

DHARMA WORLD

For Living Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue

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DHARMA WORLD presents Buddhism as a practical living religion and promotes interreligious dialogue for world peace. It espouses views that emphasize the dignity of life, seeks to rediscover our inner nature and bring our lives more in accord with it, and investigates causes of human suffering. It tries to show how religious principles help solve problems in daily life and how the least application of such principles has wholesome effects on the world around us. It seeks to demonstrate truths that are fundamental to all religions, truths on which all people can act.

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Bringing the Four Immeasurables into the Family

by Takayo Maruyama

In Japan in recent years, there has been an increase in cases of extremely vicious child abuse, parricide, and infanticide. Why should such horrendous incidents occur within families, which are the smallest units of a community, and particularly among immediate family members, who should be the most able to understand one another? No prescriptions have been discovered, either for the root causes or for a strategy to solve the problem, and it seems that both the government and those involved in education are at a loss.

As a lecturer and counselor in family education, I have the opportunity to travel all over Japan. When I listen to the people who come to me for parent-child counseling, I cannot help but think the parents and children or husbands and wives are all living their lives individually, without cooperating with each other, isolated from each other. I also have a strong sense that there has been an extraordinary increase in people who now lack a social nature.

Why has this sense of isolation advanced into the relationships among family members? I believe that the background for this is individualism that has gone too far due to the misunderstanding of the meaning of the rights and freedom of the individual. There is so much asserting of personal rights and freedom that selfish assertions fly about even between parent and child or husband and wife, and one can see that as a result families become fractured and their members become isolated.

The shape of the family has changed a great deal in Japan since the end of World War II. With urbanization and industrialization, the large extended family has been transformed into the small nuclear family. Along with this has come a weakening of connections with one's grandparents and of the veneration of one's ancestors, and a loss as well of any real sense of family members supporting each other as they lead their lives; there is a predominance of self-centered values that take for granted that individuals should live just as they want to.

In the meantime, as for education within the family and in schools, an approach that aims at intellectual training has become the mainstream. Whereas education used to be for the enrichment of our humanity by stimulating the growth of intellect, emotion, and volition, it has now lapsed into giving too much importance to the intellect.

Because of this, parents, children, and schools have all become zealously focused on simply raising grades so that the children can, as they say, "get into good schools and be hired by good companies." It's not possible, however, for all children to be first in their school or class. Obviously, this leads to rankings and the emergence of dropout students. As a result, this has brought about a feeling of frustration both in parents and children concerning the children's future paths and ways of life, a frustration that is taken out on those closest to them—their own family members.

In Buddhism, the condition wherein one's life is not going as one would like is called suffering. Although suffering is the ordinary state inherent in one's life, most people, because they try to lead their lives their own way, wind up deepening their suffering instead. I cannot help but think that at the root of every case of child abuse, parricide, or infanticide there is a person acting on a selfish impulse to change things—no matter how, or whatever they may be—that are not going as wished.

How should we change the families and family relationships of today? We need to reintroduce values that are other than intellectual, values such as gratitude and consideration, perseverance and sharing. At this point I would like to offer the idea of the Four Immeasurables that are preached in Buddhism. They are: loving-kindness; compassion; sympathetic joy; and equanimity. Simply stated, loving-kindness is the state of mind of wanting to make people happy; compassion is the state of mind of wanting to release people from suffering; sympathetic joy is the feeling of sharing in people's joy; and equanimity is the state of mind of forgetting the charity performed for others and the harm given by others, spurning all reward.

Everyone has these qualities by nature—all human beings. However, one's way of seeing things through a self-centered mind buries these intrinsic states of human nature, and this leads to fractured families whose members become isolated from one another. I fervently hope that someone in every family, no matter who that member may be, will put the Four Immeasurables into practice and bring about even the slightest change in the family relationships, and thus regain a way of living that is once again befitting of true human beings. □

Takayo Maruyama is the director of the Research Institute for Family Education in Tokyo, affiliated with Rissho Kosei-kai.

Restoring the Family for Today's World

by Yoshiaki Sanada

The “breakdown of the family,” about which so much is heard these days, is not a phenomenon unique to Japan; neither is it a phenomenon peculiar to our own time.

Recently much has been heard in Japan about “the breakdown of the family” or “the endangered family.” Men and women choosing to remain single, couples marrying later in life and some of them remaining childless, instances of child abuse and abandonment and domestic violence, the transformation of homes for the aged into mere holding tanks for unwanted parents, and even murders among blood relations—parents killing their children, children killing their parents, sisters and brothers killing each other—the newspapers, television, and other media prominently feature such trends and events, which seem symptomatic of a slide by the Japanese family toward a state of complete collapse. Or should these symptoms be seen as “birth pangs” attending the emergence of a new type of family?

Emancipation of the Individual

The “breakdown of the family” is not necessarily a phenomenon unique to Japan; neither is it peculiar to our own time. Already in the middle of the eighteenth century, there was talk of “the breakup of the community” or “the emancipation of the individual from the community.” The individual, progress, reason, and liberty were key philosophical concepts of the time.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), the influential writer

and philosopher of the French Enlightenment, held that because all people were born free and equal, the only condition under which they should transfer their freedom to another should be for their own profit. Thus, as no person is born with inherent authority over others, mutual agreement is the only proper basis for a relationship of authority of one over another.

According to Rousseau, the highest absolute form of existence for all human beings is the individual in a constant state of total freedom and equality. For such individuals, the foundation for dealing with one another in a social context should be agreement among all the individuals concerned, that is, on a contractual basis. This worldview leads inevitably to a logical conclusion that there remains only one possible type of human bond between individuals and society: ownership and contracts premised on a state of free competition.

Sir Henry Maine, an English jurist and legal historian of the mid-nineteenth century, succinctly described the historical transition from the Middle Ages to modern times with the slogan “From Status to Contract.” He characterized what he saw as the modern trend to be a gradual dissolution of dependence on the family, superseded by the growth of individual responsibility. He pointed out a sure but steady replacement of the family by the individual and the formation of interpersonal relationships on a contract basis.

The Principle of Contractual Freedom

Families come into being with the union of a man as husband and a woman as his wife. It goes without saying that such a union should be based on an agreement entered into with the free will of both parties. Thus, under the law in most countries, marriage is a contract involving a relationship of status.

The legal basis for contracts is the principle of contractual freedom. This means that the choice of parties to the contract and its content, aims, and conditions are based on the free will of the parties as long as these do not go against the public order and accepted standards of decency. As marriage is also a contract, the principle of contractual freedom also applies. In a marriage contract, the choice of spouse and conditions of the marriage—for example, whether it is cohabitation for reasons merely of economic profit, whether

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there is an intention to have children or not, whether the parties will live together or apart for stipulated periods, and so on—are entirely up to the parties as long as these factors do not go against the public order and standards of decency.

However, the principle of contractual freedom, which is founded on the assumption of the individual as an absolute entity with freedom and rights, carries within it a hidden danger that inevitably promotes the collapse of the community we call the family. The dissolution of the family we see in our present era is deeply rooted in our absolutely unshakable faith in the modern perception of the individual as the highest absolute existence, as well as in the formerly held assumption that progress in society and personal growth in the individual inevitably require freedom and rights, which are also the foundation on which contractual systems have been built. For people today, however, such freedom and contractual systems may have lost their former promise and power to promote creative emancipation; it is clear that many people now regard them as dangerous forces that promote insecurity, forced self-reliance, estrangement, division, and confusion.

Restoring the Family as a Community

The English word *community* comes from the Latin word *commune*. *Commune* is a compound of *com*, meaning “together” or “with,” and *munus*, which embraces the concepts of duty, responsibility, courtesy, and gift giving. If we interpret *community* in light of the original Latin, we can say that a community is a place where moral-spiritual bonds are strong and we as members mutually fulfill our own duties and responsibilities, treat one another with courtesy, and give one another gifts that can be either material or moral/spiritual in nature.

What we are now searching for is how to restore the family as a community in this sense. In the process of this search, we need to ask ourselves the following questions: What is a husband as an individual, what is a wife as an individual, what is a father as an individual, and what is a mother as an individual? And exactly what, in the first place, is an individual?

And what is the bond that forms when an individual man and an individual woman become a married couple, and what is the community of marriage that arises from this bond? Also, what is the bond of parent and offspring that forms when a child is born, and what is the community of parent and child that arises from that bond? And finally, what is the community of family that is created through the horizontal relationship of a married couple combined with the vertical relationship of parent and child?

The Concept of “Me”

One of the Japanese words for the English word *me* is *jibun*. It is composed of two kanji characters, *ji*, which means an independent entity, and *bun*, which refers to one part of a whole divided into pieces. The kanji characters making up

jibun indicate that the independent, unique entity “me” also inevitably exists in common with other independent “me” entities, which are parts that together make up a single, integrated whole. The Asian mind does not easily grasp the concept of the individual as the unlimited, absolute highest existence. Individuals are not understood dualistically as “me and you” but monistically as “my you and your me” or “you as you are to me and me as I am to you.”

It is reported that the number of cells that make up a human being total some sixty trillion. It is not within the power of a human being to independently create even a single cell. All of them come down to us from our uncountable generations of ancestors and from the uncountable multitude of all living things. The air essential for us to live was not created by us: oxygen is created by green plants. From an ecological point of view, humans are a kind of parasite living off green plants.

In order to maintain life, every day we consume food derived from plants, animals, fish, and so on; this means that we kill other living things in order to sustain our lives. Thus, for us to be alive means that we are taking lives. In the contexts of both time and space, we continue to take the lives of others, and through such sacrifices we live by being forgiven for our lives. At root, humans are beings that can survive only in a context of relationships with others in which we are being forgiven, being given life as we live, experiencing sacrifices as well as acts of sharing, compassion, and mutual respect. In this context, we must fulfill the duties and responsibilities we incur by living and being given life through a deep appreciation for the others that give us life, even to the point of giving up their own lives.

Restoring a More Natural State

No matter what form families take in the future, as long as they are unions of individuals, restoring the family must start with “human restoration”—the return of individuals to a more natural state—as it is the union of a husband as an individual and a wife as an individual that provides the basis for the existence of a family. We need to take a long hard look at the practical reality of the fact that, whether we want to admit it or not, no matter who we are, we are being forgiven and given life so that we can continue to live. When we recognize this as a fact, we will realize that freedom and responsibility and rights and duties are actually two sides of the same coin.

The inevitable, logical conclusion inherent in the recognition that humans are beings that can live only in a context of mutually dependent relationships is that we have a responsibility to work together and to treat one another with respect, appreciation, and compassion, overcoming differences in age, sex, race, language, culture, nationality, and so on. These natural responsibilities of human beings are an expression of the true meaning of the Japanese word *jibun*, and we now need a practical morality for implementing this concept within the modern family. □

The Role of the Family in a “Glocal” World

by Michael Fuss

*As families have been bearers of culture in the past, they
need to become aware of their new role as heralds of peace
and survival for the future of humanity.*

Everyone remains impressed by the eye-catching stadium of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, which evoked the futuristic spirit of One World—One Dream through its innovative design as a gigantic birds’ nest. Interweaving the global aspirations of the same humankind living in the same world and seeking the same dreams and ideals, the symbolic language of architecture sought to express the idea of human oneness in multicultural diversity by means of a subtle and airy grid in the shape of an open bowl. Surprisingly, a globalized society has chosen the image of a cradle to evince its desire for tenderness and intimate friendship, for protective care and shelter from adverse threats. Is it too far-fetched to detect the archetype of family behind this symbol of a global network of receiving and giving, of individual success and integrative support? As the Olympic athletes are supported by a complex infrastructure of favorable conditions, the development of a mature personality of global citizens is still backed by the positive influence of their families. The motto of the games, changed into the small coins of ordinary life, expresses the desire that humanity may prosper as one universal family.

From a sociological perspective, it seems almost impossible to identify a model family. Whereas a majority of people would probably still live in the traditional nuclear unit of parents and children, very often a family is reduced, for var-

ious reasons, to the very elementary relationship of one parent and child. Each family member would offer a different description because of her or his personal expectations. Does a family simply provide the space of uncontrolled privacy where one may do what one pleases? While the family, owing to an increasing commodification of ethical values in modern societies, is sometimes reduced to merely a service center that temporarily caters for the indispensable infrastructure of one’s own progress, it provides, at a deeper level, the horizon whose vertical (generational) and horizontal (collateral) dimensions characterize the public image of each person. Furthermore, different cultural patterns provide different models, and therefore it may be advisable to envisage a family as a subtle balance between a stable and nostalgic archetype—deeply hidden in human imagination—and a highly transitory and changing community: young adults abandon the family structure of their parents and follow new patterns in order to raise their own offspring.

The family is a highly symbolic and vulnerable reality in the sense that it is both a mirror of cultural shifts of the present and a promising cradle of new citizens of the future. On the one hand, it is a very sensitive receptacle of all threats of a mass society, such as poverty, repression, exploitation, divisions, and conflicts. It is directly affected by problems related to women, health, work, education, and religion. On the other hand, its intimate atmosphere of mutual caring and trust encourages the engagement toward building a society with a human face. Small gestures that flow from a sincere heart, in all human imperfection, express the longing for a fulfillment that will last forever. Offering a red rose as a sign of love, or lighting candles on the birthday cake, are eloquent symbols that fill ordinary life with anticipation of an ever-greater and transcendent reality. However, a family does not offer an idyllic refuge into privacy and is more than a protected playground for the most noble aspirations. By their very existence, committed families exercise a political role amid an anonymous and consumerist society with their prophetic potential of authentic human relations and their spirit of sacrifice: they are living laboratories of humanization versus the sterile cloning of unhuman robots.

Attempting to interpret the variety of biological and cul-

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tural viewpoints, the family may be considered a “we” wherein the “I” finds his or her individual existence firmly grounded within the caring and supporting solidarity of peers without ever being absorbed by them. As a dynamic and lifelong process of formation rather than a fixed institution, the family becomes the training ground for a new personality type of individuals-in-relationship. The personal self-awareness thus passes from a circle exclusively centered around the ego to the model of an ellipse with the dynamic polarity of plural focal points. Whatever has made you what you are, and whatever you have produced, remains an achievement backed by the experience of a family. Indeed, the mutual responsibility within a “we” community sets the tenor of interacting with one another in society. As a healthy

their own traditions for promoting respect and tolerance and transmitting these traditions to their followers is a crucial task for community leaders and educators. As schools of human relationships and interdependency, families still need full educational support. Such issues are a common concern of religions and have to be addressed with creativity and courage.

Growing up in a family determines personal identity. Not just the intimate mother-child relationship but the anthropological structure of family is revealed in the observations of the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (*Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe*, 1963) about the first encounter of the individual with the world by discovering loving relationships within the nuclear family: “Not by one’s own exertion of power, but

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The signboard evoking the futuristic spirit of One Dream, ready to be installed at the main stadium of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

family creates an educational experience of fidelity through a daily living of that reality, it leads to deeper relationships and lasting loyalties beyond. Wherever family members meet together in the spirit of love, share what they hold dear in a genuine spirit of freedom, and are empowered and motivated knowing that they can count on each other at all times, new humanity may grow in the spirit of love and fidelity.

The Educational Role of the Family

Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation on the family, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), affirms: “The future of humanity passes by way of the family.” Traditionally, the family has been regarded as an important institution for society. It is the first cell of society, the workshop wherein character is shaped, the nursery wherein seedlings are planted to bloom in later life. Tolerance and respect of human rights at an international level presuppose their practice in daily life. Dialogue begins at home, and finding resources within

only by a loving call from outside one’s own self, an individual becomes part in the universal community of beings.” He adds: “When throughout many days and weeks a mother has been smiling at the child, at a certain moment she will be rewarded by the child’s smile. . . . By awakening to love, the child awakens to cognition. . . . Intelligence (with its entire apparatus of perception and conceptions) begins to play, because previously the play of love has initiated from the side of the mother.” This means that the selfhood of the child will be able to grow because the loving atmosphere within the family constitutes the first sheltering and encompassing world that kindles the conviction of “being permitted to be” and lets the child playfully experience his or her stand in later life. From the biological lack of self-sufficiency for survival and the fact of passively “being thrown into existence” (J. P. Sartre), it follows that the place where being and love are coexistent is considered sacred.

It may be surprising to note an immediate backlash of

family education on one's behavior in intercultural situations. The flexibility to interact with reciprocal respect and to face complexity as well as a practical ability toward conflict resolution, peacekeeping, and conviviality in spite of differences is first experienced at home, as is also the creation of a climate of reconciliation and engaged solidarity. Families and religious communities alike are places where values of interpersonal communication and caring for one another are experienced day after day. The "glocal" dimension of education—simultaneously connecting its global and local outreach—is based on a relational pedagogy that fosters strong ties of mutual trust and interaction; abstract universality and familiar fraternity go hand in hand. Explaining the greatest commandment that connects God, one's neighbor, and oneself within a triangular relationship of dynamic love, the Christian Scripture holds that love will not be sincere unless it equally reaches out to the farthest and to the closest persons.

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884–1962) wrote about creating such a culture of mutual respect among peoples: "Where do human rights begin? In small places, close to home, so close and small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. . . . Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere." Such efforts at the local level may well prove decisive, for religious communities have great potential to heal wounds, to build bridges, and to band together against extremists who would manipulate religion to promote hatred and violence. As increasingly religious and cultural pluralism becomes a reality, more and more people

are becoming familiar with members of other cultures and religions. Many, especially young people, are building lasting friendships—in schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces. Inspired by religious trust, families may share their everyday experiences, their human solidarity, and responsibility for one another, and thus begin to knit networks of tolerance and mutual trust with other families. Far from economical or political considerations, families reach out to connect with other families on human grounds. As they have been bearers of culture in the past, granting the transmission of ethical values through generations, they have to become aware of their new role as heralds of peace and survival for the future of humanity.

The very word family is derived from the Latin *familia*, with the meaning of an extended household based on the authority of a landlord (*pater familias*) who acts as head of an economic system. Not only are parents, children, and relatives part of such a family, but also subordinate workers, business partners, slaves, and possessions. The legal term covers the vast progeny of a famous ancestor who often is venerated with religious awe, since his distinctive virtues have molded ideals that grant prosperity through generations. Belonging to such a *gens* (a tribal corporation) or *domus* (house; Greek: *oikos*), an individual connects with a mythical past and by acting according to the inherited spirit enjoys protection against any risks of the present life. From this semantic field emerges the project of "human ecology" to be concerned with the organization of labor, economic structures, and public welfare in favor of families. Inasmuch

as families are educated to live according to spiritual values, they will be able to actively create human environments that reflect a just order of life. On a political or social level, a "family of nations" could hardly subsist without the meta-physical foundation of a family of common values or a family of truth.

