

# 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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# Restoring Interpersonal Relationships

by Kimiko Shinozaki

The increasingly widespread incidence of people who are lonely, estranged, and isolated from others is one of the most unhealthy social phenomena that now characterize modern Japanese society. Shifts toward nuclear families, having fewer children, and more frequent divorce are contributing to the ongoing dissolution of traditional Japanese ties among families and local communities. Problems at work or with other interpersonal relationships are forcing many people into a state of spiritual isolation and more of them are suffering from depression.

The Kosei Counseling Institute was established in 1972 mainly to nurture counselors who base their work on the spirit of Buddhism, and to offer training courses designed to assist the dissemination activities of Rishso Kosei-kai. Its first counseling facility was set up in Tokyo in 1975, and this opened a door to a wide range of people in the region seeking advice. Counseling centers were also set up to serve the troubled in Osaka, Chiba, Kanagawa, and Saitama prefectures. The services are free of charge, and on principle all counselors are volunteers.

The total number of people receiving counseling in 2008 included 850 who visited counseling facilities, 4,905 who sought advice by telephone, and 55 who requested advice by letter. Naturally, each case was unique, but people seeking advice on problems of isolation accounted for about 10 percent of the phone calls received. However, because isolation often accompanies other problems, such as psychological ailments like depression and dysfunctional interpersonal relationships, I think that in reality isolation accounts for a greater proportion of people's problems.

The actual substance of the situations for which advice was sought by isolated clients was of course particular to the individual and included a wide range of issues, but one thing common to all was a lack of skill in relating to others: The gist of most people's problems was that they were unable to interact with others. As counselors, our work starts with listening carefully to what the clients have to say, and empathizing with their state of mind.

As they work with a counselor, clients gradually regain their ability to interact with other people. They also learn to see themselves from a fresh point of view, and recognize strengths they always possessed but had never noticed in themselves. Rather than seeing themselves negatively as without human ties, they come to see reality for what it is, and accept themselves as they are. In this way, little by little, they regain their spiritual balance, and emerge from their shells of isolation.

We consider the acceptance of oneself "as is" to be the real start of the counseling process. This is also the foundation for the truth of "the Reality of All Existence" as taught in the Lotus Sutra. We all experience various emotions and thoughts every day as we go through life. When we become too wrapped up in our own emotions and thoughts, however, we become unable to see things as they truly are. Those people who have fallen into the trap of isolation are powerfully ruled by emotions that arise from the conviction that nobody cares about them or understands them, and they lose the ability to see things objectively.

When they can accept themselves as they are with the help of counseling, however, they gain the ability to see for themselves the existence of people around them who are supporting them and relating to them. This results in a change that allows them to bring their interpersonal relationships back to life.

The American psychologist who established the client-centered therapy we use mainly for visitors to our centers, Dr. Carl Rogers (1902–87), is recognized as the specialist who has had the most influence on counseling in Japan. The "empathic listening" that forms the basis for this type of therapy corresponds well with the way problems are solved and suffering overcome through Buddhism.

Dr. Rogers held that it is human nature to strive for personal growth and realization of one's potential, and that when people are able to accept themselves as they are, change and growth will take place as a natural consequence. In terms of the Buddhist theory of dependent origination, when a client accepts himself or herself as a result of a counselor's empathic listening, this might be considered the "condition" or "secondary cause" enabling the person to achieve growth through his or her own effort.

As human relationships weaken in our complex society, the only thing that can keep the evils of loneliness and estrangement away from people who are falling deeper and deeper into isolation is, after all, those individuals themselves: Their success will also depend on the presence of others who can listen to them with empathy and help them restore and deepen their relationships with a variety of other people. I think it is not an exaggeration to say that the scale on which such growth and change can be effected will have a significant influence on the future of Japanese society. □

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*Kimiko Shinozaki is the director of the Kosei Counseling Institute, which is affiliated with Rishso Kosei-kai in Tokyo.*

# Rethinking Capitalism, Religion, and Alienation

by Sulak Sivaraksa

*Religion may in fact help anchor capitalism and trap us in its violent deadlock ad infinitum. Or to be even more blunt, to be truly against capitalism one must be against certain religious practices and thoughts.*

Capitalism is often seen as *the* source of alienation. Alienation is marked by being uprooted from traditional community and certainty. Capitalism makes social relations thin and antagonistic and estranges us from ourselves as we frantically lose control of our lives. After all, we are living in “risk societies.” By providing hope and stressing relationality, religion or spirituality is said to help overcome isolation and alienation produced by capitalism in the contemporary world; and there is no point in the world that is external to capitalism these days. This implies that religion is anticapitalist at its core. There is of course some truth to this picture, but things are far from being this simple. As it turns out, capitalism seems to embed us in social relations while religion isolates us; and far from being anticapitalist, religion may in fact work in the service of capital. A rethinking and problematization of religion is thus necessary for overcoming capitalism and alienation.

First of all, as counterintuitive as it may initially sound, capitalism itself is increasingly promoting mechanisms and processes to overcome or at least cover up isolation and

alienation, thereby rivaling or displacing religion. Who needs religion when capitalism can appear intimate, reflexive, and comforting—when capitalism befriends us? Thus, capitalism may not appear as a straightforward source of alienation.

Let’s look at consumerism as an example. Traditionally, consumerism is equated with alienation and isolation. I become slave to the things I own, acting as if they are not man-made (commodity fetishism). I ground my existence in my possessions, not relationality: “I shop, therefore I am.” In so doing, I am also alienated from nature. The things I possess are used to secure or affirm my social status in society; that is, conspicuous consumption. Or aggressive competition with my neighbors can take the form of consumption. I buy in order to show my neighbors/competitors that I’m better off than they are. I’ve got to have the things that my neighbors want first to put them in their place. I have fun in denying them their desires. Since desire is infinitely reproduced, this becomes a vicious cycle. There are no partners, only competitors—and hence no public. These types of conduct all contribute to alienation. And so we see movements that seek alternatives to consumerism, religious as well as secular.

Now, however, consumption does not always lead to alienation. A dominant trend in the new capitalism promises self-realization and public-mindedness through consumption. How many products actually promise self-fulfillment or improvement? Don’t we feel better and more responsible when our cereals come from organic farming, which, among other things, leads to less soil erosion? Don’t we feel (or imagine ourselves to be) superior and cosmopolitan when proceedings from the sales of the products we bought go to the construction of water reservoirs in debt-ridden Third World countries, the fighting of AIDS in the “Dark Continent,” the protection of rare wildlife in exotic Southeast Asia, the nourishing of starving orphans worldwide, and so on? How many of us also rely on purchased commodities to manifest ecological concerns in our stead—our ecofriendly sacks, canisters, cars, homes, and so on? Don’t we salute million-

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aires who donate a sizable chunk of their profits to charitable causes or to address humanitarian concerns—or to support religious organizations? There are numerous other examples. My point is that capitalism does not necessarily alienate. It allows you to engage and interact with others, at least at the level of empathy. It seems to have a more human and friendly face, so to speak. It is no longer cold and indifferent, making it all the more difficult to see its violence and class antagonism and to dismantle its oppressive structures. Alienation tells us what is wrong with the capitalist system. It should, however, be seen as a form of violence built into the capitalist system. Perhaps worse than alienation are exploitation, oppression, class warfare, and so on, constituting the structural violence of the capitalist system.

Furthermore, should we see capitalism as alienating or rather privatizing? Culturally, capitalism intensely cherishes the private and the personal. So many products enable you to personalize them, to make them a part of you or reflect who you “really” are. Aren’t we obsessed with our bodies? The private is quite literally everywhere. The car becomes your second home, for instance. Private experiences are broadcast live or sold in the forms of memoirs, diaries, video clips, and so on. Doesn’t the Net allow us to share pictures and videos of our cute pets or loved ones, bringing satisfaction and connection? Turning inward to the private self, to personal relations, or to authenticity may not really help serve as a bulwark against capitalism. Under capitalism, social relations may be thin, but private relations may be thick. Capital “homogenizes” us privately as opposed to socially.

Second, the symbols and values of contemporary capitalism are not necessarily alienating and isolating. In fact, they may be drawn from democracy itself. And we all have faith in democracy as the most we can hope for today, don’t we? Democracy values connection and communication, and so do major telecommunications corporations, financial speculators, portfolio investors, and so on. Democracy talks about diversity and multiculturalism, and so do global corporations and the transnational capitalist class. Nongovernmental organizations and transnational corporations both engage in awareness campaigns. Democracy talks about contingency and so do insurance companies. Democracy favors visibility but so do some Web sites, such as Facebook. And so on. This of course raises major doubts about democracy’s allegedly special capability to cope with or tame capitalism. In this context, what should religion’s position be vis-à-vis democracy? Is democracy as it exists today actually helping to make capitalism more secure?

Corporations these days also garb themselves in democratic and social values. They take corporate social responsibility seriously. They stress the importance of making transparent deals, of avoiding bribery and corruption, and so on. They are responsible to their stakeholders and not simply to their shareholders. They manifest deep concerns for the environment: “There is no business to be done on a dead planet”

(David Brower). They are innovative, creative, and public-minded. They value social relations. The days of the mean moneymaking machines are over. Corporations these days normally and generously donate money outside the market, breaking the vicious cycle of using money to make more money. In sum, they are both profit-oriented as well as social-oriented; both are not seen as conflicting goals—a case of having one’s cake and eating it too: “I am a pro-growth, free market guy. I love the market. I think it is the best invention to allocate resources and produce enormous prosperity for America or the world that’s ever been designed” (Barack Obama). The problem is not about sincerity—or about doing things merely for window dressing for the sake of profits. Rather, it’s about whether these sincere activities make it easier for us to surrender subjectively to capital and therefore to be complicit in perpetuating capitalism’s violent structures. The problem of global inequalities does not go away with these sincere activities. Or, more to the point, if you want these sincere activities, you have to shut up about global inequalities. At the very least, there’s a positive correlation between the former and the latter.

Third, and this will be the focus of this essay, religious values and practices themselves may be subsumable under or employed by capitalism. Put differently, religion may in fact help anchor capitalism and trap us in its violent deadlock ad infinitum. Or to be even more blunt, to be truly against capitalism one must be against certain religious practices and thoughts. We should not forget to problematize religion; it may in fact be part of the problem. It is not capitalism per se that we should counter but also religious solutions to the problems of capitalism. Let’s put some flesh on this thesis. I will focus on Buddhism in the context of my country, Siam (Thailand). As it turns out, the problems often associated with Western Buddhism are not peculiar to the West but can also be found in Siam.

The urban upper classes in Siam are probably as intensely connected to the global economy and therefore as “alienated” as their counterparts elsewhere in the world. They live under as much stress and insecurity due to cutthroat competition and market fluctuations and uncertainties. They can blame themselves for being bad entrepreneurs and getting bankrupt, for lacking the necessary skills to remain part of a company’s workforce, or for not being self-sufficient enough. Ultimately, they can always blame the invisible hand of the market for their misfortunes—meaning no one is really responsible.

They are conscious of the sufferings in the world. At the subjective level, they are probably decent and compassionate people concerned about society, the environment and the world. They condemn violence. To shield themselves from harsh objective realities (whose conditions they in part help create), many of them live in a world of gated communities and private clubs. To feel good about themselves, they may engage in the various nonprofit activities mentioned above. To have further peace of mind and overcome alienation,

*Citizens taking part in a meditation session at a spiritual training facility in the suburbs of Bangalore, India, in 2006. The rapid economic growth is placing a great burden upon people's minds.*

they turn to Buddhism, in particular its meditation practices.

Many of them may find the time to practice meditation regularly. If the meditation masters in the country cannot help appease their restlessness, they can still rely on the deep meditation of Plum Village, for instance. Or Goenka's. It is thus not surprising that a Thai celebrity recently compared Buddhism to the entertainment industry: both aim to bring happiness and fun. But as a leading media scholar once said, there's such a thing as "amusing ourselves to death." Religion conceived simply as fun or relaxation is no different. It helps them to develop the "inner distance" or "private space" necessary to live in structural violence and to accept the harsh realities as they are; that is, to see no contradiction between their "inner peace" and structural violence. They practice meditation to be able to maintain sanity, to tolerate the oppressive system, to be able to have better concentration to work longer hours and reap more profits, to go against their best interest, and so on. In this precise sense, Buddhism disconnects them from the world, from the violence of the capitalist system, social structures, and so on. In other words, once we have this necessary inner peace, we see the harsh realities of the world as contingent and not as necessary features that are built into the system and structures. Shouldn't we see this as alienation par excellence? In this sense, isn't Buddhism also ideological? This disconnection from the world is not about challenging or rupturing the system but is really an escape into the present, or the affirmation of the prevailing injustices and oppressive structures. In seeking to overcome alienation, they end up strengthening the structures of alienation.

Thus most Thai Buddhists forget that social structures are not natural. Rather they are constructed alongside political and economic developments that are based on exploitation. As such they can be changed. There's nothing true about them. Moral training should therefore be adapted to facilitate the transformation of society, not the preservation of things as they are.

If Buddhists do not perceive structural violence in both their knowledge and action, the mindfulness or inner peace that they are cultivating is merely a form of escapism. Many Buddhists often ask, Who are we to change the world? This mode of thinking is simply delusional. It shows a failure to grasp the Three Characteristics. That is, we must confront the state of suffering (*dukkhata*) and realize that things are transient (*anniccata*). Therefore, there's ultimately a void or emptiness (*annattata*); being nothing is not the same as not-being.

Is this suffering merely an individual problem? Definitely not. It is also structural and institutional—hence the importance of politics. We may be participating in structural violence (e.g., of capitalism and capitalist relations) even if at the individual level we are peace-loving and compassionate. We must learn to develop ethical responsibility for structural violence. What's the politics of confronting suffering? How do we confront suffering? Suffering from which violence? Suffering from violence against what or whom? How do we reduce or minimize suffering? What are the meaningful acts that will bring an end to suffering? What kinds of subject/agent are needed to bring about these transformations? What are the possible ways or political projects of reducing suffering? What if they conflict with one another? What framework do we use when we confront suffering? Do we end up with a better understanding of suffering? Or is it just an empty feeling devoid of understanding (as to the sources of suffering)?

There's a "revolutionary" dimension in Buddhism that needs to be (re-)affirmed. It can, for instance, be seen in young Siddharta's renunciations or de-individualization and subtraction from existing social relations by leaving his cocooned palace life, and ultimately his disruption or dismantling of the traditional cosmology with its fixed hierarchies and positions by opening the path to enlightenment for all. He created a new body—no, not the privatized body that we see today, but the Sangha (a symbol of equality and fraternity) and more broadly the ever-expanding community of faithful *kalyanamitta* (spiritual friends) as the vehicle for "revolutionary" change, for carrying out the consequences of his egalitarianism to the end. In other words, Siddharta's "distancing" breaks down walls, while the distancing (internally and externally) of many contemporary Buddhists resurrects walls; the latter want to help others by throwing food over the walls, for instance. I propose that Siddharta's "attitude" and gesture be adapted to our present context, for they will overcome alienation and capitalist violence in the contemporary world. □

# The Dharma of Alienation

by David R. Loy

*New media technologies sometimes encourage a kind of “hyper-individualism” because we spend less and less time meeting and interacting with other people—often not even with members of our own families.*

*We are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness.*  
—Thich Nhat Hanh

The English word “alienation” is from a Latin word that means “to be other.” To be alienated is to feel *separate from*. There are three issues involved in this: Who (or what) does one feel separate from? Why does one feel separate? And what to do about it?

Since alienation seems to be increasing as a social problem, it is important to realize that alienation can sometimes be appropriate. If we had the misfortune to live in Nazi Germany, for example, feeling alienated from the government, and from the many people who supported that government, might be a good thing.

Although we are fortunate not to live in Hitler’s Germany, it is still important to consider what it is about modern society that causes some people, especially young people, to feel alienated. Alienation has been a recognized problem in the West for some time, but now it is increasing in non-Western societies, including East Asia. The great importance of family values in Confucian cultures seemed to provide some resistance to alienation, but recently Asian families too are finding it difficult to resist social forces that make some people feel isolated and want to withdraw from personal interaction.

What are those social forces? Two in particular stand out, in my opinion. The first is “moneytheism,” which is a pun on *monotheism*, the belief in one supreme god. Today, increasingly, the supreme god is money. The globalization of consumerism means that the most important value has become making and spending (lots of) money. Since this god tends to replace all other gods, you could even say that consumerism is the new religion—in fact, the most successful religion of all time, since it is winning new converts more quickly than any other religion ever has.

The conversion techniques of this religion are extraordinarily effective and persuasive. As a teacher I know that whatever I can do with my students in class has little effect

compared to the missionary influences that surround all of us outside class: attractive advertising messages on television and radio, and in magazines and trains and buses, grab our attention and urge us to “buy *this* if you want to be happy.” This promises another kind of salvation—consumption is the good life! According to Buddhism, however, this seduction is deceptive, because this solution to unhappiness (*dukkha*) does not really work. Strange, isn’t it: it’s always the *next* thing we buy that will make us happy.

Of course, moneytheism and consumerism do not necessarily imply alienation, but they do tend to work against the kind of family and community life that traditionally emphasized group values such as cooperation and sharing. Instead, they encourage competition (“I have more than you do”) and *having* rather than *being*.

Recently psychologists such as Dan Gilbert, a Harvard professor who wrote *Stumbling on Happiness* (2006), and economists such as Richard Layard, chief advisor to the U.K. government and author of *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (2005), have been studying what actually makes people happy. They have discovered that money is impor-

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tant when you are poor, but once a very basic level of comfort is achieved the most important factor is *relationships with other people*.

Sonja Lyubomirsky, a University of California psychology professor and author of *The How of Happiness* (2008), has also been researching what happy people do differently from others who are not happy. She has found that happy people don't waste their time dwelling on unpleasant things. They are also not bothered by the success of others, because they aren't preoccupied with comparing themselves to others. From a Buddhist point of view, all these findings make a lot of sense.

Moneytheism and consumerism would not be so successful without another social influence: new media technologies, which make it possible for each of us to live in a private fantasy bubble. Today each family member often may have his

are usually quite different from the examples provided by someone like the Buddha or Jesus.

Moreover, the models that the new media provide are impossible for us to live up to. For example, the young women on TV are very sexy (although often unhealthily thin), the men much more handsome than I am, the musicians play and sing much better than I can, the talk-show hosts are more clever and wittier. All of them are more famous and wealthy than I can hope to be. In effect, the world we see on our screens becomes the real world, those people are real, and in comparison with them I am nothing. No wonder, then, that many young people today—who have grown up with these new technologies, and are therefore more susceptible to them—end up with a low self-image and become depressed. No wonder, too, that some of them want to withdraw from the uncomfortable pressures of really real life, such as preparing for university entrance exams, or coping with a high-stress job.

This brings us to another part of the problem: the triviality and frustration of the present educational system, which naturally alienates young people, in my opinion. Having been a professor in a Japanese university, I can understand why so many students become disillusioned with the whole process. The main lesson the entrance exam system teaches them is that (memorizing, exam-oriented) education is not only difficult and stressful but boring and meaningless in itself—in short, something not worth pursuing any more than you have to. By the time they make it to university many students are ex-

hausted and need to relax before graduating and going on to perform their (also very stressful) productive role in society. Just at the time they are (or should be) mature enough to start thinking about the most interesting things—such as contemplating the really important questions for understanding themselves and their society—university students are not interested. This is both a personal and a social tragedy.

### Overcoming Alienation

All the above is an effort to understand some of the factors that cause people today, especially young people, to feel isolated and alienated. By emphasizing these issues, I do not mean to justify alienation. Alienation remains a problem, both for those who feel isolated and for the society—especially the family and friends—that they feel alienated from. My point is that perhaps we need to evaluate the social

*High-school students talking on cell phones in a shopping mall in Tokyo. Cell phones have become daily necessities for most high-school students in Japan for communicating with their friends.*

or her own personal TV, DVD player, computer, cell phone, and so forth. Increasingly, each of us dwells in our own cocoon, which we construct by choosing which films and TV shows to watch, what music to play, what Web sites to surf. Sometimes this encourages a kind of “hyper-individualism” because we spend less and less time actually meeting and interacting with other people—often not even with members of our own families.

