

DHARMA WORLD

For Living Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue

CONTENTS

The Yomiuri Shimbun

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Isamu Maruyama

Cover photo: A montage of photos related to contemporary medicine. Superstock/PPS.

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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Transcending a Bioethics of
Buddhist Compassion 10

Gross National Happiness
and Buddhism 28

Self-Reliance and Liberation
from Poverty 34

Achieving Spiritual Peace 39

Buddhism and Bioethics

Where Bioethics Stands in Relation to
Advances in the Life Sciences *by Kátsumasa Imai* 3

A Bioethics Question for Buddhists:
When Does Human Life Begin? *by Masao Fujii* 4

Religion and Bioethics: A Chapter in Their Shared History
by William R. LaFleur 6

Transcending a Bioethics of Buddhist Compassion
by Susumu Shimazono 10

One Buddhist View of Bioethics *by Carl Becker* 13

Religionists and Care for the Terminally Ill
by Yoshiharu Tomatsu 17

Buddhism and Palliative Care in Japan
by Masahiro Tanaka 20

Building Bridges for the Promotion of Life, Justice, and Peace
by Juan Masiá 23

Rissho Kosei-kai's Statement on
the Proposed Revision of the Organ Transplant Law 26



Reflections

The Power to Live *by Nichiko Niwano* 27

Achieving Spiritual Peace *by Nikkyo Niwano* 39

Essays

Gross National Happiness and Buddhism
by Dasho Karma Ura 28

Founders Nikkyo Niwano and Chiara Lubich:
An Interreligious Dialogue for Peace
by Donald W. Mitchell 31

Self-Reliance and Liberation from Poverty
by Dhammananda Bhikkhuni 34

"The Flower Opens in the Sheer Drop"
by Notto R. Thelle 37

The Threefold Lotus Sutra: A Modern Commentary (91)

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law
Chapter 12: Devadatta (3) *by Nikkyo Niwano* 41

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Where Bioethics Stands in Relation to Advances in the Life Sciences

by Katsumasa Imai

Human organ transplants are being performed all over the world, and physicians in Europe and North America routinely make judgments to determine brain death for this purpose. Human embryonic stem cell research and the use of cloning technology to replicate animals have already been under way for about a decade, and the human genome was sequenced and mapped early in the new century. The rapid advances in the life sciences that started in the mid-twentieth century are now changing the world and the future of humankind. Of course, it cannot be denied that this kind of research and technology has the potential to make a large contribution to human happiness.

However, there are two sides to every coin, and every phenomenon has different aspects. Just as nuclear energy is used not only to generate electricity but also to make nuclear weapons, developments in the life sciences also combine positive and negative potential.

For example, in the case of determining brain death to allow organ transplants, there remains some doubt as to whether a determination of brain death really means the person is truly dead, and so removing organs from a brain-dead patient might be considered murder. There is also the problem of buying and selling organs, and there are doubts about any guarantee against the use of cloning technology on humans in future. Also, while the use of embryonic stem cells can make a significant contribution to regenerative and genetic therapies, the potential for massive profit-making from these procedures also gives rise to ethical problems relating to the possible use of human cells as commodities for generating financial profits. Similarly, the positive contribution to genetic therapies made by sequencing the human genome is overshadowed by the fear that eugenic notions will lead to elective abortion based on prenatal genetic diagnoses and discrimination against people with pathological genetic traits.

Japanese Buddhism started addressing some of the points raised by these bioethical issues in the 1980s, and individual religious organizations have published various opinion statements. Risho Kosei-kai has also submitted opinion statements about organ transplants and other documents to the Japanese government and members of the national Diet on several occasions. Japan's various religious communities and denominations are working together through councils and other channels to share information and react to the publication of new research results. However, the truth of the matter is that religions have so far found it impossible to sufficiently fulfill their proper role with respect to the rapid progress and developments in medicine and other sciences.

Does this have to be the fundamental relationship between science and religion? To search for the unknown and discover scientific facts are the role and mission of medicine and other sciences. The role religion is expected to play here is one of providing basic principles that lead people to achieve true happiness and of giving medicine and other sciences guidance as to the proper direction in which they should go. However, religion is hard pressed even to merely identify the important points in the ethical problems being posed one after the other by medicine and other sciences. In this sense, science and religion can be likened to the accelerator and brakes of an automobile. Is it really in our best interest to just keep on accelerating?

In Christianity, most of the ethical problems being posed by the life sciences are likely to be understood as falling into the domain of God's will. In Buddhism, they relate to the core doctrine of overcoming old age, sickness, and death. In a nutshell, Buddhism teaches that controlling your desires will allow you to overcome the most harrowing experiences of life—old age, sickness, and death—and attain peace of mind and true happiness. From a Buddhist standpoint, the overly rapid developments in the life sciences seem directed instead toward inflaming, and then fulfilling, various human desires.

Of course, most medical practitioners are dedicated to bringing happiness to humankind by means of medical and scientific developments, and they may find great joy in doing so. However, rapid advances in the life sciences have both light and dark aspects, and the latter include the potential threats of turning human life into a commodity or a means to an end, and of valuing some people's lives over those of others. It seems to me that the issue in most urgent need of global action in this regard is building mechanisms to avert these threats. □

Katsumasa Imai is the director of the Chuo Academic Research Institute of Risho Kosei-kai in Tokyo.

A Bioethics Question for Buddhists: When Does Human Life Begin?

by Masao Fujii

The lack of universal principles of bioethics means that research on related issues must be transparent and comprehensive, and include the viewpoints of fields other than medicine.

According to Beauchamp and Childress, there are four basic, albeit abstract, principles of bioethics: respect for autonomy rooted in informed consent, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice (T. L. Beauchamp and J. F. Childress. 1989. *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press). However, there really are no universal principles of bioethics; they change under the influence of the cultures and societies into which they are received. It is as if there is a separate set of bioethics for each particular culture. I also cannot stress enough that research on the increasingly diverse bioethical issues that confront us should not be limited to the field of medicine and patient treatment, but should be conducted in a transparent cultural context and from a comprehensive, humanistic perspective, including the viewpoints of philosophy, ethics, law, religion, and sociology.

Today the human genome project has been successful in decoding the entire base sequence, and I sense a frantic race to obtain patents for practical applications of the information relating to disease gleaned from the unraveling of genetic secrets. Priority has been given only to the tech-

niques for a whole array of manipulations of life, and I predict this will result in a definitive “materialization” of life.

However, our organs and tissues are not things; they are also not just parts. At the root of this lies a view of life and death. I must point out here the absence of an awareness of the importance of life from the array of bioethical issues. We must be apprehensive about this, and I will say again, we must make academia turn its attention to the importance and dignity of life.

I would like to take up the issue of regenerative medicine, and particularly of embryonic stem (ES) cells, which is currently in the spotlight as an alternative to organ transplants for dealing with serious diseases. In 1996 the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh succeeded in creating a cloned sheep, which the scientists named Dolly. A cloned cow was born in Japan two years following the birth of Dolly. Dolly’s birth had been a one-in-277 probability, however, so future prospects were fraught with difficulties.

Looking further back, mouse ES cells were successfully cultivated by Evans and Kaufman in 1981 (M. J. Evans and M. H. Kaufman. 1981. *Nature* 292:154–156) and Hooper and others in 1987 (Martin Hooper et al. 1987. *Nature* 326: 292–295); and Thomson and others of the University of Wisconsin-Madison successfully cultivated a human ES cell line in 1998. In Japan, the Act on Regulation of Human Cloning Techniques, referred to as the “cloning bill,” was promulgated in 2000. On September 25, 2001, guidelines were issued, instead of a law, for the cultivation of human ES cell lines, the “Guidelines for the Derivation and Utilization of Human Embryonic Stem Cells.” In July 2003, Professor Norio Nakatsuji of the Institute for Frontier Medical Sciences at Kyoto University, who had earlier successfully cultivated a line of ES cells from a crab-eating macaque (*Macaca fascicularis*), succeeded in cultivating a line of human ES cells. Two more lines were cultivated three months later, so he has 3 lines, while the United States is reported to have 27 lines and Sweden 25 lines. The IFMS is his distribution agent.

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While there is no question that a fertilized ovum or ES cells from a fertilized ovum are the primordia from which life originates, opinion differs as to whether they themselves constitute life. Let us look at the views of the major religions regarding the status of the human embryo. The Roman Catholic Church believes that a child is not the property of the parents, so that even an embryo has a right to be respected as a human being. As to when life begins, the church considers an embryo to be a person from the moment of conception, and has opposed in vitro fertilization, as well as the donation, preimplantation genetic diagnosis, or use in research of embryos (Pope John Paul II: *Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation*, February 22, 1987). The various denominations of Protestantism, although also Christian, believe that early-term embryos do not yet possess humanness, which devel-

June 12, 2000), saying that because human life begins at the moment of conception, it opposes any ES cell research that makes the fertilized ovum (early-term embryos) the object of medical experimentation. There is a technology in regenerative medicine that relies on somatic stem cells, but this stem cell cultivation technology is said to fall short when compared to the ability and the capability of giving rise to different cell types characteristic of ES cells.

As we have seen, the various religions, which generally provide us with spiritual support, have differing views on the subject, and we must consider how to resolve this. Various religious groups in Japan, such as the Honganji and Otani subsets of Jodo Shin Shu, Jodo Shu, Soto Shu, Rissho Kosei-kai, and Soka Gakkai have issued statements. Their positions are derived from their own particular doctrines, but their followers also have opinions on either side of the issue. Ultimately, there is no one assertive point of view such as that of the Oomoto Foundation. This may be a particularly Japanese characteristic.

As to the rights and wrongs of abortion, even when it is clear that the child will be born with severe handicaps, that the child's life will be extremely difficult, and that this will place a huge burden on the parents, no one should urge prospective parents to have an abortion or to have the baby. Only the individuals directly concerned can make the decision of whether or not to go through with a birth. In short, this is an issue that returns to being a subjective decision, made in view of the essence of life rather than external necessities. I think that we must look to resolving the issue by helping to make it easy to decide in response to individual circumstances, widening the choices on the basis of situation ethics. Situation ethics calls for sanctioning not A as opposed to B, but the middle ground C; I would like to think that these would be conditions set not from a "human" point of view, but from the viewpoint of the Buddha—in other words, from the viewpoint of his doctrine seen as a meaningful system.

On July 15, 2004, Professor Peter W. Andrews of the Department of Biomedical Science at the University of Sheffield, England, called for gathering all data pertaining to human ES cell lines, with the aim of comparing and standardizing human ES cells on a global scale. Issues related to human genome analysis must be protected as the common intellectual property of humankind. I pray that research on human ES cells will bring the dawn of a bright future for the human race and achieve the goal of conquering many serious diseases. Artificial elective termination of a pregnancy can be thought of as a contradictory trade-off, a sacrifice of one life so that others may succeed. There have also been experiments attempting to create stem cells from somatic cells. The progress that has been achieved in medical science and patient care is remarkable, but I believe that we must continue to constantly question so-called scientific rationality and the ethical propriety of the experiments connected with ES cell research. □

A nucleus is removed from an egg in the process of creating the first cloned sheep, Dolly.

ops gradually, and so they broadly sanction the donation, genetic testing, and use in research of embryos, although there is no consensus among the denominations.

Judaism holds that the embryo becomes a human being the moment it is implanted in the uterus, the key being the action by the parents of their intent to produce a child, and so it sanctions genetic testing of fertilized ova for medical purposes and the use of embryos for research. The Islamic view is that the embryo becomes a person (the soul becomes incarnate) forty days after conception; it thus also sanctions genetic testing of fertilized ova for medical purposes and the use of embryos for research.

On the other hand, Japan's Oomoto Foundation has issued a statement (*Oomoto's View Regarding Japan's Permission to Conduct Research Involving Human Embryonic Stem Cells*,

Religion and Bioethics: A Chapter in Their Shared History

by William R. LaFleur

Visiting graves in America, although it did not include some of the Buddhist and Confucian components that are part of haka-mairi in Japan, appears to have been fairly common until sometime after World War II.

Sometimes, fortunately, we make unplanned discoveries even in the course of making a mistake. At least that was my experience more than twenty years ago during days spent at a conference on Japanese studies at the University of Venice. Venice, of course, is among the world's most fascinating cities. On the morning of the second day of the conference I exited my hotel and intended to go by canal taxi to the site of the conference at the university. I boarded what I took to be the correct boat and anticipated a ten-minute ride to my destination. However, to my utter surprise, after a while the boat I was on headed out into the open waters of the lagoon. I realized that I had been foolishly overconfident about being able to read signs in Italian and had boarded the wrong boat. Mine was not going anywhere near the university; instead it was bound for the Isola di San Michele, Venice's cemetery island.

It was then that I noticed that all of my companions on the boat were older or middle-aged women dressed in black and carrying bouquets. When we arrived at the island, these women visited the graves of deceased relatives and I resigned myself to biding my time watching them and waiting for when we might return. At first I was disgruntled for having made a foolish mistake and for having to miss part of the conference. But then I suddenly realized that what I was witnessing, on what is popularly called Venice's "Island of the Dead," was a practice I had often seen in Japan but never in America. These Italian ladies dressed in black and offering flowers at the grave sites were, in fact, doing their own version of *haka-mairi* (lit., "visit to a grave").

Realizing this, I felt much more relaxed and ready to appreciate what I might observe there. Eventually we returned to the city and I was able to link up with colleagues at the conference. However, what I had seen that morning was something of a revelation to me, and I have given it more thought since then. Primarily it struck me as good and admirable that even in "the West" it was possible to find individuals or groups who were willing to take the time and effort to visit graves and remember the deceased. What I had so often

seen and participated in earlier in Japan, namely *haka-mairi*, still survived in some places in the West.

And thinking about this stimulated my own recollection of an event that took place during my very early youth—something I had not thought about for many decades. It probably occurred when I was eleven years old, because my father's mother was still alive, and she died when I was twelve. In fact, my grandmother played an important role in what transpired—namely an animated family discussion in which the adults took part. Its topic was, in sum, whether or not our practice of grave visitation would be continued. That is, our family was deciding the future of our own version of *haka-mairi*.

Family History

Visiting graves in America, although it did not include some of the Buddhist and Confucian components that are part of *haka-mairi* in Japan, appears to have been fairly common until sometime after World War II. During the second half of the twentieth century, however, most American families let this practice disappear from their lives—

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although a small minority kept it. Most families appear to have let this practice slip away without much discussion.

My family, however, differed on this score. An open discussion of the pros and cons took place. It was the most animated family “debate” I ever witnessed when young. My paternal grandfather and grandmother each represented one side in it. It had long been grandmother’s practice to visit the graves of her deceased parents and siblings at least twice a year—certainly on that national holiday in May we now call Memorial Day, but at that time bore the name of Decoration Day. The older name itself tells a tale; back then people didn’t just accept the holiday as a day off from work, one designed for picnics and ball games, but, rather, they often went to family cemeteries and literally *decorated* with bouquets the graves of soldiers and deceased relatives. My grandmother never missed doing that every year on that special day in May, and others of us went along. She also, I was told, would make a journey to the cemetery on the birthdays of her parents and dead sisters. She took a lunch along and would sit for hours by the graves thinking about her past days and years with the people she loved and wished to remember. I think we could say that in her own way my grandmother was fond of the practice of *haka-mairi*.

Although I believe their relationship was a very good one, on this particular matter my grandfather and grandmother had very different points of view. And in the family discussion, I overheard their diverging perspectives. Grandmother’s was articulated as an irrepressible love for her family, including its deceased members. That love had not been extinguished by their deaths. Love was all-important in what she said about this matter. She quoted the New Testament about faith, hope, and love—and that love is the greatest of these three. She stuck tenaciously to this theme and would not be moved away from it.

My grandfather made his case for abandoning the practice of cemetery visits. I should mention that he relished debating. (Within a few years of that time, when a teenager, I would discover how much he took pleasure in turning me into his own debate partner, forcing me to defend my own point of view. And for this gift from him I remain grateful today.)

His manner was gentle, but he had specific criticisms of our family’s practice of grave-site visits. I recount them here only because I think they tell a story about a certain chapter in the history of the religious consciousness and practices of modern Americans. One of his criticisms came from his interpretation of a passage in the New Testament—namely, the Gospel according to Matthew 8:22, where it is reported that Jesus said to a man: “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury the dead.” I myself am not at all clear about the meaning of this section of text. However, I am very sure of what my grandfather thought it implied. He understood it as indicating that Christians—that is, followers of Jesus—have far more important things to do than preoccupy themselves with funerals and memorializing the deceased.

To him the matter was clear-cut and simple. The soul of any deceased believer had gone to be with God; the corpse, a merely material residue after that separation had taken place, had no religious or spiritual significance. Cemeteries hold no more than decomposing bodies, things without value.

I wish to make it clear that I write of this rather personal matter without suggesting in any way that I lack respect for my grandfather. I mention it here simply to illustrate rather concretely a change that was then taking place in the religious sensibility of some, probably many, Americans. My grandfather was an articulate Protestant layman, but he was also someone in whom, I now recognize, was a belief in a very sharp split between body and soul/mind, as had been outlined in the seventeenth century by René Descartes. Historians today see Descartes as having had a deep and lasting impact—not only on religion and philosophy, but also on medical practices and what we today call bioethics. The phrase that today pinpoints this way of separating the soul/mind so radically from the body is “Cartesian dualism.”

There was another argument that I recall my grandfather using. It was that, since there is nothing of real value in the cemetery, to go there even for a brief bit of time would benefit no one. In fact, it would be merely a *waste of time*. To him, then, it seemed that my grandmother’s practice of packing a lunch, being driven out to the site, and spending hours sentimentally going over the past in her own mind while she was there was, to put it bluntly, wasteful. The past, after all, has passed. Nothing can be done to change it. But the present and the future lie still before us—awaiting our good deeds for our fellow humans, persons alive, in the flesh, and able to benefit from those deeds. The dead cannot benefit.

Reusing Bodies

Today I think about this argument about avoiding *waste*, especially as it has been used to challenge the propriety and value of taking part in rituals or ceremonies. Although my grandfather was probably unaware of it, the long arm of English utilitarianism was, I suspect, beginning to have an impact within America at that point when my family began to wonder if going to the cemetery might not be, in fact, a waste of time. Some utilitarians had been very eager to eliminate what they saw as foolish waste in the things we do.

This theme was especially pronounced in the writings and personal actions of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), an influential English jurist and philosopher. Bentham, it is important to recall, was in favor of things that many of us today will applaud—including the abolition of slavery, rights for women, and the separation of church and state. Bentham was also one of the first thinkers to articulate the ethics of utilitarianism. The phrase often used to sum up its core principle is “the greatest good for the greatest number,” and one of its central ideas is that, in order to produce the maximum amount of good in the world or society, we need to calculate the effect of a decision or action. Merely having good intentions is not enough—especially if the result does not

benefit as many persons as possible. Bentham, therefore, insisted that we use our minds to *calculate* what will be the likely effect of something we are about to do. As in business, so, too, in ethics. Eliminating waste is crucial. This eagerness to avoid anything wasteful is, I think, an important part of the message he wanted to convey to his own and later generations.

It is, I suggest, helpful to realize that Bentham also embraced the dualistic view of a strict separation of body and soul/mind—although he was not interested in the more spiritual side of human existence. He honed in on the question of the body, especially the body of a person who had died. Bentham may have been the first philosopher in modern times to suggest that the corpse should *not be wasted*. He assumed that once the mental or spiritual part of a human being is no longer detectably present, what remained—that is, the inert corpse—is something that no longer has value to the deceased or to persons close to him or her.

