July–Sept. 2010 Vol. 37

DHARMA WORLD

For Living Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue

CONTENTS

Tackling the Question "What Is the Lotus Sutra?"

Cover image: Abinitio Design.

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.

DHARMA WORLD is published quarterly by Kosei Publishing Company, 2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo 166-8535. E-mail: dharmaworld@kosei-shuppan.co.jp. Printed in Japan by Komiyama Printing Company. **CHANGE OF ADDRESS:** Please provide both old and new addresses. Six weeks' advance notice is requested.

The International Lotus Sutra Seminar

by Gene Reeves

What began as a single planned "final" meeting between Japanese Buddhist scholars and American Christian theologians, whose purpose was to explore aspects of the Mahayana scripture that is one of the world's great religious classics, has become an ongoing series of sessions that are increasingly both intellectually and spiritually rewarding.

The International Conference on the Lotus Sutra has turned out to be a fairly long series of conferences. The papers in this issue of DHARMA WORLD are from the fourteenth.

But it did not start out to be a series. Beginning with the World Congress of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) at the headquarters of Rissho Kosei-kai in 1984, I have been active in a variety of Buddhist-Christian activities. Among the most prominent of dialogue groups was the North American Theological Encounter Group, founded by the famous Buddhist thinker Masao Abe, and the equally famous Christian theologian John Cobb. Sometime in 1993 I learned that this "Cobb-Abe Group" had run out of funds and was about to be discontinued.

So I approached Dr. Michio T. Shinozaki with the idea of inviting the group to Japan for its final meeting. Various people were enthusiastic about the idea, and so the "final" session of the Cobb-Abe Group was held in northeastern Japan at a Rissho Kosei-kai facility known as Bandaiso, located on Mount Bandai, overlooking Lake Inawashiro. Initially there was no expectation that this would be more than a single conference. Thus, this final meeting of the Cobb-Abe Group became the first of the international conferences on the Lotus Sutra.

Later, under the leadership of Don Mitchell of Purdue University, the Cobb-Abe Group was able to secure additional funding from the Lilly Endowment and continue for several more years. And international conferences on the Lotus Sutra also continued for several more years at Bandaiso.

That first conference included, in addition to Dr. Shinozaki and myself, some eighteen very prominent Buddhist scholars and Christian theologians, including Masao Abe; Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, who would later become the first fully ordained Thai Buddhist nun; Rita Gross, the leading advocate for Buddhist feminism; David Chappell, the founder of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies and first editor of its journal of the same name; Sulak Sivaraksa, then and now the leader of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists; Seiichi Yagi, the most prominent Japanese Christian theologian; Schubert Ogden, along with Cobb the leading Christian process theologian; and John Borelli, then representing the U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The conference was very rich, both intellectually and spiritually. And Bandaiso was an extraordinarily rich setting for it. The natural landscape overlooking the lake provided gorgeous views. In autumn the ski slopes became places for contemplative walks. The outdoor hot spring provided a superb place for after-hours conviviality. And the meals prepared by Yoshio Abe not only nourished our bodies but also delighted our sense of taste.

Bandaiso was so pleasant and appropriate for this purpose that we continued to hold the conferences there for seven years, before it was closed. At Bandaiso the trees and lake and general landscape became my good friends, and I learned what it means for nature to have the buddha-nature. After its closing had been announced, but before it actually closed, it

---

Gene Reeves has done research and lectured on the Lotus Sutra worldwide for a quarter century. He is a consultant and teacher at Rissho Kosei-kai and is retired from the University of Tsukuba. Before coming to Japan in 1989, he was head of Meadville Lombard Theological School and a lecturer at the University of Chicago Divinity School. His The Lotus Sutra: A Contemporary Translation of a Buddhist Classic *was published in 2008.*

Participants at the first International Conference on the Lotus Sutra, held in Bandaiso in 1994, pose for a commemorative photo with people who assisted at the meeting.

was necessary for me to drive up from Tokyo just to bid farewell to Bandaiso, a place that has meant much to me spiritually.

Following the success of the first conference, organized by the leadership of the Cobb-Abe Group itself and hosted by us, we thought of holding a series of such conferences on the Lotus Sutra. Our purposes were basically two: to increase interest in the Lotus Sutra and to increase awareness of Rissho Kosei-kai.

Buddhism was already beginning to flourish in the West, especially in the United States. Buddhist temples of many kinds as well as meditation centers were beginning to spring up all over the country. The number of college and university courses on Buddhism was increasing dramatically along with scholarly interest. And scholarly interest was not limited to Buddhist scholars; many Christian theologians were also showing increasing interest in Buddhist teachings.

I felt, however, that too little of that interest was directed toward the Lotus Sutra and Lotus Sutra traditions. Soka Gakkai was growing rapidly, but in sections of society to which religion scholars paid little attention. Interest in Buddhism among upper-middle-class Americans was usually in Zen Buddhism. And, despite the fact that the most revered Zen leader, Eihei Dogen, loved the Lotus Sutra and was a devotee of it, American Zen Buddhists largely ignored the Lotus Sutra.

Our purpose was not to convert people, especially American and European scholars, to the Lotus Sutra, but rather to have the sutra be a part of their frame of reference when they talked about Buddhism. We wanted those who talked about Buddhism in classrooms and in public places to be aware of the Lotus Sutra and its traditions, including Tiantai/Tendai and Nichiren traditions and modern movements based on the Lotus Sutra.

One of the most impressive of the modern movements based on the Lotus Sutra is Rissho Kosei-kai. It was an overwhelmingly Japanese organization. Even its centers in the United States consisted mainly of people who were originally Japanese. Its way of interacting with people rooted in other religious traditions was through active participation in international, interfaith organizations, especially the IARF and the World Conference of Religions for Peace, of which it was a founder. To this day very little has been written about Rissho Kosei-kai in languages other than Japanese. And with the membership of its few, small centers in the United States being almost wholly Japanese-speaking people, Rissho Kosei-kai was virtually unknown in America, even among Buddhist scholars. We sought to change that, not by converting people to being members of Rissho Kosei-kai, but by having many more become aware of its existence.

This is the reason why we have not attempted to develop or sustain a community of people who participate year after year

Animated discussion continues far beyond the scheduled time.

The participants at Bandaiso enjoyed the beauty of the venue and the hearty meals.

in these conferences. Except for Dr. Shinozaki and myself, I think no one has participated in more than two of them, and for many years, a prime consideration for being invited was not having participated in previous versions. Eventually, though, the themes we chose made it virtually mandatory that some scholars be invited back.

Over the years participants have come from over a dozen countries in Asia, Europe, and North America. Most have been Buddhist scholars, but not a few have been Christian theologians, some have been art historians, and one was an editor. A few have been priests or monks or nuns, but most have been professional academics. In addition to the scholars, in most years a graduate student from one of various universities has been invited to serve as a reporter, writing especially for DHARMA WORLD. In the past couple of years, this responsibility has been accepted by Mr. Joseph Logan of the Essential Lay Buddhism Study Center.

Though all were explicitly related to the Lotus Sutra, the themes of these conferences and seminars have varied enormously, thus attracting a variety of scholars with differing kinds of expertise. The theme for the 1995 gathering was simply "The Lotus Sutra"; the next one, in 1997, was on "The Lotus Sutra as Good News"; and the most recent one, recounted in this issue of DHARMA WORLD, was on the question "What is the Lotus Sutra?" But in most years the theme was the Lotus Sutra and something such as "ethics," "social responsibility," "Pure Land Buddhism," "Zen Buddhism," and so forth.

Though called "conferences," these meetings have never been large or open to the public. And so some years ago, we began to use the term "seminar" rather than "conference." The change in terms did not indicate any change in what we were doing, but rather a realization that what we were doing was more properly called "seminars"—a relatively small group of people contributing to each other's understanding of some topic.

One of the things that makes these seminars so successful, I think, is the somewhat unusual format for an academic conference, where people normally read papers to one another that may then be commented on and discussed. In these seminars, there has been no reading of papers. Papers are written, but they are collected, distributed, and read by participants well before the seminar itself. A little time is taken for responses to papers, but the great bulk of our time together is given to discussions, which often become discussions in much more depth than might be the case at an academic conference.

Given that we have focused more on conversation rather than, for example, seeking to produce books on the themes, it is difficult to assess the outcomes of these seminars. We know that people have benefited from one another, have learned from one another, and that interest in the Lotus Sutra among Buddhist scholars has grown enormously during this period.

I will never forget a session of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1999. A panel of five theologians and Buddhist scholars engaged in Buddhist-Christian dialogue made presentations in which each spoke in part about the Lotus Sutra. I think it is not a mere coincidence that four of the panelists had participated in one of our International Lotus Sutra Seminars.

In 2002 was published *A Buddhist Kaleidoscope: Essays on the Lotus Sutra,* consisting of thirty essays, almost all of which had been initially presented at one of our seminars. Though it is probably impossible to count them, a great many of the papers initially prepared for a seminar have subsequently found their way into a variety of scholarly journals and books.

Though difficult to quantify, since 1994 interest in the Lotus Sutra has increased enormously, at least among Buddhist scholars. This is evident in the fact that several books on the sutra have recently been published as well as several new translations into Western languages from Chinese, and one from Sanskrit. New editions of older translations have also appeared.

It is very appropriate that these seminars have been sponsored by Rissho Kosei-kai, whose founders had a vision of the organization being a catalyst for worldwide appreciation of the Lotus Sutra. Rissho Kosei-kai has provided not only financial support, but a great deal of staff time and energy as well. Following each of the seminars there has been an opportunity for local Rissho Kosei-kai members to hear from the participants and interact with them. We hope these feedback sessions have given at least a few ordinary members some sense of the excitement generated among scholars by the seminars.

The next seminar will be held in the Tokyo area in the spring of 2011 on the theme of the Lotus Sutra and Confucianism. We trust that it will be as rewarding for participants as previous seminars. The need for such seminars will continue as new generations of Buddhist scholars and others interested in Buddhism enter the field. The Lotus Sutra, I believe, may be the most important religious text in the world. Certainly it is one of the most valued, and deserves ongoing scholarly attention. ❑

Groping Through the Maze of the Lotus Sutra

by Miriam Levering

The author compares herself to an unprepared explorer who found that the sutra text lacked a number of things she expected to find within its pages.

It turns out that no Mahayana Buddhist text other than the Lotus Sutra could display a greater lack of fit with the kind of Buddhism about which for many years I have been gradually acquiring knowledge and understanding, that is, Chinese Chan Buddhism. Everything I have been prepared to find in a Buddhist sutra or wisdom text, and even a number of things I expected to find specifically in the Lotus Sutra, are either not there at all or not unambiguously "there." The "eternal Buddha" appears in the sutra to be a buddha of an inestimably long life, but not exactly an "eternal" buddha; to say he is eternal would contradict the whole structure of Mahayana Buddhist cosmology. "Emptiness," a major Mahayana Buddhist theme, the profound personal recognition of which is the central goal of Chan Buddhism, seems to play a smaller role in the Buddha's teachings in the Lotus Sutra. And other things that do appear to be not only "there" but also important to some sense of what the Lotus Sutra is are truly unexpected from a Chinese Chan perspective. For example, Chan Buddhists discourage their followers from faith in a buddha who is always with us.

What follows then, is a collection of fragmentary notes collected by an unprepared explorer who may still be lost in the maze. The explorer, feverishly befuddled as she is, can only hope others will find them useful for discussion.

1. The first of many guides to the Lotus Sutra whom I consulted as I looked for a path into the unfamiliar wilderness of the sutra, George and Willa Tanabe, suggest in the opening paragraphs of their introduction to *The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture* that in the opening scene of the sutra the Buddha enters a state of deep concentration and emits a glowing light from the tuft of white hair between his brows. By that light he illuminates the thousands of worlds in all directions of the universe. Maitreya asks Manjusri what this means, whereupon Manjusri replies that given his own experience in the past that other buddhas have taught the great Dharma immediately following such a sign, at this moment the Buddha must be ready to preach the Lotus Sutra. In the past a buddha named Sun and Moon Light emitted such a light before a congregation of two million bodhisattvas and taught the Great Vehicle sutra called the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma. He remained seated for sixty small eons while he taught this Dharma, and so did his audience, which included not only the bodhisattvas, apparently, but also Brahma, devils, mendicants, brahmans, human and heavenly beings, and asuras (Gene Reeves, *The Lotus Sutra: A Contemporary Translation of a Buddhist Classic,* pp. 64–67). No one stirred, so entranced were they at these teachings. The Tanabes write that as the first chapter of the Lotus Sutra comes to an end, the assembly, having heard Manjusri's prediction, waits in expectation to hear the Lotus sermon for the first time. But (in subsequent chapters) the preaching of the expected sermon never takes place. "The text, so full of merit, is *about* a discourse which is never delivered; it is a lengthy preface without a book" (Tanabe and Tanabe, p. 2). "The *Lotus Sutra* is thus unique among texts. It is not merely subject to various interpretations, as all texts are, but is open or empty at its very center. It is a surrounding text, pure context, which invites not only interpretation of what is said but filling in of what is not said" (ibid.).

But there is a problem with this. Another guide who

Miriam Levering, an international advisor at Rissho Kosei-kai, is professor of Buddhism and of Chinese and Japanese religion at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. She received her PhD from Harvard University in 1978. She has edited a book called Rethinking Scripture, *a study of the concept and use of sacred texts in the major religious traditions, and has written many articles on women and gender in Chan and Zen Buddhism.*

Detail from the Shaka Ryojusen Seppozu, *a Lotus Sutra mandala illustrating Shakyamuni Buddha delivering a sermon on Sacred Eagle Peak. Colors on silk, 158 x 78 cm. Kamakura period (12th–14th centuries). Designated an Important Cultural Property. Nara National Museum.*

provides a map of the Lotus Sutra territory, Ryodo Shioiri, mentions that present-day scholars think that the sutra consists of three sections. The oldest are sections one and two; the first consists of chapters 2–9 of the current Kumarajiva translation into Chinese, a body of chapters that many believe form the core of the Lotus Sutra because they display a contextual coherence. Chapters 10–21 (except for chapter 18) of the current version of the Kumarajiva translation (but not including chapter 12) form the second section. They are also early but display some distinct differences from the first section. The last section, chapters 23–28, deals with specific beliefs in and practices related to specific bodhisattvas. These beliefs and practices were added later to the Lotus Sutra.

What matters for this current discussion is that it is thought that chapter 1, which includes the promise of a long explanatory Lotus sermon from the Buddha, was written to tie all the sections together. Thus the prediction of something that never happens was not an editing error but a trope that served as an editing device, and the text is not a lengthy preface without a book. The ensuing chapters must *be* the second preaching, or apotheosis, of the Great Vehicle sutra called the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma. Something else is being conveyed by the striking difference between the forms of the first and second preachings of the Great Vehicle sutra called the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma. But what?

A hypothesis: The first preaching of the Lotus Dharma is of exceedingly long duration, far longer than any currently extant Mahayana sutra could have taken to expound, yet totally enthralling, marvelous, and revelatory. It causes great astonishment and gratitude in the listeners. The second preaching as it turns out is a somewhat loosely related series of paeans in praise of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sutra, as well as at least two important announcements by the Buddha. For its "content" it features visually dramatic scenes and stories, rather short explanations, and the important announcements. These too are totally enthralling, marvelous, and revelatory, and cause great astonishment and gratitude in the listeners. Perhaps what is at issue is not an empty center but rather simply a highly exaggerated but familiar trope of Dharma preaching used as a foil—but not a rejected option—against which is set an almost totally new and different way of preaching the Dharma. This way of preaching the Dharma also uses certain familiar tropes and exaggerates them. But it is not limited to the familiar tropes associated for centuries with the preaching of the Dharma.

2. At this point I came upon another guide, Dr. Jacqueline Stone, in conversation with Andrew Cooper of *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review.* Cooper asked Dr. Stone:

"What is the *Lotus Sutra* about? In it we read how to hear the sutra, how to preach the sutra, who was gathered to hear it preached, what happened before it was preached, why it is so important, how it was preached in the past, what will happen in the future to those who hear it, and so on. It is like an extravagant preamble to an event that never seems to arrive."

Dr. Stone replied: "Some scholars of the *Lotus Sutra* have noted just that point, and I think it is a fair reading. If we just read the sutra and set aside later interpretations, one thing we see going on is that the sutra is establishing its own authority. For example, at the beginning the Buddha emerges from meditation and begins to preach spontaneously, and not, as is usually the case, in response to a question. He says that he will soon enter final nirvana, and so he is now going to preach the true and unsurpassed dharma. The text suggests that not only is this the final teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha, or the historical Buddha, it is the final teaching given by all buddhas before they enter nirvana. It is, in other words, the final word on Buddhism.

"The sutra also presents itself as being extraordinarily pre-

cious. It is difficult to encounter it; it is difficult to believe it; it is difficult to understand it; it is difficult to preach it. So embracing the *Lotus Sutra* is something that is even more difficult than the most mind-boggling supernatural feats. . . . We can't know the intentions of the sutra's compilers, but one could read this as saying that the sutra is not about the dharma, it *is* the dharma—that is, it is the embodiment of ultimate truth" ("The Final Word," *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* [Spring 2006], pp. 59–60).

Perhaps this is a clue to what the Lotus Sutra is: In its forms, in its words, in its fantastic tropes, in its stories and direct communications; in its depictions of the primordial and universe-wide universal Buddha who is majestic, powerful, and wise beyond all understanding and at the same time always totally accessible to and interested in every individual, teaching and guarding every being whom it touches or who is touched by the sutra's Dharma; and in its strong conviction that all are potential buddhas, it *is* the Dharma. But at the same time in crucial areas, as for example with respect to the precise meaning of the One Vehicle, its content is left undefined.

3. Still in search of a way into the Lotus Sutra that would lead me to some sense of what it *is*, I was fortunate to encounter yet another helpful guide: the March/April 2005 issue of DHARMA WORLD. As you know, DHARMA WORLD is published by Rissho Kosei-kai, so one would expect the Lotus Sutra to be featured rather prominently in its pages. One would expect to find some clue as to what the Lotus Sutra *is* and how to practice what it teaches so that one can develop one's potential for buddhahood. In this particular issue two clues to what the Lotus Sutra might be stood out for me. First, in the section of the magazine called "Buddhist Living" there was a collection of personal stories called "Small Trips of Self-Discovery." One by Satoe Takahashi (p. 34) struck me particularly. Satoe had a son who suffered from atopic dermatitis such that when his body was warm he itched intolerably. At a Rissho Kosei-kai training session in Ome in western Tokyo the *hoza* [group counseling] leader urged Satoe, "Serve the Buddha and your ancestors with sincerity and your son will get better." "You mean he will get well just through faith?" Satoe asked incredulously. She continues: "I was reminded of how grateful we should be for the life we have been given. 'Generation after generation of our ancestors have prayed for the happiness of their children. Life has been passed on to us from one generation to the next. Expressing our thanks to our parents and our ancestors is the starting point of our faith.'" Satoe's son that night slept through the night for the first time ever. Satoe ends her essay with these words: "Since that time, my son has become quite healthy. That day in Ome marked my first step in faith."

Does the urging of the *hoza* leader show us something of what the Lotus Sutra *is*? I think of Dr. Stone's words quoted above: "The sutra also presents itself as being extraordinarily precious. It is difficult to encounter it; it is difficult to believe it; it is difficult to understand it; it is difficult to preach it. So embracing the *Lotus Sutra* is something that is even more difficult than the most mind-boggling supernatural feats." Sufficient faith in the Lotus Sutra, its Buddha, one's own potential buddhahood, and the bodhisattva path has to begin somewhere. Perhaps the first step could well be gratitude for the manifestation of the caring of the Lotus Sutra's Buddha that comes to us through the family that gives us life. And the second step is practice—bringing that gratitude to mind over and over again and acting upon it. Reading Satoe's words, I realized that the precincts or boundaries of the Lotus Sutra can include awakenings of faith that are not explicitly described in the sutra but are linked in the life of faith of those who uphold the sutra today.

In the same issue of DHARMA WORLD is an essay called "Bodhisattvas of the Earth." It is a commentary by Dr. Gene Reeves on chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra, in which, as the Buddha announces that in this "world of suffering itself there are as many bodhisattva great-ones as there are sands in sixty thousand Ganges [rivers]," an enormous number of bodhisattvas and their attendants spring up from the earth. Of this story Dr. Reeves writes:

"That the bodhisattvas are from the earth has traditionally been taken to be an affirmation of this world, usually called the '*saha* world' in the Lotus Sutra, which means the world in which suffering has to be endured. There is a pattern in the Lotus Sutra in which some great cosmic and supernatural event demonstrates or testifies to the cosmic importance of Shakyamuni Buddha, and, since Shakyamuni is uniquely associated with this world, its reality and importance is also affirmed in this way; and, since what Shakyamuni primarily gives to this world is the Lotus Sutra, it too is seen as very special and important; and, since the Lotus Sutra is not the Lotus Sutra unless it is read and embraced by someone, the importance of the life of the hearer or reader of the sutra is also affirmed; and, since the most appropriate way of life for

A hoza *group-counseling session for women members is held at Rissho Kosei-kai's Ome Retreat Center in western Tokyo in March 2004.*

a follower of the Lotus Sutra is the bodhisattva way, it too is elevated and affirmed. These five—Shakyamuni Buddha, this world, the Lotus Sutra, the hearer or reader of the sutra, and the bodhisattva way—do not have to appear in this particular order. Any one of them leads to an affirmation of the others. But there is a pattern in the Lotus Sutra, wherein there is a radical affirmation of this world, this world of suffering, but an affirmation that is necessarily linked to the importance of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Lotus Sutra on the one hand and to the lives and bodhisattva practices of those who embrace the Lotus Sutra on the other" (pp. 10–11).

The rest of what Dr. Reeves writes in the subsequent paragraphs is also well worth quoting, but space does not allow me to do more than refer you to Dr. Reeves's essay. To me, as a relatively inexperienced reader of the Lotus Sutra, as a relatively new explorer of its precincts, Dr. Reeves's statement here captures much of what the Lotus Sutra is. Central to the sutra is the universal and primordial and yet ever accessible Buddha who guides and teaches all. Vital to the sutra is the Buddha who urges the bodhisattva path upon all and promises buddhahood to all who embark on it with sincerity and faith. The sutra presents a profound and inspiring depiction of the bodhisattva path, a path that involves not only preaching the Dharma but also relieving the sufferings of others and acting in this world. All can be Dharma-*bhanakas,* Dharma-preachers. All can be included. All can transcend their small selves, growing as future buddhas through faith, humility, commitment, and self-reflection. All will reach buddhahood. None should be despised. There can be, indeed will be, unity in diversity in the bond of peace.

Coda

As the last section demonstrates, I do believe there is "content" to the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra may not be a single sermon in which the highest Dharma is expounded in the way in which we expect given the trope invoked in chapter 1. It does, however, have a number of important and inspiring sermons.

