transform conflict, build peace, and advance sustainable development.

*Is that why the action program is so important in the forthcoming Kyoto Assembly?*

At the assembly, the representatives of the IRCs will engage in commissions examining particular areas of the assembly theme, for example, conflict transformation, peace education, human rights, or the impact of HIV/AIDS on children. Now, we want to examine these topics so that we can understand them and discern the large areas of shared moral concern among our different religious communities. This in itself is a large step. But we always want to go another step. We also want the commissions to be the place where we take practical steps to equip ourselves and our IRCs to be better prepared to act. In addition, we will bring natural potential partners for the IRCs (from governments, government agencies, or NGOs) to join those commissions, so that we can also facilitate action partnerships at the assembly.

But we will do something else as well. The assembly is an extraordinary gathering during which religious leaders from all parts of the world and all religious traditions come to work together. It offers a uniquely supportive environment that can assist religious leaders struggling to build peace in situations of conflict. During our assembly, groups of religious leaders from zones of conflict, such as Iraq, Israel-Palestine, and the Sudan, will gather in special meetings with sessions designed to assist them in their efforts for peace building. Thus, the assembly itself will become a unique moment in multireligious action for peace. It is a time when religious leaders can, in a safe and supportive environment, reach out to one another, build trust, and take real steps to build peace.

*On the occasion of the Eighth World Assembly taking place in the city of the WCRP's birth, what do you expect of religionists, especially Japanese religionists?*

First of all, we need to recognize how much the WCRP has grown since the first World Assembly in Kyoto in 1970. Its mission of multireligious cooperation for peace has been the same from the time of its birth in Japan, but the family of affiliated IRCs and groups has grown over one hundred percent since even the last assembly in 1999. This means that the majority of representatives from the national chapters who are coming to Kyoto will never have attended an assembly before. They know that there is a wider group of WCRP family members, but they have not yet met them. So the first point is to recognize that the WCRP movement that started in Japan has now spread around the world, and also that there are many brothers and sisters who have not yet come to an assembly or come back to the place of the WCRP's birth.

This is important to remember because, as we take large steps forward, we need to stay in touch with our history and keep our identity strong as a worldwide family. So I believe that we will engage in highly important, substantive work at the assembly. But we will also do the important work of deepening our sense of family, recalling our history, and

strengthening our identity. And here our Japanese hosts can give us what is priceless. I am deeply grateful to the Japanese religious leaders who will open their arms to receive their brothers and sisters from around the world, many of whom they have not yet met.

*The world has changed drastically since the 1960s when the WCRP's forefathers first established the group. At that time, the world was divided ideologically between East and West. Since the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, the world seems to have become more dangerous. Given this situation, the WCRP has a much larger challenge to face. What do you think is the most pressing challenge for the WCRP right now?*

Your question is perceptive. Our mission stays the same. But the world has changed. So the way to express our mission must also change. Our mission is to confront the real challenges of peace. Today we have to confront the present challenges to peace. When religion itself is being misused and pulled into violent conflicts, we have the special responsibility to use the deepest, most liberating, and dignified voice of our religious traditions to counter the misinterpretations of religions. We must face directly and in a unified way the manipulation of religion. We need to say together that our different religions cannot be used as justification for war against one another. More, we need to say together that our diverse religions call their respective believers, each in their own way, to respect all others and to work together for peace. This is a powerful role that the WCRP strives to fulfill today.

Further, the WCRP is also learning how to unleash the concrete delivery power of religious communities—not only in situations of conflict, where, for example, we are helping to mediate civil wars, but also in the areas of peace education, the struggle for good governance, the advancement of human rights, the promotion of sustainable development, and the combating of disease.

As I mentioned earlier, half of the world's population is living on less than two U.S. dollars per day. In the countries where these people live, government services are often quite limited. But in these same countries, the religious communities have direct access to people and their families on the most local of levels. Religious communities can provide an organizational base for responding to many labor-intensive problems. To do so, the religious communities need to learn to become partners with one another first and then with the other sectors of society committed to solving these problems. This is the front-line challenge for the WCRP, and I am happy to report that religious communities together are walking up to the front lines of this challenge and are finding ways to cooperate. Today, as we find ourselves in a time of great change in religion, the mission of the WCRP is increasingly being recognized by religious communities as mainstream. □



# Faith and Peace

by Thomas Graham Jr.

*A distinguished U.S. diplomat graphically demonstrates why it is urgent that the leaders of the world's major religions put aside their differences and unite in search of peace and disarmament.*

Disarmament, the reduction and, where appropriate, elimination of dangerous weapons that are a threat to peace, and its important contribution to the cause of peace is not a new concept. In 1139, at the Second Lateran Council, Pope Innocent II outlawed the crossbow, declaring it to be "hateful to God and unfit for Christians." However, the English longbow soon appeared, which was more effective than the crossbow and was not prohibited. Both of these weapons, in return, were soon eclipsed by the destructive firepower of the cannon. The Roman Church also banned the rifle when it appeared, but military technology continued to develop over the centuries. Disarmament efforts could not keep pace.

Efforts to limit the scope and availability of arms continue to this day. Pope Benedict XVI, in his message on the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2006, made several significant statements in this regard. "The truth of peace requires that all—whether those governments which openly or secretly possess nuclear arms, or those planning to acquire them—agree to

change their course by clear and firm decisions, and strive for a progressive and concerted nuclear disarmament," the pope said. "How can there ever be a future of peace when investments are still made in the production of arms and in research aimed at developing new ones?"

Summons to cast aside weapons date to ancient times. The prophet Isaiah said that God would "wield authority over the nations and adjudicate between many peoples; these will hammer their swords into ploughshares, their spears into sickles. Nation will not lift up sword against nation. There will be no more training for war." Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, said, "Happy are the peacemakers: they shall be called sons of God."

Messages like these indeed are fundamental across all of the great religions. According to the Holy Qur'an, war is such a disaster that Muslims must use every method in their power to restore peace and normality in the shortest possible period of time. In Sura 4, verse 90, it is said, "[Be at peace with] those who approach you with hearts restraining them from fighting you as well as fighting their own people. If God had pleased He could have given them power over you and they would have fought you: therefore if they withdraw from you but fight you not and [instead] send you [guarantees of] peace then God has opened no way for you [to war against them]."

The Dalai Lama in his New Millennium message said, "We must first work on the total abolishment of nuclear weapons and gradually work up to total demilitarization throughout the world." Mahatma Gandhi, however, noted that "it may be long before the law of love will be recognized in international affairs. The machineries of government stand between and hide the hearts of one people from those of another."

If the call for peace and the reduction of arms is a central religious message, why then has organized religion been so singularly unsuccessful in promoting peace and disarmament? The steps that the medieval papacy took in regard to the crossbow may give us some clues. For a time, the ban on the crossbow may have reduced violence. But technology was too quick, and soon the spirit of that ban was as arcane as the crossbow itself.

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While individual religious leaders have from time to time succeeded in advocating peace and disarmament, the overall picture is far more bleak. On balance, organized religion has more often been the cause, rather than the cure, for violence and war. This result is in diametric opposition to the teachings of the founders—and many subsequent major figures—of all the world's principal religions.

In classical times wars were fought to preserve and expand dynasties, to conquer new territories, or for economic gain—rarely for religious or ideological reasons. This remained largely true for centuries even after classical times. The clashes associated with the rapid expansion of Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries C.E. were far less conflicts about religion than they were wars to unify the Arab world and expand its domain. There was no attempt to eliminate Christianity and Judaism in areas that were predominantly Christian or Jewish that as a result of this expansion came under the control of the Muslim caliphate, Jerusalem was governed by a succession of moderate Muslim leaders.

And after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the early fourth century, the spread of Christianity followed Roman and Byzantine legions. Rather than solely an effort at proselytizing, it was more a civilizing force. The Israelites, likewise, in the early centuries after the Exodus established Israel in Palestine by force not so much for religious triumphalism as for the purpose of creating a national identity.

None of these conflicts were religious wars; they represented state and national expansions of a classical nature. And after the three religions of Abraham—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—were established by the end of the eighth century, Jews, Christians, and Muslims were able to live together in relative peace and harmony for some three hundred years. Far to the east, Buddhism expanded through India into China and Japan and some adjacent areas largely peacefully, and Hinduism is the cultural religion of India.

It wasn't until the eleventh century that organized religion took an inexorable turn and became a direct instigator of violence and war. In 1095, Pope Urban II preached the First Crusade. He did so in part to divert energies away from the incessant dynastic conflicts that plagued Europe in the Dark Ages, and also to turn attention away from the stagnant economic conditions that had existed in Western Europe for centuries. But most important, the goal was to create a new, aggressive, militant Christianity that would be a tool of the papacy and Western dynastic leaders.

Almost immediately, within a year or two, the First Crusade became a religious conflict. As they began their march toward Palestine, the Crusaders attacked European Jewish communities simply because they were Jewish and not Christian. Those attacks foreshadowed similar, sporadic attacks against Jews during the ensuing Crusades era, and far more serious ones during the fourteenth century when Jewish communities were singled out as scapegoats for the Black Death.

Thus the First Crusade touched off a thousand-year war between Christianity and Islam—one that still rages today. Christian anti-Semitism as we have known it stems largely from this period. After the Crusaders finally arrived, having endured many hardships en route, at the gates of Jerusalem in 1099 on the First Crusade, they decided on an all-out attack on the city's inhabitants. In the next two days, the Crusaders slaughtered forty thousand men, women, and children in Jerusalem simply because they were Muslim or Jewish. We live today with the impact of the Crusades and the many, many other similar atrocities that followed.

The battle over Palestine during the Crusades lasted nearly two hundred years. The Muslims eventually turned the tide, thanks in part to the leadership of the famous Salahuddin. However, the era of religious war had begun, and it continues today. Later the Muslim cause against the West was taken over, to a degree, by the Ottoman Turks, who conquered Constantinople in 1453 and brought much of southeastern Europe under their sway before being halted by a Christian army at the gates of Vienna in 1520.

Soon afterward, though, it was Christian battling Christian when the Reformation in Europe pitted Catholics and Protestants against one another. The Thirty Years' War in central Europe in the seventeenth century eliminated about a third of Germany's population before the Peace of Westphalia was secured in 1648.

Religious and ideological warfare—which seemed to recede during the Enlightenment in Europe and the emerging dominance of secularism there—returned with a vengeance in the twentieth century. Examples abound: the rise of fascism and communism leading to the struggles of World War II and the cold war; the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland beginning in the 1970s; the conflict among Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and Muslims in the former Yugoslavia after its dissolution following the end of the cold war; the long-running war between Judaism and Islam in Palestine beginning in the 1920s and intensifying after the founding of Israel in 1948; the clash between Muslims and Hindus in south Asia beginning during the partition of British India in 1947; the conflict between the Buddhist majority and the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka commencing in the 1980s; and the current worldwide Islamic fundamentalist insurgent campaign based on terrorism and epitomized by Al-Qaeda.

While some of these wars are largely ethnic or national conflicts, they all have a heavy religious component. And with the exception of the wars against Nazism and communism, these conflicts roil on, and some are intensifying. What can be done? How can organized religion overcome the habit of exclusivity, violence, and conflict that has been so much a part of the message for the last one thousand years and return to the path of peace?

In today's world, at least, peace and disarmament are inextricably linked. In previous centuries, military weakness was seen, to some degree correctly, as an invitation to attack.

*The Crusaders under Godfrey of Bouillon catch their first glimpse of Jerusalem in 1099. Wood engraving in 1880.*

During the cold war, “Peace through Strength” was a well-known maxim. The two superpowers, though, distorted this concept beyond recognition in the cold war’s arms race, with the United States constructing some seventy-two thousand nuclear weapons and deploying up to thirty-two thousand in the field at one time, and the Soviet Union maintaining some forty-five thousand nuclear weapons deployed for many years—a large number of these weapons on hair-trigger alert.

The world is vastly different now, and for the first time in many centuries, no major state threatens another militarily, except in south Asia. The world’s chief threat now is not major war but declining world order and catastrophic terrorism. In this situation, peace and disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament, are inseparable. Nuclear weapons now have no military utility. But if one or more should fall into the hands of an international terrorist group such as Al-Qaeda—which would surely use them—we could witness the greatest disaster in human history, throwing modern society and the world economy into ruin. Thus, nuclear weapons threaten not only states that might fall prey to such attacks but also those that possess such weapons.

Sovereign nations, on their own, have seemed unable to effectively address the problem. The international treaty system designed to constrain the nuclear threat, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the centerpiece of world efforts to limit nuclear dangers, appears to be gradually coming apart. Nearly thirty-thousand nuclear weapons still exist worldwide, and the number of countries declaring themselves to be nuclear-weapon states is growing.

If nations are unable to stem this threat, which very much

appears to be the case, perhaps the religious communities could take the lead and guide the way toward “beating swords into plowshares.” Sadly, as documented above, many of the world’s major religions remain at war with one another. Can this change? Will the Good Friday Agreement finally bring peace to Northern Ireland? Is there a solution to the Palestine question? Can Pakistan and India truly make peace? Can Buddhists and Tamils come to terms in Sri Lanka? Will the war on terror be won?

We must hope that leaders of the Christian, Buddhist, Islamic, Jewish, and Hindu faiths can put aside their differences, as their faiths at their essence truly demand, and unite in search of peace and disarmament. It will be the faithful of every walk of life suffering if any of the world’s major cities is destroyed by a terrorist nuclear device. Now more than ever in history, it is imperative that religious communities join in this most serious task.

There have been attempts. The Dalai Lama has been an outspoken advocate of peace for many years. The American Catholic Bishops’ Letter of 1983 made an important contribution, that nuclear deterrence was only morally acceptable as a step on the way toward nuclear disarmament. The bishops declared “profound skepticism about the moral acceptability of any use of nuclear weapons.”

But these efforts and parallel ones by Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu leaders have not been sufficient to affect the bulk of their followers. The religious establishments themselves must now, as a matter of greatest urgency, considering the alarmingly dangerous state of the world today, make it unmistakably clear to the faithful that the era of religious conflict is past. Religious establishments must emphasize to their followers that religion-based violence is off the table, that those who carry out violent acts in the name of God are outside the faith, that all faiths under God support and advocate universal peace and worldwide nuclear disarmament and reduction of stockpiles of other weapons.

Perhaps in this most dangerous age, the world’s religious leaders can succeed where statesmen and politicians have so appallingly failed. Working together, by implementing the visions of their faiths’ founders, perhaps they can turn the world community away from the endless cycles of violence, with these unimaginably destructive weapons looming in the background, before it is too late. This is a concept that even with complete faith and dedication would take years to organize, much less accomplish.

But if there is a lesson that history can teach us in thinking about such questions, it is that nothing that is good should be thought of as impossible. We all should be guided by the sentiment expressed in the Bhagavat Purana, a Hindu scripture that some say is more than five thousand years old: “May the entire universe be blessed with peace and good hope. May everyone driven by envy and enmity become pacified and reconciled. May our own hearts and minds be filled with purity and serenity.” □

# Religious Leaders Must Serve as Bridges to Peace

by Eiin Yasuda

*To construct a peaceful world of happiness for all, we have to  
begin by creating human beings with righteous hearts.*

Even though human beings have long hoped for peace and happiness, repeated wars have only added to their suffering. War is hell created by humanity. Including its two great world wars, the twentieth century wracked the earth with more than 250 conflicts of varying size. In them, some 200 million precious lives and numerous artifacts of cultural heritage were lost, and both the environment and society itself were devastated. The survivors were faced with desolation and poverty and were consumed by hatred and physical suffering. There are people who are suffering the aftereffects even now. Additionally, it is said that the harm caused by the depleted uranium shells deployed in the fighting in the Middle East will continue for hundreds of years. Everyone hoped that we could make the twenty-first century a century of peace, but that hope seems in vain, as evinced by the terrorist attacks in America at the beginning of this century, in retaliation for which the U.S. and coalition forces invaded Afghanistan and Iraq. As a result, many innocent civilians have been killed. That in turn fostered

more hatred, and more retaliation, and today terrorism continues to spread. Will the twenty-first century be an era of the ongoing war against terror?

Religion stands in the background of the terrorism of today, and many people interpret what is happening as a “religious war.” But if it is really a “religious war,” then the cause of the fighting must be found within religious doctrine. However, the cause of the terrorism is mostly retaliation based on hatred arising from conflicts over territory and resources; dissatisfaction over racial discrimination and inequities of wealth; and random bomb attacks, resistance against oppression, and conflicts over power.

Every religion teaches that life is precious and that we should not kill. We are admonished not to covet what belongs to others and to give to those in need. We are taught that we should not speak falsehoods but be honest, that husbands and wives should not commit adultery, that we should not do unto others what we would not have done to us.

Despite this, people speak of a “religious war” because what religionists teach is not put into practice. Also, that the unifying power of religionists is strong, and that it is easy for governments to make use of organized religion, is not the fault of the religions. Indeed, if everyone followed the teachings of their religions faithfully, there would be no war at all.

## Japan Vowed Not to Achieve Peace by Military Force

Japan has not taken part in a war in the sixty years since the end of World War II, and thus has not sent armed troops to engage in fighting in other lands. This is because Japan is painfully aware of the atrocities committed, the lasting wretchedness, and the overall stupidity of war. From that experience, Japan vowed in its postwar constitution never to use military force in order to achieve peace. But now that sixty years have passed since the war ended, the number of Japanese who experienced the war firsthand is becoming smaller, and thus I fear that the feeling of danger concerning war is weakening.

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*The Closing Ceremony of the Seventh World Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace held in Amman, Jordan, November 25–29, 1999.*

Domestically, the increasing frequency of suicide and the murder of innocent children suggests that many people do not place a high value on human life. Of course, suicide and murder also occurred in the past, but today, partly due to wide coverage by the mass media, I feel that the number of incidents that compare with deeds of war in ferocity is on the rise. The random killing of children and other innocent people is itself a form of terrorism. In these times, what is needed is for religionists to properly proselytize their faiths. I believe that debates over differences between monotheism and polytheism should end. Rather, we must all strive to find common ground for achieving peace and solving the world's urgent problems.