Family of Truth

The framework of a corporative family that is constituted by a moral and spiritual kinship permits us to look at religious communities as families of one's own preference. Religious practitioners consider themselves as newly born by divine grace and the saving word. The Lotus Sutra (chapter 3) calls the disciples "sons born of the Buddha's mouth," and Jesus Christ (Matt 10:37) exhorts his true disciples to leave father and mother and follow only him. In line with his own example, the Buddha calls his followers to leave the natural family for a homeless state and consider the *brahmaviharas* (lit. "heavenly abodes," these are the four sublime attitudes that lead to enlightenment) as their spiritual refuge. According to the Christian tradition, the family has been named a "small Church," and the Church, a family: the community members are children of God, and hence brothers and sisters, and their family is centered around the willingness to serve one another in the spirit of Christ. As this communitarian spirit is foundational to religious traditions, today a "community of communities" has to be envisioned, not by artificially postulating one world religion, but by fostering dialogue among the various faith communities.

As religions are answering, from different cultural viewpoints, the basic questions of life, they have to approach in harmony the great challenges of humanity that are, first of all, of a spiritual order. The converging point among religions is their consideration of families as the "sanctuary of life" (John Paul II, encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, 1991). Against a destructive "culture of death," religious traditions emphasize the sacred and inviolable character of life, and their meeting place is not a temple made of stones but the living sanctuary of families who gladly receive, promote, and protect life and thus reveal the fundamental truth about our human nature. Indeed, it may appear paradoxical that the deepest, and distinguishing, reality of religions is not initially perceived by their notion of "God"—which in its divergent and often contradictory guise has given rise to harmful rivalry—but by the loving communion of families as the foremost realization of what is most holy to religious people. By knitting global networks of committed families, religions are called upon to cooperate in terms of a global "family of truth" that maintains the distinctive identity of each family member and religious tradition and yet is pervaded by a common responsibility of witnessing spiritual values. A profound cultural change will occur when religious families as "people of life" become "people for life."

In her study on the increasing interweaving of religious traditions, Beatrice Bruteau (*What We Can Learn from the*

East [New York: Crossroad, 1995]) takes inspiration from a familiar experience: "We have reached the stage of entering one another's kitchens, swapping recipes, and sharing confidences over a cup of coffee. We are starting seriously to learn from one another." Dialogue means an encounter of committed individuals, not of institutions. Far from being confined to official statements and dogmatic debates, religions connect at the practical level, showing one another how to deal with everyday problems. Dialogues of life and social action offer a wide field of common concern to alleviate the gaping wounds in society. This does not mean a reduction of religions to merely humanistic agencies; it becomes a new and surprising way to live the common search for the Ultimate by creating relationships of openness. Pope John Paul II has envisaged a prophetic vision at the beginning millennium: "The name of the one God must become increasingly what it is: a name of peace and a summons to peace" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 2001). Religions are called to discover the true "name" of God by their concerted engagement against sinful structures on earth. Spiritual mindfulness and active engagement go hand in hand. Religions have no other aim but serving the truth; their fulfillment means emptying themselves in ever-greater compassion. In Buddhist terms, this may be called the bodhisattva school of religions; Christian spirituality names it the way of Jesus Christ. Humanity is called to welcome religious diversity as an important chance in establishing a firm basis for peace and reconciliation among peoples, warding off the specter of religious wars that have so often bloodied human history. This urgent task of conflict resolution deserves an atmosphere of mutual trust and the creation of a familiar spirit.

The allusion to the grammatical structure of the World Wide Web in our title is meant to indicate that the family creates the needed link between dreams of an emerging world citizenship unimpeded in its virtual liberty by spatial and temporal restrictions, and the indispensable providers of the physical and cultural infrastructure at a local level. Although its psychological complexity appears behind an infinite array of overlapping windows, the family remains the overall portal that opens deeper values of life, and thus is rightly considered sacred. Individuality is not an absolute value; it remains anchored within each family as the indispensable "@" from which all people draw their identity. The tremendous cultural impact of the electronic network that covers the globe raises the awareness of a corresponding metaphysical reality of universal values that are mediated within the very concrete atmosphere of small families. The metaphor of the global outreach of the Internet illustrates the vision of an interactive network of cultural and religious families at the selfless service of life. Sports and games are over, yet the welcoming structures of the Olympic birds' nest will stand as a secular icon for the spiritual habitat wherein individuals can perform in excellence backed by the support of families that lovingly allow them to grow and generate new hope for the future. □

Why Twenty-first-Century Families Need Faith Communities

by Michael A. Schuler

Whatever might be said about the role of religion and citizenship, it is clear that almost two centuries later the family continues to be held in high regard.

In his perceptive survey of early-nineteenth-century American life entitled *Democracy in America*, the French historian Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–59) identified three essential components of a stable, highly functioning civilization: family, religion, and democratic political participation. These entities serve as a counterweight to the individualistic and self-centered tendencies that would otherwise dominate society and inhibit the development of any sense of common purpose and collective responsibility.

Whatever might be said about the role of religion and citizenship, it is clear that almost two centuries later the family continues to be held in high regard. In recent years, entire political campaigns have been built around the theme of “family values,” and although people often differ with respect to the specific nature of those values, few would disagree that the family occupies a central position in contemporary social systems.

Nevertheless, the American family—and increasingly families throughout the world—has been undergoing a transformation and is no longer restricted to a single type. A dwindling number of people, primarily religious conservatives, still cling to the notion that the only “proper” or “legitimate” family consists of a duly married heterosexual

couple engaged in parenting. An emerging majority are learning to accept that a family can be just about anything one or more individuals want and choose it to be.

In my own faith community in Madison, Wisconsin, many types of families are represented, including same-sex couples with and without children, unmarried cohabitating couples, singles, “blended” families composed of remarried adults and their respective children, persons involved in polyamorous relationships (three or more consenting adults living intimately together), elders sharing living quarters with their adult children, and, of course, a preponderance of families that conform to the traditional definition. What I find rather remarkable and inspiring is the ease with which all of these people interact at the First Unitarian Society of Madison and how affirming they try to be of one another.

To be sure, this has not always been the case. It has taken time and repeated exposure for some of our more conventionally oriented members to become comfortable with an expanded vision of family. Gradually, ours has become a truly “welcoming” congregation. If residual disapproval of some domestic arrangements still exists, it isn’t obvious. Whatever prejudice or impediments they might still encounter in society at large, all of our families do feel affirmed by their coreligionists.

This is one way in which progressive religious communities in the twenty-first century can render an invaluable service to a changing society. For much of history, religion has functioned as a profoundly conservative social force, seeking to protect ancient mores and established institutions from being dissolved by the acids of modernity. In this capacity, religion has often withheld moral and spiritual approval from relational and familial arrangements that deviated from the norm. It did not make much difference how decently any given family conducted its affairs; what mattered most was its composition. Indeed, religion quite often tolerated highly dysfunctional families of the preferred type over warm and nurturing families that were improperly constituted.

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In many religious cultures—Roman Catholic, Christian Evangelical, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Orthodox Judaism—this remains the case: family is narrowly defined and deviations summarily disapproved. Even the normally open-minded and tolerant Dalai Lama unfortunately invokes traditional Buddhist teaching in identifying gay and lesbian relationships as “sexual misconduct,” thus rendering them impermissible.

The role of a liberal or progressive faith community is meant to be different. The basic intent of the First Unitarian Society of Madison is to provide a safe and welcoming environment for families of all descriptions and then to provide moral and spiritual resources to help them thrive on their own terms. The fact is, whatever form they might take, families today need help, and research seems to indicate that faith communities can be a significant asset in an increasingly competitive, calculating, and unstable social environment. As former U.S. vice president Al Gore and his wife, Tipper, remark in their book *Joined at the Heart*, “The odds of achieving stability, success and happiness seem to be very much in favor of families that invest their children with a strong moral and tolerant faith tradition.”

Today’s families are incredibly stretched and strained. Financially, it has become more difficult every year to make ends meet. Two incomes are a necessity rather than an option, and today’s parents have less time and energy than their predecessors for their children and each other.

Then, too, generational differences and antagonisms seem to have become more pronounced. Fashions, styles, fads, and even speech conventions appear and are discarded so rapidly that old and young share fewer common interests and are less able to communicate. Children and parents alike often feel misunderstood and underappreciated by one another.

In a hyperindividualistic, consumer-oriented culture, community values have become much murkier and more difficult to maintain. Tocqueville believed that the family should be a “locus of morality higher than that of the world” and that its purpose was to inculcate the sort of “unselfish love” that undergirds and sustains public morality itself.

But you won’t hear that last point being made very often by celebrities in today’s market-driven mass media. Primary emphasis is placed on private gratification and individual self-indulgence, with just an occasional nod to the family values that Americans profess to be so fond of. The stabilizing and integrating virtues of commitment, mutual assistance, compromise, forgiveness, and magnanimity don’t get much exposure in the steady stream of entertainment and advertising to which our families are exposed.

The problems that have beset Western families in recent decades are now beginning to appear in countries where rapid economic development has disrupted traditional social and familial mores. Writing in *The New Yorker* recently, Peter Hessler described the plight of an upwardly mobile Chinese family with whose circumstances he was very familiar. “In

seven years,” he observes, “the Wei family’s income had increased six-fold,” and their standard of living had risen accordingly.

However, the pressures of improving, or even maintaining, their position have exacted a heavy toll. The husband and father, Wei Ziqi, smokes more than a pack of cigarettes a day and has begun to drink heavily in order to relieve stress. Cao Chunmei, his wife, is probably addicted to amphetamine-based diet pills and has turned to a superstitious form of religion to cope with depression. The couple’s son, Wei Jia, is seriously overweight.

Compounding their individual afflictions, the Wei family as a whole has become increasingly dysfunctional. Previously poor but genially connected, the household has become the scene of heated arguments and bitter silences. If resources exist to help the Wei’s surmount their difficulties, the family appears not to be aware of them.

While some people do realize that responsible and responsive faith communities can be a significant asset to today’s families, many do not. Particularly in the more secular sector of modern society, the impression lingers that religion has more to do with “faith” than with “community” and that its objective is to impose arbitrary, oppressive rules rather than transmit rational, life-affirming values. Having had a negative encounter with, or having received a poor impression of, one religion or another, some find it hard to treat the matter objectively. As a result, they fail to recognize the positive contribution that organized religion can make to their own lives and to their relationships with loved ones.

In an autobiographical essay entitled “Why I Make Sam Go to Church” from her book *Traveling Mercies*, Anne Lamott writes that “the main reason is that I want to give him what I found in the world, which is to say a path and a little light to see by.” Lamott reports that among the many people she encounters, the ones who have left the deepest impression have been, as a general rule, spiritually engaged. These, she writes, are folks who “have what I want: purpose, heart, balance, gratitude, joy.” Although Lamott is a Protestant Christian, she acknowledged that no one religious tradition enjoys a monopoly on such unselfish and “self-actualized” people. Buddhists, Jews, Christians, and Muslims who join together to work on themselves and create a better world are all “following a brighter path than the glimmer of their own candle,” she writes.

More specifically, then, in what ways might spiritually grounded communities make a meaningful contribution to the well-being of twenty-first-century families?

In the first place, institutions that provide regular opportunities for cross-generational contact have become increasingly rare. This is, however, the bread and butter of many faith communities. As I mention in my forthcoming book *Making the Good Life Last: Four Keys to Sustainable Living* (Berrett-Koehler, 2009), a high-functioning church, syna-

gogue, mosque, or sangha with a life span focus is one of the few venues in which casual interchanges between young and old routinely occur. In my experience, these contacts help reduce suspicion, soften stereotypes, and increase intergenerational appreciation. Moreover, a faith community can pull “empty-nesters” and other older adults out of isolation and temper the natural drift toward age-based segregation—a development exacerbated by the gravitation of elders toward retirement communities.

Second, in our highly mobile, uprooted world, families need sources of tangible support to replace or supplement that which was once provided by the extended family. Either by choice or by economic necessity, a high percentage of young adults end up living far from the community in which they were reared. Often as not, they choose life partners and produce children at a considerable distance from their own siblings and parents.

I can attest from my own three decades of ministry to faith communities that several forms of assistance are often available to those who make a sustained effort to stay involved. Parents of infants and young children find peers with whom to share child care. Couples planning their wedding can avail themselves of prenuptial counseling. For singles, congregational programs provide a safe environment in which to make new friends or find a partner with compatible values. When illness or injury strikes, anxious and overstretched families can receive meals, transportation, and other small but helpful services from organized, caring committees. Widows and widowers, for instance, often receive invaluable emotional support from those who have suffered a similar loss.

In other words, between the intimate world of blood ties and the fee-for-service professionals to whom people today often turn for assistance, we find often underutilized religious associations. Inasmuch as individuals or families are willing to shed their pose of self-sufficiency and adopt healthy habits of interconnection and interdependence, they are likely to receive warm attention from an assortment of concerned souls.

Third, a faith community is quite unique in that its primary purpose is to address and invite conversation about life’s great imponderables. How many opportunities does any person have during the course of a normal month to meditate upon the meaning of this life or to consider his or her prospects for the next? What other modern institutions equip parents to respond appropriately to their children’s innocent but probing questions about such matters?

In a world of multiple options with all sorts of errands to accomplish it is tempting to spend our waking hours dealing exclusively with the mundane—getting and spending, performing chores, and exploring new avenues of pleasure. That being the case, making room in our busy schedules for some serious contemplation is a challenge. It should be a higher priority because those who experience a dearth of

meaning and for whom a clear sense of purpose is missing tend to be less happy and more frustrated than people who have attended to such matters.

In my experience, people who are involved in faith communities are able to come to terms with the inescapable issues of mortal existence more readily than individuals who rely on their own meager resources. And having confronted the sources of their own deep-seated fear and anxiety, they are able to move beyond self-absorption and self-pity and develop greater sensitivity to others. As a result, their relationships are healthier and their presence more welcome.

Finally, and related to the foregoing, faith communities can help people with their priorities. Free-market capitalism and a powerfully seductive, deeply penetrating advertising industry have led billions of people to suppose that the true sources of human happiness are easily procured on Amazon.com or in the shopping mall. We have seen in the last fifty years the worldwide ascendancy of materialistic values. Without denying that this has in certain respects been a positive development—a person’s sense of well-being does in fact correlate with a modest level of affluence—it is a grave mistake to think that greater purchasing power will guarantee the good life.

In fact, material consumption is far less instrumental to the quest for happiness than positive relational involvement. It is not things, but other people, that make us glad. Service to others or to some “self-transcending” cause also delivers greater internal rewards and long-term satisfaction than material gains. Creative expression and regular encounters with new and exciting ideas also matter more than the acquisition of a new car or a thirty-six-inch flat-screen TV. For a culture that increasingly suffers from what Richard Louv describes as “nature-deficit disorder,” communion with the sentient world is both therapeutic and life enhancing. Alienation from the web of life that sustains us contributes to a state of chronic anxiety whose origin many of us scarcely recognize.

It is the responsibility of religion and of faith communities to expose our cultural fallacies, present meaningful alternatives, and help us move toward them. When we pay attention to and persistently pursue activities that really matter and that reliably produce satisfaction—activities that have little to do with marketplace values—we will feel better about ourselves and more secure amid the truculence and turbulence of the modern world.

Religion helps us see that a purely instrumental relationship to the world is ultimately unsustainable for individuals and their families. It invites us to adopt a different disposition that complements and completes the gifts a faith community bestows. Indeed, what may be most needed in our world today is a renewed sense of reverence. I am convinced that if religion can instill this feeling in a family, it will be well immunized from many of the modern ills with which it is threatened. □

Putting Our Hands Together Reverently Before Our Families

by Nichiko Niwano

*Home is the basic place in which we practice religious discipline,
a place in which we can directly contemplate the cause of
suffering and free ourselves of our selfishness.*

Through our practice of the Buddha's teaching, our home can become a place in which we comfort immediate family members.

However, excessive reliance can easily develop among family members, and the attitude of insisting on one's viewpoint may arise by saying, "Don't you understand what I am saying?" or "I want you to see things my way." In other words, we tend to become selfish. That is why the home can be called the basic place in which we practice religious discipline, a place where we can directly contemplate the cause of suffering and free ourselves of our selfishness.

Just as the expression "Children naturally learn by observing their parents" tells us, such observation is a part of every child's growing up. The conduct of our children is a reflection of the conduct of their parents, and it is through their children that adults become aware of how to act as parents.

When we realize this, we can clearly see our attitude changing from "I've had so much trouble with this child" to "Thanks to this child, I have been able to become a good parent." How wonderful it is to be filled naturally with the sense of putting our hands together reverently in prayer at

home if we can say to ourselves, "Thanks to my family, we are learning the Buddha's teaching and making it our own."

When we say "put our hands together reverently in prayer," or "worship," it is usually because the person or object we are venerating is precious to us. Whenever we put our hands together reverently before another person, the fact that we are venerating the other person is something for which we should both be grateful.

I feel that putting our hands together reverently has great significance. It demonstrates our gratitude for developing the mind of venerating others through the wondrous power of the teaching of the Buddha.

The Practice of Nonsell

The third Kamakura shogun, Minamoto no Sanetomo (1192–1219), who was also a renowned poet, left us this poem in the *Kinkai Wakashu* (The Golden Pagoda-Tree Collection of Japanese Poetry): "Even the beasts in all directions / That cannot speak in words / Are concerned for their offspring. / How deeply this impresses me." Despite the fact that animals cannot express their feelings with language, as parents they show affection for their young—the poem was composed upon the writer's being moved by recognizing this.

This poem lets us know that the essence of life is common to all living beings. Parents shower affection on their children when raising them, seeking no reward for doing so. Intrinsically, the rearing of children can be called a practice of nonsell, a realm of affection in which parents and children are united as one. When an infant cries from hunger, the mother—no matter how sleepy she may be—awakes to feed her baby and becomes the very embodiment of unconditional love.

Realizing that home is the place in which we practice the Buddha's teaching, let us bear in mind the feelings of all family members by demonstrating nonsell, thus striving to train ourselves to disseminate the teaching to others. □

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The Family as Focal Point for the Restoration of *Inochi*

by Minoru Sonoda

*In contemporary society the very shape of what constitutes
a “family” has been in flux in many ways.*

It was the renowned German-born American philosopher Erich Fromm (1900–1980) who once observed: “In the nineteenth century the problem was that God is dead. In the twentieth century the problem is that man is dead” (*The Dogma of Christ*, 1963). At present, our twenty-first century world is facing the destruction of the environment, wherein ecocide against all life on the face of the earth, not only human beings, is a possibility.

One of the root causes of this is a long-standing one: confused by an objective view of life, humans have lost sight of their intrinsically subjective life view. What ails us today is that we are leaving behind, so to speak, the concept that life is a phenomenon of reality, and have reduced it to a mere material fact.