But does that mean it has no value whatsoever? Not according to Bentham, who lived at a time when medical institutions in England were eager to get access to cadavers for use in research and the education of physicians. Historians have shown that precisely at that time the corpses of the poor in London were often stolen because teaching hospitals were willing to buy usable ones. Bentham, commendably, saw the social injustice in this. He went on to assume and recommend that *all* corpses should be made useful in such ways. Cadavers should not be wasted. Richardson and Hurwitz, authorities on this period of history, comment as follows:

Lacking religious belief, Bentham viewed the human carcass as matter created by death. As an eighteenth century rationalist, he found little difficulty in addressing the problem of how this matter might best be disposed of with a view to maximising the “Felicity of Mankind.” Death was a waste of resources.¹

Bentham acted on his own recommendation—but with a twist. His last will and testament indicated that his own corpse should be dissected for the education of young doctors. But he also wanted it reconstituted afterward, embalmed, and put on ongoing public display. It was to be called an “auto-icon,” and after his death it was, in fact, treated as he had wanted and still exists today.

Bentham seems to have been obsessed with corpses and what he regarded as society’s bad habit of wasting them. He envisioned a society in which the body of anyone might be recycled and put on public display as an objet d’art. Whole groups of such auto-icons might, he conjectured, be put in public parks and in this way replace the need for sculpture and the somewhat unnecessary, ultimately wasteful labor of sculptors. Richardson and Hurwitz detect something deeply problematic in this:

Bentham’s quirky vision of the uses of human taxidermy included the erection of temples of fame and infamy in which auto-icons would take the place of carved statuary or waxwork: “so now may every man be his own statue.”²

If, that is, a thoroughgoing dedication to avoiding waste would eliminate religious ritual, it might also find a practical substitute for the works of artists.

Medical Applications

Fortunately for all of us, utilitarianism never received public sanction and application to push ahead quite that far. Later utilitarians such as Mill and Sedgwick quietly dropped Bentham’s more bizarre recommendations. However, the idea of avoiding the waste of corpses remained in place. When combined with radical dualism, a growing impatience with religious ritual, and society’s belief that medical needs trump all others, it would eventually have a wide impact within the English-speaking world. It would surface most strongly, I suggest, when what professional experts call “cadaveric organ transplantation”—that is, transplants from persons deemed brain-dead—became technically possible near the end of the 1960s.

Perhaps my grandfather, not long before that, did not realize how deeply the values of utilitarianism had subtly influenced his own thinking about religion, ritual, and what he saw as wasteful in making visits to the graves of the deceased. I do not for a moment doubt his sincerity and his own conviction that his position was in accord with biblical teachings. Because he himself died before Dr. Christiaan Barnard performed the world’s first heart transplant, what my grandfather would have thought about transplants, a

The “auto-icon” of Jeremy Bentham displayed at University College London.

Graves in the cemetery on the Isola di San Michele.

new and radical form of biotechnology, is something I was never able to learn.

It is worth noting, however, that an American who poured great energy into promoting the acceptance of transplants from brain-dead persons was a theologian and one who explicitly held that the time had come for Americans to absorb into their religion the values of utilitarianism. Joseph Fletcher (1905–91) in 1966 published a widely influential book, *Situation Ethics*, in which he insisted that “as the love ethic searches seriously for a social policy it must form a coalition with utilitarianism. It takes over from Bentham and Mill the strategic principle of ‘the greatest good of the greatest number.’”³

It is not surprising then that within little more than a year and, importantly, just after Dr. Barnard had transplanted a heart in South Africa (the “miracle of Cape Town”), Fletcher wrote an essay defending cadaveric transplants as a way to avoid what he called cases of “shameful waste.”⁴ He subsequently became an advocate of the use of every new biotechnology that came along—including, in fact, the genetic programming of unborn children for eugenic reasons. He later became a pure utilitarian and stated publicly that he no longer considered himself a Christian.⁵ Today Fletcher’s perspective appears to be alive and well, even if maybe no longer dominant, in American bioethics. One bioethicist acknowledged the continuity and, with a touch of humor in a book advocating human cloning, wrote as the concluding sentence: “Call me Joe Fletcher’s clone.”⁶

During the last half of the twentieth century, many of us were accustomed to accept and endorse every new biomed-

ical development as “good” and a sure sign of progress in our time. But the costs were considerable. Older practices such as remembering the dead through religious ritual may have been far too easily jettisoned as wastes of time and effort. Maybe the twenty-first century will give occasions to recover something of what was in danger of being lost. I see reason for hope in the fact that even in the West we now find scientists, philosophers, and religious thinkers who question Cartesian dualism and insist on the unity of the person. Japan, I hope, will retain the positive values contained in the practice of *haka-mairi*. And I hope that when my own children and grandchildren spend some days in Venice, they will still find people going out to visit the graves on the Isola di San Michele. □

Notes

1. Ruth Richardson and Brian Hurwitz, “Jeremy Bentham’s Self-Image: An Exemplary Bequest for Dissection,” *British Medical Journal* 295 (July 18, 1987), p. 196.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1966), p. 95.

4. Joseph Fletcher, “Our Shameful Waste of Human Tissue: An Ethical Problem for the Living and the Dead,” in *Updating Life and Death*, ed. Donald R. Cutler (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 1–30.

5. For more detail, see my “From *Agapé* to Organs: Religious Difference between Japan and America in Judging the Ethics of the Transplant,” *Zygon* 37:3 (Sept. 2002), pp. 623–42.

6. Gregory Pence, *Who’s Afraid of Human Cloning?* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), p. 175.

Transcending a Bioethics of Buddhist Compassion

by Susumu Shimazono

*Practicing compassion is not as simple as it may seem.
It is not an unlimited good and may cause serious harm
or loss to the person trying to demonstrate it.*

Human organs are being bought and sold for transplant operations all over the world, and this trend is not necessarily declining. In Japan, buying and selling organs is not supposed to be happening, but how long will that last? Transplants of organs between living family members are becoming relatively more common in Japan; transplants not only of kidneys but also of liver tissue are also increasing. However, why should this be all right between family members but not all right between people with a more distant relationship? In 2006, the media reported that a doctor in Ehime Prefecture repeatedly transplanted diseased kidneys removed from patients into more seriously ill recipients. As the lack of healthy and postmortem donors meant accepting a diseased kidney was the only alternative to death, the recipients and their families were deeply grateful to the doctor.

Some people also offer their sperm and eggs for use in medical treatments, a boon to couples in which the wife has been unable to become pregnant. Imagine the joy of couples finally able to have a child! Shouldn't we sanction sperm

and egg donation as long as it is not financially compensated? Perhaps we should even approve of surrogate mothers who offer to give birth to other people's babies. This practice is not allowed in Japan, but it is in South Korea. It is also said that over 2,000 eggs have been offered for use in human embryo cloning research in that country. Eggs are being donated for in vitro insemination, but can we say that they should not be used for research aimed at saving patients with diseases resistant to existing cures? Drug-induced ovulation is a serious matter for both the body and mind of the donor—in some cases it can even lead to death. However, isn't the procedure safe for women who react with insignificant side effects?

How should we answer these and the many other questions posed by the progress of new medical technologies from the standpoint of Buddhist ethics? The first thing that comes to mind is the concept of *jihī*, Buddhist compassion. The Japanese word is composed of two kanji characters, *ji*, meaning "benevolence," and *hi*, meaning "compassion." Buddhist compassion consists in giving comfort to others and relieving their suffering. Looking at the Jataka tales, which describe the previous lives of the Buddha, we find stories of how he voluntarily sacrifices his own life to try to save the lives of others. The story of the prince who offered his own body as a meal to starving tigers is one of the more well-known tales. From the point of view of those who escape death by receiving donated organs or obtain a child by receiving donated gametes or making use of the services of a surrogate mother, these medical technologies are an occasion for rejoicing. Doesn't this mean that buying and selling organs and surrogate motherhood are allowable and in line with the teaching of Buddhist compassion?

Looking at actual, individual cases, we might be led to believe that this is indeed an appropriate argument. However, the matter is not quite so simple. To actually "voluntarily sacrifice one's body," as the Buddha does in the Jataka

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tales—this is not something just anyone can do without extreme difficulty. It is only really possible for those who are so exceedingly pure and good that, like the Buddha, they fall into a category of unique beings. There are very few people who, on honest reflection, would say that they are capable of doing such a thing. Thus, if we advocate such sacrifices as manifestations of Buddhist compassion, we are in fact asking of others something we cannot do ourselves. We tend to think of Buddhist compassion as an unlimited

some kind. Thus, what additional factors do we need to consider when we ask for something that requires an act of Buddhist compassion by another?

One factor is how to apply the Buddhist precept against killing. In the field of bioethics studies in the United States, four principles are normally given as criteria for defining bioethical acts: autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice. Beneficence and non-maleficence appear to overlap, but beneficence addresses the potential for goodness and

good, but in reality, serious harm or loss may come to the person trying to put it into practice. Are we really taking this not inconsiderable possibility into account when we advocate acts of Buddhist compassion by others?

One reason we tend to use of the concept of Buddhist compassion somewhat lightly may be because the word *jihi* was originally used largely in the context of an asymmetrical relationship. This kind of compassion is primarily taken to be an attribute of the Buddha, with human beings understood as recipients of the Buddha's compassion. There are limitations to the conscious practice of Buddhist compassion by human beings. People who think of themselves as voluntarily practicing Buddhist compassion are relatively few, and so self-awareness of these limitations is also bound to be rare. In considering problems of bioethics, we need to re-evaluate what we mean when we speak of Buddhist compassion in the context of interpersonal action. When a person attempts to put it into practice, there is a significant possibility that that person will suffer loss or damage of

happiness, while non-maleficence evokes averting the threat of the possibilities for evil and violence. Where Buddhist compassion relates more deeply to the principle of beneficence, the Buddhist precept against killing relates to the principle of non-maleficence. This precept says we should not kill or harm any living thing, but in a more modern interpretation we can take it to mean that, in any event, we should refrain from violence against other people.

We need to think about whether or not we should sanction the buying and selling of organs, human egg donation, and surrogate motherhood in the light of this modern interpretation of the Buddhist precept against killing. In most cases, people offering their organs for sale are poor people who need money for daily life in the present, even if this means shortening their future life span. Little research has been done on whether donors selling organs are more likely to fall ill afterward or how much the procedure might be shortening their lives. However, it would probably be overly optimistic to assume that donating a kidney shortens

An organ transplant team carries a cooler containing a liver removed from a brain-dead patient to a hospital where a transplant operation will take place.

Detail from the frontispiece to chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra, mounted on a Lotus Sutra scroll, in which Bodhisattva Never Despise, who worships the buddha-nature in every person he encounters, is depicted as being chased by people holding sticks.

the donor's life span in only a small minority of cases, and the same most likely goes for egg donation and surrogate motherhood.

We also need to make educated guesses about what might happen if these procedures come to be perceived as a good thing as they spread around the world, and become part of normal behavior in human society. If donating human eggs were socially sanctioned, even though regulations might allow only voluntary donation, in fact many women would probably find themselves in a position where they have no choice but to donate their eggs. The same can be said for selling organs and surrogate motherhood. Research already shows that, even in the case of parts of organs being donated by the patient's living family members, many people find themselves forced into a position where they have no choice but to become a donor. If this is a true reflection of reality, it comes close to coercing people in a position of weakness to sacrifice their own health in the service of others. This violates the principle of non-maleficence, and goes against the modern interpretation of the Buddhist precept against killing.

Another factor we need to take into account in addition to Buddhist compassion is the concept of bodhisattva practice as taught in Mahayana Buddhism. Bodhisattva practice is altruistic action, and might be defined as Buddhist compassion put into practice, but a stronger sense of mutual equality between giver and receiver is implied in the case of bodhisattva practice. The Lotus Sutra is well known as the sutra in which bodhisattva practice is most forcefully expressed; in its twentieth chapter, "Bodhisattva Never Despise," there appears a bodhisattva who worships the buddha-nature in every person he encounters. This behav-

ior causes some people to become suspicious and in some cases to treat him with malice or violence, but this does nothing to deter Bodhisattva Never Despise from worshipping them. The concept of bodhisattva practice is understood as a relationship of mutuality in which one person can put himself in the place of another and vice versa. It encourages people to have a feeling for the weightiness of another's existence, and to be open and welcoming toward others even in the full realization that mutually interacting with others will inevitably involve each hurting the other somewhere along the line.

What I would like to emphasize is that the concept of bodhisattva practice includes the notion of equality and mutuality between those who interact with one another. Referring to the concept of bodhisattva practice should provide us with an approach we can adopt in our examination of bioethics that includes a sense of mutuality and equality that the concept of Buddhist compassion was less apt to evoke. Buying and selling organs, donating human eggs, and surrogate motherhood all tend to give rise to relationships that place one person in one type of position and that place the other person in a different and subordinate position. Such a relationship is extremely likely to create a situation in which one person uses his or her own body as a tool for the benefit of another. In the final analysis, this means using that person's body as chattel or as a commodity. To use a person's body as a tool or resource is to treat the human body with contempt, and this is very likely to lead to mutual psychological injury and callousness. This goes against the Buddhist precept against killing in its modern interpretation, that is, the ethical criterion of restraining violence. □

One Buddhist View of Bioethics

by Carl Becker

The Buddhist critique of the Western-style multinational medical and pharmaceutical industry is that it is less the product of compassion than of the money-making attachment of its purveyors.

Buddhism is not a single philosophy but a range of philosophies that have been accepted by some of the most densely populated sustainable cultures that the world has known. Sometimes these cultures have been criticized for failing to hold individual rights above the sustainability of their communities, or for failing to achieve the scientific developments that made possible the industrial and medical revolutions of the West. The densely populated civilizations of Japan, Korea, Indo-China, and pre-Islamic South Asia owed their sustainability to this Buddhistic reluctance to exalt the individual, to exploit the environment, and to promote forms of medicine and health care that produce more people than they can sustain. Conversely, traditional Buddhist societies have presupposed that quality of life—both physical and spiritual—was preferable to quantity—length of life or an expanding population. Modern medicine has cut infant mortality and enhanced life expectancy. This has not produced societies capable of supporting a high quality of physical as well as spiritual life for every baby brought to term, caring adequately for every mentally

or physically challenged member of the societies, or raising the level of satisfaction of elders facing their own mortality, much less distributing the benefits of health care equitably.

Bioethics studies problems of the proper response to medical dilemmas. If we know what is right to do and nothing obstructs our doing so, then we have no ethical dilemma, merely the obligation to do what we know is right. Ethics, particularly bioethics, becomes essential only when plural demands force us to choose between conflicting desires or priorities. To oversimplify, bioethics studies our reasons for setting priorities. One of the major challenges of medical ethics in countries with medical-care programs is the prioritization of limited national medical funding. In Buddhist terms, it is unwise and uncompassionate to proffer certain levels of care to particular patients while denying the same care to others.

The Four Noble Truths, the center of the Buddha's enlightenment, common to every school of Buddhism, hold that

- (1) Physical life, aging, sickness, and death are all *dukkha*—unsatisfactory and inextricably linked to suffering.
- (2) The cause of these sufferings is self-centered desire.
- (3) The elimination of self-centered desire eliminates these sufferings.
- (4) The way to eliminate desire is the Eightfold Path, including meditation.

If there were no rebirth after death, then death would be the end of this cycle of suffering, and the Buddha would have had no need to seek the way to nirvana. In other words, Buddhism *presupposes* the wisdom that life continues as rebirth after death, as well as offers ways to confirm this presupposition through meditation. If the Buddha were unconcerned with the suffering of others, he would never have left his home for years of ascetic meditation. In other words, Buddhism *presupposes* the compassionate knowledge that our own welfare and suffering is inseparable from the welfare and suffering of others, as well as offering ways to confirm

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Detail from the Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara (Mandala of the Contemplation on the Ten Realms of the Mind), a picture scroll owned by the Hayama Daien'in, Yamagata Prefecture. The painting depicts the ten realms of human existence. The semicircular mountain path represents the span of a human life, counterclockwise, from birth to death.

this presupposition through meditation. In response to human suffering in life and death, Buddhism presupposes the wisdom that this is not our only life and the compassionate understanding that we are not the only ones who suffer. The fundamental response of Buddhism is not to try to change reality to meet our unlimited desires but to try to change our desires to be able to accept reality as it is.

The Buddhist view is that painful material experience repeats itself indefinitely until desireless selflessness is attained. It points out that pain comes not only from being killed, hurt, or limited, but also from awareness that our human lives depend heavily upon killing, hurting, and limiting other sentient beings. The more “advanced” our civilization, the greater pollution, destruction, and exploitation each of us imposes on the ecosystem and the developing populations that support our consumptive lifestyles. The more aware we become of the burden that our desires impose upon other sentient beings and the unsustainability of life based upon limitless desire, the humbler we become about wanting to extend a particular life at the expense of others. Of course, we can imagine cases where a loving family desires to preserve the life of an ailing grandparent even at great expense. But Buddhism does not acknowledge

that individuals have the “right” to demand the sacrifice of others’ time or resources to improve their health or prolong their own particular life. The important thing is not the length of life but the equanimity and harmlessness with which it can be lived. An equanimity rooted in ignorance of the damage we wreak on others is not an acceptable and sustainable equanimity. The compassion and selflessness that is the ideal of Buddhism—and that has rendered Buddhist societies of dense populations sustainable for centuries—is incompatible with lifestyles and decision making that place self-interest above that of other sentient beings.

Buddhism teaches that life inevitably involves psychological suffering, concomitant with the realization of the suffering that we cause to other sentient beings. The Jatakas are replete with stories of enlightened animals and humans who gladly give their own lives to reduce the suffering of others who still cling to the desire for life or health. In short, the enlightened Buddha no longer desires physical life, except to teach others the way to selfless equanimity. Buddhist monks live off the surplus of the society; when there is no surplus, they go without eating or depend upon the compassion of others who will share their fast. Buddhist laity, while not psychologically ready to commit to a life of ascetic

mendicancy, admire and support their monks because they recognize the value of a spiritual path and hope to follow it in a future rebirth. In short, a realization of the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth decimates our desires to cling to any particular bodily life; and these are precisely the desires upon which markets for high-tech medicine, genetic engineering, and organ harvesting are based.

Traditional Buddhist cultures take sickness as an invaluable opportunity to reevaluate one's thoughts and actions. Whether resulting from stress, anxiety, overwork, cold, imbalanced diet, overindulgence, lack of exercise, or other karma, ailments enforce a period of inactivity and recuperation. This becomes a time of self-reflection in which patients can determine to balance their lifestyle and interpersonal relationships as well. What a waste it would be if illness were simply considered an inconvenience, "lost time" to be overcome with a pill or an injection, if no personal or existential insights were gained about lifestyle in the process!

If the goal of life is to achieve desirelessness, we might well wonder why we should feed or wash our bodies. Asked why Buddhist monks care for their bodies, Nagasena responded with the analogy of a fetid oozing wound. People bandage or care for a wound not because they love the wound but because they do not want it to fester or trouble them more (Vinaya Pitaka 1.302; Mahavagga 8.26). In fact, monks have served as compassionate caretakers for the sick and the dying throughout Buddhist history. They developed a herbal apothecary; their temples served as dispensaries; and monks cared for the sick, aged, widows, and dying. Buddhists never presumed that they could "overcome" sickness, aging, or death. Rather, each of these existential crises presented an opportunity to awaken to the transitoriness and troubles of life.