I traveled to Iran in the summer of 2004, and I was able to pay a visit to Dr. Moghaddam of the institute that published the collected writings of the Iranian revolutionary leader the Ayatollah Khomeini. Dr. Moghaddam met with us most amicably, and said to us: "I was in residence at an Islamic research institute in Hamburg, Germany, for fourteen years. During that time, I studied Christianity and Buddhism, and I came to realize that they were both teaching the same message, and that there was no great difference between them. Now today, some men of religion have come to visit from a faraway land to hold discussions, and they are most welcome."

I felt just as Dr. Moghaddam did, since I could not see much basic difference between the revelations that Christ and Muhammad had received from God and the truth to which Shakyamuni Buddha had been awakened. I thought that the only real differences were rather like the different views seen from the north, south, east, and west windows of a building. Of course, the landscapes seen from windows in

the four directions are all different, but if one goes outdoors, one sees that everything exists under the same sky. Further, the difference among religions is mainly that the shapes of the faces and the color of the hair and the skin of their adherents may be different, and these are differences that should be respected as indications of individuality. If we comprehensively observe the composition of the blood, the body structure, the internal organs, and the activity of the brain of all peoples, we will find very few true differences, and almost everything will be similar. In the same way, surely the feelings of right and wrong, of good and evil, and all the emotions we experience in our daily lives are also alike.

Similarly, because our hearts are moved in similar ways, the impressions we receive and the emotions we feel when experiencing artistic endeavors such as great paintings and music are much the same. The arts have a universal, lasting quality that transcends historical periods, ethnic backgrounds, and national boundaries. The religions of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam have spread over the world, and all have long histories, giving succor to the hearts of people in many lands. All of these religions seek to comfort the mind, and they all long for world peace. For that reason, the leaders of all religions should set the example of openheartedly having contacts with other religions. But religionists tend to be very strongly attached to their own religions exclusively, and I feel that this serves as a hindrance, an obstacle to discussion and cooperation.

#### **Religionists Should Be "Barrier-Free"**

Today's Japan, learning from the advanced nations of Europe and North America, has implemented the "barrier-free" con-

*Participants in the Eighth Conference of the South Korea–China–Japan Buddhist Friendly Interaction Conference praying for world peace on October 25, 2005, at the temple Pomosa in Busan, South Korea.*

cept in public and private places to make life easier for the physically impaired. Making facilities barrier-free also makes life easier for the physically unimpaired. I believe that it would be good if religionists would incorporate the idea of “barrier-free hearts” in the same spirit. The faith of devoted religionists is as passionate as affairs of the heart. Therefore, mistakes occur if one makes decisions without cool level-headedness. Religionists certainly possess very deep faith, but that can have the drawback of restricting one’s viewpoint, leading to exclusivity. That makes many people uncomfortable, which causes them to lose faith in, and intentionally avoid, religion.

In order for the general public to have confidence in a religion, it has to have the qualities of permanence and universality. Thus it follows that it must have a long history and be a religion that is widely accepted around the world. But over the course of that long history, the faith of religionists themselves may have become automatic, their passion may have cooled, and the impression they make on people may have weakened. In comparison, new religions burn with a strong fervor. In fact, sometimes the passion is so fervent that it meets a degree of resistance.

The temple at which I am serving has a history of more than thirteen hundred years and has been designated a World Heritage site. The role of the temple when it was first built was to serve as a kind of university for many monks. During its thirteen-hundred-year history, it has seen the rise and fall of fortunes, and today little remains from the time of its founding except for a few Buddhist sculptures and structures. And although its influence is faint, I am

grateful to my predecessors and proud that they have inherited and handed down the Light of the Law. But such pride can sometimes be a barrier.

I was asked by one of the monks, “Don’t you have any resistance to working together with people of new or different religions?” I immediately replied, “It is not that I have no resistance at all, but rather that my resistance is not so strong.” And then I told him a story about Shakyamuni Buddha.

The caste system has been very powerful in India since ancient times. This was also true during the lifetime of Shakyamuni Buddha, and people from all walks of life wanted to enter the Buddhist monasteries. But those who had entered the religious life from the higher castes looked with disdain on those who came from the lower castes. In response to that, Shakyamuni said there should be no class distinction such as between those nobly born or lowly born according to what kind of family one came from. A person’s baseness or nobility should be determined by his or her actions. When the Ganges, the Indus, and all other rivers flow into the ocean, the waters of all are mingled in the same body of water. In a similar way, people of various types become monks, but after entering the path, they are all simply monks. I added that in religions, too, it is not true that the old is always good and the new is always bad; what is important is what the religion does—if the behavior of the religion’s leaders is exemplary, then we should study it and occasionally work together with it. But this monk’s resistance was quite strong, and his expression told me that he could not accept that.

Temples in the Nara period (710–94) were not devoted to a single sect or branch, and all six sects of Buddhism brought from China were studied together: the Jojitsu, Sanron, Hosso, Kusha, Kegon, and Ritsu sects. Later, during the Heian period (794–1185), the Tendai and Shingon sects were added, and all eight of these sects were studied at all the temples. But in 1872, in response to a government edict, a system of single sects and branches was adopted. In addition, from long ago Shinto had been revered in Japan, and although from Heian times Shinto gods were introduced and worshiped in Buddhist temples in a sort of amalgamated form, the 1872 edict required the separation of Shinto and Buddhism. However, at my temple the history of the syncretization of Shinto with Buddhism continues. This is perhaps because the Japanese are a polytheistic ethnic group, but it is the openhearted acceptance of Nara-period Buddhism that I believe is again needed today in discussions among religions.

At the present time, the means of communication and transportation have vastly improved, so the social distance between the peoples of the world is shrinking. For that reason, exchange between people in such fields as politics, business, and culture have become simplified. Yet, that being said, in fact it is not easy to conduct exchange with people in countries with different political ideologies or those with which we are in disagreement or conflict, no matter how close they may be geographically. Among them, if there is a country with which we need to interact directly on an economic level, it has become easier to do so. But for friendly exchange between religions, much more time and effort is required. As I noted earlier, this is because religionists have a deep faith in their own religion, which causes them to tend to become exclusivistic. That serves as a kind of barrier of the heart and mind. However, I believe that a true faith should call forth the spirit of tolerance, benevolence, and compassion. Before religious leaders preach to others about peace, they should take the initiative and exhibit friendly exchange among themselves. Indeed, it is only if religious leaders respect each other's position, thought, and faith that peace will be possible.

### Awakening the Drive for Character

It seems that there are three requirements for explaining the functioning of the human brain.

First, there are the physiological drives that we share with all living things. These include the need for nutrients and rest, as well as the urge to propagate. These are at minimum the three most fundamental drives of all living things. Therefore, animals have no choice but to live by killing other living things for food.

Second, there are social wants to help us live within society with a central focus on the self. We want our position to be accepted. For that reason, we tend to exclude those who oppose what we advocate. This drive is also found among the apes and higher animals, but it is the human mind that

invented weapons for the purpose of intensely waging war. However, in human hunting communities there was not much fighting among people, but when agricultural communities developed, people started to fight so as to procure ownership of land.

Third, there is the drive for character development through which we want to demonstrate our worth as human beings, to become better individuals, and to aim to attain the ideal of human achievement. Here, through education and religion, the spirit of tolerance, benevolence, and compassion are awakened. By means of this third drive, it becomes possible for us to sacrifice our lives for others.

Religionists are supposed to be living according to this drive for good character, but in reality the second drive, for social wants, seems to manifest itself more strongly.

In Buddhism we have the expression "All living things possess the buddha-nature." This means that every human being already possesses the buddha-nature and has a built-in spirit of tolerance, benevolence, and compassion. This is the third drive, but worldly desires centered on the self, the second drive, interfere with the expression of the buddha-nature. What is necessary in such a case is to control the self-centered lust for worldly desires and to resurrect the buddha-nature that allows us to live for others. Even the late Ayatollah Khomeini affirmed: "Self-centered lust is the root of various evils." I believe that it is important for everyone to bring forth a beautiful spirit, nurture it, and polish it. It is for this that religious education is so important.

Making an analogy with a tree, religion is the roots; politics, economic resources, and culture are the trunk, branches, and leaves. If the roots become rotten, the tree will die; if the roots are healthy, spreading deep and far into the ground, it will grow into a magnificent tree that stretches its branches wide. One's heart cannot be seen with the eyes, but it shows itself through one's words and deeds. Thus, if religion or the heart is "out of order," then politics, the economy, and culture will also fall into disorder. Whether for better or for worse, all of the world's problems stem from the human heart. Therefore, in order to construct a world of peace and happiness for everyone, we will have to begin by creating human beings with righteous hearts. And we can do this only through the cooperation of religionists and educators. It cannot be done overnight or even in a day, but it is the role of religionists to see that, over time, this is achieved through collective perseverance.

What is needed by people in the world today in order to help solve our common concerns and problems is to discuss things and share our wisdom, and to endeavor to manifest solutions in a concrete fashion. And while we are earnestly discussing our common objectives, we will go beyond religion and open our hearts to one another. Whether the building of lasting peace is possible or not is up to human beings. This is the great mission with which religionists have been entrusted, so let us transcend the barriers of religion and work together to bring about that peace. □

# Religion and Peace

by Fumihiko Sueki

*An abstract, universal ideal of peace cannot be successful.  
Peace must be considered from the standpoint of what  
sort is desirable and under what conditions.*

Although religions actively preach peace, they are also often the source of war and violence. Why should this be? There are many ways to answer this question. One way is by saying that there are religions that seek peace and religions that approve of war and violence. Lately it is often said in Japan that monotheistic religions are intolerant and bring about wars, whereas polytheistic religions are tolerant and seek peace. This explanation is well suited to Japanese nationalistic concepts and is thus readily accepted and easily popularized; for this very reason, it is dangerous. It was the polytheistic Japanese, after all, who conducted an extremely brutal oppression of Christian believers during the latter part of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century. Before World War II, Japan was a militaristic nation where brave combat was glorified. We say that Buddhism is peaceful, yet during

the war years of the Showa era (1926–89) Buddhists supported the war effort most fervently, seeing it as a manifestation of the spirit of Mahayana Buddhism.

Another answer would be that religions have primarily sought peace, but some deviant elements often provoke violence and wars. The Aum Shinrikyo sect, for example, cannot be said to have been a true religion; it is considered a fraud passing itself off as a religion. Moreover, it is frequently noted that although some extremist practitioners of fundamentalist Islam provoke violence, Islam actually is primarily a religion that seeks peace. But even if we grant this, there are too many religions that are aberrations. Historically, religions have more often caused wars than they have brought about peace, and so it cannot possibly be said that religions have been inherently peaceful.

## Is Peace Truly Desirable?

I wonder to what extent we should take for granted the assumption that all people love peace and seek peace. All wars are waged with the declared objective of bringing about peace. One can safely say there are no wars conducted for the sake of war. Even the war of the Showa era waged by Japan was declared to be for the purpose of bringing about peace by means of unifying the world in the spirit of *hakko ichiu* (all eight corners of the world under one roof). Nevertheless, that is why one cannot jump to the conclusion that all people seek peace. There have been too many situations in which peace was only paid lip service.

Approaching this from the opposite viewpoint, are all wars bad? When Japan invaded China, the Chinese Nationalist and Communist parties cooperated in a war of resistance against the Japanese forces. The Japanese thought of themselves as seeking peace and believed that some Chinese were disrupting this peace and thus were at fault. Would that mean, however, that we could say that peace-seeking Japan was good and that China, resisting with military force, was bad? The opposite was true, wasn't it? How could the Chinese be blamed for resisting a military invasion on the grounds

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that such resistance was contrary to the doctrine of peace? At the time, Chinese Buddhists under the leadership of Taixu (1889–1947) joined the war of resistance against the Japanese. The Buddhist clerics cannot be accused of doing something they should not have done, as if they had cooperated to cast aside peace and make war. As one can see, there are situations in which war cannot be avoided. Merely insisting on abstract pacifism is without meaning.

### Is It Wrong to Kill People?

This question can be understood by comparison with individual violence. At a time when Japan was experiencing a series of particularly vicious juvenile crimes, one youth was reported to have asked, “Why is it always wrong to kill someone?” In response, adults debated the issue on television and in magazines; philosophers even published books on it. The

someone” has meaning only within a very limited scope. That is to say, it is only within the scope of civil society, protected externally by the institutions of the military or of capital punishment, which are premised on “killing,” that it has meaning. Even within the scope of civil society, there are difficult questions as to what extent we should permit killing for legitimate self-defense. A few years ago, there was an incident in America in which a Japanese exchange student, invited to a Halloween party at a private home, mistakenly approached the wrong house and was shot dead by the householder, who saw him as a threat. The shooter was not held legally responsible. Homicide to protect one’s family and property is recognized in American society. As can be understood from the above, “it is wrong to kill someone” is a rule that has meaning only within a certain scope and certainly does not apply universally.

The issue of peace is exactly the same. An abstract, universal ideal expressed by “peace must prevail” cannot be successful. It must be considered from the standpoint of what specific sort of peace is being sought and under what conditions. If peace is good no matter what form it takes, then realistically the most likely form of peace is one in which a single superpower dominates the world, totally suppressing all resistance and exercising strict control. But is that kind of peace desirable?

The actual situation during the cold war was that instead of a single superpower, there was a balance of power between two camps, and both sides feared to start a war against the other. It is also true that there were fewer regional wars during the cold war than we have seen in recent years. However, if we are asked if the situation was better during the cold war, I doubt that anyone could answer that it was.

### Then What Should Be Done?

Nevertheless, of course I am not trying to say that seeking peace has no value or that war is desirable. Rather, what I am saying is that simply insisting that peace in the abstract is good or that one will continue to pray for peace is, ultimately, nothing more than a rallying cry and merely offers self-satisfaction. One risks the danger that, if anything, aggressors or repressive regimes or the domination of a single superpower will thereby be rationalized, and resistance to them may even be blocked.

If that is the case, then what should be done? One thing we can say first is that we should not consider politics or moral values to provide the final answer. We cannot declare that religions should never make pronouncements about political issues. Yet it would be somewhat strange to insist that religions give priority to political values or comply with political values.

If nothing else, war and peace are issues at both the political and the moral level. Morality and politics are based on rules about which there is general understanding among people. Peace is something that emerges, even when there

*In November 1943, during World War II, Buddhist priests holding a service at a Kyoto temple for the victory of the Japanese military over the Allied forces.*

point everybody overlooked, however, was that “it is wrong to kill someone” has meaning only within a certain limited scope and is not necessarily a universal truth. To begin with, “it is wrong to kill someone” does not have meaning on the battlefield during wartime. If you think that is an extreme example, I can give another one. Japan has legally sanctioned capital punishment, a practice that is prohibited in most of Europe and is increasingly losing favor in the United States; killing by the state is legitimized. At present, however, genuine opposition to the death penalty as a social movement has not gained much force in Japan. So, while murder by individuals is prohibited, the taking of life by the state is sanctioned to maintain order among individuals.

Looked at this way, it can be seen that “it is wrong to kill

are differences in values, when an understanding is reached through people getting together and talking to each other. Consequently, it is predicated on people expressing their positions verbally and discussing them rationally and logically. People do not always operate within the framework of rational mutual understanding, however, and from time to time may deviate from that course. At such times they may encounter the Other, who is totally frank and unreserved and goes beyond mutual understanding. Encounters with such an Other can arouse extreme alarm and intense concern, which can lead to close attachment or deep hatred, resulting in unpredictable actions that are not governed by reason.

Religious feelings are something that materializes from that type of involvement with the Other. That is why religious sentiment does not necessarily conform to accepted moral values but instead always harbors the possibility of deviating from them. That religion can sometimes provide the energy for peace, but can also at times be the source for war and violence, is due precisely to the fact that religions deal with the Other, those who go beyond the framework of rational mutual understanding. Religion destroys the conceited thinking that people control their own actions rationally, demonstrating the limitations of accepted public and presumably rational rules.

Religion, however, is not simply a deviation from rules. While on the one hand it does deviate from the world of

mutual social understanding, on the other hand it returns to that world. Religion rationally devises its doctrine in the latter dimension. And since religion must operate within society, it must follow the rules that arise out of mutual understanding. Moreover, it has the right to speak out on issues concerning how those rules are determined.

Yet, for religion the issues of war and peace are not simply matters to be relegated only to the mutual understanding of the worlds of morals and politics. These are issues that confront the most basic elements of religion. This is born from confronting the dead. When we pursue the matter of the Other, we come to the issue of the dead. The reason is that the dead are the "Other" who are most difficult for the living to comprehend and with whom no type of mutual understanding can materialize. Yet the living cannot go about their lives without dealing with the dead. When we devote our thoughts to war and peace, it is those who died in wars that we think about first. We cannot think about issues of war and peace without remembering the dead who were wantonly killed at Auschwitz or Hiroshima, to give two examples. The future always builds on an accumulation from the past. If we are to talk about peace, we must start by asking how it involves the dead of past wars. There has been enough of abstract pacifism. We must go beyond that. The question we ought to ask today is, how far can we go into the past to create a true peaceful future by successfully interacting with the dead? □

# Let Peace Conquer the World

## Religious Learning for an Alternative Globalization

by Johannes Lähnemann

*Religions are learning communities. The time has passed when religious communities taught only within their own traditions. The global perspective leads us to transcend such boundaries.*

In the present world situation, violence and not peace seems to be conquering the world. There are conflicts in which religions are a contributory factor, as in the former Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, the Middle East, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, and many other places of the world. There is terrorism under the cloak of religion, for which the events of September 11, 2001, set a particularly conspicuous and catastrophic precedent. There is a new trend of resorting to sweeping generalizations such as “the aggression of Islam” or “the West has no values,” and the unguarded use of terms such as “crusade” or “holy war.”

In preparation for the Eighth World Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace in Kyoto, religious communities worldwide need to ask themselves what they can contribute in order to confront violence and work for a shared security, its necessary components being the preservation of life, a healthy development, and a lasting post-conflict reconciliation.

In industry and commerce today, companies think and act on a global scale. Politicians are increasingly aware of the interrelationships across the globe, and these are often in conflict with the national interests they represent.

### When Will Religions and Cultures Think and Act Globally?

The slogan “Let Peace Conquer the World” carries the insight that there is a deep motivation for peace in the religions—not only for personal and inner peace but also for actively overcoming aggression and creating a strong coalition for a comprehensive peace.