But structurally the challenge of making some kind of sense of the Lotus Sutra remains. As a whole the Lotus Sutra seems on an initial reading to have a loose, even disjointed structure. As I was preparing this essay, an article in the *New York Times* reminded me of a 1984 essay by the Italian philosopher-novelist Umberto Eco called "*Casablanca:* Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage," and that essay, in turn, reminded me of the Lotus Sutra. In this essay Eco describes the movie *Casablanca* as follows: "It is a hodgepodge of sensational scenes strung together implausibly, its characters are psychologically incredible, its actors act in a mannered way. Nevertheless . . . it has become a cult movie."

Eco continues: "What are the requirements for transforming a film or a movie into a cult object? . . . A movie . . . must be ramshackle, rickety, unhinged in itself. A perfect movie . . . remains in our mind as a whole, in the form of a central idea or emotion; only an unhinged movie survives as a disconnected series of images, of peaks, of visual icebergs." (Eco believes that a movie or book, in order to become a cult book or movie, must offer these disconnected parts onto which fans can fasten.) "It should not display one central idea, but many. It should not reveal a coherent philosophy of composition. It must live on, and because of, its glorious ricketiness."

While the structure of the Lotus Sutra is hardly rickety, and the first two sections display more coherence and purpose than Umberto Eco felt that the director of the movie *Casablanca* attained, it does seem to display not one central idea but many. Would Eco not suggest that the structure of the Lotus Sutra and its wild profusion of archetypal tropes might have something to do with the sutra's becoming a cult book?

Just a thought. ❑

Left: *The ruins of a brick platform on Sacred Eagle Peak at Rajgir, Bihar, India, from which the Buddha is believed to have imparted the teachings of the Lotus Sutra.* Right: *Contours of a rock formation at the summit of Sacred Eagle Peak.*

A Phenomenological Answer to the Question "What Is the Lotus Sutra?"

by Donald W. Mitchell

This author has found the Lotus Sutra to be a source of transformative goodness in the lives of Buddhists, and a motivational force to bring healing and unity to the world.

Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) was responsible for foundational advances in the phenomenology of religion in the early part of the twentieth century. In his *The Idea of the Holy* (1917), Otto sought to explore the category of the Holy through what he referred to as the "numinous consciousness." Blending the objective and subjective dimensions of the experience of the numinous, Otto proposed his famous phenomenological description of the "object" of such consciousness as "*mysterium tremendum.*"[1] For Otto, the biblical texts are conveyors of this object into the consciousness of the reader. They convey into the horizon of consciousness the mystery, power, and attraction that are fundamental dimensions of the experience of the Holy.

Following Otto's lead, I will use his phenomenological method in answering the question we are being asked to address in our symposium, namely, "What is the Lotus Sutra?" That is, I will try to locate the Lotus Sutra in the horizon of the subjective experience of the reader in order to explore what the text conveys into the consciousness of the Buddhist practitioner. I will also examine the Lotus Sutra as it has entered a collective horizon of consciousness through the Buddhist-Christian dialogue. In this latter regard, I will make comparisons with what is conveyed by biblical texts—the Gospels—in the Christian experience of Focolare practitioners. This comparative phenomenological exploration also follows the lead of Rudolf Otto, whose later comparative philosophy included Eastern religions. In this way, we may more clearly see a universal element in the particular Buddhist experience of the Lotus Sutra, thus expanding the answer to the question we are here to address.

The Lotus Sutra as Textual Object

In the early Buddhist tradition, the word *sāsana* was used to indicate what a sutra is; namely, it is a "message" of the Buddha. A sutra is the carrier or conveyer of a message from the Buddha to his disciples. Different sutras convey different messages. But their common trait is that the messages convey an aspect of the Dharma of the Buddha. More than this, it is said that what is conveyed is also the Buddha: "Who sees the *Dhamma* sees the Master, and who sees the Master sees the *Dhamma*" (S.III.120). So, one can conclude that the message of a sutra conveys a teaching of the Buddha, and in that teaching one also comes to know the proclaimer of the message, namely, the Buddha himself.

In Mahayana, sutras can be seen as texts that convey messages concerning aspects of the Dharma, and through these messages, the Mahayana practitioner encounters the Buddha. In the Lotus tradition, the Lotus Sutra is seen as the conveyer of a "final" message revealing the Dharma and the Buddha. This message conveys the Eternal Buddha and the Dharma concerning his activity in the world. In its deepest sense, the Lotus Sutra is seen as the final, complete, ultimate, perfect, and fundamental message conveying the full meaning of the Buddha's appearance in this world. This message/revelation involves the One Buddha Vehicle (*ekāyāna*). Or following Chih-i, it is a message that opens up the three vehicles and reveals the One Vehicle.

In the Parable of the Burning House in chapter 3 of the Lotus Sutra, the three vehicles of the *śrāvakas, pretyekabud-*

Donald W. Mitchell is a professor of comparative philosophy of religion at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. He has served the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops as a consultant for dialogue with Buddhism and is active in the Focolare Movement. One of his most recent books is Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience.

dhas, and bodhisattvas are seen to convey teachings to suit differences in time, culture, and human capacities. The One Vehicle revealed in the Lotus Sutra conveys the message that in all three vehicles, one finds the compassionate activity of the Eternal Buddha causing all beings to become buddhas. This compassionate activity leading to buddhahood is portrayed in the Parable of the Burning House as the activity of a "father" caring for his children. The message here implies that this compassionate parenting by the Eternal Buddha is causing all beings to progress toward the attainment of buddhahood. When you "open up" the three vehicles of Buddhism, you find one fundamental and compassionate force leading all beings to buddhahood. It is the conveyance of this truth that is at the heart of the final message of the Buddha conveyed in the Lotus Sutra.

A correlate to this fundamental truth is the message that all beings have the potential to become buddhas: all beings have buddha-nature. In terms of the Parable of the Burning House, all beings are the children of the Buddha, all have the same nature as their parent, and so all can grow up to be like that parent. Their true nature is buddha-nature, and so they are members of the family of the Buddha. In chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra, it states: "Of these who hear the Dharma, not one fails to become a buddha. The original vow of the buddhas is: 'By the Buddha-way which I walk, I desire universally to cause all beings to attain the same way along with me.'" The eternal life of the Eternal Buddha is the constant activity of the bodhisattva way of compassion bringing all beings to a realization of their buddha-nature and buddhahood. Bringing this eternal life, this compassionate action, into the con-

The frontispiece to chapter 3, "A Parable," by Ryusen Miyahara (1899–1984), from the ten scrolls of the Threefold Lotus Sutra copied by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai. A scene from the Parable of the Burning House is depicted at the bottom.

sciousness of the reader of the Lotus Sutra and stirring it into realization is the purpose for its proclamation. The cause of both this revelation to, and realization in, consciousness is the compassionate activity of the Eternal Buddha.

Finally, Michio T. Shinozaki has pointed out that the "underlying logic in the Lotus Sutra is integration or unity."[2] Underlying the textual messages and the compassionate activity of the Eternal Buddha behind them is an integrating or unifying reason for the message and its effect on the reader. The vision and transformation conveyed by the Lotus Sutra involves integration on many levels. The first is at the ontological level, where the vision of the Eternal Buddha conveyed by the Lotus Sutra reveals buddha-nature. This means that all beings are united in one family owing to their having buddha-nature, and the realization of this ontological "fact" brings unity to that family of all beings.

The second level of integration is institutional. Here one finds the vision of the integration of all schools of Buddhism wherein each school is seen as a "skillful means" (*upāya*) providing the environment for the discovery of our common buddha-nature and its realization in lived experience. This vision provides the ideal of unifying Buddhism's institutions or schools. The third level of integration is textual. In light of the Lotus Sutra, one finds an integration of all Buddhist scriptures, in that each scripture plays a role in the propagation of the Dharma according to the historical process of that propagation and the capacities of time and place in that process. This hermeneutic provides a basis for integrating the diversity of Buddhist texts.

What is behind this logic of integration or unity? Dr. Shinozaki suggests that it is the causal power of integration itself found in the One Dharma of the One Vehicle.[3] I would add that since it is true that when one finds the Dharma one discovers the Buddha, the actual integrating force of the Dharma that causes unity in diversity is the Eternal Buddha. The diversity of Buddhist scriptures preached by the Buddha is integrated in the One Dharma. The diversity of paths or schools in Buddhism is integrated in the One Vehicle. And the diversity of living beings is integrated through buddha-nature into the One Family of the Eternal Buddha. It seems to me that from the point of view of the Lotus Sutra, the Eternal Buddha brings unity to the diversity of scriptures through the process of propagation, unity to the diversity of paths through skillful means, and unity to the diversity of living beings through the realization of buddha-nature.

So now we come to the question: What is the Lotus Sutra? I would suggest that when looked at as a textual object, the Lotus Sutra is a textual vehicle of the fundamental Dharma conveying the power of the luminous, compassionate, transformative, and unifying force of the Eternal Buddha.

The Lotus Sutra in the Horizon of Subjectivity

In his article on the place of Theravada scriptures in personal experience, Bhikkhu Dhammavihari states that the stories concerning the experiences of the Elders related in the sutras "reflect the natural and spontaneous personalized growth of the scriptural tradition, like an oak out of an acorn."[4] Dhammavihari goes on to say that the personal growth produced through the Dharma conveyed in the scriptures frees one from "samsara-binding" entanglements of the mind. As one's awareness deepens concerning the vision conveyed by the scriptures, there is a "restructuring" of the patterns of thinking, with the outcome of "correct views" that generate the nirvanic "change of lineage consciousness." He notes that this restructuring is like an acorn growing into an oak. The Dharma conveyed through the scripture is the cause of spiritual growth in the subjective horizon of consciousness. The receptivity of mind and the monastic environment are the conditions for such growth.

I am reminded here of a passage from Hebrew scripture:

> Thus says Yahweh. . . . Yes, as the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes from my mouth will not return to me empty, but will accomplish that which I propose and cause to prosper that for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10–11)

In the preceding Buddhist and Jewish metaphors, the point is made that there is a power to the words of scripture, namely, the power to produce transformative growth in the persons who hear or read the texts. The scriptures enter the subjective horizon of consciousness with the causal force that effects transformation. In considering phenomenologically what the Lotus Sutra is, we need to turn our attention to what I see as three transformative effects of the Lotus Sutra in the horizon of human consciousness.

The first effect is the awakening of the luminous vision of, and deep reverence for, the buddha-nature. In terms of the objective dimension of the reception of the Lotus Sutra, there is an "opening up" of this vision of, and reverence for, the buddha-nature of all beings in the consciousness of the practitioner. In a sense, it is a conveyance of the cognitive and emotive consciousness of the Buddha into the consciousness of the practitioner that causes, like rain, growth in the practitioner's realization of the buddha-nature. In terms of the subjective dimension of the practitioner's receptivity, the degree to which the consciousness is "opened up" is due to a number of conditions. Here the "Five Categories for Propagation" of Nichiren are helpful.[5]

Nichiren taught that a person's subjective reception of a "teaching" is conditioned by the "capacity of the hearer," the "time" when the teaching is heard, the "country" or environment in which the teaching is heard, and the "sequence of propagation" that prepares the hearer for the message of the teaching. These conditions of the "soil" of the practitioner's consciousness influence his or her receptivity to the message of the Lotus Sutra. If the soil is good, then the Lotus Sutra

can more easily engender a transformative realization of the vision and reverence of the buddha-nature in all beings.

The second effect is the awakening of the Great Compassion through the compassionate force of the Eternal Buddha. The Lotus Sutra opens the horizon of consciousness to the parental power of the Buddha's compassion. The conveyance of the compassion of the Buddha into the consciousness of the practitioner nourishes the seeds of compassion of his or her buddha-nature. In terms of the metaphor of Isaiah, words are like rain that produce growth of the seeds of the Great Compassion in the ground of one's true nature. With this second conveyance, the reverential vision of the buddha-nature in all living beings is enriched with the "treasure" of compassionate, parental-like care. One's heart and mind are moved by the influence of the Eternal Buddha's compassion in the horizon of consciousness that generates compassionate actions that benefit all beings.

The third effect is the awakening to the power of integration or unity of the One Vehicle. In the horizon of subjective experience, this means the opening up of an appreciative awareness that Buddhist scriptures, traditions, and paths are integrated by the power of the Eternal Buddha. Phenomenologically, I would suggest that this appreciative awareness may not be a matter of actually knowing *how* these different dimensions of Buddhism are in fact integrated. It may be, rather, a subjective certainty *that* they are integrated by the power of the Eternal Buddha. This appreciative certainty leads one to value each member of the One Family of the Buddha in a manner that also extends to their scriptures and paths. Later, I will suggest that this appreciation of unity extends to other religions as well.

In short, the text of the Lotus Sutra conveys and reveals a dynamic force of the luminosity, compassion, and integration of the One Vehicle into the horizon of human consciousness, bringing about the three effects discussed above. In the words of Dr. Shinozaki, the "radical openness of the One Vehicle," as in the Parable of the Burning House, "emerges unexpectedly," and is an "unexpected gift . . . which is beyond the one they seek and experience."[6] Like a buddha-image in a mirror, the Lotus Sutra conveys the One Vehicle into the minds of the practitioners through whom the One Vehicle can realize the luminous and compassionate, transforming and integrating dynamic of the One Family of all beings.

So again we come to the question: What is the Lotus Sutra? Looked at from a phenomenological point of view, I believe one can say the following: The Lotus Sutra is the luminous, reverential, compassionate, transforming, and integrating force of the Eternal Buddha through the Dharma of the One Vehicle revealing and realizing the One Family of all beings.

The Lotus Sutra in the Horizon of Interreligious Dialogue

The "opening up" of the Lotus Sutra within human consciousness reveals the Buddha's vision with reverence, integration, and compassionate care for all beings. This vision, I would suggest, expands the practitioner's understanding and attitude toward other religions. Since the practitioner is enabled at a deeper level than before to appreciate and respect the fact that all beings are the Buddha's children, the practitioner is also enabled at a deeper level to appreciate other religions and the aspects of those religions that contribute to the global integration or unity of all beings. With this appreciative understanding the Lotus Sutra can expand the subjective horizon of the practitioner into a collective horizon of interreligious dialogue leading to active participation in interreligious collaboration for a more united and peaceful world. In this way, the essential unity of all beings can be realized in social, economic, and political forms of interaction between humans and with nature.

In light of the possibility of this collective and collaborative effect of the Lotus Sutra, I would like briefly to present aspects of a spiritual tradition in Christianity that are similar to what we have been exploring in the phenomenology of the experience of the Lotus Sutra. This is the Focolare Movement, based in the Catholic Church but with a membership including persons from other religions, including Buddhism. The Focolare Movement has engaged in dialogue for decades with the Lotus tradition of Rissho Kosei-kai in Japan. My reason for doing this is to provide a concrete interreligious horizon within which one can address the question of what the Lotus Sutra is in the horizon of interreligious dialogue.

We have seen that one effect of the Lotus Sutra in the subjectivity of the Buddhist practitioner is the unexpected opening up of the mind of the practitioner to the Buddha's luminous vision of, and reverence for, the buddha-nature. Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare, has said that she did not seek the truth by just reading and reflecting on scripture, but she sought God's vision of the truths conveyed in scripture.[7] Through the charism of the Focolare, Lubich discovered a "light" to understand the truths in the scriptures. Lubich said, "And thanks to God, when we study [the Gospels] with the presence of Jesus among us . . . we often find ourselves immersed in a light from above."[8]

Lubich here refers to "the presence of Jesus among us," the communal presence of God experienced through the charism of the Focolare, as "light" by which she understood what God was conveying to her through scripture. She quotes Hans Urs von Balthasar about this kind of mystical experience and the *unexpected* nature of its discoveries: "Charisms . . . can receive glimpses into the center of revelation, glimpses that enrich the Church in a very unexpected and yet everlasting way."[9] This unexpected and luminous opening up of the mind of Chiara Lubich and the Focolare practitioners is, Lubich says, caused by God's luminosity itself: "This awareness of a light and, at the same time . . . of the Absolute Being, of the most pure Light which knows neither shadow nor error . . . shines forth in the consciousness of human beings invoking them to seek this most pure Light as its final destination."[10]

It was, and continues to be, this luminous communal presence of God that opens up certain aspects of the bibli-

cal texts that have become the cornerstones of the Focolare spirituality. What Lubich saw concerning creation through this light is in some ways similar to the unexpected vision of the original buddha-nature seen from the luminous standpoint of the Eternal Buddha. She says, "Penetrating [beings] to their original depth [with] loving understanding . . . grasps the truth and beauty of creation at its roots, that is in God who contains creation within himself and nurtures it with himself."[11]

A second effect of the Lotus Sutra is the unexpected opening up of compassion though the compassionate force of the Eternal Buddha. For Lubich, the vision of God reveals God as love, "God-Love," as the essence of the Trinity: "In the light of the Trinity, Being reveals itself, if we can say this, as safekeeping in its most inner recesses the non-being of Self-giving, not the non-being that negates Being, but the non-being that reveals Being as Love: *Being which is the three divine Persons.*"[12] When God opens up the mind of the Focolare practitioner, Lubich says that there is a Trinitarian dimension to the love that is conveyed. In creation, this Trinitarian self-emptying/self-giving love is the foundation of, and dynamic pattern between, all beings. All beings are seen as a collective image of the Trinity interrelated in a dynamic pattern of kenotic love and unity. The Trinity seen in this way provides an ideal of love and unity wherein all three persons empty themselves (the positive non-being of *kenosis*) in loving and reverential affirmation of the other so that each one is "mutually indwelling in an eternal selfgiving."[13] For Lubich, this Trinitarian love is not just something to be "seen," but is an ideal to be "lived." In the consciousness of the person, it becomes *caritas,* the kenotic charity lived in each moment as a realization of God-Love in relationships.

The third effect of the Lotus Sutra is the opening up to a parenting force of integration, to a compassionate unity that extends ultimately to all beings. For Lubich, the vision of God-Love as Trinity opened up her horizon of consciousness so she could see with reverence a "golden thread" of love connecting all beings in a cosmic tapestry of unity. Here we find a parallel, though not without differences, to the opening up of the compassionate and unifying force of the Eternal Buddha through the conveyance of the Lotus Sutra in the mind of the Buddhist practitioner. In the phenomenology of this experience of the Lotus Sutra, I claimed earlier that one can say that the Lotus Sutra is the luminous, reverential, compassionate, transforming, and integrating force of the Eternal Buddha through the Dharma of the One Vehicle revealing and realizing the One Family of all beings. I think it might be fair to say that the unexpected opening up of the collective mystical experience of the Focolare, through the charism of Chiara Lubich, conveys a Gospel-based revelation of the luminous, reverential, loving, transforming, and integrating Trinitarian power of God-Love that reveals and realizes the unity of all creation.

Just as the Lotus Sutra opens up in Buddhists a new and unexpected experience of, attitude toward, and relation to the world, so the Gospels opened up a surprising experience of, attitude toward, and relation to the world in Chiara Lubich and her companions. Concerning this surprise, Maria Voce, president of the Focolare, said the following: "Chiara stated: 'the novelty flashed through my mind,' and again, 'for us it

Rissho Kosei-kai members welcome Ms. Maria Voce, the new president of the Focolare Movement, a worldwide Catholic lay movement based in Italy, and its new copresident, Rev. Giancarlo Faletti, at the entrance to the Great Sacred Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters on January 15, 2010. Focolare leaders visited Rissho Kosei-kai during their tour of Asia to visit Focolare communities.

was an absolute novelty' which determined a radical change, a conversion in the first *focolarine* [Lubich and her female companions], in the way of seeing the world, history and consequently, in their behavior. . . . God-Love opened 'our eyes to see all people as our brothers and sisters' . . . because they are all children of the one Father."[14]

Here we find a Christian parallel to the surprising discovery of the One Family of the Eternal Buddha conveyed in the Lotus Sutra Parable of the Burning House.

One aspect of the behavioral change due to the experience that Voce speaks about here is the development of a "fraternal communion"[15] in interreligious relations contributing to dialogue and collaboration for a more united and peaceful world. I would suggest that a similar behavioral change takes place in Buddhists through the vision of the Lotus Sutra. Therefore the question arises: What happens when these two religious traditions enter the horizon of interreligious dialogue with each other? I suggest that there is a mutual entering into, and contributing to, a horizon of fraternal communion wherein people gather as family with a common understanding and attitude toward each other and the world, moved and guided in that horizon by love and unity, or compassion and integration.

What would be the effects of this kind of dialogical engagement of fraternal communion? Here, I can only suggest some examples based on anecdotal evidence from persons who have engaged in dialogues and other events of the Focolare and Rissho Kosei-kai. At the first such gathering that I attended, in the late 1970s in New York City, I noticed that the participants seemed to know each other personally even though they had just met. Speaking later to Focolare and Rissho Kosei-kai members about this impression, they said that they "felt" a kinship with each other that was like an "instant recognition."

At that same gathering, I also sensed a family-like atmosphere in which people seemed to feel comfortable with each other and enjoyed being together. The occasion was marked by joyfulness and, at times, even exuberance. I must say that I felt surprised by this fellowship across barriers of language and culture. Again, what the Focolare and Rissho Kosei-kai members said about this second impression was that they felt the community to which they belonged was "expanded" to include the other community. The sense of family was not just a personal experience but a collective one as well.

A third impression from that first meeting was that the event was not self-enclosed. Rather, in the presentations, the participants seemed to have a global vision of what their coming together represented. For me, the event broadened and enriched my view of "unity" that I had formed from purely Christian sources. Hearing a similar message based on Buddhist sources and experiencing interreligious unity concretely gave me a new perspective of the interreligious and intercultural collaborative possibilities for building unity within the diversity of the human family today. This new perspective has continued to be an inspiration to me: namely, that it is possible for a fraternal communal horizon of interreligious engagement to contain "seeds" for a common sense of "mission" in the world. Over the years, I have witnessed the fruit of these seeds as Rissho Kosei-kai and Focolare members around the world collaborate in activities that have contributed to a more united and peaceful world. This has been especially true of joint efforts through the World Conference of Religions for Peace. Chiara Lubich herself was an honorary president of Religions for Peace, something that she was very proud of and took very seriously.

Finally, I would just say that through fraternal dialogue, I have found the Lotus Sutra to be a source of transformative goodness in the personal lives of Buddhists and a motivational force to bring healing and unity to the world through dialogue and collaboration. I have also been personally enriched by the Lotus Sutra. Dr. Shinozaki drew my attention to the Bodhisattva Never Despise as a model for behavior presented in the Lotus Sutra. This model has continued to inspire me, especially in difficult relationships. I also expect that Rissho Kosei-kai members have found some aspects of the Focolare spirituality to be enriching as well.

So, again we return one final time to the question: What is the Lotus Sutra? I would venture to say that within the horizon of interreligious dialogue, the Lotus Sutra is an unexpected, inspiring, enriching, unifying, and motivating force that contributes to fraternal interfaith communion and engagement, and is an impulse for practical collaboration for the good of the world, the One Family of all beings. ❑

Notes

1. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 12–41.

2. Michio T. Shinozaki, "The Lotus Sutra as the Final Revelation of the Buddha and Its Attitude Toward Other Religions," *Pro Dialogo* 100, no. 1 (1999): p. 84.

3. Ibid., p. 93.

4. Bhikkhu Dhammavihari, "Scriptural Tradition and Personal Experience in the Buddhist Tradition," *Pro Dialogo* 100, no. 1 (1999): pp. 64–65.