After all of this, it does not follow that Buddhists do not practice compassionate medicine. On the contrary, it was Buddhist monks who carried natural herbal medicine to the corners of civilized Asia, from the time of Emperor Ashoka until recent centuries.

The Buddhist ministry toward the sick, compassionately designed to heal illness or alleviate pain wherever possible, is first and foremost a ministry of enlightenment, to heal the mind of selfish delusions and attachments. The Buddhist rules for living (Vinaya, Mahavagga, 1.30) state that Buddhists are to use no medicines but natural ones. Buddhists are only to care for their own and others' bodily well-being so that they may better demonstrate and teach the way of selfless compassion (Maha-parinibbana-sutta, 9). Buddhists are enjoined to relieve suffering, by legal and physical remedies when possible, but above all by using every such occasion to preach the Noble Truths (Srimaladevisimhanada-sutra, 21). Buddhist herbal medicine is designed to alleviate suffering, to prevent or minimize disease, and to create conditions conducive to the maintenance of health in ways compatible with sustainable ecosystems and equal

availability. It does not depend upon animal experimentation nor strive for enhancement of physical prowess or attractiveness.

For centuries, Buddhist priests have served as doctors of the bodies and souls of their constituencies; Buddhist temples have served as hospitals and hospices; and the relief of suffering has been a cornerstone of Buddhist practice as well as teaching. The truth of Buddhist enlightenment does not mean total resignation to whatever ill health may befall, but, rather, an understanding that (a) aging, illness, and death are inescapable aspects of biophysical life; (b) the reduction of suffering is good, but many medical activities simply postpone the inevitable, giving rise to the counterproductive delusion that aging, illness, and death might be defeated or avoided; and (c) if the means for reducing suffering or prolonging life create greater inequalities, damage other sentient beings, or are otherwise unsustainable, then it were better from the outset not to promote them.

The wandering mendicant "brothers" and "sisters" of the original Buddhist community (*sangha*) did not intend specifically to become a ministry of medicine, welfare, or elder care. The Buddha had laid down numerous rules of hygiene and health care, and to maintain their own health, his disciples added to their own store of herbal lore. The contemporary Indian society dictated that many of their members were elderly males who had already finished the social duties of the "householder" life stage. While traditional Indian society decreed that children should care for their aging parents, the Buddhist *sangha* members had all renounced family and society for the life of meditation, so it fell to them to care for their own elders and conduct funerals for their own dead.

Buddhism diffused from the wandering mendicancy of India into the settled agricultural temple communities of China and Korea. Like European monasteries of the Middle Ages, some Asian temples also served as hostels to travelers, and some became known for their good care of the sick and aged. When Buddhism was transmitted from Korea to Japan, it was arguably the superiority of Buddhist hygiene and medicine that enabled its followers to gain a foothold against the militantly reactionary native Shinto opposition. Some of the oldest temples in Japan today, like Nara's Horyuji and Osaka's Shitennoji, distinguished themselves by setting up infirmaries as early as the seventh century. By the tenth century, Buddhist monks in Japan had assumed the role of guiding elders through that last great rite of passage. Monks followed detailed instructions on the palliative and spiritual care of the dying, recording their deathbed visions, guiding their transition from the dying body to the next, disembodied, state. Some monks meditated on the foulness of the body and painted scrolls of dead bodies in states of decomposition; others recorded the images of heavens and hells that they saw in their meditations.

By the thirteenth century, new schools of Buddhism were

growing up in Japan, centering upon preserving a calm state of mind throughout life and especially at the moment of death. From this time until the beginning of the modern era in the 1860s, most doctors were Buddhist monks, and many Buddhist monks were doctors, caring holistically for the minds as well as bodies of their patients. Even more than healing and terminal care, however, Buddhism became so inextricably intertwined with the last passage that people derided it with the epithet “funeral Buddhism.” Yet in recent years, Japanese Buddhists again have been establishing hospices, pain-control clinics, counseling centers, and ministries of care—a development long overdue and greatly welcomed.

Buddhism emphasizes not aggravating suffering, not increasing the disparities between the privileged and the unprivileged. Kant’s Categorical Imperative catches one aspect of this Buddhist view. In other words, if the operation or action that we contemplate cannot be generalized to a principle that all people would follow—or if the results of imagining all people following the same course of action would prove undesirable/unsustainable—then that particular course of action should not be undertaken. When it becomes clear that a medical procedure will likely prove futile, the Buddha recommends preparing one’s mind for life (including the spiritual life following the death of this physical body) rather than clinging to the life of one particular body. This stance becomes doubly important when the probably futile operation would deprive resources from others with greater chances of peaceful life. This sees organ harvesting as morally problematic when there are inevitably more people potentially in need of organs than there are brain-dead people (or corpses) able to donate viable organs. The result is that doctors or “God committees” must decide who will live and who will die. It tends to promote the desire for long life in a particular body and to perpetuate the illusion that longevity is somehow more important than the quality of spiritual equanimity therein.

The Buddhist critique of the Western-style multinational medical and pharmaceutical industry is that it is less the product of compassion than of the money-making attachment of its purveyors. It is demonstrably more effective to elevate national health and life span by addressing public funds to the basic common denominators of sanitation, health education, family planning, safe sex, and the preventive health care of lifestyle improvement. But it is more in the interests of the multinational pharmaceutical and medical industries to spend billions in the pursuit of elusive cancer drugs, artificial organs, and genetic engineering. The patenting and commercialization of genetic information and materials in the not-so-distant future threatens to create ever-greater gaps between the genetic as well as financial “haves” and “have-nots.”

While Buddhism criticizes the tendency to judge people on their salaries or appearances, the capitalist medical-educational system tends to implant in its doctors those very

The temple Shitennoji in Osaka, in which infirmaries were set up as early as the seventh century.

concerns with salary and status seeking while reducing their patients to the status of statistics in their reports. Already, medical professionals in Tokyo and Bangkok approach the epitome of a worldview that sees people strictly in terms of numbers—test scores, salaries, golf scores, frequent flyer miles, horsepower, carats, patents, controlling votes, etc.—rather than for deeper intrinsic or spiritual values such as wisdom, compassion, or kindness. If present trends continue, genetic engineering will inevitably entail even deeper-rooted discrimination on the basis of genetic makeup—and perhaps on the basis of the financial ability or inability to modify it. In the words of Buddhadasa, “Make things humble so they don’t trip the mind.”

Buddhists cannot condone a medical system that empowers and reimburses rich drug companies to harvest drugs and genetic materials from barefoot peasants in the rainforests or that enriches elite groups of Western-educated golf-playing jet-setting surgeons at the cost of ignoring the problems of poverty and sanitation under our noses. The greater Buddhist agenda, like that of the Third World at the Rio Summit, is how to get the elite minority to take seriously the suffering of the poor—the majority of the world! For the rich to ignore the suffering of the poor while debating the morality of unavailable transplantation and genetic engineering is perilously analogous to towered scholastics debating the number of angels dancing on the head of a pin while plagues and Crusades rage—in Buddhist terms: not conducive to enlightenment. □

Religionists and Care for the Terminally Ill

by Yoshiharu Tomatsu

Since doctors today have such badly crowded schedules, calls are growing for people of religion and specially trained professionals to undertake the spiritual care of patients facing imminent death.

Care for the terminally ill in Japan is confronting a paradox. Although the great majority of Japanese now face the near certainty of dying in a hospital, the country's physicians are taught only the major issue of prolonging their patients' lives. Although it cannot be said that doctors consider the death of a patient as nothing more than a setback, how they are supposed to interact with those whose death is imminent remains an unresolved problem. There are not enough physicians, and during their crowded schedules hospital doctors are expected to examine numerous patients. Even if they want to listen to the concerns and anxieties of their patients, there is not enough time. Under today's medical treatment system in Japan, when every kind of therapy is converted into a predetermined number of medical insurance points, the problems in running a hospital mean that nothing seems to go the way a doctor wishes when it comes to dealing with the dying. Given these circumstances, there are now strong voices calling for religionists and professionals who have undergone special training related to spiritual care to take up the task of caring for the terminally ill, not only for the sake of the patients, but also for their families.

Concerning this question, what do we religionists think, as people who often deal directly with the matter of death? Speaking from a Buddhist perspective, at present traditional Buddhist temples hold funerals and the subsequent memorial services in following years, together with several annual observances. That is the main role currently played by the temples. Indeed, it is often the case that ordinary people become involved with a temple for the first time through someone's death. In other words, a temple is a place to visit after a loved one has died.

On the other hand, on the question of how we should deal with the dying, the traditional Buddhist community did not have any special program of education for the clergy. Compared with the plans for memorial services after a person has died, it can be said that plans for offering care for the

hearts and minds of those facing death were extremely rare. In addition, because most Buddhist priests have not even the slightest knowledge of medical treatment, even if they are inspired to visit a hospital, they would just create a feeling of strangeness, and might even cause trouble for the physicians, nurses, and the patients themselves. Such a visit would do nothing but make the clergy themselves feel good. What is needed in order to have meaningful contact with patients whose condition changes from day to day is a certain degree of knowledge concerning their illness and its treatment, as well as the effects of any medications the patient might be taking.

The Right to Self-Determination

For that reason, I believe there is an urgent need for education on views of life and death for both religionists and medical therapists so that terminally ill patients and their families may be able to receive the spiritual care that they require. In the field of medical ethics in Europe and North America, autonomy (the right of self-determination) is a key term. This is the principle of giving priority to the patient's

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autonomy in terms of medical treatment, as long as doing so violates no social or moral codes. On the contrary, however, in the case of Japan's care for the terminally ill, there are many instances when doctors are not able to proceed according to the wishes of the patient because of the wishes of the family. For example, even if a terminally ill patient has made it clear that he or she does not want to be kept alive by life support systems, doctors find it very difficult to make decisions on treatment because they cannot ignore

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Children and their parents appealing to passers-by on a busy Tokyo street, asking for donations to enable a boy with a congenital heart ailment whose life could only be saved by a heart transplant to receive an operation in the United States.

the pleas of families who say they want the physician to do everything possible to prolong the patient's life.

It thus appears that Japan is not a land in which the patient's own decisions are respected. Conditions vary, so in order to obtain the best end-of-life care based upon one's own decisions, it is necessary to develop a three-way system of mutual trust made up of people from the fields of medicine and religion, and the patients and their families. That is how, first of all, the physicians and religionists involved with the patient can each deal subjectively with the question of death, and how their understanding can be shared together with the patient and the patient's family. This is a point of great importance. To be specific about details, a concerned religionist, medical practitioner, and member of the patient's family will have to go beyond their own narrow viewpoints and deal with the dying patient on a one-to-one basis. This will involve spending considerable time at the patient's bedside. To do this effectively, it is necessary to foster special "spiritual care workers" who can always be with the patient.

A previous report on brain death and organ transplants prepared by the Jodo Shu Research Institute listed some guidelines. The main point was that when a person is declared brain-dead, the wish of that person to help save the life of another by authorizing the transplanting of his or her organs must be respected. Buddhist doctrine, however, contains the concept that we should not be attached to the idea of life itself, and it is not right to say that one is correct and the other is wrong. But even here, what we can say is that from every standpoint, it is desirable to respect the right of a patient to self-determination as far as possible within limits generally accepted by society. Under Japan's current Organ Transplant Law, which was enacted in 1997, when the patient's wishes are clear and the patient's family consents, if authorized by the medical ethics committee any person over the age of fifteen may serve as an organ donor.

A proposal to revise the Organ Transplant Law that calls for an easing of the conditions for organ transplants from a brain-dead donor is now under consideration in Japan's Diet, or parliament. It states: "Brain death should uniformly define a person's death, and, if the family consents, unless a clear rejection has been stated by the deceased, then organ transplantation from a brain-dead person should be allowed." Under the proposed revision, once a person is officially declared brain-dead, that person is considered legally deceased, and any further medical treatment should be terminated. Does this not obstruct the right to self-determination of those who believe that the previously established three signs—that the heart has stopped beating, the lungs have stopped functioning, and the pupils are dilated—are the indicators of the death of a human being?

The Role of Religionists

Japanese television and the press occasionally featured people who were collecting donations to enable a Japanese child with a serious heart ailment whose life could only be saved by a transplant from a brain-dead donor, and whose parents were in the United States so that their child could benefit from that operation. The media devoted much time and space to the case because it was deemed exceptionally newsworthy. Indeed, many people were moved when they saw the coverage.

On the medical front, doctors are doing everything they can to save the life of the child. In this situation, even if religionists say, "According to Buddhism, the life of the brain-dead person and the life of the ill child have the same value, so we must not depend too heavily on organ-transplant surgery," those words would seem to be unrelated to reality and would not have the power to appeal to society. And yet, it is not right that we religionists should be carried away by emotion from the mass media coverage. Although sympathizing with and understanding the anxieties and sorrows of parents with a child whose life can only be saved by an organ transplant from a brain-dead donor, as well as the suffering

and pain of the little child, it is still the essential mission of religionists to speak about and make known the views of their faith about issues related to human life and death.

As the most important Buddhist concepts concerning birth, aging, sickness, and death teach, becoming old and dying are key aspects of life, so to say that one wants to escape from them is the same as saying that one wants to escape from life itself. One of the great roles of religionists is to take up, face-to-face, the issues of old age and death on a regular basis. In particular, an activity that can be undertaken within the framework of Buddhism is for each individual to voluntarily consider every day in a positive way the prospect of his or her own death. We can also encourage them to share their insights with their family, their neighbors, or with groups of like-minded believers. I believe that this becomes a way of "eliminating" worries, as outlined in the Buddhist doctrine of the Four Noble Truths: the Truth of Suffering, the Truth of Cause, the Truth of Extinction, and the Truth of the Path. One more important point is that Buddhists, and especially the Buddhist clergy, should always visit their ailing parishioners and become close to them. For example, even if only for brief periods, they should spend some time with them, whether just to lend an ear, make small talk, or sit silently.

Some two years ago, as a member of the Jodo Shu clergy, I began to lecture to students in the medical school of a university in Tokyo. Although I thought it strange that a clergyman without a physician's license should be lecturing to medical students, I now teach once a week in a class with ten to twenty students. As it happens, I know a few licensed physicians who are also ordained clergy, but they devote all of their time to being doctors and do not make it clear that

they are also priests. Seven years ago, my father, who was also a clergyman of the Jodo Shu, died in the hospital affiliated with the university where I now lecture. At that time, I was greatly impressed by the young doctors, who did everything in their power, including applying the best therapies, in trying to cure my father's illness.

Later, I had an opportunity to speak with the dean of the medical faculty. I asked him if there was anything that a Buddhist priest could do in the medical school, which led to my present position. In my lectures, in addition to issues related to death and the ethics of living, I call on the students to be impromptu actors and the whole class takes part in a session of role playing, depicting, for example, the thoughts of a patient with terminal cancer. This helps the students accumulate experience through these sessions and the following discussion. For the students, each such occasion is a case of acting out an actual situation, for through this role-playing the question of dying, which they usually tend to think of only in the abstract, becomes something real that puts pressure on them.

I have heard that before my paternal grandfather died, my father asked the doctors at the hospital to prescribe the best possible treatments for him. My father, though it might be misleading to say "as a member of the clergy," took proper care of his health, and never neglected to undergo periodic medical check-ups. I was able to see that he received the best possible medical care in his last years, just as he had done for his own father. That was because we were fortunate in having the service of excellent young doctors available. I cannot help but think that in both cases the situation appropriately accorded with the patient's "right to self-determination." □

Women living at a home for the elderly in Chiba Prefecture pray with a nurse before a small Shinto shrine that the facility had built within its grounds.

Buddhism and Palliative Care in Japan

by Masahiro Tanaka

The nation's hospitals are sorely lacking in spiritual-care workers who can help ease the pain of patients facing imminent death.

Buddhism was started by a man who found an answer to the problem of the suffering that stems from the fact that there is no escape from death. Hence, Buddhism has been related to palliative care, especially spiritually, since its birth. The Buddha was descended from the noble family of the Shakya clan, which shared in governing the small state of Kapilavastu, which is thought to have been located near the border between India and Nepal. His whole life was quite different from that of Jesus Christ. He was neither arrested nor crucified. He grew up as a wealthy aristocrat, married, and fathered a child.

His happiness ended when he became conscious of the basic facts of human existence. He witnessed for the first time old age, sickness, and death and worried that he too would grow old, sicken, and die. He decided to leave his home and chose a life of homelessness, seeking salvation from suffering—such as aging, disease, and dying—in the practice of yoga. He was twenty-nine years old. After six years of practice, he solved the problem of suffering, reconciling himself to the fact that there is no escape from death. That led him

to a way of life in which one works to continually control one's egoism completely. The spiritual pain of aging, disease, and death disappeared in the Buddha once he realized complete freedom from attachment to the self, which included attachment to his own life. At the same time, the compassion not to discriminate others from oneself appeared in his heart.

The Buddha was enjoying a kind of yoga that blew away the spiritual pain related to death, but he hesitated to tell people about this path to salvation. Telling a person the truth often harms the person if the truth is that his or her life will end. But without telling others this truth, the opportunity for them to realize their own salvation would be missed. It is interesting to note the similarity between the Buddha's hesitation to convey the truth about his salvation and the still common hesitation in Japan about telling cancer sufferers the truth about their condition. To tell patients that their cancer cannot be cured could cause them spiritual pain. After an inner struggle with this paradox, the Buddha decided to teach others about his salvation out of his compassion for humanity.

The Buddha's first students were his five former ascetic companions. He told them about the Four Noble Truths, which are "the truth of suffering; the truth of cause of suffering; the truth of extinction of suffering, otherwise known as nirvana; the truth of the path to nirvana." Suffering was the Buddha's main concern. Here, suffering is a translation of the Sanskrit word *duhkha*, which literally means "to be denied what we desire."

The Buddha said that there are eight kinds of suffering. The first four are birth, aging, disease, and death. The last four are separation from what we love, contact with what we hate, unattained aims, and the suffering inherent in the aggregates of attachment to five components of oneself. The last suffering summarizes all sufferings. Attachment to the self is the fundamental suffering. The cause of suffering is

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passion, such as the passion for sex, the passion to live, and the passion to die (sometimes called the death instinct). These three passions correspond to the three elements of life in biology: reproduction, dynamic equilibrium, and death. The extinction of suffering is the state of nirvana, wherein passions are extinguished, and suffering, that is, attachment to self, is also extinguished. The path to nirvana is one on which one controls the passions completely. Attachment to the self being controlled, compassion for all others appears.

The Buddha's doctrine has no purpose in and of itself. It is but the means to bring happiness to people. And as the Buddha showed, using the metaphor of a raft, the essence of his doctrine was to leave all attachments behind. Imagine a person walking down a road. He comes to a large river. The shore on his side of the river is dangerous, but the shore on the distant side is peaceful. He makes a raft. He crosses the river on the raft and reaches the other shore. After arriving, he has to leave the raft on the shore to continue on his journey. In this case, the raft is a metaphor for the Buddha's doctrine itself. Metaphor literally means "to carry over." And Buddhism, too, is just a "raft" that carries people over to the other shore of happiness. The raft should be dispensed with once one has crossed over to the other shore. A Buddhist is not attached to Buddhism itself, and also the nonattachment of Buddhism does not become attached to the concept of nonattachment.