The religions are, after all, concerned with giving meaning to life, making interpretations of the world, and not only for short-term goals. The ethic of the great religious traditions is rooted in global, not particularistic, terms. The Declaration toward a Global Ethic of the Parliament of the World’s Religions in 1993 shows this very clearly.

Furthermore, religions are learning communities. By “learning communities” I mean a comprehensive understanding of education: teachers, as well as students, have to

take part in the learning processes. The time has passed when religious communities taught only within their own traditions. Important as it is to transmit one’s own insights, one’s own conviction and spirituality, the global perspective leads us to transcend such boundaries. All too often, religions have promoted, and continue to promote, their own convictions in an exclusive, narrow way, without regard for the need to interpret their creed from a global perspective and to respect the richness of the diversity in cultures and beliefs worldwide.

This article is an invitation to share the values, to share the visions, to look with interest and curiosity at the insights, convictions, and experiences of others—not merging them, not creating a uniform and superficial harmony, but facing the present global challenges critically, searching for helpful exchange and cooperation. It presents some core insights from eight years of work in the Peace Education Standing Commission (PESC) of the WCRP, which has taken upon itself the task of bringing the messages and forces of peace

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inherent in the various religious traditions closer together with the practical possibilities of realizing them (see <http://www.wcrp.de/pesc>).

“Let peace conquer the world.” This requires common learning in the fields of values and ethics facing the global challenges that threaten life and community on earth. It can be helpful to take the Declaration toward a Global Ethic of the Parliament of the World’s Religions at Chicago in 1993, inspired by Hans Küng and his colleagues in a number of different countries, as a guideline to be set against the concrete situations, problems, and circumstances. The educational dimension of this declaration has already recently been introduced in the PESC brochure *Peace Education from Faith Traditions* (Günther Gebhardt, 2001, p. 42).

The four irrevocable directives in the declaration can lead the way to learning and training for a new “culture” of living together in respect, solidarity, truthfulness, and partnership.

### 1. Learning for a Culture of Nonviolence and Respect for Life

The Declaration toward a Global Ethic quotes the challenge in this field as follows: “The use of violence, drug trafficking and organized crime, often equipped with new technical possibilities, has reached global proportions.” The basic problem here is the view that violent action is rewarded, that the stronger win through, and that using one’s elbows leads to success, and this is confirmed time and again by practical experience and is reinforced in the media. This may be confronted with a fundamental insight (which I previously explained in the July/August 2001 issue of *DHARMA WORLD*, p. 17): people will be equipped for living together in a way that will ensure the continued existence of our planet only if they respect their fellow human beings, feel responsibility for all the living and for the inanimate world of creation, and are sensitive to hatred, violence, and all developments that threaten life and community.

Regarding this challenge, it is necessary to relate the learning efforts quite specifically to the particular context—much can be learned from efforts in parallel contexts.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most important things that needs to be learned is the ability to put oneself into the position of the other. Muhammad Mosaad describes this when he reports on the URI (United Religions Initiative) Europe and Middle East Conference in Berlin (2002, p. 50): “In their first separate session the participants decided to face their fears directly and courageously. The roots of hatred are fears, they said. What is the point of meeting without speaking from our hearts and challenging our fears? they asked. Soon there were two subgroups, one for Arabs and one for Jews, writing down all their takes on the other side. When the two long lists were finished up each group chose its spokesman from the other side. In other words, an Arab participant had to speak for the Jews, while a Jewish participant had to argue for Arabs. By doing this, the painful subject was put into a humorous, yet challenging, framework. Before starting this debate the two representatives exchanged their hats, a

movement that made everyone laugh and relax. At the end of this heated session each group enthusiastically cheered its representative and emphasized its satisfaction with his performance. Naturally, the debate did not end by someone winning or losing. Nor did any group abandon completely its narrative. Nevertheless, everyone knew that there is another narrative that does exist and which s/he must know.” It is a special task of interreligious educational work to initiate experiences like this in order to implement the first of the “irrevocable directives.”

### 2. Learning for a Culture of Solidarity and a Just Economic Order

Again, it is the Declaration toward a Global Ethic that identifies the problems in this field: “All over the world we find endless hunger, deficiency, and need. Not only individuals, but especially unjust institutions and structures are responsible for these tragedies.” Education for solidarity therefore depends not only on good will and concepts (these too!) but also on structural conditions; time and again, it becomes evident that children in unjust social structures (most extremely through child labor, child slavery, child prostitution, or as street children) are among the weakest and most easily neglected members of society. But even in the advanced industrialized countries, many young people experience widespread neglect, use drugs, and are willing to resort to violence. Work on the improvement of structural conditions must be understood as a political priority to which the religious communities have to make their contribution. The essential thing is to give the children the basic needs, that they experience love, security, protection, and that they have opportunities to live, learn, and develop with personal support.

In the PESC brochures are documented three very strong and comprehensive movements for learning and practicing solidarity and promoting a just economic order on a spiritual basis.<sup>2</sup>

It is typical of all three movements that on the one hand they follow a great spiritual vision and on the other hand they are grassroots oriented. Sarvodaya is a way of awakening along the Buddha’s Noble Eightfold Path and is present in more than fifteen thousand villages of Sri Lanka. The work of Sulak Sivaraksa is the way of a socially and politically “engaged Buddhism” and, as one very specific initiative, establishing an “assembly of the poor.” The Economy of Communion project of the Focolare Movement started in the slums of São Paulo. All three movements have developed a concept in which there are not some who are extremely rich and others who are extremely poor but that aims at a more equal sharing of goods. And at the same time they are economically successful. They also offer seminars and training for practicing spirituality as a source that gives strength to life and to actions, and they promote ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and dialogue with those of other convictions. That these movements can set an example for an

*Children expressing their opinions before religious leaders, social workers, and UNICEF officers during the WCRP Conference on the World's Religions for the World's Children held at Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey, July 25–27, 1990.*

“alternative globalization” was recently shown through the engagement that inspired help worldwide during and after the tsunami disaster of December 26, 2004.

### 3. Learning for a Culture of Tolerance and a Life in Truthfulness

The Declaration toward a Global Ethic has also paid particular attention to tolerance and truthfulness. For in this directive the religions, and religious and interreligious learning, are challenged in a special way. Not only has the deliberate and unconscious disparagement of those of other faiths (usually without any well-founded knowledge of their belief) done terrible damage in history, but often enough politics today is carried on with sheer ignorance, deliberate distortion, and disinformation, and thus demarcation and defamation are practiced specifically in the religious sphere. Those who know, those who have a greater understanding, those who have learned to investigate and ask questions, cannot simply be lied to and have the wool pulled over their eyes.

Here, in particular, the religions and religious learning have the necessary task of orientation and encounter that is based on a differentiated dialogue between the religions. The important thing, for adolescents as well as for adults, is to be prepared for a coexistence that is not burdened by barriers of prejudice but in which, rather, it is possible to listen to one another and learn from one another, which leads to the breaking down of barriers and the widening of horizons on all sides.<sup>3</sup>

The challenge for globalization is here to widen the efforts through international research, through teacher training and

textbook and syllabus development, and through endeavors within the religious communities themselves.

### 4. Learning for a Culture of Equal Rights and Partnership between Men and Women

The Declaration toward a Global Ethic describes the situation regarding a culture of equal rights as follows: “Numberless men and women of all regions and religions strive to live their lives in a spirit of partnership and responsible action in the areas of love, sexuality, and family. Nevertheless, all over the world there are condemnable forms of patriarchy, domination of one sex over the other, exploitation of women, sexual misuse of children, and forced prostitution.” It also describes the conditions for a healthy development of family life in partnership and mutual respect for each other: “The social institution of marriage, despite all its cultural and religious variety, is characterized by love, loyalty, and permanence. It aims at, and should guarantee, security and mutual support to husband, wife, and child. It should secure the rights of all family members. All lands and cultures should develop economic and social relationships which will enable marriage and family life worthy of human beings, especially for older people. Children have a right of access to education.” In the great religions we find strong traditions of giving respect and dignity to women, children, and the elderly. But we also have long-lasting examples of perverting these principles through dogmas and regulation of behavior and in practical life. The twentieth century showed many examples of an “awakening,” especially of women in the religions through feminist interpretation of spiritual tradi-

tions and new concepts of emancipatory learning. Too little has been developed concerning the family as constituting the heart and core of society.

As a very constructive example I would like to highlight the endeavors of Risho Kosei-kai in establishing and practicing *hoza* counseling. Koichi Kawamoto explains the concept in the PESC 2005 brochure: "*Hoza* is a practice that helps to keep Shakyamuni's teaching alive. The term *ho* in Japanese means *dharma* in Buddhism, the teaching of the Buddha Shakyamuni, and *za* means 'sit' or 'seat.'" Its fundamental background is the insight into "dependent origination" as a central doctrine of Buddhism: "In short, present effects are the result of past actions, and present acts will influence future causes. To truly understand human problems requires looking back to past acts and thoughts."

This is put into practice within the *hoza* sessions, where usually a group of five to eight people who know each other well come together to identify and to clarify problems (these are often family problems) of the individual participants. It is significant that the leadership in these circles is lay leadership and that a major proportion of the participants are women. On the one hand, there is a close relation to Japanese religious traditions, as, for example, ancestor veneration. On the other hand, the way of identifying problems and working around them through changing one's attitudes and behavior (which is always difficult) is so well elaborated that it is worth reflecting on these experiences on an interreligious and global level.

In conclusion, I would like to note that the preamble of the UNESCO constitution (which was taken as the motto for the work of the PESC) proves again to be true, on an international and interreligious, as well as on a personal, level: "*Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defense of peace must be constructed.*"

Therefore, let peace conquer the world! □

## Notes

1. In our PESC brochures, we have documented a principal analysis of conflicts (HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal, "Religions as Motors of Fanaticism or Reconciliation: The Middle East Conflict in a Global Context," 2005, p. 7); activities of the WCRP in areas of tension like Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, and Indonesia (James Cairns, "Does Spirituality Help in Conflict?" 2001, p. 33); new regional coalitions (Jehangir Sarosh, "Pan-European Multireligious Leaders Council Inaugurated," 2002, p. 38); media initiatives (Hansjörg Biener, "Radio for Peace, Democracy and Human Rights," 2002, p. 51); activities on a large scale (Velten Wagner, "The World Council of Churches' Decade to Overcome Violence," 2002, p. 44); symbolic actions (Yolande Iliano, "Drums for Peace," 2002, p. 39); as well as a number of projects and seminars (Christiane Lähnemann, "Israeli, Polish, and German Youths Visit Auschwitz Together," 2002, p. 39). Each of these examples is closely related to its specific context of conditions, problems, and possibilities while taking into account the mostly far-reaching implications of what is done and experienced.

2. These three movements are: (1) the Sarvodaya (Universal Awakening) movement in Sri Lanka, founded and directed by A. T. Ariyaratne (2001, p. 32; 2005, p. 50); (2) the Buddhist Alternatives to Consumerism and Spirit in Education programs of Sulak Sivaraksa in Thailand (2001, p. 36; 2005, p. 67); and (3) the Economy of Communion project of the ecumenical Focolare Movement, founded by Chiara Lubich (2002, p. 57).

The close relation between spirituality and ethical education is expressed very clearly by Chiara Lubich in the quotation at the beginning of the brochure: "Unlike the consumer economy, based on a culture of having, the Economy of Communion is based on the culture of giving. This might seem to be difficult, ambitious, heroic, but it is not so, because human beings made in the image of God, who is love, find their fulfilment in loving, in giving. This need is in the deepest recesses of their being whether they have faith or not. On this basis, supported by our experience, lies the hope of a universal spreading of the Economy of Communion" (Chiara Lubich in Brazil, May 1991).

3. This area is very widely represented in the PESC brochures, with a special emphasis on the developments in Europe, North America, and the Middle East, but also South Africa. Several articles describe the possibilities and results of textbook research: how, for example, Islam is presented in European school textbooks, how Christianity is taught in textbooks of countries with an Islamic tradition (Johannes Lähnemann/Klaus Hock, 2001, p. 22; Khairallah Assar on Algeria and Syria, 2002, p. 12; Patrick Bartsch on Turkey, 2002, p. 17; Johannes Lähnemann with propositions of principle, 2005, p. 33), taking also into account Europe's interfaith history (Hansjörg Biener, 2002, p. 19). Other papers give fundamental insights concerning education in relation to freedom of religion or belief, tolerance, and nondiscrimination (Mark J. Wolff, 2002, p. 10; James Wimberley, 2005, p. 12); concerning the developments of interreligious education in selected countries (Theodor Kozyrev on Russia, 2002, p. 21; Gordon Mitchell on South Africa, 2001, p. 25; Norman Richardson on Northern Ireland, 2005, p. 17; Jacobus Schoneveld, "Living in the Holy Land: Respecting Differences," 2001, p. 24); and concerning special fields: the experience of women in interreligious learning (Teny Perry-Simonian, 2001, p. 17); interreligious dialogue on university campuses (Patrice Brodeur, 2005, p. 24) or interfaith services as a source for spiritual and ethical learning across religions (Johannes Lähnemann, 2002, p. 27).

Publications of the Peace Education Standing Commission (PESC) of the WCRP, Johannes Lähnemann, editor; Peter Athmann, publisher; Nürnberg [Nuremberg], Germany:

- *Peace Education from Faith Traditions: Contributions to the "Dialogue Among Civilisations"* (UN Year, 2001)
- *A Soul for Education: Projects for Spiritual and Ethical Learning Across Religions* (2002)
- *Preservation—Development—Reconciliation: Religious Education and Global Responsibility*. International and Interreligious Contributions (2005)

The next major meeting of PESC members after the Eighth World Assembly in Kyoto is the Ninth Forum of Nürnberg, September 26–29, 2006: Making Visions Come True—Evaluating Concepts of Interreligious Learning (<http://www.nuernberger-forum.uni-erlangen.de/home.php>).

# Religion, Spirituality, and Concern for Social Justice

by Swami Agnivesh

*Training people to practice justice is a basic religious calling.  
Only true spirituality can lead us out of darkness and  
untruth to the light of truth and justice.*

Spirituality and religion belong to each other. However, they begin to part company as soon as religion degenerates into ritualism and obscurantism. The goal of spirituality is social and personal transformation. Spirituality alone has the resources appropriate for it. In contrast, religion tends to be the status quo, and often it becomes an ally of the oppressors. Spirituality, because of its commitment to justice, seems subversive from the perspective of a ritualistic and status-quo religion.

It is in respect of social justice that the gap between religion and spirituality becomes the widest. Godliness expresses itself as a passion for justice. Justice is the outworking of truth. God is Truth. Truth as applied to the human situation leads us to the conclusion that all people are of equal worth in the eyes of God. It is precisely out of this truth that the passion for justice or the righteous indignation at injustice is born.

The commitment to social justice arises because of the

concern for the victims of injustice. It is equally inspired by the concern for the health and dynamism of the society at large. Injustice is to society what chronic disease is to the human body. While the practice of religion at the popular level may limit itself to meeting the needs of individuals, spirituality cannot stop short of the wholeness, cohesion, and dynamism of the society. A society imperils its own vitality and progress by putting up with the forces of injustice and oppression. It is because systemic injustice has been endemic to the Indian context that we have lacked social and political vitality for more than a millennium. The vast human resources of India have remained frozen on account of socio-cultural injustice, mainly in the form of the caste system and concept of "untouchables."

Compassion is one of the most authentic expressions of spirituality. Compassion involves "standing together" with the victims. It points to a state of empathy and identification, both of which are ingredients of relationship. It is only from a spiritual viewpoint that we can see the thread of humanity that connects the oppressed with ourselves. From a secular and worldly perspective, they look so unlike us that our compassion remains unstirred. Religion, as is now notoriously well known in the Indian context, aggravates the alienation between human beings and social groups. It functions mostly as a suppressant of human compassion. Spirituality, in contrast, is a catalyst of compassion and an inhibitor of cruelty. And compassion cannot but cry out for justice.

In the Indian context, an undiluted commitment to social justice is the most effective means for the renewal and regeneration of religions. Needless to say, all religions are, at the present time, deficient in their concern for social justice. That is also why they are being increasingly marginalized from public life. Spirituality and the social justice concomitant to it are the most convincing proof that the religious tradition is alive and relevant to its human context.

Stereotypical Hinduism is a world-denying faith. This is not true of the Vedic faith. The Vedas are instilled with a passion for justice and human greatness. They are a call to

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the practice of the Dharma, the quintessence of which is social justice. The Vedas are bright with the glow of true spirituality. It is this light that we need to regain at the present time. How can we put up with Himalayan injustice and exploitation inflicted on millions of our fellow human beings over centuries and yet claim to be the inheritors of the greatest spiritual heritage that mankind has ever seen? Our passion for God has to find its authentic expression through our compassion for our brothers and sisters who suffer through no fault of their own. Social justice is a call to bear true witness to God by freeing all of his children from the shackles of poverty, social degeneration, economic deprivation, and de facto political disenfranchisement.

All religions must now unite in waging an epic war against the forces of social oppression. The political goal of spirituality is the liberation of the hostages of every society and culture. Those who want to deflect attention from this truth may provoke false battles. A commitment to truth, which, according to Gandhi, is the essence of Hinduism, alone can ensure that we do not fight wrong battles in the name of religion and discredit it under the pretext of doing it a favor. A religion that turns a deaf ear to the cries of the people will consign itself to the outer circles of irrelevance.

### **Paradigm Shift from Escapist Religiosity to Proactive Social Spirituality**

Religions are meant to help people to cope with life. They are a call to individuals and societies to transform themselves: they are thus the foremost ally of the human species in our quest for dignity, meaning, and fulfillment in life. That being the case, religions contradict themselves when they retreat from the lives of the people. Religion is a call to engagement rather than escapism.

Historically, religions have emerged from the furnace of human life. The engagement with suffering, and not indulgence in affluence, has been the stimulant for the spiritual evolution of our species. But suffering will not result in spiritual deepening if religion is allowed to be escapist.

Human existence is now under unprecedented pressures. There are evident signs of moral decay everywhere. Oppression and injustice abound. Storms of change rage everywhere in the global community. Their effects are especially acute in non-Western societies, where traditional religiosity is being imperiled by the force of materialism and hedonistic consumerism.