Our experience of the world is increasingly *mediated* by these new technologies, which means that we are exposed to many more *stories* about the world which tend to repeat the same plots. These stories do more than entertain us: they affect us unconsciously, as well. By providing models of who we could be and how we should live, they are showing us what is important in life. When we watch the same type of stories over and over, it's difficult *not* to identify with their characters and their values. Unfortunately, those models

forces that encourage alienation, and consider whether some structural changes need to be made. In any case, though, personal alienation remains a problem. What do Buddhist teachings imply about this problem, and how we might address it?

From one perspective, Buddhism is all about overcoming alienation—the sense of separation between myself “inside” and the rest of the world “outside.” This is the meaning of the essential connection that Buddhism sees between my *dukkha* (“suffering” in the broadest sense) and my sense of self. The Buddha himself emphasized that the Buddhist path is about understanding and resolving *dukkha*, and the most important point about *dukkha* is that even those who are wealthy and healthy experience a basic dissatisfaction, a dis-ease, which continually festers. That we find life dissatisfactory, one damn problem after another, is not accidental, because it is the nature of an unawakened sense of self to be bothered about something. This sense of being a self that is separate from its world is illusory—in fact, it is our most problematic delusion.

According to this Buddhist understanding of *dukkha*, the growing problem of social alienation today is only a more extreme version of the perpetual human problem that each of us needs to resolve.

Curiously, the environmental crisis—for example, global warming—can also be understood as a much larger version of the same problem: a result of our collective sense of separation between ourselves (human civilization) and the biosphere, which we dominate and over-exploit despite the fact that Earth is our mother as well as our home. Is it a coincidence that both types of alienation—personal and collective—have become so critical at the same time?

In response to the delusion of separation and alienation, Buddhist teachings emphasize interconnectedness. Thich Nhat Hanh, the well-known Vietnamese Buddhist monk, poet, scholar, and peace activist, uses the term “interbeing” to describe our interdependence. Not only is everything impermanent and constantly transforming, but nothing has any self-existence of its own apart from everything else. Like it or not, we are all parts of each other.

A Buddhist metaphor often used to make this point is Indra’s net:

Far away in the heaven of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net that stretches out infinitely in all directions. In each node of the net there is a jewel, and since the net itself is infinite in all dimensions, the jewels are also infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering

An Internet cafe opened near Times Square in New York in 2000. The huge shop, operated by a British venture company, is equipped with eight hundred personal computers.

like stars, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now select one of these jewels and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface all the other jewels in the net are reflected, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring. (Adapted from Francis Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* [1977])

The point is that our universe is just like this net, for everything in it is one of those jewels, reflecting and reflected in all the other jewels.

This includes us, socially as well as physically: not only is each of us constantly dependent on air, water, food, and so on, but we learn from others—especially parents, siblings, and friends—what it means to be a person and how to live. That everything is impermanent means that our sense of self is always being reinforced or reconstructed, as we live and learn. This highlights, again, the problem with living in a self-enclosed media bubble, which can seriously affect one's personality, according to the kinds of stories and models one is exposed to.

According to the Buddha, the most important part of our (sense of) self is our motivations. This is also the key to understanding the Buddha's teachings about karma: it is our *intentional actions* that have karmic consequences. This means that the best way to transform ourselves is to change our motivations. When what I do is motivated by greed, ill will, or the delusion of separateness (the three poisons), I create problems for myself and others. If my motivations change, so that I am motivated instead by generosity, loving-kindness, and the realization of our interdependence, then my actions will have the opposite effect: they create good feelings and build a stronger connection with other people.

This points to the Buddhist way of overcoming feelings of isolation and alienation. Motivations involve positive feedback systems that tend to incorporate other people. The more I manipulate people to get what I want from them, the more separate I will feel from them, and the more alienated others will feel from me, when they recognize that they have been manipulated. This mutual distrust encourages both sides to manipulate more. On the other hand, the more I am motivated by generosity and loving-kindness, the more I can relax and open up to other people, and the more connected I feel with them; consequently, others too become more inclined to trust and open up to me.

The important point is that, because we are so deeply interconnected with each other, our own intentions usually have a very direct effect on other people. One of the great secrets of life is that people normally respond to us in the way that we approach them. Realizing this gives us power over our immediate circumstances. If we feel isolated and alienated, there is a simple way to begin to break down that wall between us and others: be kind to them. The same is true if we want to reach someone else who feels isolated and alien-

*An imaginary computer graphic displaying metallic spheres in an infinite number, all of them arranged in straight lines and at a regular interval. On each of them we will discover that in its polished surface all the other spheres in the lines are reflected.*

ated, although in some cases it may also be important to do something about the “media bubble” that encloses the person.

The great Islamic philosopher Ibn al-'Arabi (1164–1240) wrote something similar. He asked: When God wants to be compassionate to us, how does he do it? *He makes us compassionate.* We don't need to believe in God to appreciate this profound truth. When we're feeling alone and sorry for ourselves, what is the best thing we can do? *Something that helps others.*

Does this have implications for how we understand the bodhisattva path? Traditionally, a bodhisattva is someone who postpones his or her own complete enlightenment in order to help other people become enlightened, but that is a dualistic way of thinking. If enlightenment involves realizing that I am not really separate from other people, how can I be fully enlightened unless they are enlightened too? Then helping others is like taking care of my own leg—something I naturally want to do. By taking care of others I am also taking care of myself. □

*When I look inside and see that I am nothing, that's wisdom.*

*When I look outside and see that I am everything, that's love.*

*Between these two my life turns.*

—Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897–1981)  
Indian spiritual leader and philosopher

# How Religion Can Help Overcome Feelings of Isolation

by Eric M. Cherry

*One way religious communities can address the problem is by developing ministries and disciplines that both fulfill their traditional callings and make use of twenty-first-century communication tools.*

I am a single cell in a body of four billion cells. The body is humankind. I glory in the miracle of self but my individuality does not separate me from the oneness of humanity.” With this often-cited phrase, Norman Cousins framed the current existential task for religious liberals, and perhaps for humanity generally, particularly in the context of growing interpersonal “isolation” in contemporary society. We do live lives that waver between individualism and interdependence. At our clearest moments, we courageously face the knowledge that fulfillment can be achieved on both sides of this spectrum of interrelationship.

But evidence suggests that our society is currently out of balance; we are tending toward individualism in a distressingly unhealthy way. The current president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, Rev. Peter Morales, has often described this by citing a study published in the *American Sociological Review* in 2006 that “asked subjects how many people they feel close enough to that they feel they can confide personal information.” An earlier study, done in 1985, asked the same question. Here are the key findings:

“In 1985, the modal response was having three people in whom one could confide.

“In 2004, the modal response was zero.

“The percentage of people who said they had no one in whom they could confide jumped from 10 percent in 1985 to 25 percent in 2004.

“Almost half of all Americans now either have no one or only one person with whom they can discuss important matters.

“If a person has only one confidant, chances are that the one confidant is the spouse. What this means is that relationships beyond the nuclear family are being systematically eliminated.”

The problem is immense, and religious communities are called to address it. We can do so by (1) engaging in relevant theological reflection, by (2) understanding the needs that current and prospective adherents bring with them to our religious communities, and by (3) developing ministries and

disciplines that both fulfill our traditional callings and make use of twenty-first-century communication tools.

## A Theological Construction for Analysis

One of the common criticisms of liberal religious theology is that it begins with an overly optimistic view of human nature. But in analyzing the matter of the disintegration of social relations, liberal theology’s generally high view of human nature is appropriate and important. We can begin by admitting that human beings do appreciate their conscious role in these trends. We do weigh the benefits and consequence of the decisions we make to proceed toward radical individualism or embrace lives engaged with “the oneness of humanity.” My experience teaches me that this “conscious freedom” is genuine, both practically and metaphysically. Much of the movement toward isolation and individualism is due to conscious choices to avoid the complications, commitments, and emotional investment that being in “relationship” requires.

But this tendency is balanced by motivations that are pre-conscious, unexpected, and confounding. As the Christian

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Apostle Paul described in his Letter to the Romans, we find that we “do not understand what [we] do. For what [we] want to do [we] do not do, but what [we] hate [we] do.” Paul decides that even knowledge of the eternal Law cannot prevent these confounding choices, because the flesh is weak. He suggests that spiritual rebirth is the solution.

Like many religious liberals, I find that embracing the very real power of existential freedom becomes most authentic when we simultaneously allow it to be humbled by the sort of concerns that Paul raises. In other words, we are healthiest when we do not fail to fully appreciate the extent of our human freedom, but also understand that hubristic reliance upon our ability to use that gift wisely is pure fantasy, that growing spiritually must be the companion of growing rationally.

Are people choosing isolation from a place of freedom, or is something beyond our conscious awareness creating this context? Have we forgotten that the “glory of self” does not separate us from the “oneness of humanity”? Or are we choosing to be unfaithful to it?

It is, of course, both. But I’m skeptical that there are any “noble” aspirations to a glorious Emersonian type of “self-reliance” involved. Emerson’s regret that “all Association must be a compromise” is at play here, but not as an inspiration. Instead, it is a reasonable description of antisocial motivations that pervade our cultural atmosphere. They urge us to value individual agency and to avoid compromise in order to achieve individual goals. And we are following these motivations, sometimes unconsciously, turning away from communitarian possibilities because something of value—individual agency—might be endangered.

At least this is the theological analysis which I arrive at. Others must and will certainly reach different conclusions, but the important matter is that we understand that both “freedom” and “failure” are at play in different degrees.

### A Religious Response to Contemporary Isolationism

In the January–March 2009 issue of *DHARMA WORLD*, Rev. Nichiko Niwano wrote that “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.”

Rev. Niwano’s reflection reminded me of the wisdom that Lao-tzu is said to have shared about the requirements for creating global peace. In poetic language he described how peace in the world requires peace within nations, how peace within nations requires peace within cities, and so forth, including peace between neighbors, within the home, and finally within the individual heart. Ultimately, according to Lao-tzu, there can be no peace in the world, or anywhere else, unless there is peace within the heart. And Rev. Niwano’s proposal that this work begins within the home is a very important religious message. We can only “free ourselves of our selfishness” through personal and familial “peacemaking.” Following our “freedom” toward interde-

pendence and peace appropriately begins here. Here we can most safely uncover our failures as well, most easily find forgiveness for them, and return, once again, to the path of love and peace. May it be so.

But it seems to me that Lao-tzu’s wisdom can also be read to show that peace within the heart depends upon seeking peace within ever widening circles of relationship (family, neighborhood, cities, nation, world). In other words, unless a person’s eyes are cast beyond self, and beyond family, peace—or release of suffering—will be slow to achievement.

Or as Rev. Dana McLean Greeley expressed it, “There is a stage in human development when people begin to be as much interested in others as in themselves, as much concerned with others’ lots as their own. When this stage of development is reached, by some miraculous transition, the word ‘we,’ expressive of sympathy and of the sense of togetherness in life, takes the place of the word ‘I.’ The word ‘we’ unites us. . . . I without my relationships am nothing; the people I love, the people I serve, the people who work with me and with whom I work. So we are much more important than I am.”

This is the work of the religious community: not only to uncover relevant dynamics of faith, not only to describe the implications of those dynamics in language that the mind and heart understand equally well, but also to create and offer a path, freely showing the way to the struggling and lost—that’s all of us—for the healing of self and society. A path that responds to both “freedom” and “failure” and that can reliably lead a follower away from selfishness, from “I” to “we,” and to peacemaking internally and externally.

Religious communities know a great deal about these “paths.” But religious liberals—perhaps Unitarian Universalists most of all—have been reticent to proclaim them. Yet there are signs that we are growing out of that reticence, that we have recognized how our tendency to limit “we” to a small, demographically homogenous slice of the world is, in fact, ungenerous and even selfish. Instead, new ministries of “hospitality” are taking root in our congregations—even “radical hospitality,” as some congregations refer to it. It is a fortunate concurrence, though not entirely coincidental, that congregations are recognizing this faithful imperative at the same moment that the need for a practical response to “isolationism” in our society has become apparent.

Though some congregations may not use the lens of “social capital” to inform their ministries of hospitality, it certainly helps to be aware of this “building peace within the nation” aspect of religious work. As Lew Feldstein, co-chair of the Saguaro Seminar\* has written, “We need to look at front porches as crime-fighting tools, treat picnics as public health efforts and see choral groups as occasions of democracy. We will become a better place when assessing social capital impact becomes a standard part of decision-making.” This is a clarion call not just to secular organizations, but to religious institutions that understand the importance of public ministry.

More often congregations that create ministries to address societal isolation are responding to the very real and present needs that people bring with them to worship. Religious services are one of the few places where people can (1) face the loneliness and isolation that have become real in their lives, and (2) find a welcome and a constructive path toward living more interdependently. Our opportunity, as religious organizations, is both unique and imperative.

Congregations are wise when they take note of the clearest sign that people are not yet resigned to isolation, for example, the incredible interest and growth in social networking on the Internet. The depth and quality of the social capital created through online networking is not yet clear. But more important for religious organizations is recognizing what the growth of these technologies demonstrates. It reveals that people are thirsty for connection with others. It suggests that we haven't lost an impulse toward interdependence, but that the methods and pathways of previous generations have lost some poignancy. It suggests that "connecting" institutions formed in the early twentieth century's wave of creating "voluntary associations" need to adapt to remain relevant and effective. It suggests that connecting organizations—and in this context religious organizations—that adapt toward twenty-first-century relevance will find that people are hungering for them, and that their historic principles and ministries take on new life.

In traditional religious language, we can frame this as a question about the meaning of "salvation" and, more importantly, how congregations are involved in *salvific* work. Religious organizations have answered this question differently over centuries, always in the context of their sociohistorical era, always in the context of how the question is being asked. In the same way we may ask: What is "salvation" today? And how are religious organizations involved in it?

From a Unitarian Universalist perspective, the answer to those questions begins in the here-and-now, the world in which we live and breathe, where we face our daily joys and sorrows—indeed, our freedom and our failure. I would answer that salvation means living in right relationship with Creation and the Holy. The trend of cultural "isolation" is the phenomenon of being outside of right relationship. In fact, isolationism suggests that there is cultural confusion about how to be in right relationship with Creation and God in the twenty-first century.

Organized religion, if it wishes to be involved in the work of salvation in a twenty-first-century context, must respond accordingly—inviting people out of isolation and into right relationship—with the language of the heart, with a ministry of hospitality, and with practical methods for experiencing the spiritual benefits of interdependence.

*Organized religion, if it wishes to be involved in the work of salvation in a twenty-first-century context, must respond accordingly—inviting people out of isolation and into right relationship—with the language of the heart, with a ministry of hospitality, and with practical methods for experiencing the spiritual benefits of interdependence.*

Let it be through small group ministries of various kinds that offer an easy entry into close relationships and which lead to commitment to a larger community. Let it be worship that makes room for reflection on freedom and failure, and offers a vision of right relationship. Let it be social events that remind people of the simple joy of sharing a meal or of intergenerational celebration. Let it be ministries of hospitality that heal both the "welcomed" and the "welcomer." And let it be opportunities for the lonely and isolated to emerge into community and gather the courage and strength to hear and embrace their life's calling, and carry a blessing to the world around them through it.

But, as importantly, I pray that we find the strength to effectively share our ministries through Twitter; that we recognize a ministry to the masses of people on Facebook and MySpace who are tuned in and paying attention already; that profound ways of bringing hope and courage to the lonely and lost occur via e-mail and text messaging; that communities of faithful justice seekers are made stronger through video conferencing and Skype. And may strangers, rejected, castoff, and alone, when they come through the Internet wilderness to find a homepage of a religious organization, take away from it a ray of hope that

there, maybe there, they can find the right relationship that their soul is longing for.

The concerns we all share over growing social "isolation" present an opportunity to re-engage in public, countercultural, religious work. We are being called to remind ourselves and our neighbors of the beautiful truth that "[we are each] a single cell in a body of four billion cells. The body is humankind." Our place is in relationship. Our interconnectedness is existential, and all great joy—from individual fulfillment to world peace—relies upon our stewardship of that beautiful truth. □

\* The Saguaro Seminar is a long-term research project conducted at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government aimed at significantly increasing Americans' connectedness to one another and to community institutions.

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# From Disparities in Compassion to Mutual Support

## Pinning Hope on the Social Contributions of Religion

by Keishin Inaba

*Religions can use their “social capital” to promote humanitarian volunteer work, which in turn spreads a spirit of compassion that helps build a society of mutual support.*

When people speak of a society of inequality, they normally are thinking of a society in which income differentials have grown prominent, but in the following I wish to address the topic of a society with conspicuous differentials in feelings of compassion. I call it “a society of disparities in compassion,” and it is one in which differences have arisen in the strength of compassionate feelings.

Modern Japanese society is moving decisively in the direction of neoliberalism and self-responsibility. It is a society with a strong current of egotism, of the thinking that “all is well as long as I get what I want.” In a 2009 opinion poll on social attitudes conducted by the Cabinet Office, 45.8 percent of the respondents characterized the current age as one in which people put their own interests first in one multiple-answer question, while only 11.2 percent called it an age of compassion in another.

Even as some individuals devote their energies to self-

interest and self-protection, however, there are others who feel uncomfortable with a society of excessive egotism and pursuit of profits, and some participate enthusiastically in volunteer welfare activities. In this way, Japan is becoming a country of disparities in compassion, with a dividing line between those who do and do not act compassionately toward others.

Needless to say, adults who think little about others and are lacking in compassion influence children by the way they lead their lives. Survey results show that the strength of compassionate feelings among Japanese elementary school pupils declined rapidly in the 1970s and 1980s and has remained at a low level since the 1990s. Economic disparities are problematic in their own right, but when one considers the responsibility of adults for bringing up the next generation, one can say that disparities in compassion are of even greater concern. We have reached the point where action is imperative to regain truly human compassion and build a society of mutual support. (Based on this belief, the author in 2008 published a book titled *Omoiyari kakusa ga Nihon o dame ni suru: Sasae-au shakai o tsukuru yattsu no apurochi* [Disparities in Compassion Will Ruin Japan: Eight Approaches to Building a Society of Mutual Support]).

### A Judgmental Society: The Loneliness of the Modern Individual

Why have disparities in compassion arisen? One of the main causes, I would say, is our “judgmental society.” After we come into the world and while we are growing up, we are constantly under pressure from being evaluated by those around us. There is no end to the judgments. Are we going to a good school or good university? Have we landed a job at a first-rate company? Are we satisfactorily performing our assigned tasks? Of course, it is a fine thing to strive with all your might, receive a just evaluation, and be rewarded for your efforts. In an environment of never-ending evaluation,

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however, you may be unable to easily admit your blunders or tell somebody about your worries, since that could cause you to be seen in a less favorable light. Interpersonal relations weaken in this kind of setting. Individuals keep their worries to themselves, and not a few eventually commit suicide as a result. More than thirty thousand Japanese take their own lives every year. Japanese society gives such individuals but a sideways glance. It has become a place in which many people focus their attention narrowly on efficiency and profits and pay little consideration to others. Meanwhile, there are also others who choose another road, one of a compassionate way of life, and you will find them volunteering for disaster relief or working with nonprofit welfare organizations. The disparities in compassion just keep on widening.

### Social Capital

Beneath a society's assorted organizations and groups is a foundation of trust, norms, and reciprocity between individuals, and when this foundation is firm and strong, it works to the advantage of organizations and groups. Mutual-support activities motivated by compassion become livelier, and various social problems are remedied. The trust, norms, and reciprocity between individuals in organizations and groups constitute "social capital."