The Buddha said, "What I can control freely according to my desires is mine. But what I cannot control freely according to my desires is not mine." We do not have control over our bodies as far as birth, aging, disease, and dying are concerned. So in order to control ourselves, we must recognize that our bodies are not our own. There is nothing that can be said to be mine or myself because even this body does not belong to me. If we consider ourselves thus, we do not discriminate others from ourselves. This is the wisdom of equality in Buddhism. Having compassion for all people without attachment to self is the situation of a Buddhist who affirms all other religions equally. Therefore, many personalities gradually came to be included in Buddhism, and the concept of the mandala, which encompasses all types of human life, developed.

Buddhism as such expanded throughout Asia thanks to its association with medicine. In the third century BCE, Ashoka, ruler of an Indian kingdom, had a medicinal herb garden that was the oldest of its kind in the world. He sent Buddhist priests to many foreign countries to treat people with medicine from his garden. In this way they could save people from physical diseases through the medicine and from spiritual suffering through the Buddha's teaching. It is

interesting to note that in Japan, the first national hospital was established in a Buddhist temple.

Unique Buddhist manners and rituals for dying developed in Japan. One of these ideas was contained in a text titled "The Esoteric Exposition of the Most Important Matter in Life," which has nine chapters. The first chapter says that if a disease can be controlled by medicine, one must never give up nor give in to death. The second says that if a disease cannot be controlled, and there is no way to be healed, one must not cling to life. From the third chapter, one learns how to prepare for death by concentrating one's mind on one's own ideal personality of worship—which is the essence of yoga.

Next I would like to discuss how this relates to the current approach toward illness and death in Japanese medicine. The word "religion" in Japanese is written with two characters, *shu* and *kyo*, which literally mean "mystery" and

Buddhist priests take part in a meeting with a group of people preparing to set up a website on ethical issues surrounding organ transplants, in Tokyo in 1999.

"doctrine." The latter half, doctrine, corresponds to the rational part of religion, which can be transmitted easily by words. The first part, mystery, corresponds to that part of religion that is outside of rationality and cannot be transmitted by words and requires a master-disciple type of transmission. Almost all Japanese culture developed under the influence of esoteric Buddhism and followed the formality of mystery and doctrine, and included a master-disciple type of transmission. The Japanese cultural changes that grew from this esoteric influence include the Japanese arts of flower arranging, poetry, calligraphy, painting, and theater.

Also, a nonverbal communication style gradually became

more important than one of open verbal communication. To understand something difficult that cannot be expressed in words easily, one needs to relive it or experience it vicariously. But vicarious experience requires that one has already, at some point, had the actual experience. If one has not, metaphors or symbols are frequently used to help people vicariously understand such experiences. The most difficult things to understand, such as the mystery of the Buddha's enlightenment, are called "secrets." The word "secret" in Japan did not originally mean hidden from view but described something that was difficult to understand by verbal communication.

To help in understanding the current state of palliative care in Japan, please consider some reports that have appeared in medical journals. The May 1988 issue of the weekly *Medical Tribune* described how an international conference on cancer was held using satellite communication. The chairman of the Soviet Union Cancer Society stated that he did not tell cancer patients their true diagnosis because it would cause the patients mental distress, and that in turn would have a negative influence on their condition. An American doctor said that he tells cancer patients their true diagnosis as a matter of course. I think it is because American hospitals have spiritual-care workers that doctors there can tell their patients the truth, whereas the former Soviet hospitals did not. How to prolong a life depends on refutable matters, so science and doctors can handle it properly. But how to live a limited life does not belong to science. So spiritual-care workers must take care of it.

In a paper ironically titled "Curable Cancers and Fatal Ulcers: Attitudes toward Cancer in Japan" published in 1982, it was pointed out that Japanese patients having terminal cancer were generally not told their true diagnosis. Japanese doctors do not approach patients through open verbal communication. It points out that vagueness is an important part of Japanese culture and that there is a principle of

secrecy in Japanese culture. This culture of secrecy and vagueness originated in Buddhism.

Unfortunately, Buddhism was excluded from Japanese society in 1868 by the revolutionary government of the Meiji era. When Western culture was adopted to modernize Japan, the government tried to exclude Christianity, attempting instead to replace Christianity with Shinto, the native religion of the people. However, this attempt did not succeed, and the people in charge of spirituality disappeared from Japanese hospitals. After that revolution, the formal vagueness was left without any connection with its important Buddhist spirituality. The resulting absence of spirituality, and therefore, spiritual-care workers, in Japanese hospitals makes it difficult to give a true diagnosis to cancer patients.

Utilization of the principle of informed consent is still not universal in Japan, although it has become the most important principle in medical ethics through the Helsinki and Lisbon declarations. Buddhist priests are not doing their essential work, using the "raft" to transfer patients to the other shore of palliation, in present-day Japan. Currently, many palliative-care units exist in Japan, but the main task of those units is not the relief of spiritual pain but only the management of physical pain. The training of spiritual-care workers is urgently necessary, since they are currently absent from most medical institutions in Japan. □

This essay is an edited version of a paper that was delivered by the author at an international conference sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers in November 2004 at the Vatican New Synod Hall, where Catholic spiritual care workers, priests, sisters, doctors, nurses, etc., were convened to study palliative care from all angles.

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Relieving the Physical and Mental Distress of the Terminally Ill

Kosei General Hospital, affiliated with Rissho Kosei-kai, opened its Fuyu Center in April 2004, next to its main building in Tokyo. The center has three facilities: a kidney center, an intermediate care unit for the elderly, and a terminal care unit. The center serves many elderly patients from the local community.

The terminal care unit (twelve beds), called Kosei Vihara, is for patients with terminal cancer and their families. The staff of thirteen includes nurses and orderlies, who seek to relieve the physical and mental distress of cancer patients and their families. The period of stay ranges from a few days to several months. Some 280 patients have received palliative care in the unit since its opening.

A patient's room within Kosei Vihara.

Building Bridges for the Promotion of Life, Justice, and Peace

by Juan Masiá

A Roman Catholic priest describes the basic importance of cooperation among different fields of science, philosophy, and religion for achieving the ultimate benefit for humanity.

I was once invited to participate in a symposium about the value of life, human dignity, and the protection of human rights. The professor who had invited me was responsible for moderating the dialogue. Since he had to introduce the speakers, he reviewed our curricula, in order to say a few words about each of the participants in the round table. But he was puzzled about my curriculum. He realized that I had written books on different subjects that seemed, at first sight, to belong to very different fields. He asked me politely: "Would you tell me, please, why did you change from one subject to another in your academic life? I see that you wrote about the hermeneutical philosophy of Paul Ricoeur in 1979 and about bioethics in 1983. Then you moved into the field of social justice when you wrote about the theology of liberation and ethics in 1985. Recently I hear that you have been involved in translating the Lotus Sutra and *The Awakening of Faith*. I am sorry, but that makes it difficult to decide which label to put under your name."

Then I responded: "Thank you very much for your frankness. If I were to answer ironically, I would repeat the famous slogan of the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno (1864–1936), who used to say: 'Please, do not pigeonhole me.' I used a quotation from Unamuno because the editing of a Japanese translation of his selected works was one of my first tasks at Sophia University in the early seventies. Anyway, the four examples you cited from my curriculum are just four expressions of only one concern, namely, to build bridges for the promotion of life, justice, and peace."

After I made this comment, the professor who had invited me smiled and said humorously: "Well, we thought we had invited a philosopher, but we have with us a constructor. Let us hope the budget is not excessive. Anyhow, welcome to our symposium."

"Thank you again," I said, "but, please, let all of us become builders of bridges, let us all join together in the effort to build a truly intercommunicating and peaceful world."

While recalling that exchange, I should like to encourage

readers to build bridges toward the future. Such are the four fields of intercommunication with which I have been working until now: (1) hermeneutics, (2) bioethics, (3) global justice, and (4) interreligious spirituality. In reality, these four fields are very much interrelated. If I may be allowed to use a metaphor inspired by the Lotus Sutra I would say: "I have not been traveling in four different vehicles. There is only one vehicle, as the Buddha says. To put it in Japanese: *ichijo*, namely, just One Vehicle."

When the word "bioethics" appeared for the first time as the title of a book, it was linked to the metaphor of "building bridges." More than three decades have passed since the famous book by Van Rensselaer Potter, *Bioethics: Bridge to the Future* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1971), was published. The task of building bridges between the culture of the sciences and the culture of the humanities is still an ideal we have not yet achieved.

Bioethicists have continued to examine the ethical dimensions of problems at the cutting edge of biotechnology, biomedicine, and ecology in their application both to human life and to the protection of the environment. The sphere covered by bioethics is very broad. Cooperation among

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A symposium on "Religion and Bioethics" that the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations held at Rissho Kosei-kai's facility in Tokyo on February 22, 2005, in which the issue of organ transplants was discussed from interdisciplinary angles. The panelists included a physician at a critical care center, a jurist, a bioethicist, a scholar of religious studies, and a representative of a religious organization.

many different specialties and disciplines is needed in order to confront the challenges of bioethics. For such interdisciplinary work we must not be constrained by the narrowness of each particular field. We must continue building bridges of dialogue and interface, mostly with regard to the relation between life sciences and the values that should frame human life.

Potter, an oncologist at the University of Wisconsin, defined bioethics as "a new discipline that combines biological knowledge with a knowledge of human value systems." According to him, bioethics was supposed to foster a better environment and a better human adaptation to that environment. As a result, both human survival and the survival of both the environment and the civilized world would be promoted. That is why Potter understood bioethics as "a new science of survival." In 1978 *The Encyclopedia of Bioethics* (Warren T. Reich, ed., 4 vols. [New York: The Free Press]) already defined this discipline as a bridge between the sciences and humanities: "the study of the ethical dimensions of medicine and the biological sciences" (vol. 1, pp. 19–20).

One of the best researchers on the history of bioethics, Albert R. Jonsen, has given a very good portrait of bioethics: "The subject of Bioethics is life, but not as described in the biosciences, which attempt to discern the chemical, physical, and environmental processes that sustain living beings. Bioethics is about life as a value, worthy to be fostered by human decisions and actions. . . . Our choices about reproduction, medicine, and science can affect the ways in which the value we place on life is manifested. We must ask many deep questions about our choices. Bioethics is a scholarly attempt to collect those questions and to seek answers."

(Albert R. Jonsen, *Bioethics beyond the Headlines* [New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005], p. 2)

I have just described one of the main characteristics of bioethics as an attempt to build bridges between the "bio" of biology and the "ethos" of ethics. The reason that I am making a point of emphasizing this task of building bridges is that I understand not only my commitment to bioethics but my whole life's work precisely with the use of this metaphor of "building bridges." I shall try to explain what I mean by sharing with you some thoughts about the task of building bridges.

The prefix "inter" could be the keyword for such an explanation, expressing the task of being always "on the threshold," "between two poles," "playing the role of a bridge." "Inter" appears in the following four themes: *interpretation of texts, interdisciplinary dialogue, intercultural communication, interreligious cooperation.*

This is not just abstract reasoning but something that springs from the daily experience of living between two cultures and daily confrontation of the problem of misunderstanding. Therefore one feels the need to build bridges of understanding. Why are we saying that there is a need to translate and to interpret, a need to make an effort to understand? There are many misunderstandings. We need to continuously to put into practice the arts of dialogue, reading, interpreting, and communicating. That is what *philosophical hermeneutics* is all about as we try to start a dialogue between the text and the reader: the bridge of interpretation. That was my main concern when I started teaching philosophy in the early seventies.

"Inter" is also the key to the other three subjects that were mentioned earlier, namely, my works on *bioethics* (since the

late seventies), on *liberation ethics* (since the early eighties), and on *interreligious encounters* (since the nineties). The subjects about which I wrote the books that were referenced above (*The Philosophy of P. Ricoeur*, *Studies of Bioethics*, *Theology of Liberation*, and the translation of *The Awakening of Faith*) are very much interrelated. They all have to do with the task of building bridges for the promotion of life and peace.

Briefly, I have formulated the four tasks of my life's work in the following way:

Hermeneutics is concerned with the bridge of translation and *interpretation* between the text and the reader.

Bioethics is concerned with the *interdisciplinary* bridge of communication between science and human values.

Liberation ethics is concerned with the *intercultural* bridge of global justice between North and South, between the rich and the poor, the oppressors and the oppressed.

Interreligious encounters are concerned with the *interreligious* bridge of cooperation to foster and nurture both interior peace of mind and global peace.

All four tasks are vehicles that converge and point to one common mission and destination, namely, the only One Vehicle of building bridges for the promotion of both life and peace.

I finish by stressing one more point about the importance of religions in building bridges for the promotion of life and peace.

I started writing about bioethics in Japanese in the early eighties. The word "bioethics" was not much understood at that time in Japan. In fact, when the Life Science Institute of Sophia University started a program in bioethics, it took some time and effort to obtain from the Ministry of Education sanction for the use of the word "bioethics" as an academic discipline. At that time I was able to publish my first book on bioethics in Japanese thanks to a grant from the Niwano Peace Foundation. It is worth noting that some of the first symposiums on bioethics in Japan were organized by a foundation that was inspired by the Buddhist religious association Rissho Kosei-kai.

I mention just one example, which is particularly relevant, as a witness to the pioneer role played by the Niwano Peace Foundation in this field in Japan. On September 16, 1981, the symposium "Life Sciences and Religion" was held at the Akasaka Prince Hotel under the sponsorship of the Niwano Peace Foundation. The impact of the keynote addresses by such important academic leaders as Professor Itaru Watanabe (from the field of biology) and Professor Koshiro Tamaki (from the field of religious studies) played a decisive role in the beginning and later implementation of bioethics in Japan. At that time I had just started working in this field both at the Life Science Institute of Sophia University, with Professor Kiyoshi Aoki, and in the Institute of Sciences for Survival (*Seizon Kagaku Kenkyujo*), under the leadership of Dr. Taro Takemi.

I believe that symposium played a key role as witness to

the importance of the mutual cooperation between religion and science for the promotion of life, justice, and peace. I stress here that pioneering initiative of the Niwano Peace Foundation. I am especially interested in emphasizing this point because today there is a need for a wider and more profound approach to bioethics, which may be enriched by insights on the meaning of life and death, or about health and sickness, or about pain, suffering, and pleasure that are found in several religious traditions and can be learned through interreligious and intercultural encounters about spirituality.

In closing this personal reflection, I quote the words of a religious leader as an appraisal of the role of religions in the bioethical dialogue about life. These are the words of Pope John Paul II in a 1995 letter to all of the Roman Catholic churches in the world: "It would therefore be to give a one-sided picture, which could lead to sterile discouragement, if the condemnation of the threads to life were not accompanied by the presentation of the *positive signs* at work in humanity's present situation. . . .

"Among the signs of hope. . . . Especially significant is the reawakening of an ethical reflection on issues affecting life. The emergence and ever more widespread development of *bioethics* is promoting more reflection and dialogue—between believers and non-believers, as well as between followers of different religions—on ethical problems, including fundamental issues pertaining to human life." (*The Gospel of Life: On the Value and Inviolability of Human Life* [Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995], nn. 26–27) □

Pope John Paul II blesses a terminally ill patient at St. Joseph's Hospital in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, in May 1984.

Rissho Kosei-kai's Statement on the Proposed Revision of the Organ Transplant Law

Ten years have passed since Japan's Organ Transplant Law was enacted in 1997, and there has been an increasing call for its revision from many quarters. In 2004, the Liberal Democratic Party's Research Commission on Brain Death, Life Ethics, and Organ Transplants finalized its proposal for the revision of the Organ Transplant Law, and in 2006, Diet members of the ruling coalition parties presented the Lower House with two proposals for revision as lawmaker-initiated legislation. Through loosening the restrictions on the conditions required for organs to be donated, the proposed revisions aim to promote the spread of organ donation.

The Chuo Academic Research Institute, an organization affiliated with Rissho Kosei-kai, from an early date established a study group on the subject of bioethics, and has submitted its views and recommendations to the Prime Minister's Ad Hoc Commission on Brain Death and Organ Transplantation and members of the Diet, adding to its own research religious, social, and cultural insights on the issue of brain death and organ transplants.

In response to the submission of the two proposals for revision of the Organ Transplant Law, Rissho Kosei-kai in December 2006, in the name of Rev. Katsunori Yamanoi, chairman of its board of directors, submitted to Diet members it has endorsed and who sit on the Lower House Committee on Health, Welfare, and Labor "An Opinion on the Proposals for Revision of the Organ Transplant Law." It calls for respect for the basic principles of the current law from the standpoint of protecting the dignity of life. An abridgment of its contents follows.

An Opinion on the Proposals for the Revision of the Organ Transplant Law (abridged)

In Japan, a person's death has traditionally been determined by three signs: cardiac arrest, respiratory arrest, and dilation of the pupils. Taking "brain death" as an indication of a person's actual death has not achieved a public consensus. The current Organ Transplant Law, in effect since 1997, was enacted following widespread debate in many quarters among people of differing viewpoints on the question of life and

death. It did not accept brain death as equivalent to a person's actual death, but it did define it thus: "only in cases of organ transplantation shall brain death serve to indicate actual death," and it was established with the basic premise of "respecting the deceased person's own wishes."

The recently submitted Plan A, which says "Brain death shall be uniformly taken to indicate a person's actual death, and, as long as that person has not expressed disapproval, organ transplants from the person's body shall be possible with only the consent of the family members," essentially ignores the debate on which the current law is grounded. And even in the case of Plan B, in which the framework of the current Organ Transplant Law remains unchanged but the minimum age for a donor would be lowered from fifteen to twelve, concern has arisen over the lack of a legal basis for this.

An organ transplant from a brain-dead patient is a special type of medical intervention that is based on the premise that one person's death can save another person's life. The fundamental human rights of the donor and the right of someone to decide whether or not to become a donor must be given full and careful consideration.

As religionists, we revere all life as sacred, and from the standpoint of defending the dignity of life, concerning the proposals for revision of the Organ Transplant Law we submit the suggestions that follow. It is our strong hope that, based on a wide range of opinions from people in all walks of life and at all levels of society, there will be cautious and rigorous deliberations within the Diet.

(1) Brain Death and Actual Death

We cannot define brain death uniformly as actual death. In the case of organ transplants, we should respect the wishes of the would-be donor and defer to the views on life and death of each person.

(2) Confirmation of One's Consent to Become a Donor

The removal of organs from a patient declared brain-dead is a practice of medical intervention that is legally accepted on the condition that the patient's voluntary will to donate his or her organs is respected; the patient's consent must therefore be an essential condition.

(3) Declaration of Intent for Persons under Fifteen Years of Age

Concerning the declaration of intent of young people under fifteen years of age, in addition to the consent of the parents or a legal guardian, appropriate legal measures need to be set up. Children under six years of age should be exempted from organ donation.

(4) Determination of Brain Death

For a determination of brain death, it is necessary as in the past to have the wishes of the patient in writing, as well as the consent of the patient's family.

(5) Education and Knowledge concerning Organ Transplant Medicine

Detailed information about organ transplant medicine must be sufficiently conveyed to the public from humanitarian, cultural, and social standpoints with the general agreement of all concerned.

(6) Medical Ethics and Comprehensive Measures

The forming of a comprehensive plan for medical treatment and subsequent patient care that are fitting for Japan as a nation that seeks to ensure the health and welfare of all citizens must be actively pursued through such means as the enhancement of holistic medical education to restore ethical morality and trust in medical treatment as a benevolent art and the development of medical techniques that can be used in place of organ transplants.