Even as materialism mounts and the agonies of social and personal life aggravate, people are increasingly turning to ritualistic and escapist versions of religions. Religiosity has increased rather than decreased in recent times. This religiosity serves as an adjunct to the prevailing system and not as a resource for transforming peoples and societies.

There is no dearth of religiosity in India. On the contrary, we are suffering from a surfeit of it. Ironically, we are even suffering on account of our religions. Though meant to be a

cementing force, religions have of late become sources of division and alienation. Instead of nurturing and ennobling our humanity, the communal passions unleashed by religions are corrupting our native goodness.

Hate, rather than love, is being preached and practiced. Injustice, when sanctioned by religion, is more difficult to combat and contain. This is a serious threat to the health and integrity of our social life.

The need of the hour is to shift from religiosity to spirituality. Rituals, dogmas, and communal interests belong to the surface of religions. Spirituality composes their deeper core. Justice is the essence of spirituality. In a legal sense, justice is mostly a matter of redressing individual and at times collective, grievances. Spiritually, justice calls for the creation of wholesome conditions of life and the affirmation of basic values whereby human beings are helped to attain fullness and find fulfillment in life. Spiritually, justice has a social foundation, for we are social creatures.

Spirituality is not a matter of some formulas or dogmas. It is a dynamic phenomenon that expresses itself through an ongoing engagement with the human predicament. Escapism is an outright denial of spirituality. While religion may be hijacked by the oppressors, spirituality is, and forever will be, the resource and refuge of the oppressed. It is also, in the final analysis, the hope of the oppressor, for it is only a spiritual revolution that can help one to rediscover one's misplaced humanity.

India has been a melting pot of religions. Unlike the West, India has been marked by religious plurality for centuries. But three limitations have forestalled this unique situation from eventuating into a spiritual revolution. First, the ritualistic and formulaic approach to religion gained the upper hand. A shallow religiosity was fostered in people that saw religion in isolation from their day-to-day lives and the aches and pains of their society. Life was lived according to the demands of the world: its politics, economics, culture, and so on. Periodically, one returned to religion almost for repair work so that one's pursuits did not suffer. Religion was not meant to impact and transform the given situation. It was to subservise the interests of the status quo so that the situation did not get out of hand, especially on account of divine displeasure or human discontentment. This kept religion and life in separate watertight compartments.

Second, religions themselves functioned in separate and mutually exclusive spheres at a safe distance from one another. While there was no serious hostility, there was no active cooperation among them either. They shared little in common. As a matter of fact, attempts were made to preserve the dividing walls between religions, as this has been more beneficial to the dominant powers at all times. This called for a focus on the surface (where differences abound), to the total exclusion of the inner core, where the spirit of oneness resides.

Third, the secular rhetoric further legitimized the dichot-



omy between religion and the social public life by insisting on the privatization of religion. Religion was to be tolerated only in the private domain and was an unwelcome trespasser into the public space. In this advocacy, secularism saw only the specters of religion and was blind to the treasures of true spirituality. It envisaged social engineering and nation building as value-neutral enterprises wherein only material resources were relevant. Practical experience and the witness of history prove convincingly that this outlook is an invitation to disaster. To see this for what it is, we need to look at the present scenario through the eyes of the victims of the current scheme of things.

The reconstruction of India since attaining independence six decades ago has faltered for want of an adequate spiritual culture. Our politics is more communalized today than it was in the fifties. The oppression of the powerless continues unabated. Social, religious, and economic justice is not available to the *dalits* and the lower castes. Millions live sub-human lives. The poor and the lower castes continue to be socially degraded, alienated from the fruits of development. Our society is becoming more and more violent. The apathy of those in authority toward human needs and avoidable suffering continues. National priorities do not reflect human needs and social realities. The voice of the powerless is becoming feebler and feebler. The invisibility of the poor has reached unprecedented proportions in the wake of globalization.

Training a people to practice justice is a basic religious calling. Individuals and societies have never been, by nature, committed consistently to justice. The eagerness to secure justice for oneself is seldom matched by the willingness to do justice to others. This imbalance results from entertaining vested interests that make us blind to the balance and harmony of the total context. Objectivity, the ability to see the truth, is basic to justice. For want of this, we succumb to the delusion that we can thrive at the expense of others. Only true spirituality can lead us out of this darkness and untruth to the light of truth and justice.

As the spiritual culture of a society declines, the burden of the resultant social digression falls squarely on the poor and the powerless. The concern for the well-being of those who do not have the muscles to fight for it themselves is essentially a spiritual one. In its spiritual core, every religion exhorts us to be kind and generous to the needy, to be compassionate to those who suffer, and to stand by the oppressed: for we all belong together and are equally the children of God. On the contrary, all human institutions and systems are dominated by individual and group interests that seek to tilt the balance in their favor. Unless continued spiritual vigilance is exercised, therefore, injustice and oppression could overrun a society over a period of time, as has been the case with our society. Gandhi's self-identification with the poor and the untouchables was an

expression of his spirituality. Independent India succumbed to corruption proportionately as its religious vision was abandoned.

The need of the hour is not a divorce between religion and politics, as is advocated by the secularists. The need is, on the contrary, to make the state and society alike conform to the mandates of spirituality. While religions must be judged in terms of their current practices, they must also be evaluated in terms of their core spiritual visions. Highlighting the contradiction between the two is the prophetic task of our times. This unveils the need to reform and renew religions as well as to regenerate the spiritual foundations of our society. It is such a purpose that underlines the founding of Religions for Social Justice, whose goals are:

- (1) to build a healthy society free from exploitation and oppression of every kind, particularly arising out of the caste system, the concept of untouchability, and gender inequity; and
- (2) to emphasize applied spirituality in the religious sphere so as to make religion a dynamic force that empowers people and transforms society.

Today religion is politicized and politics communalized. In this process, the people in need are lost sight of. The ascendancy of vested interests threatens to splinter our society and cripple our country. Avoidable suffering and deprivation mount. The foremost need of the hour is a spiritual regeneration so as to imbue progress with social justice and moral passion. Religions for Social Justice is envisaged to be a people's movement to attain this end.

The very first program undertaken under the auspices of Religions for Social Justice was a multireligious pilgrimage to Manoharpur, where the Australian missionary and social worker Graham Staines and his two children were burned alive on the night of January 22–23, 1999. A group of fifty-one religious leaders, representing the major religious traditions of India, visited Baripada and Manoharpur in Orissa in the wake of this event, which wounded the very soul of India. It sent the message loud and clear that, irrespective of religious difference, no one who is spiritually sensitive can approve of atrocities and all must acknowledge the glow of the spirit wherever it is found. Spirituality must, and does, rise above communal loyalties. In the large-heartedness and spiritual generosity of a Gladys Staines, who spontaneously forgave the assassins of the murderous mob, do we find a reflection of the divine, no matter what religions we follow. Through the several articles published after the pilgrimage and press conferences, this message was articulated throughout the country, and it had a powerful national impact.

Again in April 2002, a Multi-faith Pilgrimage of Compassion comprising seventy-two religious and spiritual leaders of various faiths visited Gujarat State in India when that state was seething with communal bad blood and the state-

*Mourners attend the funeral of Australian missionary and social worker Graham Staines and his two sons in Baripada, India, on January 25, 1999. A group of Hindu radicals had attacked the family and burned them to death, thus wounding the very soul of India.*

sponsored genocide of Muslim men, women, and children.

A year later, in 2003, this same group undertook intensive campaigning in four other states of India, under the banner of Adhyatma Jagran Manch (Forum for Spiritual Awakening). The challenge was to save these other states from the virus of Hindu fundamentalism and from a politics of hatred and violence.

Very recently, in November 2005, a similar interfaith group under the leadership of the World Council of Arya Samaj traveled the length and breadth of the land from Gujarat into Rajasthan, into Delhi, Haryana, Chandigarh, and Punjab, in order to create a spiritual awareness of gender justice to combat the scourge of the abortion of female fetuses.

And as recently as March 2006, we organized a March of Solidarity with Hindu and Muslim victims of a terrorist attack in the holy city of Varanasi (Benares).

This proactive social spirituality found its first expression in 1981, when a sustained movement was launched against the modern-day slavery called bonded labor and child labor. It continues today under the banner of the Bonded Labor Liberation Front, which has brought about the release and rehabilitation of around 175,000 victims of contemporary forms of slavery. I took this battle against slavery to Nepal and Pakistan and then served at an international level as chairperson of the United Nations Voluntary Trust

Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery from 1994 to 2004. This struggle from a profound spiritual perspective is being intensified in various parts of India. It is proving very effective in arousing compassion for the unborn girls who otherwise are being mercilessly slaughtered in the millions in India alone. This preference for sons is rampant in some other countries as well, such as China, Korea, and others, where the declining sex ratio is causing grave social concern.

Religions for Social Justice is aimed at creating an active forum for uniting the various religious traditions that flourish in India. Their scattered existence, insulated both from the burning issues of the times and from one another, is the root cause of their ineffectiveness in creating a society based on a foundation of justice and peace. Given the needs and challenges of today, the dialogue among religions cannot be limited to words and concepts. Religions must discover a shared agenda to promote the good of all people and to safeguard the health of the society. This will effect a paradigm shift from conflict to cooperation, from communalism to spiritual humanism, through which religions will become a constructive, rather than a destructive, influence on societies and nations.

It is to this glorious goal that we must all commit ourselves. □

# Where Are You Staying?

by Notto R. Thelle

*People in the East have a unique awareness of religion as a path. Christianity, however, is the doctrine, not the "Way" of Christ. But perhaps we have transformed Christianity into an exceptionally complicated doctrine.*

One of the shortest conversations in the New Testament took place in the desolate desert tracts east of the Jordan. Two of John the Baptist's disciples were walking behind Jesus in order to find out more about his message. Turning around, Jesus asked them:

"What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi, where are you staying?"

"Come," he replied, "and you will see."

They went with him and remained with him that day. It was about the tenth hour (Jn 1:35–39). In the East, daily exchanges like this can widen out to embrace the great existential questions; those who are attuned to what these simple phrases can mean, who know that the words used by Jesus and the disciples are full of meaning. Some of the classic encounters between Buddhist masters and the pilgrims who visit them begin with the perfectly ordinary question, "Where do you come from?" The pilgrim often replies by saying which temple he comes from, or which master he has visited. But the real question is: Where have your wanderings led you? How far have you come along the Way?

When they met Jesus and asked him where he lived, the

two disciples were looking for the great truth. They followed him to his home and remained with him. This was the beginning of a long wandering, for Jesus did not "stay" anywhere: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Mt 8:20). Jesus' "home" was a path that led him from place to place. He called himself "the Way." And the first Christians were described as "those who belonged to the Way" (Acts 9:2).

People in the East have a unique awareness of religion as a path; one of the commonest words for religion is *Tao*, which means the Way, the law of the universe, the innermost meaning in existence. Buddhism is indeed the teaching of the Buddha, but it is just as much the "Way of the Buddha." Taoism is the religion of the Way. "Shinto" means the "Way of the Gods." But Christianity is called the doctrine of Christ, never the "Way of Christ."

Japanese often assert that Christianity is difficult. What they have in mind is the Christian doctrine and preaching, which all seems so complicated, indeed virtually incomprehensible! I have often felt compelled to ask myself whether we have turned things upside-down. Jesus talked about the narrow path and gateway. He preached a simple message about a difficult path, knowing full well that few would be willing to take it. We have transformed Christianity into an exceptionally complicated doctrine about a way that is so easy that we are tempted to rest on our laurels, thinking that we have already reached our goal.

How often have I heard Christians say that the Buddha took the path and pointed to the path, but left it up to other individuals to take this path themselves! The problem is that when we affirm that Christ himself was the path and that he took this path for us, becoming our "Way," we assume that there is no path that *we ourselves* need to take! In other words, we lose our awareness of what "traveling" means.

It is indeed true that Christ took the path for us, but we can pervert this truth into a huge lie, if we forget that when he spoke of the "path"—the path that led to his own suffering and death—he was calling *others* to follow him. When he spoke of the cross, he was not summoning others to sit down at the foot of *his* cross! He was challenging us to take up our *own* cross and follow him.

In other words, for Christians, Christ as the "Way" is a path that one takes, not a place where one "stays." □

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# The 23rd Niwano Peace Prize Awarded to Rabbis for Human Rights

The Niwano Peace Foundation presented the 23rd Niwano Peace Prize to an Israeli group of ordained rabbis and rabbinical students working for the defense of human rights for both Jews and Palestinians. The presentation ceremony took place on May 11 at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan in Tokyo. Some 200 people, including Israeli ambassador to Japan, H.E. Eli Cohen, and representatives of Japan's political and religious circles, attended the ceremony.

The prize is awarded annually to a living individual or an organization that is making a significant contribution to world peace through promoting inter-religious cooperation. A screening committee made up of religious leaders of international stature selects the recipient from among candidates nominated by religious leaders and other persons of intellectual stature around the world.

At the presentation, H.E. Bishop Gunnar Stålset, head of the Diocese of Oslo of the Church of Norway and a former member of the screening committee for the Nobel Peace Prize, described the screening process for the prize, and Rev. Nichiko Niwano, the foundation's president, presented a citation, a medal, and an award of 20 million Japanese yen to the rabbis who attended the ceremony on behalf of the organization.

Following the congratulatory addresses by special guests, Rabbi Ma'ayan Turner, chairperson of Rabbis for Human Rights, delivered an acceptance address on behalf of the organization (the text of her address appears on pages 29–32).

The tragic situation in the Middle East is in the hearts of everyone concerned with peace and justice. At the core of the conflict stands the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Among the many religiously based organizations commit-

ted to promoting the ideals of human rights, justice, and compassion for all the people in the region, Rabbis for Human Rights holds a unique position. It brings together more than 130 Reformed, Orthodox, Conservative, and Reconstructionist rabbis and rabbinical students in a committed fellowship for justice and reconciliation.

The organization, Rabbis for Human Rights, is built on, and promotes, concepts and values that are central to Jewish tradition and law. These ideals are often marginalized in a search for legitimate "security" and "safety," which, in many cases, does not honor the equally legitimate rights of "others." The organization was founded as a not-for-profit organization in 1988 in response to serious abuses of the human rights of Palestinians by Israel's military authorities in their attempt to suppress the first Intifada. It represented a reaction to the indifference of many of the country's religious leaders and citizens to the suffering of innocent people who were seen as "the enemy."

As a rabbinic voice of conscience in Israel, Rabbis for Human Rights is not affiliated with any political party or political ideology. It has many volunteers and its members are Israeli citizens. Basing itself on a central pillar of Judaism—the dignity of every human being—it decries the denial of Palestinian rights to land, freedom of movement, and the lack of adequate access to livelihood, health care, and education. Although focusing specifically on Palestinian human rights as a measure of Jewish ethical behavior, it also concerns itself with the rights and dignity of other groups, such as foreign workers and Ethiopian Jews. It is devoted to championing the equal status of women. Among many issues on its agenda, it is engaged in improving Israel's health system for those who lack adequate ac-

cess to it. It also advocates an Israeli bill of rights as a guarantee for all citizens regardless of ethnic or religious identity or national provenance.

The premise of its actions is that by following Jewish teachings that call for love of one's neighbor, justice, and compassion, greater security and safety for all the inhabitants of the region will be achieved rather than the reverse. It demonstrates, to both the religious and non-religious sectors of the Israeli public, a face of Judaism that sees the divine image in all human beings. It is convinced that human rights abuses are not compatible with the age-old Jewish tradition of moral responsibility for the Biblical care for "the stranger in your midst."

Rabbis for Human Rights has received the "Speaker of the Knesset Award" for Quality of Life in the field of "Enhancing the Rule of Law and Democratic values, Protecting Human Rights, and Encouraging Tolerance and Mutual Respect."

The activities of Rabbis for Human Rights are concentrated in four main fields: education, non-violent fieldwork, legal campaigns, and interfaith activities. The organization serves as an important information outlet on human rights and publishes books and articles for the education of the public at large.

Through its various programs the organization takes a practical approach to the challenges facing individuals, groups, and the whole state of Israel.

The Niwano Peace Foundation awarded the 23rd peace prize to Rabbis for Human Rights in order to honor the organization as a unique voice of the compassion, care for others, love, and justice that is at the heart of Judaism and indeed of all other religions, at a time when religious fundamentalism and extremism receives so much publicity in the Middle East. □

# The Day Is Short and the Work Is Great

The 23rd Niwano Peace Prize Acceptance Address

by Ma'ayan Turner  
Chairperson of Rabbis for Human Rights

It is a great honor for me to be here to accept the 2006 Niwano Peace Prize on behalf of Rabbis for Human Rights. We feel today both pride and humility before you who have chosen our organization, and before God. I think that we have the right to feel proud of our accomplishments, small as they may be, in a region and a world

*Niwano Peace Foundation president, Rev. Nichiko Niwano, presenting a certificate to Rabbi Turner as two other representatives of Rabbis for Human Rights, Rabbi Arik Ascherman (center) and Rabbi Yehiel Grenimann (right) look on.*

that is still battered by inhuman conduct. Yet we are humbled by all that remains to be done and by the knowledge that we have not acted, and cannot act, alone. We are thankful for the recognition you have afforded us. Receiving the Niwano Peace Prize encourages, and indeed enables, us to do more. May we, with the help of Heaven, dedicate ourselves to human rights and peace with renewed vigor of spirit and strength of heart.

The Hebrew name of Rabbis for Human Rights is *Shomrei Mishpat*, which means "Guardians of Justice," coming from the words of the biblical prophet Isaiah: "Happy are those who guard justice, who do right at all times." What is the meaning of guardianship?

A story tells of a king who called to himself two of his trusted advisors and gave to each of them a bushel of wheat, saying: "I am going on a long journey—I wish you to guard these for me until I return." One of the advisors immediately ordered to have made the strongest and safest box, into which he carefully placed the wheat, and then he locked it with a special gold key that he kept with him at all times. The other advisor, however, took the wheat and beat out the grains; some he planted and some he had ground into fine flour. When the king returned, the second advisor was able to greet him with a fresh-baked loaf of succulent bread and to show him a beautiful growing, golden field, but the first advisor had nothing but the wheat with which he started.