In the aftermath of the 1995 Kobe earthquake, media coverage enabled people to see the flood of volunteers from all over the country into the affected areas. In the World Values Survey (WVS, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>) con-

ducted during that year, the degree to which individuals trust other people rose in Japan. Upon witnessing the existence of fellow Japanese who felt compassion for the suffering of others and were ready to take action on their behalf, many people became more willing to place trust in others. Trust gains strength in places where volunteerism is flourishing. Data of the WVS collected from more than thirty countries have identified a strong correlation between such mutual-support activities as volunteer work and the ability to trust others. And as interest in the concept of social capital spread around the world, countries started implementing a variety of policy measures to utilize it.

Why has social capital come to be regarded as valuable? Like many other countries, Japan has become increasingly democratic, and people have pursued greater affluence. But modern society also has a host of problems, such as crime, poverty, environmental degradation, and terrorism. Urbanization has progressed, nuclear families have spread, and the framework of the community faces the danger of collapse. With people placing supreme value on the market, economic differentials have widened. Today, in reaction to these trends, criticism of excessive egotism is on the rise, and the longing for a mutual-support society is strengthening. It is in this context that social capital has attracted attention.

### Religion as Social Capital

Religion is considered to be one of the wellsprings of social capital. In a society of risks, where people cannot easily place trust in others, interpersonal relations grow weak, and indi-

*Volunteers taking part in a fund-raising campaign for the victims of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami at a railway station in Kobe City. Photos by author.*

viduals lead lives that are not closely connected to social capital. Human beings cannot live, however, in the absence of relationships based on trust. They therefore strive to develop such relationships, though they find this to be no easy task in a world where social capital is in short supply. Religious organizations, meanwhile, connect individuals together on the basis of faith, and they have the potential to serve as the foundation of a community. That is why people in Western countries have in recent years been looking at religion as a form of social capital.

An effort is going forward in Britain to create an inclusive society embracing all who have been excluded or become isolated. The British government enthusiastically introduced the concept of social capital and is promoting partnerships with citizens on a voluntary basis. At the same time, charities grounded in a faith are engaged in wide-ranging fields on the front lines of social welfare, where they are seeking, for instance, to eradicate poverty.

In the United States, the land of “civil religions,” their roots planted in the Declaration of Independence and the words and actions of the nation’s founders, about half the people attend church services once a week. Over the course of each year, welfare services run by religious organizations extend

support to more than 70 million Americans. Religions in the United States have developed connections with social welfare and community-based mutual-support activities.

### Social Contribution Made by Japan’s Religions

In 2006 a Japanese research project was launched on the social contributions of religions, and information on it can be found at the Web site <http://keishin.way-nifty.com/scar/> (in Japanese). For a definition of the social contributions of religions, I proposed the following: “contributions to the resolution of problems in the various fields of society and to sustaining and improving the quality of human life made by people of religion, religious organizations, or culture, ideology, or other affairs with a religious connection.”

Religion plays an important role in the fostering of compassion toward others, which underlies activities to make social contributions. Undertakings by religious organizations and people of religion to succor the socially weak function as the essential providers of services contributing to society, and they also function as public vehicles in which the spirit of compassion is strengthened. This is because the various religions all teach the importance of having a compassionate heart and altruistic motives. Attitudes of reverence and

*A volunteer standing in front of a department store in London for fund-raising campaign promoted by the Salvation Army on December 16, 2006. Photo by author.*

thankfulness toward the gods and the buddhas for their protection in life breed humility and encourage you to treasure the lives of others just as you treasure your own life. At the same time, the traditional Japanese spirit of thankfulness, which is expressed in words of thanks and actions to return favors, also motivates compassionate behavior. Those who are making social contributions based on such religious convictions have the potential to influence others in a positive way.

Religious organizations in Japan undertake many activities that contribute to society. Even so, the public recognition of these activities is not widespread, and the expectations of them are not very high. In 2008 the Niwano Peace Foundation conducted a survey of attitudes toward the social contributions of religious organizations, and one of the questions was, "Do you know that religious organizations are contributing to society by, for instance, providing school education and managing hospitals?" Only 35 percent of the respondents said yes.

The limited recognition of these social activities of religious organizations provides an indication of a weak context for religions to function as social capital. That is, the Japanese milieu is not one in which people of religion can easily forge strong bonds of trust with communities and bring individuals together through close relationships with local residents. The Japanese scene also has a special feature, however, which is that reappraisals at home can be encouraged by first getting an appraisal overseas. If religious organizations become active overseas through nongovernmental organizations and win praise for their accomplishments, Japanese society will take note of this, and people will gain awareness of the ways in which Japanese religious organizations are contributing to society, resulting in a reappraisal.

Quite a few Japanese religious organizations have become active overseas through NGOs. Based on religious ideals, they are engaged in activities directed at such objectives as realizing peace and aiding refugees. Around 1990 they began to form networks. In 1993 cross-denominational Buddhist groups set up the Ayus Buddhist International Cooperation Network, and in 2000 the Arigatou Foundation affiliated with Myochi-kai launched the Global Network of Religions for Children. Then, in 2003, the Buddhist NGO Network of Japan was brought into being with forty groups taking part, five of which have taken the lead: Niwano Peace Foundation, Ayus Buddhist International Cooperation Network, Shanti Volunteer Association, Rissho Kosei-kai Donate-a-Meal Fund for Peace, and Arigatou Foundation. In this way, the NGOs of Japanese religious groups are cooperating with each other in the field of social contributions.

### In Conclusion

Nobody wants to live in a lonely, inhospitable world where some people put their own survival first, without any thought for the oppressed and the anguished, while others are forced

to deal with miserable conditions all by themselves. In order to bring a mutual-support society into being, all of us, one by one, must raise our consciousness and take action. Communities today are extending aid to those who have been excluded from society or are in an isolated position, helping them to become self-supporting. Even if you do not engage directly in such activities, you can still help build a society of hope, not by looking on those who are suffering as somebody else's problem but by making a place in the corner of your heart for compassion toward them.

The power of an individual may not amount to much, but a single step forward by one person can set off waves that spread out like the ripples of a pebble dropped in water. Compassionate feelings coupled with a warm gaze are all it will take to pass a loosely connected society of mutual support on to the next generation.

Anybody at all can be compassionate in thought and action; this is not something bestowed only on special individuals who uphold lofty ideals. The duty of adults is to create an environment conducive to the fostering of a compassionate mind in children. Compassion in thought and action that arises naturally, without being forced upon one, will provide the motive power for the transition to a mutual-support society from our problem-plagued contemporary society, with its juvenile delinquency, poverty, and deaths with nobody present. I know that some will object to this statement, saying that reality is harsher than that, but I nonetheless wish to believe in the power of that which resides within the human heart, including empathy and compassion.

A religious individual engaged in social work in Britain said to me as follows: "Conflicts between individuals occur in the course of our activities. They do not occur because of intolerance, however. When you engage in group work, your values are bound to come into conflict with those of others, and you learn from that, using it to change yourself."

This is a suggestion to perceive clashes of values, which would seem to be the opposite of compassion, as presenting you with an opportunity. Upon experiencing such a collision between values, you take the route of dialogue to transcend the state of dispute. Various ways of thinking are current in this world, and you can strengthen your own compassion through acceptance of the fact that there are values that quite naturally differ from those you hold yourself.

While religion is important for fostering compassion and altruism, it has to be a religion that comes to life within society. No doubt preaching, expounding on compassion, and providing moral education have some effect, but their power is not that great. Individuals are socialized through their connections with other individuals. For compassion to grow within the heart, it is indispensable for one to have contact with good role models, with people who have gained experience through actual action. The people of religion need to be such a role model. I am pinning my hopes on the social contributions these people can make. □

# Creating Hope by the Way We Live

by Robert Traer

*We cannot change the natural cycles of life, nor can we escape the unavoidable suffering of death. We can, however, resist the avoidable suffering caused by damage to the biosphere by acting now to restore Earth's carbon cycle.*

A woman, whose only child had died, was unable to accept her loss. So she went to the Buddha seeking a cure. He sent her out to gather mustard seed, requiring that “the mustard-seed must be taken from a house where no one has lost a child, [spouse,] parent, or friend.”<sup>1</sup> As the grieving woman went from house to house, she found that every family had lost a loved one. Suddenly, she realized that death is part of life and that continuing to grieve was selfish as well as futile.

A man, angered by the suffering of his people, asked Jesus to explain God's reign. “It's like a mustard seed,” Jesus replied, “the smallest of all seeds, but when it falls on prepared soil, it produces a large plant and becomes a shelter for birds of the sky.”<sup>2</sup> The people suffering were Jews ruled by Romans. Working in the fields, they would welcome the shade of a plant large enough to shelter birds, but the landowner would uproot the plant to keep birds away. Yet, mustard seeds continue to fall into fields and grow, and the crucifixion of Jesus by Roman rulers did not end faith in the reign of God. Acts of love, though fragile, are not futile and may flourish.

When we experience *unavoidable* suffering, we can let go

of our grief and live with compassion for all sentient beings. When we experience *avoidable* suffering, we can find in life and love the faith to resist what is wrong and make some things right. To respond creatively to our environmental crisis, we have to set aside our sorrow for the devastation of nature caused by our industrial economy and take steps to reduce our “ecological footprint.”<sup>3</sup> Once we are aware of our dependence on the ecosystems that sustain life, then we may change our way of living to restore the ecological balance of the earth's biosphere.<sup>4</sup>

Moved by our awareness and the compassion of others, we can create hope by the choices we make.

## Exemplars

The Buddha rejected the ascetic life, but counseled restraint in eating and other pleasures. Saint Francis is an exemplar of simplicity in the Christian tradition, and Sufis represent this way of life in Islam. Simple clothing, modest meals, fasting, physical work, and contemplation are the distinctive practices of such a “religious” life.

John Muir founded the Sierra Club because he found God in nature. “The Song of God, sounding on forever,” he wrote. “So pure and sure and universal is the harmony, it matters not where we are” for “as soon as we are absorbed in the harmony,” then “plain, mountain, calm, storm, lilies and sequoias, forests and meadows are only different strands of many-colored Light—are one in the sunbeam!”<sup>5</sup>

As a child Jane Goodall was inspired by Dr. Dolittle stories, and in 1960 she began living in Tanzania with chimpanzees. The Jane Goodall Institute (JGI) pursues her vision of “creating healthy ecosystems, promoting sustainable livelihoods and nurturing new generations of committed, active citizens around the world.” One JGI initiative gives us the ethical choice of buying coffee grown in Gombe Stream National Park. “Those who purchase this high-quality coffee are supporting cultivation of a sustainable, chimpanzee-friendly crop grown by farmers in the impoverished Kigoma region of western Tanzania. The coffee is shade-grown (meaning trees aren't cut down). What's more, because chim-

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panzees don't like coffee beans, they don't raid the fields, thus avoiding human-wildlife conflict—an increasing, life-threatening problem in areas where human and wildlife live in proximity.” Goodall grieves the loss of wildlife due to economic development, but urges that we “try to replace impatience and intolerance with understanding and compassion. And love.”<sup>6</sup>

### Awareness

Realizing how ecosystems sustain all life may also inspire us to live more responsibly. Within an ecosystem, “every species is bound to its community in the unique manner by which it variously consumes, is consumed, competes, and cooperates with other species. It also indirectly affects the community in the way it alters the soil, water, and air.”<sup>7</sup> Bacteria, the most abundant form of life on earth, play a crucial role in every ecosystem. Trees and other plants that sustain all animal life depend on nitrogen fixing bacteria in the soil.<sup>8</sup> And to digest the food we eat, we rely on hundreds of millions of bacteria living in our intestines, stomach and mouth.<sup>9</sup> The astounding fact is that the great majority of cells in our bodies are not our own but belong to other organisms, which makes each of us an ecosystem!

Awareness of the interdependence of life led conservationist Aldo Leopold to conclude: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”<sup>10</sup> Natural events may disrupt an ecosystem without destroying its integrity, as ecosystems are resilient. But modern economic development has devastated nature, so we must now protect natural habitats to ensure biodiversity. “Earth, from here onward, will become increasingly a managed planet. If humans wish a society with integrity, such management, for the foreseeable future, continues to require integrity and health in ecosystems, keeping them stable in the midst of historical change.”<sup>11</sup>

To learn how to protect the wilderness, Leopold suggested “thinking like a mountain.”<sup>12</sup> But we may have to think “like a field” to see that sustainable agriculture requires maintaining ecosystems. “Mother earth never attempts to farm without live stock; she always raises mixed crops; great pains are taken to preserve the soil and to prevent erosion; the mixed vegetable and animal wastes are converted into humus; there is no waste; the processes of growth and the processes of decay balance one another; the greatest care is taken to store the rainfall; both plants and animals are left to protect themselves against disease.”<sup>13</sup>

Modern agriculture has replaced farm animals with machines, diverse crops and crop rotation with a single crop, natural fertilizer with artificial fertilizer, and grazing with barns and stockyards where livestock are fed grain laced with hormones and antibiotics to fatten the animals and resist the bacteria that thrive in these artificial environments. Raising cattle to produce beef has led to overgrazing, soil erosion, desertification, and tropical deforestation.<sup>14</sup>

*Entrance of Gombe Stream National Park in the western region of Tanzania.*

Also, cattle emit almost “a fifth of the world’s greenhouse gases” that are warming the planet.<sup>15</sup> Cattle eat half the world’s grain, and producing one pound of beef takes about seven pounds of grain as well as 2,700 gallons of water. In contrast, an acre of grains, using much less water and producing no greenhouse gases, may yield ten times more protein than an acre used to produce beef. An acre of legumes may yield twenty times more protein than an acre used to raise cattle.<sup>16</sup> Modern agriculture and the production of meat, especially beef, are environmentally unsustainable.

### Acts

Eating, therefore, can be an act of love. Most of the world’s vegetarians are Hindus, for not eating meat in the Hindu tradition is a way of improving karma. Some Jews, however,

are combining “traditional Jewish dietary laws with new concerns about industrial agriculture, global warming and fair treatment of workers.”<sup>17</sup> Supporters of “cruelty-free diets” oppose the suffering inflicted on animals raised for food. Whether we choose to be vegetarians or simply reduce our consumption of meat, deriving more of our nutrients from grain reduces our ecological footprint and increases the supply of food for others.

Our consumption may in other ways support environmental sustainability. Fair Trade–certified foods are a small but significant market, and demand for organic food has had a major impact on retailers.<sup>18</sup> Consumers can also buy products and services “where the making and the use of the product are carried out in an environmentally friendly way.”<sup>19</sup> We can purchase more energy-efficient light bulbs, appliances, and automobiles, and some cities allow a switch to electricity generated without the burning of fossil fuels. Lumber from sustainably managed forests is now available, and European laws require manufacturers to bear the cost of recycling electrical appliances.

For too long the “metabolism” of cities has been linear. Food imported into cities is consumed and then “discharged as sewage into rivers and coastal waters. Raw materials are extracted from nature, combined and processed into consumer goods that ultimately end up as rubbish that can’t be beneficially reabsorbed into the natural world.”<sup>20</sup>

Awareness is growing, however, that our industrial and urban way of life must resemble the “circular metabolism” of nature “in which every output which is discharged by an organism also becomes an input which renews and sustains the continuity of the whole living environment of which it is a part. The whole web of life hangs together in a ‘chain of mutual benefit,’ through the flow of nutrients that pass from one organism to another.”<sup>21</sup>

To resolve our environmental crisis, we must see each city as an ecosystem that provides “a sustainable livelihood, whose ecological footprint is minimal, and which interfaces with natural systems in a way that promotes ecological integrity.”<sup>22</sup> There are many examples of such “urban ecology.” Austin, Texas, owns its electrical generating company, so it offers residents the option of receiving energy from renewable resources. Curitiba, Brazil, a city of two million in a metropolitan area of 3.5 million, relies for mass transit on buses that are used by 85 percent of the population. The city of Bristol in the United Kingdom transforms the annual sewage output of its 600,000 inhabitants into 10,000 tons of fertilizer used by nearby farms growing food.

In Vancouver, Canada, a new building has “nine composting toilets and three urinals that require no water. Gray water and rainwater are used for irrigation.” These changes “save about 1,500 gallons of potable water every day.”<sup>23</sup> San Francisco is imposing “the country’s most stringent green

*A graphic image showing damage to the biosphere: “The biosphere of the earth maintained a level of about 280 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere until the Industrial Revolution, but now the level has risen to 380 parts per million and is increasing by over six gigatons per year.”*

building codes, regulations that would require new large commercial buildings and residential high-rises to contain such environmentally friendly features as solar power, non-toxic paints and plumbing fixtures that decrease water usage.<sup>24</sup> Chicago has planted over 400,000 trees since 1989, created 250 miles of bicycle lanes, and operates nine free trolley routes with trolleys using biodiesel fuel. Chicago also maintains a garden of 20,000 plants on the roof of city hall that “mitigates the urban heat island effect by replacing what was a black tar roof with green plants,” and absorbs rainwater, reducing runoff.<sup>25</sup>

All these changes not only make ecological sense by conserving energy, but lower emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere that have upset the carbon cycle. The biosphere of the earth maintained a level of about 280 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere until the Industrial Revolution, but now the level has risen to 380 parts per million and is increasing by over six gigatons per year.<sup>26</sup> This is largely due to burning oil, coal, and natural gas, as well as wasteful cultivation in industrial agriculture, which releases carbon from the soil, and the burning of forests to clear land for grazing cattle and cultivating cash crops.

We cannot change the natural cycles of life, nor can we escape the unavoidable suffering of death. We can, however, resist the avoidable suffering caused by damage to the biosphere by acting now to restore Earth’s carbon cycle. We can plant more trees and require sustainable forestry, which involves cutting mature trees and removing deadwood to maximize the net carbon dioxide absorption. We can make agriculture sustainable by reducing the use of fossil fuels to pump water, run combines, produce artificial fertilizer and pesticides, and truck food to distant markets, and by applying the lessons of nature in planting, cultivating, and protecting crops from pests. We can generate much more of our energy using renewable fuels, and we can fly and drive less. We can eat less meat (especially beef), recycle more, and buy and use products that will reduce our ecological footprint.

Acts of faith and love are needed to create hope and change. May we open our hearts to those who inspire us, and follow. . . . □

## Notes

1. Paul Carus, *The Gospel of the Buddha* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1894), <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/btg/btg85.htm>. In the quote I’ve changed the word “husband” to “spouse.”

2. The Gospel of Thomas, p. 20. In the New Testament this parable is in Matthew 13:31–32, Mark 4:30–32, and Luke 13:18–19.

3. Ecological footprint is “a resource accounting tool that measures how much nature we have, how much we use and who uses what,” <http://www.footprintnetwork.org>.

4. Robert Traer, *Doing Environmental Ethics* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2009).

5. John Muir, “Mountain Thoughts,” [http://www.sierraclub.org/john\\_muir\\_exhibit/writings/mountain\\_thoughts.html](http://www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/writings/mountain_thoughts.html).

6. The Jane Goodall Institute, <http://www.janegoodall.org>.

7. Edward O. Wilson, *The Future of Life* (London: Abacus, 2003), p. 11.

8. Lynn Margulis, “Power to the Protocists,” *Slanted Truths: Essays on Gaia, Symbiosis, and Evolution*, eds. Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1997), p. 79.

9. Steven Rose, *Lifelines: Biology Beyond Determinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 2.

10. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949, 1968), pp. 224–25.

11. Laura Westra, foreword to *An Environmental Proposal for Ethics: The Principle of Integrity*, by Holmes Rolston III (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), xiii.

12. Aldo Leopold, “Thinking Like a Mountain,” <http://www.eco-action.org/dt/thinking.html>.

13. Michael Pollan, *Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), p. 149.

14. R. Goodland, “Environmental Sustainability: Eat Better and Kill Less,” *The Business of Consumption: Environmental Ethics and the Global Economy*, eds. Laura Westra and Patricia H. Werhane (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), p. 204.

15. Mark Bittman, “Rethinking the Meat-Guzzler,” *New York Times*, January 27, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/27/weekinreview/27bittman.html>.