(7) The Understanding and Cooperation of the People

It is dangerous to make revisions to the law that only address the current situation and that emphasize speed over quality. It is hoped that the understanding and cooperation of the general public will be obtained through full and adequate discussions with people of varied opinions and viewpoints.

Before revision of the Organ Transplant Law is undertaken, we humbly urge all the legislative and administrative bodies involved to obtain the opinions and cooperation of the general public from all quarters and at all levels, and to try their utmost to bring about a suitable medical care system for our country as a nation that holds the basic principle of seeking to ensure the health and welfare of all its citizens. □

The Power to Live

by Nichiko Niwano

*With the understanding that we are granted life by the life
of the Buddha, we cannot help but feel moved
and joyful at each of the teachings.*

When our stomachs are empty, food always seems more appetizing and especially delicious, and we can digest it thoroughly. When our bodies feel tired from the day's activities, nothing is so good as a sound night's sleep, which leads to a revival of our energy. While these are the natural functions of the life we have been given and we take them for granted, at the same time we have to recognize something more important about our daily lives.

The Zen priest Dogen said, "This life and death of ours is actually the venerable life of the Buddha." The phrase "this life and death" refers to the lives of delusion that we lead, and here Dogen teaches us directly that our lives are a manifestation of the venerable life of the Buddha. In other words, we are granted life by the life of the Buddha, the great life-force, so we have already been given the great power to live.

Incidentally, because we delude ourselves that we are living under our own power, it is usually the case that we become conceited or else demean ourselves and lose confidence.

With the understanding that we are granted life by the life of the Buddha, we cannot help but feel moved and joyful at each of the teachings, such as "Sentient beings and the Buddha are not two." We are then overwhelmed by the

desire to live each day thankful for the life we have been given and have been allowed to live.

It is a fact that we human beings have many wishes and desires, such as wanting to lead happy lives and wanting to be accepted by others. These, too, are manifestations of the life of the Buddha: precisely because we have desires and delusions, we also wish to transcend them and this wish awakens in us the aspiration to buddhahood. In this sense, even delusions are a part of the life of the Buddha, since they can be said to have the mysterious power to lead us to enlightenment.

Placing Ourselves in the Realm of Death

Through the teaching of impermanence that "all things are always changing" we know that our lifetimes are limited and become aware of the fact that in this world, no one lives forever. Religion teaches us how to wisely acknowledge the certainty of death, so that when we face the issue of death squarely, we are also recognizing that our own deaths are inevitable.

A saying attributed to the late Edo-period lord of the Nagaoaka domain, Kawai Tsugunosuke (1827–68), goes: "Human beings are creatures who end up in coffins, on which the lids are closed and nailed shut, and then are buried in the ground—and unless they keep that always in mind, their lives are utterly wasted."

We could say that the real meaning of Kawai's words is that we should place ourselves in the realm of death, do away with ego, savor the mystery and gratitude of being granted life in the here and now, and above all else correct our way of living.

In November we celebrate the anniversary of the founder's birth. Let us learn from the lifetime he spent in walking the way of disseminating the Dharma. We should not let our focus shift to the superficial details on all sides of us and always keep our eyes fixed on the Buddha as the source of life, exercising the power to live that we have been given and working to achieve lives that demonstrate a genuine reason for existence. □

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Gross National Happiness and Buddhism

by Dasho Karma Ura

This article presents briefly the relationship between Buddhism, Gross National Happiness (GNH), and the economy. GNH is not exclusively an aspect of Buddhism. However, in this article, which was written especially for DHARMA WORLD, the links between GNH and Buddhist understanding of reality are explored. Nonetheless, it must be understood that because of the wide applications of GNH, it can also be discussed in a completely secular context such as health, politics, the economy, education, the environment, communications, and technology. GNH's relevance is, in fact, mostly in practical public policy fields.

The concept and practice of Gross National Happiness originated from the former ruler, the fourth king of Bhutan, H.M. Jigme Singye Wangchuck, in the 1970s. The present king, H.M. Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, has proclaimed the fulfillment of GNH as one of the four main responsibilities in his reign. Thus, GNH is accorded extremely high priority in the nation. Official documents, such as the National Assembly proceedings and other planning documents, frequently refer to GNH or its Dzongkha equivalent, *Gyelyong Gaki Pelzom*. In April 1986 the exact term GNH appeared in an interview given by His Majesty to the *Financial Times* of London. The title of the article was "Gross National Happiness Is More Important Than Gross Domestic Product." In that interview, His Majesty questioned the assumption prevailing at that time that collective happiness can be attained by following exclusively the internationally accepted GDP-based development model. His Majesty chose to place strong emphasis on the fact that

there is something beyond material goods that people aspire to and that economic growth alone may not achieve happiness. As part of the GNH-related strategy, His Majesty emphasized environmental preservation, decentralization of government decision making, cultural preservation, and other policies that were all quite ahead of the times. But it was not until a few decades later that opinions around the world began to take note of happiness as an interesting alternative path of economic and social development.

The Relevance of GNH for Any Nation

Happiness should be of interest to any nation in the world regardless of its religious creed or political ideology. There is no government or society that is not interested in the longevity of its citizens. In a GNH society, citizens will enjoy greater health and longevity. There are highly suggestive findings pointing to happiness as a significant contributor to improved immune function, which leads to resistance to diseases. By focusing on happiness and well-being, returns on a GNH-oriented policy will include improved health and longevity of the people, ultimately making the economy more efficient by greatly cutting health spending costs.

Another impact of GNH will be the benefit an economy receives from an increased level of creativity and the consequent increase in intangible capital. If the citizens are happy, then they will be more creative and innovative. As a result, the sector of an economy that is based upon technological innovation, organizational improvements, and those factors that drive the economy more than natural resources will be stimulated. In economies like that of the United States, one-third of the exports consists of intellectual property goods, such as cultural products, films, media, technology, software, etc. One of the main inputs to such sectors is creativity or innovation, for which citizens need the requisite autonomy

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and development of their mental potentials. A GNH society will enable its citizens to express their entrepreneurial qualities and thereby greatly augment the creative sector.

Yet another impact of GNH will be the ability of members of a society to bond together toward a common pursuit. Every nation is interested in maximizing its social capital by fostering the organization of its citizens through all kinds of associations that bring people together in pursuit of common goals. If citizens are happy, their citizenship qualities will be enhanced, as they will be more sociable and altruistic and thus will collaborate more actively within the organizations to which they belong.

The last relevance of GNH to any nation is that it will help ecological sustainability. By all accounts, the world is becoming more and more unsustainable and will become more so unless we change our ways. GNH is interesting globally because of its relationship to ecological sustainability.

The intensity of resource use is based on the proliferation of wants, which is further based on the proliferation of goods and products that are designed for a short use-life so that they must be replaced through continual consumption. Industries deliberately design such schemes in order to sell more goods within a shorter period of time. Consumers are equally vulnerable, as they are led to think that they can dismiss the vacuum they feel in their minds through increasing their purchasing, consumption, and possession. If people are happier, they are less driven to consume by what they perceive as a lack in their lives and more likely to be judicious in their consumption choices. As a result, the ecological impact will be significant due to conserved resources.

GNH as Public Good

If happiness is defined simply as that which makes the individual happy, that which fulfills the individual in terms of a self-conception of what happiness is, then that is an example of what we might call "private happiness." It is different from what we would term "collective happiness," or that which will make all individuals happy and create a society characterized by happiness. When happiness is conceived as "private happiness," the means of obtaining happiness differ according to the needs and tastes of individuals.

Any individual who thinks that he can achieve his own happiness at whatever cost to society neglects the external nature of happiness that is conceived individually and maximized as such. Such maximization of happiness leads to an irresponsible and egocentric "happiness."

The perception of happiness as a "private happiness" does not take into account the needs of others and is therefore irresponsible and egocentric. All negative effects are passed on to other members of society. In order to achieve collective happiness, the principle of interdependence should be considered. We all have two eyes to take care of our own self-interests, but as members of a society we also need a third eye, the eye of wisdom that recognizes interdependence. Thus, with the third eye we can elevate our vision

beyond individual self-interest and truly address the happiness of all as a collective goal.

Individuals often resort to inappropriate and unhelpful behavior. In order to deal with problems caused by behavior and judgment that deviate from the pursuit of collective interests, we need to create governments that pursue the public good. Happiness is and must be "public happiness"; it cannot be left to private individual striving and competition. If a government's policy framework and thus the nation's macroconditions are adverse to happiness, it will fail to be attained as a collective goal.

Individuals often make mistakes regarding happiness that cannot be corrected without policy frameworks that address,

A shopping street in Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan.

resolve, and work to prevent such problems from arising again. Government policies must play a crucial role in educating the citizens about collective happiness. It is easy to choose the wrong alternative, such as the purchase of redundant goods that have no effect on our happiness. Citizens and consumers must be educated concerning their choices and the consequences that their choices have from the perspective of collective happiness.

The Means to GNH

As the goal of a GNH society is collective happiness, the means of achieving it must reflect progress toward that end. Our understanding of how the mind achieves happiness affects our very experience of happiness by influencing the means we choose in striving toward satisfaction in life. GNH bases its concept of happiness partly on the Buddhist

understanding of reality. But before we explore this relationship, let us look, as a contrast, at the means to happiness as understood by the behavioral sciences.

The behavioral sciences present a model of the mind that reflects the means to happiness shared by most societies today. It portrays the brain as an input-output device developed in order to receive external stimuli that are translated into pleasures, which are also known as utilities in economic literature. In such a model, the brain's basic structure and function are more or less fixed, with any output dependent upon an input coming from some external stimulus. The consequence of this reductionist theory is that happiness and pleasurable feelings are seen as dependent upon external stimuli. In other words, happiness is in general perceived as a direct consequence only of sensory stimulation.

With such an overemphasis on external stimuli as the source of happiness, it is not so surprising that individuals assume that the consumption and accumulation of material goods will increase their happiness. Unfortunately, this has also been the basis for most economic planning. Even after fulfilling necessities and even after reaching a certain level of affluence, the dynamics of economic systems imply that people must continue purchasing and accumulating goods because they are perceived to directly correlate with increased happiness.

Buddhist thought provides views contrary to these assumptions. It understands the sources of happiness quite differently, claiming that pleasurable feelings will be generated by stabilizing human minds and reducing the mental chatter that is a consequence of the unending stream of external stimuli. People can find a good deal of happiness simply by calming the mind through meditation. The process of meditation is to direct the attention inward, where the subject experiences the subject itself, as opposed to the subject perceiving external stimuli.

The Dalai Lama has said that happiness and compassion are skills that can be learned. Using meditation for training, our turbulent emotions and moods can be managed. In other words, pleasant sensations in the brain can take place without any significant external input. If a practitioner trains himself to meditate well, through either religious or secular forms of meditation, he can be quite contented; and the more regular the practice, the more lasting the impact. New research suggests that through persevering for years in meditation, such as in retreats, the brain may even become structurally modified to the degree that the neural pathways in the brain have physically changed.

Relatedly, the Buddhist perspective states that externally derived pleasure only distracts the individual from inner sources of happiness. Consequently, rather than amassing material goods, detachment from the proliferation of wants can significantly contribute to happiness. Thus, the means to happiness as detailed by Buddhist thought differentiates between the quality of happiness achieved through external means and that achieved through internal means, highly

elevating the latter. As a result, when the Buddhist view is applied, stationary, stable, sustainable economies can be considered successful. An economy that is continually growing would be seen as a failure because of its inability to promote detachment from the proliferation of wants. People cannot be happy if caught in such a runaway process. One of the disadvantages of many current economies is that they structurally feed the individual's proliferation of wants, and that individual consumption feeds the industries. There is a structural malfeasance where such economies do not know where to stop and what the optimal size of the economy is. If the economy is stationary, it is considered stagnant, but actually it could be a signal that stability in wants has been achieved. As it is directly related to the control of individual wants and desires, such stability may also reflect some psychological stability among consumers.

GNH as a Buddhist Social Contract

H.M. King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck defined GNH as the creation of an enlightened society in which the happiness and well-being of all people is the ultimate purpose of governance. Strictly speaking, it is the well-being of all people *plus* all sentient beings, as in the Buddhist view, all sentient beings are incipient buddhas and must be treated as such. Humans are not that different from other sentient beings, their main difference resulting from their greater cognitive ability. Hence, under a GNH society, there is an extended view of citizenship encompassing all life forms, such as the humble earthworm that delivers no small ecological service. Those for whom the state works extend beyond the human population.

GNH should be considered as a Buddhist society's equivalent of the social contract, where citizens pursue collective happiness. To be a member of a GNH society requires one fundamental property: to see all things as interdependent with all other things. By being convinced and informed about interdependence, compassion should naturally arise as a person recognizes that his happiness is dependent on all other creatures' welfare. Without this basic understanding, the individual sinks into poor motivation and weaknesses.

Because of the discursive nature of karma, all are part of an intricate web. Karma is simultaneous and is constantly being revised in all of our interactions with one another. Such a view of interdependence sufficiently motivates us to forget our own narrow existence, changing us such that we begin to engage meaningfully with others and pursue collective happiness. By recognizing the true nature of interdependence, one can see that all karma is collective, that all enlightenment is collective, and therefore that happiness and the policies required to promote it must be oriented toward collective achievement.

May all beings attain happiness! □

(I would like to thank Peter Herschok, Nick Marks, and Ron Colman for their helpful comments.)

Founders Nikkyo Niwano and Chiara Lubich: An Interreligious Dialogue for Peace

by Donald W. Mitchell

The encounter between two spiritual giants of the modern era has led to lasting cooperation of the most meaningful kind in ways that benefit all of humanity. This essay is based on an address delivered by the author at a symposium held by Religions for Peace and Rissho Kosei-kai of New York at the Japan Society in New York to commemorate the centennial of the birth of the late founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, on December 14, 2006.

Much of Rev. Nikkyo Niwano's early work in founding Rissho Kosei-kai was devoted to teaching the Lotus Sutra and creating his new Buddhist lay movement. Then, on September 16, 1963, Founder Niwano met for the first time with Pope Paul VI. Two years later, the pope invited Rev. Niwano to attend sessions of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II). Founder Niwano said that he was inspired by the spirit of openness, reconciliation, and peace building that Vatican II presented as a model for Christian living.

During that visit to the Vatican, Rev. Niwano met for the second time with Pope Paul, on September 15, 1965. The pope said that there is no better way for religious people to contribute to humanity than by walking hand in hand in the way of peace. Founder Niwano replied that he would make the utmost effort for the sake of world peace, and later said that this encounter determined the second half of his life.

It was just five years later, in 1970, that Founder Niwano worked with others to establish what is now called the World Conference of Religions for Peace. It was through Religions for Peace and other interreligious initiatives that Founder Niwano became one of the most distinguished promoters of interreligious dialogue and cooperation of the twentieth century.

In February 1979, Rev. Niwano stopped in Rome on his "Peace Pilgrimage" after attending a preparatory meeting of the Third World Assembly of Religions for Peace in New York. There he met with Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement in the Catholic Church, for the first time. Ms. Lubich felt strongly that the two movements were destined through this encounter to enjoy a close relationship of interfaith friendship and collaboration.

Founder Niwano invited Ms. Lubich and the Focolare members to participate in Religions for Peace, to which she agreed. Since that time, the contributions of the members of the Focolare Movement have been invaluable to the

world assemblies of Religions for Peace. The movement became a permanent member of Religions for Peace, and since 1994 Ms. Lubich has been one of the group's honorary presidents.

Two months after their meeting in 1979, Founder Niwano was in England to receive the Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion. At the award ceremony, members of the Focolare Movement warmly greeted him and his colleagues. More friendship encounters continued to take place, and in 1981, Founder Niwano invited Ms. Lubich to visit Tokyo, where, on December 28, she shared her experience of the Focolare Movement with twelve thousand leaders and members who gathered in the Great Sacred Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters.

It was the 1979 interreligious encounter of these two spiritual giants of the twentieth century that caught my attention. I had heard of Rissho Kosei-kai as one of the most popular new religions in Japan and knew about the meeting between Pope Paul VI and Rev. Niwano during Vatican II. But I thought as I looked at photos of the 1979 encounter that there was something very intriguing about Founder

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Ms. Chiara Lubich and Founder Nikkyo Niwano at Rissho Kosei-kai's Horin-kaku Guest Hall in Tokyo in 1985.

Niwano's person and smile. So I read his autobiography, *Lifetime Beginner* (a wonderful title reflecting his spiritual humility).

I was impressed reading about his early life of poverty and struggle, his courage and confidence on his religious journey, his compassion for those who suffer, and his creativity in forming a new type of lay Buddhism that seeks to bring healing and peace into the human heart, to the family, to society, and to the world. I was also interested in Founder Niwano's commitment to interreligious dialogue, which stemmed in part from his meeting with Pope Paul VI during Vatican II, and his ongoing interreligious efforts to care for the poor around the world.

In fact, it was in the fall of 1979 that I was able to attend a Focolare/Rissho Kosei-kai gathering in New York City. About two hundred youth members of the Focolare Movement and Rissho Kosei-kai held a friendship gathering at the United Nations. This was my first direct experience of a Focolare/Rissho Kosei-kai interreligious event. I was impressed by the warmth and openness that the youths showed to each other and the strong spirit of fellowship and peace that characterized the atmosphere of the gathering.

In 1984 I had the opportunity to meet members of Rissho Kosei-kai in Japan during a visit to the Niwano Peace Foundation in Tokyo. My host in Japan was a member of the Focolare Movement, and after the meeting at the foundation, we all visited the Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters. What impressed me was the unity between the Focolare and Rissho Kosei-kai members. It seemed to be the fruit of a long and positive interreligious dialogue of life and collaboration. I knew that after their meeting in Rome in 1979, Founder Niwano had invited Ms. Lubich to Tokyo in 1981,

where she spoke to Rissho Kosei-kai leaders in the Great Sacred Hall. Now, five years later, I could see the fruits of that dialogue between Ms. Lubich and Rev. Niwano in the interreligious unity between my Catholic and Buddhist acquaintances.

This interreligious unity was not just a state of mind but a basis for interreligious collaboration. During the same year I was in Japan, members of Rissho Kosei-kai and the Focolare Movement in Kenya were working together to organize the Fourth World Assembly of Religions for Peace. And after that assembly, Religions for Peace opened a center for refugee assistance in East Africa staffed jointly with members of the Focolare Movement. The next year saw further interreligious collaboration that resulted in the Asian Inter-Religious Youth Forum in Manila, April 1–3, 1985, with the theme of "Participation, Development, and Peace." This close collaboration has continued to the present.

This dialogue of collaboration between the Focolare Movement and Rissho Kosei-kai is built on a dialogue of life, on sharing the lived experience of friendship. This dialogue of life has also generated a dialogue of spirituality. Members of Rissho Kosei-kai visit for short or extended periods the spiritual retreat centers of the Focolare Movement around the world. They participate in the spiritual life of the Focolare communities, maintaining their Buddhist practices, which the Focolare communities respect and support.

The spiritual encounter goes in the other direction as well. For example, I attended in 2002 the Third Buddhist-Christian Colloquium of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) at the Vatican, hosted by Rissho Kosei-kai in Japan. While there, I attended a *hoza* meeting.

For me, it was a memorable and enriching experience of the transformative power of Rissho Kosei-kai spirituality, as well as a testament to patient compassion nourished by the Lotus Sutra tradition.