In the Japanese language, the word *seimei* (life) refers to the bio-phenomenon of life that can be defined objectively only when it is seen through the eyes of a third party; but the word *inochi*, the traditional expression for “life,” is a concept that connotes an existential approach to life as beheld

by the subject. For example, *seimei* involves all the phenomena surrounding an organism from birth to death, whereas the connotation of *inochi* extends to the fundamental contradictions of “living,” in addition to existential issues related to one’s self before being born into this world as well as one’s death and after-death experience. That is to say, being aware of *inochi* causes a reverence for the emotions of human existence and for the mystery of living, which is none other than the restoration of man’s original religious nature. And furthermore, the most important setting for people to directly experience the reality of the existence of such *inochi* is the family, which has been the “living community/unit” since ancient times. I would like to examine these ideas below.

It goes without saying that in contemporary society the very shape of what constitutes a “family” has been in flux in many ways. In the 1960s in the United States, anti-establishment youth called “hippies” broke up the family and formed communes; in the large cities, the mass media has been carrying on as if a “society of singles” were the mainstream of the times; and today we are in an age when same-sex marriage is recognized. Furthermore, an examination of the ethnographic examples of the variety of family structures that have come about throughout the world over human history shows that the commonly accepted “nuclear family” of today is by no means universal. In other words, the basic units of the cooperative communities that are called “family” vary considerably according to differences in the era, the culture, and the civilization, making it impossible to determine from the internal structures themselves what sort of membership structure was commonly accepted and considered appropriate.

If one asks, then, if the communal unit called “the family” is necessary or not, the answer is that it definitely is. In past human history, the vital unit that is the family has existed without exception, however varied the forms it has taken,

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and it is also certain that for the present and the future it remains an indispensable communal unit of human life.

As to what the reason for this is, it is because the family is the primary community unit that shares the inherent nature of human existence, that is, the reality of *inochi*. People are born into and raised in families, and then, after having walked on all sorts of paths, they fulfill their lives by leaving their families behind. That is in accordance with the objective facts common to all living beings on earth, and, where the concept of *inochi* is involved. It is a reality that only human beings are capable of experiencing.

Nevertheless, as I mentioned earlier, the family has existed under many conditions throughout history, and has taken on the appropriate forms to meet the differences of cultures and civilizations. More than anything else, the families made up *inochi* communities only when the form that they took was based on the religion-oriented worldviews of the various cultures.

The confusion and fluidity surrounding the image of the family in our civilized societies of modern and recent times is a reflection of the harm done to the family by the sweeping secularization of society; the family had been supported by the older religion-based societies, but has lost its earlier nature as an existential community unit. The inevitable result is that the family has become demoted to being simply a part of consumer life. Formerly, children would first become aware of their relationship to others by defining themselves as an "other" in relation to their mothers, and, while being raised in the love and affection of the family, they would grow into being "people" as social beings, which the Japanese philosopher Tetsuro Watsuji (1889–1960) described as "beings of betweenness." Man continues to seek ego-identity in the "ontological primacy" (M. Heidegger) called concernedness, and, in the process of doing so, encounters the contradiction of life and death and the mystery of *inochi*.

From this point of view, old religious cultures should have provided traditional responses appropriate to the mystery of *inochi* that fit into the particular forms of the family and the social structures of those cultures. The ideal family should be, regardless of its form, first and foremost a biogenic unit in which the function of physical reproduction—passing on one's life (*seimei*) to the next generation through giving birth and raising children—works as its nucleus. At the same time, the family must also be, so to speak, a spiritual unit in which the reality of *inochi* is shared.

However, in the single-hearted pursuit of the ultimate goal of human salvation, religions seem to have somewhat left behind both the physicality and spirituality of the family unit. Indeed, Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, required that disciples leave home and become monks and seek enlightenment in order to be freed from the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death. Christianity's savior, Jesus Christ, while he was preaching on the road, advised his followers to be prepared to quarrel with their families.

Both of them required that their followers be reborn into the absolute realm of God and the Buddha through "rejecting the world"—abandoning their families and renouncing their ordinary lives, in order to overcome the conflicts and discord of *inochi*, with which the traditional community units, including families, are involved.

But it is impossible, even for a world of religion that is free from worldly concerns, to be disconnected from the secular world as long as it is related to the human conduct of mundane matters. Generally, through the actions of preaching and propagation, the existing families and community units are reorganized along the lines of churches and lay supporters of Buddhist organizations and are imbued with a new sense of *inochi*. This can be called the rebirth of the family unit, basking in God's love (*agape*) and the Buddha's compassion.

Unlike such organized religions, Japanese Shinto is by nature a communal religion based on the religious nature inherent in ethnic cultures. Based on traditional kinship groups such as families and groups of relatives, as well as local groups in settlements, Shinto is a religious culture that worships multiple natural and ancestral deities.

Also known as "the religion that predates religions," Shinto, rather than being a religious organization wherein people become believers of a propositional doctrine and form a group of like believers, comes down to us today as the successor of the "life communities" that, as part of culture, have continued to coexist with the natural environment, and also has inherited the cult of deities that interact with the deceased. Incidentally, the English word *culture* derives from the Latin word *cultus*, which also serves as the root for such words as cultivation and cult.

The cult of Shinto also prays for the symbiosis of the *inochi* of gods, nature, and people, making the best of one another, while living in a rice-producing culture. Within this context, Shinto quite naturally became a spiritual community of *inochi* with the family as the core. *Inochi* is not merely life that has been regarded as simply an individual "thing"; rather, precisely because it is a spiritual quality that has come down from our ancestors to our children, family members cooperate in having and raising children, entrusting their afterlife to the next generation, and assuring peace of mind after death.

The great early-modern scholar of Japanese classics, Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), discerned that the Shinto mythological classics (compiled in the eighth century) do not actively mention the world of the afterlife and, concluding that in Shinto "the absence of the assurance of peace of mind in the afterlife is itself reassuring" (*Tomonroku*, "Record of Dialogues"), wrote that his remains were to be buried in the nearby mountains and his bereaved family and disciples were to conduct a ritual to console his spirit without respite. Without regard for his fate in the afterlife, he entrusted his peace of mind in the afterlife to the connectedness of *inochi* to his bereaved family and relatives in this world. □

The Dharma of Family

by David R. Loy

Family crisis and breakdown is part of a larger issue for Buddhism: its confrontation with modernity, undoubtedly the greatest challenge it has ever faced.

According to the traditional account, Siddhartha, the future Buddha, embarked on his spiritual quest by deserting his wife and newborn son. This is the beginning of a wonderful story, but is it a wonderful way to begin that story? His son was left to grow up without a father, and his wife to raise him without a partner to share the joys and responsibilities. The Buddhist tradition has not questioned Siddhartha's decision, yet today it raises questions for us.

His departure into the forest established the pattern: *bhikkhu* (monks) and, less often, *bhikkhuni* (nuns) "leave the world" to join a *sangha* of celibate, full-time practitioners who have no families of their own and therefore no family responsibilities. According to the Pali canon, laymen and laywomen can become enlightened, but historically their spiritual role has been to support the *sangha* by offering food, robes, temple necessities, and so forth.

The difference between these two roles is related to a problematic, even self-defeating, understanding of karma. In many Buddhist cultures, the main focus for devout laypersons is gaining "merit," which can lead to a more favorable rebirth next time, and the main role of the *sangha* is therefore to serve as a "field of merit," within which, by following the monastic rules strictly, one becomes a worthy recipient of lay support. The result is that some Asian *sanghas* and

their lay supporters are locked into a codependent marriage in which it has become difficult for either partner to change. I wonder if this sort of "spiritual materialism" is what the Buddha intended.

This sharp distinction between monastic and laypeople may even have played a role in the disappearance of Buddhism from India. Long before Muslim conquerors destroyed its monasteries, Buddhism had been eclipsed by Hinduism, which offered more family-friendly religious practices. According to the Hindu ideal, it is all right to wander off into the forest, but only when your children are grown and married. The Bhagavad Gita teaches that you do not need to renounce the world to follow a spiritual path: there are other types of spiritual practice, such as *karma-yoga*, which involves fulfilling your daily responsibilities as well as you can in an unattached way, without regard for the consequences, or "fruits," of your actions.

The situation of Buddhism in Japan is different but not necessarily better. Since 1872, temple monks have been permitted to marry, which means they must provide for their families. Temples have become family businesses, and the oldest son is often expected to become a priest to keep that business in the family, regardless of whether he has any religious inclinations. As a result, traditional Japanese Buddhism today is a thriving (and lucrative) industry focused on funerals and memorial services—and usually not much else.

In general, the Abrahamic traditions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—have done a better job of integrating religious practices into the family (although, according to the Gospels, Jesus had no spouse or children, and his teachings did not promote the "family values" that U.S. Christians emphasize). This integration has become a serious problem for Western Buddhism, especially the white, middle-class convert Buddhists (such as myself) attracted to meditation and practice centers. Western Buddhism has been creating new forms of Buddhist commitment that try to overcome the dualism between monastic and lay practice, yet, by and large, these new institutional structures have not resolved the old Buddhist challenge of what to do about families. Although some practice centers make serious efforts to include activities for children, many Buddhist centers in the

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United States are noticeably aging and graying, and many American Buddhists are concerned about what will happen to Buddhism when the present generation is no longer around. Most members have families, but (from my experience) few of their children identify themselves as Buddhists. My guess is that the situation in Japan with young people is not much different. They may go to temples for memorial services, but how many have been genuinely influenced by Buddhist principles and values?

I emphasize the above because it broadens our perspective: the issue is not only how Buddhism might help us respond to the critical situation of many families today but also how this challenge points to an ongoing problem within Buddhism itself. It is not a simple matter of going back to what the Buddha and his successors said about family life, because they said very little.

The main exception is the Sigalovada Sutta (in the Digha Nikaya), in which Shakyamuni Buddha offers guidelines to a “young householder.” The Buddha emphasizes avoiding the usual vices, including dissipating one’s wealth by indulging in intoxicants, theatrical displays, gambling, idleness, and bad companions. This *sutta* advises parents to restrain their children from evil, to encourage them to do good, to train them for a profession, to arrange a suitable marriage, and to hand over their inheritance at the appropriate time. Children should venerate and support their parents when they are old.

Unfortunately, these general guidelines for laypeople in ancient India do not help us very much when it comes to dealing with the specific family problems that have recently become widespread in our modern societies: domestic violence, juvenile crime, eating disorders, refusal to go to school, and an increasing gap between the older and younger generations. How are we to apply the Buddha’s advice today, when parental authority has been eroding so quickly? When divorce is becoming so common? When so many parents are too busy to spend time with their children?

In short, family crisis and breakdown is part of a larger issue for Buddhism: its confrontation with modernity, undoubtedly the greatest challenge it has ever faced. Buddhism has much to offer a world in crisis, but in order to do that well, it must clarify its own basic message. This, I suggest, is where we need to start.

Ever since the Buddha’s time the nature of enlightenment (nirvana, satori, etc.) has been ambiguous: does Buddhist “awakening” involve experiencing another reality (where we go after death) or realizing the true nature of this world? Popular Buddhism usually emphasizes the first, but whether or not there is an afterlife today we need to emphasize that Buddhism is about transforming the quality of our lives here and now. According to the Buddha, we do that by transforming our motivations: when what we do is motivated by greed, ill will, and the delusion of a self separate from others (the three poisons), we cause suffering for ourselves and others; when we are motivated by generosity, loving-kind-

ness, and the wisdom that realizes our interdependence with others, we create healthy relationships and our lives become happier.

How does this apply to family dynamics? From a Buddhist perspective, the challenge is twofold: how can such a transformation help the family, and how can the family help with that transformation?

Even as each of us is not separate from other people, so our families are not separate from other families and social institutions. The notion that the family can be understood and its problems solved apart from a larger social transformation is a delusion. It was never a safe haven from a heartless world, and that is even truer today because of modern

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Family crisis is part of a larger issue for religions today.

technologies and social pressures. Thanks to electronic media such as radio and television, cell phones, Internet and e-mail, school demands, peer-group pressures, and so forth, the boundary between the family and the rest of society is increasingly permeable and often fragile. These external influences inevitably have important consequences on how various members of the family relate to one another.

If the family is a microcosm of the social macrocosm, it is an illusion to think that families can be repaired without also addressing an increasingly dysfunctional social system. When our economic system institutionalizes greed and we are constantly surrounded by advertising that encourages us to “buy, buy, buy,” we can expect that the main values of young people will become “moneytheism” and consumerism. If the media glorify ultrathin celebrities as role models, of course some young people will do whatever they can to look like them. If schools encourage rote learning that is meaningless except for passing exams, of course students will feel alienated and seek meaning elsewhere. There is something natural, perhaps even inevitable, about the problems of

teenagers today: as they become more independent, they must learn to survive and thrive in a sick society. If companies expect one (or both) of the parents to be so workaholic that they can be only minimally involved with their spouse and children, of course there will be something lacking at home. It is unreasonable to expect that isolated nuclear families can be healthy and happy dwelling in high-rise apartment buildings with little social connection or sense of community with those around them.

From this perspective, family breakdown reflects a larger social breakdown, and we cannot expect to resolve the former apart from changes to the latter. But neither can we simply wait around hoping that bigger social changes will improve our situation. So what should we do? What, if anything, do Buddhist teachings imply about family life today?

What little I can suggest is based loosely on the Buddha's advice to "reduce bad influences and increase good ones." The most important point is not to preach but to set an example. This is almost too obvious to mention, yet one of the main things I learned as a parent is that when I became angry at my son for doing something that I did not like, what he really learned from me is that it is permissible to get angry at people when they do something you do not like. This implies, among other things, that when my child develops values that I do not like, the first place for me to look is in the mirror. Now that he is a teenager, peer-group influence is enormous, probably greater than that of his parents, but my sense is that his basic values have already been established.

A focus on values, however, should not overshadow another concern: developing healthy *habits*. The most important Buddhist principle of all is the emphasis on mindfulness—that is, on one's *awareness* and *attention*. One way to understand the distinction between delusion and awakening (the word *buddha* literally means "awakened") is the difference between awareness stuck in unhealthy grooves and awareness liberated from such ruts. What I *do* determines the kind of person I *become*. An anonymous verse makes this point very well:

Sow a thought and reap a deed
Sow a deed and reap a habit
Sow a habit and reap a character
Sow a character and reap a destiny

This gives us insight into how karma works, and it is also consistent with Buddhist teachings about nonself (*mu-shin*). Buddhism starts with what I think, because that determines the intentions that motivate my actions, and actions repeated become habits. Habits create my character because my sense of self is actually composed of habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. This sense of self determines how I relate to the world and thereby strongly affects how the world relates back to me.

This is simple but profound in its implications. One of those implications is the responsibility of parents to make sure that their children develop good *awareness habits* early. (Early, because by the time they become teenagers it is too late.) Among other things, this means avoiding or at least limiting the addictive behaviors that the intrusive electronic media otherwise tend to instill: a radio or television that's on all the time, not to mention obsessive use of cell phones, video games, and Internet/e-mail. It is important to control the amount of time devoted to these activities, which suck one's awareness out of the home and distract from the everyday back-and-forth of family relationships. For those limits to work, however, it is also important that the quality of family communication be high. If Dad prefers to read the newspaper and Mom prefers to talk with her friends on the phone, it is unfair to expect the kids to act any differently.

The other side of this emphasis on *the quality of awareness* is developing a family spiritual practice—meditation, chanting, prayer services, and the like—that ideally involves the whole family. Such practices help to focus and free our awareness from the attention traps that beckon to us. Living in consumerist societies, we cannot avoid all the advertising messages that increasingly intrude upon us, subconsciously teaching us that the way to be happy is to *buy me!* We can, however, learn to ignore them.

Finally, I doubt that any of this will be very successful without the support of other families trying to do the same thing. One reason that modern families find it so hard to resist outside pressures is that the nuclear, two-generation, family is inherently stressful and weak. We are all hungry for community, and one way to respond is to develop and strengthen relationships with other families that share the same values and concerns. Mom and Dad need help, too: family breakdown applies as much to pressured parents as to their children. In place of television as the universal babysitter, playgroups and group outings can help to provide the physical and emotional support that young parents often desperately need.

In the face of the enormous challenges that confront so many families today, I am well aware that these general suggestions are woefully inadequate. In line with Buddhist emphasis on interdependence, the best way to conclude may be by returning to my earlier point: that we cannot hope to solve such private problems without also finding ways to address the larger public ills they reflect: institutions that encourage moneytheism, consumerism, workaholism; an educational system that teaches students to hate studying; and so on.

Perhaps the best conclusion, then, is this paradoxical one: in order to address our own personal issues, Buddhists today need to become more publicly involved and socially engaged. Our own family problems are not separate from the family problems of others. The modern world needs a new breed of bodhisattvas. □

The Muslim Family Today

Reconciling Tradition with Modernity

by Mehrézia Labidi-Maïza

The Muslim family may look as strong and immutable as a citadel, but in reality it is a fragile citadel. It depends on the emotions and attitudes of its members.

If I had to define the Muslim family, I would say, "It is a citadel whose foundations are made of love, its walls of duties and rights, and its roof of mercy." The family is one of the main topics of the holy Qur'an, which deals with its different aspects: marriage, child rearing, divorce, heritage, and rights and duties inherent to kinship. The family is at the heart of the Islamic social vision.

Since society undergoes evolution on the moral, economic, social, cultural, and political levels, the family continuously faces new challenges and has to cope with this constant change. Therefore, the Muslim family, which looks as strong and immutable as a citadel, is in reality a fragile citadel, depending on the emotions and attitudes of its members. These latter are human beings influenced by changing times and epochs. While trying to perpetuate the traditional model of the family, they are aware that they have to comply with the requirements of modernity.

To build a family, we need a couple, a man and a woman who agree to contract marriage in the name of Allah and with his blessings and to live according to the tradition of his Messenger, Muhammad, peace be upon him. The holy Qur'an describes man and woman as created from the same essence, "Nafs wahida."¹ This equality of origin engenders human and spiritual equality but gives to each of them peculiar biological and social roles in order to make them complementary to each other and not rivals of each other. Thus, marriage is depicted as "a strong rope"² uniting husband and wife with a relationship based on "tenderness and love" and "mercy," and making each of them "serene" and "confident" in his or her partner³. To reinforce and complete the recommendations given by the Qur'an, the Messenger, peace be upon him, taught the first generation of Muslims to facilitate marriage of their youngsters in order to preserve virtue and social order. He exhorted young men to marry "pious women and you will be a winner"⁴ and advised fathers to accept suitors for their daughters if "they have a good morality, otherwise there would be corruption in society."⁵

Nowadays, many obstacles hinder the way to marriage of young people; some are of an economic nature: the cost of the wedding ceremony, the large dowries requested by families for their daughters, the desire of some families to buy very expensive furniture for the newly married couple; some are bad social traditions: choosing brides from the same social class, forcing girls to marry a man chosen by the family. Islam loathes these bad practices, which delay marriage or impose loveless marital life on men and women. Families that adopt these negative practices are betraying the spirit of Muslim principles.

