

# DHARMA WORLD

## For Living Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue

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

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# Choosing Quality over Quantity

by Yoichi Noguchi

Gross national product and gross domestic product are common global measures of economic strength and growth. Not surprisingly, governments and citizens alike think that if the GNP is high, there will be a correspondingly high level of economic prosperity.

There is a growing number of people, however, who have fundamental doubts as to whether the pursuit of quantitative economic expansion can ensure sustainable growth. The financial failures in recent years in the United States, brought about by the subprime loan meltdown and the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy, have cast doubt on capitalist ideals.

Behind these issues, broadly speaking, are the three kinds of limitations to the current socioeconomic system: the external limitations of resources and the environment, the internal limitations of public demand, and the limitations of domestic as well as North-South distribution.

The hope for economic growth using GNP as an indicator is that the overall economic pie expands so that a country's citizens can live in prosperity. Economic growth increases their share of the nation's wealth.

The other side of the coin, however, is that as a nation's economy grows, so do problems with global resources and the environment. Moreover, growth widens the disparity between developed countries in the north and developing countries in the south. Domestically, economic growth widens the disparity between the haves and have-nots. Most countries are now experiencing many of these imbalances.

In solving these problems, it is necessary to envisage a society that can surmount the external and internal parts of the three limitations mentioned above. This is because if we examine the distribution issue closely, we see it arises from the external and internal limitations.

We can envision what sort of society we should aim for in the future if we bear in mind the model of a "steady-state society" advocated by Professor Yoshinori Hiroi of Chiba University, in Chiba City, Japan. It is a society that has overcome its external and internal limitations and can exist without economic expansion or growth as its objective.

Furthermore, according to Professor Hiroi, there are three ways to view a steady-state society. First, it is "a society in which the consumption of things and energy is standardized" (a postmaterialist steady-state society); second, it is "a society that does not have quantitative expansion (of the economy) as a fundamental value or target" (meaning changes are more qualitative than quantitative); and third, it is "a society that can place a value on 'things that don't change,' such as nature, community, traditional events, and the arts.

An example of a steady-state society is Bhutan, where in 1972 the king proposed the concept of gross national happiness (GNH). While GNP stresses material values, such as products, GNH stresses a spiritual value, "happiness."

Bhutan is a tiny country in the middle of the Himalayas. Originally a steady-state society, it has been exposed to the waves of globalization, but it is endeavoring to preserve the goodness of its society. Although its GNP is low, its people's sense of well-being, as measured by GNH, is extraordinarily high. There are many indicators for calculating GNH, such as the literacy rate or the infant mortality rate, but they all point to people's sense of well-being.

The fundamental thinking at the root of GNH is the four immeasurables: loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. These are fundamental to Buddhist thought. Stated simply, they mean loving, or feeling compassion for, all living things and empathizing with other people.

The Niwano Peace Foundation has noted the GNH advocated by Bhutan, and we have undertaken a variety of efforts to foster those values in Japan.

In Japan, before it prospered after the Second World War, there were numerous local communities based, like Bhutan, on coexistence with nature and people helping each other. Postwar industrialization and urbanization, based on the myth of GNP, have destroyed those local communities.

Most Asian countries are trying to follow the same path as Japan, but in these countries, more than a few people feel the need for new values, such as GNH.

Today it is not possible for religion to remain indifferent to a country's economic activities or the changes they bring about. I think the Niwano Peace Foundation would like to continue contributing, through cooperation with people who see the need for new values, to the conversion of cultures of *quantity* to cultures of *quality*. □

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*Yoichi Noguchi is the executive director of the Niwano Peace Foundation, whose office and activities are based in Tokyo.*

# Looking Beyond Growth

## Refocusing Development on Human Capacity and Community

by Katherine Marshall

*A longtime development specialist recognizes that its promise has yet to be fulfilled in many places and that the world faces three central challenges in achieving even basic goals.*

The world has witnessed over the past six decades the most rapid change that it has ever seen, from the very dawn of human history. Changes have literally transformed the planet in terms of its landscape, but even more, life today for billions of people would barely be recognized by people who lived a mere hundred years ago.

We have come to term these changes “development,” a term associated both with the hope that this change means progress toward a better life and world and with certain more specific dynamics, among them the expansion of the market economy and the processes we term globalization, which connect nations and peoples through trade, technology, learning, and culture. Yet the promise of development has yet to be fulfilled in many places, and never before have inequalities been as visible and obvious to all as they are today, in the age of information. Further, the growing awareness of grave threats to the environment, in the form of climate change, calls us to reflect more deeply about the very meaning of the term *development* and what its future direction should be.