16. Lester R. Brown, *Full House: Reassessing the Earth’s Population Carrying Capacity* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), p. 163.

17. Alan Cooperman, “Eco-Kosher Movement Aims to Heed Conscience,” *Washington Post*, July 7, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/06/AR2007070602092.html>.

18. Tony Cenicola, “Five Easy Ways to Go Organic,” *New York Times*, October 22, 2007, <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/10/22/five-easy-ways-to-go-organic/>.

19. James Gustave Speth, *Red Sky at Morning: America and the Crisis of the Global Environment* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 167.

20. Herbert Girardet, “The Metabolism of Cities,” *The Sustainable Urban Development Reader*, eds. Stephen M. Wheeler and Timothy Beatley (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 125–26.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

22. James J. Kay, “On Complexity Theory, Exergy and Industrial Ecology,” *Construction Ecology: Nature as the Basis for Green Buildings*, eds. Charles J. Kibert, Jan Sendzimir, and G. Bradley Guy (New York: Spon Press, 2002), p. 96.

23. Jessica Woolliams, “Designing Cities and Buildings as if They Were Ethical Choices,” *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, eds. David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 428.

24. Celia M. Vega, “S.F. Moves to Greenest Building Codes in U.S.,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 20, 2008, <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/03/20/MN7QVMJ5T.DTL>.

25. Department of Environment, City of Chicago, “About the Rooftop Garden,” <http://egov.cityofchicago.org>. See also William McDonough and Michael Braungart, *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things* (New York: North Point Press, 2002), p. 83.

26. Bill McKibben, “Carbon’s New Math,” *National Geographic*, vol. 212, no. 4 (October 2007): 33.

# “I Am Always Abiding Here, Teaching the Dharma”

by Nichiko Niwano

*In 1958, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, toured the United States and Brazil. He traveled to Brazil to attend the fiftieth anniversary celebration of Japanese immigration to that country. After that he visited San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Hawaii, where he met and gave spiritual guidance to Japanese immigrants who had joined Rissho Kosei-kai in Japan. These Japanese members went on to become local leaders and share the Buddha's teachings, mainly with fellow Japanese immigrants. In 1959 Rissho Kosei-kai opened chapters in Hawaii and Los Angeles.*

*New Sanghas were also formed in other parts of America, including San Francisco, Seattle, Chicago, and San Antonio, where English-speakers also played active roles in the practice and dissemination of the Dharma. Some of these Sanghas were designated by Rissho Kosei-kai as Dharma centers: San Francisco in 1979, New York in 1982, and Oklahoma in 2007. Rissho Kosei-kai in the United States now comprises eight corporations and 1,742 member households.*

*The following is the text of President Nichiko Niwano's address on August 1, 2009, in Las Vegas at the fiftieth anniversary celebration of Rissho Kosei-kai's successful dissemination activities in the United States.*

Let me offer sincere congratulations to all the members of Rissho Kosei-kai in America, gathered here today at this convention commemorating fifty years of sharing the teaching in the United States. It is truly remarkable that you have reached this half-century anniversary.

Of course you know that last year Rissho Kosei-kai also

reached a milestone, the seventieth anniversary of its founding. To mark this significant event, we began implementing a plan to install the icon of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni and the Dharma titles of Founder Nikkyo Niwano and Co-founder Myoko Naganuma at the home altars of all members. It is my understanding that the American members of Rissho Kosei-kai played a key role in advancing this important proposal and have continued to be instrumental in its realization.

It is no exaggeration to say that on reaching this milestone, Rissho Kosei-kai has shed its former image as a Japanese religion and has emerged as a world religion. For Buddhists whose trust is in the Lotus Sutra, this brings us back to the original and essential form of Buddhism as a global faith.

Now I would like to touch upon the Members' Vow, in which our faith is so concisely expressed, and speak about it in the sense of reviewing the meaning of the vow.

The Members' Vow begins with the words “We, members of Rissho Kosei-kai, take refuge in the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, . . . under the guidance of our revered founder, Nikkyo Niwano” and concludes with “And we pledge ourselves to follow the bodhisattva way to bring peace to our families, communities, and countries, and to the world.”

Since the first words are “We . . . take refuge in the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni,” the invocation of the focus

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*Nichiko Niwano is president of Rissho Kosei-kai and the Niwano Peace Foundation, a president of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, and special advisor to Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan).*

of devotion by all members therefore is literally a living Members' Vow.

As the Members' Vow also contains the phrase "under the guidance of our revered founder, Nikkyo Niwano," invoking the Dharma titles is another step in bringing the vow to life.

When we review the vow this way, the installation of the focus of devotion and the Dharma titles of the founder and cofounder is nothing out of the ordinary, but entirely natural.

Now I would like to say something about the focus of devotion, the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni.

Two Shakyamunis appear in the Lotus Sutra, in which we place our faith. One of them, needless to say, is the human being Shakyamuni, a historical person. This Shakyamuni, who was born in 463 BCE and died in 383 BCE (according to the distinguished biographer of the Buddha, Dr. Hajime Nakamura), had a physical body of flesh and bone, just like all of us.

In Mahayana Buddhism, this is termed the manifest-body that appeared in order to assist all living beings—all things that have life. We revere the human Shakyamuni as the "manifest-body of the Buddha," meaning that the Buddha appeared in the form of a human being in order to save us and all living beings.

But, because Shakyamuni was a human being, he eventually died. In their grief Shakyamuni's disciples and followers put their faith in the final teaching Shakyamuni left them: "This body of mine that you see with your eyes is limited and therefore will die, but the Dharma (Buddha Dharma) that I realized, which you cannot see with your eyes, is eternal truth, and therefore does not disappear and will never die. It is forever." They called the personification of the formless Dharma realized by Shakyamuni upon his enlightenment "the Dharma-body" (the body of the Buddha Dharma), and put their faith in the "Dharma-body of Shakyamuni," in contrast to the human Shakyamuni.

So the meaning of "the two Shakyamunis" becomes clear. The Lotus Sutra is structured so that the first half explains the preaching by the human Shakyamuni as the manifest-body of the Buddha, and the latter half contains the preaching by the Dharma-body of Shakyamuni. Although we speak of the two Shakyamunis, from the beginning they actually have never been separate, because the human Shakyamuni only became so by virtue of being enlightened to the Dharma (the truth permeating the universe and all living beings). Put another way, the Dharma is the original body, the true form, of the physical or human Shakyamuni. Because the human Shakyamuni, who had only a limited lifetime, embodied the limitless Dharma, we take refuge in the Tathagata Shakyamuni unifying the Dharma-body and the physical body.

However, one of the distinguishing characteristics of Mahayana Buddhist thought is taking refuge and having faith in "the Eternal and Original Buddha," the reflection of

Shakyamuni as the eternal Dharma-body Buddha personifying the Dharma, rather than in the human Shakyamuni, the physical, manifest-body of the Buddha.

This is easy to understand if we take an example from the field of science. As we learned in school, the seventeenth-century English mathematician and scientist Sir Isaac Newton discovered the law of gravity. Although Newton died at the age of eighty-five, his discovery is eternal. Let us think about this more deeply. The law of gravity would have been in effect from the beginning of time, whether Newton had been born or not, and whether it had been discovered or not. Since no one had been aware of this basic truth before Newton discovered it, however, he has justly been praised as a great man.

Similarly, the law of dependent origination existed before its realization by Shakyamuni, but like the law of gravity, no one had been aware of it. (The law of dependent origination means that all things have no fixed, absolute form, but are made up of the coming together of many different impetuses [cause] and situations [condition]. Put more simply, dependent origination means that since things arise through karmic conditions, one's own life is entirely due to what lies outside of oneself: the gods and the buddhas, as well as the people around us.) There is a Buddhist fable known as "The Seven Buddhas of the Past" about the six buddhas who appeared before Shakyamuni. It symbolizes the fact that the law of dependent origination preceded Shakyamuni's enlightenment.

Shakyamuni himself commented on this: "I, too, am nothing more than one who has uncovered the old way pursued by the enlightened ones of the past." This was said not from his modesty, but rather Shakyamuni's acknowledging that, like the law of gravity, the law of dependent origination to which he became enlightened is truth, regardless of his human birth and death. The personification of the eternal truth realized by Shakyamuni is "the Eternal Buddha Shakya-

*During the anniversary celebration, American members shared their joy of encountering the Dharma with other Sangha members.*

*Founder Nikkyo Niwano visited a local member's home at San Mateo City in San Francisco Bay Area, California, on August 14, 1958, on the way back from his visit to Brazil as a member of Japan's official mission to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Japanese immigration to Brazil.*

muni” and “the Dharma-body Shakyamuni.” Clearly it follows that the physical-body Shakyamuni and the Eternal (Dharma-body) Shakyamuni are not separate from each other.

“Eternal” in this instance does not refer to time that began in the past very long ago, but rather to the time stretching forward to a very distant future. To quote from the words of a Japanese university’s school song, “an eternal ideal . . . that does not forget the past.” In a sense, the way of life led by us who believe in the teaching of the Lotus Sutra is the same as living with an eternal ideal without neglecting all the changes and discoveries of our own time. The fact of becoming the Buddha, having been enlightened long ago to the truth of the Buddha Dharma that has existed since the beginning of time whether or not it was discovered or realized, like the law of gravity and the law of dependent origination, we term “the true attainment of enlightenment in the remotest past.” The flesh-and-bone Shakyamuni who reached this enlightenment and the Dharma-body Shakyamuni are one and the same exactly.

Although the physical Shakyamuni did die, Shakyamuni’s teaching will never perish, and I believe what is being taught today is the teaching of the Dharma-body Shakyamuni. This is explained in the Lotus Sutra by the verse, “I am always abiding here, teaching the Dharma.” “Always abiding” describes the fact that he is forever living with us, existing for eternity.

In order to deepen our understanding of “I am always abiding here, teaching the Dharma,” I would now like to touch upon “all things have the form of truth,” a central teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

“All things” means “all of existence.” Everything existing in the universe is covered by “all things.” “The form of truth” means the appearance of absolute truth. The word “form” can also mean an image we see with our eyes, so it can refer to facial features. Facial features reflect a person’s inner personality, which is invisible to the eye but which takes an outer, visible form in the look on one’s face.

“All things have the form of truth,” and similarly, all things we see with our eyes—mountains, rivers, grasses, and trees, the birds in the air, the fish in the water—themselves have the appearance of a visible form of reality (truth). Put differently, we could say that the forms we see with our eyes are the appearance of the truth that we cannot see with our eyes.

For instance, let us consider the phenomenon of an apple falling from a tree branch. This appearance manifests the truth of the law of gravity, and also that “all things have the form of truth.” In other words, the truth invisible to the eye is the visible appearance or manner (phenomena).

Zen master Dogen, founder of the Japanese Soto sect, wrote the following tanka poem concerning “all things have the form of truth.”

The colors on the peak,  
The echoes in the gorge—  
In all of them  
I hear the voice of Shakyamuni.

The meaning of this poem is that all the changing colors of the mountain and the sounds of the river in the gorge are nothing else but the appearance and the sound of the voice of Shakyamuni. We can share through this poem the experience of looking in awe upon the appearances of all things such as mountains, rivers, grasses, and trees, as they are representations of the enlightenment of Shakyamuni.

Here, once again, I return to my starting point.

The meaning of “I am always abiding here, teaching the Dharma” is not limited to the Dharma-body of Shakyamuni; when we become aware of the fact that we are being taught by the silent voices of parents, teachers, and friends who are no longer with us, then we could say that it also includes the good advice we have received from those people.

Our ears can hear the voice and our eyes see the appearance of a person who is still alive and in possession of a physical body. However, we cannot hear the voice of a person who is now deceased, a person without appearance or form. Only if our ears and our hearts are pure can we somehow see and hear them, even though we may not be trying to.

Ten years have now passed since Founder Niwano entered nirvana. In his last years he used to admonish me with the

slogan “many in body, but one in spirit.” Even now, I sometimes think I hear him saying that to me.

And my late mother used to always say that there was a deep karmic connection between the day on which someone was born and the corresponding chapter of the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra. I suppose she had a rather unique perspective; however, I was born on the twentieth of the month, and of course chapter 20 is “The Bodhisattva Never Despise,” of which I have many special memories.

I imagine that all of you gathered here at today’s convention also have been taught many things by the silent voices of parents, teachers, and friends.

Now let me offer some concluding words.

As we all know, the word “present” as a verb means “to give” and as a noun it means “a gift.” Yet the word “present,” as in “the present moment,” is spelled and pronounced the same way. I think these homonyms teach us something very important.

The things we now see with our eyes, the sounds we hear with our ears, the food we eat and the words we speak with our mouths, the way we walk with our feet—all these things that our bodies receive and accept are presents from the Eternal Buddha, who permeates the universe.

Therefore, presents are not only things that we did not have until they were given to us by other people; presents are also all the things flowing all around us that we are now receiving.

The meaning of the English word “present” hints at a deeper understanding of such phrases as “I am always abiding here, teaching the Dharma” and “All phenomena now appearing before your eyes are the Buddha’s teaching, the Dharma.” At the same time, this discovery allows us to experience their meaning anew with a feeling of deep emotion.

*Members sharing their spiritual insights on their daily lives from the viewpoint of the Buddhist teachings in a coffee shop.*

And then, we feel, with even deeper emotion, the teaching saying that:

How difficult to receive life as a human,  
And yet more difficult now to have this life  
That must eventually die.  
Hearing the True Dharma is even more difficult,  
And encountering buddhas in the world is more difficult  
still.

Verse 182 from the Dhammapada

It is difficult for people to receive life, and for all things that must die, to have life is difficult (a rare thing). And even for those who receive life, it is very rare in their lifetimes to come into contact with a true teaching, and very rare to be born into the world (here on earth), which is filled with buddhas.

I would like to conclude by reciting from the Members’ Vow: “And we pledge ourselves to follow the bodhisattva way / To bring peace to our families, communities and countries, and to the world.”

And also from the Transfer of Merit: “May these merits be transferred to all living beings, so that together with them, we may accomplish the Buddha Way.” □

*A member of the Dharma Center of Oklahoma holds a sutra recitation service in front of her Buddhist home altar.*

# Real Invitation, Welcome, and Inclusion— Our Present Hope and Our Future

by John Michael Schuh

*The following is the edited text of a testimonial speech by a member of  
Rissho Kosei-kai of New York at the fiftieth anniversary  
celebration in Las Vegas on August 1.*

Let me begin with a quote from the Lotus Sutra, chapter 21, “The Divine Power of the Tathagata”: “Just as the light of the sun and moon / Can chase all darkness away, / So these people, practicing in this world, / Can bring living beings out of darkness, / And cause countless bodhisattvas / To at last abide in the One Vehicle.”

My name is John Michael Schuh. I have been a member of Rissho Kosei-kai of New York, Chicago Chapter, for twenty-five years. It is a great honor to give my testimony on the fiftieth anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai’s dissemination in the United States.

## **Painful Childhood**

I am the oldest of three children and was raised in a middle-class Chicago suburb. My father was a laborer and an alcoholic. My mother needed to work a part-time job to help support us. My father would often become drunk and would verbally abuse Mom, my brother and sister, and me. My childhood was often painful and I felt the profound sting of feeling unwelcome early on. In this traumatic atmosphere my siblings and I learned to mistrust and resent our father and fear our mother.

Grade school was another place of torment for me. Some of my schoolmates would make fun of me and I would become defensive and cry. I was laughed at and mocked, and I became a target for regular abuse. Again I felt unwelcome and excluded. I even took to running home from school at the end of the day. Once in junior high school, I was so unhappy and felt so tortured, I remember confessing to a priest that I hated my schoolmates and wanted to kill them all. Between what happened at school and what went on at home, I longed to be an adult and escape my unhappiness.

After graduating from high school, I began my first year at a college seminary, but during my first semester, I fell into a deep depression due to my struggle with my sexual identity, my faith, and my family. I made it through that first semester with the help of a kind priest, a social worker, and friends, but during my second seminary year, I left the sem-

inary as there was no place in the priesthood for someone with a different sexual identity. Again I was left feeling very unwelcome, but the worst was yet to come.

Upon returning home, and facing my parents’ anger and disappointment, I was told to get a job to help support my parents and siblings. Dad’s alcoholism caused him to develop neuropathy in his hands. Dad was unsure if he would be able to work in the future. I felt confined, oppressed, lost. My parents and I argued viciously over my future. A few weeks later, my parents found out that I was gay. Mom pronounced me dead and gone to hell, and I was banished from the family. I couldn’t believe my ears, since years earlier my mother had told us when we were children that we would always have each other. When I asked the reason for her feelings, she told me that her decision was based on her Christian beliefs. At that moment, the very faith that sustained me through the years of my childhood unhappiness had been taken away. I burned with hatred and anger deep down inside. I felt deeply wounded, betrayed, and unwelcome in the Christian church and abandoned by my family.

A few years later, at age twenty-three, I became interested

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*John Michael Schuh is a member of the Chicago Chapter of Rissho Kosei-kai of New York.*

in Japanese Buddhism through a book published by the Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai (Society for the Promotion of Buddhism). Around the same time, I started learning Japanese. I told my Japanese tutor that I was interested in Buddhism. She recommended I contact a friend who belonged to Rishsho Kosei-kai, and I attended a Sunday service and *hoza* at a local member's home. When I had arrived, the members were reciting the *Kyoten* in Japanese. After the ancestor-appreciation service, we had a *hoza*, and one of the members was kind enough to translate. Afterward, Mr. Yasuo Sato told me about Rishsho Kosei-kai, the meaning of the ancestor veneration service, and the founder's teachings. I was very impressed by all that I saw and heard, and I decided to join. There was no hesitation on my part. I felt the joy of being welcome. In Rishsho Kosei-kai I found a new spiritual home.

The branch leader assigned Mr. Sato to be my Dharma parent. Through his fatherly guidance, I became very serious in my study of the Lotus Sutra and Rishsho Kosei-kai's doctrine. I came to respect Mr. Sato's knowledge of Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra and loved him like a father. It was his kindhearted guidance as my Dharma parent that sustained me for the first eleven years of my membership in our Dharma center. I believe that without his guidance, I might have lost interest and drifted away as other English speakers had.

Through his guidance, I found a new connection with my family through performing daily ancestor-appreciation services. Ultimately, though, that was not enough. I still carried the pain of being exiled from my family and those many years of trauma and hurt whenever I thought of my parents. I felt angry and I felt very sad. I feared my parents would never accept me back. I so wanted their love and acceptance. I so wanted to be welcomed home.

Five years later, after attending many *hoza* sessions and with the loving guidance of Mr. Sato, I gathered the courage to return home to apologize to my parents for my disrespect and hateful words at our parting. Mr. Sato guided me to have no expectations and accept whatever my parents offered me—even their rejection—as the Buddha's compassion. When I returned home, my parents were surprised at my appearance. I apologized wholeheartedly for what I had said years before. Mom and Dad accepted my apologies. At that time, I felt the great weight I had carried for five years lifted from my shoulders. Even though this all took place many years ago, I am still working on transforming my relationship with my parents and working to welcome them more fully back into my heart.

### Our Karmic Ripple

In preparation for this testimony, I have spent much time in deep reflection on my life, my actions, my choices, and my challenges. This has been a painful, but also a growth-filled blessing of the Buddha. I was given the gift of exploring those deep memories of feeling betrayed and unwelcome

and also the memories alive with the richness of being welcome. I am now aware that these deep-rooted feelings have strongly influenced my actions, both conscious and unconscious, over so many years. I regret any hurt I may have caused others by lack of inclusion, being unwelcoming, or building walls of division.

What we offer or do not offer to others creates a karmic ripple that continues outward and reshapes this plain of existence.

I have talked about my early years of family, school, and faith when I suffered betrayal and being unwelcome. Then my early adulthood when I found a new spiritual home at Rishsho Kosei-kai and felt so welcomed by Mr. Sato, my Dharma parent.