5. "The Teaching, Capacity, Time, and Country," in *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Nichiren Shoshu International Center, 1986), pp. 7–21.

6. Shinozaki, "Lotus Sutra," pp. 99, 102.

7. Chiara Lubich, "Toward a Theology and Philosophy of Unity," in *An Introduction to the Abba School* (New York: New City Press, 2002), p. 19.

8. Ibid., p. 23.

9. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theology III* (Milan: Jaca Books, 1992), p. 22.

10. Lubich, "Toward a Theology," p. 32.

11. Ibid., p. 35.

12. Ibid., p. 34.

13. Ibid.

14. Maria Voce, "God-Love in the Thought of Chiara Lubich," talk presented at Rocca di Papa, Italy, September 21, 2009, pp. 3, 7, 8.

15. Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 34.

The Materiality of the Lotus Sutra: Scripture, Relic, and Buried Treasure

by D. Max Moerman

Whatever place a roll of this scripture may occupy, in all of those places one is to erect a stupa of seven jewels, building it high and wide and with impressive decoration. There is no need even to lodge a relic in it. What is the reason? Within it there is already a whole body of the Thus Come One.
—The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma
(Myōhō renge-kyō)

Bones are the relics of the living body, but sutras are the relics of the Dharma-body.
—Commentary on the Lotus Sutra
(Myōhō renge-kyō mongu)

What is the Lotus Sutra? The scripture itself provides one ready answer: The Lotus Sutra is a Buddha relic. Like a number of other early Mahayana sutras, the Lotus Sutra asserts an equivalence between a roll of scripture and a relic of the Buddha. Employing a new theory of embodiment, the Lotus Sutra replaces the Buddha's corporeal remains with his textual corpus. The material form of the Buddha's word, rather than the material remains of the Buddha's body, is recognized as the central object of veneration and, as such, is to be enshrined in a stupa, a reliquary previously reserved for the remains of a buddha.

The relationship between the cult of the relic and the cult of the book has been of interest to Buddhist scholars for at least the last thirty-five years (Schopen 1975). But it has been of interest to Buddhist practitioners for much longer than that. Sutra passages, in particular the *gāthā* on the chain of causation (*pratītyasamutpāda*), were inscribed on objects deposited in stupas in India and Central Asia from at least the second century and in northwest China from the fifth century CE (Boucher 1991). By the eighth century, the practice of enshrining Buddhist *gāthā* and *dhāraṇī* within stupas had spread to the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago (Fontein 1995). This transposition of the text and the relic—a concern central to the Lotus Sutra—was foundational to the Japanese Buddhist tradition. One million miniature stupas were produced by the state between 764 and 770, each containing a printed *dhāraṇī* (Yiengpruksawan 1987). By the mid-eighth century as well, the relics traditionally deposited beneath the central posts of Japanese pagodas were replaced by sutra texts (Kidder 1972, 140). Such examples of bibliolatry, following the injunctions of the Lotus Sutra, underscore the significance of the materiality and performativity of religious texts.

Illuminated transcriptions of the Lotus Sutra from Heian- and Kamakura-period Japan are emblematic of this equation of Buddha and Dharma bodies. In the tenth-century *Ichiji Ichibutsu Hokekyō* (Zentsūji), each character of the Lotus Sutra is paired with a miniature image of a buddha as if illustrating Sengxiang's claim in the *Fahua zhuanji* that "each single character of the Lotus Sutra is a Buddha" (Rambelli 2007, 109; T. v. 51, 49a). In the twelfth-century *Ichiji Rendai Hokekyō* (Ryūkōji), each character of the sutra is placed on a lotus: the Dharma physically taking the place of the Buddha. In the twelfth-century *Ichiji Hōtō Hokekyō* (Togakushi Jinja) each character of the sutra is enshrined within a stupa: the text, in each of its lexical components, a sacred Buddha relic. Perhaps the most complete conflation of text and relic is represented in the stupa sutra (*tōkyō*), such as the twelfth-century example at Danzan Jinja or the thirteenth-century example at Ryūhonji, in which each character of the sutra's

D. Max Moerman, associate professor in the Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Cultures, joined the faculty of Barnard College in 1998. Dr. Moerman is the associate director of the Donald Keene Center for Japanese Culture, Columbia University, and of the Columbia Center for Japanese Religions. His publications include Localizing Paradise: Kumano Pilgrimage and the Religious Landscape of Premodern Japan.

ten fascicles is transcribed in gold to form a set of ten stupas. In these painted scrolls, the Lotus Sutra and the stupa are inseparable and mutually constitutive, or in a more Buddhist turn of phrase, interdependent and nondual. This paper will examine another practice in which the text of the Lotus Sutra was treated as a relic. Beginning in the eleventh century, Japanese Buddhists copied, consecrated, enshrined, and then buried the Lotus Sutra underground in the precincts of sacred mountains, shrines, and temples. The sutras, produced at great effort and expense, were not meant to be read, studied, or even seen for eons. Rather, they were deployed as ceremonial artifacts to assure the salvation of both the religion and the individual.

The practice of sutra burial began in the eleventh century during a time that marked, for many Japanese Buddhists, the beginning of the end: the onset of the age of the Final Dharma (Jpn., *mappō*) in which both the availability of texts and the ability of people to realize them would reach their lowest points. The Dharma, it was believed, would not be fully restored until 5.67 billion years after the death of Shakyamuni when the Future Buddha Maitreya would descend from his heaven and inaugurate a new golden age. The ineluctable decline of the Dharma presented soteriological problems for both the tradition and the individual. The death of the Dharma challenged, of course, the very existence of Buddhism and required acts of protection and preservation to ensure its survival. But the age of the Final Dharma also had implications for Buddhist practitioners for whom individual salvation became increasingly difficult as the source of teachings receded into an inaccessible past and the spiritual capabilities of humans diminished. It was a time when history itself represented a profound religious problem

Ichiji Ichibutsu Hokekyō, *or a Lotus Sutra scroll in which each character is paired with a miniature image of a buddha. Heian period (794–1185). National Treasure. Zentsuji, Kagawa Prefecture.*

and when Japanese Buddhists began to formulate specifically religious responses to the problem of history. The burial of sutras—as revealed in their contents, dedicatory inscriptions, material form, and locations—sought to address the twin religious challenges of the Final Dharma by establishing a link between the death and salvation of Buddhist texts and that of the individual believer.

Buried copies of the Lotus Sutra were transcribed on a variety of materials, most often on paper or silk scrolls in black, gold, or vermilion ink (the latter was occasionally mixed with blood). Yet there are also numerous examples of sutras inscribed on more permanent materials such as stone, ceramic tiles, or copper plates, signaling perhaps an even more explicit concern with the preservation of the teachings. The silk or paper sutras would be placed in cylindrical, stupa-shaped containers fashioned out of bronze, iron, ceramic, or stone that were often in turn encased in a second outer vessel of ceramic or stone. They were then buried in small underground chambers lined with stones and occasionally packed with charcoal to aid in preservation. The chambers were sealed with stone and marked, like a grave, with an earthen mound and a stone stupa, lantern, or stele. The sutra containers themselves exhibit a great variety of styles, from the detailed miniature treasure pagoda (*hōtō*) to the simple lidded cylinder. Yet, however elaborate or plain, all of the containers share the basic form of the stupa, a reliquary housing the remains of a buddha. As death rituals for the Dharma-body, sutra burials were understood within the vocabulary of Japanese Buddhist practice as *kuyō*, or memorial services. As such, sutra burials produced a great deal of symbolic value, yet the beneficiary of this merit—the Dharma, the sponsor, the sponsor's family members—was by no means fixed.

Although it was not the only sutra buried, the Lotus Sutra, including the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings and the Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue as its opening and closing chapters, was by far the most common. There are nearly one hundred examples of Lotus Sutra burials dating from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and by the middle of the twelfth century such burials were performed in every province of the country (Seki 1990). The Lotus Sutra reserves the highest praise for those "who shall receive and keep, read and recite, explain, or copy in writing a single verse of the *Scripture of the Blossom of the Fine Dharma*, or who will look with veneration on a roll of this scripture as if it were the Buddha himself" (Hurvitz 1976, 174). In carrying out these scriptural instructions, the sponsors of sutra burials enjoyed the combined merit of copying and protecting the sutra together with that of building a stupa in which to enshrine and venerate it. The enshrinement of the Lotus Sutra within stupa-shaped reliquaries is thus entirely in keeping with the sutra's own sacramental logic. It is also in keeping with the eschatological concerns of the Lotus, in which the Buddha praises "those who preserve the sutra in the evil age after my parinirvana."

Although preeminent, the Lotus Sutra was neither the only text nor the only cult represented in sutra burials. As the Final Age was understood to portend political as well a religious troubles, the Lotus Sutra was also often joined by two additional scriptures held to protect the state, the Golden Light Sutra (Jpn., Konkōmyō-kyō) and the Benevolent Kings Sutra (Jpn., Ninnō hannya haramitsu-kyō). The other scriptures most commonly buried, and usually accompanying the Lotus Sutra, were the three sutras dedicated to the Buddha Amida: the Larger Pure Land Sutra (Jpn., Muryōju-kyō), the Smaller Pure Land Sutra (Jpn., Amida-kyō), and the Sutra of Meditation on Amida Buddha (Jpn., Kanmuryōju-kyō), and the three sutras dedicated to the Future Buddha Maitreya, known in Japanese as Miroku: the Sutra on Maitreya Achieving Buddhahood (Jpn., Miroku jōbutsu-kyō), the Sutra on Maitreya's Rebirth Below [on Earth] (Jpn., Miroku geshō-kyō), and the Sutra on Maitreya's Rebirth Above in Tuṣita (Jpn., Miroku joshō tosotsu-kyō). The Amida sutras describe the Gokuraku Pure Land and the Buddha Amida's vow to guarantee rebirth there for all who call on him. The Miroku sutras describe Miroku, while still a bodhisattva, practicing in the Tosotsu heaven, where, with the accumulation of sufficient merit, his devotees may also be reborn. They tell as well of a future golden age, 5.67 billion years after the death of the Buddha Shakyamuni, when the Dharma will rise again to the apex of its historical cycle. At that time Miroku, also known as Jison in his role as the future Buddha, will descend to the earth and expound the Dharma at three assemblies to be held beneath the legendary Dragon Flower Tree.

The Lotus Sutra, Amida, and Miroku cults were in no way mutually exclusive. The Lotus Sutra, for example, guarantees rebirth in Amida's Pure Land to women who revere the sutra's twenty-third chapter (Hurvitz 1976, 300). Elsewhere it promises that any male devotee "at life's end . . . shall straightway ascend to the top of the Tosotsu heaven, to the place of the bodhisattva Miroku" (Hurvitz 1976, 335). Miroku faith, moreover, emphasized that heavenly rebirth can be gained through religious works, the most common of which in Japan at the time was copying the Lotus Sutra. This emphasis on scriptural production and displays of piety suggests another reason, beyond the eschatological, for the connection between the Miroku cult and the burial of the Lotus Sutra.

The origin of Lotus Sutra burial is traditionally ascribed to the Tendai patriarch Ennin (794–864), who copied the Lotus Sutra and enshrined it in a small stupa on Mount Hiei in 831. Ennin's method of copying, known as "according to prescribed method," or *nyohō*, was itself a major ritual undertaking and set the standard for sutra transcriptions thereafter. Although sutra copying as a religious practice goes back to the earliest period of Buddhist Japan, Ennin's efforts were of a different ritual scale. He is said to have gone into retreat for three years to prepare for and carry out the transcription. He grew the hemp to make the paper on which the sutra was to be written, made his own brush of twigs and grass rather than animal hair, and made his own ink from graphite rather

The Konpon Nyohōtō, which now stands in Yokawa on Mount Hiei, was built in 1924 on the site where the Nyohōdō once stood.

than using ink sticks containing animal glue. Combining ritual and writing, Ennin performed three full prostrations with the transcription of each character. He placed the completed sutra within a small wooden stupa, presented to it ten kinds of offering, and installed it in a hall at Yokawa later known as the Nyohōdō (*Genkō shakusho* 1930, 62).[1] Ennin's wooden stupa containing the sutra was later placed inside a larger stupa made of bronze. Yet the sutra was not in fact buried until 1031, a full two centuries after Ennin's transcription, when it was enclosed within a third bronze reliquary and interred in the earth beneath the Nyohōdō. The text chronicling the burial emphasizes the text's performative power to preserve both Buddhists and Buddhism itself until the coming of the Future Buddha.

> In the Final Age, the head monk commanded that the gilt bronze sutra tube in the hall be moved and that the sutra be buried beneath the earth and stones of the mountain to await the coming of Miroku. This is in accordance with the Master's original vow. [The sutra] dwelling inside a seven-jeweled stupa will assuredly be transmitted to the age of Miroku and thus Shakyamuni's Dharma will save people. People will rely on this sutra until the age of Miroku arrives (*Eigaku yōki* 1959–60, 549b).

The eleventh and twelfth centuries were both the earliest and the most active period of sutra burial. Although the practice continued into the eighteenth century, more than half of all sutra burials date from these first two hundred years. Sutra burials from these early centuries are more extravagant than those of later periods and include many examples of gold ink transcriptions on indigo paper. The period is also distinguished by the greater number of sutras interred at a single site and by the inclusion of other items such as mirrors and swords.[2] Yet these burials speak to more than the historical and soteriological anxieties of the age. They also locate the sites where such anxieties were expressed and where, it was hoped, they could be conquered as well. In an age so closely identified with the imperial court, it is significant that the majority of these sites were located outside the capital of Heian-kyō. Some of these sites were relatively close by, such as Daidōji and Mount Inari to the south, Mount Kurama to the north, and Mount Hiei to the northeast of the capital. Others, such as Makiosan in Izumi Province, Mount Kōya and Kumano in Kii, and Mount Asakuma in Ise, were somewhat farther from the capital. Numerous other Heian-period sutra burials have been found throughout the northeast from Mount Fuji to as far north as Dewa and Mutsu. It is western Japan, however, that reveals perhaps the most surprising examples. In the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, when the practice was at its height, more than 60 percent of known sutra burials took place in the northern part of Kyushu (Chijiwa 1987, 426).[3] Indicative as well of an anxiety over the permanency of the teachings are two sets of the Lotus Sutra engraved on thin bronze plates excavated in northern Kyushu. The two sets, made of a material designed to outlast the Final Age itself, were created within a year of each other in the mid-twelfth century.

Scholars have suggested a variety of reasons for eleventh- and twelfth-century sutra burials. Some see the practice linked to the rituals of Tendai mountain asceticism, some to the hope for rebirth in Amida's or Miroku's paradise, some to the desire for enlightenment and benefits for oneself and others. Nearly all, however, agree that the primary motivation was the concern to preserve the sutras throughout the Final Age until the coming of the Future Buddha Miroku, who will use the buried sutras in his three inaugural sermons beneath the Dragon Flower Tree. The locations of major sutra burials—such as the mountains of Hiei, Kōya, Kinpusen, and Hiko—were believed to be the sites of Miroku's future descent. Moreover, dedicatory inscriptions included with the deposits appear to support the claim that an anxiety over the Final Dharma constituted the central motivation for sutra burials in this period.

The term *Final Dharma* appears often in inscriptions, as if attesting to the timeliness of the rites. It seems to function both as chronological notice and theological rationale for the burials. A Lotus Sutra inscribed on tile and buried in 1071 is dated "the third year of the Enkyū era in the Final Age of the Buddha's Dharma" (Takeuchi 1947–68, 127, no. 123). In 1082, another buried Lotus Sutra is inscribed "at the beginning of Shakyamuni's Final Dharma Age . . . to be used when Miroku comes to preach the Dharma beneath the Dragon Flower Tree" (Takeuchi 1947–68, 131, no. 130). Numerous other sutra burials are dated "in the age of the Final Dharma of Shakyamuni" (Takeuchi 1947–68, 357, 394, nos. 407, 449). Some are even more specific, counting off the exact number of years that have elapsed since the Buddha's passing. The inscription on a sutra reliquary buried in 1103 is dated "2052 years after the death of the Buddha Shakyamuni" (Takeuchi 1947–68, 161–62, no. 163; Nara National Museum 1976, 83, no. 168).

Although a preoccupation with the age of the Final Dharma clearly informs the practice of sutra burial, the preservationist impulse was not necessarily the sole motivating factor. Inscriptions also express the hope that, because of this meritorious act, the donor (or another individual to whom the merit is being transferred) will be reborn, in the interim, in Amida's Pure Land or in Miroku's Tosotsu heaven. These two goals, one concerned with the salvation of the Dharma and the other with the salvation of the self, address the dual challenge of the Final Dharma and were often combined in the logic of practice. Even the burial of sutras inscribed on tile—a medium intended to withstand the test of time—reveals such multiple intentions. Perhaps the most significant burial of tile sutras was performed in the years 1143 and 1144 at Gokurakuji in Harima Province by six monks under the leadership of Zenne, the abbot of the temple (Takeuchi 1947–68, 265–78; Taira 1992, 115–18). Nearly five hundred ceramic tiles were inscribed with some thirty different sutras and images of buddhas and bodhisattvas, and various mandalas were interred to last throughout "the ten thousand-year period of the Final Dharma" (Takeuchi 1947–68, 269).

Zenne calculated that, "20,160 years have passed since Shakyamuni entered nirvana and it is still 5.67 billion years before Jison's advent" (Takeuchi 1947–68, 268). Zenne then asked for "tranquility in this life, good health, and longevity . . . rebirth in the upper realms of the Gokuraku Pure Land and presence at the coming of Jison" (Takeuchi 1947–68, 274). In addition he prayed for a felicitous rebirth for his ancestors, his teachers, and the retired emperor Ichijō (980–1011), for "the tranquility of the [present] Emperor," and for "the protection of the state" (Takeuchi 1947–68, 270). The other monastic sponsors of the burial, however, make no mention of Miroku or the chronology of the Final Dharma but ask only for rebirth in Amida's Pure Land for themselves, their teachers, and their parents. Indeed the salvation of one's parents was not an uncommon motivation. A burial at Shiōjisan was made in 1116 expressly "for the benefit of my mother"

A ceramic tile inscribed with a passage from "The Merit of Joyful Acceptance," chapter 18 of the Lotus Sutra, unearthed at Iimoriyama Sutra Mound in Fukuoka Prefecture, Kyushu. 22.9 x 18.9 x 1.8 cm. Twelfth century. Nara National Museum.

(Nara National Museum 1976, 44b, no. 74), and another at Kurodani in Echizen Province in 1157 "so that my father and mother may attain rebirth in the Pure Land" (Nara National Museum 1976, 117b, no. 233). Thus, even in the age of the Final Dharma, people buried sutras to save more than just themselves.

Such multiple intentions, moreover, characterized sutra burials from the very beginning. The sutra burial performed by Fujiwara no Michinaga in 1007 at Kinpusen in Yamato Province is usually considered the first documented example of the practice. Kinpusen had long been associated with Miroku and his realm (Miyake 1988, 15). The Daigoji monk Sonshi (832–909) identified the deity of Kinpusen as a manifestation of Miroku and described the mountain as the inner realm of the Tosotsu heaven (*Shugendō shōso* 1985, 62, 80). The sutra burial of Michinaga, the most powerful figure of the age, was an enormous ritual production. He had an elaborate sutra case cast in gilt bronze and inscribed with a lengthy dedicatory inscription and twelve Sanskrit characters praising the Lotus Sutra. He then began a seventy-three-day period of purification.[4] As he climbed the mountain, with sixteen other aristocrats in attendance, he stopped to make offerings of silver and silk at fertility shrines along the way.

Once at the central sacred area, he presented lamps and parasols, 100 copies of the Lotus Sutra, 100 copies of the Benevolent Kings Sutra, 110 copies of the Heart Sutra, and 8 copies of the *Essential Meaning of the Heart Sutra* to "the

thirty-eight gods" of the fertility shrines. These dedications were performed for the benefit of the sovereigns Reizei (950–1011) (whose consort was Michinaga's sister Chōshi) and Ichijō (whose consorts included Michinaga's eldest daughter Shōshi and niece Teishi); for Michinaga's nineteen-year-old daughter; and for the crown prince, the future Emperor Sanjō (son of Reizei and Michinaga's sister Chōshi).[5] Michinaga then dedicated a set of eight scriptures in fifteen rolls that he had copied out himself in gold ink. These are listed in his inscription as including "one copy of the Lotus Sutra in eight rolls together with the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings and the Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, and one copy each of the *Essential Meaning of the Heart Sutra*, the Amida Sutra, the three Miroku sutras, and the Heart Sutra." He described these actions, in an inscription on the gilt bronze case in which the sutras were buried, as "burying the relics of the Dharma-body (*hosshin no shari*)." In identifying the sutras as "relics of the Dharma-body," Michinaga's inscription may have been informed by the statement in the *Commentary on the Lotus Sutra* (*Myōhō renge-kyō mongu*) that "bones are the relics of the living body, but sutras are the relics of the Dharma-body" (T., 1718, 110c).

Michinaga worshiped both Amida and Miroku, stating that "the Amida Sutra promises that one who calls on Amida on one's deathbed will be reborn in his Gokuraku Pure Land [and] the Miroku sutras allow one to avoid an inauspicious rebirth and to be received at Jison's advent." Michinaga asked to be reborn in Amida's Pure Land but only until Miroku's advent: "When Jison becomes a buddha, may I journey from the Gokuraku realm to the place of Miroku Buddha, listen to his lectures on the Lotus Sutra, and attain buddhahood." Michinaga prayed that at that future time his "buried sutras would spontaneously well up out of the earth" like the Jeweled Stupa in the Lotus Sutra and be used by Miroku in his inaugural sermons (Nara National Museum 1976, 6b–7a).

Early sutra burial donors such as Michinaga and those that followed for close to two centuries expressed a wide range of desires. They prayed for the salvation of the Dharma, themselves, and their family members. Michinaga dedicated the merit from some of his pious exertions on Kinpusen to his brother-in-law Reizei, his son-in-law Ichijō, his daughter Shōshi, and his nephew the crown prince. Thus, although the sites, scriptures, and dedicatory inscriptions indicate an anxiety over the death of the Dharma, the death of the individual received an equal if not greater degree of attention. Fujiwara no Moromichi (1062–99), for example, the great-grandson of Michinaga, followed his forebear's practice of burying sutras on Kinpusen. In 1088 Moromichi dedicated a large number of memorial transcriptions to an equally large number of family members.[6] In the colophon of his gold-ink copy of the Lotus Sutra, Moromichi, who at the time was suffering from an earache, reveals some of his motivations:

> In copying this sutra during the period of ritual purification for my pilgrimage to Kinpusen, I pray for the purification of my inner ear, one of the Six Roots, and thinking of the importance of the daughters of this house, hope that the merit of [copying] the One Vehicle of the Lotus will provide them with the karmic bond to be present at the three sermons beneath the Dragon Flower Tree (Nara National Museum 1976, 20b, no. 30).