A rabbi is a Jew who has studied much in the formative Jewish texts and codes of law and custom and leads his or her fellow Jews in learning and understanding, in prayer, and in ritual and Jewish doing. There are many who believe that the job of a rabbi is to preserve Jewish tradition and that the only way to do this is through study and through stringent observance of the laws and rituals, the daily and weekly and yearly cycles of celebration and remembrance and prayer. These are indeed important tasks of the rabbi, and all Jews, and they are indeed a part of what the members of Rabbis for Human Rights do, all to the best of our own understanding, but they cannot preserve Judaism alone; they are a dry bushel of wheat.

The importance of study is that it teaches us how to act. The importance of prayer and ritual is in focusing our spiritual lives to lead us in our daily interactions with the rest of humanity. A Jew cannot live Jewishly alone, without a congregation or community. Human interaction is our growing golden field. The codes of Jewish law, from the Bible onward, give us much guidance in how to behave toward our fellow people, and these are things that are best preserved not by locking ourselves away in our houses of study and prayer but by taking an active part in the life of our community, our nation, our world. Our guardianship must be one of doing. This is the great strength, and the great challenge, of Rabbis for Human Rights. We study and we teach—we are running programs for teachers, for schoolchildren, for soldiers, and for students that help them internalize the connection between Jewish tradition and human rights. We also study and teach with leaders of other faiths, often finding that differing traditions can nonetheless have much in common. We also act: we lobby and protest against economic policies that are detrimental to the poor and unemployed, to the elderly, and to the sick. We work to empower those affected by these policies to help themselves and those around them. We accompany Palestinian farmers to their lands when they are threatened by violence on the part of some Jews who think that Judaism is only about Jewish rights, particularly rights to the Land of Israel, and we petition the courts to assure that agricultural access be allowed and protected. We rebuild homes and replant trees. We visit victims of

*Rabbi David Forman, founder of Rabbis for Human Rights, visiting an Israeli victim of terrorism with Islamic and Christian clerics.*

terror. We deliver humanitarian aid. We argue and rethink. We manage to hold together the only organization in Israel that includes orthodox and nonorthodox rabbis of a variety of denominations—that in and of itself is, I think, worthy of a peace prize! Values can be preserved only by fulfilling them. The Jewish values of justice and equality of all people must be guarded through our action and study together. This is the meaning of “Shomrei Mishpat.”

In *Pirkei Avot*, the Sayings of our Sages (2:15), we learn: “Rabbi Tarfon said: The day is short and the work is great, the workers are lazy, the reward is very great and the Master of the House is pressing.”

The day is short and the work is great: often we can be overwhelmed by all the work there is to be done on issues of human rights in Israel and the territories it controls—the abuses are many, and often we can feel that the time is running out—this is particularly true on the individual level:

the single mother who has no food for her children, the pregnant woman at the checkpoint, the soldier with his finger on the trigger—for all of these the day is indeed very short, and answers must be given, solutions found, help offered now. Also, on the larger stage, we can feel that the clock is ticking—if human-rights abuses in the Territories continue to escalate, the outlook is grim for both Israelis and Palestinians, as terror is all too likely to show its ugly and brutal face more often. If terror—perhaps one of the most awful abuses of the right to life—continues, then more Israelis will feel that all Palestinians, all Arabs, are enemies and, act accordingly. If the weak and poor continue to be pushed aside and denied rights to a dignified living, then society is in danger of economic and moral collapse. The day is short; the work must be done now. How difficult for us then to engage in long-term planning—educating future leaders and soldiers, and the public at large, is a slow process. Interfaith discussions, empowerment training, the growth of an olive tree—these are things that take time. And yet they must be done.

Every member of Rabbis for Human Rights acts out of a boundless love for Israel—the people, the land, and the state. We pray and we act in order to make the people of Israel a light unto the nations, the Land of Israel a house of prayer for all people, and the State of Israel a model of social justice that does not oppress the orphan, the widow, and the stranger, a responsible democracy, striving toward the prophetic vision: nation shall not lift up sword against nation. Some accuse us of being unrealistic idealists. To them we reply in the words of Theodore Herzl, the father of modern Zionism: “If you will it, it is no dream.” And others accuse us of undermining the state when we criticize its actions and policies. To them we reply in the words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel: “In a democratic society, some are guilty, but all are responsible.” If we do not decry the abuses of power and the injustices of our country, then they will remain with us, destroying our society from within much more effectively than any enemy without. And we do have enemies. The State of Israel and the Jewish people are still objects of hate for some individuals and nations. Terrorism poses a very real threat to Jews, to Israelis, and it is the responsibility of the state to do all that it can to protect its people. Yet our tradition teaches that justice must be reached by just means. The careful balance between security for Israelis and fairness toward Palestinians and the rights of *both* to self-determination and, most important, to life, cannot be treated lightly. The day is short, both sides need solutions soon, and the work is very great.

The workers are lazy: it is painful to admit, but we are not doing all we can. And here the “we” is a number of circles of people: the staff of Rabbis for Human Rights indeed do all that they can, with limited time and budgets, but the membership, the people whose names are on our lists, are not active enough, often enough; we need to work to see that the incredible things that we can do are indeed realized, that we take pride and take part! The wider circle is our friends,

*Students participating in a program on Judaism and democracy held by Rabbis for Human Rights.*

*Executive members of Rabbis for Human Rights.*

supporters, and partner organizations—without them, we would not be able to do much; we would not have people to accompany Palestinian farmers to their fields, to interview families whose homes are threatened with destruction; we would not have people to hand out rights brochures to the unemployed; we would not have letters written to members of the Knesset and members of the American and other governments decrying human-rights abuses; we would not have the legal, organizational, and field experience that other groups give in the joint struggle for equity; and we would not have the finances to help victims of terror, victims of violence, and so many others who need our help. And yet there is more that could be done. We need to learn to better activate our volunteers and work *with* other organizations and not replicate work that they do; we need to motivate donors to become letter writers, letter writers to become activists, and activists to become more dedicated. A wider circle yet is the Israeli public: they do not hear our voice often enough, clearly enough, when we cry for a state that is just and also Jewish, because to be just without Judaism is not the reason the state was founded, and to be Jewish without justice is a perversion of Judaism, and of the state. We praise the Holy One who gives strength to the weary, and we dedicate ourselves again to overcoming our laziness and to energizing our partners in the sacred work we do, because:

The reward is very great. (Here, I am not talking about the prize, although that too is very great and will help us to maintain both the body and soul of our organization, to increase our doing, and to enrich our feeling of spiritual well-being in knowing that our work is appreciated.) The true reward of our work is the work itself. When we are able to change government economic decrees, when we are able to rescue a home or provide the physical and legal protection

for Palestinian farmers to work their lands, we feel greatly rewarded. And even when we do not attain all of our goals, we are rewarded by the smiles of our partners, the respect of those for whom we have tried to make a difference. Often, although we have not succeeded in causing a drastic change in the situation, we know that we have changed hearts and minds—we have shown Palestinians that there are Jews, Israelis, rabbis who care about their welfare and are not prepared to sit quietly when *their* rights are abused by *our* government or our fellow citizens; we have shown secular Jewish Israelis that Judaism has a message of peace and human respect and that there are rabbis whose concern is the Palestinian's body, and the foreign worker's wallet, as well as the Jew's soul. We have worked side by side with Palestinians and seen their humanity with our own eyes. Rabbi Arik Ascherman, our executive director, often tells of the Arab villagers who bring their children to meet him, to show them a caring Israeli Jew. My own son, who is four, was filmed for both Israeli and Palestinian television as he helped plant olive trees with Palestinians on the Jewish holiday of *Tu BiShvat*, the "birthday of the trees." What greater reward can there be than planting the seeds of hope for future generations?

The Master of the House is pressing: Rabbis for Human Rights came into being because as rabbis, as religious Jews, we *must* work for human rights. It is our calling. God is the creator of the world and all that is in it, and therefore God is the ruler, who commands and demands. God saved the Israelites, the ancestors of the Jewish people, from slavery, and in doing so enabled us, as free people, to follow God's laws. God demands that we love our neighbor, and also love the stranger. God requires us to emulate God's qualities—visiting the sick, clothing the naked. God commands us to seek peace and pursue it. God expects us to feel the joy and

*Leaders of Rabbis for Human Rights carrying quotes from the Torah during a rally calling for economic justice.*

also the pain of others. God created within us the ability to change our environment and ourselves. It is not enough to pray that God send healing to our battered nation and world, unless we, too, can make the effort to be God's partners in the work of repair.

Rabbis for Human Rights was founded in 1988. Today Rabbis for Human Rights is eighteen years old. In the Jewish tradition, the number eighteen holds special significance, for written in Hebrew letters it spells the word *chai*—life. Eighteen years ago, Rabbis for Human Rights was a small circle of dedicated colleagues, and now we number more than one hundred members and a growing, and very talented, staff in Israel and have sister organizations in other countries and thousands of friends and supporters in Israel and around the world. We have indeed added to the life of our organization, yet our goal has always been to act for life on behalf of those whose rights to life, livelihood, and dignity are abused. Jewish tradition teaches that human life is immeasurably precious and that one who saves even a single human life is to be considered as one who has saved the entire world, for, as we learn in the very beginning of the Bible, a single human was created by God and from that first being, all humanity descended. We do not know the color of that being's skin or hair, the shape of its nose or eyes—one tradition says that God took dust of different colors from all the corners of the earth with which to make this first human, and another tradition says that this creature was both male and female—but we do know that it contained a God-like soul, an unquenchable divine spark, for it was created in God's image, and that image remains in all of its descendants, in all human creatures—regardless of their race or gender, regardless of their beliefs, regardless of their abilities.

This is the quintessential basis of religious human rights. This, the first of our texts, teaches us categorically that all humans have infinitesimal, God-given value and that there-

fore it is our divinely mandated responsibility to respect all human beings and ensure their rights. Humans are created in God's image and therefore have inalienable rights. Humans are created in God's image and therefore have irrevocable responsibilities.

All too often, particularly in the Middle East, religion is seen to be the problem, and not the answer to the violence and the denial of human rights. Fundamentalists on all sides claim that right, and rights, belong only to those who follow their beliefs. They claim God as their exclusive property, and therefore God's favors, too, are theirs alone—the land, the law, the right to life. All too often secular humanists reject all religion as the basis of inequality between people, between peoples, and as being out of touch with modern realities. Yet it is the task of all people of faith to speak out against both rejectionism and fundamentalism and to stress the values of truth, justice, and peace that must be the basis for a true relationship with the Holy One and with all creation. "The world exists because of three things, because of truth and because of judgment and because of peace." (*Pirkei Avot*)

Hans Küng, the previous recipient of the Niwano Peace Prize, suggests that we should reunderstand the biblical commandment "Thou shalt not kill" in positive terms, as "Thou shalt have respect for life," which calls for the safety of all minorities, social and political justice, a culture of non-violence, and respect for the environment. This is a beautiful example of the way that religion can speak to the real issues of today's world, leading us away from particularistic and fundamentalist "religiosity" and directing our feet to paths of respect for all creation. Such paths lead us to actions like that of our sister organization, Rabbis for Human Rights—North America, in their work to eradicate government-sanctioned torture.

Life is the most precious gift of God, the Source of Life. In this, our eighteenth year, our year of *chai*, of life, we commit ourselves above all to sanctifying life and helping to shape a society in which life flourishes.

As Rabbis for Human Rights receives the Niwano Peace Prize today, we receive it also in the name of those who are our partners, our supporters—religious and nonreligious, Jewish and non-Jewish—who have worked, dreamed, studied, and prayed with us. We accept this prize in the name of all those whose examples and teachings throughout the generations light our path. And we dedicate this prize to those who are suffering, to the victims of human-rights abuses, whom we will do our utmost to help, strengthened now by your recognition.

We must thank Rabbi David Forman, our founder and first chairperson, and all of those who established our organization, and Rabbi Ascherman, our tireless and fearless executive director, and all of our truly dedicated staff. And above all we must thank the Holy One of Blessing who has given us the opportunity and ability to do this holy work, and we must pray: *Umaase yadeinu konena aleinu*: May You establish the work of our hands. □



# Why Interreligious Cooperation Is Essential

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.*

In its essence religion does not reject others but instead allows us to think of others with the same regard we have for ourselves. The oneness of self and others is fundamental to religion. Thus even when it is fractured into differing sects and groups, it is not natural that they should fight one another. People of religion should, rather, study each other's doctrines and practices, discuss issues of religious faith that are of mutual concern, and on that basis, work together to establish world peace. Wherever I have traveled, I have taken every opportunity to speak about the need for interreligious cooperation based on the true meaning of religion. We must acknowledge and respect the vari-

ous differences of religious expression that are found among groups and societies, for it is the words and actions that express faith that are deeply ingrained in the emotions of believers. Such emotions are important, and we should be sensitive to them.

Because human beings have not been able to recognize and accept the underlying principle that is common to the various faiths, they see only differences in objects of worship, expressions of doctrine, and religious practice, and are quick to accuse what is different of being unorthodox or even heretical. Thus they react emotionally, slighting what is different, rejecting and suppressing it.

It is not difficult to understand why there are so many different religions in the world. In the past, communications were severely limited, and people lived in small communities based on their ethnic group. Ancient societies were made up of such groups, each with their own "god." Some "gods" were regarded as the tutelary deities of the individual, village, or tribe, and others had aspects of the fundamental life force of the universe. The former gods obviously belonged to one tribe and no other, while the latter gods could be, at their root, common to all religions of the world.

In an age when communications between peoples and countries were poor, there was little possibility of any exchange of information among them, and so people did not understand that their religious ideas stemmed from a common source. Because their gods had different names and they expressed their religious beliefs in different ways, they thought they believed in different divinities. As a result, they accused anyone holding different religious views of heresy, and it was difficult to reach the mutual understanding necessary for them to get along with each other. Without understanding, they resorted to conflict and slaughter and other such reprehensible acts.

Today things are different. With the great advances in transport and communications of modern times, the world has become a much smaller place, and people everywhere are increasingly subscribing to common patterns of thought.

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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.*

*Continued on page 46*

# Kuan-yin

by Gene Reeves

*The name of the most popular of all the Buddhist bodhisattvas can be translated as “Regarder of the Cries of the World.” Associated with both wisdom and compassion, this bodhisattva has many different portrayals and manifestations, both male and female.*

One could easily devote an entire article of this kind to a discussion of the names of the bodhisattva Kuan-yin, without doubt the most popular and most often portrayed of Buddhist bodhisattvas. In Sanskrit this bodhisattva is known primarily as Avalokiteshvara. This name was translated into Chinese characters written in Wade-Giles transliteration as Kuan-shih-yin, which is often shortened to Kuan-yin. The Pinyin forms of these names are Guanshiyin and Guanyin. These same Chinese characters are pronounced in slightly different ways in other Chinese dialects, such as Cantonese, where Kuan-yin becomes Kwun Yum, and Japanese, where it becomes Kannon. In addition, the name Kuan-shih-tzu-tsai (Kanzejizai in Japanese pronunciation) or, in the shorter version, Kuan-tzu-tsai (Kanjizai) can often be seen. In the West, Kuan-yin is also known as the Goddess of Mercy, but this is not a translation.

While there is no universal agreement on how best to translate any of these names, the three characters involved

in Kuan-shih-yin (Kanzeon in Japanese pronunciation) mean approximately this: *kuan* has to do with seeing, sensing, observing, or perceiving; *shih* means “world”; and *yin* basically means “sound.” So a very literal rendering of this name might be “perceiver of the world’s sounds.” But the kind of perception involved here is not an indifferent observing, not mere perception; it involves compassion. And the sounds involved are not just any noises but the cries of the suffering of the world. So I translate the name as “Regarder of the Cries of the World.” While useful as a translation, that is not convenient for some purposes, so, as I think that the most commonly used name in English, as in Chinese, is Kuan-yin, that is what I will primarily use here.

In similar fashion, Kuan-shih-tzu-tsai can mean “Regarder of the World’s Freedom.” From Sanskrit there are also other names, such as “Light of the World’s Cries,” and so on. And this same bodhisattva also has a great variety of names derived from numerous portrayals in Chinese Buddhist art, images that for the most part are derived from stories about the bodhisattva’s many different manifestations, both male and female. The most common of these include “Thousand-armed” or “Thousand-handed” or “Thousand-armed and thousand-eyed” Kuan-yin, so named because the image has a great many arms, typically forty-two being used to represent a thousand. Often each of those hands has an eye in it. More often they hold a symbol of some kind, quite often some kind of implement or tool, such as a willow branch to drive away illness, a conch to summon friendly spirits, a vase for dispensing water or nectar, a monk’s staff, a sutra, a bowl of fruit, and so on. Other popular forms include the “Sacred” or “Holy” Kuan-yin, the Water and Moon Kuan-yin, the White-robed Kuan-yin, the Kuan-yin of Eleven Faces, the Fish-basket Kuan-yin, and the Wish-fulfilling Kuan-yin. It is often said that there are six forms of Kuan-yin, corresponding to the six kinds of living beings who are subject to rebirth, but there are at least two very different sets of six, and many popular forms of Kuan-yin are not included in either set of six. There are also lists of

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*White-robed Kuan-yin (Byakue Kannon), attributed to the Muromachi-period Zen monk-painter Mincho (1352–1431). Ink on paper. Tokyo National Museum.*

the thirty-three embodiments of Kuan-yin found in chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra. Other east Asian sets show Kuan-yin in fifty-three forms, combining images from various Chinese sources.

### Stories

Though certainly not the only one, the primary discussion of Kuan-yin found within Buddhist sutras is the twenty-fifth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, titled “The Universal Gateway of Kuan-yin Bodhisattva.” In east Asia this chapter has frequently been circulated and used as an independent sutra, typically known as the Kuan-yin Sutra. But it is important to recognize that there are a great many other Chinese texts, some also known as sutras, some of which are Buddhist, some Taoist, some simply Chinese, that are devoted to Kuan-yin or in which Kuan-yin plays a large part. And there are other scriptures from India, especially the Avatamsaka Sutra, in which Kuan-yin plays an important role.