Almost everyone here today is a member of Rishsho Kosei-kai, and while we may have many differences and dissimilar journeys, we have found a home together. We have been invited in and welcomed. Our inclusion in Rishsho Kosei-kai has been strengthened by our Dharma parents.

This said, how are we in turn being invitational, welcoming, and inclusive of others?

If our slogan "many in body, but one in spirit" is to transcend the level of simple rhetoric, we must work to give it life and meaning in this country. We must explore how we individually and collectively are striving to make "many in body, but one in spirit" a reality. Have we invited others to a Dharma circle? How willing have we been to do dissemination work or be an attentive Dharma parent? Are we open to becoming more diverse? Can we move beyond the often imposing walls of culture?

It was Rev. William Sloane Coffin who said, "Diversity may be both the hardest thing to live with and the most dangerous thing to be without."

If we choose the path to become more diverse and make Rishsho Kosei-kai grow, we must explore creative ways to make Rishsho Kosei-kai a known organization in the United States, and work to spread the liberating truth of the Lotus Sutra as guided by our founder, Nikkyo Niwano, utilizing the strengths of both its American and Japanese members.

Invitation, welcome, and inclusion are the key. We U.S. Rishsho Kosei-kai members must move beyond our fear of dissemination outreach and spread the Lotus Sutra among our circles, family, school, work, and in our communities. I believe this difficulty, in part, relates back to our current crossroads—preserving Japanese culture versus spreading the Dharma and making Rishsho Kosei-kai grow in the United States. Our Dharma centers must be places where new people feel welcome and are easily included.

The Japanese dissemination method is a well-tested one, and we North Americans must be willing to speak openly about our society and its activities. We must be willing to share how Rishsho Kosei-kai's teachings and its practices have liberated us from our sufferings.

*O-michibiki*, or dissemination, is an excellent practice for

*Mr. Schuh making his testimonial speech at the anniversary celebration on August 1, 2009.*

a bodhisattva-in-training. Once an individual is brought to membership, the Dharma parent must understand the great importance of this karmic connection. It is very important that the spiritual guidance of a fledgling member be recognized as a valued skillful means to advance both the Dharma parent's and Dharma child's spiritual growth. Our Dharma parent-child relationships are opportunities to share our struggles and achievements. Such relationships mirror each other, and together the two learn how to better incorporate the Lotus Sutra in their daily lives. This Dharma parent-child relationship practice, along with *hoza* practice, is what makes Rissho Kosei-kai unique.

As we strive toward greater inclusion, Rissho Kosei-kai in the United States must take care not to pattern itself after other North American Buddhist groups that have chosen the path of individual liberation, as opposed to the bodhisattva way of walking hand in hand together toward enlightenment.

In addition, in the United States Rissho Kosei-kai needs to foster Sanghas that are welcoming and embrace diversity, making it known that our Dharma center community accepts all people, regardless of race, skin color, culture, economic status, gender, or sexual identity.

Our inclusiveness and welcome must extend to our ancestors as well. Ancestor appreciation and respect for parents can also be a vital way to restore a sense of family that

has been lost to the pursuit of unbridled individualism. If an individual does not feel a strong familial connection with his blood family, let him or her know the compassionate embrace of our Sangha in the spirit of "many in body, but one in spirit."

So while the work that lies ahead will be a challenge, our efforts will be fruitful if we are willing to roll up our shirt-sleeves and take the risks required to spread the teachings of the Buddha and Founder Niwano. In so doing, we will help Rissho Kosei-kai grow into the future.

Together, we, the members of Rissho Kosei-kai, can tear down those walls that divide us and transform those walls into ever expanding circles of compassion.

In closing, I would like to quote Founder Niwano: "Shakyamuni Buddha stated at the end of chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra, 'Skillful Means,' 'Rejoice greatly in your hearts knowing that you will become buddhas.'

"If we really want to become enlightened, let us always meet people with cheer and joy. And let us guide people to the faith. Becoming fully aware that if we walk the path of the bodhisattva way, we will, without fail, become buddhas. We must also know that it is only by diligent devotion of repeating our deeds over and over again, day by day, that we will become buddhas.

"And lastly hear these words from Shakyamuni Buddha: 'Make the self your light, make the Dharma your light.'" □

# Think Big!

by Gene Reeves

*This article is adapted from a talk delivered by the author on August 1, 2009, at a ceremony in Las Vegas commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai's activities in North America. Some parts were also used in a talk given in Tokyo earlier that year.*

I'm both glad and grateful to be here with you today—and more than a little embarrassed. I'm glad in part because it's fun to be here. I'm really enjoying seeing all of you again and being with you. It's exciting to be part of the launching of a new international venture by Rissho Kosei-kai, to celebrate the previous fifty years in North America, and to look forward to where we are going from here. So I am just enormously happy to be here with you and I'm grateful to all of those who have worked hard to make this convention a success, from the people who served us food, to those who designed the program, to those who entertained us with music, to those who have made speeches, especially President Nichiko Niwano, who gave us a very interesting, very deep and penetrating understanding of the Buddha of the Lotus Sutra. So, there is a lot to be very grateful for, and to make me happy to be here.

But I'm also a little embarrassed. I'm embarrassed because I don't know why I'm standing here, actually. For years, I've been learning from you. I've been to your Dharma centers in Boston and New York, in Chicago, in San Antonio and Oklahoma, in Los Angeles and Seattle and San Francisco, and of course in Hawaii. I think I've been to all of them. And in all of these places and in other places as well (occasionally some of you even come to Tokyo and visit us there), I've been learning from you! So it seems to me a little inappropriate that I'm the one standing on this stage right now.

The title of my talk is "Think Big!" Almost every year we hold an international seminar on the Lotus Sutra for scholars, and this talk began at our most recent one, held in Hawaii at Kona in the spring. One of the participants, a famous Japanese Buddhist scholar, said something like, "It cannot be doubted that the core teaching of the Lotus Sutra is universal salvation." I didn't want to quarrel with this distinguished professor in public, but during the next break time I said to him: "You know, there is a certain truth to that, but it's really not the whole truth. Really what the Lotus Sutra is concerned about," I said to him, "is your salvation, not some abstract universal salvation, but *your* salvation."

The Lotus Sutra, I want to say to you this morning, is about *you*—about *your* liberation, about your attitudes, your self-understanding, your behavior, your life! It's not, at least not primarily, about some abstract, universal everyone. It's about you!

There are several ways to read and understand any text. One can understand the Lotus Sutra to be about doctrines, about skillful means, buddha-nature, universal salvation, and so on. You can also understand it as stories about the Buddha and bodhisattvas. All of this is true, it is always about such things. But when it comes down to the bottom line, to the purpose of those doctrines, the purpose of those stories, the purpose of having Guanyin (Kuan-yin, Kannon) Bodhisattva in chapter 25, the purpose of all those things is to change your life. It's about you, especially about your imag-

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ination, your vision, your size, about whether you are able to think big and be big!

This is a little difficult to explain, but by “you” I don’t really mean all of you together. I mean each and every one of us. Each and every one of us, the Lotus Sutra says, can become a buddha! That’s thinking big. It requires a kind of expansion of the imagination. It requires thinking beyond the box. It requires thinking, and doing, things that we never imagined we could.

At the end of chapter 5, the Buddha says to his disciples, who are shravakas, or hearers,

What you are practicing  
Is the bodhisattva way.  
As you gradually practice and learn,  
Every one of you should become a buddha.\*

That’s big! Wow!

In 1973, E. F. Schumacher published a little book called *Small Is Beautiful*. The Lotus Sutra does not conflict with this. It is not talking about big houses, big companies, big farms, big cars, and so forth. Small is still beautiful. Yet I want to encourage you to think big. The Lotus Sutra is talking about you—your goals and your ability; about your ability to think big!

The Lotus Sutra uses mind-stretching, expansive thinking—often with very, very big numbers. Sometimes they are simple: for example the Buddha tells his son Rahula that on the way to becoming a buddha he will make offerings to buddhas equal in number to the specks of dust of ten worlds. Imagine how many specks of dust there are just in your own living room, then in ten worlds. That’s a lot of dust and a lot of offerings! Imagining them is mind-stretching.

In chapter 7 we are told about the time that has passed since Excellent in Great Penetrating Wisdom Buddha lived on Earth.

Suppose someone took all of the earth in a universe and ground it into ink powder, and then passed through a thousand lands to the east, dropping one speck as large as a speck of dust, and again passing through another thousand lands, dropping just one speck. Suppose he proceeded in this way until he had exhausted all the ink powder. . . .

Then suppose the earth of all those lands through which that man had passed dropping a speck, as well as those lands where he had not dropped any, were ground into dust. Let one speck of dust be one eon. The number of eons since that buddha passed into extinction . . . vastly exceeds that number by innumerable, unlimited hundreds of thousands of billions of eons.

You may think that this is just trying to express an unimaginably great big number. And it is true that that is what it is doing. But the reason it is doing that is to get us to stretch our minds. This is not just a big number; this is a mind-stretching number. It’s much more than a very large number; it’s really an invitation to you to think big.

Chapter 7 has other very large numbers: When that buddha became awakened, *five million billion* buddha-lands in each of the ten directions shook and became bright. Wow! *Eight trillion* men became novice monks. Wow! The buddha preached this sutra for eight thousand eons without resting, then meditated for eighty-four thousand eons. Wow! If you can wrap your mind around such numbers, you are thinking big!

The lifetimes of future buddhas are enormous. Ananda, for example, the Buddha’s beloved assistant, is told that he will eventually become a buddha:

[His] lifetime will be innumerable tens of millions of billions of countless eons, so that even if a man counts and calculates for tens of millions of billions of innumerable, countless eons, it will be impossible to know the full number.

Wow!

The great stupa of Abundant Treasures Buddha in chapter 11 is five hundred leagues tall, enough to reach the heavens. Wow!

To prepare enough space for all of his guests, Shakyamuni Buddha had to prepare two million billion myriads of worlds. Wow! You might have to borrow an apartment or house from your next-door neighbor if your party is too big, but he borrowed a lot more than that.

Do you remember the passage in chapter 16 when the Buddha says, “Since I became a buddha”?

“Suppose,” says the Buddha, “someone were to take five hundred thousand billions of myriads of countless universes and grind them into dust. Then, after going east through five hundred thousand billions of myriads of innumerable lands, one of those specks of dust was deposited. And suppose he continued eastward until he had used up all those specks. What do you think? Is it possible to imagine or calculate the number of all those worlds?”

“Maitreya Bodhisattva and the others said to the Buddha: ‘World-Honored One, those worlds are innumerable, unlimited, beyond the reach of calculation and beyond the reach of thought. . . . We too cannot comprehend them. World-Honored One, such worlds would be innumerable and unlimited.’”

“Then the Buddha said . . . : ‘Good sons, suppose you took all those worlds, where a speck of dust has been deposited and where none has been deposited, and reduced them to dust. Let one speck be equal to one eon. The time that has passed since I became a buddha exceeds these by hundreds of thousands of billions of myriads of countless eons.’”

Wow!

Or think about Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva in chapter 24 of the Lotus Sutra. He doesn’t get talked about very much because he is sort of enormously overshadowed by Guanyin or Kannon Bodhisattva. Wonderful Voice is forty-two thou-

sand leagues tall. According to various calculations, a *yojana* (*yujun*), or what I call a “league,” is sixty-four or 120 or 160 kilometers. Forty-two thousand times the smallest of these is a little under three million kilometers. Now, the approximate distance from here to the moon is 382,500 kilometers. So the height of Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva is at least eight times the distance from here to the moon. That’s tall!

Wow!

These numbers are mind-stretching, encouraging us, encouraging us to think big. They seek to open up your imagination, your thinking, and your feeling, encouraging you to think big, even beyond normal human imagination.

The title of this talk is “Think Big!” but it’s more than our thinking that should be big. It’s also our behavior. We should, for example, be generous, not just with time and money, but also with friendly smiles, with kindness and good will. We should, in other words, be big-hearted. This is a little easier to say in the Chinese or Japanese languages because they have the concept of *hsin* (*xin*) or *kokoro*, which is both what we call mind and what we call heart. So it is more obvious in Chinese or Japanese that to think big is also to be big-hearted. That’s what the Lotus Sutra expects of us. We should be ambitious for the Buddha Dharma.

I heard a story just recently about the 1942 opening ceremony in Tokyo of the first Risho Kosei-kai training hall. The members, not so many in those days, had worked very hard to gather the materials and funds to put up that building. They were exhausted, and more than a little proud of what they had accomplished. Founder Nikkyo Niwano, though expected to praise and congratulate them, instead admonished them, saying that the place was too small. Cofounder Myoko Naganuma told him that he should apologize to the members for saying such a thing. But he refused, saying that the Dharma is too important to be restricted to such a small room. “We have to grow,” he said. That’s thinking big, and encouraging people to think big.

Think for a moment about the four bodhisattva vows. Of course in Risho Kosei-kai people are taught to understand that we should be the bodhisattvas who emerge from the earth in chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra. Bodhisattvas have four vows. There are various ways of expressing them. Here’s one version:

- Living beings are innumerable, I vow to save every one of them
- Hindrances to my awakening are innumerable, I vow to overcome every one of them
- Approaches to the Buddha Dharma are innumerable, I vow to master every one of them
- Awakening is unattainable, I vow to attain it.

Wow! What the Lotus Sutra is trying to teach us, like these vows, is to dream the impossible, and to do the impossible. It’s no wonder that in the Lotus Sutra bodhisattvas are almost always called *mahasattvas*, bodhisattva *mahasattvas*,

great ones, big ones, people who can think big, and act big.

Thinking big means among other things that you should never just accept defeat. Find a victory, a silver lining, a lesson, in every defeat, even if only a tiny one. It’s the best way to avoid stress, anxiety, and depression—always look for the silver lining.

Thinking big and being big do not mean that you should never be humble. Remember the short, common-looking, one-eyed, unimposing men in chapter 4. When the poor son has run from his rich father’s home in fear, the father sends these men to persuade him to come back, and they succeed. This is a story about the rich man enabling the son to gain the strength to develop and overcome his own self-depreciation, to think big, or at least bigger. So the point I want to make about the short, common-looking, one-eyed, unimposing men is that they make it possible for the father to save his son. And they do this by doing the seemingly impossible.

Becoming a buddha does not necessarily mean being a buddha for everyone. People heard Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva say, “I deeply respect you. I would never dare to be disrespectful or arrogant toward you. . . . Because all of you are practicing the bodhisattva way and surely will become buddhas.” But *people* did not see him as a bodhisattva, as one becoming a buddha. They saw him as a nuisance and a pest.

But, if you can’t be a buddha for everyone, you can be for someone, even today. That’s all the Lotus Sutra ever asks of us—to be a buddha for someone, and for as many as you are able.

In Mahayana Buddhism the blossoming of the lotus flower is much celebrated. But what the Lotus Sutra teaches is that we ourselves should be Dharma flowers—flowering, blossoming, springing up from the earth of everyday life, bringing a little beauty and happiness into this world. To be such a flowering is to be the buddha for someone. You don’t need a PhD, you don’t even need credentials from Risho Kosei-kai or from anyone else. You don’t need to study Chinese. You don’t need to study Japanese. You don’t need any of these things to be a blossoming lotus flower for someone else. All of those things are good, but they are not essential.

What the Lotus Sutra says is that it doesn’t matter who you are, or what your condition, whether you are rich or poor, whether you are gay or straight, or, as someone else mentioned earlier this morning, just confused. It doesn’t matter who you are. Any and every one of us has this ability and this power. The miracle of the Lotus Sutra is not only that this is a theoretical possibility, but that it is an actual possibility. Every single one of us has a power within us to help other people. That is all the Lotus Sutra asks of us. □

\* Quotations from the Lotus Sutra used in this article are all from *The Lotus Sutra: A Contemporary Translation of a Buddhist Classic*, translation and introduction by Gene Reeves, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2008.

# Dialogue That Opens Us to Others' Religious Experiences

An interview with Dr. Cinto Busquet

*A book in Italian on Rissho Kosei-kai's Founder Nikkyo Niwano titled *Incontrarsi nell'Amore (Encounter in Love)* was published in September 2009 by Città Nuova, Rome. Rissho Kosei-kai invited the author, Dr. Cinto Busquet, a Spanish Catholic priest and a member of the Focolare Movement, a Rome-based worldwide Catholic lay organization, to lecture at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters on September 5. After the lecture, DHARMA WORLD interviewed Dr. Busquet on the content of his new book and his thoughts on interreligious dialogue.*

*Could you briefly explain the content of your new book, *Incontrarsi nell'Amore*, which we learned is based on your doctoral thesis on Founder Nikkyo Niwano?*

Four years ago, I was asked by the Focolare headquarters to take a doctorate in Buddhism at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome. I specialized in interreligious dialogue from an academic point of view, and speaking with my professors there, I thought that the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Nikkyo Niwano, would be a very good topic to choose as the focus of my research. That was because, as Paul Cardinal Poupard [former president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue] says in the preface of my book, Nikkyo Niwano was one of the most eminent Buddhist representatives who have entered into dialogue with the Christian world, as well as other religions, but specifically with the Christian world. During the last decades of the twentieth century, he was one of the most prominent Buddhist leaders who engaged in interreligious dialogue.

As you know, there are a lot of misunderstandings among people engaged in interreligious activities, because Buddhist categories and Christian categories in this case are not the same. People misunderstand concepts or words because they do not mean the same in the categories of the two religions. One of the main aims of my research and my book, therefore, was to try to understand and to explain to Christian readers a few of such important religious concepts in Buddhist categories.

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One such concept is Ultimate Reality. Buddhists do not speak about God. That is because they have other categories of words, such as the Buddha, the Dharma, and so on, to express that Reality that is beyond all phenomena of our world. It does not mean that Buddhism is an atheistic belief.

One more thing is about man—the anthropology of Buddhism through the teachings of Founder Niwano, about how he is seeing man from a Buddhist point of view. By studying Founder Niwano's teaching and his understanding of man and Ultimate Reality, I tried to understand why he was so deeply engaged in interreligious dialogue and collaboration, and why he was so proud of proposing it to many people, both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. And in my research, another aim was to try to understand what we can learn from this, from a Christian point of view.

*You lived in Tokyo and Nagasaki for seventeen years, from 1987 to 2003, as a member of the Focolare Movement and engaged in dialogue with religionists in Japan. What are some of the fruits of your experience in Japan?*

Many things, of course. But from the religious point of view I will say one thing. As you know, most Japanese people do not identify with a specific religious organization or a single religious group. That is a typical situation for most of Japanese families and individuals. But at the same time, I think the Japanese people are a very religious people. They have a religious heart, which is called in Japanese *shukyoshin*. People are very sensitive to one another, and Japan has a long tradition of cultivating that sensitivity and of sharing a general sense of harmony with other people and with nature. I think that is a religious attitude, a very important and a very deep one.

The fact that many Japanese are indifferent to religion and

do not trust organized religion may be because there were incidents such as the sarin attack in the Tokyo subway by Aum Shinrikyo in 1995. There is this strong mistrust among the general public toward religious organizations because the public generally thinks that religious organizations focus too much on material things, power, money.

Rissho Kosei-kai, on the other hand, stresses religious experience, living religiously, putting into practice religious teachings in daily life, in being useful to society and other people. In the Focolare Movement also, while being a Christian institution, a Catholic one, we are open to people of other religions and we stress living in a religious way. I think from my experience in Japan, one of the things that I understood through this experience of collaboration with people of Rissho Kosei-kai is that the important thing is to show a religious experience and propose a religious experience. In that way people can open themselves to the deeper dimension of reality.

Mainly from my experience in Japan, I was able to experience at a very deep level that if we live as religious people and if we sincerely put into practice what our respective religions teach, then we can deeply meet each other in that spiritual dimension, in which we realize that we are really one. It is an experience that comes from my engagement in the Focolare Movement for almost thirty-five years.