It is important to reflect on how the understanding of what development is about has changed over the decades. We must then take stock of what it has brought that is positive, what lessons we have learned, and what these suggest for the future. In these reflections, we should never ignore the voice of faith, because it is our spiritual impulse above all that goads and encourages us always to look deeper than superficial assumptions and understandings, to question direction and purpose. In the light of a decade spent seeking to bridge different perceptions of development paths by many secular and religious actors, this brief reflection explores the development path traveled, some critical lessons that apply to today’s challenges, and the deep questions that face us today.

### The Path of Development

We should not forget that both the concept of international development and the institutions engaged in it are quite new.

Of course, the ideal of development of the human person has deep roots, in religion and in philosophical traditions. But the idea that a future with true equal opportunity for all peoples, with knowledge shared across cultures and civilizations, with the elements of a decent life for all, is radical and new. And the changes that have come with widespread education, as the world community is committed to education for every child, are quite extraordinary and point to a very new portrait both of human understanding and of human possibility. Universal basic health care, an idea far from full realization, has still extended life spans by some twenty years in less than a generation and made infant deaths, and the death of mothers in childbirth, a grave tragedy and not a normal fact of life. Today’s societies are deeply unequal, but there are far more human beings alive today who live lives without misery and enslavement than ever before in history. And the poverty of

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billions of people today is a shame largely because we have the moral sense that poverty should end and the knowledge that it can be ended and that we have the means to do so (for example, compare the funds mobilized to stem the recent economic crisis versus what seem in contrast paltry sums dedicated to international development). These changes are truly a revolution, and they must be seen as wonderful progress, carrying a promise and a deep obligation.

The path to this progress has not been smooth, and the way ahead is not clearly marked, but there are important lessons that we have learned on the way. Among them are the need for a deep humility in the face of the challenges and the promise. In the early years of development work after World War II, there were rather simplistic assumptions that progress might be achieved by applying certain recipes: investment in infrastructure, flows of capital, large-scale projects. The faith in the market system was bolstered by the visible contrast with communist and socialist systems, which relied far more on strong direction of economic development, but in a sense faith in planning and investments was shared. There was little doubt in the early years about the benefits of modernization and a straight path toward the future. Concerns about equity were rather dim then.

Also, part of this history was an imbalance of power that was reflected in economic relationships, increasingly contested as the world of nations expanded and the spirit of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights took hold. What did it indeed mean to have equal opportunity for all? Equality of voice? Equal promise for all people?

As the turn of the millennium approached in the year 2000, many reflected on how far the human community had come and on common responsibilities for the future. The Millennium Declaration, signed by all world nations, was translated into Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that sought to link the right to freedom and opportunity to responsibilities for achieving promises. The MDGs, as the goals are known, offer a remarkable promise, without precedent, and carry a promise to translate promises, by politicians and institutions alike, into reality. They focus sharply on accountability. Broad and sweeping and full of disappointments in their execution, the promise of ending absolute poverty in a finite time, of sharing a responsibility to offer a chance at a decent life, is truly the embodiment of ancient spiritual commitments to human potential. Even with disappointments, that hope is alive, and the MDGs are an important reference point in discussions of poverty and equity.

Most economic and social decisions are taken separately by families and by nations, in billions of places around the world. But practical policies of nations and international institutions, and the ideas of public intellectuals and scholars, also play roles and can set directions. Thus the broad sense of hope and commitment that the MDGs epitomize, the promise of a collective effort to end the ancient scourge

of avoidable misery, is a scaffold on which we can and must build hope for the future. The theme of partnerships, new and creative partnerships that join public and private, civil society and business, spiritual and secular worlds, is a vital and vibrant new element.

### Lessons from Development

As I noted above, early ideas about what would bring development were rather simplistic, even arrogant, whether they were held by market advocates or by communist leaders. Experience has shaped these ideas in dramatic ways, and difficult debates continue (for example on the merits of trade liberalization). Yet it is not always appreciated how radically different today's perspectives about the challenges of development are from those of the early leaders and intellectuals. We have traveled a long and stony path, but from it we have learned important and practical lessons.

To simplify an immensely complex period of history, there are some vital lessons that emerge.

A first is that there is not one development path but many, and despite the worrying homogenization of the world that we associate with globalization, there is more recognition that diversity is as critical for human society as it is for the ecology. In the terms of a slogan, "many worlds are possible."

This links to a weakening faith in recipes and simple solutions. Among the most powerful lessons learned is that nothing, absolutely no plan or policy prescription, can succeed if those involved are not engaged and involved. Understanding basic economics and forces of social change is today a task for all.