Another dedicatory inscription included in the sutra mound speaks also to a concern with the future glory of Miroku and of Moromichi's lineage as well. The final section begins with Moromichi's statement that

> I have copied out the Threefold Lotus Sutra, the Heart Sutra, and the Diamond Lifespan Sutra by hand in gold letters and buried them at Kinpusen in a copper vessel in order to advance the noble teachings of the One Vehicle of Shaka and to establish the karmic bond to be present at Jison's three assemblies. With faith that these offerings will surely enjoy the longevity of metal and stone, I present them to the mountain god with reverence for his miraculous powers, and to the fertility deities of the Thirty-eight Sites.

Yet it concludes with a prayer "for those born into this hereditary house to quickly rise to the Third Rank, for the past karma of its deceased fathers and grandfathers, and for the prosperity of its descendants" (Nara National Museum 1976, 19b–20a, no. 29).

To these ends Moromichi offered one copy of the Diamond Lifespan Sutra for the reigning sovereign, Horikawa, and his consort; one copy each of the Benevolent Kings Sutra for the longevity and prosperity of his brother-in-law the retired sovereign Shirakawa, his sister Fujiwara no Kenshi, and their four sons; ten copies of the Lotus Sutra, five copies of the Benevolent Kings Sutra, and one hundred rolls of the Diamond Lifespan Sutra for the longevity and prosperity of his father, Fujiwara no Morozane; five copies of the Lotus Sutra, five copies of the Benevolent Kings Sutra, and one hundred rolls of the Diamond Lifespan Sutra for the health and longevity of his mother, Fujiwara no Reishi; three copies of the Benevolent Kings Sutra and one hundred rolls of the Diamond Lifespan Sutra for his son Fujiwara no Tadazane; and for his wife, Fujiwara no Zenshi, one roll each of the Kannon Sutra, the *Essential Meaning of the Heart Sutra*, the Heart Sutra, the Diamond Lifespan Sutra, the Sutra of the Eight Secret Dhāraṇīs, and the Sutra of the Eight Spells of Heaven and Earth together with five copies each of the Lotus Sutra, the Benevolent Kings Sutra, and the Diamond Lifespan Sutra. These offerings were all in addition to his personal gold-ink transcriptions of the Lotus Sutra, the Heart Sutra, and the Diamond Lifespan Sutra. The disproportionate range of sutras that Moromichi dedicated to his wife suggests that the principal reason for this sutra burial was, like that of his grandfather Michinaga, to pray for the birth of descendants. Zenshi had given birth to one son, Tadazane, in 1078 and

A sutra reliquary and the encased Lotus Sutra scrolls unearthed at Kokawa Sutra Mound in Wakayama Prefecture. Left: *an outer ceramic case.* Right: *a bronze reliquary with a dedicatory inscription. Twelfth century. Nara National Museum.*

another consort had produced a second son two years later. But Moromichi was still without a daughter to marry into the imperial line, which was essential to the Fujiwara strategy for maintaining their political power. Moromichi explained as much in his prayer: "I am a young man in the prime of my life and yet I have not been blessed with many children. This I bemoan. My prayer is that I might have another" (Nara National Museum 1976, 19a).

The motivations for sutra burials were, like their contents and locations, so various that no single explanation can be meaningfully applied to all. The stated intentions of the donors exceeded a concern with the salvation of the Dharma to include the salvation of oneself and of one's family members both living and dead. This range of religious desire is reflected in the scriptures chosen and the goals to which they were directed: rebirth in Miroku's Tosotsu heaven or Amida's Gokuraku Pure Land. Gokuraku rebirth was seen not as a means of final escape but as an intermediary stage in a larger eschatological plan: a place for the fortunate to wait before returning to earth to attend Miroku's sermons ushering in the next age. Other donors who asked for rebirth in the Tosotsu heaven understood their goal also as a temporary station from whence to descend with Miroku in the far distant future.

There remains, however, a fundamental tension between these two motives; a difference in the way they approach history. The preservationist aspect of sutra burial, saving the Dharma in its material forms for the Future Buddha, represents an act of historical responsibility, an investment in the future. The advent of Miroku's golden age cannot be accelerated; its eventual appearance after a long period of decline can only be prepared for. The other intention of sutra burials, saving oneself and one's family through immediate future rebirth in either Amida's or Miroku's paradise, follows a different model entirely. Although retaining a this-worldly emphasis (the petitioner would continue to amass spiritual capital to assure his future reward), its goal has become "severely dehistoricised."[7] Buddhism's cosmological timetable, the grand historical model to which the Final Dharma belongs, is circumvented. The Pure Land path of personal salvation with its immanent eschatology seems to obviate the need for institutional preservation.

This divergence is borne out in the sutra burials themselves. A preoccupation with preserving the sutras throughout the age of the Final Dharma in anticipation of Miroku's advent was largely limited to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Later sutra burials rarely mention Miroku's age and are more directly related to the fate of the individual after death. As their ritual function changed from preservation to memorialization, devotion to Amida came to replace the cult of Miroku. In Japan, as in China, Miroku's paradise cult was absorbed and superseded by that of Amida, and the transformation of sutra burials may have been part of this larger religious shift. Rather than the Miroku iconography of early examples, later burials exhibit far more pronounced Amida imagery. The engraved mirrors and hanging bas-reliefs that often accompanied the sutras were decorated with scenes of Amida descending to welcome the dying into his Pure Land, rather than portraits of the Future Buddha.

Yet as we have seen, sutra burials from their earliest examples were concerned with the postmortem salvation of both the religion and the religionist. The Pure Land faith was not limited to a single temporal orientation. Concern with a future rebirth, nostalgia for a past golden age, and visions of a paradise in the present world were in no way mutually exclusive. Such multiple intentions may explain the combined presence of the Miroku and Amida cults as well as the ambiguous place of the age of the Final Dharma in the sutra burials. For although presented, both implicitly and explicitly, as the ostensible reason for the practice, the discourse of the Final Dharma appears on closer examination to have functioned more as a rhetorical center around which other personal, familial, and political anxieties converged. If the practice of sutra burial reveals anything about the role of eschatology in early medieval Japan, it is the range of concerns that are contained within this discourse. As an umbrella term, the Final Dharma is able to embrace a variety of religious desires while at the same time charging them with a heightened sense of historical urgency.

In the age of the Final Dharma, history and salvation presented a formidable set of interrelated problems. To many

monks and aristocrats of the period, the practice of sutra burial provided a solution of sorts. Ceremonial transcription, enshrinement, and burial of the Lotus Sutra was among the repertoire of Lotus Sutra–related practices that offered the ritual strategies and material means whereby the end-time could be prepared for and paradise secured. For historians of Japanese Buddhism, however, the evidence of sutra burials can address another set of problems and provide another kind of buried treasure. Sutra burials, like so many time capsules, offer materials for a geography of religious aspiration. They identify the desires, the individuals, the cults, and the sites central to Japanese Buddhist practice. As such they may offer a map to a new sort of history, a spatial history that might begin to explore the vast and less charted landscape of the Japanese religious imagination.

For scholars of religion beyond Japan, the history of sutra burials offers other lessons as well. The practice reveals that the meanings of sacred texts are not limited to their narrative content. Although the particular sutras selected were certainly relevant to the aspirations of those who buried them, the texts themselves did not bear the communicative or pedagogical function usually attributed to scripture. Great care and expense went into the production of these texts: carved on stone, clay, bronze, and copper; inscribed on precious indigo dyed paper, on costly silk, or in ink mixed with one's own blood; enshrined in reliquaries of figured gilt bronze and imported Chinese porcelain. Yet the texts were never to be recited, studied, or taught, or at least not for 5.67 billion years. The value of their production and use lay in their media as much as in their message: what mattered most were the time, place, and materiality of their deployment. They were created expressly to be hidden from sight, buried so as to outlast time and overcome death. They represent an example of how the power of sacred texts lies not only in their words and ideas but also, as the Lotus Sutra insists, in their materiality and instrumentality. ❑

Notes

1. The ten kinds of offerings are traditionally presented to a buddha, not to a text. As listed in the Lotus Sutra, they are flowers, incense, ornaments, powdered incense, unguent, burning of incense, canopies and banners, clothing, dancing and music, and joining one's hands in worship.

2. These extra-scriptural materials are usually interpreted as representing the donor's concern with the protection of the sutra. Chijiwa, however, has suggested that they may also represent a form of offering directed more toward local deities than the buddhas (Chijiwa 1987, 444).

3. For example, 173 sutra burials (of known location) were performed in the hundred years between 1064 and 1163. Of these, 104 took place in Kyushu (Seki 1990, 710–24).

4. *Midō kanpaku ki,* Kankō 4 (1007) 5/17. Although Michinaga's dedicatory vow, inscribed on the exterior surface of the sutra tube, refers to one hundred days of purification, the standard period lasted around seventy. Ritual preparations for pilgrimages to Kinpusen could last for twenty-one, fifty, or one hundred days. Michinaga began the rites on the seventeenth day of the fifth intercalary month and ended them on the first day of the eighth month.

5. Ibid., 4/8/2–11.

6. *Go-Nijō Moromichi ki* (1952), Kanji 2 (1088) 7/1. This was the first of two sutra burials on Kinpusen. Moromichi again journeyed there two years later in 1090.

7. Nattier (1988) has analyzed these two models as the "here/later" and the "there/later."

References

Boucher, Daniel. 1991. "The Pratītyasamutpādagāthā and Its Role in the Medieval Cult of the Relics." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 14, no. 1, pp. 1–27.

Chijiwa, Minoru. 1987. "Hachiman shinkō to kyōzuka no hassei—mappō shisō kōchō no yūin zokkō." In *Funbo to kyōzuka,* ed. Tadashi Saitō. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan.

Eigaku yōki. 1959–60. In *Gunsho ruijū,* vol. 16. Tokyo: Zoku Gunsho Ruijū Kankōkai.

Fontein, Jan. 1995. "Relics and Reliquaries, Texts and Artifacts." In *Function and Meaning in Buddhist Art,* ed. K. R. van Kooij and H. van der Veere. Groningen: Egbert Forsten.

Fujiwara no Michinaga. 1952–54. *Midō kanpaku ki.* In *Dai Nihon kokiroku,* vol. 2. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.

Genkō shakusho. 1930. In *Kokushi taikei,* vol. 31. Tokyo: Kokushi Taikei Kankōkai.

Go-Nijō Moromichi ki. 1952. In *Dai Nihon kokiroku,* vol. 7. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.

Hurvitz, Leon, trans. 1976. *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Kidder, J. Edward. 1972. *Early Buddhist Japan.* New York: Praeger.

Miyake, Hitoshi. 1988. *Ōmine shugendō no kenkyū.* Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Company.

Nara National Museum, ed. 1976. *Kyōzuka ihō.* Nara: Nara National Museum.

Nattier, Jan. 1988. "The Meanings of the Maitreya Myth: A Typological Analysis." In *Maitreya, the Future Buddha,* ed. Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 23–47.

Rambelli, Fabio. 2007. *Buddhist Materiality: A Cultural History of Objects in Japanese Buddhism.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Schopen, Gregory. 1975. "The Phrase '*sa prthivīpradesas caityabhūto bhavet*' in the *Vajracchedikā:* Notes on the Cult of the Book in Mahāyāna." *Indo-Iranian Journal* 17:147–81.

Seki, Hideo. 1990. *Kyōzuka to sono ibutsu. Nihon no bijutsu* 9, no. 292. Tokyo: Shibundō.

Shugendō shōso. 1985 (1916). In *Nihon daizōkyō.* 3 vols. Tokyo: Meicho shuppan.

Taira, Masayuki. 1992. "Mappō matsudaikan no rekishiteki igi." In *Nihon chūsei no shakai to bukkyō.* Tokyo: Hanawa Shobō, pp. 110–54.

Takeuchi, Rizō, ed. 1947–68. *Heian ibun,* vol. 12 of *Kinseki ibun.* Tokyo: Tōkyōdō.

Yiengpruksawan, Mimi Hall. 1987. "One Millionth of a Buddha: The *Hyakumantō Darani* in the Scheide Library." In *The Princeton University Library Chronicle,* 48:3.

The Lotus Sutra Eludes Easy Definition

A Report on the Fourteenth International Lotus Sutra Seminar

by Joseph M. Logan

Look! Up in the sky!" "It's a bird!" "It's a plane!" "It's Superman!" The people in Metropolis didn't have nearly as much trouble identifying Superman as eleven scholars had in trying to nail down a concrete answer to the theme question, "What is the Lotus Sutra?" at the fourteenth International Lotus Sutra Seminar held, for the second consecutive year, in Paradise (i.e., Rissho Kosei-kai, Kona Branch, Hawaii). Gene Reeves, one of the founding fathers of this conference series, even allowed for the ambiguity inherent in the topic by inviting participants to approach the theme from any particular point of view they desired to use. It will surprise no one, however, that sometimes there is no easy answer to what may seem to be a "simple" question.

Arrivals and official welcomes were completed on January 26, 2010, and the business of the seminar consisted of the presentation of papers from the twenty-seventh to the twenty-ninth, along with a panel presentation for members of the Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Hawaii in Pearl City near Honolulu on the evening of the thirtieth. Papers presented at these seminars are not read during the meetings—they are prepared in advance, and participants receive copies of all of them prior to the conference. Each presenter gives only a brief summary of his or her work during the sessions. A respondent for each paper is also designated in advance. The purpose of the response is to be a catalyst for discussions—discussions within which all kinds of things might arise and from which come the electricity, the flavor, the substance, or, in a word, the "magic" of these seminars.

As the one charged with chronicling this investigation into the whys and wherefores of the Lotus Sutra, I also viewed the papers beforehand, and in reading them I realized that many of the writers (and I borrow here the confessional words of one scholar) "managed to avoid or skirt the issue" by "taking a page from Lotus Sutra itself and redefining the question. That's what the Lotus Sutra does." Therefore, during the opening orientation session, to redirect them a little bit I suggested (to a collection of teachers, no less) a "homework assignment"—a statement from everyone in the classic format of "twenty-five words or less" (thereafter expanded to twenty-eight words in homage to the sutra), beginning with "The Lotus Sutra is . . ." Although the word limit seemed to be an additional challenge for some of them, I think their responses bring to light the multitude of ways in which the Lotus Sutra can be, and is, perceived. So, then, "What is the Lotus Sutra?"

1. A Dharma of Undefined Content

Seeing various commentators on the Lotus Sutra describing it, for example, as "lacking content," or as "a lengthy preface without a book," Miriam Levering (University of Tennessee, Knoxville; specialist in Zen Buddhism and the history of Chan Buddhism in China) in her paper "Groping Through the Maze of the Lotus Sutra," wrote of her attempt to gain a perspective on the Lotus Sutra by putting aside what she knew about it from commentaries by other scholars and just looking at the sutra to see what was in it. Finding that the content of the sutra is not one particular thing—not one doctrine, but many pieces revolving around, for example, Shakyamuni Buddha; the bodhisattva path; and the ideas that all can be included, none should be despised, and all will

---

Joseph M. Logan is a senior fellow at the Essential Lay Buddhism Study Center in Tokyo. His work as a member of the center's translation team focuses on English wording and cadence with the goal of making recitation in English a more effective practice for internalizing a sutra's teachings.

reach buddhahood—the sutra for her becomes a whole series of stories, metaphors, scenes, and dramatic actions that are absolutely compelling and fascinating, which, at first sight, don't seem to cohere into any kind of organized structure. She finds the composition of the sutra to be not unlike that of the ever-popular cult movie *Casablanca*, with its collection of rather different chapters, scenes, and themes, and wonders whether it is that aspect of the Lotus Sutra—its structural similarity to movies like *Casablanca* that we particularly like to see over and over again—that has made the sutra so tremendously popular over so many different periods in Japan and China and everywhere it's been known.

In her twenty-eight words or less, Dr. Levering described the sutra as "a Dharma of undefined content," and also, equally succinctly, as "a life-affirming text; something that inspires faith." Her paper was an appropriate opening piece, as it provided several avenues for discussion that were frequently traveled throughout the seminar. [*Editor's note: The full text of Dr. Levering's paper begins on page 5.*]

2. An Encyclopedia

How is a text constituted? How is it formed? How is it received? How is it used in life? In his complex and intricate paper "A Sūtra within a Sūtra: The Litany of Avalokiteśvara in the *Lotus* and in the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*," Luis Gómez (El Colegio de México, Mexico City; professor emeritus, University of Michigan; specialist in Indian Buddhism) took up the issue of the current use of a text, and, from there, how one can explore its historical use along with the history of its transmission. In exploring an intertextual aspect of the Lotus Sutra, he looked at the appearance of the litany of Avalokiteśvara (Japanese: Kanzeon) in chapter 25 of the Lotus with the intention of clarifying its history. Finding a similar situation regarding the same litany's appearance within the corpus of the Avataṃsaka-sūtra (Japanese: Kegon-kyō), Dr. Gómez concluded that this textualized form of the Avalokiteśvara litany originally came from a ritual oral practice that was probably in existence in India even before the Lotus took final shape. Thus, the Avalokiteśvara litany can be viewed as an "add-on" to the main body of the Lotus Sutra in a symbiotic way that at once gave prestige to the larger text (the Lotus) while at the same time increasing the prestige of that which was added on. An underlying theme of the paper was to emphasize the importance of practice—the virtue of actual devotion, what one actually does rather than the words one tries to understand—since it should be kept in mind that a "religious" text is something more than just a set of coherent arguments about truth or doctrine.

Coming up with a few more than twenty-eight words, Dr. Gómez described the sutra as "an encyclopedia of Buddhism which contains many different layers of meaning. It is an encyclopedia in the sense that one finds multiple teachings that one can access at any given time and use in one's life." For Dr. Gómez, the most important aspect of the sutra is what one does with it: "When one recites it, for example, it has an effect on you that is different from reading it in order to find a doctrine. What is important is how you make use of what the text inspires in you."

3. A Drama

"The Art of Overcoming: The Lotus Sutra and the Fetishization of Tradition" is a passionate offering by Alan Cole (Lewis and Clark College, Portland, Oregon; specialist in Buddhist narratives) that describes the Lotus Sutra as "art," and that details, in his opinion, the completely artful way in which the Lotus Sutra approaches readers in the telling of its tales. He writes of the "intersubjectivity" of the sutra, such that one can see a framing in which the reader is invited to watch two people talk and share language and come to some conclusions; and in that framing, the message that is exchanged between the two people in the text is also for the reader. Thus the sutra has "figured out" how to include the reader in the narrative and in the discussions so that the reader finds himself or herself, in a way, spoken of. It is crafted in such a way to have readers take a detour from their "traditional" paths and wind up thinking of the detour as the main road; and should one come to the sutra having never practiced, "old tradition" looks like the detour and the Lotus Sutra looks like the direct route, which is only one example of its being "good art" in its structuring of meaning and experience for the reader.

In talking with Dr. Cole about the "homework," his answer was brief and direct: "The Lotus Sutra is a drama!" But he spoke at some length about his appreciation of the "genius" that he thought was in the text with regard to the skill of its authors' language use and explained that he felt that there was an amazing amount of compassion and love in the text "because you don't make art for people you don't care about. One can say that [the Lotus Sutra] is a real stern attack on traditional Buddhism . . . but I would say that this text is maybe coming out of a real hope and commitment that the Buddhist tradition could re-found itself and re-ground itself."

4. Large, Rich, and Undefinable

In his paper "The Poets' Sutra," William LaFleur (University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; specialist in Buddhist tradition and medieval Japanese literature) wrote that the Lotus Sutra was a major influence on medieval Japanese poets. Inasmuch as much of the substance of the sutra is itself in the form of poetry, Buddhist poets used poetry as their way to best respect it and saw themselves as responders to the Lotus Sutra in contrast to the Buddhist clerics and occasional laypeople, who saw their task as interpreting it. As poets, they were free to find their own meaning in the sutra and reveal it in their verse. He cited the poems of "two major poets who wrote entire sequences on the chapters of the Lotus"—Fujiwara no Shunzei (1114–1204), a devout lay Buddhist and the "dean" of court poets of that era, and the monk-poet Saigyō (1118–90)—and contrasted their views relating to chapter 5 of the sutra, "Medicinal Herbs." Shunzei's verse "*Harusame*

Eleven scholars of Buddhist studies and theologians from Japan, Hong Kong, and the United States discussed the Lotus Sutra to shed new light upon it from many perspectives during the fourteenth International Lotus Sutra Seminar held January 26–29 at Rissho Kosei-kai's Kona Branch (Hawaii).

wa / konomo kanomo no / kusa mo ki mo / wakazu midori ni / somuru narikeri" translates as "Spring's fine rain / both in the distance and right here / both on grasses and trees / is evenly dyeing everything / everywhere in its new green." Saigyō's poem "*Hikibiki ni / naeshiro mizu o / wakeyarade / yutaka ni nagasu / sue o tosamu*" translates as "Not allotting water / to some seedlings but not / others, I'd spread / it liberally, unstintingly / to every one of them." Dr. LaFleur points out that while both poems touch upon nondiscrimination, a central theme of the Lotus Sutra, Shunzei's verse was seen as traditional in that "new green" referred to the well-known (in elite aristocratic circles) process of dyeing of new kimonos as well as to the greening of the plants (from which the dyes were made). Saigyō's poem, however, was seen as quite a departure from the norm at that time in that he is referring to rice fields and farmers, thus widening the circle of Buddhism's message to include common people outside the aristocracy. In this instance, Saigyō, a cleric, could be viewed as an interpreter of the sutra as well as being a respondent to it.

For Dr. LaFleur, the sutra is too great a thing to be briefly described: "The vast and infinitely rich thing called the Lotus Sutra resists every attempt to confine what it is to a single sentence or single idea. To reduce it would be like trying to boil the ocean down to a handful of salt. I prefer to keep it large, rich, and undefinable."

(All of us who participated—his new friends and his longtime acquaintances alike—were extremely saddened to learn soon after the seminar that Bill LaFleur had died suddenly of a massive heart attack on February 26, 2010. He will be missed by many.)