I had a lot of opportunities to meet and work with members of Rissho Kosei-kai, and because of that, for me it is not just a question of diplomacy or an external collaboration, but as religious people we are making something possible together.

*In general, what do you think is the current status of interreligious dialogue, especially between Christianity and Buddhism? And what are your expectations of it for the future?*

As you know, in the Christian world, especially in the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965, there was a boom in interreligious dialogue. There was a very strong interest in interreligious dialogue, and I think it is possible to say that the Catholic Church was at the forefront of it.

After twenty or thirty years, however, people started to realize that there were not many concrete results. And at this present moment, I think that in the Christian world—and I would say specially in certain sectors of the Catholic Church—there is a kind of disappointment in what we can achieve through interreligious dialogue, except for the area of cooperation in the social field and things like that.

But, on the other hand, there are also very enlightened people with farsightedness who think that in this great encounter between East and West when globalization is going on, in which neither East nor West is self-sufficient, with all the means we have at our disposal, we are able to encounter in a deeper and more concrete way. I think in such

an age it's a challenge and a great chance to meet as religious people.

I prefer the expressions “religious dialogue” and “religious exchange” to “interreligious dialogue” because I think if we meet as religious people, as people who live and try to give importance to the spiritual dimension of ourselves, then we will be able to meet on a very deep level on which we can make together a religious experience without renouncing or denying our own religious background and identity.

As a Christian and as a member of the Catholic Church, I can meet with you, who as a sincere Buddhist is open to the truth, open to the light that comes from that dimension in which all of us can really deeply meet. And here is that truth, I will say as a Christian, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. God himself is working there, in the fact that we meet

*A new book by Dr. Busquet on Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.*

together with love, respecting each other, trying to understand each other, open to the religious experience of each other, when I am giving out of love my own experience to you and receiving you sincerely as a gift to me.

In this moment there is something new that has happened. It is not just an exchange of ideas or beliefs or experiences that enrich us mutually. It is something new that we are experiencing together through the fact that we are just encountering each other in this way. And as a Buddhist open to the truth, you have the same experience—a deeper understanding of this enlightening experience of the Dharma, and you are also receiving something. We are open to that Mystery, to the Universal Law, to God, who is giving himself to us in the very moment of encountering each other in love. □

# To Build a Civilization of Love

## Pope Benedict XVI on Islam in a Global Age

by Harold Kasimow

*The author of this essay feels that the views on interreligious dialogue held by the head of the Roman Catholic Church have been misconstrued. The pope believes that such dialogue may help reduce violence and promote justice and peace, but its ultimate goal is the quest for truth. It must not only be about recognition of similarities, but also about the differences.*

On September 12, 2006, at the University of Regensburg in Bavaria, Pope Benedict XVI delivered a lecture titled “Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections.” In it he explored the relationship between faith and reason in Christianity, but the speech is best remembered for its perceived anti-Muslim rhetoric.

The reaction that the speech provoked among Muslims led to mass protests, fatwas, and even attacks on churches. Karen Armstrong, a prominent scholar of comparative religion, represented the thoughts of many when she said that the pope had, “most unfortunately, withdrawn from the interfaith initiatives inaugurated by his predecessor, John Paul II, at a time when they are more desperately needed than ever.”<sup>1</sup>

I disagree. Pope Benedict did not use that speech to provoke a global controversy, to provoke a clash of civilizations. On the contrary, his hope was to foster conversation, to urge the Muslim world to make it clear to Islamists that violence in the name of God is un-Islamic. He also wanted to start a new chapter in interreligious dialogue between Chris-

tianity and Islam based on an honest and frank assessment not only of the affinities but also of the differences between the two traditions.

While John Paul II is justifiably lauded for his work in interfaith dialogue, Pope Benedict’s approach actually represents a step forward from his predecessor. It has already had positive results: in the three years since the speech in question, Muslim leaders and the Roman Catholic Church have engaged in unprecedented levels of dialogue. One may hope that this lecture, which caused so much pain, may yet help, in the pope’s words, “to build a civilization of love” and to contribute to creating a society where strangers will become friends.

The controversial passage in the Regensburg lecture came near the beginning. Pope Benedict told his audience he had just read a book that included a conversation from 1391 between a Muslim intellectual and a Christian Byzantine emperor. The pope quoted the emperor:

“Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only *evil and inhuman*, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.” The emperor, after having expressed himself so forcefully, goes on to explain in detail the reasons why spreading the faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul. “God,” he says, “is not pleased by blood—and not acting reasonably . . . is contrary to God’s nature.”<sup>2</sup>

When I first read about this talk, I too was puzzled why the pope chose to quote a fourteenth-century ruler who clearly associated Islam with violence. If he wanted to demonstrate the rationality of God and show that violence is not rational, why not choose a passage from the Bible? Is there really less violence in the Bible than in the Qur’an? To determine why the pope chose this quotation, we must first understand his views on Islam and his views on interreligious dialogue.

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Because John Paul II was so renowned for his dedication to interfaith dialogue and because the Regensburg lecture came so early in Benedict's tenure, it is tempting to believe that this pope has no interest in reaching out to other faiths. But from early on in his papacy, Benedict emphasized the importance of interreligious dialogue. On August 20, 2005—four months after his election, more than a year before the Regensburg lecture—the pope delivered his first major address to Muslims, in Cologne, Germany. In the talk, he labeled Christian-Muslim dialogue “a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends.”<sup>3</sup> The pope has long felt that relativism, not any other religion, is Christianity's greatest enemy. In 2003, he wrote that “relativism has become the central problem for faith in our time.”<sup>4</sup> Other religions are potential allies in the battle against relativism and secularism.

But what of his views on Islam? Does the pope agree with the Byzantine emperor? In his 1997 book *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millennium: An Interview with Peter Seewald*, the future pope laid out why Christian-Muslim dialogue is so difficult. First, there is a technical problem: there is no one who can speak for Islam as a whole. Second, Christianity and Islam see their role in society differently: “The Koran is a total religious law, which regulates the whole of political and social life and insists that the whole order of life be Islamic. *Sharia* shapes society from beginning to end.”<sup>5</sup> In a later conversation with Seewald, he speaks of the radical distinction between the way Muslims view the Qur'an and the way Christians view the Bible: “Moslems believe that the Koran was directly dictated by God. It is not mediated by any history; no human intermediary was needed; it is a message direct from God. The Bible, on the other hand, is quite different. It is mediated to us by a history.”<sup>6</sup>

Third, and most important for understanding why the pope quotes the Byzantine emperor is his concern about the rise of a violent strain of Islamism. In the interview with Seewald he states: “There is a noble Islam, embodied, for example, by the King of Morocco, and there is also the extremist, terrorist Islam, which again, one must not identify with Islam as a whole, which would do it an injustice.”<sup>7</sup> This is a reflection of the view of his major advisor, Fr. Samir Khalil Samir, who stated, “it is important not to confuse Islam with Islamism.”<sup>8</sup>

Just before he became pope, then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger wrote on this issue in his book *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*. He wrote: “Yet even Islam, with all the greatness it represents, is always in danger of losing balance, letting violence have a place and letting religion slide away into mere outward observance and ritualism.”<sup>9</sup> He continued by admitting that Christianity faces

the same problem: “And there are of course, as we all know but too well, diseased forms of Christianity—such as when the crusaders, on capturing the holy city of Jerusalem, where Christ died for all men, for their part indulged in a blood-bath of Moslems and Jews. What that means is that religion demands the making of distinctions, distinctions between different forms of religion and distinctions within a religion itself, so as to find the way to its higher points.”<sup>10</sup> It does not take much reading between the lines to see that the pope thinks the “making of distinctions” is a more pressing need for Islam than it is for Christianity.

Thus we see that, on the one hand, the pope recognizes the necessity of dialogue between Christianity and Islam and, on the other hand, recognizes the radical differences between the two traditions. For Benedict, interreligious dialogue is a path that may help reduce violence and promote justice and peace, but the ultimate goal is the quest for truth. Dialogue is not simply about mutual recognition of similarities between the two religions; it also must be about the differences.

*Thus we see that, on the one hand, the pope recognizes the necessity of dialogue between Christianity and Islam and, on the other hand, recognizes the radical differences between the two traditions.*

If the story of modern interfaith dialogue between Catholicism and Islam were a love affair, John Paul II's encounter with Islam would be the first stage of the romance, when lovers see a reflection of themselves in each other. Benedict's approach signals the maturing of a relationship, when each party has to figure out a way to coexist while maintaining his or her unique identity. As the future pope said in 1999, “Let me speak plainly: Anyone who expects the dialogue between religions

to result in their unification is bound for disappointment. This is hardly possible within our historical time, and perhaps it is not even desirable.”<sup>11</sup>

Now that we have considered some of the pope's statements on Islam, we can understand his use of the emperor's quote more fully. It addresses his primary critique of Islam, that too many of its adherents use violence. His lecture, which addresses the synthesis between revelation and reason in the Christian tradition, seems to argue that Islam could benefit from the moderating effect of reason. From Benedict's perspective, it would be helpful for Islam to engage more fully with Greek thought, as Christianity did two thousand years ago. A week after the lecture, he clarified his views: “[I]n no way did I want to make my own the negative words spoken by the Medieval emperor in this dialogue, and . . . their polemical content does not express my personal conviction. My intention was quite different: . . . I wanted to explain that it is not religion and violence but rather religion and reason that go together.”<sup>12</sup>

On October 13, 2006—little more than a month after the Regensburg lecture—thirty-eight Muslim scholars and leaders from different parts of the world wrote “An Open Letter to the Pope” in response to the lecture. In this friendly letter, they wanted to correct some errors in the pope's talk, in-

cluding his remarks about the verse from the Qur'an which states there is no compulsion in religion, and to explain the Muslim understanding of God's transcendence, the idea of reason in Islam, and a number of other core ideas. The letter expressed gratitude and profound respect for the pope. The letter ended:

Muslims also appreciated your unprecedented personal expression of sorrow, and your clarification and assurance (on the 17th of September) that your quote does not reflect your own personal opinion, as well as the Cardinal Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone's affirmation (on the 16th of September) of the conciliar document *Nostra Aetate*. Finally, Muslims appreciate that (on September 25th) in front of an assembled group of ambassadors from Muslim countries you expressed "total and profound respect for all Muslims." We hope that we will all avoid the mistakes of the past and live together in the future in peace, mutual acceptance and respect.<sup>13</sup>

A year later, a most extraordinary event occurred. On October 13, 2007, 138 Muslim leaders from more than forty countries, a very powerful group of prominent Muslims with a great deal of influence in many parts of the world, addressed a new statement to the pope. The document, titled "A Common Word Between Us and You," has now been signed by more than three hundred Muslim leaders. The thesis of this document is that at the heart and center of Christianity, of Islam, and of Judaism is the love of God and the love of one's neighbor.

This document states: "Christians and Muslims . . . make up more than 55 percent of the world's population, making the relationship between these two religious communities the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world. If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace. . . . The very survival of the world itself is perhaps at stake."<sup>14</sup>

I find the ending of this document particularly powerful: "So let our differences not cause hatred and strife between us. Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works." They then cite Sura 5:48 from the Qur'an: "If God had so willed, He would have made all of you one community, but [He has not done so] so that He may test you in what He has given you; so compete with one another in good works. To God you shall return and He will tell you [the truth] about that which you have been disputing."<sup>15</sup>

This document is significant not only for what it says but also for the fact it was signed by representatives of so many diverse streams of Islam. David Ford, professor of divinity at Cambridge University, claims: "So often the extremists have been able to use the modern media. Now finally there is a platform, a mode, for the moderate mainstream, traditional Muslim leaders to come together and find consensus."<sup>16</sup>

A few weeks later, for the first time in history, the king of Saudi Arabia, protector of the holiest city in Islam, came to Rome to meet the pope. As a direct result of this meeting, King Abdullah organized an unprecedented interfaith conference in Madrid in 2008, attended by representatives of many of the world's religions, including Judaism. This demonstrates to me that the pope is helping to bring about an age of global dialogue. For this pope dialogue is a tool to help fight what he sees as the enemy of all religions: secularism and relativism.

In *Pirke Avot*, one of the best-known and beloved rabbinic texts, the rabbis state: "Any dispute which is for the sake of Heaven will in the end yield results."<sup>17</sup> I believe that the pope gave the Regensburg lecture for the sake of Heaven. One can therefore hope that this controversial speech will eventually lead to greater peace, to what the pope calls "a civilization of love." □

## Notes

1. Karen Armstrong, "We Cannot Afford to Maintain These Ancient Prejudices against Islam," September 18, 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk>.
2. Pope Benedict XVI, "The Regensburg Lecture," *The Regensburg Lecture*, ed. James V. Schall, S.J. (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2007), pp. 133–34.
3. Pope Benedict XVI, "Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI," Cologne, August 20, 2005, <http://www.vatican.va>.
4. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), pp. 117 and 143.
5. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millennium: An Interview with Peter Seewald*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), p. 244.
6. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *God and the World: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), p. 151.
7. Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, p. 244.
8. Fr. Samir Khalil Samir, quoted on <http://www.ratzingerfanclub.com>.
9. Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, p. 204.
10. Ibid.
11. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Many Religions—One Covenant: Israel, the Church and the World*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), p. 109.
12. Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, Wednesday, September 20, 2006, <http://www.vatican.va>.
13. "Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI," October 13, 2006.
14. "A Common Word Between Us and You," October 13, 2007, <http://www.acommonword.com>.
15. Ibid.
16. Quote in Robert Pigott, "Emerging Voice of Mainstream Islam," October 12, 2007, <http://www.news.bbc.co.uk>.
17. *Mishnah Avot, Torah from Our Sages*, trans. Jacob Neusner, (Dallas: Rossel Books, 1984), p. 164.

# Each of Us Has a Role in World Peace

by Nikkyo Niwano

*This essay is part of a continuing series of translations from a volume of inspirational writings by the 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.*

From the very beginning of Rissho Kosei-kai, we have taught about a “humble heart” as being crucial to our mental attitude about how to live. A humble heart means that everything we do should arise out of self-reflection and from a sense of contrition for our faults. The essential way through which we can bring happiness to ourselves and peace to the world around us is by putting aside our small self and acting according to the greater truth.

World-renewal through religion involves rebuilding the hearts and minds of all people. As we painstakingly strive to do this, the world will become steadily brighter and more harmonious. This is the Right Path. Rebuilding hearts and minds aims at creating people who seek eternal truth rather than immediate gain, who take joy in spiritual attainment rather than material prosperity. Such rebuilding is very difficult, and many people regard it as impossible, like waiting a hundred years for the Yellow River to run clear, as the ancient Chinese proverb has it. But actually, it is not that difficult at all. It is far easier in fact than to change an object from one substance to another. So for example, you would think it impossible if you were asked to change wood into iron, but on the other hand, if you were asked to do away with all the discord that possesses your mind, you wouldn't think that completely inconceivable, would you? You would probably feel you could do it if you tried.

From the distant past, there have been many instances where evil and cruel people have been quickly reformed through the words of eminent priests and persons of great virtue. If you want to change, you can, almost in an instant. Toward the end of chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra, “Devadatta,” we are told how the eight-year-old daughter of the dragon king (symbolizing people of different races who live in isolated places outside the mainstream of culture) attained enlightenment as a buddha.

When the bodhisattva Manjushri stated that the daughter

of the dragon king could speedily attain enlightenment, Shariputra demurred, and said to the girl, “The Buddha Way is so vast that only after passing through innumerable kalpas, enduring hardship, accumulating good works, and perfectly practicing the Perfections can it be accomplished. How can a child of a savage tribe, a female with many hindrances, and one who is only eight years old, become a buddha?” Thereupon, the dragon king's daughter silently held out the precious jewel she was carrying and presented it to the Buddha, who immediately accepted it. She then said to Shariputra, “I offered my jewel and the World-honored One has accepted it. Was this action speedy?” He answered, “Most speedy.” The girl said, “See me become a buddha even more rapidly than that,” and she then and there transformed into the buddha of the world Spotless in the southern quarter. Shariputra and all the congregation were astonished.

This episode tells us that if you only would be honest in facing the truth, your heart can change in an instant. We

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*Nikkyo Niwano, the 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.*

might be inclined to believe that because people today are so caught up with material things that it might be difficult, or even impossible, for them to change how they think, but that is not so. I believe in people. I do not give up on them. I believe that they will approach truth, goodness, and the sacred without fail if they are exposed to a good and correct religious teaching. When the hearts of many are changed in this way, the realm of eternal tranquillity will be established in this world.

Perfect peace might be far in the future, but it is not a dream because the means to attain it are clearly laid out as various stages in our world today. The means may seem impossibly involved and the goal far beyond our imagining, but we will reach our destination step by step without fail. There is no doubt about this. There are, however, two important points we must remember. First, human happiness can be found not only after arriving at the final goal, the Land of Tranquil Light (the world in a state of perfect peace), but in each of the countless stages of practice it takes to get there. Attaining the first stage is to experience the happiness of that stage, and the same goes for the second, third, and all the rest. If we lose sight of this, our goal will seem so distant that we will be merely bewildered and anxious, and unable to take even the first step.

The second point is that we must not be under the illusion that only activities labeled “peace this-and-that” make up work that contributes to the goal of peace. Such activities are like the pinnacle atop the great hall of a temple complex that reflects in the morning and evening sun, drawing all eyes to it. However, if it were not for the auxiliary buildings surrounding it, making up the rest of the complex, and the foundations underpinning those buildings, it could not survive the blows of a sudden storm. In Rissho Kosei-kai, it is not the founder alone who works for world peace. Each and every member, like each pillar and each foundation of every building in a temple complex, works every day at his or her religious tasks to bring about peace. Unless we are all able to liberate people from the suffering caused by the defilements, and bring about a change of heart in those caught up in the waging of war, how can we ever achieve peace in this world?

The Preamble to the Constitution of UNESCO states: “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.” This is absolutely right. Tackling the violence in the hearts of people and converting it to peace and brightness is the way to realize peace.

People are born into this world with different roles. What each achieves by fulfilling his or her role to the maximum is essentially exactly the same. What do I mean by this? There are two ways of looking at it. The first is the personal aspect and the second is the social aspect.

Let us look at the personal aspect first. People’s characters are gradually cultivated through their own efforts and practice, as they pursue their individual roles and values in so-

ciety. The place they eventually reach as they build their character further and further is in modern terms “self-perfection,” and in Buddhist terms, the attainment of buddhahood. Thus, however different people are in character, physical strength, talents, occupation, or position, they need only to demonstrate perfectly what they are made of for them all to perfect their potential as human beings, which in other words is to achieve buddhahood. In this, all people are absolutely equal.

And society also benefits. When we make serious efforts to fulfill our own goals, values, and roles, and achieve them to the full, our work blends harmoniously with the work that all other people are doing to bring about a great balance, so that all aspects of society function smoothly, and genuine progress is encouraged. We can say that this is social peace, or in Buddhist terms the Land of Tranquil Light. Thus, however different our roles in society are, you can be assured that if you fulfill yours to the maximum, you will be equal with all others in being responsible for bringing about the realization of peace and the manifestation of the Land of Tranquil Light in this world. □

*Itten shikai kaiiki myoho, meaning “One heaven and the four seas are attributed to the Wonderful Dharma,” inscribed by Founder Nikkyo Niwano.*

# The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

## Chapter 16

### Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata

#### (1)

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

**INTRODUCTION** As frequently mentioned, this chapter constitutes the core of the realm of origin. Together with chapter 2, "Tactfulness," which constitutes the core of the realm of trace, it is the nucleus of the entire Lotus Sutra.

Since antiquity it has been held that this chapter has three important meanings: (1) opening up the near and revealing the far, (2) opening up the trace and revealing the origin, and (3) opening up the temporary and revealing the true. The expression "opening up the near and revealing the far" (*k'ai-chin-hsien-yüan* in Chinese) means that we take the fact that we see near at hand as our departure point and by gradually tracing the origin of this fact reveal that which is far off. The fact that is near at hand is that Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in this world, attained enlightenment, and preached the path of enlightenment to many. That which is far off is the Buddha's having attained buddhahood in the infinite past.