Though elements of it subsequently became very impor-

tant in east Asian Buddhism, the story found in the Lotus Sutra is not particularly dramatic or memorable.

A bodhisattva named Inexhaustible Mind asked the Buddha why the bodhisattva Kuan-yin is called “Regarder of the Cries of the World.” The Buddha explained that if those who are suffering sincerely call Kuan-yin’s name with all their heart, they will immediately be heard and will be able to free themselves from suffering. A wide variety of possible misfortunes from which one can be saved and a large variety of benefits that can accrue from worshipping the bodhisattva are mentioned. If a huge ship with thousands and thousands of fortune seekers is caught in a storm at sea and blown ashore on an island of terrible beasts, if just one person calls to Kuan-yin, all of them will be saved. By calling upon Kuan-yin, people can be saved not only from those who attack them but also from their own lust, anger, or stupidity. A woman wanting a boy or girl child will be granted that wish by Kuan-yin. The bodhisattva sometimes takes the form of a buddha, a pratyekabuddha, a shravaka, a king, a prime minister, a wife, boy, or girl, or any of thirty-three

bodies in order to help those who can be helped in such a way.

Inexhaustible Mind Bodhisattva then took an extremely valuable necklace from around his neck and offered it to Kuan-yin. But the bodhisattva would not accept it, until the Buddha pleaded with Kuan-yin to do so out of compassion both for the bodhisattva Inexhaustible Mind and for all other living beings. Then Kuan-yin accepted the necklace and divided it into two parts, offering one to Shakyamuni Buddha and the other to the stupa of Abundant Treasures Buddha.

The two elements that have been lifted out of this story and widely used for various purposes are the idea that simply calling the name of the bodhisattva will be sufficient to save one from any kind of difficulty and the idea that Kuan-yin takes on a great variety of forms.

### Princess Miao-shan

In China, while both the concept of appealing for help by calling the name of the bodhisattva and the idea that Kuan-yin takes on many forms remained important elements in Kuan-yin devotion and religious practices, a great many other stories, extracanonical stories, especially stories of embodiments of Kuan-yin, attracted popular attention. Probably the most common of these stories to come down to the present day is the story of Princess Miao-shan.<sup>1</sup>

Miao-shan (meaning “wonderfully good”) was the third daughter of King Miao-chuang. She was naturally attracted to Buddhism, keeping a vegetarian diet from a young age, reading Buddhist scriptures during the day, and meditating at night. Having no sons, the king hoped to choose an heir from among his sons-in-law. When Miao-shan became old enough to marry, unlike her two older sisters, who had married men chosen by their father, she refused to wed. This angered her father so much that he found a variety of ways in which to punish her. For a while, for example, she was made to do hard work in the garden. When those tasks were completed, she was allowed to go to the White Sparrow nunnery, where she underwent further trials designed to discourage her from becoming a nun. But she persevered, so the king burned down the temple, killing the five hundred nuns who lived there, and he had Miao-shan executed for disobedience.

While her body was being protected by a mountain spirit, Miao-shan’s spirit traveled to a kind of purgatory, where she was able to save many beings by preaching the Dharma to them. Returning to earth, she went to Fragrant Mountain, meditated for nine years, and became fully awakened. By this time the king had become very ill with a mysterious incurable disease.

Disguised as a wandering monk, Miao-shan went to her father and told him that there was only one thing that could save him—a medicine that was made from the eyes and hands of someone who had never felt anger. And she even told him where such a person could be found. Then she

offered her own eyes and hands to be turned into medicine, which was taken by the king, curing him of his disease.

The king then went to Fragrant Mountain to give thanks to the one who had saved him. There he immediately recognized the ascetic without eyes or hands as his own daughter. Overwhelmed with remorse, the king and his entire family converted to Buddhism. And Miao-shan was transformed into her real form—Kuan-yin with a thousand arms and eyes. Soon after this, Miao-shan died and her remains placed in a pagoda.<sup>2</sup>

### Calling the Name of Kuan-yin

Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, said that chapter 25 is the most misunderstood chapter of the Lotus Sutra.<sup>3</sup> What he meant by this is that, properly understood, bodhisattvas are not gods from whom we should expect to receive special treatment, even in times of great trouble; bodhisattvas should be models for how we ourselves can be bodhisattvas, at least some of the time. In the Horin-kaku Guest Hall at the headquarters of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo there is a very large and magnificent statue of the Thousand-armed Kuan-yin. In each of the hands we can see an implement of some kind, tools that represent skills that can be used to help others. When Founder Niwano first showed that statue to me, he emphasized that it should not be understood to mean that we should pray to Kuan-yin to save us from our own problems; rather, we should understand that the meaning of Kuan-yin’s thousand skills is that we should develop a thousand skills for helping others.

In fact, however, Kuan-yin has more often been understood by devotees to be one who can do things for those who are devoted to her. This is based, at least in part, on the part of the story in the Lotus Sutra in which we are told that one has only to call out the name of the bodhisattva in order to be saved from a long list of calamities and dangers. One can be saved not only from external dangers but also from the three inner poisons—from lust or greed, from anger or rage, and from folly or foolishness. Praying to Kuan-yin can also result in having a baby of the desired gender, one who will be blessed with great merit, virtue, and wisdom if a boy and one who is marked with great beauty and who has long-planted roots of virtue and will be loved and respected by all if a girl.

The Buddha says to Inexhaustible Mind Bodhisattva: “If there were countless hundreds of thousands of billions of living beings experiencing suffering and agony who heard of Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World and wholeheartedly called his name, Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World would immediately hear their cries, and all of them would be freed from suffering.”

The list of misfortunes from which one can be saved by calling upon Kuan-yin is interesting but not terribly important, as the meaning is quite clear—Kuan-yin can save anyone from any misfortune. The list simply provides concrete examples. This power to save is why early Jesuit missionar-

the Buddha to bring the Dharma in some fashion to ordinary people in the midst of their suffering. By his offering them, through countless indigenous images, texts, poems, and devotional practices, a kind of access to Kuan-yin's compassion, they gained strength to embody compassion in their own lives.

### Compassion Embodied

Buddhism, perhaps especially Indian Buddhism, was closely associated with the goal of "enlightenment," and therefore with a kind of wisdom, especially a kind of wisdom in which teachings are most important. Even the term for *Buddhism* in Chinese and Japanese means "Buddhist teaching."

With the development of Kuan-yin devotion, while wisdom remained important, compassion came to play a larger role in the relative status of Buddhist virtues, especially among illiterate common people. Thus, there was a slight shift in the meaning of the "bodhisattva way." From being primarily a way toward an enlightened mind, it became primarily the way of compassionate action to save others. Princess Miao-shan does, of course, teach her father a great deal, but we are not told that she was devoted to studying scriptures or to cultivating wisdom. She embodies compassion by devoting her hands and eyes to compassionate action.

The Lotus Sutra itself, I believe, can be used to support the primacy of either wisdom or compassion. When it is teaching in a straightforward way, the emphasis is on teaching the Dharma as the most effective way of helping or saving others. But, taken collectively, the parables of the Lotus Sutra suggest a different emphasis. The father of the children in the burning house does not teach the children how to cope with fire; he gets them out of the house. The father of the long-lost, poor son does not so much teach him in ordinary ways as he does by example and, especially, by encouragement. The guide who conjures up a fantastic city for weary travelers does not teach by giving them doctrines for coping with a difficult situation; instead, he gives them a place in which to rest, enabling them to go on. The doctor with the children who have taken poison tries to teach them to take some good medicine but fails and resorts instead to shocking them by announcing his own death. All of these actions require, of course, considerable intelligence or wisdom. But what is emphasized is that they are done by doers, people driven by compassion to benefit others.

More important, no doubt, compassion is a useful virtue, in that it can be effectively used by anyone. One of the most impressive things one can experience, as I have on many occasions, is the compassion that dying people often have for those around them. On many occasions I have seen dying people attempt to calm and cheer friends and relatives at their bedside. Of course, everyone can be wise to some degree as well, but there surely is a sense in which the way of compassionate action is more open to everyone than a way that emphasizes the acquisition of wisdom.

Compassion is best embodied in skill, in compassionate

*The statue of the Thousand-armed Kuan-yin (Senju Kannon), enshrined in the Horin-kaku Guest Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters in Tokyo.*

ies to China invented the term *Goddess of Mercy* to refer to Kuan-yin and relate her to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Kuan-yin, in fact, was a goddess of mercy for a great many, answering prayers and bringing them comfort.

Of course, those who would follow the bodhisattva way should see great bodhisattvas as models for us and not be looking to gods or goddesses for special favors.

A Chinese poem says:

The Dharma-body of Kuan-yin  
Is neither male nor female.  
If even the body is not the body,  
What attributes can there be? . . .  
Let it be known to all Buddhists:  
Do not cling to form.  
The bodhisattva is *you*;  
Not the picture or the image.

Still, respecting the hidden wisdom of ordinary people, we might see Kuan-yin devotion as a skillful means used by

practice. The tools in the hands of the Thousand-armed Kuan-yin symbolize the many means by which Kuan-yin can help living beings in need. This imagery is, I believe, revealing of the kind of wisdom embodied in Kuan-yin—not some kind of esoteric knowledge of the mind alone, but the practical wisdom found not only in minds but also in hands.

But skill is, after all, a kind of wisdom. So compassion should not be seen in contrast to wisdom but only in contrast to disembodied wisdom. To be compassionate is to embody compassion, not just to feel it or think about it or contemplate it. It is to actualize compassion in the world, wherever you are, and thus in your relationships with relatives, neighbors, friends, and strangers. It is to be compassionate. This is to embody the Buddha, that is, to give life to the Buddha in the present world.

Being embodied can be contrasted with being “on high,” as Avalokiteshvara is described in some Indian texts. To be embodied is to be a physical presence in this world. This means that we can see Kuan-yin not only in many splendid images in temples and museums but also in our mothers or sons or neighbors. Kuan-yin is not only a symbol of compassion, she *is* compassion, so that wherever compassion can be seen, Kuan-yin can be seen. Kuan-yin is not some god looking down at the world from a distance but the Buddha’s compassion embodied in the actual world of quite ordinary men and women.

Tradition also says that we should understand that we ourselves should embody Kuan-yin, that if, for example, we concentrate on Kuan-yin or recite the Kuan-yin chapter, we can open ourselves to compassion, not to some abstract compassion from a distance, but to actually embodying compassion by being compassionate in our own lives and behavior.

### The Universal Gateway

The title of the twenty-fifth chapter of the Lotus Sutra is “The Universal Gateway of Kuan-yin Bodhisattva.” This implies that while the way of monks and nuns, the way of wisdom, the road to perfect enlightenment, may be extremely difficult, the way of Kuan-yin is open to all. This may be seen as dependent on the idea of universal buddha-nature, the idea that every living being has the capacity and power to become a buddha. But the universal gateway of Kuan-yin is not necessarily dependent on the idea of buddha-nature. It is dependent, rather, on the idea that everyone can be compassionate, a far more accessible goal than becoming a buddha.

In the Lotus Sutra this idea is suggested by a list of the embodiments of Kuan-yin. Though these are often counted as thirty-three, and are sometimes even associated with other lists of thirty-three, such as the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods, the Lotus Sutra does not mention the number thirty-three but provides a list that can easily be counted as thirty, thirty-two, thirty-three, or even thirty-five. At temples in China, it is not uncommon to see a set of thirty-two

or thirty-three panels depicting the various ways in which Kuan-yin can be embodied. There is not enough space to include the entire list here, but a few observations should be made.

In each case, the text says that for those who need someone in such and such a body, Kuan-yin appears in that body and teaches the Dharma to them. This means that the way in which Kuan-yin appears to someone is dependent on what the perceiver needs. In other words, Kuan-yin appears to people in many forms not as a way of showing off some sort of magical power but as a way of responding to the needs of people; this is precisely what was called “skillful means” earlier in the Lotus Sutra. This is why, with the exception of a few named gods, the list is a list of generic titles. For example, it says that Kuan-yin appears in the form of a king but does not say that he appears in the form of “King So-and-So.” This means that Kuan-yin can appear to us in the form of anyone we meet, that anyone at all can be Kuan-yin for us.

The list includes shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and gods but begins with the embodiment of Kuan-yin as a buddha. Any Buddhist scholar, indeed any educated monk, can tell you that Kuan-yin is a bodhisattva, not a buddha. But countless laypeople, and not a few nuns as well, can tell you that Kuan-yin is a fully awakened buddha who has chosen to be in this world to help relieve the suffering of all living beings, an idea that can also be found in much Chinese Buddhist literature. The assertion in the Lotus Sutra that Kuan-yin appears in the body of a buddha to teach the Dharma to those who need someone in the body of a buddha in order to be saved suggests that it is quite reasonable for Kuan-yin to be the Buddha for someone. This tendency of ordinary people in east Asia to regard Kuan-yin as the Buddha can be seen as a certain kind of wisdom, a knowledge that understands that the Buddha can come to us in many different forms, including those of Kuan-yin. While often seen by scholars as a departure from scriptures, popular devotion to Kuan-yin can be seen as a fulfillment of the assertion in the Lotus Sutra that Kuan-yin can take on the body of a buddha.

Several of the forms listed in the Lotus Sutra are explicitly female. Included are a nun, a female lay believer, four kinds of housewives, and a girl. Some others could be male or female. Thus we can see that the transformation in China of Avalokiteshvara from male to both male and female and the identification of Kuan-yin with Princess Miao-shan are also entirely in accord with what is written in the Lotus Sutra.

### Kuan-yin and Amida Buddha

In India, as Avalokiteshvara, Kuan-yin was associated with the god Shiva. Both are called Maheshvara (Great Lord) and descriptions of the two are often the same. Potalaka, Avalokiteshvara’s mountain home, is also very similar to Shiva’s. In China, this Potalaka would be identified with an island in Hangzhou Bay called “Puto-shan” (Universal Buddha Moun-

tain, despite the fact that it really is not a mountain), which is a major site for Kuan-yin devotion and tourism.

In addition to chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra, probably the most influential appearance of Kuan-yin in Buddhist sutras of Indian origin is in the Pure Land sutras, especially the Sutra on Contemplation of the Buddha of Infinite Life. There Avalokiteshvara appears, along with Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva, as an attendant of Amida Buddha. The two bodhisattvas, whose features are described in great detail, serve primarily for guiding the spirits of the dead to Amida Buddha's Pure Land in the West. In artistic images, these two bodhisattvas often appear as a triad, with Amida in the middle, Mahasthamaprapta on his right, and Kuan-yin on his left. Both Mahasthamaprapta and Kuan-yin are dressed as Indian princes, with ample robes and jewelry of various kinds, and can be distinguished from each other mainly by the fact that Kuan-yin has an image of Amida Buddha in his headdress. Most images of Kuan-yin adopt this convention of having Amida Buddha's image in the headdress.

The close association of Kuan-yin with Amida continues to the present day, especially among followers of Pure Land Buddhism, a very large percentage of Chinese, Japanese, and American Buddhists. Kuan-yin's rise to preeminence among Buddhist figures in east Asia can be attributed in large part to the rise in popularity of Pure Land Buddhism among ordinary people, both in China and in Japan.

### Male and Female

The story related above is found in chapter 25, but much more than with any other story in the Lotus Sutra, the story of Kuan-yin develops more profoundly and significantly outside the sutra, in Chinese religion and culture, beginning around the end of the tenth century. Centering on Kuan-yin devotion rather than doctrine, Chinese Buddhism gradually evolved from a religion of aristocrats and monks into a popular religion of the common people. In images, Kuan-yin was portrayed less and less as an Indian prince and more often in a relaxed pose, sitting on a rock, for example. She is portrayed, in other words, as accessible to common people. And, like virtually all Chinese gods but unlike Indian bodhisattvas, Kuan-yin was increasingly seen as a human being, even one who has a birthday.

In this process, for reasons that are both obscure and complicated, Kuan-yin began to be perceived and portrayed not only as a male figure but also as female, and quite often as androgynously male and female. Female Kuan-yin figures are often dressed in a white robe, perhaps signifying that Kuan-yin is not a monastic but a layperson. As far as I know, there is no precedent for such female, white-robed Kuan-yin images outside China. She is clearly a Chinese development. While it is sometimes said that in China the male Avalokiteshvara was transformed into a female, I think it is important to recognize that the tradition of both male and female forms has continued in east Asia down to the present. Thus Kuan-yin should not be regarded as a male

transformed into a female but as one who is both male and female.

Another Chinese development in which Kuan-yin plays a unifying role is the common portrayal of her as being accompanied by, or served by, Sudhana and the Dragon Princess, a boy and a girl—one from the Avatamsaka Sutra, the other from the Lotus Sutra.

All human beings, I believe, have both male and female qualities, but strict adherence to the ideas that all buddhas are male, and that nuns should always be subservient to monks, restricts access in both women and men to their female selves. By being a buddha who is both male and female, Kuan-yin provides a kind of balance to the overwhelmingly male-oriented weight of Buddhist tradition, enabling women to appreciate their value and men to appreciate the woman often hidden in themselves.

### Lowland Buddhism

Kuan-yin, I have said on many occasions, represents a kind of "lowland Buddhism." By this I mean that in contrast to those who would see religions as a matter of climbing to a mountaintop for enjoyment of some kind of "peak experience," the Lotus Sutra, especially as it is embodied in Kuan-yin, is a religion that emphasizes the importance of being earthly, of being this-worldly, of being involved in relieving suffering. Some prominent Buddhists, especially in Taiwan, have called this "humanistic Buddhism." The longer, Sanskrit Heart Sutra has Avalokiteshvara looking down from on high, but the shorter, Chinese Heart Sutra knows nothing of that. In east Asia, Kuan-yin is a bodhisattva of the earth, one who sits on rocks, one who wears a simple white robe, one who takes on a great variety of human forms, including female forms, one who appears in a great variety of indigenous stories and scriptures, as one who embodies compassion in this world.

Like Kuan-yin, I believe that we should also be lowland Buddhists, seeking the low places, the valleys, even the earthy and dirty places, where people are suffering and in need. That is how we will meet the bodhisattva Kuan-shih-yin, at least if we are lucky or perceptive. That is where we will find those who hear and respond with compassion to the cries and sorrows of this world. They too are bodhisattvas of compassion, Kuan-shih-yin embodied. □

### Notes

1. For this and much of this article, I am indebted to Chün-fang Yü's wonderful book *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). Anyone with even a passing interest in Kuan-yin or east Asian Buddhism should read this book, remarkable not only for insights gained from familiarity with Kuan-yin devotion but also for extensive use of popular materials usually ignored by scholars.