5. A Way to Find the Ultimate Goal as Buddhists in the Buddha's Absence

The passing away of Shakyamuni Buddha clearly must have had a profound effect on his followers in ancient India, especially with regard to concerns over the transmission of the teachings in his absence. Thus, the first compilation of his teachings at the so-called First Council is thought to have been motivated by such concerns. Moreover, the impact of the Buddha's death would necessarily have continued to be felt with regard to the composition of sutras, including that of the Lotus Sutra, long after his passing. With his paper "The Lotus Sutra as the Teaching in the Age of the Buddha's Absence," Masahiro Shimoda (University of Tokyo; specialist in Indian Buddhist studies) examined several small sutras that focus on the topic of the nirvana of the Buddha in an effort to understand how the compilers of the Lotus Sutra took the Buddha's passing into account in the sutra's composition. These sutras belong to two different lineages of transmission: the *sūtra-piṭaka* (collection of doctrinal teachings) and the *vinaya-piṭaka* (collection of rules of monastic discipline). He explains that the editors of the *vinaya-piṭaka* clearly accepted the fact of the Shakyamuni Buddha's passing away and tried to maintain the continuity of Buddhism by showing the continuity of their lineage within the Bud-

dhist community—starting from the Buddha's awakening, through his passing away, to the so-called First Council. The nirvana sutras in the *vinaya-piṭaka* function to link Buddhism when the Buddha is physically present to Buddhism after his physical disappearance. The editors of the *sūtra-piṭaka,* on the other hand, developed the topic of nirvana such that all accounts subscribe to one and the same Shakyamuni. In following this format, it became necessary for the compilers-editors to affirm the Buddha's existence after his death. This inevitably led to a number of serious challenges regarding the authenticity of the Buddha, the nature of the Buddha, the relation between the Buddha and his words and teachings, and so forth—challenges that confronted the Mahayanists as well. In this style of narrative it becomes particularly necessary to cross distinctions of time between past, present, and future, which was accomplished by introducing such concepts as memory, observation, and prediction. The compilers of the Lotus Sutra framed the whole of its discourse by making the nirvana of Shakyamuni Buddha into a milestone—it became the pivotal point for redirecting the mode of the teaching. Shakyamuni's passing is, of course, not clearly mentioned, since the existence of Shakyamuni Buddha as mediator of the sutra is consistently affirmed as the primary characteristic. But it is undoubtedly clear from the context that the event of Shakyamuni Buddha's nirvana is taken into consideration in the composition of the sutra. And when looking at the mode of compilation of the nirvana sutras found in the lineage of the *vinaya* and the *sūtra* traditions, it can be seen that the Lotus Sutra shows a remarkable resemblance with both traditions. Though the sutra makes a clear distinction in content between prenirvana and post-nirvana discourse—a characteristic of the *vinaya-piṭaka* lineage—it maintains throughout the consistency of the agent of the sutra's being the person of Shakyamuni, a characteristic appropriate to the lineage of the *sūtra-piṭaka.*

Describing his concept of the Lotus Sutra, Dr. Shimoda said: "If you look at the history of Buddhism, almost all Buddhists have lived in the absence of Shakyamuni. So the key teaching in the absence of the Buddha is a crucial question to virtually all Buddhists. In this sense the Lotus Sutra is an ideal that shows the deeper narrative frame—the deeper language—and the story in which we find the way to the ultimate goal as Buddhists in the Buddha's absence. To study the Lotus Sutra is to find the way for us to reach an ideal ultimate goal."

6. A Foundation for Expressions of Practice in Art and Architecture

In her paper "Some Thoughts on Early Practice and Art Forms Related to the Lotus Sutra in China and Japan, 6th to 8th Centuries," Dorothy Wong (University of Virginia, Charlottesville; specialist in Chinese Buddhist art of the medieval period) focuses on certain rituals and associated art forms that relate (although not exclusively) to the Lotus Sutra, such as meditation, recitation of Buddha names, and repentance. She details ways in which Lotus Sutra–related practices link to rituals associated with other texts such as the Golden Light Sutra, the various sutras of Buddha Names, and the Huayan (Japanese: Kegon) Sutra, and to the Guanyin/Kannon cult. Citing an example illustrative of such interrelationships, she describes a Buddhist stele (monument in the form of a stone slab) found in China, dating to 535. The design and imagery of this monument (connected to the Lotus Sutra and the Golden Light Sutra) led her to conclude that it was related to a repentance ritual of a lay devotional society. Dominating the space on the front of the slab is an image of Shakyamuni, flanked by Kannon Bodhisattva and Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva. Above them is a row of seven images depicting the Seven Buddhas of the Past. On the two sides of the monument are images of Amida Buddha. There are forty-two images in seven rows on the reverse side of the stele. The first two rows contain images related to the Golden Light Sutra (which was recited together with the Lotus Sutra). Shakyamuni Buddha and Abundant Treasures Buddha appear in the center of the third row, flanked by other prominent buddhas and bodhisattvas. The remaining images are of those who are predicted to become buddhas in chapters 6 through 9 of the Lotus Sutra. Dr. Wong concludes that these Lotus and Golden Light Sutra–inspired depictions indicate that the sponsors of this monument were most probably familiar with rites of repentance based on these two texts and that, by the inclusion of the names of those predicted to become buddhas in the Lotus Sutra, the stele also emphasizes the fulfillment of the Buddha's promise of enlightenment for all beings.

I asked Dr. Wong if there was any particular aspect of the Lotus Sutra that was most influential in the realm of Chinese art, and she replied that it was the chapter on the jeweled stupa—two buddhas appearing together, one from the past and one from the present, representing the most fundamental and simple way of explaining how the Buddha remains ever present and engaged in the world. For her, the Lotus Sutra is "a foundation that provides content as well as inspiration for expressions of practice in art and architecture."

7. A Wellspring of Information

"The Lotus Sutra is a text that excites very strong emotions in people, even today," said Paul Groner (University of Virginia, Charlottesville; specialist in Japanese Tendai) when summarizing his presentation, "The Lotus Sutra in East Asia." The paper is actually his proposed introduction to a forthcoming publication of the same name, edited by him, that will be a volume of essays about the Lotus Sutra. The content of the volume will be broad-based, with papers organized into four distinct realms: "The Compilation of the Text," "The Lotus Sutra in Pre-modern China," "The Lotus Sutra in Pre-modern Japan," and "The Lotus Sutra in Modern Asia." The introduction itself also spans a range of topics, as Dr. Groner discusses issues touched on in the collected essays under headings such as "The Lotus Sutra in India," "Why East Asians Viewed the Lotus Sutra as Being Important in India," "The Lotus Sutra

and Emptiness," "Doctrinal Issues," "The One Vehicle," "The Eternal Buddha," "The Lotus Sutra and Religious Practices," and "The Lotus Sutra in Modern Religious Movements." In the section on religious practices, Dr. Groner notes that while many religious practices in East Asia are associated with the Lotus Sutra, the text itself lacks specifics. Indeed, many of the practices mentioned in the Lotus Sutra are echoed in many other Mahayana texts. The sutra says of itself that it should be *upheld* (internalized and spread), *read, recited aloud, explained,* and *copied.* And particular stories or passages from some chapters have been taken as guides for some type of religious practice—the actions of the Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, for example. Dr. Groner concludes by offering a few insights into why the Lotus Sutra was so popular and so influential in the realm of Sino-Japanese Buddhism, citing the sutra's flexibility, through which it could be utilized by a variety of traditions; the variety of its practices; and its capacity to be easily applied to daily life.

During his presentation, Dr. Groner said that the sutra "is this in one person's hands, and it is something else in another person's hands." When I asked him what the sutra was in his hands, he offered that the sutra is a wellspring of information with regard to the history of Sino-Japanese Buddhism. "It is a way to get into the minds and behaviors of people who lived a long time ago in Japan and China who I admire. There were people who I thought were marvelous human beings, and if you know the Lotus Sutra you can see how they interpret it and what practices they did, . . . and of course then it sheds a little bit of light back on my own actions."

8. A Teaching that Everyone Can Attain Enlightenment

In "A Huayanist Reading of the Lotus Sutra: The Case of Li Tongxuan," Jin Park (American University, Washington DC; specialist in Zen and Huayan Buddhism) gives a detailed summary of how Li Tongxuan (635–730) regarded the Lotus Sutra. Li was a seventh-century Chinese Buddhist scholar in the Huayan Buddhist tradition. A lay practitioner as a youth—an experience that heightened his sense of the importance of practice—Li was extremely knowledgeable about the various Buddhist scriptures and discourses of his time, although his views relative to the Huayan tradition were considered to be outside the mainstream. In the later stages of his life he wrote the *Exposition on the Eighty Fascicle Version of the Flower Ornament Scripture* (*Exposition on the Huayan Sutra*). At the beginning of this work he offered a tenfold classification of Buddhist teachings in which the Huayan Sutra (considered to be the "Buddha Vehicle") occupied the tenth, or highest, stage. The Nirvana Sutra (revealing the buddha-nature in sentient beings) occupied the ninth stage; the Great Collection Scripture (Chinese: Daji-jing; Japanese: Dai-hō-dō-dai-jikkyō; [the stage to protect the Buddha's teachings]) held the eighth stage; and the Lotus Sutra (offering a way to reach truth through skillful means) occupied the seventh stage. Even though he located it in a lower stage, Li mentions the Lotus Sutra far more times in his exposition than the sutras in the eighth and ninth positions. His point of focus in the Lotus Sutra is the story of the dragon-girl in chapter 12, which he compares to the story of the youth Sudhana in the Huayan Sutra. To Li, both represent the core of their respective teachings. In the Lotus Sutra, the dragon-girl is a nonhuman being, a female, and only eight years old, but she was able to attain enlightenment in an instant. In the Huayan Sutra, Sudhana is a young truth seeker who is determined to practice the bodhisattva path. He seeks guidance from Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, who directs him to a monk, who in turn directs him to another teacher. This process continues until he has met fifty-three Dharma teachers, representatives from all walks of life—all of the diverse existences in the phenomenal world—after which he is able to attain enlightenment. For Li, both stories indicate the possibility of attaining enlightenment in one lifetime (even instantaneously, in the case of the dragon-girl). They represent the actualization of the buddha-nature that is present in all sentient beings. Dr. Park proposes that Li Tongxuan's experience as a lay practitioner taught him the importance of having faith—faith in one's buddha-nature. For Li, believing in the fact that one has the buddha-nature and trying to actualize it in everyday life is the way to practice the Lotus Sutra.

The Lotus Sutra, for Dr. Park, is "a teaching about everybody being able to attain enlightenment, so there is no exception whatsoever. I think that is important in Buddhism; it works with Buddhist theory."

9. A Scripture that Invites Readers to the Buddha and the Dharma

With his paper "The Materiality of the Lotus Sutra: Scripture, Relic, and Buried Treasure," D. Max Moerman (Barnard College, Columbia University, New York; specialist in premodern Buddhist culture) addresses the materiality of the Lotus Sutra—the Lotus Sutra as an object—and one way in which Japanese Buddhists in the eleventh and twelfth centuries tried to practice the Lotus Sutra within that framework. At that time many Japanese Buddhists thought that they were living in the beginning of the age when the ability of people to encounter, have access to, and practice the Dharma would become increasingly difficult over a long period of time—until the appearance of the next Buddha. Thus, to preserve and protect the "treasure" that was the Lotus Sutra, they did the practices it encouraged—copying and venerating it; the sutra was copied in various ways with various materials, and the copies were enshrined in a reliquary. Then in a further effort to protect and preserve it for the future, copies were buried in the ground—a practice that is not mentioned in the sutra. Buried along with the copies were vows and prayers for the transfer of any merit gained through the production of the copies to their families, communities, country, and even to all sentient beings. This seemingly unusual practice thus reveals that the meanings of sacred texts are not necessarily limited to their narrative content.

In a precisely crafted twenty-eight-word statement, Dr.

Moerman offered that the Lotus Sutra is "a scripture that invites its readers to recognize the Buddha and Dharma through the sutra and to celebrate the Buddha and Dharma by putting the sutra into practice." [*Editor's note: The full text of Dr. Moerman's paper begins on page 15.*]

10. An Inspiring, Enriching, Unifying, and Motivating Force

Noting that the first rule in interfaith dialogue is that one should "never try to tell another person what he or she believes," in "A Phenomenological Answer to the Question: 'What Is the Lotus Sutra?'" Donald Mitchell (Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana; specialist in Buddhist-Christian dialogue) seeks to explore what the Lotus Sutra conveys into the consciousness of the Buddhist practitioner. He acknowledges that trying to specifically define the Lotus Sutra is new ground for him, since in interfaith dialogue one uses one's knowledge of other traditions in order to *form* questions to people who belong to that tradition, or to more clearly explain one's own position, but not to try to *answer* questions about that tradition, which is exactly the challenge put to him by the theme "What is the Lotus Sutra?" Using the realm of perceptual experience as the focal point of his approach, Dr. Mitchell answers the question from three perspectives: The Lotus Sutra as a textual object; the Lotus Sutra in the horizon of subjectivity; and, finally, the Lotus Sutra in the horizon of interreligious dialogue. [*Editor's note: The full text of Dr. Mitchell's paper begins on page 9.*]

11. A Source of Ethical Guidance

Introducing his paper "What Is the Lotus Sutra as a Work of Ethics?" Charles Goodman (Binghamton University, Binghamton, Oregon; specialist in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist philosophy) began by saying that there are, unquestionably, a large number of stories in the Lotus Sutra in which wise and benevolent figures benefit people by misleading them or by outright lying to them. "And that is ethically interesting!" There are, of course, people who would find that highly problematic morally. In that regard, Dr. Goodman's paper aspires to answer a number of questions. The first questions are: Could such paternalistic deception actually be justified? Could the kinds of things that these compassionate figures in the Lotus Sutra "allegedly" do be morally permissible? What would be the context in which these actions could be viewed as morally permissible? The next question is: Who should get to perform this kind of skillful means or to act in such a paternalistically deceptive manner? Dr. Goodman turned to the writings of Immanuel Kant to provide ethical thinking adamantly opposed to benevolent deception. Kant reasoned against lying in two ways. The first idea was the conception of a universal, exceptionless moral principle that holds—in all cases—that one must never lie under any circumstances. But Dr. Goodman notes that Kant's reasoning to get to that idea is not widely supported. His second approach centers on human dignity. Since one has a noumenal self—a self outside of boundaries of space and time—one is at least capable of maintaining "rational autonomy" at all times, thus it must be presumed that one is acting rationally at all times. One must therefore be accorded a kind of "dignity." When you are deceived by someone who is acting for what is believed to be your own benefit, it is a morally impermissible affront to that "dignity" of your rational nature. Dr. Goodman notes that this approach has found more support than the first. However, if one is not always a perfectly rational being—and Dr. Goodman suggests that many Buddhist texts profess that to be the case, and that psychological research has shown predictable tendencies toward irrationality in human behavior—then one can be a candidate for the occasional paternalistic deception. Who, then, is allowed to engage in this kind of benevolent deception? According to Dr. Goodman, certainly not politicians. What about spiritual leaders? It seems evident that in order for Buddhism to "work the way it is supposed to," then spiritual leaders must be permitted to do so. They should be able "to tell this person one thing and tell that person another thing appropriate to their respective conditions, even if the two messages are contradictory." But spiritual leaders are not perfect; there is always a risk of misuse of authority, a risk that Dr. Goodman thinks must be tolerated if the Buddhist tradition is to function in its most appropriate way.

Thus, for Dr. Goodman, "The Lotus Sutra is a pointer to the unavoidable dangerous moral truth that teachers must sometimes tell students what they need to hear and not always the final truth."

12. "We Really Never Did Answer That Question, but We Had a Lot of Fun Discussing It"

So said Gene Reeves in his introduction to the panel presentation held at the Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Hawaii on the evening of January 30. There were, indeed, lively discussions throughout the seminar, and several themes—such as narrative concepts, filmic comparisons, and the existence or nonexistence of doctrine in the sutra—were touched on repeatedly throughout the three days of presentations. The following excerpts from the discussions will reveal, I think, something of the dynamic of the seminar program and might inspire some reflection on what the Lotus Sutra may be for you.

Dr. Goodman: A point has been made by a number of readers of the Lotus Sutra that the text is all frame and no painting. Indeed, it is a very ornate frame, with wonderful images on it, but somehow its form is like an elaborately gift-wrapped box with nothing inside. It was said that the sutra's greatly disjointed narrative structure perfectly fits the most "culty" of all cult movies, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, which is full of disjointed and disparate elements, both from a plot point of view and from a thematic point of view. It is the very paradigm of a cult movie. Some people have seen it hundreds or thousands of times, and it is used in ways that subvert or transform social practices of watching films.

During a panel presentation on the evening of January 30 at the Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Hawaii in Pearl City near Honolulu, the participants briefly outlined the outcome of their fruitful discussion at the fourteenth International Lotus Sutra Seminar.

People do things with *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* that they don't do with any other movie, like opening umbrellas in the theater and throwing rice at the screen. And people do things with the Lotus Sutra that they don't do with any other Mahayana sutra, such as chant the title.

Dr. Moerman: The film door that the paper opens actually has to do with not the discussion of content but the discussion of the form. What was suggested in the new and different way of preaching the Dharma is that we have a different mode of narrative. I think the difference is filmic. I think the narrative that you have—both narrative time and space, the editing, the flashbacks and flash-forwards, the special effects, the different images that it opens up—is much more cinematographic than other narrative modes.

Dr. Gómez: Perhaps the payoff of the Lotus Sutra is the narrative itself, as it in some ways reflects our condition as human beings. I think the movie motif works very well, but we should be careful—it works well because that is our culture. So we can look at it and go, "Wow! The Lotus Sutra is really twenty-first century!"

Dr. Groner: One of the things we should be thinking about, too, is that I'm not sure people are looking at this as a narrative. It is a memorized text, and it is recited. And if you think about the repetition of reciting this again and again and again, or copying it again and again, it seems to me that probably what you have is that certain images would come to mind, and the person reciting realizes: "Now I finally understand that passage" or "This applies to a problem I'm having," or something like that. . . . It's like memorizing and reciting it and finally having certain parts appear. So I'm not sure there's a narrative structure in the same sense you have in film as much as it is certain visual images, perhaps that come to mind at certain times, connected to what is happening to me now.

Dr. LaFleur: I wonder, like Paul [Dr. Groner], about the appropriateness of considering it as a narrative, because unlike the way Christian tradition became formed, there is not in the sutra, or any other significant place in Buddhism to my knowledge, a kind of story of the whole thing. There is no beginning and end. It's not that kind of story. And that, in a sense of time, it is very hard to pinpoint where things started or where things will go.

Dr. Park: Narrative does not always have to be interpreted as a compact story line from beginning to end. Narrative can be in a way a kind of doctrine. In the Huayan Sutra there is Sudhana: His is not a story from beginning to end, and it is different from the telling of doctrine—what is going on is that the story is "happening." So, in that sense, it is like there is no distance between a kind of doctrine and what is actually happening to people. Can we see this kind of narrative in the Lotus Sutra?

Dr. Reeves: I think that there are even negative kinds of doctrines in play. Nirvana is an interesting case. Basically, the Lotus Sutra seems to say that nirvana is a teaching for *śrāvakas* and that it's a mistake for them to stay there. Though it doesn't mean it should be thrown away, it's just that you

shouldn't stay there. I think there are other cases like that in the Lotus Sutra; you have a kind of flexibility. It's the same thing I think with respect to the question of whether awakening can be done quickly or not. Usually it takes a lot of work, it takes a very long time. But you get this *naga* princess who does it quickly. I think that's saying that there could be exceptions. So I think it's got doctrines. But it has a kind of flexible use of them. So I think that it does intend—that these things serve a certain kind of purpose—to move the reader in a certain kind of way. Even something like universal salvation can be put as a doctrine. But I think the Lotus Sutra really doesn't care about that doctrine. It only cares about it in the sense it wants you to believe that you can become awakened. And universal salvation is a way of persuading you—if everybody can become awakened, then surely you can. You can't get out of this.

Dr. Gómez: There is a sharp distinction between image and narrative. Narrative is whenever you have a sequence of images, and they don't have to be in any kind of logical sequence, or a beginning or end. In a lot of sutras, that is what you have. You have an expectation of coherence in the text, but coherence according to what?

Dr. Moerman: I think one of the things that perhaps makes the Lotus Sutra powerful, even in its incoherence—if we accept that it is not a completely coherent text—is the degree or the role of the reading community; the degree to which the reader or the auditor is implicated within the text itself. That is, you are constantly invited to enter the text and become one of the characters in there. And that is why it is exactly like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, because it is a text that asks you to enact it. In the telling of it, it asks you to enact it. It wants to fold you into the text; midway, even, it keeps asking you to do that. So, of course you are going to open umbrellas and throw rice, because now there is no longer that gap between us and the text. We are allowed into it, and if we are allowed into it, we are allowed into it for particular scenes. You don't have to worry that there isn't coherence. There are different parts of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* that you enact because one person wouldn't play all of those roles. But in the ritual moment, in the moment of enactment, it is very powerful. Even if it is just a self-contained chapter or scene.

Dr. LaFleur: Let's go back to the film analogy. In film theory, of course, in early discussions there was a lot of talk about suturing—suturing the viewer into the film. It just happens that that is a cognate to sutra. So, specifically, I'm referring to the way in which the reader is meant to be brought into the text. That seems to me to be a not bad way to think about what the sutra does. It is doing something like the surgeon does, through a very clever way. It would seem to me that, depending on the personality and the desires of the individual readers, that suturing can take place at any juncture. They don't have to follow the entire sequence. As long as the connection happens, the sutra has succeeded.

Dr. Moerman: There is a degree to which the exposition of past and future keeps repeating—a program that is replayed. There are lots of places to enter the text. You have lots of opportunities. I often tell students who have trouble with the repetition that they find in the Lotus Sutra, I ask them to consider it as music, and [to consider] how repetition and patterning and rhythm work in music.

Dr. Groner: The sutra's request that appears translated as *read*—as in *read* the sutras—is not like reading it on a Kindle. You have to copy the thing. It is reading it aloud. It is a very different sort of business than the way we normally think of reading. That is important to bring out. When you think of it as music and repetition, then chanting it makes sure that you have that.

Dr. Gómez: In India you don't memorize by reading, you memorize by hearing. Your teacher will tell you the text, and you memorize it as he goes along. It is a memory culture. We don't have a memory culture; ours is very different.

Dr. LaFleur: I think that chanting also facilitates the suturing that I was talking about. Because if you try—have you ever tried to memorize a poem or anything without ever reading it aloud? It's virtually impossible. But once you read it aloud it becomes much more readily something you have memorized, which means it's become part of you.

Dr. Moerman: And then you quite literally have to embody it.

A Tribute

At the concluding panel program, Alan Cole said:

"It was in the evening, and we were on the balcony, and one of the staff, Rie, came to deliver these embroidered necklaces which I hadn't seen before. They were lovely. And I was the first to receive the necklace, so I was surprised at being given a gift, first of all. So, as she put this around my neck and said, 'Aloha.' I was looking down and suddenly I was being hugged, and I was so surprised. At first I didn't know what was happening—and this is a normal welcome hug—and later I thought that it was for me a moment of blindness almost. As we say, I was 'blindsided.' And reflecting on that moment, it occurred to me that I was experiencing someone's generosity and openness, a welcome that was really full and warm. And thinking about my reaction to it—for that split second I didn't know what was happening. So I'm really interested in perhaps thinking about this as proof that maybe I've decided the world is less friendly than it actually is. And in that moment I was reminded that it could be more friendly, and that there was reason for me to take that lesson with me. That, in fact, was a stunning moment in the four days for me."

All of which goes to prove, I think, that "Paradise" can be as much about people as it can be about place. On behalf of all of us, I wish to extend a sincere thank-you to all of the staff and members in Kona and in Honolulu who contributed to making our stay so memorable. ❑

Like the Lotus Blossom

by Nichiko Niwano

The Japanese poet Saigyo (1118–90), known for such works as his *Sankashu* (Mountain Cottage Collection), left us this verse: "The lotus blooming, / The waves beating / On the shore— / My mind hears them / As the preaching of the Dharma."

The poem means that from the sound of waves and the lotus, which pushes up its stem from within muddy water and puts forth with a slight popping sound a beautiful blossom unsullied by the mud, we can learn the Buddha's teaching.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma (the Lotus Sutra) is one of the sutras that preaches the Dharma through the symbol of the lotus blossom. As representative of such sutras it has given people encouragement and joy in life since ancient times by a verse that cites the lotus as an example of being untainted by worldly things.