Also on a personal note, it was after that meeting in Tokyo that, inspired by the joint efforts for peace of Rissho Kosei-kai and the Focolare Movement and encouraged at that meeting by the president of the PCID, I returned home and founded the Indiana Center for Cultural Exchange (ICCE). The ICCE is really a collaboration among Purdue University, Indiana University, the University of Notre Dame, the University of Minnesota, Georgetown University, Columbia University, and the University of Chicago, along with such organizations as Religions for Peace, the National Council of Churches, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Islamic Society of North America, the Council for American-Islamic Relations, the National Collegiate Athletic Association, and the National Youth Sports Corporation.

We work with nongovernmental organizations in countries with significant Muslim populations. Since 2004 one of our most successful initiatives is Unity Through Sports (USPORT). USPORT has worked with at-risk children in Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, and Algeria through sports projects that provide an opportunity for education in health, leadership, tolerance, and conflict resolution. We are now planning to expand to Uganda, Tanzania, and southern Sudan.

As the interreligious encounter deepened between the Focolare Movement and Rissho Kosei-kai, there evolved an exciting theological or philosophical dialogue. For example, there is a new series of more formal Buddhist-Christian dialogues supported by the Focolare Movement and Rissho Kosei-kai. The second in the series was hosted in 2006 by the Osaka Branch of Rissho Kosei-kai. At that second dialogue, which I was honored to attend, there were other noted Japanese Buddhist leaders from the Tendai, Nichiren, and Nara traditions, as well as Theravadin monks from Thailand. I know that the Focolare participants were very impressed with the spiritual depth, the rich philosophical tradition of thought, and the long and fruitful lineage of the Lotus Sutra tradition in Japan. The significance of this lineage was made even clearer through a wonderful overnight visit to the magnificent Tendai complex on Mount Hiei.

So, we can see that the interreligious dialogue between Rissho Kosei-kai and the Focolare Movement covers all four major types of dialogue: (1) the "dialogue of life," together in interfaith friendship; (2) the "dialogue of spirituality," with members participating in each other's spiritual communities; (3) the "dialogue of theological discussion," in order to build bridges of mutual understanding and appreciation; and (4) the "dialogue of collaboration," where members work together to foster a more united and peaceful world. I think that the genius of Founder Niwano was to envision how such an integrated dialogue, which he encouraged with the Focolare Movement, could transform

people, societies, and the world. When all four forms of dialogue are practiced, which is not at all common, there is a synergy between sharing life experiences, spirituality, reflective discussion, and collaborative action. This synergy opens people's minds and hearts to realize a deeper interreligious fellowship and a shared motivation to compassionately live and work together in order to contribute to a more united, just, and peaceful world community.

The compassionate daily living, the communal problem solving of *hoza* spirituality, and the universality of the Lotus Sutra philosophy of the One Vehicle all contribute to Rissho Kosei-kai's sensitivity to the interrelatedness of life, to the need to work together with others, and to the ideal of building a more united and peaceful world community. It seems to me that Rev. Niwano stressed a universal vision of ourselves and the world that sees all humankind as one family in need of healing, unity, and peace. To bring about this ideal, he saw the collaborative problem-solving "*hoza*-like" approach as most helpful to this transformation. For example, when people of religion are brought together in Religions for Peace, they can share their aspirations, fears, hopes, and longings for humanity and then together seek ways for healing humankind in order to overcome the mentality of power, wealth, and conquest and foster the mentality of compassion, sharing, and peace building. Therefore, based on Founder Niwano's vision, members of Rissho Kosei-kai are today open to fostering dialogue with people of other religions in search of shared ideas, practices, and ideals in order to work together through interreligious collaboration to bring all humankind to unity and peace.

Recently Ms. Lubich wrote, "The wars that are being fought even in our day, as well as the terrorism and ethnic conflicts, are signs of social and economic inequality, of injustice and of hate. . . . The obstacles to world harmony come from deeper moral and spiritual attitudes, from how we value the human person, from how we treat each other. . . . Without love, we will never attain true justice, a sharing of goods among rich and poor, an attentiveness to the uniqueness of each man and woman and to the concrete situations in which they find themselves."

Certainly, Rev. Niwano found in this dialogue partner in Italy a kindred soul, a person with whom he could engage in an interreligious collaboration for the benefit of humanity. And Ms. Lubich found in Rev. Niwano a beloved friend and companion on the path pointed out by Pope Paul VI that leads to realizing world harmony by transforming the deep moral and spiritual attitudes of humankind through love and compassion, so that in Ms. Lubich's words, by "living in mutual giving, sharing our spiritual and material goods, we will become one family." We are indeed fortunate today to have visionaries like Founder Niwano and Ms. Lubich to foster together deep interreligious relations and collaborations that lead in the direction of peace through creating "one family" of humankind with its rich diversity of religions and cultures. □

Self-Reliance and Liberation from Poverty

by Dhammananda Bhikkhuni

Women are independent and must be responsible for their own spiritual development. This message is supreme, not only in the context of Buddhism, but also in the history of world religions.

Buddhism is one of the major world religions, and one of its strong characteristics is self-reliance. Buddhism frees itself from the Brahmanistic background of its time by breaking from the total belief and dependence of taking the Vedas as the complete and absolute authority. That is why Buddhism was categorized as *nastika* (“one who denies”), as opposed to other trends of belief and practices of the time that accepted the authority of the Vedas as absolute.

In addition to denying the authority of the Vedas, Buddhism goes even further and claims that to be a Brahmin is based on one’s actions rather than one’s genealogy. Therefore, early communities (Sangha) drew people from all walks of life, the line drawn between different castes was lifted, and people were able for the first time to enjoy true spiritual freedom through their own potentiality and achievement.

Buddhism recognizes people’s equality in their spiritual potentiality and cuts across gender differences. Buddhism is the first religion in the world to offer a true liberation to all humankind.

Tracing back through its historical context, we find that

the Buddha discovered this Supreme Truth and liberated himself from the bondage of old age, sickness, and death at the age of thirty-five. He spent the remaining forty-five years of his life preaching this wonderful message to the rest of humankind.

His Sangha started first as a male Sangha, which was in accord with the social attitudes of the times. Later on, when his own aunt and stepmother, Queen Mahaprajapati, requested that she be allowed to join the Sangha, the Buddha hesitated. But when she had proven to him her sincerity for pursuing the spiritual path by following him on foot from Kapilavastu to Vesali with a large retinue of women, he agreed to allow her to join the monastic order. It is very interesting to read closely this event. It was Ananda who asked the Buddha if women were not capable of spiritual attainment. The Buddha confirmed that women are equal to men in their spiritual potential to be enlightened.

This recognition opened up a new vista of spiritual pursuit, as had never before women had this opportunity. To recognize and make known this spiritual equality itself made the teaching of the Buddha shine through the clouds of social myth.

Women are independent and must be responsible for their own spiritual development. Women must be self-reliant. We all must be self-reliant.

This message of self-reliance for women is supreme, not only in the context of Buddhism, but also in the history of world religions. There is no other religion before or after Buddhism that propounds such a clear and vivid message of spiritual self-reliance for both men and women equally.

Prior to Buddhism, Indian women had to get married. Salvation for them was through complete *bhakti* (devotion) to their husbands, no matter what kind of husbands they might be. Another social and religious bond that came after marriage was the expectation that married women would bear sons. For the sons would have to perform *sraddha*, the rites to enable their deceased parents to go to heaven. A married woman without a son was treated as inauspicious,

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and the husband then was entitled to seek yet another wife.

An unmarried girl was looked down upon, and became a social and financial burden to her parents.

It was within the social values of this context that the Buddha came forth with his teaching liberating women from the social and religious responsibility to get married.

A woman's salvation relied totally upon herself, and came neither through her husband nor her son. With this message of absolute freedom, socially and spiritually, it is no wonder that women flocked to Buddhism.

The nun Mutta in the Therigatha (Songs of the Nuns) was a clear example of this freedom. She was freed from her hunchbacked husband, and also freed from pots and pans—which was symbolic of being liberated from the household chores that bound women of all nations and all times to the kitchen.

This message of spiritual self-reliance outshines all other messages.

At the time of ordination, one is to repeat:

“Sabba dukkha nissarana, Nibbana sacchi karanattha ya,” which means: “I will try to end all the suffering (myself), and I will try to make Nirvana a reality (myself).”

The message again is loud and clear. Nobody, not even the Buddha, can assist us unless we walk the path ourselves. The Buddha, at best, can only show us the path that he himself had walked to find spiritual salvation.

When we talk about enlightenment, we talk about that specific quality of the mind that has gone beyond the bonds of all worldly attachment. When we talk about that enlightened mind, we do not make any distinction between male

and female. Enlightenment is beyond gender. This realization is very powerful and enables each one of us, male or female, to strive with equal perseverance toward this spiritual goal.

When the highest spiritual potentiality is recognized, women's self-reliance in other spheres also follows suit.

Social and cultural customs in Thailand are such that they generally place women in a house-bound context. This is understandable if in that household we have a balanced number of men and women. But in many households, women are more numerous than men, although the reverse is also possible. We cannot be rigid any more in the way we look at the role of gender. As we have all kinds of work in the family, if we are stuck with the notion that this work is only for men and that work is only for women, then we run into a problem when we do not have a sufficient number of men or women in the family.

In order to be able to face poverty squarely, let us face the need and the work as it is without attaching any unnecessary gender label.

Do not keep driving only for the men, and do not keep cooking only for the women.

In order to crack this stereotype mentality, allow me to narrate a tale of the training at our temple. One day, I went to work in the garden. Our temple is a Buddhist nunnery without any men. That day we were supposed to remove the concrete wall to make another entrance to our garden. I worked with five other girls and women. We all faced the wall with our equipment, hammers and pounders.

The girls were quite taken aback, as our task was to remove the old brick wall, 3 meters wide and 2.5 meters

high. I did not ask them whether we could do it or not. But I asked them how to do it. Psychologically, I provided them with a presupposition that we can do it. This is very important, for much of the work we do not do is purely from the belief that we cannot do it. I did not give them the chance to doubt whether they could do it or not.

I asked them which point on the wall they thought we should begin pounding first. One teenage girl suggested that we start right in the middle. I asked her for the reason. She said that it was because it is the furthest from the posts on the two sides. Others seemed to agree.

So we decided to start from the center, but no one wanted to make the first move. I provided them with the leadership role, but to tell you the truth I had never done it before. I gave forty-six bangs with a heavy pounder on the center of the wall before I could make a hole. When we cracked the first hole, I could feel that the girls had really gained the sudden belief that they could also do it. We started opening up the crack from the one hole and finally within one hour we could remove the whole wall.

The older woman in our group helped to pick up the loosened bricks and piled them on the other side.

When we moved over to the next wall, this time the youngest girl in the group, who was fifteen, volunteered to make the break-through hole. We allowed her to take the initiative. That was a very good and effective way to boost her self-confidence. When she got halfway through, I encouraged the others to come and help. I knew that it was too strenuous to expect the girl to do it all by herself. They cracked the first hole with only thirty-two bangs. And before we knew it we had finished the second wall within half an hour. It only required half the time of the first wall.

By working on tearing down these two walls, the group achieved immense self-esteem and self-reliance. Otherwise, in our stereotype, the women tend to say "Oh, let the men do it." Or otherwise someone would suggest "Let's hire some workers to do it."

Self-reliance comes with self-esteem and self-worth when we are able to overcome these social values and stereotypes, which often make us unnecessarily handicapped.

From this understanding and training, we can examine some of cases of poverty. We find that in many households, it is only the males, the fathers or the husbands, who are wage earners. But it is not necessarily so. Women are capable of doing many things to bring in some income for the family as well.

The age-old social values that put the financial burden on the shoulders of male members only must be redefined. In this fast-moving age, both husband and wife should work to lessen the financial burden.

Education should be given equally to both daughters and sons. In Thailand, particularly on the village level, sons tend to get better opportunities for education than daughters, who are told that it is because the boys will grow up to be the heads of families.

Now we need to prepare both sons and daughters to grow up to be equal partners, and both should be responsible for supporting the family.

Education for boys only, or for boys first, has no place in the reality of the world today.

Both boys and girls must be trained to be fully self-reliant to lead their lives efficiently and morally with or without the responsibility of raising a family.

All children must be given the opportunity to blossom to the completeness of their potentiality.

All human beings must be allowed to grow to their fullest potential, both physically and spiritually.

As Buddhists, we need to realize the most beautiful message that the Buddha provided for us: that each one of us has an equal opportunity to be enlightened. That is the highest human achievement. That is the most meaningful message on self-reliance. □

An Ajanta cave painting depicting the Buddha's return to his birthplace, Kapilavastu, after his enlightenment. The Buddha's former wife, Yashodhara, and his son, Rahula, are depicted as meeting him at the palace gate. Yashodhara was later admitted to the Buddhist Sangha together with Queen Mahaprajapati, the Buddha's aunt and stepmother, and other women in Kapilavastu. 5th-6th centuries.

“The Flower Opens in the Sheer Drop”

by Notto R. Thelle

One could call Keiji Nishitani (1900–1990), one of Japan’s leading philosophers, a Socratic Buddhist, one who sought answers and got other people to see by means of the questions he put to them.

There was always someone who was taken by surprise when the shabby old man shuffled into the circle of thinkers and philosophers. His long undervest poked out from his sleeve. He carried some slices of bread in a plastic bag and occasionally broke off a piece and ate it. He was a chain-smoker. When he began to speak, he groped carefully for the right words. He was not in a hurry; he gave his thoughts time to take shape. He was not eloquent, and his formulations were not particularly elegant. He posed a series of questions that slowly homed in on the subject, and some people wondered what he was trying to say.

After a while, however, something happened to those who listened to him. They were caught in the magic of wondering as he drew them into his own world and filled the room with his presence. This was no longer a closed room, for the walls vanished and the wind began to blow. He was not giving an academic course in philosophy—he was taking his hearers with him on a philosophical journey into reality. And this was highly demanding, because he expected something of his fellow travelers: they had to take responsibility for their thoughts, and they themselves had to encounter reality. The conversation lasted for several hours, but no one left the group.

The shabby old man was Keiji Nishitani, who died at the age of ninety on November 24, 1990. He was active to the very last as one of Japan’s leading philosophers, the most prominent representative of the so-called Kyoto School. I met him in Kyoto in 1972, while I was studying at the Buddhist Otani University, and I had the great privilege in subsequent years of getting to know him in seminars and lectures, formal dialogue encounters, and informal conversations. Few persons have influenced my thinking more profoundly.

Nishitani was a traveler. His basic attitude to life was shaped by Zen Buddhism, and there is no doubt that it was Buddhist concepts that best expressed his ideas; but his travels took him into other worlds too. He studied the Bible, the church fathers, and the great thinkers of the Christian church with a quiet passion, and he taught Western philosophy throughout his long life. His own existential questions were shaped by the existentialist philosophy elaborated by

Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger—questions about meaning and meaninglessness, and the problem of nothingness. He took these questions along on his travels and wove them into his own experience of life. One could call him a Socratic Buddhist, one who sought answers and got other people to see by means of the questions he put to them.

When I asked Nishitani to sign one of his books, toward the end of his life, he wrote a poetic greeting that expressed his attempts to discover meaning:

The flower
opens
in the sheer drop

This was not just poetry: it was dearly bought existential wisdom, a profession of faith on the part of a man who had walked along the rim of the sheer drop, had seen the abyss yawning below him, and had discovered that it was precisely there that life’s meaning could be seen. “The flower opens in the sheer drop.”

Nishitani’s travels began with the despairing experience of meaninglessness. In the few glimpses he has given of his own life, he describes his youth as a period without hope, when he was sucked down into the experience of nothingness and hopelessness. He saw his decision to study philoso-

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phy as a religious matter, a question of life and death. "In the little story of my soul, this decision was a kind of conversion," he has written. Right up to our last conversations, he maintained his conviction that a true understanding of life is possible only when one is confronted by the abyss of nothingness.

Nishitani was a man of faith. He held that our search for meaning is not a hopeless groping in the dark; existence is borne up by a power that holds all things together, and this power drives us toward the abyss because it knows that it is there we shall catch sight of a new world.

Although it was Buddhism that formed the basic pattern in Nishitani's thinking, he did not wish to be called a Buddhist. Whenever this happened, he felt somewhat embarrassed, and claimed with a perplexed smile that he was in fact searching for something more fundamental, something that lay beyond or beneath both Buddhism and Christianity. The essential point was our shared humanity. What does it mean to be a human being? This is the riddle to which all religions seek the answer. Since Buddhism and Christianity possess treasures of insight, they can help us understand. But Nishitani did not think that any religion had discovered the definitive answers.

Two or three thousand years amount to only a small fragment of history. Must this not mean that religion has an infinite potential to penetrate more and more deeply into the riddles of life? This was the question Nishitani pondered. We must continue our search with an open mind. We must stop hanging on self-consciously to our own principles. We must struggle with life's problems in a radical openness.

Nishitani was most reluctant to let himself be called a Buddhist, but it was even clearer that he did not wish to be a Christian. If pressed, he could say with a smile that he was *en route* to faith; it would be unthinkable for him to *end up* as a Christian. But when he spoke of Christ, his words expressed his love for the great Master whose friend and disciple he was. He had a special preference for biblical motifs, to which he returned again and again. He spoke of God's selfless and unreserved love, about the incarnation as God's "self-emptying," and about Jesus, who won life only by giving his life for others. He spoke with warmth and respect even of the idea of a personal God, and he affirmed that

belief in God as a person has given special dimensions to our human conscience and love, raising the personality to new heights.

At the same time, however, he was unsparing in his criticism of Christian thinking and Western philosophy, both of which were held captive in the structures of their ego. The faith in God that the church has inherited has imprisoned it in a universe that will disintegrate in the encounter with science, nihilism, and atheism, he argued. The world does not turn on the axis of a relationship between God and the human person! We must reject belief in God as an absolute deity who rules the world from outside. The attempt to make the human person the center of creation leads to a distorted relationship to reality. What is needed here is nothing less than a revolution.

Nishitani was not a man who raised his voice often, but on this subject he used strong words. He said that Christianity, and most religions, are facing a catastrophic change comparable to what happened millennia ago when the dry land emerged from the sea and many marine animals had to adapt to life on land. Christians must get used to living in a world where there is no longer any God "out there," and where it is no longer possible to understand the human person as the absolute center of activity and thought.

Although he admired Christianity, and not least Christ himself, Nishitani was a severe critic who asserted that there is no future for Christianity in its present form. The solution is not to abandon the faith but to let something new grow out of the old. Perhaps he envisaged a future Christianity that had been transformed by the encounter with Buddhism?

It is somewhat surprising that a philosopher who was so critical of Christianity should have exercised such a strong attraction on Christians. Apart from his exceptional personality and the inherent power of his thinking, the reason for this attractiveness was quite simply his love for Christ. I shall never forget the time I asked what he thought about what Christian mystics call the "flame of love" in our relationship to God. He sat in silent thought for a while and then replied quietly, to the astonishment of the Buddhists who were present: "Surely we all need something of that flame."

His criticism came from outside the church, but it was born of his endeavor to penetrate the riddles of life. As a traveler, Nishitani made countless fellow travelers his friends. He showed them new landscapes and taught them to see, to ask, and to wonder. I never heard him speak of his "disciples," but he had many more than he knew—and a good number of them are Christians.

Now he has laid down his earthly pilgrim's staff, now he is in new landscapes. We still hear the wind blow. □

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Keiji Nishitani,
photographed in 1982.

This essay is a translation from the author's 1991 book in Norwegian whose title translates as "Who Can Stop the Wind? Travels in the Borderland between East and West."