The "strong rope" that ties husband and wife together has to be a rope of love and tenderness and never a rope of oppression and frustration. Indeed, the holy Qur'an describes the intimate relation between the married couple, using a very nice metaphor, as close as that we have with our own clothes: "Allowed to you on the night of the fasts, is the approach to your wives. They are your garments. And ye are their garments."⁶ The garment protects the body, keeps it warm, and embellishes it, and so shall the spouse.

The family becomes a reality when the married couple has

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children. The holy Qur'an deals with the rights and duties of fathers, mothers, and children in a very detailed and precise way in many chapters, especially chapters 2, 4, 24, and 31. It depicts the family as a network of relations based on mutual solidarity and complementary roles and shared feelings, not limited only to parents and children but extended also to uncles, aunts, grandparents, in-laws; even neighbors are considered, in way, a part of the family.

The first duty of children after that of believing in God is that of obeying their parents: "Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honour. And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: 'My Lord! Bestow on them Thy Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood.'"⁷

The requirements of modern life often do not allow children to live with their parents, yet Muslim young adults always keep in touch with their immediate direct relatives, provide for their financial needs, and prefer not to leave them in retirement homes when they become old. In general, Muslims believe that being good toward one's parents is rewarded by God's blessings in one's life.

In return, parents are required to provide for their children a safe environment and an adequate education. Islamic law secures for the child the following rights: to enjoy good health and be protected from disease, to grow up in a family, to have a name, to receive an education and acquire competence in life, to live in peace and security, and to enjoy human dignity. If the family fails to fulfil its duties, the society shall take care of the child. The *ummah*, the Muslim

community, is also seen as a family. Indeed, the Messenger, peace be upon him, declared believers to be brothers and sisters and said to them, "Believers' community is like a wall built of individual stones, each of them backing and strengthening the other."⁸

He depicted fathers and mothers as shepherds or pastors of their families. As such, they are accountable for the path on which they lead their children. To the father, Islamic tradition gives a moral authority called *qiwama*. He is the head of the family but not its master; his authority is in reality a responsibility toward the other members of the family. Muslim fathers who nowadays behave as absolute chief by oppressing their children and depriving them of tenderness are ignorant of the teachings of their religion.

To the mother, Islam offers a privileged place within the family and a subtle power over her children, boys and girls. This power is based on numerous recommendations of the holy Qur'an and of the Messenger, peace be upon him, and nurtured by social traditions. The mother plays a key role in transmitting religious education to the children and in giving them the basic elements to build their identity as Muslim persons. Chawqui, a famous Arab Muslim poet, said, "Educate a mother and you will educate a whole people."

Muslim parents have to be at the same time *murrabi*, that is to say "trainers of the souls," and *muallim*, which means "instructors of the minds," since Islamic education never divorces spiritual teachings from transmitting knowledge.

I would like to end this article with a personal testimony. I was born in a Muslim family in Tunisia. As a child, I received the local family tradition from my grandmother, a peasant

Alamy/PPS

A Muslim family celebrating the end of Ramadan with a meal called Iftar.

Children playing at a park in Paris. In the city, people from various ethnic backgrounds live side by side.

woman who used a very nice image advising me to be as delicate and docile as a gazelle—apparently very fragile but strong enough to withstand the harsh life of the desert—to be a “good Arab woman.” At the same time, she enjoined me to be like a lioness, to be a good mother capable of protecting her children and securing her home. I must say that it is difficult to reconcile the two images, but I do my best to achieve this ideal.

My father was the imam of our city, the Islamic religious leader who teaches religion and leads collective prayers. From him I received my Muslim education. As an enlightened man, he taught my sisters and me to be proud of being Muslim women and made us aware of our rights and duties toward husbands, family, and society, in compliance with Islam’s principles. He also encouraged us to study in public school and build a career, since he was convinced that a Muslim woman nowadays should be an educated and independent woman to cope with modern life.

Owing to this education, I have chosen to build my own family with my husband on common feelings and common thought. Besides tenderness uniting us, we share the same attitude toward our respective families and our religious tradition. Our families were involved in the organization of our marriage and are still tightly linked to our life as a couple, in spite of the fact that they live in Tunisia and we live in France.

While having an independent family life, we maintain moral and material links with our families. We visit them twice a year. During our stay, we start by visiting our mothers and paying tribute to them, and then we take our children to visit the tombs of our fathers, where we recite the first chapter of the holy Qur’an and give alms to honor their

memories. We tell our children that we behave according to the teachings of Islam and we hope that they will do the same thing for us when we become old and after we pass away. We always meet with our uncles and aunts and nieces and nephews, for we want our children to realize that as individuals they belong to a big family and that they share with its members the same collective memory. This memory helps each of them to build his or her inner self while living in France. We want them to be deeply rooted in our home country and in our Muslim culture but also to be open to their French social environment. We are aware that they belong to the French culture, and we hope that they reconcile their Muslim faith with their French citizenship.

Together as a small family we have two common prayers extracted from the Qur’an: “Lord! May our spouses and children be a source of happiness to us” and “Lord! Bless our family and guide us on the path of virtue.” We usually say these prayers after our daily devotions, which we try to accomplish together whenever the frenetic rhythm of Parisian life allows this. □

Notes

1. Qur’an, chapter 4, verse 1.
2. Qur’an, chapter 4, verse 21.
3. Qur’an, chapter 30, verse 21.
4. Sahih Al-Bukhari, Book of Marriage, chapter on equity in the choice of partners, no. 3700, reported by Abu Hurayra.
5. Sunan ibn Majjah, Book of Marriage, equity of partners, no. 1957, reported by Abu Hurayra.
6. Qur’an, chapter 2, verse 187.
7. Qur’an, chapter 17, verses 23–24.
8. Hadith reported by Bukhari.

All Are in One Family

by Carol J. Ewer

In the world of impermanence, everything changes. What we deem as traditional or normal is only a moment or period of time as transience takes place. In our Buddhist practice today, if we do not move along with the impermanence, we suffer.

What is the definition of family? Is there really much difference between traditional and nontraditional families? What is the role of religion in the family unit? All of these questions can be answered through the words of scholars, spiritual leaders, and religious teachings. As a member of Rissho Kosei-kai of Oklahoma, I turn to the teachings of the Buddha for an answer.

First, let us define the many different family units. There are traditional families for each and every culture, blended families that are parents, children, or both from other family units; there are same-sex families with and without children; and there are extended (nonrelated) families that expand the definition even further. Grandparents are raising their children's children. Single males and females are adopting children; and some single women are having children. There are even those who mutually care for each other in ways that they cannot care for themselves, thereby creating a family unit. One example of this is two women who have taken care of each other for more than thirty-five years. One of them is mentally challenged but physically capable, and the other has cerebral palsy and is confined to a wheelchair. Their strengths take care of each other's weaknesses. All of these families can have core values and beliefs, with an ever-present ability to practice their spirituality. Our world has created the opportunity for everyone to be a part of a family.

Spiritual orientation comes from many places. Family is

one of these places. And spirituality as a belief comes to and from the individual. Imagine the many faces of the "family" unit. The parent, whoever that may be, begins the spiritual process along with the rest of the family members by practicing his or her chosen spiritual path. In fact, you could say it begins at the moment of conception and is the subtle transference of the buddha-nature from mother to child.

Some believe that the bonds of the family have weakened as the definition of family has expanded. I am more concerned about how the suffering within impermanence may weaken us as individuals and how that affects our family structures. As a child growing up, we do what is modeled in our family unit, and that is what we know. If that model does not transfer the teachings of the Buddha and only transfers the definition, spirituality becomes lost in the mask of religion, which is not being practiced. So let us go to the teachings of our faith. It immediately takes us to the state of transience. Eternal peace and fulfillment come from remembering impermanence.

The Seal of the Three Laws begins the journey.

1. All things are impermanent.
2. Nothing has an ego.
3. Nirvana is quiescence.

Impermanence teaches us that our experiences change in an instant and that if the ego hangs on to the challenges that come from the movement, we become shaken by circumstances. All things, without exception, are related to one another, existing from the same life energy. When we separate ourselves through our ego, the ability to provide the family with spiritual guidance or teachings becomes lost. However, as the illusions the ego creates are dispersed, peace and quietude return.

It seems in this day of transient families, the illusions of ego have grown to enormous proportion. Everyone has an opinion of what is family. Again, we are all interconnected with the same buddha-nature. When this is not realized, we see that "all existence is suffering," which we learn from the Four Noble Truths. This suffering is showing its many forms through juvenile crime, domestic violence, addictions, and

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withdrawal from society. Suffering exists when a person's buddha-nature is challenged and when the person's actions are judged to be "wrong" by "traditional society," even when this individual is practicing the Buddha's teachings. When following our buddha-nature, we go to the type of family unit to which we are most drawn: that which best expresses the spirit of our buddha-nature.

As I think back on the life of Shakyamuni, his way of being emanates transience. He lived in a wonderful house with family and friends around him. He did not want for anything, and that was his life. One day he saw the suffering of others outside the walls inside of which he lived. This was very troubling to him, and it became his mission to understand the truth. So Shakyamuni left his happy life and family and went out into the world, seeking the answer.

As the Buddha sat under the Bodhi tree, did he suffer? Of course. Did he give up? No. Then it came to him that everything is impermanent and at times we suffer and at times we feel joy. As fast, as hard, and as long as the suffering presents itself, so also does the joy of life emerge. Shakyamuni clearly understood causes and conditions and also saw that normal human beings are limited in their awareness of all aspects of causation and in recognition of the impermanence of all things. We are perplexed by things that seem to be out of our control. So in relationships change is immanent, and change in family structures is immanent. Shakyamuni did not leave us without answers when he entered nirvana.

In his book *Cultivating the Buddhist Heart*, President Nichiko Niwano wrote: "When a relationship with another person seems to be breaking down, we tend to believe that the tension and unhappiness will last forever. We become bitter and complain, and feel caught in an unending circle

of accusation and despair." He describes what has happened on the family level. When an individual's situation becomes impermanent, those who do not understand or see the buddha-nature of that individual become bitter and accuse that person of not being the same person they thought they knew. However, this does offer the community of family the chance to grow and change, presenting a new opportunity for everybody to be part of a family. We are all connected and interconnected. Without acceptance, the six realms and egos bear down and many suffer.

The Buddha's teaching leaves us with hope for all things. Following the truth and the Dharma, we can look within ourselves and open our minds to compassion. How quickly the suffering changes to joy again. When we change, others change. We just do not change so that others will change. We change because that is our faith, our spirituality, and our religion. The role that religion can play in these troubled times is to make room for the understanding of transience.

Life is always an opportunity. We are all seeking a wise path through life, longing for inspiration and support. In Western psychology, we are looking for a vision to radiate human dignity. With the teachings of the Buddha, we find a practical path for realizing this vision in our own lives. Peace, happiness, and fulfillment come with seeing life as precious and having gratitude for all sentient beings.

Shakyamuni was a wonderful example of the true nature of family. He left his family of origin and became part of the families of the entire world. Those who are suffering while trying to find their way in this transient world can find their way as they look to the truth. I am in awe when I look to my teacher and am reminded of the wonderful teachings of the Dharma. □

Five “Secrets” for Today’s Families

by Alberto Friso

A noted Italian sociologist offers some detailed suggestions to help young couples who are starting out on married family life achieve a stable union of lasting mutual affection.

Looking at the family today, in this era of globalization, means penetrating the social network where we all belong in order to examine its fundamental social good, which is the origin of society itself.

The world scene is worrisome and packed with contrasts. According to recent surveys, matrimony and a stable family life stand at the top of young people’s ideals. Women, who today are most likely to work outside the home, declare that marriage and motherhood are their prime aspirations. In contrast, couples often separate only a few months after getting married, and in some European countries as many as 50 percent of marriages fail, leaving behind suffering in their wake, particularly in children. Oftentimes, at the root of these family dramas caused by a variety of factors, the relationship of the couple is widely considered from a superficial point of view.

However, there is also an urgent issue to be addressed in the relationship between children and parents. The family, instead of being the place, as recently defined by Pope Benedict XVI, where “the ‘grammar’ of peace is learnt through the loving gestures of the mother and the father, even before their words,”¹ has often become a permissive environment where the children receive a suite of services and enjoy great freedom, making it harder—in particular for teenagers—to achieve true emancipation.

Another front to the crisis of the family is in the relationship with elderly members, who are often pushed aside and institutionalized. This is painful for them as well as for the new generations, who are missing out on the contribution of values and strong emotional ties matured by the protagonists of past events that have also determined the history of the younger members. The family encounters further difficulties in the social and cultural dimension. The individual is the main point of reference in current policies; as a consequence, the family as a social reality is not taken into consideration. On the cultural front, there is a new language, the fruit of an individualistic and pragmatic culture that is used with the intent to remodel anthropology through science. This analysis refers to evidence gathered from families from around the world, with particular reference to the situation in Western societies. Other cultures are being initiated into the same situations and problems.

At the same time, some fundamental changes are taking place. Luc Ferry, philosopher and former member of the French cabinet, underlines the relevance of the unique relationship that takes place within the family: “Putting aside misleading appearances, the only social relationship that, in the last two centuries, has been deepened, intensified, and enriched is the relationship that unites the generations within the family that is today more authentic and richer in affectivity and solidarity.”²

In fact, we can observe a humanizing experience taking place within the family that even enhances the religious dimension of the person on a spiritual path toward transcendence. Within the family, source of our social belonging, trust is born; the ability to cooperate responsibly for the common good in a constant reciprocal exchange takes place. For this, the family is considered today as a primary source of social capital that, once strengthened and enhanced, will generate well-being for the entire social community. If this capital is wasted and weakened, it will inexorably lead to the coming apart of society. A family appropriately motivated and aware of its function brings about a wealth of feelings and energies for the subsistence and the well-being of the social body, which makes it truly a social subject.

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Because it is constantly challenged by new difficulties, the family today finds new ways to relate to the culture and the society in which it is immersed. Family associations are one of these ways. This is a heterogeneous phenomenon that is born from a desire to share, to journey as a family together with others, sharing religious and moral values—recognized as crucial for the person—or simply looking to find answers to some aspirations or specific needs. When families get together to share reflections and expectations, often in the light of anthropological or spiritual values, a way of life emerges that contributes to strengthening the values and goals of the family nucleus itself, increasing its capacity on various levels to be a constructive element of society.

The New Family Movement of the Focolare Movement can be considered such an entity that contributes to strengthening the meaning and the function of the family. It is present in many countries on all five continents. It is made up of families and individuals of various cultures and religious creeds, all in agreement that self-giving love is the basic and constitutional good of family relationships. This is a value that is reflected, first of all, in the relationship between the two parents. This is, in fact, where the original encounter of love that made them one is renewed continuously, causing them to experience an ever-deeper unity: craving, fascination, the first and last dream of every couple.

Self-giving love is that strength which, already present from the first meeting,³ becomes concrete in the daily gestures of reciprocal service, in the deep attention to the other, in the gratuitousness. Self-giving love is yet an expression of a constant impulse to make two into one, sharing all they possess and all they are toward an ever richer union among them at every level: body, character, heart, mind, will, soul.⁴ The self-giving love experienced at the first meeting is one that will remain important even when, inevitably, it will no longer have the exciting initial connotations. It is important because if this intensity of feelings were lacking, nobody would get married. And it remains important because we have experienced that when we love someone, we feel that it is forever, almost as a confirmation that “forever” is engraved in the DNA of human love. The challenge that new families want to respond to is to be engaged forever. In order to achieve this, they dig deep into the teachings of the late Focolare founder, Ms. Chiara Lubich, and adopt a method made up of five secrets, so called because they deal with the intimacy of the couple.

The Pact

Every family originated on a precise day when two people made a reciprocal and public pact of love for life. They did this because the feeling they experienced, a spark of God's love, pushed them to unite forever. On that day they did not give each other *something* but gave themselves. With these or other words they told each other: “From now on, I live for you and you live for me. I give my life for you; you give your life for me.”

For every couple, this starting point is a subject of great remembrance, full of light. But as time goes by, how many couples keep experiencing the same intensity and strength? The diminishment of intensity is why new families try to renew that pact as often as possible, in order to keep the initial love always alive and relevant, and to seal in God-Love their union on earth. While renewing the pact, it is necessary to eliminate any shade of judgment or pretense. It is necessary to go beyond that small or big resentment “I” experience, beyond anything that could distance me from her (or him) in thought or in action. While renewing the pact I wish, I want to abandon myself in the partner. Then each will have to deal with his or her own business. But it will be as if everything were done together, even if physically far from each other. In renewing the pact, the love of the couple acquires new vigor, meaning, impetus, freshness.

Communicating Experiences

Let us reflect a moment on the communication between two spouses in the light of the pact. My wife is talking to me. If I am ready to give my life for her, I will concentrate with love on what she says, without interrupting her and without thinking of the answer to give. I will listen intently without any prejudice and in total acceptance. But she, also, abides in love; therefore, perceiving how positive is my listening, she, too, will tend to communicate with love and as well as possible her experience and the events of the day as well as proposals and ideas. Even if there might be diverse opinions, the difference is often just an appearance, because if love is what inspires our words, it will be easier to understand the reason for that diversity and to accept it.

To live for the other to the point of giving one's life is not limited to the area of communications. It becomes obvious for the couple to have everything in common: time, money, career, ambitions, worries, and so on. If something is missing on the table, or if, at night, the baby is crying, I will know to be the first one to get up. Daily life becomes in this way a marvelous exchange of gifts. For instance, she will be happy to go visit my parents; she will welcome my friends with joy; she will look after my health as well as after her own; together we will look after our things, our clothes, our home.

I will try to guess her most hidden desires, her wish for tenderness, for fulfillment. In the commitment to be ready to give our life, we also learn to manage the conflicts due to the diversity that any couple soon discovers—just think of male/female—that same diversity that was what attracted us at first, in time is perceived and experienced as insurmountable limits. Only love can recognize the full value of the other person and help us realize that we, too, have limits that require forgiveness. And as the engine is self-giving love, we go beyond any role preestablished by the culture in which we live. This way, we experience true equality between man and woman, which becomes the most complete freedom for each. In this dynamic relationship and communication, it will be spontaneous to also exchange with others how we

have tried to live and this commitment to abide in that love that is the foundation of our unity.

The Communion of Souls

With what we have said so far, we understand that a high level of communication is established between the spouses, a trust that extends also into a strong spiritual dimension. In this way we succeed in communicating to each other the small and big inner intuitions, those brief and intense moments of light that at times shine and enlighten us about the profound meaning of life and of humanity around us. They are shared to edify each other, to help each other on the path. In the communion of souls we experience an always deeper knowledge of the other to the point of perceiving his or her authentic personality. Spiritual trust between spouses is not immediate and not easy to achieve, because we know the character of the other or because of some shyness at expressing the feelings of our own soul.