Chapter 12 of the sutra, "Devadatta," contains the profound verse, "If they are born into the presence of buddhas, they will be born from lotus flowers," which teaches us that even bad people who have the opportunity to hear the Buddha's teaching can reach a state of purity untainted, like the lotus blossom.

From this, we can also receive a powerful message from the Buddha, teaching us that, even if we are experiencing severe circumstances in which many things seem almost unbearable, once we believe in and accept the Dharma, the negative aspects of our lives will be transformed into positive ones.

The life of the lotus blossom lasts a mere four days. It opens with an audible sound in the early morning and between late morning to midafternoon it closes (depending on the day's temperature). It repeats this for three days, and on the fourth day its petals drop off. I am struck by the purity of the lotus blossom, and its being unsoiled by the mud in which it grows, as a solemn example of the truth of impermanence.

Pain and suffering exist in every era. The symbolism of the lotus blossom seems all the more profound, however, in an age like ours of many trials and difficulties. For the lotus flower to bloom beautifully, the mud from which it springs is needed. What does that teach us?

The mud can be likened to the trends of our times and the events that bring us pain and suffering. Not giving in to such trends or being dejected by such events is like keeping ourselves unsullied. But, then, even when the world seems so filled with tragic happenings that we want to express our unhappiness aloud and when so many things that occur seem to be to our disadvantage, if we change our way of looking at events and accept them as manifestations of the Buddha's teachings and important lessons for us, then all of our hardships can become rich spiritual nourishment. That is what the Buddha teaches us through the symbolism of the lotus blossom.

Precisely because we ourselves experience pain, we empathize with the hardships of other people. Our failures and setbacks might be the working of compassion, teaching us humility. Even sickness can be an opportunity to foster the spirit of being grateful for being caused to live here and now. In other words, like the lotus that thrusts a great circle of a blossom from muddy water in which it grows, the experience of suffering allows human beings to also blossom in their feelings of true joy and gratitude.

Incidentally, the Lotus Sutra verse mentioned earlier, which reads, "And are as untainted with worldly things as the lotus flowers in the water," is preceded by the words "They [sons of the Buddha] have ably learned the bodhisattva way." In order to lead our lives like the lotus blossom it is important that we follow the bodhisattva practice by which we diligently study the Buddha's teaching. A great example of such a bodhisattva is Nichiren, who risked his personal safety to promote his understanding of the Lotus Sutra. His life was certainly not an easy one.

However, all of us are capable of being welcoming and cheerful toward the people we encounter, like lotus blossoms bathed in sunlight, and can create a pleasant atmosphere like a refreshing breeze fragrant with the perfume of the blue lotus. In other words, "I, together with other people, cheerfully."

Day after day, full of energy and good cheer—if each and every one of us has such a positive attitude, we will without fail build the basis for a happy society for ourselves and other people. ❑

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).

Women, Work, and Peace

by Ela Ramesh Bhatt

The Niwano Peace Foundation presented the twenty-seventh Niwano Peace Prize to Ms. Ela Ramesh Bhatt, the founder and former secretary-general of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat State, India. Her contribution to the empowerment of socially and economically oppressed women in India and elsewhere through the activities of the SEWA has won her recognition around the world. The prize was presented in Tokyo on May 13. The following is the recipient's acceptance speech.

I am deeply honored to receive the Niwano Peace Prize, which I humbly accept on behalf of my sisters at SEWA, the Self-Employed Women's Association. I see that this prize has created a bit of a stir among the peace community, as you are redefining peace. Thank you very much for understanding us and our efforts. We have firmly linked peace with nonviolence. Peace is nonviolence, and lasting peace cannot be achieved without it. Peace achieved through war lasts only as long as it takes to start another war. SEWA finds that nonviolence in day-to-day affairs is as good as making peace where it did not exist. Keeping poor people poor is violence, and so it is not peace. Peace and poverty cannot coexist. There may not be a war, but surely there is the possibility of a hidden war where poverty is allowed to continue. SEWA strives for a way to build peace through poverty eradication.

We believe, but have not said in so many words, that peace is not only a matter of state or foreign policy but a day-to-day matter, and women—*poor* women—do help build peace, piece by piece, through remaining nonviolent. And this can be done at the ground level, through day-to-day processes, though global processes can only help this more. Peace is not external to us but within us, in us. Any positive, constructive act of love and care builds peace. And when millions take these actions, peace spreads. Prosperity follows. This is not new; it is as old as the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi or Christ or the Buddha. This is in our heart. But somehow we forget this, set this aside, when we take up matters of importance.

My own experience in SEWA shows me that peace can be built by work, by having an income and a livelihood. Peace is built by doing what one does on a daily basis, for one's income, for the family. Peace is built from the bottom up, day to day, brick by brick, woman to woman, man to man.

In SEWA we have tried to democratize peace and make it everybody's business, which is what Gandhiji taught us in so many ways.

My story and philosophy can be summed up in three simple words: *women, work,* and *peace.* Each represents a biography of the universe.

Let me elaborate on what I mean to say before this august body.

Our world today is in turmoil. There is a widening divide between nations, between peoples, and between governments and their own people. Where there is an unfair distribution of resources, there is unrest. Peace is under threat. When people cannot enjoy the fruits of their labors fairly, we have the basis of an unjust society. Peace needs protection. When governments cannot ensure the happiness of their people, they resort to silencing them in the name of peace. For where there is violence and conflict, a struggle for resources, unemployment, widespread anger against injustice and inequality, and governments that resort to repression, we invariably find poverty. Poverty is peace about to be broken into pieces.

Poverty is a society's disrespect for human labor. Poverty strips people of their humanity, and poverty takes away their freedom. Nothing that compromises a person's humanity is acceptable. Poverty is wrong because it is violence perpetuated with society's consent. Poverty means agreement to dislocate peace.

Violence today is often abstract. It is not the violence of the state or the local bully. Violence is the destruction of ways of life that are at right angles to the official world of bureaucracy. Women's work does not fit official classifications. Women's work is often not legally or officially recognized. The struggle

of women's work is against the violence and indifference of official classification. Reworking the official classifications has been one strand of SEWA's work for peace. When the official classifications exclude a vast majority of the country's working poor, it creates marginal worlds in which they seek to survive. Women's work is that guarantee of survival—the survival of women, their families, and the peace they hold dear.

Resorting to violence is immoral. Violence is the least effective means of achieving laudable goals. Peace is natural to humanity. A human begins life seeking love, truth, trust, and kindness, which is natural. Hence peace is a serious force in itself; the fact is that it has never failed us so far. And, of course, it is not a rare or a revolutionary idea. It is not a threat to the established order. Peace is a concept accepted by all religions, every religion.

According to the Bhagavad Gita, the way to liberation is karma. Karma means action; karma means work. Just as love and truth are fundamental to human beings, I believe work is central to human life. I admit, *work* is too limited a term for all it invokes. By *work* I do not mean sweatshops and cheap labor, which are another kind of exploitation. Work is better understood as livelihood. Livelihood is always linked to life, the life cycle, lifestyle, and life in the world. Livelihood invokes life values and life vision. Livelihood evokes the language of a biomass and an informal economy, a people's economy. When you erase a livelihood, a memory, a competence, then a community and a culture are destroyed. By *work*, I mean essentially the production of food and access to water. It means upgrading the existing and traditional occupations, which people have undertaken for thousands of years: agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, forestry, housing, textile making, recycling. Such work feeds people, and it restores their relationship with the self, with fellow human beings, with Mother Earth, and with the Great Spirit that created us all.

Productive work is the thread that weaves a society together. When you have work, you have an incentive to maintain a stable society. You not only think of the future, but you plan for the future. You can build assets that reduce your vulnerability. You can invest in the next generation. Life is no longer just about survival but about investing in a better future. Work builds peace, because work gives people roots, it builds communities, and it gives meaning and dignity to one's life.

In my experience, women are the key to building a community. Focus on a woman, and she will grow roots for her family and work to establish a stable community. In a woman, we get a worker, a provider, a caretaker, an educator, and a networker. She is a forger of bonds; she is a creator and a preserver. I consider women's participation and representation an integral part of the development process. Women will bring constructive, creative, and sustainable solutions to the world. I have great faith in the feminine way of transforming the world.

SEWA is a trade union of poor, self-employed women. We have come together to form a union to stop economic exploitation. We have formed our own bank to build assets, to tap resources, to improve the material quality of life. We have built trade cooperatives of women farmers and artisans, and a trade facilitation network connecting local and global markets. We have built a social security network for our maternity needs, health, and life insurance. SEWA is more than a million members strong spread across six states of India and beyond. We come together in support of each other. Our goal is the well-being of the poor woman, her family, her work, her community, and the world we all live in. We are in pursuit of self-reliance and freedom. We realize what Mahatma Gandhi said, that freedom is not given, it is generated within oneself. My experience says that women's work is that guarantee of freedom coming from within.

It is evident that political freedom is incomplete without economic freedom. It is only when people have both political and economic freedom that we will get lasting peace. Civil groups like NGOs, women's groups, trade unions, cooperatives, guilds, and church groups are all essential to building peace. Diplomats and armies can negotiate peace. But can they build peace? Only people can bring peace—without the involvement of the people; without their voices; without their communication, participation, and representation, there can be no peace. Peace is about restoring balance in society. Peace is not a separate way of life. It is intrinsic to life and living. Peace is not the absence of war or a cease-fire or mere conflict resolution, nor is it achieved just by elections. Peace is not made by governments. Peace is a way of life in harmony with our bodies, with nature, and with our selves.

Peace derives from need, not greed. Peace is the sense of limits, the feeling of generosity that shares the last piece of *roti,* or bread. Peace begins before nation building and continues long after it. I consider, in essence, that to separate peace from work and nature is an act of violence. Peace is the whole that makes life and work life-giving.

This is my philosophy. It can be explained by reciting the story of SEWA. SEWA may be a local story or a South Asian story. It is a local struggle, but it has to meet global questions. The local and the global have to combine in new ways and new communities. SEWA, or translations or interpretations of SEWA, will be invented elsewhere. In that sense I recognize the gift of the Niwano Peace Prize as a challenge for us. The challenge today is for SEWA to meet the challenges of Darfur, Afghanistan, or Sri Lanka. The challenge now is to see how women's work and women's idea of community and nature can create new commons of peace.

In that sense, accept my speech as a prayer, a woman's work for peace.

We have a long way to go. But the path is clear and liberating at every step. Thank you, Niwano Peace Foundation, for holding our hand on this journey.

Aum Shanti! Shanti! Shanti! ❑

True to Self and Open to Others

An interview with Rev. Fergus Capie, director of the London Inter Faith Centre

In the following interview, Rev. Fergus Capie describes his views on interfaith relations and dialogue with fundamentalism as well as movements outside the boundaries of religion. Rev. Capie is the director of the London Inter Faith Centre, which he describes as a place of meeting, study, and dialogue among the religions and with the secular world. The interview took place in Aldeburgh, England, with Ms. Janine Edge, chair of the Trustees of the Scientific and Medical Network in Gloucestershire, England, as the interviewer. It originally appeared in the Network Review, *the journal of the Scientific and Medical Network in slightly different form in December 2009.* Dharma World *is pleased to publish this revised version of the interview, in which a new reference on interfaith cooperation has been added by Rev. Capie.*

I would like to start with finding out a bit about you personally and in particular how you square your own religious beliefs with acceptance of other religions?

I was brought up in a Christian community in which (as in many others) it was acceptable to consider your own religious position to be right and that of others to be wrong. I suppose it was only when I moved in ministry from Oxford to East London that my firsthand encounter with those of other faiths, especially Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, gave me a fresh challenge. It was then I became convinced that if we can but be "true to self and open to others," then, in the words of your question, we might move toward squaring our own position with acceptance of others. For me it is a paradox. The greater the depth of my experience of others, the further I am led into my Christian and Christ-centered life, while at the same time becoming more open to those with different beliefs. It would be easy to say that this was because I found things in common with other religions, but for me, looking for the "lowest common denominator" is not the way forward. It is true that exposure to insights from other religions, whether it be the Brahman-Atman connection in strands of Hinduism or the Islamic emphasis on the oneness and transcendence of God or the powerful Sikh constant remembrance of the name of God or Buddhist insights on the nature of the self, has enriched my own life and faith, alongside my Christian focus on "the self-giving love of God in Christ" and its power through sacrificial love. Some of my Christian spiritual practices have been informed by contact with other religions, particularly those involving meditation and silence. But were I to sum up squaring my position with those that are different, I would say that it happens via a sort of paradox, and I do not think it is avoiding the issue to say so.

I take it from what you say that you are not a relativist when it comes to religion. By which I mean that you would consider it simplistic to say that all religions are a version of the same truth?

You are right. I am not a relativist, as, for me, that would suggest there would be a single frame of reference. I was once asked by a Christian colleague "Can Buddhists be saved?" The sense in which the idea of "saved" was being used may work well in the context of Christianity, but in my view it could be a sort of category mistake outside such a context. In other words, for me this question may not be the best place to start. There are a number of ways of accounting for the religions, and we could for a moment look at three. The first could be described as propositionalist, namely, that religious truths are propositions about ultimate reality, "handed down from above." The second could be described as an experiential-expressive approach. Starting from inner experience, the forms of religion are taken to be objectifications of core human feelings and attitudes. I suspect this may have become the default position of many Western liberal Christians and thereby the basis for many of the assumptions of a Western interfaith impetus, as well as underlying assumptions within current related U.K. government policies. But I favor a third approach, which may be described as cultural-linguistic, as

---

Fergus Capie is an Anglican priest whose involvement in interfaith work, based in London, has taken him to many parts of the world and—its various and complex issues notwithstanding—has led him to the conclusion that it is through the pursuit of real and open engagement that hope for progress may be found.

outlined by the American Lutheran theologian George Lindbeck in his *Nature of Doctrine.* This proposes that each religion could be accounted for as a sort of language, which thus has its own discrete grammar. Such an account enables us to work with contradiction, without needing to find commonality. This would remove the need to explain one religion in terms of another, as each is then accorded its own integrity as a system.

There might be an analogy here with science, which originally was seen as a description of actual reality, but now there are many different accounts of its epistemological status. One is that it is a codification of intersubjective experience, and another is the social constructionist interpretation. But just as scientists often find the idea of science as just a social construction unsatisfactory, do you not find the idea of Christianity defined by culture and language inadequate?

That is not quite a correct description of what Lindbeck is saying, because for him the languages of religions are idioms

Rev. Capie (left) during his interview with Ms. Janine Edge in Aldeburg, England.

both for constructing reality and for living life. I would be more comfortable with saying that, on the one hand, I see Christianity as expressed via culture and language, and on the other, as not being limited or wholly encapsulated by them. There is perhaps a sense in which adherents of any religion see its insights as existing precisely to help us break through the limits imposed by culture and language. Lindbeck's use of the concept of "cultural-linguistic" allows us to see by analogy something of how religions "work" and can be accounted for.

So the fact that one religious language is different from another is explicable, and should in theory be less troubling, because each has as its purpose the construction of a way of living and each is pointing beyond itself (indeed, beyond the idea of a definable reality). But what does your experience show is the key to tolerance among those of different faiths?

Were tolerance to mean a sort of "anything goes" in the sense that being tolerant is to be uninterested in and indifferent to the other, then its potential for being constructive could be missed. However, when it can mean an active accommodation of and engagement with difference, then that, I think, can only be creative and helpful both for those immediately involved and for the wider world.

What has been most effective in bringing those of different faiths together at the London Inter Faith Centre?

My definition of interfaith is "faiths in encounter and the issues raised thereby." In my experience, it is not necessarily the most effective route if the encounters are about faith. So, for example, we have musical events. As a result of these, three young musicians, a Muslim, a Baha'i, and a Sikh, have met and now work together. On the one hand, they are able to fully acknowledge one another's faith, and on the other hand, each is putting the faith part of his identity into a wider perspective. One of the emerging dangers of our U.K. interfaith project is that we overplay the faith element in personal identity. The fact is that there are multiple aspects to our identity, and having events that are not focused on interfaith issues helps to redress this balance.

What types of event do you hold that do focus on interfaith issues?

Well, we offer a variety of contexts for meeting, ranging from informal gatherings such as faith-neutral meditations and study groups to formal conferences and courses. For example, over the last decade we have run three two-year courses, taught by those of different faiths, giving a "Certificate in Interfaith Relations." Many of those attending had roles in education or society, and this course has given them the confidence to enable greater cross-faith interaction to occur. One representative of a non-Christian faith attending the center once said to me, "We never meet except at your place." So I have found that events at the center sometimes enable different ideological groupings from within one faith to come together, thus building cohesion. This in turn may help interfaith relations. Perhaps as much as anything else, I believe that if you designate a space for a particular activity, that can help legitimize the activity. In one sense, creating the space at the center has done just that.

This comes back to a recurring theme in our conversation, namely, that giving permission to all people to be true to their own faith actually helps interfaith relations, as opposed to trying to ignore or reduce the difference between religions.

Yes, and by way of example on that, a Muslim friend of mine applied for the post of deputy head teacher of a Church of England school. After morning assembly, the head teacher apologized for the explicitly Christian content of the assem-

bly. My Muslim friend said that he was saddened by this. He had known when he had applied for the job that it was a Church of England school and expected them to worship God in the Christian way. He said to me, "I could never apologize or deny my faith in that way." On another occasion, at a gathering where those of other faiths had been attending, we sang a very explicitly "Christ-as-God" hymn. When someone enquired later in conversation about the sensitivity of that, a Muslim colleague replied, "If that is what you believe, then sing it." In my experience, lack of clarity and confidence in your own faith does not help interfaith relating at the faith level.

You say on your Web site that you might like to be thought of more as an interideological, than as an interfaith, center. What do you mean by that?

The interfaith impetus in this country emerged largely from responding to the presence of those of other faiths, through the pattern of immigration to the United Kingdom in the postwar period. But all the other-than-Christian faiths in the United Kingdom put together account for only about 10 percent of the population. What of the other 90 percent? What of the significant numbers of thought-out views, be they within aspects of Humanism or Secularism, or within the spectrum of New Age and New Spiritualities? What of them? We are developing projects toward their inclusion, such as our "Who Owns Britain?" series of seminars, which looks at both the secular and the spiritual/religious dimensions of our society.

What then do you think is the role of New Age spirituality in interfaith relations?

Initially, interfaith relating needed to be about the main faiths, but I think it can now be extended to include New Age and New Spirituality. Within the New Age movement, I personally see a plus and possibly a minus. The plus is that it can offer a way of challenging materialism and gives a spiritual alternative outside the boundaries of traditional religion. In this respect, New Age spirituality both is salutary and can have a new constructive angle, such as on environmental and gender issues. But I have two reservations on New Age spirituality. The first is that this form of spirituality can become like some of the less attractive features of a consumer society, including a type of shopping for a spirituality that suits one and gives one freedom to shop for spiritual self-fulfillment. Secondly, this "spirituality shopping" can be problematic, and on occasions, in my experience, potentially dangerous if the shopper is working outside any known grammar of spiritual practice, mixing elements that first arose in different times and places, which may never have been intended to be combined. There is a way in which time and consensus can give a tradition authenticity and a proper container.

What about those such as Deepak Chopra, Wayne Dyer, and Eckhart Tolle, who seem to have evolved a new form of spirituality that many are finding fulfilling? Are these examples of New Age spirituality not based in any particular religion?

They may not appear to be based in any particular tradition, but no one works out of a vacuum, and these and other writers also have a sort of place and lineage. So, for example, someone like Wayne Dyer seems to me to have the European Jewish-Christian post-Enlightenment story in his background, however "free" he may seem in his writing. (I greatly appreciate some of what he has written, such as parts of *The Power of Intention.*)

You have talked about how you involve those of no established religion, but how do you approach fundamentalists when you encounter them through the center?

As you may imagine, an interfaith center is not the first port of call for a fundamentalist. Having said that, we have striven to engage with the more conservative elements of each faith. It is easy to think that we have to help people to be less fundamental in their religion, but then we fail to register the force of its significance from their point of view. They see the world as losing purpose through lack of a particular view they hold. It seems they may rather lose their own life to the end of a potentially better human future, as they see it, rather than soften their view within liberal compromise that could then lead to further degeneration of civilization. Our desire to soften fundamentalism could almost become its own sort of fundamentalism.

I would also just like to point out that people can be fundamentalist in their belief but be against any kind of political extremism or violence. I think that two constructive approaches to fundamentalism would be, first, to work toward understanding it better, and second, to promote wherever possible (and this is not at all easy) the increased contact between those we consider to be fundamentalist and their wider social context—be it family, local, or a wider religious community. When people have come to me with concerns about a member of their family whom they fear may perhaps be becoming fundamentalist, they also note that the individual concerned is becoming somehow more remote from the family and less connected to the mainstream of his or her community.

We also encounter fundamentalism in science; particularly the view that science renders religious truth superfluous or just plain wrong. How, for you, do religious belief and the scientific worldview fit together?

I suppose I see them to be different approaches to similar issues: again, in terms of George Lindbeck, they have dif-

ferent "grammars." The writers of the Genesis accounts of creation were expressing theological truth. They were not seeking to record observable phenomena. Reimaging the cosmos, taking insights from both science and religion (as in the work of someone like Richard Tarnas) may continue to be a challenge. Within all of this, in my view, God can be seen as the ultimate locus of energy in a world constantly re-creating itself.

Do you think that even scientists become "fundamental" in their views, by which I mean that they seem to take the view that science is the only form of truth?

Well, this is a complex subject, but I think it is again about meaning and purpose. If scientists gain a definite sense of purpose from asserting that scientific law is the only truth, who knows, perhaps they may become fundamentalist about it.

Do you think religious relativism (by which I mean the idea that all religions are versions of the truth and none the truth) could actually be unhelpful to interfaith relations?

I fully accept people's desire to emphasize what is held in common to the end of greater cooperation and mutual understanding. However, I think the longer-term solutions may be better found through accepting and working with difference. What I think is important is to have a reasonable awareness of one's own position and how it came to be (most people on the planet belong to the tradition into which they were born). Only then can one interact with and learn from others, with one's own self constantly growing and changing thereby.

In other words, understanding your own religious position is the first step to knowing yourself and therefore both honoring and transcending it when interacting with others? I take it from what you have just said that you do not think the idea of a perennial philosophy will resolve differences between religions.

The perennial philosophy is interesting in a number of respects, but the moment you say that the different religions are to be seen in terms of that view, then you are in effect saying "You ought to see it this way." So, constructive as the idea of the perennial philosophy may be, it would be difficult to imagine how it could actually resolve differences, as it would actually be promoting a single view of how to do so. It would virtually become its own religion. Good old human nature would surely kick in and before long, hey, presto! you would have the Temple of the Perennial Philosophy, with the first schism about a generation down the line. "Are you a conservative perennialist or a liberal perennialist? You don't mean you're one of them?"—and back to square one we would go. No. "True to self and open to others" is my own hope and prayer for where we all may go on all of this.