2. This account of Miao-shan follows quite closely the account given by Chün-fang Yü in *Kuan-yin*, pp. 293–94.

3. *Buddhism for Today* (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing, 1976), p. 377.

# Aspiring to Right Liberation

by Santikaro

*Robert D. Larson was a recent university graduate when he joined the U.S. Peace Corps in 1980 and went to Thailand. He was later ordained there, in 1985, as Santikaro Bhikkhu. He studied under the late Ajahn Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906–93), the most eminent Theravada monk-teacher in Thailand, translating his discourses and writings into English, leading meditation retreats, and participating in socially engaged Buddhist activities. After his teacher's death, he returned to America and began a Dhammic community named Liberation Park outside Chicago, where people can pursue the realization of the essence of Buddhist teachings, thus bringing spiritual values back into the modern world. Although he has left the monkhood, Santikaro remains committed to helping transmit Ajahn Buddhadasa's teachings as true guidelines for human life. Santikaro was recently in Japan, where he spoke of his experience in Thailand and his hopes for sharing the Dhamma among his fellow Americans.*

Many people come to Liberation Park for reasons related to healing. In America, as elsewhere, physical stress and psychological suffering continue to increase, in large part due to worsening polarization: the rich are getting richer; the middle class is being left behind; and the poor are being abandoned. Two million people are in prisons across the United States—often the result of merely using drugs, without crimes against people. We also have problems of obesity, an unhealthy diet, social problems, and so forth. Many Americans cannot now afford modern health care. And we are immorally and illegally at war. The problems in America look very bad these days.

One of the reasons people come to us is that we are a small haven of sanity for them. People are unhappy with stress and fear: fear of losing jobs, fear of terrorism, fear of a family member dying in Iraq, and now there is the fear of bird flu. People have to work harder to maintain their lifestyles, which is strange considering how unhealthy those lifestyles can be. And now, after the disaster of Hurricane Katrina, many people have been made aware of global warming, government incompetence, and the racism that permeates our society, though not as blatantly as before. We also face gender injustice between men and women, as well as toward gays and others.

Thus, Americans badly need places where we can explore healthy living, which I believe requires mature spirituality. For such people, we offer Buddhist meditation training, Dhamma teachings, discussions concerning how to practice in the current reality, qigong and yoga practice, Thai and cranial-sacral massage, and friendship. Soon we will offer the opportunity for people to join us on a farm outside the city where we can practice organic gardening, simplicity, and land

stewardship. We hope to learn from friends who are experienced in these areas so that we can provide opportunities to practice a well-rounded life within a Buddhist setting.

We also use the Enneagram, a system of understanding personality types that supplements our Buddhist teachings. We find it useful in understanding how people act, think, feel, communicate, and see differently. While we use the Buddha Dhamma as our core path in transforming our heart-mind, cultivating wisdom, and acting compassionately, the Enneagram helps us in specific applications because people vary in their temperaments, worldviews, and motivations. It also offers an understanding of how we need to adjust ourselves in different situations and is a wonderful tool for understanding each other.

Most of the people who work with us have social involvements of one kind or another. Unitarians are among our friends, and they bring the social awareness central to their tradition. One good friend is finishing his studies at Meadville/Lombard, the nearby Unitarian seminary. Other friends are active through the Chicago chapter of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship that a Zen teacher and I helped organize a couple of years ago. Others simply come for meditation or some peace and quiet amid their busy, stressful lives. Some come for deeper study of the Dhamma. I hope that those people who are participating in spiritual training and are also involved with social work will spread the Dhamma at the same time that they serve society. We want to support people who are working for a peaceful world. For us, the universe is where we must practice, whether in the woods or in the city.

Following Ajahn Buddhadasa's example, we try to support others without making them subservient to us. Those who



the United States about 180 years ago. On Sundays, I went to church fairly regularly, though I also tried to escape frequently. My parents are still very active in that church. During my college time, I first became interested in other traditions of Christianity, and later in Oriental philosophies and religions. My interest in the latter began rather superficially among friends with whom I dabbled in the *I Ching*. While majoring in English literature, I became interested in mythology and read books written by Joseph Campbell, as well as by his teacher Heinrich Zimmer, a great German scholar of mythology and religion. Around that time, I started to read the Bhagavad Gita and a few other Indian texts. My interests at that time were more about Hinduism than Buddhism, though I read a little about that as well.

When I graduated from college, I had no job. However, I must admit that I did not much want a job. In college I wanted to write fiction, primarily short stories, maybe novels. But I did not want an ordinary job. I had no interest in making money; I have never considered it very important. But I realized just before graduating from college that I would have to feed myself. So I thought about the Peace Corps. I wanted to do something that was good and worthwhile, and I thought that through the Peace Corps I could do something helpful as an American, experience other cultures, and learn about the world. Though it was more complicated than I first thought, in my naïveté, I believe I did more good than harm.

An important reason for deciding to join the Peace Corps was the impact of the Vietnam War that was raging while I was a teenager. Though I did not follow it in any depth, because of my age, an awareness that something was very wrong began to affect me. I began to question the stories we learned as children, which were more or less centered on how great our country is, how good we are, how everyone should like us. This led me to study literature, philosophy, psychology, and religion, even if each of them was difficult for me at that time. Deep down, I wanted to understand why people do not do the things that they could do to make the world better and often do harmful, even horrible, things. I could not fully understand that, but I realized that something really bad was going on. I was beginning to realize that not everything is so wonderful with America. There is a simplicity to this that sticks with me even though the issues are so complex. Why is it so difficult for us to follow the examples of the Buddha and other great teachers?

### Being Ordained a Monk

Before I became a Peace Corps volunteer, I had a few months of Thai-language training in Thailand and also underwent a preparation course to be an English teacher. My Peace Corps assignment was to be both an English teacher and an advisor on small agricultural projects for my Thai students and their families. About a week after arriving in Bangkok, I was sent with three of my colleagues to a village in Supanburi province, which is the primary rice basket in the center of

*Santikaro during the recent interview in Tokyo.*

are active in other groups—Buddhist and others—do so freely. I hope that we are able to help them bring more Dhamma into what they do and how they do it. As Buddhists, perhaps we have something special to offer. Buddhism has great riches that must be shared with whomever can benefit from Buddhist approaches. At the same time, we should also cooperate with other groups. Different Buddhist groups need to cooperate with one another. That is very important. And then we should also cooperate with other religions or other movements that aim for peace, for a healthy environment, and for the foundation of a real democracy.

Although I decided to become a monk in Thailand when I was twenty-seven, I was always interested in social issues. Fortunately, I found a teacher who spoke about Dhammic Socialism. My life has been largely guided by a sense of responsibility, obligation, and what is right. Especially after 1989, it was clear to me that there were problems in the world and that America had a big role in causing them. So I asked myself what I should do if I really wanted to work for peace and as someone who feels a responsibility to serve. After many years of trying to do work for peace in Thailand, I decided that I should return to my country in order to do something for Americans by transmitting the teachings of the Buddha as a primary vehicle for the sake of right liberation from suffering. Ajahn Buddhadasa's approach to those teachings has great potential in the U.S. I figure that less suffering in America will lead to America's doing less damage in the world.

### As a Peace Corps Volunteer

I was raised in a Christian family. We belonged to a denomination called the Disciples of Christ, which originated in

the country. In the temple of the village that was chosen for us, we used an open-air hall for our daily Thai language class while staying in the homes of rice farmers for a month. Everyday—six days a week—I went to the temple with the others. Because I studied seven hours a day and then went home to a Thai family that did not speak English, I got lots of practice. I went to sleep at eight o'clock simply because I was exhausted. But it was a wonderful experience indeed. My family and other villagers were so kind and generous.

We also participated in the weekly Buddhist observance ceremony called *wan phra*. All the villagers came to the temple; dogs also followed the people along the roads and paths to the temple grounds; children sat together with their parents and grandparents in the hall, some of them either playing on their grandparents' laps or playing in groups. My first impression was "how informal this all is" compared with an American church. I really appreciated their way of life and how truly relaxed and joyful they were about religion. And I, too, became more relaxed in such an atmosphere.

Most mornings we were invited to have tea with the abbot, who was very friendly. He received us with a warm smile, glad to see how our daily training in the Thai language was going. One day, toward the beginning of our language training, the abbot said to us: "In Thailand there is a custom of temporary ordination, so before you go home you should become Buddhist monks for a time." One guy said, "No way," and the other said, "Maybe," but I replied, "That sounds great!" So simply, I got the idea in my mind that "it's not a big deal to be a monk; it's something I should do, so I'll give it a try." I decided at that moment that before I went back to the United States I would be a monk for a while. Later I began to study Buddhism more seriously, and also began to meditate, so I planned to be a monk for perhaps three to six months, to learn more about Buddhism and meditation.

### An English Translator of Ajahn Buddhadasa

As my mission as a Peace Corps volunteer was wrapping up, I began planning to enter the Divinity School of the University of Chicago and obtain a Ph.D. in the history of religions. After being ordained and going to stay at Suan Mokkh, where Venerable Ajahn Buddhadasa Bhikkhu was the founder and main teacher, I noticed that people were coming from Europe, Japan, the United States, and elsewhere to study with him. Some wrote Ph.D. theses about him. I started to wonder, "Where is the best place to study religion—secondhand in a university or more directly where it is being lived?" I enjoyed the first six months of life living in the woods and practicing Dhamma. I was learning many new things and had many pleasant challenges. Also, it was considered poor form to disrobe just before the rainy-season retreat, so I delayed my plan. Then I waited another three months, till the new year. And then I decided a few more years were needed, and then five years, and then I

stopped thinking about it until much later, after some important changes began to happen.

When I started to work on translating Ajahn Buddhadasa's teachings, I had the chance to discuss the Dhamma with him directly, which has meant a great deal in my life, continuing to this day. He and I developed a good relationship around translating, both books and orally. He trusted me, as I did him. For me it was a wonderful experience, and unique. Although he was usually available, hardly any of the other monks would go to him with questions because of a cultural tendency to greatly respect, even fear, teachers. For the sake of the translations, however, I could talk with him regularly, and as an American I wasn't afraid. To be honest, I was too bold at times. He prepared me as an interpreter, making sure that I understood the Pali terms he was using and the teachings he wanted to get across. We both enjoyed discussing important terms to seek the best way to translate them. For me it was like having a good friend and a teacher together; in a way, it was also like having a grandfather, since he was about the same age as my grandfathers, both of whom were dead. This experience with him became very important for me. He became my primary inspiration and role model.

### Returning Home

Even after Ajahn Buddhadasa died in 1993 I stayed at Suan Mokkh for another six years, largely because I was very much involved in the monastery and felt responsible for its future. I was considered one of the main teachers there, for Thais as well as foreigners. People wanted me to stay, and thus I was very involved, especially with the foreign community of monks and practitioners. At the same time, I felt a strong sense of commitment to carry on my teacher's work, because I had concerns that others might not do so, especially regarding his social teachings. After Ajahn Buddhadasa died, his more controversial teachings were downplayed by some of the senior monks. To me, something important was being lost, which disappointed and frustrated me. Eventually the winds changed further and I came to feel that my place was no longer at Suan Mokkh. That was a difficult and painful decision.

Things had changed at this beloved monastery, and I was pressured to stop doing things that I believed were important, even things that Ajahn Buddhadasa had encouraged me to do. I believe that many of the monks were afraid of social involvement because of long-standing government interference. The issue is rather delicate.

In Thailand, Buddhist monks are privileged, especially teachers. Furthermore, not only was I a monk, I was a leading student of perhaps the most important Thai teacher of the century. Further, Thailand is a country where Americans are liked, so being American scored me special points. For example, I doubt I will ever be invited to be on a TV talk show in my own country, while I was invited to appear on

*Santikaro seated before three Thai prelates in 1986. From left to right: Ven. Ajahn Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Ven. Boonchuan Khemabhiratana, and Ven. Panyananda Bhikkhu (his preceptor).*

some of the best intellectual talk-show programs in Thailand. As a foreigner in an Asian country like Thailand, I received such privileges. And privileges, I believed, carry responsibilities. And I felt responsible to repay what I could. At the same time, one always undergoes stringent tests. Thai hospitality is very nice, it is true, but the average guest does not understand the feelings of the Thai people. To give any help to them, you have to do things in the Thai way, and feelings are all-important. This is the cultural reality. Obviously, my responsibilities could never be the same as those of my Thai colleagues. In America I would have more freedom but less access and support. In America I must take responsibility for things that Thai Buddhism provides culturally and start from scratch.

So when it was time to move on, I considered various options—other monasteries in Thailand; other Asian countries such as the Philippines, India, and Japan; and America. Then Ajahn Buddhadasa's words struck home. I always believed that he intended for me to go home someday, because he thought that the best thing for foreign monks was to teach Buddhism in their own cultures and not hang around Asia too long. At first I did not fully agree with him. I wanted to stay at Suan Mokkh and be close to him. But I also had a strong commitment to help transmit the Dhamma and my teacher's message to Americans and eventually decided that America was the place to do so.

### Buddhism as a Way of Life

We hear that about 3 percent of the U.S. population regard themselves as Buddhists. I think the figure must be much

higher, but it is difficult to estimate and perhaps not important. What concerns me is whether or not Buddhism takes root in America as a true way of life. Being a Buddhist in America can mean various things. For many, the main thing sought in Buddhism is meditation in pursuit of some peace of mind. For some, meditation seems to be a form of psychotherapy. It often takes place within the values of consumerism and a certain amount of American salesmanship. For me, this is the crux of the problem. Meditation is over-emphasized and often taken out of its proper context. First of all, being a Buddhist means being a practitioner of the Way, which is a way of life, not just a way of meditating or becoming peaceful. Of course, practicing meditation is an important aspect of the Middle Way. But it seems that the most important thing is neither understood nor accepted. A lot of people seem to do Buddhist practice according to their personal tastes and desires. The Buddha taught the Middle Way of ending suffering through letting go of

selfishness, egoism, and "me."

Contrarily, Ajahn Buddhadasa's approach to the core of Buddhism is considered unique even in Theravada Buddhism. I believe that his teachings can break through some of the barriers between Theravada and Mahayana. Most Theravadins think that Theravada is original and that Mahayana is a debased form. But Ajahn Buddhadasa did not put it in this way. In his perspective of Buddhism, there was an original Buddhism, which he called Pristine Buddhism. Both Theravada and Mahayana developed, more or less simultaneously, out of the original Buddhism. For instance, many people believe that emptiness is a Mahayana teaching. In fact, teachings on emptiness are recorded in the original Pali scriptures. Later, Theravada came to ignore this vital expression of reality. Of course, I reject the Mahayana idea that Theravada is a lesser, or inferior, vehicle. That is an unfortunate Mahayana prejudice. While it is natural that differences appeared as Buddhism diffused among different parts and cultures of Asia, eventually being separated by geographic and linguistic barriers, there is no benefit in looking down on each other. Mahayana teachings primarily moved into central Asia and China; Theravada teachings took root primarily in Southeast Asia. Historically speaking, both Theravada and Mahayana moved away from the core of early Buddhism. Therefore, I believe that it is necessary to go back to early Buddhism, or original Buddhism, in order to find out what was, and still is, central to Buddhism—in other words, the spiritual practice that brings about the liberation of all beings from ignorance, selfishness, and suffering. I further believe that almost all of the current traditions

carry on this core of Buddha Dhamma, as well as the accumulations of sociocultural adaptation, many of which are limited and temporary.

But there is another thing that needs to be mentioned. Going back to original Buddhism means to see not only our own lives but also modern society—with its political, economic, and social issues—through the Dhamma. Ajahn Buddhadasa was the first major Theravada teacher to speak of these aspects of the Buddha Dhamma with any rigor and consistency. While he did not use the words “engaged Buddhism,” he insisted on seeing Buddhism in ways that supported social engagement as the practice of Dhamma.

Through realizing this, Buddhism becomes the Way of Life. Thus he presented the idea of Dhammic Socialism. Back in the 1960s and the 1970s, when Thailand was torn by disputes between capitalism and communism, he said that Buddhism is basically socialist. He did not mean the socialism of Marx, Lenin, and Mao, which he called bloodthirsty socialism because of its penchant for class revenge and violence. (Of course, capitalist colonialism has been equally violent.) Buddhism, he taught, offers a different kind of socialism, one guided by the Dhamma, nonviolence, and spiritual maturity. So Ajahn Buddhadasa tried to respond to the concerns of modern society through Buddhist principles.

### The Need for Conversion

My dream is to build a spiritual community where various groups of people will cooperate and have a place to meditate, study Buddhism, and support one another, because the Sangha is crucial. We need to learn from the experience of other people—Buddhists, Christians, and other movements and traditions—to find valid ways to live in a deeply trou-

bled world. We need sacred communities to express the Dhamma most meaningfully, because everything is interconnected and nothing can exist independently.

I have the impression that after 9/11 people are more inclined to fearful, rigid, and narrow interpretations of religion. Especially, Americans seem to be too concerned with narrow understandings of justice and morality that they want to impose on others. We must pay careful attention to the influence of conservative Christians who have a very narrow and rather immature kind of morality. I agree with whoever said that America is a Christian-dominated country in which religion plays an important part in fostering a sense of morality. This has healthy potentials, and dangerous possibilities as well. Further, we must question how genuinely Christian America actually is. In my view, Christianity is much confused with capitalism, which I consider to be the dominant structure of greed and violence. The Buddha Dhamma teaches that violence is a byproduct of people being swept up in cravings and selfishness. Is that Christianity?

Ajahn Buddhadasa put forth these three resolutions:

- to help everyone penetrate to the heart of their own religions,
- to create mutual understanding among all religions,
- and to work together to drag the world out of materialism and selfishness.