One can start by sharing the state of mind experienced in seeing or living through painful moments or moments of wonder, to then move on, little by little, to share what we have inwardly understood in our sincere quest for the true good. It is important to do this as a gift, without expecting the other to respond along the same lines. The other, however, does not remain insensitive to this type of love, and sooner or later communion becomes reciprocal. In this profound communion, decisions are truly shared. As a matter of fact, it is when it is time to make a choice that, with surprise, we experience unity of mind either because we have the same idea or because we realize that our proposal does not fully satisfy the other and that it is time to let it go. It is not rare that, then, a third idea springs up that satisfies the aspirations of both, the fruit of the love present between us.

The Moment of Truth

Experiencing a moment of truth has nothing to do with those remarks that all spouses make when they see that something is not going right. The moment of truth can be considered the apex of reciprocity in loving that can be reached only after having lived the previous steps. Only then, the dialogue within the couple has reached maturity because the spouses, always abiding in the reality of wanting to contribute to the greatest good for the other, are opened to let each other know the positive and negative aspects of each other's personality.

One needs to know how to speak with sensitivity and respect and how to listen with great readiness, knowing that what is being said is love. Therefore an appropriate preparation is needed, because the moment of truth has to do with sensitivity, psychology, and the state of the soul of each one. It is advisable to start with the positive, explaining well those circumstances that we were pleasantly struck by to help the other understand that our love is attentive to all the nuances, that any attention or commitment of the other comes without the need to be noticed or appreciated.

Then one can talk about some negative aspects. It is not necessary to list all of life's errors. Limit yourself to a few recent things without ever addressing the issue on a personal level but limiting yourself to the facts. For example, do not say, "This is how you are" but rather, "Wouldn't it be better to do this or that. . . ." After a successful moment of truth one can feel such a strong unity that the potential negative remarks are almost more painful for the one who is talking than for the one who is listening. It is a beautiful experience that remains as a point of light in the history of a couple and gives the desire to do it again.

The fruits are the experience of a new freedom and a new enthusiasm for being always more committed to the richness and creativity of love.

The Chat

At times along the way in any family, there might be a moment in which one needs exposure to some experience not yet lived through. This is why relationships of esteem and trust with other couples in our community that have journeyed further and are more mature are very precious. These are the couples (or individuals) to go to for an exchange of reflections, of perspectives, of expectations or projects. With them you can have a chat, an encounter between a family in search and another that, because further ahead, agrees to listen. Here we can experience the full social force of love. Listening and dialogue are expressions of love, and it will be from this love that light will shine to illuminate the upcoming steps that the couple will have to take.

These five points are "secrets" to achieve unity for a couple; this is a simple method that is helping countless families bloom throughout the world. It was born out of a charism—of the Focolare Movement—born as an answer to the demands of humanity today that feels more than ever the call to unity on every level. The family is the primary form of association in humanity. This is why, with humility but also with strength, it presents itself as the paradigm and a vital contribution to universal brotherhood. It will be interesting to go further in this practice, which can have a positive impact on cultural research and direct institutions and families toward new goals for the fulfillment of the common good today and in the future. □

Notes

1. Benedict XVI, "The Human Family, a Community of Peace," message for the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2008.

2. Luc Ferry, *Famille: Je vous aime! Politique et vie privée à l'âge mondialisation* (Paris: Pocket, 2007).

3. This observation may be related both to cultural models in which the family is formed on the basis of a direct meeting of the two partners and to models in which the mediation of the families of origin, or of society, can contribute to the formation of the new household.

4. Cf. *Familiaris Consortio* 19.

Peacemaking in Asia

The Declaration of the Seventh Assembly of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace

Under the main theme, “Peacemaking in Asia,” the Seventh Assembly of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP) was held in Manila, the Philippines, October 17–20, hosted by the University of Santo Tomas in Manila and the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines. Some four hundred people from twenty countries in Asia and the Pacific region representing Asia’s principal religions took part. The participants addressed the problems facing Asia, including armed conflicts, poverty, discrimination, human rights violations, and environmental destruction, and discussed practical ways to make peace.

On the last day, the participants adopted a declaration emphasizing the importance of dialogue. The declaration includes fourteen recommendations as part of an action plan for the next five years, among which are that national chapters establish centers for dialogue at universities or other educational institutions and urge their national governments to strengthen their commitment to nuclear disarmament. Following are excerpts from the declaration with slight revisions.

Introduction

The Seventh Assembly met in Manila, October 17–20, 2008, under the theme, “Peacemaking in Asia,” with the participation of almost four hundred people as delegates and observers belonging to all the principal religions of Asia—Buddhist, Baha’i, Christian, Confucian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Shinto, Sikh, Tao, Zoroastrian, and others. The Asian Conference of Religions for Peace, in tandem with its partner and parent, Religions for Peace International, works to coordinate the various Asian religious heritages in pursuing peace and interreligious harmony based on the tenets of truth, justice, compassion, and the transcendent dignity of the human person.

During this assembly, Iraq and Cambodia were admitted as new members. As well, there were observers from Iran, Krygystan, and Malaysia.

The assembly was preceded by a pre-assembly Women’s Conference attended by seventy participants from eleven countries and seven faith traditions. They highlighted their unique qualities as women of generating life, having the capacity to love, and being instruments of unity.

Also preceding the assembly was the Asian Youth Summit held at Davao, where ninety young people engaged all stakeholders in Mindanao. They subsequently presented to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo during the opening ceremony of the ACRP their resolutions pledging to build a sustainable momentum of peaceful measures until the

The opening ceremony of the Seventh Assembly of the ACRP.

immediate cessation of hostilities, all sides returning to the negotiating table, and the immediate care of internally displaced peoples.

Peacemaking in Asia

The theme of “Peacemaking in Asia” was chosen because of the importance of making peace in a world that has become a more dangerous and a riskier place in which to live and work. Across Asia, we see not only a religious resurgence and a rise in secularism but also a rise of religious extremism and terrorism. Too many Asian countries are still riven

3. Common Values and Community Building
4. Sustainable Development and Social Justice
5. Healing the Past and Building the Future

Dialogue and Reciprocity

In all the discussions during the assembly, the need for dialogue was the central concern.

True dialogue is characterized by trust, sincerity, and humility; it also shows respect for the larger questions of life: our origins as human beings; the purpose of life; our relationship to the transcendent. Its obstacles are an obsession with the past or historical grievances, a spirit of mistrust and suspicion, a phobia toward change, the running of a political or religious agenda, the attempt to convert or denigrate another faith or ethnicity, and an attitude of national or religious superiority.

The discussions highlighted the importance of reciprocity. As ethnic and religious diasporas develop with the movements of peoples, there ought to be across the world a commitment to the just and principled treatment of minorities by the mainstream groups in each country in the spirit of reciprocity.

Following up on the discussions, the assembly adopted the following recommendations as part of an action plan for the coming five years:

Recommendations

1. Each national chapter, according to its capacity and its own context, should design and present to the next executive committee meeting in 2009 its action plan for helping to bring peace and social cohesion to its country.

2. Each national chapter should establish in one of its universities or similar institution a Centre for Dialogue, and these Centres for Dialogue should form an Asian network to work for peace, provide specialist studies, including religion, conduct research, and provide informed advice to the ACRP/WCRP.

3. Each national chapter should work to establish local interfaith bodies in towns and cities to encourage interfaith interaction and cooperation.

4. Each national chapter should address the healing of spiritual and psychological wounds in the aftermath of a conflict.

5. The appropriate chapters, in the aftermath of a conflict and in those countries receiving refugees from the conflict, should work to have governments establish therapeutic centres to provide special assistance to the survivors of trauma and torture.

6. The appropriate national chapters, in the aftermath of a conflict and as a way of healing the past, should cooperate to arrange inter-country visits to the actual places of war atrocities in order to hold joint memorial services of healing as part of the reconciliation process.

7. Each national chapter should encourage its govern-

Rev. Kosho Niwano, president-designate of Rissho Kosei-kai, read out a message from Rev. Nichiko Niwano, president of the Japanese Committee of the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

with conflict and division. The danger of nuclear weapons has not subsided across the world; neither has the process of militarization diminished. The quest for peace remains urgent. Faith traditions betray their authentic messages if they do not commit themselves to making and building peace, to resolving and preventing conflict.

The longing for peace and well-being is the central message of all religions; it is the essential goal toward which all men and women must strive, peace across the Asia-Pacific region and the world, peace and social cohesion in every society, personal well-being in terms of food, water, money, shelter, and spiritual fulfilment. Outer peace is the fruit of justice and development; inner peace is the deep silence of our minds and hearts that resonates and reverberates through the virtues and values of a moral life.

The assembly examined peacemaking in Asia according to five perspectives:

1. Human and Shared Security and Conflict Transformation
2. Human Rights and Responsibilities and Peace Education

ment (1) to sign the treaty against cluster bombs and (2) to increase the commitment of states to nuclear non-proliferation, nuclear weapons disarmament, and peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and especially to adopt the Nuclear Weapons Convention at the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

8. Each national chapter should encourage its educational authorities across the world to introduce curricula that aim at education for global and national citizenship incorporating a global ethic underpinned by common universal values.

9. Each national chapter should encourage its religious education and religious formation institutions to educate their students in peace and conflict studies and in knowledge about other religions and the interfaith movement.

10. The executive committee of ACRP should examine the feasibility and desirability of amalgamating the Asia Pacific Women's Network with the ACRP women's committee and to act accordingly as a way of strengthening women's networks.

11. The ACRP women's network should design a module to educate mothers in imparting education for peace to their children.

12. ACRP's executive committee should establish a finance and marketing committee to raise funds from governments,

supragovernmental agencies, international and national banks, and other sources in order to broaden its funding base.

13. Each national chapter, as appropriate, should encourage its government to create ministries for peace and inter-communal harmony.

14. Each national chapter should initiate or continue to support its national youth network with wide representation with active participation in the proposed 2009 Asian Youth Summit in South Asia, and each chapter should fully support and advise a united Religions for Peace Asia-Pacific Youth Network.

The assembly will present these recommendations to the Assembly of the Parliament of the World's Religions to be held in Melbourne in December 2009. The assembly also notes the steps toward peace taken on the Korean peninsula. The ACRP commends the peace process, asking the two governments and their people to continue forwarding the process. It also commends the proposal for a United Nations' Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation and hopes that the Asian governments supported by the national chapters will vote for this initiative in the UN's General Assembly. □

All participants on the campus of the University of Santo Tomas, Manila.

Conflict and Dialogue

Peace Building in Islamic Areas and the Role of Asian Religious People

by Mir Nawaz Khan Marwat

Adapted from an address delivered at the International Interfaith Seminar held in Seoul, July 17–19, 2008

We are living in the civilized era of the twenty-first century, but the world is still unsafe. There are many trouble spots and unresolved conflicts that endanger peace and hinder peaceful living.

There is a ray of hope as people have realized the importance of peace and peaceful coexistence. But this realization and desire should be translated into action that should be apparent, to be seen and felt by people.

The dialogue process should be result oriented and initiate a new era of peace and cooperation. Conflict and dialogue are interconnected: to resolve conflict, dialogue is the best course to adopt.

To curb violence only with the use of force is always fatal. Sometimes preventive wars are waged with the idea of curbing the ensuing danger and warding off imminent attack, but how far does the invader have a right to engage in a war against a threat that has not yet materialized from a remote corner of the world?

The obvious result would be failure and destruction. In the nineteenth century, the great German chancellor Otto von Bismarck dismissed the notion of preventive war, saying that its logic was on a par with “committing suicide for fear of death.”

The pivotal point is the achievement of peace. To achieve peace we have to purify our eyes, mind, heart, memory, and soul to see peace, to understand peace, to love peace, to work for peace, and to breathe peace. There should be no dichotomy. Forgiveness and accommodation are the essence of peace. Revenge, extremism, and fanaticism give birth to violence and terrorism.

Let us pinpoint some unresolved conflicts, such as the issues of Palestine, Jammu and Kashmir, Iraq, Afghanistan, Mindanao in the southern Philippines, southern Thailand, the Korean peninsula, and the insurgency in Sri Lanka. These issues have been pending since long ago and have resulted in great loss of human life and property, coupled with untold misery.

The United Nations till this date could not amicably resolve conflicts. The obvious result is an environment of tension and mistrust, causing a great burden for the exchequers of the concerned nations. Along with this we have ethnic conflicts, communal conflicts, and sectarian conflicts that also endanger domestic peace in certain countries. Some people prepare the ground for religious conflict with ulterior motives for which no religion can be blamed. This is the result of malicious designs by an individual or a group of individuals.

For fruitful dialogue between religions, we must evolve a code of ethics based on mutual respect, human love, peaceful cohesion, and a deep sense of equality and sincerity. We should keep in mind that we are members of the same large human family. We should preach that the salvation of humanity lies in our policy of sharing one another's sorrow and grief. We must search for the commonality in our faiths and strive for unity in diversity.

Our beautiful world can no longer afford armed conflicts. We have to make joint coordinated efforts to resolve existing conflicts and to fight against poverty, ignorance, disease, fanaticism, extremism, and terrorism.

Moderate and peace-loving religionists have a great responsibility to defuse the existing volatile situations in the world in general and Asia in particular. Asia, being the

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largest and most populous continent and being the birthplace of all the great religions, has great responsibility for peace building. We must use religion as a source of peace and peaceful coexistence and perform our obligations and duties honestly and diligently for creating a culture of peace and bridging the gap between religions.

To pursue this mission, imparting peace education and cultivating the wisdom for building a culture of peace within societies, nations, and religions, should be our aim. We have to adopt a common curriculum of peace education. There is a dire need for coordination among different interfaith organizations based on justice, impartial resolution of conflicts, tolerance, mutual respect, human love, and dignity. In the interfaith peace organizations we must induct and elect persons with spotless reputations armed with the spirit and zeal for peace and impartiality. These persons should command respect in their respective faiths, areas, and countries. There should be no picking and choosing on the basis of personal likes and dislikes. Nonentities and cronies cannot deliver the goods, and their selection would be an exercise in futility.

Religionists should tread the path of patience, forgiveness, self-restraint, and the repelling of evil with all that is best. This is the cornerstone of every faith. If we adopt this path it will lead us to the resolution of many conflicts and can open the doors of reconciliation. Permit me to refer to some unresolved conflicts that agitate the Muslim mind. The Palestine issue stands unresolved, and occupation of Arab territories by Israel in 1967 and Jewish settlements on their land are matters of great concern.

Fresh Peace Moves Underway

Every right-thinking person is of the opinion that without a mutually satisfactory resolution, peace cannot be achieved. So far the Sharmul Sheikh, Camp David, and Oslo accords could not be implemented.

There is a fresh move as former United States president Jimmy Carter, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, has undertaken an important mission in this regard. He is devoting his sincere and tireless energy to resolving this issue, which has so far caused great human loss and untold misery. It is the irony of fate that both Jews and Arabs, being children of Abraham and having much in common, could not come to terms.

In Syria Mr. Carter met Khalid Meshael, the political head in exile of Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement.

There was a reaction against this meeting in certain quarters. In response, Mr. Carter said, "The problem is not that I met with Hamas in Syria; the problem is that Israel and the United States refuse to meet with someone who must be involved."

It is an established fact that in the January 2006 elections the Palestinians gave an indisputable mandate to Hamas. This is the reason that Mr. Carter said everyone who matters should be consulted.

I pray for the success of his mission and the peaceful res-

olution of the Palestine issue according to the wishes and aspirations and to the satisfaction of the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Another major issue is Iraq, where we find a huge number of widows, orphans, the destitute, and the incapacitated persons. The war there has changed the country's entire social, economic, and cultural status. We find rubble everywhere. Let us put an honest question to ourselves: Have the objectives announced for the invasion of Iraq been achieved? The main announced reasons for the invasion were eight: first, Iraq had weapons of mass destruction; second, Iraq was connected with the terrorist attacks of 9/11 on the United States; third, it posed an existential threat to the United States; fourth, that the foreign troop level would be reduced to sixty thousand six months after the invasion; and fifth, U.S. and Allied troops would be greeted as liberators by the Iraqis.

The sixth premise was that the transition to a post-Saddam Hussein Iraq would be relatively painless. Seventh was that radical Islam posed a serious threat to world peace and the best place to eliminate it was in Iraq, which was declared to be the central battleground in the "war on terror." Eighth was that the world would accept the preventive-war doctrine on which the invasion of Iraq was predicated. When it became obvious that world opinion was strongly opposed to the war, such thinking was dismissed as misguided and irrelevant.

Nevertheless, I must pay the highest tribute to the peace-loving people of the United States and Europe who came out in large numbers and demonstrated against the war in Iraq. The American people are magnanimous, openhearted, peace loving, and humane.

Now let us admit that the war in Iraq was an exercise in futility. Instead of resolving the issue, it has given birth to instability, ethnic violence, poverty, and chaos. Instead of curbing violence and terrorism, it has resulted in the creation of a large force of terrorists and extremists.

The same is the case in Afghanistan. I am fully aware of the history of Afghanistan. The British were wise enough when they were defeated in Afghanistan; they adopted a policy of diplomacy instead of war, which proved successful. Before invading, the history, geography, and demography of Afghanistan should have been studied. The Afghans are known for their love of the motherland and for their warrior spirit. It is their tradition to fight united, despite their differences, against a foreign force.

The former Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was a great folly. The Afghans, with arms and ammunition and generous support of the United States and other Western countries and the unstinting support of Pakistan, defeated the Soviets and forced them to sign the Geneva Accord on April 14, 1988.

Partly as a result of this failed venture, the old Soviet Union collapsed, and even its large number of nuclear weapons could not save it. I, as a member of the Pakistan parliament, proposed many possibilities. One was to form a broadly

based government consisting of moderate persons from different ethnic groups. Otherwise the Afghans would fight among themselves, and that would result in an insurgency and general insecurity that would produce terrorists. The foreign fighters who had battled against the Soviets should be either sent back to their respective countries or permanently settled in Pakistan and Afghanistan; otherwise they would create a big problem. The result was that this war-ravaged country was taken over by the Taliban extremists, who destroyed the entire social, economic, and cultural structure of the country and forced the people to live as in a primitive time.

After the Taliban was ousted, another blunder was committed. The major ethnic group, the Pashtun, who had ruled Afghanistan for centuries, were altogether ignored in the power-sharing arrangement. The obvious result has been the resurgence of the Taliban, which has created instability in the whole region. Pakistan, which had given shelter to more than three million Afghan refugees during the Soviet misadventure, once again became the target of terrorists, who created an atmosphere of insecurity and fear.

Suicide bombers attacked important installations and even foreign diplomatic missions in Pakistan. Some hundred thousand Pakistani troops are deployed at the border with Afghanistan to combat terrorism. More than fifteen hundred Pakistani troops have been killed so far, and a large number are missing.

Islam Has No Place for Terrorists

Let me say without fear of contradiction that there is no place for terrorists, suicide bombers, extremists, and warmongers in Islam. Such people are enemies of the entire

human race. They do not represent Islam at all. Rather, their activities are inhuman and un-Islamic. Islam is a religion of peace, love, and amity. We should not allow these terrorists to tarnish the image of Islam.