Achieving Spiritual Peace

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.

The desire for freedom and liberation is constantly being played out within the course of human history. Especially from the beginning of modern times, this has taken the form of seeking freedom from poverty, illness, the restrictions of status and social class, and the pressures of those in authority, and it is possible today to see how this is gradually being achieved and to welcome that development. Nevertheless, human beings seem to be no happier for it. In fact, as the insistence on freedom persists, the reverse of responsible freedom seems to be widespread: selfishness and egotistic behavior are rampant, greed and a breakdown in morals are common, and people have lost their peace of mind, becoming captive to irritation, anger, and aggressive feelings. Why should the achievement of freedom and liberation lead to such results? Clearly this is due to the fact that when we live under a democratic form of government, we are technically free, even though in our hearts we may not always feel truly free. In other words, there has been no spiritual liberation.

Those who do not know Buddhism struggle to find happiness and freedom only within the bounds of the finite—their actual physical bodies, their everyday lives, and the

realities of their society. But however much they rely on things that are finite and relative and strive only within those boundaries, they will never achieve true happiness or freedom. It is impossible to do so forever. Because things that are relative are only transient, undergoing constant change, yesterday's happiness disappears today, and today's joy will turn to pain tomorrow. The more we struggle, the deeper we are sucked into the whirlpool of confusion, and we find ourselves unable to escape from it.

In the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni spoke of the way of truth by which people might be rescued from their predicament. Thus he taught of the eternal life span of the Buddha. He preached that all human life is sustained by the Buddha (the Eternal and Original Buddha), and therefore it is eternal in the same way as the Buddha is eternal. Deep within our limited and transient physical bodies, within the painful reality of the present, lies the human essence that is sustained by an absolute existence, and this in turn means that we are endowed with radiant eternal life.

People who clearly recognize this truth are able to lead their lives cheerfully, however difficult their circumstances may be, for an inexpressible joy wells up from the depths of the spirit. If they are able to make this realization their own, however confused the situation in which they dwell, they can live in the confidence that they are being guided by a radiant light that emanates from deep within them. This leads to true happiness, true freedom, indeed, supreme human salvation.

This does not pertain simply to individual salvation. Only by awakening to the eternal life with which we are endowed can we achieve true tranquillity within society and attain genuine peace among all the peoples of the world. This is because real love between people, as well as real harmony between people and nature, first arises from this realization. When we understand that we live as part of this eternal life sustained by a single and absolute existence, it is only natural that we should realize that all other people do so as well. By the same token, we also recognize that this same abso-

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.

lute existence is bestowed on and lives within trees and plants, water and air, and the very earth itself. Consequently, we are aware that everything in the world has the same roots and is a member of the same family. This is not something we comprehend by logical reasoning alone; rather, it also pours out from us in direct experience.

If all humans are members of the same family that lives together sustained by a single great life force, how can we be deluded by simple surface differences to discriminate against, hurt, and reject some people? All matter is similarly the manifestation of the great life force of the universe, and it too can be said to partake of that eternal life. How can we then not encourage each life as the embodiment of that eternal life, so as not to use life wastefully before we dispense with it? Treating things as throwaway objects is as much a negative act as taking the lives of things.

All life in the universe, including human life, shares in this eternal existence and is connected like the webbing of a net. We must be careful not to pull on that net too tightly or break it out of a self-centered lack of concern, thus caus-

ing trouble to others. Rather, if we reflect on how we have deviated from the path that stems from our inherent nature, boldly turn our minds around, and return to the path that our innate existence dictates, we will attain for ourselves true peace, in turn giving rise to great harmony throughout the world. In other words, the Land of Tranquil Light will be manifested in this world.

I believe that we have to remind ourselves very carefully at this time that material things do not bring us true happiness. Real human happiness can only arise from realizing what constitutes spiritual peace. Spiritual peace arises from a deep conviction that we are one with the great life force of the universe, from regaining a sense of coexistence with all other things, and from acting in a spirit of “live and let live” with all others. No other way is open to us. Put in other words, the only way for us to follow is to act in accordance with the Buddha’s Law.

True peace will come about when all individuals seeks to attain fulfillment in their own faith and work to perfect themselves based on that faith. □

An offering being made by overseas members who participated in the Third World Sangha Assembly before the image of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni in the Great Sacred Hall on October 13, 2006. The event was one highlight of the group pilgrimage to the headquarters in 2006, the centennial of the birth of Founder Niwano.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 12 Devadatta

(3)

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

TEXT Thereupon a bodhisattva-attendant, from a region beneath, of the World-honored One Abundant Treasures, named Wisdom Accumulation, said to the Buddha Abundant Treasures: "Let us return to our own land!" But Shakyamuni Buddha said to Wisdom Accumulation: "Good son! Wait a while! Here is the Bodhisattva Manjushri. [First] meet and discuss with him the Wonderful Law and then return to your own land."

COMMENTARY *A region beneath, of the World-honored One Abundant Treasures.* Abundant Treasures is the buddha within the Precious Stupa that sprang up from the earth, as recounted in chapter 11, "Beholding the Precious Stupa," hence the allusion to "a region beneath." As already explained (see the January/February 2006 issue of DHARMA WORLD), the Precious Stupa symbolizes the buddha-nature, and the stupa's springing up from the earth indicates that the buddha-nature is not something received from an entity outside ourselves but something within us from the start.

Wisdom Accumulation, a bodhisattva-attendant of Abundant Treasures, believing that the truth that all are equally endowed with the buddha-nature had been fully expounded and that the significance of Abundant Treasures' appearance had served its purpose, suggested to the buddha that they now return to their own land. But Shakyamuni had not finished; he wished to drive home the truth of all people's equal possession of the buddha-nature. So he told Wisdom Accumulation to discuss the Wonderful Law with the bodhisattva Manjushri first. It is clear from the context that "Wonderful Law" here refers to the truth of all people's equal possession of the buddha-nature. Why Shakyamuni specified Manjushri will become clear as we read on.

TEXT Thereupon Manjushri, sitting on a thousand-petaled lotus flower as large as a carriage wheel, with the bodhisattvas who accompanied him also sitting on jeweled lotus flowers, unaided sprang up from the great ocean, out of the palace of the Sagara Dragon [King]. Taking up his place in

the sky, he advanced to the Divine Vulture Peak, alighted from his lotus flower, went before the Buddha, and reverently made obeisance at the feet of the two World-honored Ones. When he had expressed his reverence he went over to Wisdom Accumulation, and after they had asked after each other's welfare, they withdrew and sat to one side.

COMMENTARY Another marvelous spectacle now unfolded. Manjushri, accompanied by a host of other bodhisattvas, all seated upon lotus flowers, sprang up from the great ocean. The "great ocean" refers to the sea of living beings—not just those of India, regarded at that time as the center of the world (actually, the people of every country regarded their land as the center of the world), but those of all the three thousand worlds. The palace of the dragon king beneath the sea can be interpreted as indicating a place far removed from the center of civilization. That Manjushri and the other bodhisattvas, having gone to that remote place to instruct its inhabitants in the Buddha Law, were seated on great lotus flowers symbolizes the fact that all bodhisattvas, wherever and whenever they may be, invariably teach on the basis of the Wonderful Law of the Lotus Sutra.

TEXT The Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulation asked Manjushri: "Virtuous sir! Since you went to the dragon palace how many beings have you converted?" Manjushri answered: "Their numbers are immeasurable; they cannot be calculated, nor expressed in words, nor fathomed by the mind. Just wait a moment! You shall have proof." Before he had finished speaking numberless bodhisattvas sitting on jeweled lotus flowers sprang up from the sea, advanced to the Divine Vulture Peak, and took up their place in the sky. All these bodhisattvas had been converted and saved by Manjushri, had become perfect in bodhisattva deeds, and together discussed the Six Paramitas.

COMMENTARY *Discussed the Six Paramitas.* This means that the bodhisattvas praised the great teaching of the Six Paramitas, the six virtues of the bodhisattva practice (see

the January–March 2007 issue of DHARMA WORLD), and stressed their importance.

TEXT Those in the sky, who had formerly been shravakas, told of [their former] shravaka deeds. [But] now they all practiced the principle of emptiness of the Great Vehicle. Then said Manjushri to Wisdom Accumulation: “Such has been the result of my course of instruction in the ocean.”

COMMENTARY *Those in the sky, who had formerly been shravakas, told of [their former] shravaka deeds.* Shravakas are practitioners who strive to rid themselves of their delusions and defilements through hearing the Buddha’s teaching. That these bodhisattvas “had formerly been shravakas” means, of course, that they had already advanced further, to the stage of the bodhisattva; but they were stressing that their practice as shravakas had also been highly significant.

This is an extremely important point. People who have reached a high level in any field of endeavor have a tendency to take their present stage of achievement as the norm and to hold others to the same standard. This is a rather arrogant attitude. Such people have forgotten that they were able to reach their present eminence only by going through the stages of lower-level disciplines. This is especially true of Buddhist practice. Constant and consistent efforts to eradicate delusions and defilements are an indispensable element of practice.

When these bodhisattvas in the sky were shravakas, they strove to gain personal emancipation from delusions and defilements, but another step was required before they could attain the bodhisattva’s aspiration to save all living beings; that is all. Their practice as shravakas was far from meaningless; it formed the foundation on which they qualified to become bodhisattvas. That is why they preached the importance of shravaka practice even though they were already bodhisattvas practicing “the principle of emptiness of the Great Vehicle.” This is something we who follow the way of the bodhisattva today would do well to ponder.

• *The principle of emptiness of the Great Vehicle.* The principle of emptiness of the small vehicle is emancipation from phenomena, the teaching that all phenomena are devoid of self (substantive reality), being nothing but temporary manifestations arising through the conjunction of causes and conditions, and that through enlightenment to this truth one must dispel the delusions that keep one’s mind in thrall to phenomena. The principle of emptiness of the Great Vehicle goes a step further, positively affirming the buddha-nature that is the original nature of every human being. It is the teaching that the fact that everyone is originally empty (*shunya*) means that everyone is equally animated by the Original Buddha; the buddha-nature is the essence of human nature and is equally present in all people. Therefore, becoming aware of one’s own and others’ buddha-nature and developing it is the way to save both oneself and others. That is true salvation.

TEXT Then the Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulation extolled him thus in verse:

“Most wise, virtuous, brave, and strong one! / Thou hast converted innumerable beings, / As now this great assembly / And I have all seen. / Expounding the principle of the real aspect / And revealing the One Vehicle Law, / Extensively hast though led living beings / To attain with speed Bodhi.”

COMMENTARY Traditionally, it was the custom in India to compose and recite extemporaneous verses at gatherings, and Indians were highly accomplished at this kind of versifying. Even today it is a common practice in intellectual circles. In much of the Lotus Sutra, it is said, the verses (*gatha*) were composed first and the prose passages (*gadya*) added later. Knowing this gives Wisdom Accumulation’s verse in praise of Manjushri greater verisimilitude.

• *Brave, and strong one.* “Brave” here means constant and resolute progress in pursuit of the truth and its clarification. “Strong” signifies the staunch willpower to persevere without losing heart, no matter what difficulties may befall one or how long they may last.

• *Great assembly.* This phrase is a reference to the multitude of human and other beings gathered to hear the Buddha preach.

• *The principle of the real aspect.* This is the real aspect of all things (see the January/February 1993 and November/December 1997 issues).

• *The One Vehicle Law.* This refers to the teaching of the One Buddha Vehicle. The Buddha taught by means of many expedients or skillful means (*upaya*). Because all are of great value, people have a tendency to remain at the level of expedient teachings and to think they have been saved. But this is not ultimate salvation, merely temporary, personal salvation. True salvation is salvation together with all other living beings. Unless we expand our understanding of whatever teachings we may hear to include this dimension, we cannot attain true salvation. As has already been discussed, the Lotus Sutra reveals the meaning of the truth underlying the expedient teachings and makes it clear that all the teachings are expounded for the one aim of guiding all living beings to buddhahood. This is the teaching of the One Buddha Vehicle (see the May/June 1998 issue).

TEXT Manjushri replied: “That which I in the midst of the ocean always proclaimed was no other than the Wonderful Law Flower Sutra.” Wisdom Accumulation asked Manjushri: “This sutra is very profound and subtle, the pearl of all the sutras, a rare thing in the world. Is there any being who, diligently and zealously practicing this sutra, can attain speedily buddhahood?”

COMMENTARY *Diligently and zealously practicing.* This means practicing steadfastly and single-mindedly, never allowing oneself to be diverted.

TEXT Manjushri replied: “There is the daughter of the

Dragon King Sagara, just eight years old, wise and of keen faculties, well acquainted with the karma arising from the roots of action of all beings, who has obtained dharani, has been able to receive and keep all the most profound and mystic treasures revealed by buddhas, and has deeply entered into meditations and penetrated into all laws. In a moment of time, she resolved on Bodhi and attained non-relapse [into mortality].

COMMENTARY *Keen faculties.* Just as a keen blade cuts sharply and cleanly, a person who has keen faculties can cut straight to the heart of a matter and comprehend it.

- *Well acquainted with the karma arising from the roots of action of all beings.* “Roots” refers to the six sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind). “Action” refers to the feelings, thoughts, and actions of which the sense organs are the agents. “Karma” has to do with the effects of one’s actions on oneself and others. Thus, the daughter of the dragon king knew clearly how the actions of body, speech, and mind influence both the doer and others.

- *Dharani.* This Sanskrit word refers to the ability to keep the teachings in one’s heart. More precisely, it indicates the power to sustain and nurture good and to repel evil and prevent it from arising.

- *In a moment of time, she resolved on Bodhi and attained nonrelapse [into mortality].* The attainment of nonrelapse is important. Even if the aspiration for enlightenment arises suddenly, as in a flash of inspiration, nothing will come of it unless it can be sustained.

TEXT She has unembarrassed powers of argument and a compassionate mind for all the living as if they were [her] children; her merits are complete and the thoughts of her mind and explanations of her mouth are both subtle and great. Kind and compassionate, virtuous and modest, gentle and beautiful in her disposition, she has been able to attain Bodhi.”

COMMENTARY *Unembarrassed powers of argument.* This does not mean mere fluency, a smooth tongue. It refers, rather, to the unrestricted persuasiveness, the ability to convince anyone, that springs from deep inner wisdom. It is people with this ability—not only people of religion but also those in other walks of life—who should be regarded as truly eloquent speakers.

- *A compassionate mind for all the living as if they were [her] children.* This is the virtue of the sublimated maternal instinct. As I will discuss in more detail later, this is an invaluable element of women’s attainment of buddhahood.

- *Merits.* This refers to the virtues of guiding people to the truth, saving them, and benefiting them (see the May/June 2002 issue).

- *The thoughts of her mind and explanations of her mouth are both subtle and great.* The dragon king’s daughter’s thoughts and words were not superficial but had indescribable depth

and breadth. This sentence contains much food for thought for people today.

- *Virtuous and modest.* In the Chinese text of the sutra this phrase is written with two ideograms, *jen* and *jang*. *Jen* means impartial, all-embracing love, while *jang* means the modesty and humility that keeps one from putting on airs no matter how eminent or wise one may be. Both *jen* and *jang* have been highly esteemed since ancient times as marks of a true person of character. Contemporary society seems to have cast aside these virtues in favor of self-assertion, but this is extremely shortsighted.

- *Gentle and beautiful in her disposition.* The ideogram for “gentle” in the Chinese text is *he*, which has connotations of peace and harmony. These qualities represent the ideal in all human relations. The ideogram for “beautiful,” *ya*, includes the meanings of elegance, grace, and refinement; it connotes uprightness, refinement, and good taste. An abrasive, prickly uprightness is not the real thing. *Ya* is a quality of the mellow heart. Gentleness and beauty of disposition are intrinsic to women; they are part of women’s natural endowment. How unreasonable it would be for women to lose these intrinsic qualities—and how unfortunate for both oneself and others. This point, I think, calls for deep thought. I will discuss this further in the commentary on women’s attainment of buddhahood.

It was because the dragon king’s daughter possessed the qualities discussed above that Manjushri was able to say firmly that she had “been able to attain Bodhi,” that is, supreme enlightenment.

TEXT The Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulation said: “I have seen [how] Shakyamuni Tathagata, during innumerable kalpas, in doing arduous and painful deeds, accumulating merit, and heaping up virtue, sought the Way of Bodhi ceaselessly and without rest. I have observed that in the three-thousand-great-thousandfold world there is not even [a spot] as small as a mustard seed where he has not laid down his body and life as a bodhisattva for the sake of the living; and only after that did he attain [the Way of] Bodhi. It is incredible that this girl, in but a moment, should become perfectly enlightened.”

COMMENTARY After renouncing the world, for six years Shakyamuni undertook austerities so severe that his life hung by a thread. Then, realizing that this was not the way to gain enlightenment, he entered a state of deep contemplation and finally attained Perfect Enlightenment. All this, however, merely constituted his course of practice in the present life. Shakyamuni himself taught, and we today believe, that he had practiced as a bodhisattva in countless past lives.

This is what the Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulation was emphasizing in saying that in the Buddha’s innumerable past lives as a bodhisattva “there is not even [a spot] as small as a mustard seed where he has not laid down his

body and life as a bodhisattva for the sake of the living.” Wisdom Accumulation found it incredible that the dragon king’s daughter, a mere eight-year-old girl, could attain Bodhi in such a brief time. As we shall see, Shariputra, known as “foremost in wisdom,” also found it impossible to believe.

If we were subject to the same conditions as Shakyamuni, we today would not be able to believe it, either. But the conditions pertaining to Shakyamuni were totally different from those pertaining to the dragon king’s daughter or ourselves. Shakyamuni truly achieved enlightenment through his own efforts. He pioneered the way to the truth. Hacking his way through the jungle of illusion, he cleared new ground and made it into a fine and fertile field. In doing so, he accumulated great merit. But we, like the dragon king’s daughter, are in a position to make use of the field already cleared and cultivated by Shakyamuni.

We are like the poor son in the parable of the elder and his poor son in chapter 4 of the Lotus Sutra, “Faith Discernment”; we cannot be saved if we are unaware that we can inherit the elder’s wealth. Once we realize that the Buddha’s legacy (his teaching) is ours for the asking and are willing to receive it, any one of us can swiftly attain enlightenment. Herein lies the peerless value of the teaching left by Shakyamuni and of our believing and receiving it. Needless to say, the basic reason the dragon king’s daughter could so speedily attain the Buddha’s enlightenment was that she possessed the buddha-nature; but she was able to realize her buddha-nature because of the existence of Shakyamuni’s teaching and because she was able readily to believe and receive it.

We can never be too grateful for the great blessing the Buddha has conferred upon us. He has bequeathed to us intact, in the form of his teaching, the enlightenment he attained through the most arduous effort. This is what enables us to attain an enlightened state so much more easily and quickly than Shakyamuni. We must firmly grasp this fact in reading the above passage. If we do, the true meaning of the words “in the three-thousand-great-thousandfold world there is not even [a spot] as small as a mustard seed where he has not laid down his body and life as a bodhisattva for the sake of the living” will become clear.

On the face of it, the spot “where he has . . . laid down his body and life” means the place where he has sacrificed his body as a bodhisattva for the sake of living beings, but on a deeper level it means the place permeated with Shakyamuni’s great effort to attain enlightenment. The Buddha’s enlightenment extends to every tree, every blade of grass, in the three-thousand-great-thousandfold world, even to a spot as tiny as a mustard seed. In other words, there is no place in the entire universe that is not permeated with Shakyamuni’s incalculably arduous effort. If we realize this, the sight of a tree, a blade of grass, a spot as tiny as a mustard seed, must arouse in us profound gratitude for the magnitude of Shakyamuni’s enlightenment and the blessing

of his teaching, which contains the sum total of that enlightenment.