I think we now have to change the course of modern society through *metanoia*, a radical revision and transformation of our whole mental process, in order to achieve self-liberation and world peace. □

## Japanese Buddhist Folktales

### The Ogre Mask That Would Not Come Off

Once there was a strong-willed, spiteful old woman who had a kind daughter-in-law named Okiyo. This Okiyo was very pious, and went every evening to the temple to hear the priest Rennyō talk. One evening it occurred to the old woman, who really despised visiting the temple, that if she could intimidate Okiyo, she would not want to go to the temple any more.

So the old woman quickly made herself an ogre mask, and hid in a thicket of bamboo grass. She caught sight of Okiyo, who had finished her temple visit and was making her way home by herself along the night road. The old woman tried to jump out from the bushes, but her foot fell asleep and she could not move. All the while, Okiyo was reciting a prayer and passed right by her.

When Okiyo arrived home, she found that her mother-in-

law was not there, which she thought peculiar, so she went out to look for her. And so she came upon a crying ogre. When she looked closely, she realized that it was her mother-in-law crying. No matter how she tried, the ogre mask would not come off.

Even when they pulled with all their might, the ogre mask still would not come off. Both of them were thoroughly perplexed, so they asked Rennyō for help. Rennyō took pity and recited a prayer for them. Then the old woman regretted that she had been so mean to her daughter-in-law, and with all her heart she also began reciting the prayer. The merits accumulated by their prayers caused the ogre mask to pop right off.

“Okiyo, I’ve been bad. The ogre was my own heart.”

The old woman experienced a complete change of heart and thereafter mother-in-law and daughter-in-law went together for temple visits. □

(A story from Fukui Prefecture)

# The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

## Chapter 11

### Beholding the Precious Stupa

(2)

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

**TEXT** Then those buddhas, each bringing a great bodhisattva as his attendant, arrived at the saha world, and each went to the foot of a jewel tree. Each of the jewel trees was five hundred yojanas high, adorned in turn with boughs, leaves, blossoms, and fruit; under all those jewel trees there were lion thrones five yojanas high, also decorated with magnificent jewels. Then each of those buddhas sat cross-legged on those thrones. Thus all around him the three-thousand-great-thousandfold world was filled [with buddhas],

**COMMENTARY** *Sat cross-legged.* This is the full lotus position, which is the correct position for Zen meditation: The right foot is placed on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh.

**TEXT** though as yet, from but one point of the compass, the bodies which had emanated from Shakyamuni Buddha had not finished [arriving].

**COMMENTARY** This passage is extremely difficult to understand. Its meaning is easier to grasp if we consult the Sanskrit original, which states, "though as yet the emanated bodies of the World-honored One, though one, had not arrived from the ten directions." This image signifies that Thusness (fundamental truth) transcends time and space. The assembled buddhas who fill the world are those who appeared before the time of Shakyamuni or whose realms exist beyond the saha world. It suggests that though none of the emanated bodies of Shakyamuni Buddha in the present world have yet assembled, the earth is already replete with the Absolute Truth (Thusness).

**TEXT** Then Shakyamuni Buddha, desiring to make room for the buddhas who had emanated from himself, in each of the eight directions of space transformed two hundred myriad kotis of nayutas of domains, all of them pure,

**COMMENTARY** In modern terms, not only has the earth been transformed into the Land of Tranquil Light and filled with buddhas, but also this transformation has extended to

other planets, to the whole galaxy. It is a drama on a vast scale.

**TEXT** without hells, hungry spirits, animals, and asuras, and moreover removed their gods and men to other lands. The domains thus transformed also had lapis lazuli for earth and were ornate with jewel trees five hundred yojanas high, adorned in turn with boughs, leaves, blossoms, and fruit; under every tree was a jeweled lion throne five yojanas high, decorated with all kinds of gems;

**COMMENTARY** *Without hells, hungry spirits, animals, and asuras.* These domains contain none of the evil paths of rebirth (the realms of hell, hungry spirits, animals, and asuras). This means that there is no one who has such delusions as anger, greed, ignorance, and contentiousness.

• *And moreover removed their gods and men to other lands.* The meaning has been explained above. "Gods" here means people in the realm of gods, and "men," people in the human realm. We should remember that the realm of gods is not the eternal Land of Tranquil Light but a world where people live, still unenlightened and liable to fall into the evil paths. The realm of human beings refers to the condition of maintaining mental equilibrium, in which though still potentially in thrall to the four evil paths the conscience controls them. It is impossible for us to go forward to meet the Buddha's emanated bodies unless we purify the mind. In other words, if we want to hear the Buddha's teaching we must of course not have fallen into one of the four delusions (the four evil paths) or even be in the ambiguous states of gods and men, still liable to fall into those delusions; rather, we must go forward to greet the Buddha's teaching (Thusness) with the serene state of mind of non-self. This is why the sutra says that those in the in-between states of gods and men are removed to other lands. Strictly speaking, they remove themselves.

**TEXT** and there were no great seas or great rivers, nor any Mount Mucilinda, Mount Maha-Mucilinda, Mount Iron

Circle, Mount Great Iron Circle, Mount Sumeru, and so on, all these kings of mountains which always form one buddha land; their jeweled ground was even and smooth; everywhere jewel-decked awnings were spread and streamers and canopies hung, while most precious incense was burning, and precious celestial flowers everywhere covered the ground.

**COMMENTARY** *Mount Mucilinda, Mount Maha-Mucilinda, Mount Iron Circle, Mount Great Iron Circle, Mount Sumeru.* These mountains belong to the cosmology of the ancient Indians; since they have nothing to do with the essence of Buddhism, I will refrain from further comment about them. It is enough to know that they are all lofty peaks. The fact that the innumerable transformed domains have no such mountains, seas, and rivers but are “even and smooth” indicates that there is nowhere that does not receive the Buddha’s light (wisdom), that as far as the eye can see all has become radiant. The deeper meaning is, as already mentioned, that our minds have become completely non-self, enabling us to receive fully the Buddha’s light, or wisdom.

**TEXT** Shakyamuni Buddha, in order that the buddhas who were coming might be seated, in each of the eight directions transformed two hundred myriad kotis of nayutas of

domains, making them all pure, without hells, hungry spirits, animals, and asuras, and removing [their] gods and men to other lands.

**COMMENTARY** The buddha land (the Land of Tranquil Light) spreads wider and wider. In modern terms, the land extends to the entire galaxy, encompassing the universe.

**TEXT** The domains thus transformed also had lapis lazuli for earth and were ornate with jewel trees five hundred yojanas high, adorned in turn with boughs, leaves, blossoms, and fruit; under every tree was a jeweled lion throne five yojanas high, decorated with great jewels; and there were no great seas or great rivers, nor any Mount Mucilinda, Mount Maha-Mucilinda, Mount Iron Circle, Mount Great Iron Circle, Mount Sumeru, and so on, these kings of mountains which always form one buddha land; their jeweled ground was even and smooth; everywhere jewel-decked awnings were spread, and streamers and canopies hung, while most precious incense was burning, and precious celestial flowers everywhere covered the ground.

At that moment the bodies that had emanated eastward from Shakyamuni, [namely] the buddhas who were each preaching the Law in a hundred thousand myriad kotis of nayutas of [eastern] domains [numerous] as the sands of the Ganges, arrived and assembled. In like manner in turn

## Why Interreligious Cooperation Is Essential

*Continued from page 33*

This trend can only intensify in the future. In such an era, if every religion in the world should continue to be isolated and hold itself apart from others, it would be extremely anachronistic.

In a world where all are tied closely together, questions of peace, as well as of war, also connect all human beings. It is impossible that one powerful country can be concerned solely with peace for itself alone and try to preserve it by force of arms. Whether everyone likes it or not, we must move toward achieving a world order that transcends individual nations. The modern world has arrived at a point when it must tacitly acknowledge what Buddhism calls “the oneness of the self and others.”

People possessing a religious faith probably have a stronger wish for peace and deeper compassion for others than those of no faith, for they know that such a wish and such compassion can be made to work through action. Therefore it is these people, I believe, who above all others are capable of transcending ethnicity and nationality and joining their hearts with others. It is because I believe this that I am making every possible effort toward achieving interreligious cooperation. It is only through such cooperation that we

will be able to build lasting bonds of peace based on a deep spiritual connection with others.

Some people will say, of course, that it is impossible to get people of different faiths to cooperate. Some anxiety is understandable when we remember the self-righteousness and exclusivity that religions have displayed in the past. But this is because people of religion in the past clung to the superficial differences in faith and ignored the identical points that lie behind different religions. I believe if we strive to broaden our outlook and understand the true meaning of religion, the narrowness of so much past thinking will be swept away.

At this point in time the human race is confronted by many common problems—effective management of natural resources, population issues, and energy supply, as well as questions concerning social injustice and corruption. The task facing people of religion regarding their mission to help solve these problems is of mammoth proportions. No single religion or religious group can possibly perform it alone. Rather, people from all religions must work together. By doing so, I believe they will fulfill their responsibility. Most important, such interreligious cooperation will have the effect of purifying and improving those religious people who tend to think insularly and in a self-righteousness manner by putting them in contact with people of other religious faiths. □

the buddhas from all the ten directions all arrived and assembled and took their seats in the eight directions. Thereupon each direction was filled with buddha-tathagatas in [its] four hundred myriad kotis of nayutas of domains. Then all the buddhas, each under a jewel tree, seated on a lion throne, sent their attendants to make inquiries of Shakyamuni Buddha, each sending a double handful of jewel flowers, and saying to them: "Good sons! Do you go and visit Mount Gridhrakuta, the abode of Shakyamuni Buddha, and, according to our words, say: 'Art thou free from disease and distress? Art thou at ease in thy powers? And are all the groups of thy bodhisattvas and shravakas at peace?' Strew the Buddha in homage with these jewel flowers and say thus: 'Such and such a buddha joins in wishing that this Precious Stupa be opened.'" All the buddhas sent their messengers in like manner.

**COMMENTARY** *A double handful of jewel flowers.* Even today in India and Southeast Asia people offer flowers (the flowers alone, without leaves or stems) in the same way when they visit temples. They may also make offerings of flowers in dishes. They place the flowers before the image of the Buddha or strew them over the image.

\* *Free from disease and distress.* The Chinese translation here says literally "little disease and distress," but the meaning is the same as "no disease or distress."

**TEXT** Then Shakyamuni Buddha, beholding the buddhas who had emanated from him assembled together, each seated on his lion throne, and hearing that those buddhas unitedly desired the Precious Stupa to be opened, straightway rose up from his throne and abode in the sky. All the four groups stood up, folded their hands, and with all their mind gazed at the Buddha.

**COMMENTARY** Since the Precious Stupa has risen into the sky, it is of course necessary for Shakyamuni too to rise into the sky in order to open its door. Here "sky" has an important meaning. The stupa has sprung up from the earth, but it has not remained on the surface but has risen into the sky. This signifies that the buddha-nature seems to ordinary people only an abstract ideal. Even though it is taught that the essential nature of human beings is the buddha-nature, which must be realized and developed, this does not seem real to ordinary people, who are enveloped in the delusions of the five desires. Thus they consider the buddha-nature a lofty ideal far removed from actuality. The fact that the Precious Stupa rises into the sky vividly expresses the mental state of ordinary people. It is then that Shakyamuni rises to the height of the Precious Stupa and then comes to a halt. By doing so he demonstrates that even a human being can reach the ideal realm. The multitude, however, sees this as a manifestation of the supernatural powers of a sage. Thus they do no more than look up at him with admiration and reverence ("All the four groups stood up, folded their hands, and with all their mind gazed at the Buddha").

**TEXT** Thereupon Shakyamuni Buddha with the fingers of his right hand opened the door of the Stupa of the Precious Seven, when there went forth a great sound, like the withdrawing of the bolt on opening a great city gate.

**COMMENTARY** *The fingers of his right hand.* The right hand has been considered the holy hand since ancient times in India. In Buddhism, the right symbolizes wisdom, and the left, the principle, or noumenon as opposed to phenomenon. The principle is the universal truth and the right path that human beings must follow. Unless they realize the principle, they cannot make it work in human life. That is, they cannot give life to the principle. Thus, what is considered most important to human beings is the wisdom to realize the principle.

In Buddhism, compassion is placed between the left, principle, and the right, wisdom. Compassion is the pure emotion that manifests itself when the buddha-nature flows forth of its own accord. It wells forth with the practice of benefiting others. Without this practice, even if human beings have realized the principle through wisdom they remain unperfected as individuals, and humankind as a whole remains unliberated. This is why compassion is considered central to the teaching. It is only when the principle, wisdom, and compassion are closely connected and made to circulate and work in the world that human beings can become perfected, humankind as a whole can be liberated, and humanity can establish the Land of Tranquil Light in this life. The teaching of Buddhism, and the Lotus Sutra in particular, being based firmly on this elaborate structure, will never lose its value as long as humankind continues to exist, however much the times change.

**TEXT** Thereupon all the congregation saw the Tathagata Abundant Treasures sitting on the lion throne in the Precious Stupa, with his undissipated body whole and as if he were in meditation. And they heard him saying: "Excellent! Excellent! Shakyamuni Buddha! Happily have you preached this Law Flower Sutra. I have come hither in order to hear this sutra."

**COMMENTARY** *Saw . . . his undissipated body whole and as if he were in meditation.* As we saw above, "his undissipated body whole" means being perfectly endowed with the complete aspect of Thusness, which is now seen not partially but in its entirety. The Tathagata keeps utterly still, like a person meditating. This suggests that Thusness does not alter with time or place but is unmoving and everlasting.

From one point of view, though, unmoving Thusness would have no power to change our human lives. It is when there are people who preach Thusness, the Absolute Truth, so that it begins to act in the minds of people, that it brings relief to the human world. Therefore the Tathagata Abundant Treasures, Thusness itself, puts Thusness into motion. In other words, he praises the Tathagata Shakyamuni, who preaches Thusness, saying that he has come to hear

Shakyamuni's discourse on Thusness. Here a great truth is revealed: Thusness itself desires to be preached and understood by all and put to practical use. This is of great significance.

Imagine that you have a talent for painting. If you have a true talent, it will inevitably express itself in works of art. Similarly, if you are a poet, your talent will show itself in the poetry you write. Or if you have innate kindness, it will manifest itself in kind and thoughtful action. What is true must express itself. If there is no such compulsion, it is not real. Truth, goodness, and beauty likewise first give birth to something of value when they are manifested. In the same way, the Tathagata Abundant Treasures, who symbolizes the perfect aspect of Thusness, announces this in a great voice: "However much you may worship my form that remains unmoving, like one meditating, it has no worth. The one great thing is to hear the discourses of the Tathagata Shakyamuni, who has set me in motion as the true life." Unless we understand this, we will not actually have read this chapter, however many times our eyes have passed over it.

**TEXT** Then the four groups, seeing the buddha who had passed away and been extinct for immeasurable thousand myriad kotis of kalpas speak such words as these, praised this unprecedented [marvel] and strewed on the Buddha Abundant Treasures and on Shakyamuni Buddha heaps of celestial jewel flowers.

**COMMENTARY** I have already explained the significance of the threefold body of the Buddha (the Law-body, the reward-body, and the manifest-body), but let me go over it again, since it is crucial to the understanding of this passage. The Law-body (*dharma-kaya*) is eternal, immortal Thusness itself, the Buddha as the great life of the universe. The manifest-body (*nirmana-kaya*) is the Buddha who appeared in the world as a human being to instruct and save all living beings, based on Thusness. Shakyamuni, born in India, is the Buddha of the manifest-body. The reward-body (*sambhoga-kaya*) is neither the Law-body that is Thusness (Law) itself nor the manifest-body that has an actual physical body, but the Buddha as the personified Law-body with attributes that we can imagine. In other words, the reward-body is the power that begins to work when Thusness takes on personified energy. The Buddha of the reward-body is so called in the sense that buddhahood has been attained through the merit of having realized Thusness.

To put it more simply, the Law-body is Thusness itself, the reward-body is the personified power giving form to Thusness, and the manifest-body is the Buddha as a human being, who manifests that power in this world. Thus the Law-body, the reward-body, and the manifest-body are inseparable. Shakyamuni has the threefold body as the Eternal Original Buddha of the Law-body, the Buddha of the reward-body, and the Buddha of the manifest-body.

Through the discourses given thus far, the assembled

ordained and lay believers have received many hints that the Buddha is of threefold body, but they have had the idea that the only buddha is the Buddha they can see, the manifest-body. Thus they are astounded when the Tathagata Abundant Treasures, who has been extinct for immeasurable eons, suddenly appears.

**TEXT** Thereupon the Buddha Abundant Treasures within the Precious Stupa shared half his throne with Shakyamuni Buddha, speaking thus: "Shakyamuni Buddha! Take this seat!" Whereon Shakyamuni Buddha entered the stupa and, sitting down on that half throne, folded his legs.

**COMMENTARY** This is one of the most impressive scenes of the Lotus Sutra. This marvelous scene of the Tathagata Abundant Treasures inviting the Tathagata Shakyamuni to share half his throne and the Tathagata Shakyamuni instantly sitting there is called "the two Buddhas sharing the same throne." This act has two meanings. First, it breaks down many people's mistaken idea that the Tathagata Shakyamuni is just a buddha with a mortal body and shows them that he is as imperishable as the Tathagata Abundant Treasures, appearing and disappearing but not subject to arising and extinction. Second, the Law-body (Abundant Treasures) and the manifest-body (Shakyamuni) are shown to be equal, with no difference in terms of superiority. Thusness and the preacher of Thusness are therefore to be equally respected and venerated.

We undoubtedly possess the buddha-nature. Indeed, the essential nature of a human being is the buddha-nature. But we are thickly enveloped by the grime of the five desires and delusion. If we do nothing, we will be eternally enmeshed in struggle and conflict. Herein lies the importance of the person who teaches about the buddha-nature. Because there is someone who teaches about the buddha-nature, we can realize it in ourselves and begin efforts to develop it. At this point the door to true liberation opens.

Thusness has value when it is known. The more people who know of it, the greater its value. This is the principle of value creation. One who has known Thusness must surely transmit it to others. The wish to monopolize this knowledge reveals what is called "the inclination toward the two vehicles" (shravakas and pratyekabuddhas), the meanest selfishness. Such a person is not worthy to sit within the Precious Stupa.

These are the points that we must understand from the holy and impressive scene of "the two Buddhas sharing the same throne."

*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.