Permit me to point out that some persons from other faiths draw caricatures of the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and have them published in magazines, journals, and newspapers. That is a sacrilegious and blasphemous act.

Some scholars in the West also published articles stating that the holy Qur'an was not revealed in the Arabic language but in the Aramaic language and was later translated into Arabic. Yet it is clearly stated in the holy Qur'an that it was revealed in the Arabic language. The language of the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and the Arabs was Arabic and not Aramaic.

These scholars cannot change the teachings of the holy Qur'an. It is the most preserved revealed book and until now none could change, delete, or add a single word to it because Almighty God has taken the responsibility for its preservation. This sacred book is meant for the guidance of the whole of humankind. It is a complete code for life.

Recently Greet Wilders, a member of the Dutch parliament, in a film titled *Fitna*, distorted and misinterpreted the verses of the holy Qur'an. No civilized person can justify this blasphemous act. By such nefarious acts the feelings of Muslims around the globe are injured and they fail to understand the thinking behind these acts. To justify their misdeeds these persons take protection under the umbrella of freedom of the press and of expression.

No canon of civilized law permits this so-called prerogative. Such defamatory acts sometimes lead to a clash of civilizations and people are led astray by emotion and senti-

Five members of a South Korean Christian missionary group released on August 29, 2007, after they had been taken hostage by Taliban militants together with eighteen other members in Afghanistan.

ment, although no religion can be blamed for this mischief. These insults are individual acts of commission.

All religious people should join hands and frustrate the vicious and malicious designs of these people. The UN General Assembly should be approached to make the defamation and insulting of any religion, prophet, and religious founder a cognizable offense.

It is a cardinal principle of Islam to respect all faiths, all prophets, religious founders, spiritual leaders, and sacred, divinely inspired books. It is a great exponent of human love and brotherhood.

The Dalai Lama on June 1, 2008, addressing a conference in Delhi, correctly said, "The international community needs to deal with the root causes of terrorism, and it is wrong to brand all Muslims as militants. Every action comes from some motivation. We have to address or deal with the motivation which creates terrorist actions."

Let me add that the indiscriminate use of force, bombardment of the innocent civilian population, and accidental so-called collateral damage lead to strengthening of the Taliban. It should be restrained.

On July 19, 2007, when members of a South Korean Christian missionary group in Afghanistan were kidnapped by the Taliban, I was approached by the Christian Council of Korea and Dr. Sunggon Kim, a member of the South Korean parliament and secretary-general of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace, to make efforts for the release of these people.

I contacted many religious and political leaders in Pakistan and Afghanistan in this regard. I even offered to go to Afghanistan during this dangerous situation without concern for my own safety.

I was in regular contact with some influential peace-loving Afghan elders who informed me from Kandahar by telephone about forty-five minutes before the official announcement that the hostages would soon be released. I rang up the consul-general of the Republic of Korea in Karachi, with whom I had been in constant touch, and conveyed to him this good news, which he was very happy to hear. Subsequently the Taliban made an official announcement.

Peace has not yet returned to the Korean peninsula. Families are still divided, with some members living in the north and others in the south.

This humanitarian issue has been politicized, and foreign intervention may be the main hurdle to the unification process. The Korean people alone should be the masters of their fate.

I also see clouds of war on the horizon over Iran. The issue of Iran's enrichment of uranium has not been resolved. I see no light at the end of that tunnel.

There are threats of attack on Iran and of retaliation by Iran. If such a war breaks out, it will engulf the whole region.

It would be a catastrophe. Force must be avoided and peace efforts must continue.

The incarceration of prisoners at Abu Ghraib in Iraq, Bagram in Afghanistan, and the U.S. base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, has sent an alarming adverse message, making the job of peace seekers difficult. Terrorists are using it as a propaganda tool. These detainees should be given the earliest opportunity for a fair trial and provided facilities to defend themselves. That would send a good message.

It is heartening to mention that an International Islamic Conference for Dialogue was held June 4–6, 2008, in Makkah, opened and hosted by H.M. King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. It was attended by five hundred key figures in the Muslim world.

The conference was aimed at launching an interfaith dialogue with the other Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Christianity, to eradicate misconceptions about Islam. The world needs to know that Islam is the voice of justice and humanity, a voice for coexistence and just and rational dialogue. The Islamic world faces difficult challenges from the extremism of some Muslims. Their aggression prevents the world from absorbing the true message of Islam.

An Appeal to All Faiths

I appeal to the followers of all faiths, particularly to their enlightened moderate scholars, intellectuals, and government leaders, to make a common effort for peace and assist in defusing tension and resolving conflict, as well as to preach justice, impartiality, and brotherhood. Interfaith dialogue should be frequent.

Islam stands for peace, reconciliation, and common living. The prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, strove hard to achieve peace. At the beginning of the seventh century he signed peace protocols with the infidels of Makkah, the Jews of Medina, and the Christians of Najran and strictly abided by their terms.

Today the world needs peace accords, not wars. We must work together for the betterment of humanity and fight our common enemies, which include poverty, disease, injustice, environmental pollution, terrorism, fanaticism, and the lack of employment opportunities. To forge unity we have to respect all faiths equally. We must heal the wounds of all those who have suffered through different acts of violence.

I make a special appeal to the followers of the monotheist religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which have the common patriarch Abraham, peace be upon him, to end their differences and work together to meet the challenges of the time.

A verse from the Qur'an applies to every believer: "Verily those who believe and those who are Jews and Christians, Sabaians, whoever believe in Allah and the Last Day do righteous good deeds shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve."

So let us do good deeds and prohibit bad deeds. Let us change hatred into love, hostility into peace, and revenge into forgiveness. □

Toward a Universal Ethic for Youth

The Twenty-fifth Niwano Peace Prize Commemorative Dialogue
between His Royal Highness El Hassan bin Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom
of Jordan and Rev. Nichiko Niwano

The twenty-fifth Niwano Peace Prize was awarded to H.R.H. Prince Hassan of Jordan. Prince Hassan's tireless interfaith advocacy and leadership in the promotion of peace based on his profound faith in Islam has won him recognition around the world. In this commemorative dialogue with Rev. Nichiko Niwano, president of the Niwano Peace Foundation, on the theme "recommended peace education for young people," held on May 7, 2008, in Tokyo, he emphasized the importance of focusing on human security and cohesion with the poor.

Editor: First, we would like to begin by asking President Niwano to comment on His Royal Highness Prince Hassan's devoted work in various fields.

Niwano: On behalf of the Niwano Peace Foundation, I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to you for having undertaken the long journey from Jordan to come to Japan. I also feel very deep appreciation for your superb leadership as a moderator of the World Conference of Religions for Peace for seven long years. Your Royal Highness has devoted your life to achieving conflict resolutions, human rights protection, and environmental protection. And your wise leadership has been very widely appreciated and supported by people around the world. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to express our deepest respect to you. In Buddhism we have a very special bodhisattva with a thousand arms and a thousand eyes who hears the cries of the world and acts with true compassion, and you have truly acted like this bodhisattva.

Based on the Islamic faith, you have especially continued to exert efforts in order to realize in the actual world the essence of religion, that is, the protection of the dignity of all human beings and the dignity of life. For a world that finds itself in a state of crisis arising from division and confrontation, your work can be seen as a beacon light in which all can find courage and hope.

In this context, it gives us very great pleasure to extend to you our sincere congratulations upon your receipt of the Niwano Peace Prize this year. It is an especially auspicious time for both of us to get together for this interview, for, though we were born in different years, we share the same birthday.

Editor: Your Royal Highness, could you kindly give us your impression or thoughts on Rissho Kosei-kai?

Prince Hassan: It is important for me to note that Rissho Kosei-kai and Buddhist organizations are doing so much all over the world for people of different denominations. The organization founded by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano in 1938 emphasizes the innermost spirit of compassion, and in that context I want to say that what is important in the world of the Internet today is not the Internet but the "inner net."

Editor: We are facing various challenges that are very difficult. I would like to ask Your Royal Highness to outline your expectations of youth or to evaluate the future potential of young people.

Prince Hassan: My question today is this: Can we live up to the challenge of the International Declaration of Human Rights' sixtieth anniversary this year? And can we place as a strategic target in our minds a referendum for a coalition for common global issues, interconnecting society and nature by 2010, or maybe even serving as the basis for a law of peace?

First, I must refer to the report of the Independent Commission on International Human Issues entitled *Winning the Human Race?*, on which Professor Sadako Ogata and I worked in the 1980s to present a New International Humanitarian Order to the General Assembly of the United Nations. Since 1988, the General Assembly has reiterated its interest in this appeal, addressing the subject of human security, speaking of the world's uprooted refugees, displaced persons, statelessness, and mass expulsions.

Human beings are taken in the context of victims of neg-

His Royal Highness El Hassan bin Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (left) and Rev. Nichiko Niwano during their friendly dialogue at a Tokyo hotel.

lect. And these victims, as we search for the ethic of human solidarity, fall into the category of neglected refugees, for whom no formal educational system is recognized. Neglected people, indigenous people, and those who have disappeared are one subject of concern for the Asian Muslim Association. And according to the Catholic Bishops' Councils, in Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam, one and a half million children have disappeared or entered into the domain of criminal practice.

As you know, from the experience of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, and from the experience of Afghanistan through Iraq and Palestine, and from Somalia, the level of psychological trauma is serving the hatred industry, through poor governance or the failure of the patriarchal system to assist everyone in need. We are building the platform of the hatred industry with fear. The suicide bombers of tomorrow are between ten and fifteen years old today. So when we speak of youth as an agent of change, I would like to comment on the work of the Human Development Group in Geneva, which has assisted our Voices from Southeast Asia meetings, and social organizations and NGOs, to develop a citizen's charter, a social charter, and a cohesion fund.

We have now started with West Asia, where Israelis, Pakistanis, and Turks—people of different religions and different backgrounds—are meeting in the context of the Middle East Citizens' Assembly.

On November 27, 2007, representing six regional interreligious youth networks, the members of the International 2007 Youth Committee of Religions for Peace successfully concluded the International Youth Committee and shared their insights. Our problem, as I see it, is that we are focusing on what is possible, which means projects, and not a concept. But if we want to build long-lasting peace, youth are the

silenced—not the silent but the *silenced*—majority. It is for this reason that I call on Rissho Kosei-kai and the other international networks to assist in coming together in order to focus on shared consciousness—on universal consciousness and shared values.

Editor: His Royal Highness has alluded broadly to the critical situations young people in the world are facing today and how important it is to share universal values. President Niwano, would you please share your views on the fate of the youth of the world today, as well as on how a universal sharing of values among youth can be accomplished?

Niwano: Your Royal Highness, your words describe the global situation and the very real circumstances in the world today very well. My respect has deepened by listening to you.

Rissho Kosei-kai also promotes several projects overseas, within the limits of its ability, connected with peace activities. By considering types of cooperation and aid that meet the needs of local people, and also by putting ourselves within those stark realities, we have promoted such programs in the spirit of sharing “the same sadness and the same suffering.” Furthermore, we believe that such programs will become much more successful when we can work in collaboration with other groups or organizations with which we share a common goal, and can thus form together a network of cooperation. Through your words, I can confirm the importance of that.

The Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore left behind the words, “Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man.” It is very sad to see pure and innocent youth think that they are being given up on or

neglected, which is why they harbor a sense of hopelessness.

The doctrine of dependent origination teaches that all that comes into being is interrelated, and thus there is nothing that is unrelated. This is at the center of the universal truth, or Dharma, preached in Buddhism. I keenly feel the need to promote a religion-oriented education, in which we are obliged to assist not only the youth but also the adults to realize such things.

Furthermore, Buddhism teaches us that everyone is the Buddha's child, and we are all brothers and sisters. I guess that there is nobody who would not care for a brother or sister. In order to build up a peaceful world in which there are no more people who lose hope and become lost in the depths of despair, I think that it is necessary for us to be considerate of others and support them in a viable way. And at the same time, unless we promote across every generation a religion-oriented education that forms the basis of building human character development, the various problems arising across the world will not be thoroughly solved. As Buddhists, we learn that true compassion can be found in conveying the universal truth to many other people. I believe that the very starting point for making our world harmonious lies therein.

Editor: Your Royal Highness, could you kindly comment on what type of common ethic is capable of becoming an important part of the peace education of youth?

Prince Hassan: I would like to thank you for speaking of the universality of human ethics. And I would like to refer to ethics, models, and values by saying that in each family of each culture or faith, there is a different interpretation of all three of these words. It is for that reason that thirty years of conversations with people of monotheistic faith—not all monotheistic faiths, but Judaism and Christianity—have focused on building a bridge between theology and practicality.

Recognizing noncompulsion in religion and recognizing the importance of compassion on the basis that there are at least three forms of dialogue with our Creator (or creators, in the case of other faiths in the Asian historical context), all of us—Christians, Muslims, and Jews—share a belief in a dialogue of beauty, a dialogue of conviction, which means respect for human dignity and respect for others, which means teaching by analogy, putting ourselves in the place of others, and even revisiting our texts, heritage, and history, and also recognizing the life situation, the economic and social conditions underpinning the interfaith dialogue among the adherents of different faiths. But in the age of the Internet, we have also discovered the importance of containing the dialogue of ugliness—the dialogue of hatred between conflicting groups.

So I would like to say that we do not have one citizens' conferencing facility—we are speaking here as a privileged few with an outlet to the general public. But citizens from

Asia—East Asia and West Asia—are not speaking to one another. So we are not promoting an understanding of identity and movement. When you speak, the spirit of Dharma finds an echo; the spirit of truth finds an echo in the Muslim statement in the Holy Qur'an: "Oh, human beings, you are struggling to meet your Creator and you will meet Him." Please note that the reference is to "human beings," not to Muslims, Christians, Jews, or those of any other faith. And in the words of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's son-in-law, the fourth caliph of Islam, and one of the greatest experts on Muslim jurisprudence, "The human being is two sides of the same coin, or twins, brothers in faith, direct counterparts in creation—not God's creation, but human creation." Direct counterparts in human creation. So two virtuous people from the East and the West from different cultures and backgrounds can be direct counterparts of each other.

So when you ask me what kind of ethics we can discuss with the Catholic Church, we come to the conclusion that we can go on talking about ethics, morals, and values with reservations within each of our textual contexts—to put the text in context. Or we can take the courageous step advocated by a previous awardee of the Niwano Peace Prize, our mutual friend Professor Hans Küng, and start speaking of shared standards.

When we come to the table on the sixtieth anniversary of the International Declaration of Human Rights, we will have

to express what is uncontroversially, unambiguously our position on human dignity, on civil liberties, on the sanctity of human life, and so on. So I would like to say that participation in our collective wisdom is interconnected in Islam as it is in other faith groups. In education, for example, we say, cherish your children until they are seven, educate them until they are fourteen, and help them to mature until they are twenty-one, and then you have fulfilled your responsibilities. Thus we can feel that they are responsible for contributing to a better world when they are participating in all cycles of life. But our basic lack of a model, for example, of an international, nondenominational peace corps, is one of the major challenges—the lack of knowledge of one another can be bridged by young people working together to construct a better future for the less fortunate.

I have, for some time, been promoting the idea of a nondenominational peace corps, which would create an alliance between scholarship and the media and would promote better understanding—but there is very little comprehension of this by Muslims or Buddhists and vice versa. This has to be addressed.

Editor: President Niwano, could you please comment on His Royal Highness's comments and express your own view?

Niwano: Actually, there is a faith community of Muslims living in Japan, and as you know, we also have some Japanese leaders representing Islam as members in the Japanese Committee of the World Conference of Religions for Peace. Therefore, I think that we have opportunities to learn from each other. But our efforts to promote a better understanding do not seem sufficient on the whole.

Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, taught us the importance of taking action from global points of view and opened up a path that we can follow through his actual actions. The spirit of the One Vehicle that the founder preached embodies our stance, which is to develop our ideas or projects based on the viewpoint that because Earth, the world in which we live our lives, is a common vehicle, we are all brothers and sisters. In that sense, the founder's spirit should not be forgotten, and we will have to cope with the actual problems through a more and more globalized perspective.

So I feel that by listening to you, we of Rissho Kosei-kai must continue to strive for that purpose.

Editor: Now, Your Royal Highness, we would like to ask you to comment on how we can overcome through peace education the deep resentment that has been nurtured by various suppressions.

Prince Hassan: A World Bank report titled "The World Development Report 2007: Development and the Next Generation" focuses on youth transitions. The report discusses priorities for governmental action across five youth

transitions that shape young people's human capital—learning, working, staying healthy, forming families, and exercising citizenship. Countries need programs specifically designed for young people who have fallen behind because of difficult circumstances or poor choices. And the report also identifies three strategic policies that may assess priorities. However, priorities vary across developing countries.

In February 2006, the Association of Psychologists of Iraq released a study based on interviews of more than a thousand children countrywide. Among those examined, 92 percent were found to have learning impediments that can be connected to the current climate of fear and insecurity. As to the mental condition of Iraqi youth, I would like to tell you an anecdote. I was invited to dinner at the Swiss Embassy in a rich suburb of Amman where at least six European ambassadors at the dinner were all talking about investment. My wife said, "Would you please show them the real Amman?" So I took them down in the early hours of the morning to a popular coffee shop. Many of the Iraqi street children came into the shop immediately. I bought them dinner and they went to sleep comfortably in the warmth of the coffee shop. I said to the ambassadors, there are other parties that are giving money directly to these children, without asking for collateral. When they ask them to sacrifice their lives, they will give their lives because they have nothing to lose.

Nearly a billion people entered the twenty-first century

unable to read a book or sign their names. The Middle East and the North Africa region remain the regions with the highest unemployment rate in the world—12.2 percent in 2006, double the rate for global unemployment. The Middle East–North African region has the lowest labor force participation in the world—53.9 percent. Some sixteen thousand children die from hunger-related causes, one child every five seconds. And as you know, the AIDS epidemic claims more lives each minute. . . . So the lesson is very clear—we need to focus on human security and cohesion with the poor.

The Arab Thought Forum, of which I am the head, we will be holding their third youth conference this year. And we hope that we can encourage cooperation between the United Nations and the Arab League toward a new paradigm for development. Through listening to what people have to say, our National Center for Human Resources Development has developed the Al-Manal project, a beacon project to create a professional online career forum; it is designed to encourage young people to become active contributors to career development, to identify job-search skills or interpersonal skills, and to facilitate job hunting. So we need, especially from Japan and East Asia, the experience of those who have gone through postwar reconciliation and reconstruction.

We have a choice, either we continue with MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction)—and who benefits? the weapons industry!—or we develop a new movement for MAS (Mutually Assured Survival) of the people. We have to be more proactively moderate.

Editor: President Niwano, could you comment on how you view the Japanese people's role.

Niwano: What is happening across the world has already flown to Japan. The point is that however much we empathize with the real situation facing the world, I regret to say that it is undeniable that the Japanese often lack a stance meeting the needs of the various issues occurring in the world today.