The great Japanese expounder of the Lotus Sutra Nichiren (1222–82), keenly feeling this, wrote, “The Buddha should have lived to the age of 120 but entered nirvana at the age of 80, bestowing favor upon us instead of living 40 more years. How could I express my gratitude to the Buddha’s favor even if I should use the waters of the four great seas as the water for my inkstone, burn all the plants to make charcoal

A statue of Nichiren that stands inside the precincts of the temple Shishinkaku on Mount Minobu, Yamanashi Prefecture.

for my ink, use the fur of all animals for my brush, and use the lands of the worlds in the ten directions as my paper?”

TEXT Before he had ceased talking, the daughter of the dragon king suddenly appeared before [the Buddha] and after making reverent obeisance withdrew to one side, extolling him in verse:

“Profound of insight into sin and blessedness, / He illuminates the universe; / His spiritual body, ethereal and pure, / Has the thirty-two perfect signs; / With the eighty kinds of excellence / Is his spiritual body adorned: / He to whom gods and men look up, / Dragons and spirits pay reverence, / And all species of living beings / Do worship and honor. / That, having heard [the truth], I attained Bodhi / Only the Buddha may bear witness. / I will reveal the teaching of the Great Vehicle / Which delivers living beings from suffering.”

COMMENTARY This beautiful verse sums up concisely the Buddha’s merits and the working of his compassion.

• *Profound of insight into sin and blessedness, / He illumi-*

nates the universe. The word *profound* merits close attention. One who has profound insight into “sin and blessedness” will necessarily also realize the truth that the essence of human nature is the buddha-nature, which transcends “sin and blessedness” and which everyone possesses in equal measure. The above two lines laud the Buddha’s deep wisdom and the preciousness of the teaching that is the light of that wisdom.

• *His spiritual body, ethereal and pure, / Has the thirty-two perfect signs; / With the eighty kinds of excellence / Is his spiritual body adorned.* As explained in the July–September 2006 issue of DHARMA WORLD, there are three buddha bodies. “Spiritual body” in the lines above is a reference to the Law-body (*dharma-kaya*): Thusness, or the fundamental Law that animates all things. “His spiritual body, ethereal and pure” is an allusion to Thusness, which is so pure that it cannot be seen or even conceptualized. All human beings, and indeed all other phenomena, are animated by Thusness, as is Shakyamuni, the manifest-body (*nirmana-kaya*) of the Buddha. Unlike ordinary unenlightened people, however, Shakyamuni was a perfected human being, as indicated by the thirty-two signs, or primary marks, and the eighty kinds of excellence that characterize a buddha (see the September/October 1992 issue for a discussion of these). “Is his spiritual body adorned” can be interpreted as a reference to the symbolic, visible manifestation of the invisible Law-body.

• *All species of living beings / Do worship and honor.* The phrase “all living beings” has often been interpreted as meaning “all people,” since it has been seen as necessary and expedient to regard the Buddha’s teaching as aimed first and foremost at saving human beings, but strictly speaking it refers to *all* living beings. That is clearly the case here, as seen by the inclusion of the words “species of.” Some may think it odd to speak of nonhuman animals and of plants as worshiping and honoring the Buddha, but what is meant here is something much deeper than such a superficial interpretation: that all beings live in accordance with the Law taught by the Buddha.

• *That, having heard [the truth], I attained Bodhi / Only the Buddha may bear witness.* “Having heard” refers to the dragon king’s daughter’s having heard the Buddha’s teaching from the Bodhisattva Manjushri and having believed and received it.

Hinayana Buddhism considers practice to be the primary factor behind enlightenment, but Mahayana Buddhism regards belief, or faith, as the prime requisite, since one can make no progress without belief in the Eternal Original Buddha (the Law-body). Practice must be grounded in this belief. One can attain true enlightenment only through believing in the Eternal Original Buddha and becoming deeply aware that one is animated by that Eternal Original Buddha (“having heard [the truth], I attained Bodhi”).

Only one who is enlightened can testify to enlightenment. That is why the dragon king’s daughter said, “Only the

Buddha may bear witness.” This means the same thing as Shakyamuni’s statement in chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra, “Tactfulness,” that “only a buddha together with a buddha can fathom the true aspect of all things.”

• *I will reveal the teaching of the Great Vehicle.* This means to elucidate the true meaning of the profound teaching of Mahayana in a way that all can clearly understand.

• *Which delivers living beings from suffering.* These words, expressing the dragon king’s daughter’s resolve to save suffering living beings and emancipate them from their suffering, are a clear statement that true Mahayana enlightenment entails not only hearing, believing, and receiving the Buddha’s teaching but also putting it into practice, spreading it to others with the strong resolve to save all living beings.

TEXT Thereupon Shariputra said to the daughter of the dragon: “You state that in no length of time you attained the supreme Way. This thing is hard to believe. Wherefore? [Because] the body of a woman is filthy and not a vessel of the Law. How can she attain supreme Bodhi?”

COMMENTARY Later we will see how cleverly the dragon king’s daughter counters Shariputra’s objection, causing him to back down. The Vimalakirti-nirdesha-sutra includes a similar episode, in which an *apsaras*, or celestial maiden, sharply rebukes Shariputra for voicing such sentiments. The compilers of the Mahayana sutras probably put such words into the mouth of Shariputra, who was renowned for his wisdom, as a way of criticizing such a narrow-minded view of women among bhikshus, and among men in general. Shariputra was certainly given a thankless role to play!

• *A vessel of the Law.* This indicates a person fit to understand and uphold the Buddha Law.

TEXT The Buddha Way is so vast that only after passing through innumerable kalpas, enduring hardship, accumulating good works, and perfectly practicing the Perfections can it be accomplished.

COMMENTARY *The Perfections.* This is a reference to the Six Perfections, or Six Paramitas.

TEXT Moreover, a woman by her body still has five hindrances: she cannot become first, king of the Brahma heaven; second, Shakra; third, a Mara king; fourth, a holy wheel-rolling king; and fifth, a buddha. How then could a woman’s body so speedily become a buddha?”

COMMENTARY Shariputra is made to express a belief prevalent in ancient India. Brahma and Shakra (Indra), two of the supreme gods of the Brahman pantheon, were regarded by Buddhists as protectors of the Law. The Mara king was a god possessing prodigious supernatural powers, while a holy wheel-rolling king was a great monarch who unified

the world under his rule by means of his virtue; both can be regarded as supermasculine beings. “Buddha” needs no explanation.

All these beings were endowed with superhuman powers or represented the pinnacle of human ability. It was believed that women, being subject to various bodily hindrances, could not attain any of these states. The refutation of this viewpoint that follows appears to be an argument against the view of women as innately inferior to men.

TEXT Now, the dragon’s daughter possessed a precious pearl worth a three-thousand-great-thousandfold world, which she held up and presented to the Buddha, and which the Buddha immediately accepted.

COMMENTARY What is this “precious pearl worth a three-thousand-great-thousandfold world”? It is faith, absolute belief in the Buddha’s teaching. The instant we have that kind of faith, we can merge with Thusness, or absolute Truth (*tathata*), the Original Buddha. The entire universe becomes ours. Therefore faith is certainly “worth a three-thousand-great-thousandfold world.” The metaphor of the precious pearl is a most important one.

The Buddha’s immediate acceptance of the precious pearl signifies that when we have faith we can resonate directly with the Buddha’s heart. If we sincerely believe in the compassion of the Original Buddha, its power immediately begins working within us. This is the action of resonance, and it is the shortest path to buddhahood. Of course the effort to tear down the thick wall built up around our buddha-nature by delusions and defilements is also important, but we can hardly hope to do this at all thoroughly unless we renounce secular life altogether and take the tonsure. Heartfelt faith in the truth that the essential nature of human beings is the buddha-nature is a much faster way. Anybody—even ordinary lay people, even someone like the dragon king’s daughter—can do this.

If we are firmly rooted in such faith, the wall of delusions and defilements that surrounds us will cease to be a barrier even though it remains; it will become permeable, as it were. The buddha-nature that was closed off by that wall will come into direct contact with the compassion of the Original Buddha and become one with it. This is the principle of the attainment of buddhahood through the Mahayana teaching. The dragon king’s daughter was about to demonstrate this principle through her own experience.

TEXT The dragon’s daughter then said to the Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulation and the honored Shariputra: “I have offered my pearl, and the World-honored One has accepted it—was this action speedy?” They answered: “Most speedy.” The daughter said: “By your supernatural powers behold me become a buddha even more rapidly than that!”

COMMENTARY As already explained, faith and the Buddha’s

power resonate instantaneously. Thus, if one only has absolute faith, buddhahood is also accomplished instantaneously. Saicho (767–822), the founder of the Tendai sect of Japanese Buddhism, expressed this as follows in his *Hokke Shuku* (Excellent Words About the Lotus): “If one sincerely receives and keeps the Lotus Sutra, one can speedily attain buddhahood through the sutra-power of the Wonderful Law.” “The sutra-power of the Wonderful Law” refers to absolute faith in the true teaching and resonance with the compassion of the Original Buddha.

TEXT At that moment the entire congregation saw the dragon’s daughter suddenly transformed into a male, perfect in bodhisattva deeds, who instantly went to the world Spotless in the southern quarter and sat on a precious lotus flower, attaining Perfect Enlightenment, with the thirty-two signs and the eighty kinds of excellence, and universally proclaiming the Wonderful Law to all living beings in the universe.

Then the *saha* world of bodhisattvas, shravakas, the eight groups of gods and dragons, and human and nonhuman beings, all from afar beholding the dragon’s daughter become a buddha and universally preach the Law to gods, men, [and others] among that congregation, all rejoiced greatly and made reverent salutation from afar. The countless multitude, on hearing the Law, were aroused to apprehension and attained never sliding back [into mortality]. The countless multitude also received their prediction of the [perfect] Way. The world Spotless made the sixfold movement.

COMMENTARY We will leave discussion of the phenomenon of the dragon king’s daughter’s transformation into a male to the end of this chapter.

- *The eight groups.* This is a reference to the eight kinds of supernatural beings, including gods, dragons, *yakshas*, and others, that safeguard the Law.

- *The sixfold movement.* That the earth moved in six different ways upon a buddha’s birth, attainment of Perfect Enlightenment, or preaching of a sermon was a traditional Indian figure of speech indicating that the entire world trembled with intense emotion.

TEXT Three thousand living beings in the *saha* world took up their abode in the stage of never returning [to mortality], while three thousand living beings set their minds on Bodhi and obtained their prediction [of attaining it].

The Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulation and Shariputra and all the congregation silently believed.

COMMENTARY What a dramatic denouement! The Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulation and Shariputra fell silent in the face of the truth. But theirs was not a sulky silence; on the contrary, they were struck dumb by their keen realization of the buddha-nature and of the peerless value of the

Lotus Sutra. As the text says, they “silently believed”—a most impressive phrase.

The message of the second half of this chapter, the story of the dragon king’s daughter, is clearly that women as well as men can attain buddhahood. The Lotus Sutra was the first Buddhist scripture to teach this explicitly. Indeed, this chapter contains the earliest articulation of true equality of the sexes in the history of the world.

Male superiority was taken for granted throughout the ancient world. The Old Testament states that Eve was created from one of Adam’s ribs. The Qur’an declares that males are placed above females. The *Analects* of Confucius states that women and children are hard to educate. This belief has persisted down to modern times. Even France, honored as the original home of the ideals of liberty and equality, only granted women full political rights in 1946. The United States has a reputation for valuing women more than any other society, but even there the sexes do not enjoy true equality. This is probably the legacy of the pioneer period, when the female population was small and it was believed that women needed to be treated gently because they were weak.

When we consider this pervasive attitude, the Lotus Sutra’s proclamation almost two thousand years ago that women could attain buddhahood is nothing short of amazing. To become a buddha is to become a perfected human being. That men and women are equally perfectible is, surely, true equality of the sexes. It also expresses the ideal concept of equality, since it is based on investigation and elucidation of the very essence of human nature.

Some people may think that there is no need to labor this point in modern societies where gender equality is legally recognized. But men’s tendency to look down on women remains strong, while women continue to harbor a sense of inferiority. It is necessary to settle both these problems once and for all. And I believe that the best way to do so is through a deep reading of the Lotus Sutra, whose teaching of equality is based on insight into fundamental human nature.

How did men’s sense of superiority and women’s sense of inferiority develop, and why do these attitudes linger today? Men and women are thought to have enjoyed equality in the earliest prehistoric times. Of course there was a division of labor between the sexes: For the most part the men hunted and fished, while the women gathered fruit, nuts, roots, and other plant life for food. But this was nothing more than a simple division of labor. Because women had to care for children, they could not afford to wander too far from home, so they gathered food in the immediate vicinity. The men, meanwhile, ventured farther afield in search of birds, beasts, and fish. This division of labor also made sense for physiological reasons. Women’s bodies are adapted to their important function of giving birth. They do not have the muscular strength of men, but they are better equipped to endure such hardships as food shortages.

These inherent differences became more highly devel-

oped in both sexes because of the above-mentioned division of labor. Constant wandering in fields, forests, and mountains made men nimbler, battling the elements made them stronger, and their lifestyle made them brave and bold. Women’s innate capacity for love, patience, and endurance were enhanced by childbirth and child rearing. Neither set of qualities can be said to be superior to the other. But because the muscular strength needed to do battle with nature was the first condition for survival in those rigorous times, inevitably the idea of women as weaker than men took root. Thus, even though women were indispensable, men developed a tendency to look down on them. Meanwhile, women internalized this attitude and began to see themselves as inferior. Generally speaking, hunting and herding peoples tended to look down on women, while agricultural peoples tended to revere them. Early Japan provides a good example of the latter type of society, as indicated by the fact that Amaterasu Omikami, the deity of the sun and the mythical progenitor of the imperial line, is female.

Toward the end of the hunting-and-gathering period of prehistory, population gradually increased and food grew scarce. The men had to range farther afield in search of game and were often away for long stretches. This meant that the women had to take care of their needs and those of their children with what they could gather themselves. They came up with the idea of cultivating crops instead of depending on plants growing in the wild. According to one theory, the concept of cultivation arose when people observed that seeds thrown away near their dwellings sprouted the next year and bore fruit. Be that as it may, it is generally accepted that agriculture was invented by women.

This invention led to a great change in people’s way of life. Indeed, it marked the beginning of culture. Here too women’s intelligence and love played a major role. Having invented agriculture, women gradually refined it. They thought up the idea of using fertilizers to improve crops, and their observation of the best times for planting and the other stages of cultivation gave rise to the calendar. Women are also credited with discovering how to weave plant fibers like hemp into cloth and how to dye it with juices from plants and with inventing the molding of clay into pots and other vessels.

At that time women were the mainstay of the home and the linchpin of the community. Since the men tended to be away for long periods, it was the women who cultivated the communal fields, oversaw the harvest and saw that it was fairly distributed, and taught the children how to till the soil. In short, women were in charge of agricultural labor, of government, and of education. Amaterasu Omikami was the central deity of the Japanese people. The myth of the world growing dark when she hid herself in a cave symbolizes women’s high status in early Japanese society.

Something happened, however. As agriculture became more sophisticated, people switched from a nomadic or seminomadic lifestyle to sedentary life in permanent settle-

ments. Men began to take part in farming. They also domesticated animals, which meant that there was a source of meat and other animal products close to home. In time the strongest males took charge, monopolizing economic power and relegating women to the status of servants providing labor. Gender equality became a thing of the past.

When men seized all sovereignty, they began to think of everything in terms of their own interests and convenience. For example, where once women had been revered for their precious role of giving birth and rearing children, they were now seen as mere instruments for producing offspring—that is, new labor power and fighting power—and for satisfying men's sexual needs. Meanwhile, men arbitrarily blamed all their anxieties and struggles over securing mates on women, branding them as evil temptresses.

As male-centered society persisted, women were forced to depend on men for their livelihood. Not only was it no longer necessary for women to think and talk about social and political matters, it was downright inconvenient for the men. In time women were shut out of public affairs and taught that “a woman's place is in the home”—and only in the home. Such education made women's way of thinking narrow and passive. Another thing that happened when society came to revolve around men was that women found it necessary to attract male protectors. This exacerbated coquetry and jealousy, which led to women's being seen more than ever as evil temptresses. What is more, the longer male-centered society continued, the more pervasive grew the view of women as innately weak, an idea whose seed had been planted in the earliest times because of physiological differences between the sexes. As already mentioned, women themselves came to believe that they really were inferior to men.

All this makes it clear that the concept of gender inequality is nothing but the product of ignorance. Ignorance comes from not looking beneath the surface of phenomena. Men and women together have created the world we know; both are indispensable. If we just open our eyes a little, any one of us should be able to see that men and women are essentially equal. And yet people do not see. That is ignorance.

Shakyamuni, in the “Devadatta” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, demolished this ignorance. The story of the dragon king's daughter's attaining buddhahood at the age of only eight—and attaining it so swiftly—is a great declaration that all human beings, male and female alike, possess the buddha-nature equally. Has there ever been as clear and thoroughgoing a statement of gender equality?

There is one bothersome point, however: the dragon king's daughter's transformation into a male before becoming a buddha. Any thoughtful person will probably wonder why she did not become a buddha just as she was. Why the intermediate stage? But we should not make too much of this. We must remember that the Lotus Sutra was preached not for a handful of scholars and bhikshus but for the salva-

tion of countless multitudes. In the India of Shakyamuni's time, as in almost every other country of the world, the concept of male supremacy was deeply embedded. Women themselves took it for granted. The best way to get ordinary people to accept the revolutionary idea that a woman could attain buddhahood was to have her turn into a man first. This expedient made it easier to understand.

If the Lotus Sutra had been a philosophical work intended for scholars and bhikshus, the teaching of the essential equality of the sexes would probably have been developed through logical argument. But since its aim was to enlighten ordinary people to the loftiest truth, it was put together in the form of dramatic episodes. In the circumstances, having the dragon king's daughter turn into a male was a natural device.

The basic message is that human beings are essentially equal, transcending gender differences. But the actual dramatic personae used to illustrate this are perforce either male or female. Had the dragon king's daughter been presented as becoming a buddha while still in female form, it is doubtful that people could have swallowed the idea, given the prevailing social assumptions. It was much more effective to conform to the conventions of the times by having her turn into a male first.

How should we today interpret her change of sex? I myself think that it teaches that women themselves should throw off their sense of inferiority and realize their essential equality to men. Even in societies where men and women are equal under the law, there can be no true gender equality until women stop thinking in terms of dependence on men. Women who quietly examine their own hearts will, I believe, agree.

I hope that both men and women will learn the meaning of true gender equality through the teaching in this chapter and become deeply aware of it. If men would honestly recognize women's excellence and women would rid themselves of not only their sense of inferiority but also their hostility to men, both sexes would be more open and could cooperate to create a new and better life.

At the same time, although men and women are essentially equal as human beings, they should not forget that on the phenomenal level they are divided into two sexes. Men are men, and women are women. We must willingly accept the fact that the differences between men and women are naturally ordained. It is important to develop the breadth of vision to see that true happiness comes of men and women making the most of their innate characteristics and working together in amity for their mutual benefit.

To be continued

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