Could Shakyamuni have suddenly appeared, unrelated in any way whatsoever to the history of the universe and of humankind, and become enlightened to the true Law as it appears in the Lotus Sutra? Such a thing is beyond the realm of the possible. The true Law must have existed since the moment the universe was formed. Those who lived in antiquity, however, did not know the Law, living without knowing what they were doing. They lived as their instincts commanded them.

Because instinct is based on the fundamental delusion that the physical body is the self, as consciousness developed within human beings it gradually bolstered the covetousness of instinct, and consequently human beings came to know numerous sufferings unknown to other animals. For humanity this is a great contradiction and tragedy. Unless this contradiction can be resolved, the suffering of human beings will only increase. Nevertheless, human beings cannot regress to being instinctual creatures like birds and other animals. Rather, humankind must, as consciousness devel-

ops, look for a means of ameliorating the torment that arises from it.

What is vital for accomplishing this? There can be only one thing. With the advanced wisdom of human beings, we learn the true Law and align our way of living along the path of the truth and the Law. There is no other path. Someone had to become aware of this path and show it to humankind. When all seemed impossible, the path opened up. That which is absolutely necessary will invariably emerge. Out of this necessity, Shakyamuni appeared in the world and attained enlightenment. It is no accident that he was born into this world. He was manifested in this world because it was necessary for humankind. By means of Shakyamuni's enlightenment, the true Law, which had existed in full authority since primeval times but had not been grasped by anyone, was made clear for the first time. The present chapter elucidates this, and through the proximate fact of Shakyamuni's birth and attainment of buddhahood, we can come to understand the true Law that has been in existence since time immemorial and realize that Shakyamuni attained buddhahood in the infinite past. Herein lies the meaning of "opening up the near and revealing the far."

The expression "opening up the trace and revealing the origin" (*k'ai-chi-hsien-pên* in Chinese) can be taken to mean "accepting the historical Buddha as a temporary manifestation of the Eternal Buddha and revealing the eternity of Shakyamuni Buddha," and is essentially the same as "opening up the near and revealing the far." Whereas "opening up the near and revealing the far" teaches that Shakyamuni is the Buddha who achieved enlightenment in the infinite past and elucidates that he is "neither arising nor perishing" in temporal terms, "opening up the trace and revealing the origin" clarifies the meaning of and relationship between the trace Buddha and the Original Buddha.

The Chinese term translated as "trace" also means "footprints." We are so constituted that whatever we look at, we

actually see not its substance, or true form, but only its “footprints.” For example, although we are certain that air exists, we cannot actually see it directly. All we can do is observe its “footprints” by looking at the rustling of leaves on trees and by feeling it on our skin.

We can directly perceive physical objects like stones, earth, and trees, but as everyone knows, all these are made up of invisible matter called elementary particles. No one has yet directly observed these elementary particles. Not even the world’s most sophisticated electron microscope can see them. Atomic physicists are able to grasp the existence of these entities only by tracing their activity, in other words, by means of their movement.

Even if something is not visible or tangible, as long as it leaves a trace or imprint of some kind, there is an entity. Precisely because it exists, there is a trace of it. Such reasoning also holds true for the existence of the Buddha. As long as there is a trace, there is an entity. Shakyamuni was an actual human being who was visible to anyone. As a consequence, he is also spoken of as the trace Buddha. In that he appeared in this world, he must have a true form, and this true buddha we speak of as the Original Buddha.

What kind of being is the Original Buddha? When and where does he exist and how does he act? The answer to these questions appears most clearly in the present chapter.

The phrase “opening up the temporary and revealing the true” (*k'ai-ch'üan-hsien-shih* in Chinese) exhorts us to “open up” the temporary, or expedient, teaching and thereby manifest that which is true. “Temporary” here means an instrumental truth. It is a provisional teaching that is a prerequisite to the preaching of the truth. By means of this expedient teaching, the minds of sentient beings have been elevated and people have been awakened to the way they truly ought to live, but for the most part this has been a rational awakening. An awakening that comes from reason is dispassionate; although one can enter the correct path and obtain peace of mind, such an awakening lacks the passionate energy necessary for extending that enlightenment to all people.

If enlightenment is not accompanied by an excitement that moves one to the very bottom of one’s heart, one will not lay hold of true religious strength. This vital awakening is based not on reason but on enlightenment that is directly tied to the buddha-nature that is one’s true essence. In other words, it is the kind of startling awareness that reverberates to the very depths of the heart.

This is the cardinal element of the present chapter. It teaches of the Eternal Original Buddha and elucidates the truth that we are alive through the benevolence of the Original Buddha. It is precisely because of this teaching that we feel an unlimited joy that seems to gush forth from the very depths of our bodies. This is not to imply that we should reject the expedient teaching. Rather, the teaching in chapter 16 opens up and reveals the truth that lies concealed within the expedient teaching, that is, it provides true life to

the expedient teaching, hence the expression “opening up the temporary and revealing the true.”

Those who are analytically inclined maintain that “opening up the temporary and revealing the true” refers to the realm of trace, the first half of the Lotus Sutra, and that “opening up the trace and revealing the origin” and “opening up the near and revealing the far” refer to the realm of origin, the latter half of the sutra. Such detailed inquiry is best left to the realm of scholarship, however; lay believers ought to accept chapter 16, the focus of the entire Lotus Sutra, as the culmination of all the teachings of the Buddha’s lifetime.

Let us now review the teaching of the realm of trace. The central teaching of the realm of trace is chapter 2, “Tactfulness,” and the essence of that chapter is the Ten Suchnesses. The doctrine of the Lotus Sutra is concentrated in these ten aspects of all existence: such a form, nature, embodiment, potency, function, primary cause, secondary cause, effect, recompense, and complete fundamental whole. The Ten Suchnesses, representing as they do the distillation of the teaching, have long been referred to as “the abbreviated Lotus Sutra.”

The Ten Suchnesses describe the state of the universe, that is, they are a concise expression of the fundamental law that pervades all phenomena. More precisely, they mean that all things in the universe have such a form, such a nature, such an embodiment, such a potency, such a function, such a primary cause, such a secondary cause, such an effect, and such a recompense. All things are based on the great law of the universe, and though in appearance they seem to constitute an infinite variety, in reality they are equally part of a great harmony from beginning (form) to end (recompense), that is, they are part of a complete fundamental whole.

From this alone, it is difficult to understand what that law is all about, so let us delve further. It is extremely important to recall that the ultimate basis of Shakyamuni’s enlightenment is the teaching of emptiness: Nothing in the universe is immutable, unrelated to others, and existing independently; everything is part of a great harmony. Why then does the word *emptiness* not appear in the Ten Suchnesses? It is merely my own conjecture, but could it not be that the doctrine of emptiness was so basic that to those who had heard the Buddha’s teaching over a long period it was self-evident, so that there was no need to preach it?

Emptiness is also a major premise of the teaching of the Twelve Causes and Conditions (see the January/February 2004 issue of *DHARMA WORLD*). The secondary cause of the Twelve Causes and Conditions is a condition, and because it is an indirect cause there must be another, fundamental cause, in other words, a primary cause. This fundamental, primary cause is ignorance. Ignorance is lack of wisdom, and “ignorance causes actions” means that our acts are based on a fundamental ignorance that prevents us from seeing things correctly. Hence it becomes a matter of what it is that we

see incorrectly, what we are ignorant of. The answer is that we are ignorant of the real aspect of all things. In other words, we are unaware of emptiness. We see those things that are originally empty in such a way that they seem to have real form. The teaching of the Twelve Causes and Conditions shows that ignorance is the source of all suffering. Hence, emptiness is a major premise of the Twelve Causes and Conditions.

The same is true of the Three Seals of the Law. When we distill the three teachings that “all things are impermanent,” “all things are devoid of self,” and “nirvana is tranquil,” we are left with emptiness. These teachings are in no way different from the tenet that all things are originally empty.

In the Ten Suchnesses, the idea of emptiness is expressed as “such a complete fundamental whole.” This means that when we look at everything in this world, from beginning (form) to end (recompense), it appears that there is a truly great transformation taking place and that phenomena are of infinite variety, but everything is penetrated by the true Law. In its deepest sense it means that whatever changes occur, from form to recompense, in the final analysis everything is empty and equal in that all things never fail to function according to the Law.

Let us now turn to the law that governs the changes from form to recompense.

*Form:* Everything has its own peculiar form or shape. Though at first glance things may seem identical, on closer examination each has a special form.

*Nature:* Each thing has a differentiated form, so it is entirely natural that this form is provided with specific characteristics. The individuality each possesses is its nature, or quality.

*Embodiment:* Whatever has form and nature also has substance, or embodiment. This does not mean that it possesses a special existence, that it exists eternally unchanged or that it exists unrelated to all else, complete in and of itself. It is the thing itself, its substance.

*Potency:* Whatever has embodiment possesses latent strength or energy—in other words, potency.

*Function:* When this potency comes into play, it always generates a function.

*Primary cause:* When this energy is set into action and performs some form of activity, there must always be an origin, a primary cause.

*Secondary cause:* That there is a primary cause does not mean that a certain function will be completed. It is due to the interrelatedness of various conditions that accord with the primary cause that a function can be completed. For example, if we have one morning glory seed (primary cause), without the necessary conditions, such as soil to plant it in and the appropriate temperature and moisture to nurture it, the seed will not germinate. These conditions we refer to as the secondary cause.

*Effect:* When an action is complete, it will produce a result, or effect.

*Recompense:* An effect does not merely come into existence and stop there. Rather, it always leaves some kind of trace, or residue. It is like the vapor of the air, which, when it comes into contact with the secondary cause of a plant, creates frost and as a consequence causes damage to crops. This kind of influence is called recompense.

*Complete fundamental whole:* Due to all the above, the reality in which we find ourselves entangled is so complex that it often seems impossible to determine what is cause and what is effect. All things occur in accordance with the law of the Ten Suchnesses, and at the same time within these changes the progress from form to recompense will always be fundamentally identical. This truth of ultimate nondifferentiation is called the complete fundamental whole.

The Ten Suchnesses represent the worldview of the Lotus Sutra. Because they are extremely hard to understand, Shakyamuni hesitated before preaching them: “Enough, Shariputra, there is no need to say more. Wherefore? [Because] the Law which the Buddha has perfected is the chief unprecedented Law, and difficult to understand. Only a buddha together with a buddha can fathom the true aspect of all things.”

What is it that we must learn from the law of the Ten Suchnesses taught in chapter 2? And how ought we to apply that to the way in which we live our lives? Of course, there are an infinite number of ideas and teachings that develop from this outlook on the world, but I believe that first of all we must ascertain through this the undifferentiated (the aspect of equality) and differentiated (the intrinsic discriminated form) states of human existence. We must establish a view that merges these two.

This view when applied to human beings emerges in chapter 5, “The Parable of the Herbs,” blossoms in chapter 11, “Beholding the Precious Stupa,” and bears fruit in chapter 16, “Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata.” To confirm this connection, let us trace the thread of the view of humanity that emerges from the Ten Suchnesses.

To humankind, the most important thing is the mind, the heart. The mind is the core of a human being, and it is the source of all activity, the driving force. One might say that the mind is what makes the person. If you recall the teaching of the Three Thousand [Realms] in One Thought, I believe you will agree (see the January/February 1998 issue). Let us then restrict our consideration of the teaching of the Ten Suchnesses to the issue of the human mind.

As I have frequently noted, all human beings possess the buddha-nature. In actual manifestation, human beings appear to have a variety of minds, but if we pursue the essence of each, we will discover that all human beings possess an identical buddha-nature. This truth is known as “the equality of the buddha-nature.” I have also pointed out that this buddha-nature does not exist in its authentic form in the human mind but is thickly overlaid by the dust and rubbish of defilements. Furthermore, as I commented in the discus-

sion of the Twelve Causes and Conditions (see the January/February 2004 issue), because we have long been involved in the cycle of transmigration due to ignorance, our true mind has been so heavily buried beneath the accumulation of defilements that this original mind has come to appear entirely different.

The outward appearance appears to be entirely different, but its true nature remains the unchanged buddha-nature. That the mind appears altered is due entirely to the accumulated defilements. It is like rays of sunlight, which as they emanate from the sun are entirely colorless but appear red when seen through smoke, become greenish in a forest, and turn to seven colors when passed through a prism. Moreover, when the sky is covered in thick, dark cloud, the world looks gray. Just as the sun's true light shines brilliantly when we remove the impurities in the air, our original buddha-nature shines forth when we remove the dust and debris of defilements from our minds. This is what is meant in Buddhism by the expression "extinguish defilements."

More than anything else it is this that we ought to learn from the teachings of the Twelve Causes and Conditions and the Ten Suchnesses. We must become aware that we can change our mental state of our own accord. In other words, should the mind turn upward, it will open toward the buddha-nature, and should it turn downward, it will fall into the hell of foul impurities. The doctrine of the Three Thousand [Realms] in One Thought, which evolved from the teaching of the Ten Suchnesses, teaches this unlimited potential of the human mind.

Despite the fact that the minds of all human beings equally possess the buddha-nature, the forms in which it appears are extremely varied. There are combative people, mild-mannered people, selfish people, compassionate people, cold-blooded people, kind people, profound people, and frivolous people. Consequently, it is true that human beings are all equal in terms of the buddha-nature, but it is also true that in appearance they are different. Therefore when one looks at a human being, if one does not see both the undifferentiated and the differentiated, one cannot grasp the truth of humanity as it is.

Upon deeper reflection, we understand that the differentiated aspect is not fixed but is in constant flux. That is to say, the primary cause in a person's mind, if it encounters suitable conditions (the secondary cause), can become either meanness or nobility, or can turn from humility to perversity. Accordingly, we are equal in the sense that we can turn to whatever spiritual realm we choose. As a result, the differentiated form that we see before us is not a fixed thing, but can be turned in any direction, depending on the inclination of the mind. This is the teaching of the Three Thousand [Realms] in One Thought, which is the quintessence of the teaching of the Ten Suchnesses.

Earlier I noted that when we look at a person, we must see both the undifferentiated and the differentiated aspects. That means that we should look upon these two aspects not

as fixed but as flexible. This, I believe, is the culmination of Shakyamuni's view of the Middle Path. This way of thought leans toward neither the undifferentiated aspect (the aspect of equality) nor the differentiated aspect (the aspect of distinction), yet does not merely assume an intermediate viewpoint between the two. Instead it finds truth in the unlimited possibility of mobility.

The ultimate way of seeing things that was taught by Shakyamuni is the view of the Middle Path, but in his sermons instructing disciples and lay people there had to be a certain order. Further, the manner of teaching had to suit the listeners' inner capacity and be adapted to the circumstances.

When an ordinary person views other people, he or she is inclined to focus on the distinguishing aspects. As you consider how you yourself view others, you will undoubtedly notice the truth of this. Accordingly, Shakyamuni devoted special attention to teaching the equality of human beings and the equality of the buddha-nature. This is true also of the teaching of the Ten Suchnesses, and at least superficially it seems that he preached this as a strict philosophical principle quite carefully explicated. Nevertheless, we must recall that Shakyamuni's motivation was the deeply compassionate wish to make everyone aware of the equality of the buddha-nature. As evidence, in the somewhat philosophical sermon in chapter 2, when Shakyamuni became aware that Shariputra alone had become enlightened, he quickly related the Parable of the Burning House and taught how all human beings could attain the enlightenment of the Buddha equally, that is, how they could reveal their buddha-nature. Thereupon Subhuti, Maha-Katyayana, Maha-Kashyapa, and Maha-Maudgalyayana attained enlightenment.

Moreover, in chapter 5, "The Parable of the Herbs," in the Parable of the Three Grasses and Two Trees Shakyamuni preached the correct way of seeing both the undifferentiated and the differentiated aspects of human beings, and also guaranteed that everyone would attain buddhahood. In chapter 7, "The Parable of the Magic City," he explained once again what true salvation consists of and provided great encouragement to his followers. In later sermons many more people were given the guarantee of buddhahood.

No matter how many metaphors one may employ, however, it is extremely difficult to teach the truth of the equality of the buddha-nature theoretically and to bring another person to understand it in a way that penetrates to the bottom of the heart. It may be possible when addressing someone of considerable spiritual capacity, but it is a hard task when dealing with an ordinary person. It is hardly necessary to mention that Shakyamuni's desire was not to bring a mere handful of superior disciples to enlightenment but to save all humankind.

If that is the case, the issue then becomes what method is necessary to bring ordinary people to a deep awareness. The most effective way is to point to something that has form: not to teach by means of abstract theories but rather to elu-

cidate in terms of things that are visible. Shakyamuni, of course, made use of this method, too. In chapter 11, "Beholding the Precious Stupa," one of the climaxes of the drama of the Lotus Sutra, he caused the Precious Stupa to spring up out of the earth before the assembly and seated himself within it. This stupa symbolized the buddha-nature. When he sat down in it together with the Tathagata Abundant Treasures, he showed that he embodied the buddha-nature. This is clear in his words "In this stupa there is the whole body of the Tathagata."

Shakyamuni united the wisdom to discern the real aspect of all things, the ability to guide people by explaining that wisdom to them, and unlimited compassion toward all living beings. In other words, he was the greatest embodiment of the buddha-nature in this world.

Not only were others conscious of this, but he himself carefully nurtured this self-awareness. This is apparent in the Buddha's first encounters following his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. On his way to the city of Gaya, he was asked by Upaka, a young follower of another teacher, "Venerable One, what do you seek in leaving the world? Who is your teacher?" Shakyamuni replied, "Victor am I over all, and omniscient. For me there is no teacher. I alone am the perfectly enlightened." When he met the five ascetics at Deer Park, they called him "friend" and "Gautama," but he solemnly told them, "Bhikshus, do not address a tathagata by name or as 'friend.' Bhikshus, I am a tathagata, a perfectly enlightened one."

If anyone else made such a declaration, it would seem as if he or she were bragging of his or her own power. But in regard to the Buddha's self-knowledge, no such attitude was apparent. His was a self-realization that transcended the distinction between subject and object, one in which he embraced everything in the universe within himself, so if he had not had this self-assurance and had not declared himself the Buddha it would have amounted to a falsehood. The Buddha's self-awareness was a state of selflessness that was unified with everything in heaven and earth and was clearly far removed from the commonplace thinking of worldly ways.

Shakyamuni clearly had the understanding of a buddha. The people of his age offered reverence to him as one possessed of perfect human character, as a superior leader of all human beings, and as a person like an affectionate, loving father. Unless we grasp this background of the interchange between Shakyamuni and the veneration of the assembly, we will be unable to comprehend the Lotus Sutra. Therefore I would like you to visualize as clearly as possible the circumstances of that time. If you can do so, you will be able to accept the mystical spectacle described in chapter 11.

Up to this point, the truth of the equality of the buddha-nature had often been taught. Therefore, the listeners understood it well—in a theoretical sense—but did not clearly grasp it as a reality, so it merely spun round and round in their minds. We, on the other hand, when we consider

Shakyamuni, respect him unconditionally as a being who possessed the ideals of humanity and love him earnestly as our savior who devoted boundless compassion to us. We are convinced that he was a being without parallel in this world. In chapter 11, however, he said, pointing at the stupa that had sprung up out of the earth, "In this stupa there is the whole body of the Tathagata." Tathagata means "one who has come from Thusness," or the supreme Truth; that means that within this stupa dwells the supreme Truth. As already stated, this stupa was a symbol of the buddha-nature. Consequently, if we delve deeper, we see that this means that a person who manifests the buddha-nature is one who embodies Thusness, or the supreme Truth.

In order to open the Precious Stupa, Shakyamuni rose into the sky and came to a halt before the stupa, thus showing the listeners, who until then had thought that buddhahood was no more than an ideal state far removed from reality, that an actual human being was capable of attaining buddhahood. In this way they developed the ability to see a connection between the living human being and the buddha-nature, which they had previously regarded only as a philosophical principle, an abstract ideal. In other words, they came to see that the Buddha who stood before them was the embodiment of the buddha-nature. And from this sprang the desire to become the same kind of ideal human being.