So, with this background, I think it is we ourselves, people of religion, who are required to positively keep our eyes upon those under hardship and take the proper actions.

Rissho Kosei-kai has promoted programs to send its young members overseas, hoping that such programs will allow the participants to learn more about the various problems our societies face and to find ways to promote global harmony as individuals. I believe that it is still necessary for such efforts to be furthered.

During the sixty-three years since Japan's defeat in World War II, the Japanese have become wealthy from an economic point of view. The nature of human beings is such that when they are poor, they can perceive the feeling of other people who are under similar conditions. However, as they become well-to-do, they become unable to perceive the sorrow and suffering of others.

As I said earlier, we all are children of the Buddha, and we are all brothers and sisters from the viewpoint of the Buddha's teachings. What is most important now is that we all regain the acute sense that we are all brothers and sisters, setting aside the differences in race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion, and also repeatedly make strong efforts to live together in peace.

Actually, it has been revealed through recent findings by scientists that the roots that cause us and all other living beings to live are one and the same. Some 3.8 billion years have already passed since life first emerged on the surface of the earth, but we are all still truly related to one another.

As we live our lives on the same planet, this Earth, we would like to value the feeling that we are one, and live up to the spirit of sustaining one another.

Editor: Would Your Royal Highness like to add anything further?

Prince Hassan: As I said at the Religions for Peace meeting in Jordan in 1999, when you visited us, we have to create an ark for the salvation of our common humanity. We must work to overcome egocentrism through compassion. We not only have to continue to fight against discrimination and intolerance, but we also have to struggle to build upon the existing structures of humanitarian and human rights laws. I would like to see cooperation on the one side from Eurasia—with West Asia and the Euro-Atlantic community, including the United States—and on the other side from the Far East, in terms of cooperation with the ESCAP (UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) region. So we stopped speaking of the East and the West as we used to speak of the North and the South. But this can only come about through opening our minds to all branches of science, including modern psychology, anthropology, and genetics, and not considering any field of study as off-limits, such as the question of astrophysics, for example. We are only guests in this world, and we have to do our best to earn the respect of future generations. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak on these matters.

Editor: President Niwano, would you care to make a closing comment?

Niwano: Please allow me to express my wholehearted congratulations and my respect once again. You have shared with us the belief that we should move forward in the direction of having broad perspectives and of joining hands with all people. I truly believe that this is in accord with the spirit of God and the Buddha. I would like to express to you my deep appreciation for your having reinvigorated our wish to create a world in which all people, from every corner of the globe, will be united at heart and act as one through assisting one another. □

Causes and Conditions behind Our Roles in Life

by Nikkyo Niwano

This essay is part of a continuing series of translations from a volume of inspirational writings by the late founder of Rissho Kosei-kai. DHARMA

WORLD will continue to publish these essays because of their lasting value as guidance for the practice of one's daily faith.

On being asked what is meant by “to lead an ideal life,” I would respond in two ways. On a personal level it is to thoroughly fulfill our individual lot as given to us by the heavens, and from the aspect of human relations it is to come together in harmony, helping each other out as we strive toward a peaceful world for the sake of all. Of course, we all have our own particular ways of living, our own manners and customs, depending on our nationality or ethnic group, but these are mere variations on the same principle, expressed through different languages and behaviors. In other words, it is only because of the different combinations of causes and conditions that the various outcomes also look different.

It goes without saying that as human beings we must all cherish our common nature, but at the same time it is crucial that we respect our varying situations as readily observable phenomena. We each have individual circumstances and roles in life, and these are differences we have to honor. Between nations and ethnic groups too, we must value our respective sovereignties, honor our differing languages, and recognize one another in all of our diverse manners and customs.

According to the Buddha, “All things on Earth are equal,” but it is important to be careful in our understanding of this, so that we do not take it to mean that we all have to look and behave the same just because we are equal in essence. This is a twisted view of equality that some would call a way of thinking that causes discord in the world.

All things are said to comprise an all-encompassing emptiness, but their manifestations in this world come in various shapes and sizes, whether as inanimate objects, animals, or human beings. If all of these countless forms were each to exercise the full value of their existence and completely fulfill their responsibilities, we would have a harmonious world of ineffable proportions. Such a state of true harmony is what we call nirvana, that is, absolute peace.

I rarely used to squabble as a boy, and even as a working man I keep my distance from anything that might be called a

dispute. Instead of concerning myself with winning or losing, and thus being tossed between joy and despair, I have preferred to avoid conflict in the first place. In my youth I would sometimes question whether my passive disposition was not in fact a form of cowardice, but as I grew older and encountered Buddhism, I made the decision to promote peace as my lifelong task. I increasingly began to feel that this was the way things should be.

One morning [June 1972], I chanced to hear a radio talk by Mikisaburo Mori, a professor in the Chinese philosophy department at Osaka University, about “the heart of water.” This finally let me know that I had not been wrong in my convictions. Let me describe briefly just one part of his discussion. Water is a selfless substance possessing no fixed form. It becomes square in a square-shaped container and round in a round container. Despite its flexibility, it possesses the considerable inherent power to overwhelm even the toughest of substances, permeate all things, and bring great benefit to everything in the world. This idea of the Taoist master Laotzu (604?–531? BCE), he concluded, represents the greatest good, and it is this “heart of water” that will be the salvation of humankind.

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.

Indeed, in today's world everything seems to involve being tough and strong. We assert our individuality, insist incessantly on our rights, and resort to force as soon as we feel threatened. We turn everything into competition and chase after the goal of victory. Industry involves competition, business involves competition, military forces involve competition. Even road traffic and mass transportation are competitions in speed.

Because this attitude prevails, war will continue to infect our planet, natural conditions will continue to deteriorate, and pollution will inexorably worsen day by day. There is now reason to have growing concern that if things continue to worsen at this rate, there will not be a world for our grandchildren to live in. Sure enough, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in that same year of 1972 had as a slogan the woeful reminder: Only One Earth.

In Buddhism, the idea of nonself is one of its core teach-

ings. Everything that exists is enabled to live by supporting, and being supported by, other existences in a complex network of relationships. Thus when someone insists on having his or her own way in relations with others, it causes a disruption in the social equilibrium and sows the seeds of conflict that are at the base of all human calamities.

What practical steps can we take to prevent this from happening? In passive terms we can avoid conflict by being gentle and forbearing, and in active terms we should teach people to help others with an attitude of generous compassion. Such actions to relieve human distress are the very foundation of a peaceful society.

We must rediscover these Buddhist ideas, together with those of Laotzu that I mentioned above, making them our own once again so that we can disseminate the teachings to people all around the world. I am convinced that this is the best and most fundamental way of protecting our precious planet and saving humanity from extinction. □

Toward a Larger Faith

by Notto R. Thelle

Every time I have wandered around in the borderland and reached summits where I had a panoramic view of the landscape in all directions, I have been forced to ask: Can I exclude any of this? Is not this the world of *my* faith? Some tell me that I must reject the border zone and return home; others think that I must forget my own Christian faith in order to lead a full life on the far side of the border. This choice is impossible! If faith should demand that I forget the border zone, it would be too narrow. But if I were to cross the border for good and put down my roots in a foreign region, I would be consumed by homesickness. Faith would become rootless.

This is why I sought a larger faith. My travels in the border zone between East and West kindled in me the longing for a faith large enough to encompass all I had seen and experienced both in my homeland and in the borderland, a faith that would lead me through new landscapes, with space enough for life in all its contradictory variety.

A larger faith does not close the borders, but throws them open. A larger faith does not claim that it has God under lock and key in its own world, but sees his tracks everywhere. A larger faith grows out of the profession of faith in the Creator of heaven and earth.

I crossed the border in order to bring God to new worlds—but I discovered that he was already there. And naturally enough! How could he not be present in the world that was his own? It was he who blew the breath of life into the human person's nostrils so that Adam became a living being. How could one fail to perceive his presence when the breath of life became deep and the heart beat strongly? All I could do was to point: There he is! Look! And not least: I could point to the place, the time, and the person where God's own being

and work shone out in transfigured splendor, namely Jesus Christ.

I have never understood how some people can use Christ to erect borders. They think that their profession of faith in him means that the circle closes around him, with a clear difference between that which is inside the circle and that which is outside. And yet Jesus broke through borders all his life! He was in places where no one expected him to be! He never let himself be imprisoned in the categories of the pious, but made God present where he really ought not to have been present—if he had been a “pious” God. Jesus kept on surprising me by turning up on the little side-streets, far away from all the paths that led to a church building.

Perhaps we are wrong in the way we conceive the center and the periphery of the circle. Ought not a faith that was truly centered on Christ have the same openness that he displayed? Concentration on *this* center frees us from the need to define the periphery of the circle; on the contrary, we perceive how the light radiates out from Christ to the uttermost borders of the circle, permeating everything.

A larger faith takes seriously the Bible's affirmation that “everything” was created in Christ, through him, and for him. “Everything” means all that is in the universe, “in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, thrones and dominations, powers and authorities” (Col 1:16). And that which has been created will one day be “gathered together” in him (Eph 1:10). We do not fully understand what this means, and perhaps not even Paul himself understood it, for he uses mysterious words when he praises this mystery. At any rate, his words affirm that nothing in the world—with all its beauty and ugliness, its goodness and evil, its yearning for God and its devilry—is untouched by Christ, and that everything can be transformed and created anew by God's grace. If Christ is involved both in the creation and in the perfecting of all things, it would be a mockery of the divine plan to close the borders and prevent him from working in the world, in those landscapes in which he in his goodness allows us to travel.

My longing for a larger faith was kindled by the divine presence I believed I discerned in the border zone of the East. It might be confusing, chaotic, and unclear, but I never doubted that He was there. I wanted to put a name to his presence and show its true nature. At the same time, the border zone left lasting impressions on my own mind, giving me a larger appreciation for the hidden mystery of his presence.

Gradually, I also realized that the border zone is not just “out there.” It exists just as much here at home. The border zone is in our own mind. If we do not shut ourselves up in our faith, we cross borders all the time.

We need a faith that can accommodate human life in all its dimensions. We need a larger faith. □

Notto R. Thelle, D.Th., is a professor in the Faculty of Theology, the University of Oslo, Norway. Having studied Buddhism at Otani University in Kyoto, he acted as associate director of the NCC (National Christian Council) Center for the Study of Japanese Religions in Kyoto from 1974 to 1985. He was also a visiting scholar at the center in 1999 and 2000.

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.”

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 14 A Happy Life

(2)

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

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

“If there be any bodhisattva / Who, in the future evil age, /
With fearless mind / Desires to preach this sutra, / He must
occupy his [proper] sphere of action / And his [proper]
sphere of intimacy,

COMMENTARY *With fearless mind.* Here, “fear” includes not only fear of others and of external phenomena but also fear of oneself. Thus it refers to lack of self-confidence and hesitancy in one’s actions. One who teaches the Lotus Sutra must not only be unafraid of misunderstanding, persecution, and ridicule from outside, but also be confident and undaunted within oneself. Because such fearlessness is founded on the excellence of one’s life and conduct, the Buddha goes on to speak in detail of the sphere of action and the sphere of intimacy.

TEXT Constantly avoiding kings / And princes, / Ministers
and rulers, / Brutal and dangerous performers, / Candalas, /
Heretics, brahmacarins; / Nor does he consort with / Men
of arrogance / Who are fond of studying / The Tripitaka of
Hinayana,

COMMENTARY *The Tripitaka.* The scriptures of Buddhism are classified into three divisions or “baskets” (*pitaka*), called the Sutra-, the Vinaya-, and the Abhidharma-pitaka, which are collectively known as the Tripitaka (Three Baskets or Storehouses). Very briefly, the Sutra-pitaka is the collection of sutras, or discourses, by which the Buddha taught his disciples how they should perceive the world and human life and how to live as true human beings; the Vinaya-pitaka is the collection of monastic regulations by which the Buddha taught his disciples a basic attitude to life and a moral code for it; and the Abhidharma-pitaka consists of discourses by

the Buddha explaining the truth, or important meanings, of his teachings, as well as commentaries and treatises by his followers (including those of later times) analyzing and organizing the teachings and illuminating how they should be understood. Scholar-monks of superior merit, deeply versed in the Tripitaka, were honored as Masters of the Tripitaka (*tripitaka-dhara* in Sanskrit; *san-tsang-shi* in Chinese); though knowledgeable in an academic sense, however, as adherents of the Hinayana teachings in regard to their own practice they did not accord with the bodhisattva way. Therefore the Buddha warns bodhisattvas not to be intimate with them, for they are interested in Buddhism only as an academic exercise.

TEXT With commandment-breaking bhikshus, / Arhats
[only] in name, / Or with bhikshunis / Fond of jocularly, /
Or with female disciples / Who, through sensuousness, /
Seek present nirvana. / He consorts with none of them.

COMMENTARY *Commandment-breaking bhikshus.* These are bhikshus who break the Buddha’s precepts, act wrongly, and disregard the regulations of the Buddhist community.

• *Arhats [only] in name.* Arhats are people who have rid themselves of all illusion and who are therefore worthy of honor. “[Only] in name” means that they have not yet gained true enlightenment.

• *Seek present nirvana.* This phrase means to enter the realm of nirvana in the present body, that is, to be detached from all afflictions of the defilements. Though lay believers seeking this condition have great faith, care must be taken when consorting with them, for it is a misunderstanding that lay believers should nourish such an aspiration. This is because “present nirvana” is a kind of selfishness, a retreat from life. Everyday life must be prized and enlightenment be made to work within it. This is the correct attitude of lay Buddhists.

TEXT But if such people as these, / In goodness of mind, / Come to the bodhisattva / To hear the Buddha Way, / Then the bodhisattva, / With fearless mind, / Cherishing no expectation, / [Should] preach the Law to them.

COMMENTARY *In goodness of mind.* This means to be well disposed. It does not describe people's attitude to bodhisattvas but a pure-hearted willingness to listen to the teaching.

TEXT Widows and virgins / And all sorts of eunuchs / He never approaches / For close friendship; / Nor does he consort with / Butchers and meat mincers, / Hunters and fishermen, / Who slaughter for gain; / Those who vend meat for a living / And procurers, / With such people as these / He should not consort. / With brutal wrestlings, / Amusements and plays, / Whores and so forth / He should have no intimacy whatever. / He should not, alone in a screened-off place, / Preach the Law to a woman; / If he has to preach the Law [to her] / He will avoid jocularly.

COMMENTARY *A screened-off place.* This refers to a secluded place or a room with a closed door.

TEXT [When] he enters a hamlet in quest of food, / Let him take along [another] bhikshu; / If there be no [other] bhikshu, / Let him with single mind think of the Buddha.

COMMENTARY *[Another] bhikshu.* This does not mean only one other bhikshu but other bhikshus in general.

TEXT These then are what are called / The spheres of action and of intimacy. / Maintaining these two spheres, / He can teach with peace and joy. / And again [if] he does not observe / Laws, higher, middle, or lower, / The conditioned or the unconditioned, / Laws real or unreal; / Also [if] he does not discriminate, / "This is a man" or "This is a woman"; / [If] he discovers no laws / Nor recognizes nor sees them; / This then is called / A bodhisattva's sphere of action.

COMMENTARY This is a particularly difficult passage.

- *Laws, higher, middle, or lower.* The "higher" Law refers to the vehicle of the bodhisattvas, the "middle" to the vehicle of the pratyekabuddhas, and the "lower" to the vehicle of the shravakas. The reference to "Laws, higher, middle, or lower" means that bodhisattvas should not adhere to the teachings of the vehicles of bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, or shravakas. There is only the teaching of the One Buddha Vehicle.

- *The conditioned.* This is a translation of *samskrita* or *samskara* in Sanskrit, meaning all phenomena that arise through a combination of causes and conditions, that is, everything that we can perceive with the five senses.

- *The unconditioned.* This term is a translation of the Sanskrit *asamskrita*, which signifies elements whose existence is per-

manent and immutable, or that which neither arises nor decays. Since all things arise through a combination of causes and conditions, there is nothing that creates or is created in any special way outside this.

- *Real.* This designates that which exists of itself, that is, the (supramundane) Buddha Dharma.

- *Unreal.* This refers to the things of this world, which, having arisen through dependent origination, are only temporary manifestations. Since they are neither fixed nor substantial, they are called "unreal." The teaching that bodhisattvas should not observe the laws of the conditioned (unreal) or the unconditioned (real) should be understood in the following way: Bodhisattvas should not adhere to such relative concepts as the difference between that which changes (phenomena) and that which does not change (the Buddha Dharma); both phenomena and the Buddha Dharma, being manifestations of the compassion of the Original Buddha and directly involved with the liberation of living beings, must be activated as the teaching of the One Buddha Vehicle.

- *[If] he does not discriminate, 'This is a man' or 'This is a woman.'* Previously male bodhisattvas were told not to approach people in certain occupations or women. Here, though, there has been a complete turnabout, and all discrimination between men and women is denied. Bodhisattvas are therefore being taught that they must come to a complete realization of the fundamental equality of all human beings despite differences in surface phenomena.

- *[If] he discovers no laws, nor recognizes nor sees them.* This is an extremely difficult expression. Bodhisattvas must not be misled by trivial manifestations of phenomena, nor imagine that they have perfectly understood all things, having known them or having penetrated them. Instead, they must realize the true nature of all things.

TEXT All laws [or things] are / Empty and nonexistent, / Without permanence, / Neither beginning nor ending; / This is named the sphere / To which wise men resort.

COMMENTARY In attempting to view all phenomena correctly, we will become confused if we are not absolutely certain about the standpoint from which we do so. For example, we think that cherry blossoms are very beautiful, but they soon fade and fall. In other words, they are "without permanence." Though they have scattered, however, they have not disappeared forever, for they will bloom again just as beautifully next year. Thus, they have "neither beginning nor ending." If we base our understanding on whether flowers bloom or fade, we are viewing all things as being in constant flux. If, however, we take our stand upon the truth, that the cherry will bloom with the circling of the seasons, we can be confident that this truth will never change.

The above passage urges us to associate with other people by understanding the workings of all things and never wavering from that understanding.

TEXT The perverse discriminate / All laws as either existing or nonexistent, / Real or unreal, / Produced or unproduced. / Let [the bodhisattva] abide in seclusion, / Cultivate and control his mind, / And be firmly fixed and immovable / As Mount Sumeru;

COMMENTARY *Cultivate and control his mind, and be firmly fixed and immovable as Mount Sumeru.* This does not simply mean to be of firm mind, but is concerned with how a person becomes convinced and is therefore unshaken in belief. Though not apparent in the surface meaning of the passage, this refers to enlightenment to emptiness.

TEXT Contemplating all laws / As though they were not, / As if they were space, / Without solidity, / Neither produced nor coming forth, / Motionless and unreceding, / Ever remaining a unity. / This is named the [proper] sphere of intimacy.