World Conference of Religions for Peace is one of the key initiatives working toward such openness and interaction, with a valued focus on issues to do with peace and conflict resolution. Religions for Peace has a track record of sustained work on this since the late 1960s, when they were among the first—and I am honored and delighted to have been involved in supporting their vital work (including as chair of the U.K. chapter). I warmly commend their work to readers—who, in many parts of the world, will find a local chapter with which to become informed and involved, that yet more of us can be "true to self and open to others." ❑

The World Conference of Religions for Peace organized a meeting called Religious Youth Responding to Nuclear Weapons in Dialogue with a Hibakusha (atomic bomb survivor) on May 7 at UN headquarters in New York. The meeting was held during the 2010 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty in May and as a part of Religions for Peace's disarmament petition drive, Arms Down! Campaign for Shared Security.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 16

Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata

(3)

This is the 102nd installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano. In this installment, the TEXT *section begins in the middle of the Buddha's sermon to the bodhisattvas and all the great assembly.*

TEXT The Tathagata clearly sees such things as these without mistake. Because all the living have various natures, various desires, various activities, various ideas and reasonings, [so] desiring to cause them to produce the roots of goodness, [the Tathagata] by so many reasonings, parables, and discourses has preached his various truths. The Buddha deeds which he does have never failed for a moment.

COMMENTARY *The roots of goodness.* This refers to the source, or root, of such things as good character, good desire, good action, good thought, and good judgment. It is like the root of a plant that is the source of a good trunk, branches, and leaves. In brief, it is the fundamental spirit of working for the betterment of humanity.

• *Reasonings, parables, and discourses.* I have already discussed the first two in detail (see the July/August 1996 issue of DHARMA WORLD). "Discourses" means theoretical preaching, especially in the sense of reasoned persuasion through appropriate language. It is probably best to think of this as synonymous with "preaching by Dharma."

• *Buddha deeds.* This refers to the action of the Buddha in leading all human beings to enlightenment and salvation. That action encompasses diverse forms—whether speaking of himself or speaking of others, whether indicating himself or indicating others, and whether indicating his own affairs or the affairs of others—and through these forms he instructs living beings in every possible place and method.

We must be fully aware that considering these Buddha deeds to be merely the work of the Buddha would be a grave mistake. Both transmitting the teachings of the Buddha and listening to and reading the teachings are no less Buddha deeds. Just as the Buddha has never once failed in the past to do these Buddha deeds, they will not be set aside for even a moment in the future. And the responsibility for these Buddha deeds in the future lies with us. Let us take full cognizance of this responsibility and always bear it in mind.

TEXT Thus it is, since I became Buddha in the very far distant past, [that my] lifetime is of infinite asamkhyeya kalpas, forever existing and immortal.

COMMENTARY Here, at long last, the entity of the Buddha is made clear. This is a major proclamation that the entity of the present existence of the Tathagata Shakyamuni is the Eternal Original Buddha, who neither arises nor perishes but is an eternal actuality that lives from the timeless past through the unlimited future.

• *I became Buddha in the very far distant past.* The literal translation from the Chinese is "an unlimited period of time has passed since I became the Buddha."

TEXT Good sons! The lifetime which I attained by pursuing the bodhisattva way is not even yet accomplished but will still be twice the previous number [of kalpas].

COMMENTARY When the Buddha declares, "I became Buddha in the very far distant past," he is of course speaking of the lifetime of the Eternal Original Buddha, the ultimate Truth. In contrast, here he says, "The lifetime which I attained by pursuing the bodhisattva way is not even yet accomplished but will still be twice the previous number [of kalpas]." This means the lifetime he acquired as the trace Buddha who appeared in this triple world and acquired various merits.

That this lifetime extended twice as long as the number of years mentioned previously is evidence that there is merit to be gained by practicing the way of the bodhisattva. The Buddha bears witness to this, so what more certain proof could there be? In brief, the Original Buddha and the Buddha who appears in various forms are one and the same; therefore his lifetime as the trace Buddha is actually infinite. Consequently, our buddha-nature can also be said to be eternal and infinite.

TEXT But now, in this unreal nirvana, I announce that I must enter the [real] nirvana. In this tactful way the Tathagata teaches all living beings.

COMMENTARY *Enter nirvana.* This means to enter parinirvana, that is, to die. In the Lotus Sutra the Buddha repeatedly says, "After my extinction." The foremost reason the Buddha began to preach the Lotus Sutra was that because he would soon have to depart this world, he would impart the teaching of the innermost, deepest truth. His disciples and the multitude, thinking that the Buddha would soon be gone so they ought to listen earnestly to the teaching while it was still possible, came with determined minds to join the assembly attending him. And not long thereafter, he did indeed pass from this world.

Why, when life still remained to him, did the Buddha leave the world behind and enter nirvana? That, too, was a skillful means of earnestly preaching to living beings, nothing less than a manifestation of the Buddha's compassion. He patiently explains the reasons.

TEXT Wherefore? If the Buddha abides long in the world, men of little virtue who do not cultivate the roots of goodness and are [spiritually] poor and mean, greedily attached to the five desires, and are caught in the net of [wrong] reflection and false views—

COMMENTARY The Buddha appeared in this world as a human being who was unparalleled as a guide in life. If disciples and ordinary believers, whatever their physical and mental sufferings and whatever their worries, sought the advice of the Buddha, he would immediately provide them with a solution. Yet however grateful one would be if such a superior guide in life continued to exist forever, a person would tend to become strongly dependent. A person would develop a carefree attitude, think that whenever one had problems one could always appeal for help, and would gradually lose the drive to improve.

• *Poor and mean.* This refers not to anything material but to poverty and meanness of spirit.

• *Greedily attached to the five desires.* This is to be captivated by the joys perceived by the five senses—form, sound, smell, taste, and touch—and the incessant pursuit of them. It means to constantly covet pleasure and to be in thrall to the desire to see only beautiful things, listen only to agreeable sounds, smell only pleasing fragrances, eat only delicious foods, and have only pleasant things touch one's skin (for example, to have cool summers and warm winters, to never be rained on or blown about by the wind, and to wear soft, comfortable clothing).

The desires of the five senses are instinctive, and there is nothing intrinsically bad about them. But since the earthly cares (defilements) come from them, one must not become enslaved to such physical pleasures and indulge in them. Nor can one allow the mind to be thrown into confusion and become impure.

The Buddha indicates on a variety of occasions that the instincts are not bad. He also showed this when he abandoned his ascetic practices and partook of milk gruel. The same idea is included in the teaching of the Middle Way. He also says that the instincts are morally neutral. This means that they are neither good nor bad, that is, they precede the distinction between good and bad. This is certainly true. If appetite, for example, were an evil instinct, we would die because we would be unable to partake of any food. And if sexual desire were an evil instinct and we were to repudiate it, the human species would become extinct.

The Buddha's teaching is not so extreme; rather, it holds that instincts exist prior to the distinction between good and evil and that although we ought not pull away from them, if we become captivated by instincts and indulge in them, the fires of earthly cares flare up, giving rise to the diverse miseries of humankind. If we misunderstand this point and fall into the extremes of complete devotion to ascetic practice or the denial of all desires, we wind up estranging ourselves from true salvation. We must not forget that the teaching of the Buddha is consistently that of the Middle Way.

• *Caught in the net of [wrong] reflection and false views.* "Reflection" refers to thinking and to the various ways in which we reflect on things that do not exist in actuality in front of us, including retrospection, conjecture, imagination, and assumption. "False views" means a mistaken way of thinking. It carries a strong connotation of self-centered, haphazard thought.

As an example, imagine that a man is walking down the hall at his company, unaware that some food is stuck to his chin. And imagine that when he happens to encounter the president of the company, the president looks at him and grins. If the employee is always wanting to get ahead and be promoted, he will think, "When the president looked at me, he smiled. That must mean I'll get some good news before long." On the contrary, if he is the kind of employee who has skipped work the previous day to have a date with his girlfriend, he will probably be startled and start worrying that he has been found out.

In both cases, because he is seeing the world only from his own narrow perspective, he is unable to see that the real reason the president grinned was because of the food stuck to his chin. One falls into this trap through a self-centered view of things, through self-preoccupation. This is "false views." If, however, the man is not self-preoccupied, his perspective is honest and pliant. "That's strange," he thinks. "The president looked at my face and smiled. It was an impish sort of grin, almost as if something were stuck on my face." And he will reach up and stroke his chin.

This is a light-hearted example, but there are innumerable instances in our daily lives of how a self-centered view and being caught up in our own perspective can cause us to fail to recognize the real aspect of things, to ponder various undesirable things, to worry, and to become miserable. This is to be "caught in the net of [wrong] reflection and false views." A person becomes this way by being "[spiritually] poor and mean, greedily attached to the five desires," that is, because the mind is debased and is captivated by the five desires.

TEXT if they see the Tathagata constantly present and not extinct, [they] will then become puffed up and lazy, and unable to conceive the idea that it is hard to meet [the Buddha] or a mind of reverence [for him].

COMMENTARY *Puffed up.* This refers to a self-indulgent mind. If the Buddha is always present, then we begin to feel that we can hear the teaching anytime we want. And we become willful, thinking that we may as well enjoy today because we can wait until tomorrow to hear the teaching. This sort of mind is puffed up.

It is said that those who go to Tokyo for sightseeing know the sights there better than those who were born and bred in the city. Because Tokyoites think that they can go to these places whenever they wish, they wait for some excuse to go and end up postponing going indefinitely. If one were able to separate Tokyo residents from those who live outside the city, it is probably safe to say that the majority of those who have gone to the top of Tokyo Tower are nonresidents.

It is hardly a matter of concern how long one neglects visiting a famous site, but it is quite a different matter when it comes to the teaching of the Buddha concerning the truth of the universe and the correct way to live one's life. One day's delay means one day's delay in growth as a human being. Yet even a single day's delay can result in something irreversible.

Let us suppose that suddenly some major personal problem arises. A person who has listened to the Buddhist teachings for some time and has awakened to a proper frame of mind will be able to deal the problem correctly. At the very least, the person will not be crushed by the problem. In contrast, normally a person with no spiritual support whatsoever will merely be thrown into confusion and be unable to do anything about it. Even if the person figures out some way of dealing with the problem, he or she will not be confident that it is really the correct path. And in the very worst case, he or she will hasten along the path to self-destruction.

Hence, it is imperative that we not postpone hearing the true teaching for even a day. Confucius teaches, "If a man hears the right way in the morning, he can die in the evening without regret." In the same way, if we listen to the teaching of the truth and attain enlightenment, we will be able to greet death with perfect composure whenever it may come. The same is true of various problems beside death.

• *Lazy.* This is the mind that grows weary and becomes idle. "However often I hear the Buddha's teaching, it's always the same. I know it, so there's no need to listen anymore." The Buddha's teachings are not so shallow. The more one listens and learns, the deeper the teachings are. Beyond enlightenment is yet another enlightenment. If one grapples seriously with the teachings, every day new ground will open up and every day will be replete. There could be no greater pleasure than this. If the Buddha is always present, however, we may become lazy.

• *The idea that it is hard to meet [the Buddha].* This refers to how hard it is to imagine the difficulty of meeting the Buddha. We cannot meet the Buddha at a moment's notice, and even if we could, it would be the opportunity of a lifetime. As evidence of this, since the day on which the Buddha entered nirvana not one person who can stand comparison with him has appeared in this world. Despite this, if the Buddha is right before our eyes, we forget how grateful we should be and take it for granted that we can always meet him. Likewise, we do not recognize the blessing of our parents while we have them.

• *Unable to conceive . . . a mind of reverence [for him].* "A mind of reverence" means venerating the Buddha and respectfully and earnestly heeding his teaching. That this intention becomes diluted when the Buddha is present is a sign of the wretchedness of ordinary people.

Without doubt people are capricious. For instance, the audience of a performance of traditional Japanese storytelling always includes some people who pay absolutely no attention to the performance but fidget, chatting with their neighbors or nibbling on snacks, entirely unable to stay focused. Such an attitude presumably springs from the confidence that one can always hear such tales, as long as one has the money and time to do so. But if a master from another country were performing for the first time in Japan, the audience would watch and listen with full attention.

Incidentally, when the audience fidgets, the storyteller seats himself on the stage and makes a low bow. Then, after looking around at the audience, he strikes the stand in front of him sharply with his folded fan in order to gather everyone's attention and begins to tell his story in a subdued, barely audible voice. As a result, the audience settles down. This is a skillful tactic of the professional storyteller—making it difficult to hear so that the members of the audience will feel that they want to hear. The storyteller has grasped this psychology very well. It is far more important to arouse the sense that it is difficult to encounter a buddha, so that the person will feel that he or she wants to listen earnestly to the teaching.

TEXT Therefore the Tathagata tactfully teaches: 'Know, bhikshus, the appearance of buddhas in the world is a rare occurrence.' Wherefore? In the course of countless hundreds of thousands of myriad kotis of kalpas, some men of little virtue may happen to see a buddha or none may see him. For this reason I say: 'Bhikshus! A tathagata may rarely be seen!'

COMMENTARY There are two crucial points in chapter 16, "Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata." The first is that the entity of the Buddha is made clear for the first time, and it is explained that his life is neither arising nor perishing. The second is that it is explained clearly why it is that the various trace buddhas, particularly the Tathagata Shakyamuni, must depart from this world. This passage is the crux of the second of these key points.

I imagine that nearly everyone who reads these lines has

one doubt. It arises from feeling that there is a contradiction between this passage and the understanding of the Original Buddha, who is eternal and omnipresent and who gives life to each and every sentient being. Since the Buddha possesses unlimited compassion and saves each and every living being, one must wonder whether the Buddha ought not allow even a person of little virtue to see him.

This, though, is going a little too far. Previously I employed the metaphor of radio waves and a TV set, and it is surely true that the Original Buddha is like these radio waves, suffusing our surroundings. Therefore, a person with a highly sensitive TV antenna, that is, a person who excels in virtue or has striven through religious practice, can sense this spontaneously. But an ordinary person, one who neither excels in merit nor has worked at religious practice, will not be able to do this. That is because the TV set remains incomplete. Therefore it is necessary for the Buddha or those who have succeeded to his teachings—such as T'ien-t'ai Chih-i, Prince Shotoku, Saicho, Dogen, and Nichiren—to come into this world and preach the Law directly. By hearing these teachings directly, for the first time we are provided with a spirit that is attuned to these waves.

Those who are by nature lacking in merit, even if they are fortunate enough to live in the time of such a person, are unable to come in contact with his teaching. The reason for this, as I have explained, is that a buddha has already been manifested, that is, we need only awaken to his presence.

• *To see a buddha.* It is the same with seeing a buddha. No matter how often we may hear the teaching of a buddha, if our heart is not oriented toward what is taught, we will be unable to see that buddha. If you look around, you will undoubtedly notice many examples of this.

The Eternal Original Buddha is always present everywhere around us, but if we do not choose to worship him, it is only natural that his salvation will not manifest itself. It is like a TV set that is turned off. It is selfish to assume that because the Buddha is always close at hand we need not listen to the Way of truth and can continue a lazy, self-centered way of life guided by our own greed, all because we think we can count on the Buddha for salvation.

The Buddha is not outside us. Nor is he only within us. He is both outside and inside us; in other words, he fills the universe. For that reason, the moment we choose to worship him, his salvation becomes manifest. Honen (1133–1212) said, "When living beings bear the Buddha in mind, the Buddha also bears living beings in mind." That is to say, as soon as we take the Buddha into our hearts we come to understand that the Buddha already has us in his heart.

Consequently, the Buddha's salvation is something that people must seek for themselves. It is we who must persistently seek his teaching. If we do not possess the urge to do this, we will not have ears to hear the teaching even if it is preached right before us. Even if we hear the teaching, it will not sink in. People themselves must make the effort to seek salvation. This is one of the primary goals that the Buddha has taught us. He speaks of this again later in the Parable of the Good Physician, so I will explain it in greater detail at that point.

TEXT All these living beings, hearing such a statement, must certainly realize the thought of the difficulty of meeting a buddha and cherish a longing and a thirst for him; then will they cultivate the roots of goodness.

COMMENTARY *Longing.* If we can understand just how difficult it is to encounter a buddha, when we see a buddha we will be filled with a desire to be at his side every possible moment and to remain under his influence so that it permeates us like a wonderful fragrance.

• *Thirst.* Just as a person who is thirsty will constantly search for water, a person who adores and yearns for the Buddha will inevitably believe in and revere the Buddha wholeheartedly.

When it comes to this part of the teaching, rather than pursue explanations it seems to me most important to consider the teaching as it applies to personal life. We speak of the Buddha quite familiarly, but when we quietly consider it, we realize how difficult it is to meet and revere a buddha in this world of the Decay of the Law. In this dreadful world where people deceive, struggle with, and kill one another, it is most uncommon to encounter a buddha. When we think about this deeply, we awaken to a strong desire to truly meet a buddha. We gravitate powerfully toward the compassion of the Buddha, just as we cannot help feeling a strong yearning for the light of the sun after days of continuous rain or snow. This is to "cherish a longing and a thirst for" a buddha.

When this feeling arises, we are always purified. That is because the intentness of the desire to be drawn into the bosom of the Buddha leaves no room for impurity or defilement. Once we have become pure minded, we will pursue the teachings of the Buddha all the more and will deepen the desire to behave in accord with those teachings. In this manner, we not only improve ourselves but also naturally and spontaneously put the teachings into practice for the sake of other people and the world as a whole.

This is what makes religion what it is. Mere ethics and morality do not possess the power to sway people so deeply. Even if people are convinced by their reasonableness, they do not generate the powerful energy to put them into action. But within religion, feelings deepen through longing and thirsting for a god or a buddha, and that gives rise to the strength for practical action.

TEXT Therefore the Tathagata, though he does not in reality become extinct, yet announces [his] extinction. Again, good sons! The method of all buddha-tathagatas is always like this in order to save all the living, and it is altogether real and not false.

COMMENTARY *Altogether real and not false.* This phrase

indicates the true value of skillful means. "Real" here connotes "true" rather than "factual." It is a truth that the Buddha is an entity with both no beginning and no end, but to people of little merit he does not reveal this but instead reveals that he will enter nirvana. This is not factually true, so it appears to be a falsehood, but in the context of the Buddha's great compassion for saving living beings, it is true. It is certainly not a falsehood. The word *false* has the connotations of "falsehood" and "futility." Falsehood and skillful means are often conflated, but that invites misunderstanding.

Let us take a case in point. A man tells a boy, "I will take you to America and put you through school there," and boards a ship with him at Yokohama. Just when the boy thinks the ship is heading east, it turns and heads west. The ship calls at Manila, Singapore, and Calcutta. The boy cannot help being filled with dissatisfaction and unease. Having been promised to be taken to America, it would have been easiest to get on an airplane and fly directly there, but no, he has to go by this slow ship, which, moreover, is heading in the opposite direction. The boy will entertain doubts about what is going on. Eventually the ship sails into the Mediterranean and docks at Marseilles. From there the man and boy travel overland to Paris. Thinking all this quite odd, the boy is then taken from Paris to England. After a stay in England he is finally put on an airplane and taken to America.

The reason the man took such a circuitous route is that the boy was unable to speak English and was unaccustomed to the lifestyles and customs of foreign lands. Had the man taken the boy directly to America by plane and abruptly placed him in school, the boy would probably have had absolutely no confidence, felt humiliated, and in general had a hard time. Out of parental concern, during the long ocean voyage the man gave the boy an opportunity to get used to Western foods and come into contact with non-Japanese. While he learned new customs, he also had actual practice with English. Having given the boy the chance to gain some self-confidence, the man took the boy to his ultimate destination. In this case, having promised to take the boy to America and then taken him by ship in the opposite direction was not a falsehood at all. Nor was it futile. It was a true and effective means. Skillful means refer to just this sort of thing.

Next the Buddha carefully sets forth the Parable of the Good Physician, the last of the seven famous parables of the Lotus Sutra, to make this point clear enough for anyone to comprehend.

TEXT Suppose, for instance, a good physician, who is wise and perspicacious, conversant with medical art, and skillful in healing all sorts of diseases. He has many sons, say ten, twenty, even up to a hundred. Because of some matter he goes abroad to a distant country. After his departure, his sons drink his other poisonous medicines, which send them into a delirium, and they lie rolling on the ground. At this moment their father comes back to his home. Of the sons who drank the poison, some have lost their senses, others are [still] sensible, but on seeing their father [approaching] in the distance they are all greatly delighted, and kneeling, salute him, asking: 'How good it is that you are returned in safety! We, in our foolishness, have mistakenly dosed ourselves with poison. We beg that you will heal us and give us back our lives.' The father, seeing his sons in such distress, in accordance with his prescriptions seeks for good herbs altogether perfect in color, scent, and fine flavor, and then pounds, sifts, and mixes them and gives them to his sons to take, speaking thus: 'This excellent medicine, with color, scent, and fine flavor altogether perfect, you may [now] take, and it will at once rid you of your distress so that you will have no more suffering.' Those amongst the sons who are sensible, seeing this excellent medicine with color and scent both good, take it immediately and are totally delivered from their illness. The others, who have lost their senses, seeing their father come, though they are also delighted, salute him, and ask him to heal their illness, yet when he offers them the medicine, they are unwilling to take it. Wherefore? Because the poison has entered deeply, they have lost their senses, and [even] in regard to this medicine of excellent color and scent they acknowledge that it is not good. The father reflects thus: 'Alas for these sons, afflicted by this poison, and their minds all unbalanced. Though they are glad to see me and implore to be healed, yet they are unwilling to take such excellent medicine as this. Now I must arrange an expedient plan so that they will take this medicine.' Then he says to them: 'You should know that I am worn out with old age and the time of my death has now arrived. This excellent medicine I now leave here. You may take it and have no fear of not being better.' After thus admonishing them, he departs again for another country and sends a messenger back to inform them: 'Your father is dead.'

COMMENTARY *Unbalanced.* This word is regularly found in various sutras. It means to see and think about things upside-down or in reverse, to not understand the real aspect of things.

It is said that ordinary beings suffer from the following four illusions (*viparyasa*): the illusion of permanence (*nitya-viparyasa*), regarding what is impermanent as permanent; the illusion of pleasure (*sukha-viparyasa*), mistaking what is essentially suffering for pleasure; the illusion of purity (*suci-viparyasa*), regarding only the surface of things and mistaking the impure for the pure; and the illusion of self (*atma-viparyasa*), mistakenly thinking that although all things are devoid of self, there is a lasting entity or substance (self) that exists independent of all other things (see the January/February 1992 issue of DHARMA WORLD). In addition to these illusions, there are many others, including the precise opposite of these. All in all, this passage explains that because the sons succumb to these illusions they regard things of peerless value as worthless.

TEXT And now, when those sons hear that their father is

dead, their minds are greatly distressed and they thus reflect: 'If our father were alive he would have pity on us, and we should be saved and preserved. But now he has left us and died in a distant country. [Now] we feel we are orphans and have no one to rely on.' Continuous grief brings them to their senses, and they recognize the color, scent, and excellent flavor of the medicine and thereupon take it, their poisoning being entirely relieved. The father, hearing that the sons are all recovered, seeks an opportunity and returns so that they all see him.

COMMENTARY *Orphans.* In the Chinese text, this word means that the sons have been orphaned and have been left under the open sky with no shelter from the wind and rain. With no one to stand by them, they are disheartened and forlorn.

Now I will explain the teaching in this parable in detail. It should be apparent that the physician is the Buddha and that his sons represent living beings. The poisonous medicine is the defilements of the five desires, and the good medicine is the teaching of the Buddha. Ordinary people have various flaws, the greatest of which is thinking that only what they can see is actually real. This error generates all other errors and all misfortunes.