Shakyamuni opened the door of the Precious Stupa. That is, he revealed to the assembly the truth of the buddha-nature. Within the stupa the Tathagata Abundant Treasures, symbolizing Thusness, or the supreme Truth, in its complete form, was seated in meditation. Abundant Treasures praised Shakyamuni, saying, "Excellent! Excellent! Shakyamuni Buddha has preached the Law Flower Sutra." In other words, he praised Shakyamuni for having mobilized Thusness, manifested its merit, and developed it for human society.

Had Thusness not moved into action, it would have been as if it had not existed in the first place, and its true merit would not have appeared. Unless the buddha-nature is manifested in a living human being, its value is not exercised. Moreover, unless the buddha-nature is developed in all humanity through its truth being taught to the multitude, its value is not perfected.

Here lies the true value of the Buddha, who was the embodiment of the buddha-nature and explicated its truth. As a consequence, Abundant Treasures invited Shakyamuni to sit with him, sharing his throne. He showed the assembly that they sat side by side as buddhas of equal stature.

Shakyamuni was the embodiment of the buddha-nature. He gave living form to the buddha-nature and taught it for the benefit of humankind, that is, he activated Thusness. At the same time, it is implied that Abundant Treasures, the Buddha of the Law-body (the Buddha of absolute Truth), and Shakyamuni, the manifest-body Buddha (the Buddha who appeared in this world as a human being), were one and equal.

This teaching is also associated with chapter 15, "Springing

Up out of the Earth.” The host of great bodhisattvas who “had all before been dwelling in [infinite] space below this saha world” enjoying contemplation “sprang forth from below.” This signifies that the teaching of the truth that they had been contemplating was put into action in the world.

Because we are human beings of a later age, we are able to analyze and comprehend the dramatic events that unfolded in the sutra, but the disciples and the assembly that actually witnessed in India 2,500 years ago how countless great bodhisattvas sprang up from crevices in the earth could only have stood by in blank amazement. Shakyamuni said of these great bodhisattvas, who had achieved a state clearly more elevated than the bodhisattvas who had for long years engaged in practice in this world, that they were those he had instructed in the distant past.

The disciples and the rest of the assembly were confused: Shakyamuni, whom they had always believed to have been born as a human being in this world and to have become an embodiment of the buddha-nature through his attainment of enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, was saying that he had instructed these great bodhisattvas in the distant past. Temporally this was implausible, and spatially they could not comprehend where this instruction could have taken place. When they considered how Shakyamuni, the Buddha of present existence, and Abundant Treasures, the Buddha of the Law-body, sat side by side in the Precious Stupa, they could sense a certain thread of connectivity, but that thread was tangled in mysterious darkness, and no matter how hard they tried, they could not comprehend it.

When the assembly was in this delicate state, the sermon of chapter 16 commenced. Let us now turn to the text.

**TEXT** At that time the Buddha said to the bodhisattvas and all the great assembly: “Believe and discern, all you good sons, the veracious word of the Tathagata.” Again he said to the great assembly: “Believe and discern the veracious word of the Tathagata.” And again he said to all the great assembly: “Believe and discern the veracious word of the Tathagata.”

**COMMENTARY** The admonition is repeated three times. From this we can infer just how important the forthcoming teaching will be.

• *The veracious word.* “Veracious,” meaning “true,” is used in correlation with “tactfulness.” Tactfulness is repeatedly advanced as a valuable teaching in the realm of trace, because the truth is presented in various ways in accordance with the capabilities of those who hear it. Unless ordinary people become acquainted with tactfulness, they cannot approach the truth.

“The veracious word” means truth in full measure, undiluted truth. It is neither sugarcoated to make it more palatable nor mixed with bitter substances to jolt people awake, but is simple, unvarnished truth. One reason for clarifying the truth in its unvarnished state at this point is that Shakyamuni’s disciples had advanced in understanding far

enough that he felt it was now appropriate. Another reason is that Shakyamuni was nearing the time when he would depart from the world, and if he did not preach the supreme Truth at this point it would not be complete. Upon hearing the phrase “the veracious word” we are clearly forewarned that what is about to be explicated is indeed profound.

**TEXT** Then the great host of bodhisattvas, Maitreya at their head, folded their hands and said to the Buddha: “World-honored One! Be pleased to expound the matter, and we will believingly receive the Buddha’s words.” Thus they spoke three times, repeating the words: “Be pleased to expound the matter, and we will believingly receive the Buddha’s words.”

**COMMENTARY** The repetition of this plea indicates both the fervor of the bodhisattvas’ desire to hear the Law and their resolve to put it into practice. “Believingly receive” conveys that fervor and the resolve to embrace the truth and never forget it.

Another point that should not be overlooked is that it is Maitreya who assumed the role of representative of the assembly in requesting that the Buddha preach the Law. In chapter 1, “Introductory,” when the Buddha sent forth from the circle of white hair between his eyebrows a ray of light that illuminated innumerable domains, it was Maitreya who asked Manjushri to resolve his doubts. In response, Manjushri reflected upon past experience and replied that this act had always signified that the Buddha was about to preach the Great Vehicle sutra called the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law.

This tells us that Manjushri was the most prominent of the great bodhisattvas, first among equals, as it were. Later, in chapter 12, “Devadatta,” the Buddha caused Manjushri and the Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulation to discuss the merits of the Lotus Sutra. And in chapter 14, “A Happy Life,” Manjushri served as the representative of the assembly to ask the Buddha to expound the Law.

From the second half of chapter 15, “Springing Up out of the Earth,” onward, however, Maitreya became the spokesman for the assembly. Manjushri appeared again in chapter 24, “The Bodhisattva Wonder Sound,” but only in a secondary role. In the present chapter, as well, Maitreya served in a leading role. This was not accidental. Manjushri was the bodhisattva associated with wisdom. Therefore, in the realm of trace, which is the teaching of wisdom, for the most part it was Manjushri who acted as representative of the assembly. Maitreya was the bodhisattva associated with compassion. Therefore, in the realm of origin, which is the teaching of compassion, it was he who assumed the representative role.

When we come to chapter 28, “Encouragement of the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue,” we will see Universal Virtue, who was associated with practice, in the role of representative. (The bodhisattva Universal Virtue was considered to

*Pictures of the bodhisattvas Maitreya, Universal Virtue, and Manjushri, hanging at the entrance at the Great Sacred Hall of the Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo.*

preside over principle, practice, and the witness to enlightenment and the truth, and the Lotus Sutra especially emphasizes practice.)

The sequence of the bodhisattvas' relative prominence gives us a good view of the structure of the Lotus Sutra: Manjushri—wisdom, Maitreya—benevolence and compassion, and Universal Virtue—practice.

Becoming a good, just person requires wisdom before all else. In the sense that ignorance is sin, a person who does evil does so because he or she does not have true wisdom. Naturally, what we mean here by wisdom is different from the ordinary usage of the word. For example, a person who understands the inner workings of politics or government may profit handsomely or skillfully evade justice. Some call such people wise or resourceful, but this kind of cleverness is not true wisdom.

True wisdom means having the intellect to penetrate to the true essence of all things in the world, to comprehend clearly the way things occur and change, and to grasp the complex relationship among things. If one is endowed with such true wisdom, whatever one does is naturally correct. One will be unable to do evil even if asked to do so, nor will one be deceived or tempted into doing evil. If everyone in the world were able to attain such wisdom, how pure and bright the world would be. Because of this, the Buddha teaches us that we must acquire true wisdom before all else.

Once we possess true wisdom, we understand that all things are related and interdependent (the law that all things are devoid of self) and that if we alone possess wisdom or we alone are right, the world as a whole will not improve. As a result, we cannot help wishing to teach the Law to those who have not acquired wisdom and to return those who have

strayed to the correct path. In other words, the spirit of compassion wells up within our hearts.

Once this compassion springs forth, we cannot help showing it in our actions. We cannot help teaching the Law to those who do not know it, guiding wanderers back to the correct path and teaching and protecting all who are trying to live according to the Law.

When we can perfectly perform the three practices of wisdom, compassion, and practice, the teaching of the Buddha will be perfected in us. This world will be transformed into the Land of Tranquil Light. The teaching of the Lotus Sutra is organized systematically in this way, so we cannot grasp the true meaning of the sutra by skipping around, reading a little here and a little there.

TEXT Then the World-honored One, perceiving that the bodhisattvas thrice without ceasing repeated their request, addressed them, saying: "Listen then all of you attentively to the secret, mysterious, and supernaturally pervading power of the Tathagata.

COMMENTARY *The secret, mysterious, and supernaturally pervading power of the Tathagata.* This phrase does not connote concealed or hidden but rather something so profound that it is difficult to fathom. When the boundless life-instilling power (the force that sustains all; great compassion) in the true form of the Tathagata works on each and every sentient being, it is unobstructed and is capable of influencing everything freely. In other words, what is "secret, mysterious" is the true form of the Tathagata, and "supernaturally pervading power" signifies the compassionate working of the Tathagata.

*The bodhisattva Maitreya representing the Buddhist ideal of benevolence and compassion.*

It is of great significance that true form and working are expounded separately. The true form of the Tathagata is his original power, and the working of the Tathagata is the manifestation of his power. We can achieve nothing unless we are endowed with both this original power and its manifestation. Some people are fond of flashy display in their way of working. Some companies and other organizations act in a similar way. But such ostentatious displays do not bear fruit of true value. Such working does not come from true inner strength but is merely activity stemming from vanity. As a consequence, like a shallow well it soon dries up. By the same token, no matter how great original power may be, if it is not accompanied by manifestation it is not complete. It is just like unlimited groundwater that is of no use in our daily lives unless it either gushes out as a spring or is pumped out of the earth.

The true form of the Tathagata, the power that sustains everything, is infinite, and the working of the Tathagata, the manifestation of his vital power, is free and unrestricted. So it is clear that the salvation of the Tathagata is perfect. Thusness (*tathata*) is the supreme Truth of the universe, the pure, never-changing reality. It is something that one cannot awaken to completely unless one attains buddhahood, and through it all things and beings in the universe are given life.

Up to this point, we have seen that everything in the universe exists through dependent origination and that there is no fixed, perpetual existence. We can say that Thusness is the truth of dependent origination and, moreover, that it is the fundamental Law, or Dharma; it is ultimate reality in the sense that it is not conditioned. Since it is pure truth, ordinary people have a hard time grasping it, whether it is

*The bodhisattva Universal Virtue representing the Buddhist ideal of practice.*

called Thusness or the fundamental Law. Even when we are told that Thusness sustains everything, it seems vast and abstract, and we feel as if we are grasping at clouds. When we take a photograph and do not focus clearly on the subject, we end up with a blurred image. Likewise, when we try to conceive of Thusness, which has no form, unless we can envision it in some form that we can focus on we will not end up with a clear image.

It is only natural, then, that we visualize Thusness as a person. It is most natural for us to imagine a perfect human being, an absolute being who from the infinite past into the infinite future is at all times in this world and gives us life. For the first time, blood begins to flow within the stern truth of Thusness. Warmth comes through, and we feel keenly that we are embraced by something great that is alive and full-blooded. We call Thusness, which gives life to all of us, the Buddha. Our belief in and veneration of the Buddha is based upon this certain truth, and through this we receive the power of true salvation.

If we did not need this sort of salvation, it would be sufficient merely to comprehend Thusness as the philosophical principle of the supreme Truth or fundamental Law. If we understand it only philosophically, however, the anxieties of our complex human mind will not be relieved, nor will we have the courage to stand up to the hardships of life. One in ten thousand may be saved by philosophical understanding alone, but the other ninety-nine hundred and ninety-nine would not. Although the truth is the same, it is important to grasp it in a religious way. This is something anyone can do. It is, therefore, religion that serves as the power of salvation for the ten thousand.

who was born in India twenty-five hundred years ago, is the manifest-body of the Buddha.

To sum up, the Law-body is Thusness itself, the reward-body is the personified power that embodies Thusness, and the manifest-body is the Buddha who as a human being manifests that power in this world. Therefore, although one may speak of the Law-body, the reward-body, and the manifest-body, the three are only distinctions within the mind; actually they are all one perfect whole.

In this passage Shakyamuni, who faces the bodhisattvas and proclaims the Law, is the Buddha of the manifest-body. "The secret, mysterious, and supernatural pervading power of the Tathagata" indicates the mystical strength of the Buddha of the Law-body and the reward-body that lies concealed within Shakyamuni the manifest-body.

**TEXT** All the worlds of gods, men, and asuras consider: 'Now has Shakyamuni Buddha come forth from the palace of the Shakya clan, and seated at the training place of enlightenment, not far from the city of Gaya, has attained Perfect Enlightenment.' But, my good sons, since I veritably became Buddha [there have passed] infinite, boundless hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of nayutas of kalpas.

**COMMENTARY** At this point, the true form of the Buddha is finally made clear. Ordinary people believe only what they see with their own eyes. They think that Shakyamuni before them is the only one Buddha that exists, and he is their spiritual foundation and the hope of their practice. But here he states clearly that they are mistaken, that the Buddha exists from the infinite past to the infinite future.

He declares this to the disciples. He declares this to all human beings. He declares this even to the heavenly beings and asuras. The reason is that even those who dwell in the heavenly realm have not achieved nirvana. They exist in a world of temporary joy and solace. Therefore they too must hear the teaching of the Buddha in order to attain true salvation. Likewise, however bad a person may be, that person can achieve salvation if given the opportunity to hear about the Way of the Buddha. The same is true of other beings. In the eyes of the Buddha, all beings are equal. It is of great significance that gods and asuras are included here.

• *The training place of enlightenment.* There was no special building for religious practice along the banks of the Nairanjana River near Bodhgaya. Shakyamuni sat beneath the Bodhi tree in a forest and entered meditation. It is because it was here that he meditated in his quest for enlightenment that it is called a training place. Any place where people practice in seeking the Way is a "training place of enlightenment." The home or the workplace can be a training place. The commuter train one takes, the playground, virtually any place can serve as a training place.

This does not mean there is no need to build training halls. Religious practice requires a conducive environment. Even

*The bodhisattva Manjushri representing the Buddhist ideal of wisdom.*

As we have seen, Thusness is the fundamental Law. It is the fundamental strength of all things and all beings, so it can appear in any form. It is free and versatile. When we attempt to visualize it, it is natural to visualize a human form. In reality, when it manifests itself in this world, it is not only most natural but one might say even inevitable that it takes human form. What might such a person be like? It would be like one who has awakened to Thusness and has self-awareness of being one with it. We call such a person *tathagata*, because that person "has come from Thusness."

When we think of it in this way, we are surely aware that the one we call the Buddha can assume three forms (for details, see the May/June 1992 issue of DHARMA WORLD).

The Law-body (*dharma-kaya*) is the Buddha as Thusness, or the supreme Truth, an unchanging entity with no beginning and no end. It is the fundamental Law that is the pure truth. This is the true form of the Buddha.

The reward-body (*sambhoga-kaya*) is the Buddha in a form with human characteristics that is comprehensible to the human mind, a form that personifies the fundamental Law. It is called the reward-body because it has become endowed with perfect wisdom in reward for having continued religious practice for a long time. The Tathagata Amitabha, the principal focus of devotion in Pure Land Buddhism, is a reward-body.

The manifest-body (*nirmana-kaya*) is the historical Buddha, a human being who was enlightened to the truth and in accordance with that truth instructed and saved living beings. This body is a manifestation of Thusness, and since it appeared in this form to respond to the needs of the human world, it is also called the transformed-body. Shakyamuni,

a peerless personage like Shakyamuni chose a quiet forest and there entered meditation. That is, he chose an environment that was suitable for practice. In the places where we spend our daily lives, we are likely to be distracted by various factors. Therefore it is essential to create as many opportunities as possible to go to a designated place where like-minded people gather to practice together, to learn the teaching of the Buddha, and to purify the heart and mind. As we persevere with such practice, eventually we will achieve a level at which we can practice in all the training places of everyday life.

The Buddha says that an infinite length of time has passed since he achieved enlightenment, and to make his hearers truly aware of the meaning of “infinite,” he explains further,

**TEXT** For instance, suppose there were five hundred thousand myriad kotis of nayutas of asamkhyeya three-thousand-great-thousandfold worlds; let someone grind them to atoms, pass eastward through five hundred thousand myriad kotis of nayutas of asamkhyeya countries, and then drop one of those atoms; suppose he thus proceeded eastward till he had finished those atoms—what do you think, my good sons, is it possible to imagine and calculate all those worlds so as to know their number?”

**COMMENTARY** *Three-thousand-great-thousandfold worlds.* A three-thousand-great-thousandfold world refers to the world that one buddha is assigned to instruct, but for us there is nothing wrong with considering it as this world.

• *Five hundred thousand myriad kotis of nayutas of asamkhyeya countries.* In this phrase, the word *nayuta* is an extremely large number; one theory holds that it is equivalent to one hundred billion. *Asamkhyeya* is also an immense unit. When these two numbers are put together, they represent an infinite number.

• *Country.* Here “country” refers to the celestial bodies in space, that is, the stars. Take the powder ground from one world and fly through the universe past an infinite number of stars before dropping one atom, then fly past another infinite number of these stars before dropping another atom—just how many stars would one have to pass? Not even Maitreya can comprehend such a number. Hence he and the other bodhisattva-mahasattvas reply as follows.

**TEXT** Maitreya Bodhisattva and the others all said to the Buddha: “World-honored One! Those worlds are infinite, boundless, beyond the knowledge of reckoning and beyond the reach of thought. Not all the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, with their faultless wisdom, would be able to imagine and know the bounds of those numbers. And to us also, who are dwelling in the state of *avaivartika*, these matters are beyond apprehension. World-honored One! All such worlds as these are measureless and boundless.”

**COMMENTARY** “Measureless” here means “beyond estima-

tion”; “boundless” means “without limit.” In other words, only the buddhas are capable of comprehending such worlds.

The shravakas and pratyekabuddhas are beings that have heard the Way of the Buddha, have contemplated it, and have eliminated all delusions. Yet those who have attained this stage still occupy the narrow world of the self. They are satisfied with their present condition of having purified themselves and extinguished all delusions.

• *Not all the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, with their faultless wisdom, would be able to imagine and know the bounds of those numbers.* As long as they are in such a restricted realm, their wisdom has certain limitations. These words of Maitreya certainly ring true.

The bodhisattvas, who have attained a higher state than shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, are beings who are engaged in religious practice in order to save people everywhere. They possess a magnanimous spirit, and their wisdom is profound. They have attained the state of *avaivartika*.

• *The state of avaiivartika.* This is the state of nonretrogression, or no backsliding. To dwell in the state of *avaivartika* is to have achieved a state of mind in which one is no longer swayed by changes in circumstances and does not regress. Although one may have attained this state, however, one must still persevere in practicing the teaching. As might be expected, there remains within one’s consciousness a “self.” In that one feels that “I” will save others and that “I” will make the world better, one is still conscious of a distinction between “self” and “others” or “society.” One still considers them as separate entities. Of course, bodhisattvas have achieved a state of superior spiritual awareness, entirely beyond that of ordinary people, but it cannot yet be called a state of perfect freedom. As a result, there is a limit to how far the heart can reach out. That is precisely why Maitreya makes such a confession.

The Buddha, however, is completely selfless. The “self” is one with the universe, so all sense of a distinct “self” disappears. Because all things in heaven and earth are contained within the mind, one can penetrate whatever one addresses. This is the wisdom of the Buddha.

Achieving such a splendid state of awareness is not possible within one or even two lifetimes. Still, we can become increasingly permeated with wisdom as we rid ourselves of “self.” The stronger our sense of working in behalf of others, in behalf of the world—that is, the stronger our altruism—the more extensive our wisdom.

Hearing Maitreya’s response, the Buddha silently nods and continues.

*To be continued*

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