COMMENTARY Saying that we should contemplate all phenomena both “as though they were not” and “ever remaining a unity” seems at first to be contradictory. There is no paradox, though, if we remember the example of the cherry blossoms provided above to illustrate that the way we regard something depends upon our standpoint. All things come into existence through the law of dependent origination, so it is a truth that there is nothing that has a fixed and eternally unchanging substance. But our five senses tell us that what exists in the world is true. We should therefore, according to the truth that everything in this world exists through the law of dependent origination, view phenomena as being constantly existent and of one form. If we truly understand this, we will not be swayed by change but will be able to act positively, knowing that nothing is transient.

TEXT If any bhikshu, / After my extinction, / Enters this sphere of action / And sphere of intimacy, / When he preaches this sutra / He will have no timidity or weakness. / When the bodhisattva at times / Enters a quiet room / And in perfect meditation / Contemplates things in their true meaning, / And, rising up from his meditation, / To kings of nations, / Princes, ministers and people, / Brahmins and others / Reveals, expounds, / And preaches this sutra, / His mind shall be at ease / And free from timidity and weakness.

COMMENTARY Though the sutra previously warned against association with kings, princes, and Brahmins, here it is urging that the Dharma be fully expounded to such people. This is no contradiction, for what is important is the reason for the association. If our motivation is some sort of gain, then we should not approach them; on the other hand, we must draw near them for the purpose of teaching the Dharma.

The two important attributes of a person of faith are clearly represented here: reflection on the teaching and exposition of the teaching for the sake of all people. Such

spiritual exertion, both inward facing and outward looking, is the mark of a true believer. When we reflect upon the teaching in our own mind we must meditate upon it with right mindfulness to be sure we have remembered it correctly, and contemplate it according to its true meaning. When we expound it for the sake of others, we must, so that our listeners can comprehend easily its true meaning, not be wedded to the literal meaning of the words but reveal its truth in a comprehensible way, employing various forms to do so. This is the very pinnacle of preaching.

TEXT Manjushri! / This is called a bodhisattva's / Steadfastness in the first method. / He is [then] able, in future generations, / To preach the Law Flower Sutra.

COMMENTARY *The first method.* This refers to the pleasant practice of the body, the first of the four pleasant practices of a bodhisattva (see the October–December 2008 issue of DHARMA WORLD).

Bodhisattva Manjushri, painted by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.

TEXT “Again, Manjushri! After the extinction of the Tathagata, in [the period of] the Decline of the Law, he who desires to preach this sutra should abide in the pleasant ministry [of speech].

COMMENTARY The following passage discusses the pleasant practice of the mouth, the second of the four pleasant practices.

TEXT Whenever he orally proclaims or reads the sutra, he takes no pleasure in telling of the errors of others and of the sutras;

COMMENTARY This is an extremely important rule, telling us how we should act when tempted to find fault with people or the teaching. Included here is believing something to be a fault when it is not and forcing a meaning into something that is not there. To respond to people or the sutras with such a warped and spiteful mind is contemptible, and not the attitude expected of a true believer. Such faultfinding occurs in the secular world even among those who occupy important positions. It is very difficult to help such people, for their minds are closed to both the truth and other people. Unable to open their minds to others, they constantly try to hurt them. Such people can be said to have placed themselves in the realm of violent asuras. They reject liberation, even when it is before their eyes.

In the final analysis, liberating others is an act of compassion. Compassion toward people and toward all things is the basis of rich relationships, a tranquil life, and a peaceful society. Compassion opens the heart to accept all, and to make others one with oneself. The same applies to the sutras: They should be read with a completely open mind, free from prejudice. It is then that liberation flows richly forth.

TEXT neither does he despise other preachers;

COMMENTARY This is also an important point. It applies to other teachers of the Lotus Sutra, to members of other Buddhist sects, and to followers of other religions. True bodhisattvas are not so proud that they despise all other preachers. Those who propound the truth, whoever they are, must be respected.

TEXT nor speaks of the good and evil, the merits and demerits of other people;

COMMENTARY In the secular world such criticism is necessary, but a person of religious faith must be a person of compassion above all. He or she must transcend a worldly spirit of criticism and be always tolerant and open minded.

TEXT nor singles out shravakas by name and publishes their errors and sins, nor by name praises their excellences; nor does he beget an invidious mind.

COMMENTARY Shravakas are students of the Hinayana teachings, whose religious practice is inspired by the desire to attain personal peace of mind. While they may be regarded as inferior from the standpoint of bodhisattvas, they must not be despised, for they practice the Buddha's teaching seriously. Though at the moment they are seeking Hinayana enlightenment, one day they may begin practicing the bodhisattva way and seek the Buddha's enlightenment. Therefore, to accuse someone of being hopeless, or to criticize his or her errors by name, causes the person targeted to feel discouraged and react negatively to the teachings. It is a thoughtless action that may well cause the seed of the aspiration for enlightenment to rot.

This is as true for secular as for religious life. Even if someone is inexperienced and in a humble position, we should not act inconsiderately, for example calling him or her worthless, as long as the person is trying hard to improve. To do so is to nip the bud that may someday grow into a flower; it is exactly the same as taking sentient life. On the other hand, in everyday situations, if we praise someone by name we can be assured that generally only good will result. Strengthened by words of encouragement, the person will usually respond by blossoming. In the case of Buddhists, however, such praise often gives rise to excessive pride. Therefore the Buddha warns us not to praise their excellences by name. This is an indication of the strictness of religious practice.

• *Nor does he beget an invidious mind.* We should not bear grudges against others or take things badly; that is, we should not regard people with hostility. In particular, we must not look on followers of what we may think of as inferior teachings as enemies, but seek to lead them to a higher stage through compassion. This is the mission of the bodhisattva.

TEXT By keeping well such a cheerful heart as this, those who hear will offer no opposition to him. To those who ask difficult questions, he does not answer with the Law of the small vehicle [but] only with the Great Vehicle, and explains it to them that they may obtain perfect knowledge [of the Buddha].”

COMMENTARY Not to “answer with the Law of the small vehicle” (Hinayana) means that we should not underrate others by preaching inferior teachings to them. However dramatic or simple our preaching style may be, what we teach must be of the highest order. This is very difficult but very important. In any branch of learning, writing a primer is much more demanding than anything else. Introductory works must be simple enough for beginners to understand, yet they must not deviate from the inherent truths of the teaching, and must be able to lead to the deepest understanding though treating the early stages. Religious instruction is the same. We must never compromise, using the excuse that we are only instructing beginners. Everything we do must be based on the teaching of the One Buddha

Vehicle, the Way of Truth, and our preaching must always have the intention of bringing our hearers to the highest wisdom. Though this may cause us hardships, these difficulties are not insurmountable; to be able to deal with them is the bodhisattva's express task.

• *Perfect knowledge [of the Buddha]*. This signifies the wisdom of being able to discern all things in this world in their essential equality and phenomenal differences, that is, the wisdom to see all things just as they are.

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

"The bodhisattva ever delights / And is at ease in preaching the Law; / In a clean and pure spot, / Setting up [his] pulpit, / He anoints himself with oil, / Having bathed away uncleanness, / Puts on a new, clean robe, / All clean within and without; / Calmly seated on the Law throne, / He teaches as he is questioned.

COMMENTARY Anointing oneself with oil (particularly the head, face, and hands) was a form of purification that was performed before sacred rituals in ancient India. Whenever we expound the Dharma, we should be sure that the place where we teach it, as well as our own body and mind, is clean and pure.

TEXT If there be any bhikshus / And bhikshunis, / Male lay disciples / And female lay disciples, / Kings and princes, / Their retainers and people, / He preaches the mystic principle to them / With a gentle countenance.

COMMENTARY *The mystic principle*. This is a phrase with many implications. The true meaning of the Buddha Dharma is profound and difficult to express, that is, "mystic" or subtle. Therefore bodhisattvas must explain its profound teaching skillfully and simply, so that it may be deeply ingrained in all minds. Furthermore, because the hearers come from a variety of backgrounds it is all the more necessary to be sensitive to their needs. This is extremely important in the modern world.

• *With a gentle countenance*. Shakyamuni teaches the bodhisattvas that they should always approach others with a gentle countenance and kind words. This is the fundamental attitude for bodhisattvas, as for us all.

TEXT If there be any difficult question, / He answers according to its meaning. / By reasonings and parables / He expounds and discriminates it. / By this tactful method, / He stirs them all to earnestness, / To steady advance / And entry on the Buddha Way.

COMMENTARY This is the key to success in preaching, for it tells of the importance of skillful means (expedient devices). While we must never deviate from the true meaning of the

Buddha Way, it is the height of stupidity to preach the Law to all people through hard-to-understand theory. We must also be able to teach using simpler devices, such as parables (see the July/August 1996 issue of DHARMA WORLD) and sermons about causes and conditions, for these encourage people to aspire to the highest enlightenment.

TEXT He rids [himself] of a lazy mind / And slackness of thought; / He is free from all worries / And with kindly heart proclaims the Law; / Day and night he ever propounds / The teaching of the supreme Way, / By various reasonings / And innumerable parables, / Revealing it to the living, / And causing them all to rejoice.

COMMENTARY *The teaching of the supreme Way*. This means the teaching that leads to the highest enlightenment.

• *Revealing*. This indicates explaining difficult concepts in an easily understood manner.

TEXT Garments and provision for sleep, / Drink, food, and medicines— / For all these things / He has no anticipation. / Only with single mind he thinks of / The cause of [his] preaching the Law, / Resolved on accomplishing the Buddha Way / And causing all others likewise so to do; / This then is [his] great profit / And joy and service.

COMMENTARY Here we have a direct exposition of how we should regard the purpose of preaching the Buddha Dharma. We are also shown, in a concise way, the true significance of profit and merit. It is an extremely important passage.

Causing all others to accomplish the Buddha Way is a lofty ideal, and we may think it beyond the realm of possibility. It is not, though. Most people can begin to imagine how the world can change, even when they have taken only one or two steps toward the ideal. As we advance toward the ideal, it manifests itself in its functioning. Thus, from the very first step we take to seek it, the ideal has already begun to function. Similarly, the ideal of aspiring to the Buddha's enlightenment must be understood in this sense, as something that functions in the present.

TEXT After my extinction, / If there be any bhikshu / Who is able to proclaim / The Wonderful Law Flower Sutra, / His mind will be free from envy and anger, / From distresses and obstacles, / And from grief and sorrow, / As well as from the abuse of men. / Further, he will be free from fear, / From laying on of swords and staves; / Nor will he be driven away, / Because he is steadfast in forbearance.

COMMENTARY Here the Buddha seems to be encouraging the bodhisattvas in the face of the persecution spoken of in the previous chapter, "Exhortation to Hold Firm." Rather than think that such persecution cannot happen, we should understand that the Buddha teaches that if the bodhisattvas

can maintain forbearance, they will not interpret persecution as persecution but will sustain peace of mind. "Fear" here does not mean the feeling of dread but actual threats from without.

TEXT The wise man, in such ways as these, / Rightly cultivates his mind, / Being able to dwell at ease, / As I have said above. / The merit of that man, / Though thousands of myriads of kotis of kalpas / Were reckoned in illustration, / Is incapable of full expression.

COMMENTARY This verse marks the end of the discussion of the pleasant practice of the mouth, the second of the four pleasant practices of a bodhisattva. The next section begins to explain the third of those practices, the pleasant practice of the mind.

TEXT Again, Manjushri! The bodhisattva-mahasattva who, in the corrupt ages to come, when the Law is about to perish, receives and keeps, reads and recites this sutra, does not cherish an envious and deceitful mind;

COMMENTARY To be envious of other people or other teachings is to lack confidence in oneself and one's own faith. One who transmits the teaching by distorting it to flatter one's listeners or who, deceiving oneself with strained interpretations, takes what one wants from the teaching to suit one's own needs is desecrating the Dharma and lowering oneself. Since this is an evil path into which inexperienced believers can easily fall, the Buddha makes a special point of warning against it.

TEXT nor does he slight and abuse [other] learners of the Buddha Way and seek out their excesses and shortcomings.

COMMENTARY All who seek the Buddha Way are our revered companions. We should study and progress together, bolstered by this strong sense of solidarity. It is harmful and without merit to criticize other ways of thinking.

TEXT If there be bhikshus, bhikshunis, and male and female lay disciples who seek after shravakaship, or seek after pratyekabuddhahood, or seek after the bodhisattva way, he does not distress them, causing them doubts and regrets, saying to them: 'You are far removed from the Way and will never be able to attain to perfect knowledge [of the Buddha]. Wherefore? Because you are unstable people and remiss in the Way.'

COMMENTARY Even people who practice to achieve the shravaka, pratyekabuddha, or bodhisattva stage are, in the broadest sense, all walking along the path to the Buddha's enlightenment. They are merely aiming a little lower than buddhahood. Therefore to express contempt for them is

mischievously to make them doubt their faith, and to nip their aspiration for buddhahood in the bud. The same applies to a variety of situations in society as a whole.

TEXT Moreover, he should not indulge in discussions about the laws or engage in disputations; but in regard to all the living he should think of them with great compassion; in regard to the tathagatas he should think of them as benevolent fathers; in regard to the bodhisattvas he should think of them as his great teachers; in regard to the universal great bodhisattvas he should ever from his deepest heart revere and worship them.

COMMENTARY This is a very important and apt teaching. It is worth memorizing the passage from "in regard to all the living" to "from his deepest heart revere and worship them."

TEXT In regard to all living beings, he should preach the Law equally, so as to accord with the Law, neither more nor less; even for those who deeply love the Law, he will not preach more [than it].

COMMENTARY Just as all living beings are equal, so are the teachings (the Law) equal. The preacher of the Law should not show favoritism toward any person or any teaching. This meaning is especially plain in the Sanskrit version of the Lotus Sutra.

TEXT Manjushri! When this bodhisattva-mahasattva, in the last age when the Law is about to perish, has accomplished this third pleasant ministry [of thought], and preaches this sutra, nothing will be able to disturb him.

COMMENTARY *This third pleasant ministry.* This refers to the pleasant practice of the mind, the third of the four pleasant practices of a bodhisattva.

TEXT He will find good fellow students who will read and recite this sutra with him. He will also find a great multitude come and hear him, who after hearing are able to observe it, after observing are able to recite it, after reciting are able to preach it, after preaching are able to copy or cause others to copy it, and who will pay homage to the sutra, revering, honoring, and extolling it.

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

"If one would preach this sutra, / Let him renounce an envious, angry, proud, / Deceitful, or false mind, / And ever do upright deeds;

COMMENTARY *Ever do upright deeds.* These deeds refer not only to behavior and activity but also, as we have seen above, mental activity and speech.

TEXT He should disparage none, / And never for diversion discuss the laws, / Nor cause others doubt or regret, / Saying: 'You will never become buddhas.' / This Buddha son in preaching the Law / Will ever be gentle, patient, / And compassionate to all, / With never a thought of slackness.

COMMENTARY Thoughts of "slackness" arise from the idea of self. If our minds are filled with a deep compassion for others, such slackness will not occur. We should truly take to heart the teaching of being "compassionate to all, with never a thought of slackness."

TEXT To the great bodhisattvas everywhere, / Who walk the Way in pity for all, / He should beget a reverent mind, / [Thinking]: 'These are my great teachers.' / To all world-honored buddhas / He should feel as to peerless fathers, / And suppressing his haughty spirit, / Should preach the Law without hindrance. / Such is the third method. / Let the wise man guard it. / Such a single-hearted pleasant ministry / Will be revered by countless hosts.

COMMENTARY We come here to the end of the teaching concerning the third of the four pleasant practices and go on to the fourth, the pleasant practice of the vow.

TEXT Again, Manjushri! The bodhisattva-mahasattva, in the last age to come when the Law is about to perish, who keeps this Law Flower Sutra should beget a spirit of great charity to laymen and monks, and beget a spirit of great compassion for those not [yet] bodhisattvas. And he should reflect thus: 'Such people as these have suffered great loss; the Law preached, as opportunity served, by the tactful method of the Tathagata they have neither heard nor known nor apprehended nor inquired for nor believed in nor understood. Though those people have not inquired for, nor believed in, nor understood this sutra, when I have attained Perfect Enlightenment, wherever I am, by my transcendental powers and powers of wisdom, I will lead them to abide in this Law.'

COMMENTARY "Those not [yet] bodhisattvas" refers both to those who are practicing only in order to achieve personal enlightenment and to those who have no knowledge at all of the Buddha Dharma. They are not bodhisattvas because they have no aspiration to seek the highest enlightenment and because they do not exert themselves for the happiness of others. "Such people as these," needless to say, refers to "those not [yet] bodhisattvas." They are people who have no knowledge of the skillful means employed by the Buddha or of the essence of the Lotus Sutra, that is, the underlying meaning of the Law preached by "the tactful method."

The Buddha taught the Law in the way best suited to people's individual needs and situations. Because the teaching was tailored to the requirements of each listener, the surface details did not necessarily suit others. As a result, people in later times, when the Buddha was no longer in the world to

teach people individually about the nature of the troubles and sufferings that continually arise, were forced to seek out the truths contained within the Buddha's discourses and to solve each problem, one at a time, on the basis of those truths.

The Lotus Sutra is a compilation of the essential teaching appropriate for everyone in every age. "Such people as these have suffered great loss; the Law preached, as opportunity served, by the tactful method of the Tathagata" means that people have been unable to grasp the underlying truth, that is, they do not know the Lotus Sutra. It does not mean that they have lost sight of the teaching that has been preached opportunely by skillful means. It is very important that such people are brought to realize the essence of the Lotus Sutra. Indeed, this is the first and greatest task of a bodhisattva. This is why the bodhisattva must vow that "though those people have not inquired for, nor believed in, nor understood this sutra, when I have attained Perfect Enlightenment, wherever I am, by my transcendental powers and powers of wisdom, I will lead them to abide in this Law."

TEXT Manjushri! This bodhisattva-mahasattva who, after the extinction of the Tathagata, has accomplished this fourth method, when he preaches this Law will be free from errors. He will ever be worshiped, revered, honored, and extolled by bhikshus, bhikshunis, and male and female lay devotees, by kings and princes, by their ministers and people, by Brahmins and citizens, and by others;

COMMENTARY *This bodhisattva-mahasattva who, after the extinction of the Tathagata, has accomplished this fourth method.* The "fourth method" is the pleasant practice of the vow, the fourth of the four pleasant practices. Here, "accomplished" does not mean "perfected" but "devoted himself wholly to." Thus it means to hold to a pure vow and practice devotedly to accomplish the vow.

TEXT all the gods in the sky also, in order to hear the Law, will always follow and attend on him; if he be in a village or city or secluded forest and someone comes desiring to put difficult questions to him, the gods day and night, for the sake of the Law, will constantly guard and protect him, so that he shall be able to cause all his hearers to rejoice. Wherefore? Because this sutra is that which all past, future, and present buddhas watch over by their divine powers.

COMMENTARY If a person has great faith, surely this will be his experience. A well-known episode in Nichiren's life is his vivid realization of this.

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.