First of all, we suffer from being swayed by viewing whatever is before us—whether it be our own body, material things, money, or events that occur around us—as if it were actually real. This is the defilement of the five desires. Here the Buddha teaches us that all phenomena in this world are merely transitory manifestations that spring forth from the combining of cause and condition. Having been taught this truth, people for the first time realize that they have thought that things that do not really exist are real and that things that change do not change essentially. Because of this, they have been anxious and have suffered. Understanding this puts their minds at ease.

We are safe as long as a great guide like the Buddha is close at hand and we are continuously graced with his teaching, but it is one of the sad aspects of living beings that when a guide leaves us we gradually retrogress to being no better off than we were in the beginning. As I have said earlier, ordinary people have a habit of not believing in the existence of that which they cannot see with their own eyes. Despite the fact that the teaching has been left in good order, when the guiding figure is not present to lead them along the correct path, they wander from the true Way. This is what is meant by the passage in which the sons (living beings), in the absence of the father (the Buddha), mistakenly take the poisonous medicine and as a result writhe in pain.

Then the father returns from his journey. Seeing him, the sons, who are in agony from the poison (the defilements of the five desires), are filled with joy. The reason is that every human being possesses the buddha-nature. There are people who will kill others for personal gain, but even such people, deep down, possess the buddha-nature. It is merely that this buddha-nature is concealed beneath the poison of the five desires. Therefore, even in a man who appears to think only of his own profit, motivated by an entirely materialistic view of life, there is an uneasiness and loneliness that is unsatisfied by materialism. Though the man may not be aware of it, somewhere in his heart he searches for true peace of mind and a true sense of satisfaction. Therefore, if he has the opportunity to come into contact with a teaching that provides real peace of mind and deep satisfaction, he will gladly accept it. Need it be pointed out that our vocation as followers of the Buddha is to provide people like this with such opportunities?

For people who are suffering from the poison of the five desires, the Buddha has concocted a compound of medicine to remove delusions, medicine for attaining true wisdom, and medicine to elicit the spirit of serving others and has pounded them into a powder that is palatable to ordinary people. The Buddha, who is the good physician, delivers his teachings based upon such careful preparations. Those who obediently take this good medicine (the teaching) are immediately saved. But there are some who do not even attempt to take the medicine. That is because to them this nicely colored, pleasant-smelling medicine seems to have a strange color and an unpleasant odor. That is, people who are overwhelmed by the pleasures of the five senses feel that they cannot endure the constraints of the Buddha's precepts and teachings. They feel that the practice of contemplation, which concentrates the mind, is entirely too troublesome. And they feel that the practice of the bodhisattva who endeavors to help others is foolish.

This is self-indulgence on the part of frivolous humankind. It is the same as a child who has not yet attained wisdom rejecting the strict lessons of his or her father. Out of mercy, the father disciplines the child so that in the future the child will be able to stand on his or her own two feet, but the child, because he or she is living under the protection of the father, presumes upon that security and acts selfishly. The attitude of ordinary people toward the teachings of the Buddha is no different from this.

Regarding such living beings, the Buddha is neither angry nor resigned. He has compassion on such wayward children, saying, "Alas for these sons." This is something for which we must be truly grateful. In order to make ordinary people open their eyes, the Buddha employs extraordinary means. That is, he conceals himself for a while. In historical terms, the Buddha who appeared as the manifest-body entered nirvana. When this occurred, all those who had relied upon him were dismayed. They came to realize that one way or another they would have to stand on their own. This is precisely how the Buddha, out of great compassion, thrusts us away.

It is most important for people to do things for themselves. This is especially true when it comes to faith. Although we may adopt a faith upon the encouragement of others, we cannot become true believers unless we earnestly seek the Way with our own minds. Regardless of who brings food to

the table, one must eat it oneself without the help of others. One who cannot do so is sick. Yet even when one who is physically sick is offered food on a spoon, one must chew and swallow it on one's own. Just as food tastes best when one eats it on one's own, this is true of other things. Because one seeks and grasps them for oneself, one truly makes them one's own. The Buddha concealed his physical body from us so that we might awaken to just how vital this self-discipline is.

Finally, the father's return to let the sons see that he is alive and well contains a most important lesson. We must pay particular attention to the word *see*, which means that something naturally enters the eye without conscious effort on our part. If we believe in the teachings of the Buddha with all our heart, we will naturally come to see the Buddha. This does not mean that we will see the figure of the Buddha, but rather that we will become aware that the Buddha is with us.

The relationship between the Buddha and human beings is not a distant one like that between ruler and ruled but is like that between father and child, who are bound by ties of blood. It is a relationship of warm affection, of embracing and being embraced. Because of this, even if we temporarily lose sight of the Buddha, if we correctly receive and believe in his teachings he will instantly return to our minds. As our true parent, he eternally lives with us and protects us. In this parable, we feel the indescribable compassion that the Buddha directs toward us.

After finishing the Parable of the Good Physician, the World-honored One asks the assembly the following.

TEXT All my good sons! What is your opinion? Are there any who could say that this good physician had committed the sin of falsehood?"

"No, World-honored One!"

The Buddha [then] said: "I also am like this. Since I became Buddha, infinite boundless hundred thousand myriad kotis of nayutas of asamkhyeya kalpas ago, for the sake of all living beings, by my tactful power, I have declared that I must enter nirvana, yet there is none who can lawfully accuse me of the error of falsehood."

COMMENTARY The Buddha then explains again, this time in verse, the infinite lifetime of the Original Buddha and the reasons for the extinction of the trace Buddha. The passage beginning with the words "Since I attained buddhahood" is considered one of the most important verses in the entire Lotus Sutra.

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

"Since I attained buddhahood, / The kalpas through which I have passed / Are infinite hundred thousands of myriads / Of kotis of asamkhyeya years. / Ceaselessly preached I the Law and taught / Countless kotis of living beings / To enter the Way of the Buddha; / Since then are unmeasured kalpas. / In order to save all living beings, / By tactful methods I reveal nirvana, / Yet truly I am not [yet] extinct / But forever here preaching the Law.

COMMENTARY *I reveal nirvana.* In this case, nirvana means leaving this world, the state of extinction, and "reveal nirvana" means to manifest to everyone the phenomenon of extinction.

TEXT I forever remain in this [world], / Using all my spiritual powers / So that all perverted beings, / Though I am near, yet fail to see me.

COMMENTARY Because the Eternal Original Buddha is the fundamental Law (Dharma), the great life force, which gives life to all things, his power is free and unrestricted. The grounds for this are different from those of the supernatural strength that a person may have developed through ascetic practices.

From the perspective of the Buddha, although he is close he does not show himself, and from the perspective of ordinary people, he is close but they cannot see him. In other words, despite the fact that the Original Buddha is always with us, we cannot see him. This is because ordinary people see things only from their own point of view—appraising things as gain or loss, pleasant or unpleasant—and are unable to see that all phenomena are actually the Buddha's sermons. This is what is meant by "perverted." As I explained in detail in the context of the law of the Twelve Causes and Conditions (see the January/February 2004 issue of DHARMA WORLD), it seems that from the very beginning of life living beings have acted this way and there is nothing that can be done about it. It seems to be an irremediable perversion.

Unlike other living beings, however, human beings possess superior wisdom and thus need to realize that everything is an illusion. With such enlightenment, even within daily life, when people attend only to what can be seen by the eye, their minds are continually turned in the direction of the Buddha. Therefore, whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, their deeds are based on the teaching of the Buddha and they come naturally to practice the way of the bodhisattva. And when they become capable of perfecting this, human beings' unborn and undying buddha-nature is able to shine radiantly. Surely this is the zenith of religion.

TEXT All looking on me as extinct / Everywhere worship my relics, / All cherishing longing desires, / And beget thirsting hearts of hope.

COMMENTARY *Me.* Here the term refers to the Tathagata Shakyamuni, the Buddha of the manifest-body. The Buddha referred to within this verse is sometimes the Eternal Original Buddha and sometimes the trace Buddha, Shakyamuni, and it may be difficult to determine which is being referred to on each occasion. Since both the Original Buddha and the

trace Buddha are originally identical, it may not make much difference, but we should, I think, try to distinguish between them. This is verse, and because it differs from expository prose we must use our powers of comprehension as believers to understand or intuit the true meaning.

TEXT [When] all living beings have believed and obeyed, / In [character] upright, in mind gentle, / Wholeheartedly wishing to see the Buddha, / Not caring for their own lives,

COMMENTARY *Believed and obeyed.* When a feeling of longing and thirst for the Buddha wells up, there naturally arises within living beings the ability to learn deeply the teachings imparted by the Buddha while he was in this world and to believe it from the bottom of the heart.

• *In [character] upright.* If one believes and obeys, one's character cannot help becoming upright. This means being simple in the sense of unadorned, straightforward, and pliant. Of all the things that modern people have lost, this seems the most significant—despite the fact that it is humanity's most valuable, jewellike possession. Surely this must be because humankind has gradually drifted away from true religion.

• *In mind gentle.* This is a truly wonderful expression. It expresses precisely the distinctive character of Buddhism and its believers. "Gentle" means tender and pliant. "Tender" does not mean limp or weak hearted. Rather, it is like the flexibility of athletes, who cannot improve their technique, persevere, and become truly strong unless they are physically flexible. Possessing gentleness of mind means that one is selfless and can pliantly accept the truth.

The teaching of Buddhism is gentleness itself. Although it is correct and right, it is not a stubborn, stiff kind of rightness. Nor is it a severe, unsparing rectitude. As I have pointed out in explaining the Middle Way (see the May/June 1997 issue), the Buddha's teaching is simultaneously always in concert with the truth and possessed of complete flexibility and freedom in its manifestations. As a consequence, the spirit of believers in the Buddha is not pressed into a rigid mold or shackled by dogma. Ideally, that spirit is free and possessed of the pliancy to remain faithful to the truth.

• *Not caring for their own lives.* This means not only being willing to lay down one's own life but also needing neither money nor fame, not desiring the pleasures of the body, and being willing to abandon social status. When combined, these elements mean a spirit of willingness to cast aside self and seek the teaching of the Buddha. When this spirit reaches its culmination, one is willing to offer up even one's life. This is the highest stage a believer can attain.

That does not mean placing a low value on life. On the contrary, precisely because one attains such a stage one is able to make the most of one's life in the true sense. Worldly desires are wishes to make something of the transient self, the self as a temporary phenomenon. Therefore, when those wishes are strong, one's true being cannot manifest itself.

It is in achieving the invigorating state of nonself, wherein one is willing to throw away even one's life, that the unborn and undying buddha-nature emerges. Modern people seem to have lost track of this truth. Because of this, whether in the fields of politics, education, or social work, there is a dearth of truly magnetic figures who have the capacity to pull along others.

It seems to me that this is because a very materially oriented, realistic way of thinking has become entrenched in the minds of the Japanese people in the postwar period. If everyone is so caught up in thinking about things, who will be able to save us from the crises that confront the world? Who will be able to guide humanity to the finer and deeper things in life?

I am convinced that the Japanese, who for well over a thousand years have cultivated their hearts and minds with the spirit of Buddhism, are a people worthy of this noble mission. I never cease hoping that people will give deep consideration to this spirit of not caring for one's own life.

TEXT Then I with all the Samgha / Appear together on the Divine Vulture Peak. / And then I tell all living beings / That I exist forever in this [world], / By the power of tactful methods / Revealing [myself] extinct and not extinct. / [If] in other regions there are beings / Reverent and with faith aspiring, / Again I am in their midst / To preach the supreme Law. / You, not hearing of this, / Only say I am extinct.

COMMENTARY *With all the Samgha.* This refers to all those who assist the teaching.

• *The Divine Vulture Peak.* Because the Divine Vulture Peak was the principal location where the Lotus Sutra was expounded, this refers to everything, that is, to this world. Whether we hear the true Dharma in Japan, in America, in the center of a city, in a temple, or in a place set aside for practice, each is the Divine Vulture Peak.

• *Other regions.* This refers to realms beyond this saha world. In more modern terms, we can consider it to refer to other planets. Many speculate that there must be other planets where intelligent life exists, and since the Eternal Original Buddha is the life force of the universe, it would be entirely natural for him to manifest himself on those worlds, as well.

TEXT I behold all living beings / Sunk in the sea of suffering, / Hence I do not reveal myself / But set them all aspiring, / Till, when their hearts are longing, / I appear to preach the Law. / In such supernaturally pervading power, / Throughout asamkhyeya kalpas / [I am] always on the Divine Vulture Peak / And in every other dwelling place.

COMMENTARY *Sunk in the sea of suffering.* Just as the text says, people who do not know the teaching of the Buddha are sunk in an ocean of hardship and travail. Some are not even aware that they are sinking in the bitter waters. Yet during their long lives even these people from time to time and for one reason or another must feel an indescribable loneli-

ness or anxiety and therefore reach out for something to hold on to. They must hope for some absolute power upon which they can rely. This feeling is the first step toward longing for the Buddha.

• *When their hearts are longing.* It is important to note that it is because of their longing for the Buddha that he actually manifests himself to them. As I have said before, from our own perspective, if only we seek the Buddha, we will spontaneously come to see him.

TEXT When all the living see, at the kalpa's end, / The conflagration when it is burning, / Tranquil is this realm of mine, / Ever filled with heavenly beings, / Parks, and many palaces / With every kind of gem adorned, / Precious trees full of blossoms and fruits, / Where all beings take their pleasure; / All the gods strike the heavenly drums / And evermore make music, / Showering mandarava flowers / On the Buddha and his great assembly.

COMMENTARY *The kalpa's end.* Here we are talking of eons. In ancient India, it was believed that when the current age ended, there would come an age when everything would be reduced to ashes (see the September/October 2004 issue).

Even if such an age were to come, the world of the Buddha would be neither consumed nor destroyed. On the contrary, there would be a beautiful, serene realm. Regardless of how the world we know changes, the world of the Buddha's enlightenment, that is, the world in which the unborn, undying buddha-nature has been manifested, remains the Land of Tranquil Light.

TEXT My Pure Land will never be destroyed, / Yet all view it as being burned up, / And grief and horror and distress / Fill them all like this. / All those sinful beings, / By reason of their evil karma, / Throughout asamkhyeya kalpas, / Hear not the name of the Precious Three.

COMMENTARY *My Pure Land will never be destroyed . . . fill them all like this.* To the eye of the Buddha, this saha world is the realm of the Buddha, yet to the eye of sinful beings it displays the aspect of hell itself.

• *Sinful beings.* "Sinful" does not necessarily mean that one has done evil. It refers to being unable to manifest one's buddha-nature and, through one's delusion, trying to conceal the fact (see the July/August 2005 issue).

• *The Precious Three.* Soon after the Buddha began to propagate his teachings, he taught his disciples three things that believers take refuge in. Since there is nothing more valuable to believers, they are referred to as the Precious Three: the Three Treasures of the Buddha, the Law, and the Samgha.

First, needless to say, is the Buddha. Second is the Law, the truth of the universe, the teachings elucidated by the Buddha. To merely adore the Buddha and worship him would simply be adulation. The distinctive characteristic of Buddhism is revering the Law and making it one's spiritual ground. Third is the Samgha, the Sanskrit term for the Buddhist Order, or community of believers. Originally, the word meant "a close gathering." The Buddha gave this name to the group of companions, including himself, who followed the Way.

Ordinary people find it difficult to pursue the Law and practice alone, for they are apt to lapse into idleness or evil ways. But by joining hands and forming a close community of fellow believers to instruct, admonish, and encourage one another, they can make steady progress along the Way. That is why the Buddha taught us to make the Samgha one of our spiritual foundations.

When we Buddhists speak of the things that we ought to rely on spiritually, we arrive at these three. In other words, if we take as our spiritual ground the Buddha, the teaching of the truth (the Law), and the community of fellow believers (the Samgha), we will be able to practice the true Dharma in our daily lives without error.

When Prince Shotoku began the second clause of his Seventeen-article Constitution with the words "Sincerely reverence the three treasures," he did so out of a belief that they should be the spiritual foundation of the Japanese people. But those who remain in ignorance, forever victim of the defilements, have never even heard of the Three Treasures. In other words, they have not been blessed with an opportunity to encounter the teaching of the Buddha or become part of the community following that teaching, let alone meet and revere the Buddha.

TEXT But all who perform virtuous deeds / And are gentle and of upright nature, / These all see that I exist / And am here expounding the Law. / At times for all this throng / I preach the Buddha's life is eternal; / To those who at length see the Buddha / I preach that a buddha is rarely met. / My intelligence power is such, / My wisdom light shines infinitely, / My life is of countless kalpas, / From long-cultivated karma obtained.

COMMENTARY Here the Buddha is referring not to the Eternal Original Buddha but to the lifetime of the Buddha attained through the accumulation of practice as a bodhisattva in former lives.

TEXT You who have intelligence, / Do not in regard to this beget doubt / But bring it forever to an end, / For the Buddha's words are true, not false. / Like the physician who with clever device, / In order to cure his demented sons, / Though indeed alive announces [his own] death, / [Yet] cannot be charged with falsehood, / I, too, being father of this world, / Who heals all misery and affliction, / For the sake of the perverted people, / Though truly alive, say [I am] extinct;

continued on page 48

The Buddha's Teachings Affect All of Humankind

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.*

In chapter 21 of the Lotus Sutra, "The Divine Power of the Tathagata," we find the following passage: "At the same time all the gods in the sky sang with exalted voices: 'Beyond these infinite, boundless, hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of ashamkhyeya worlds, there is a realm named saha. In its midst is a buddha, whose name is Shakyamuni. Now, for the sake of all bodhisattva-mahasattvas, he preaches the Great-vehicle Sutra called the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law, the Law by which bodhisattvas are instructed and which the buddhas watch over and keep in mind. You should with all your utmost heart joyfully follow it and should pay homage and make offerings to Shakyamuni Buddha.'"

The expression "Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law" likens the unsurpassed teachings that guide all people everywhere to lead a life of purity and spiritual liberation in this secular world, without being sullied by its corruption, to the lotus that proudly offers its beautiful blossoms although it grows surrounded by muddy water. "The Law by which bodhisattvas are instructed" teaches us that we can reach the supreme stage only by applying the compassionate conducts taught by Buddhism toward all others at the same time as we undertake religious practice to perfect ourselves. "The Law which the buddhas watch over and keep in mind" is the teaching whose essence a buddha (one who has realized the Truth) cherishes and protects so that it may be spread correctly.

These three expressions directly articulate the contents, the purpose, and the value of the Lotus Sutra. If we truly understand them, the Lotus Sutra will not be merely a proper noun as a title to us but a common noun referring generally to the Truth and the supreme teaching, the universal principle that shows all people everywhere how to lead genuine lives. There can be no duality between the Truth and the supreme teaching, however. Though they may appear different in form and in the way they are expressed, at root they should be considered as essentially one. Thus, in the passage I quoted at the start, "the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law, the Law by which bodhisattvas are instructed and which the buddhas watch over and keep in mind," the description does not refer to the sutra in a limited way, nor does it confine the object of reverence and veneration to the individual figure of the Buddha Shakyamuni.

Then if we understand the above passage as meaning that all the divine beings everywhere in the universe are propounding the message that all of us should follow the teachings of the sutra to the utmost with joyful hearts and calling us to pay homage and make offerings to Shakyamuni Buddha, we may think that all the teachings that now exist in this secular (*saha*) world may actually impede the road to shared happiness for all human beings. In my view, however, the passage is a kind of prophecy that essentially all sacred teachings and all scholarship will inevitably be integrated into the teachings of a single great Truth. When this is fully realized, this *saha* world will become the greatest realm in the universe.

At present, many of the various religious teachings that are

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.

supposed to raise people up seem to be moving in different directions one by one, and furthermore, a number of religions and religious sects seem to endorse ideas and sentiments that are selfish, exclusivist, or self-righteous. People holding such beliefs cannot help but take an antagonistic stance toward others. Governments, too, whose duty it is to help improve the lives of their citizens, brandish opposing ideologies and engage in conflicts, forgetting that the people are what is most important. They are not working to promote and protect the welfare of their people, but rather are increasing their suffering and involving them in the danger of future ruin.

The same can be said about much modern scholarship. Originally, learning was intended to improve and enrich people's lives. It has now become so fragmented, however, that its underlying spirit often seems to have been largely forgotten.

If all religions, ideologies, and fields of scholarship could return to the spirit that Shakyamuni advocated, which honors truth, humankind, and harmony, this world would soon manifest itself as the ideal Pure Land, where a high spiritual civilization would come into being in combination with our present advanced material culture. It would make the *saha* realm the center of the universe in the truest sense. The cited passage from the sutra preaches the thought I explained above. From ancient times it has been said that this passage indicated the fact that all religious teachings would be recognized as returning to the essential teachings, those of the Buddha, in the future.

At the root of "unifying the worlds of religion" lies the idea that there actually is a single underlying principle. Shakyamuni told us that there can be no doubt that in the future all teachings will be integrated into the one basic Truth, and at that time, the *saha* world will become the most honored realm in the universe. The fundamental principle of religious cooperation has to be that all teachings will be seen as part of one whole in the future. That is why I have taken the position of honoring truth, humankind, and harmony as a unified, integral part of my creed, and have committed myself to the religious duty of achieving it. ❑

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law
Chapter 16: Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata (3)

continued from page 46

COMMENTARY Here, the Original Buddha and the trace Buddha merge. This is the true aspect of the Buddha.

What a wonderful verse this is: "I, too, being father of this world, who heals all misery and affliction." The Buddha's compassion overflows. Can we not feel the warmth of that compassion as it is transmitted through our bodies and fills our hearts?

TEXT [Lest,] because always seeing me, / They should beget arrogant minds, / Be dissolute and set in their five desires, / And fall into evil paths. / I, ever knowing all beings, / Those who walk or walk not in the Way, / According to the right principles of salvation / Expound their every Law,

COMMENTARY *Evil paths.* See the January/February 1993 issue.

• *According to the right principles of salvation.* This means choosing the most appropriate means of propagating the Law so that it will be as effective as possible.

TEXT Ever making this my thought: / 'How shall I cause all the living / To enter the Way supreme / And speedily accomplish their buddhahood?'"

COMMENTARY These words are the acme of the Buddha's compassion. They refer not to salvation from individual sufferings but to the Buddha's original vow, which is to manifest essential salvation. Consequently, our Buddhist practice must also take this as its goal and ideal. Unless we do this, we will diverge from the Buddha's original vow.

We have reached the conclusion of chapter 16, "Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata." We have come to understand three things. First, the true form of the Buddha is the Eternal Original Buddha (the life force of the universe), and in that sense the Buddha has neither beginning nor end and always exists in this world. Second, the Eternal Original Buddha constantly dwells in this world, embracing all within and without, always and everywhere with us, giving us life. Third, because the Buddha and living beings are originally parent and child, we too will live for eternity.

If we fix this awareness firmly within our hearts, our lives will be truly free of anxiety. What is more, we will be filled with courage and a positive spirit.

This chapter is the quintessence of the Lotus Sutra, which is why it is considered to embody the spirit of all the scriptures of Buddhism.

To be continued

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