New thinking about the balance of public and private responsibilities remains a central element in policy debate. There are no simple answers: every nation must struggle with the tension of balancing public and private responsibilities in many fields (welfare, regulation of pollution, forest protection). But there is a mounting consciousness that basic global standards are essential in today's interconnected world, whether they apply to banking and accounting or to labor regulations and certification of higher education.

Nothing is more important as a goal and as a means than human development. That means education, health, social protection, and opportunity. It means freedom, including freedom to speak and to worship, and freedom from fear and from want. The notions of empowerment are central to development discourse today and reflect both an awareness that people must be engaged in their own development and the realization that equality, between men and women, among ethnic groups, and among any other identity divisions is an achievable if bold and ambitious dream.

### The Role of Growth and Its Limits

It has been and remains a central premise of many involved in development that without economic growth none of the promises of equality and a decent life can be achieved. The

arguments are straightforward: economic growth is what creates jobs, and without jobs a decent life is a chimera. Jobs offer the means to independence and a decent life. Jobs depend on investment and on consumption. And without growth the resources for human development—health, education, and a safety net for old age and times of trouble—are unimaginable.

But there are plenty of doubts about bland and unthinking advocacy of economic growth. These range from the very troubling inequalities that accompany economic growth even in what seem very successful societies to the deep concern that growth, in an Adam Smith-simplified paradigm, where it is driven by individual selfish and often greedy self-interest, is a poor and unethical view of the human community. In a more practical sense, the powerful links between unbalanced and uncontrolled growth and the ravages to the environment seen in forest cutting, filth around industrial complexes, and air and water pollution are linked powerfully to global warming and climate change.

Thus another important lesson and paradigm shift is that while indeed economic growth is essential to achieve the social benefits to which we aspire, it must be regulated, balanced, equitable growth. The forces of the market, which are both negative (challenging cultures, encouraging greed) and positive (stimulating creativity and allowing many freedoms), must be balanced with strong and principled governance at the national and international levels.

### Questions and Paths Ahead

This brings me to three central challenges that face us today: how to achieve the wise, principled, and farsighted global governance that the world needs; how to deal with today's deep problems of fragile, conflicted states; and how to balance community diversity and freedom with global principles and directions.

Governance is perhaps the central challenge we face, because the world is so much in need of it. Governance has many meanings: it can mean simply effective leadership and direction; efficient administration; honest, noncorrupt use of resources; and the guarantee of freedom and human security. To some, it is above all about democracy and decent politics. All of these facets of governance are essential. Sadly, there is a consensus that the complex structure of the international institutions gives a system that is still far from achieving this goal. So we need to work harder and demand more of the institutions set up with such hopes and noble principles. Watching young people engaged in exercises like a model United Nations rekindles the inspiration behind the institutions and reawakens hope in their promise.

But we need to do far more, at all levels, beginning at the level of personal responsibility. We can see all too clearly that sweeping global action on climate change is unlikely to come

close to meeting the urgent needs for action. Citizens and nations must come into the breach, and indeed this is happening. It is heartening to see the growing strength of the movement, and one of the most encouraging and promising avenues is through the leadership of spiritual institutions and leaders. Nowhere is the balance between the responsibilities of an individual and a community so vividly apparent as it is here. Even a small child can understand and act to make a difference and can understand the metaphor of the butterfly whose wings can be felt across the planet. Bringing ethics more into education and showing the way in fighting corruption and demanding principled political leadership are two important paths for all.

A second challenge reflects a new understanding of the development challenge and above all the need for action to end raw poverty and work toward true equity. The world

is no longer divided into rich and poor, a north and a south, or a first, second, third, and even fourth world. Today's community of nations is a complex and diverse mosaic. But a group of nations is left too far behind. Many are mired in conflict, like the nations of the Great Lakes of Africa and the Horn of Africa, and nations like Afghanistan. Others face deep longstanding problems of poverty, like Haiti and Cambodia. The new

understanding that has emerged is that these nations need a special, far sharper focus to bring conflict to an end, help develop human resources, and trace a promising path out of the mire of poverty and appalling governance. These nations often face a vicious circle, where conflict breeds poverty and vice versa and where political leadership fails, so that any resources sent to the nation go into a useless void. Concerted, determined, and creative action is needed.

The final challenge is complex and does not lend itself to simple solutions. Perhaps that is what calls most for the wisdom of spiritual traditions and leaders. It is to balance a world of standards, shared information, and limitless hopes for all with the security and commitment that come from belonging to a community and a culture. Multiple, fluid identities are a new reality of today and in many respects a hope, because they are indeed a new facet of freedom. It is worth remembering that most humans lived short lives in virtual slavery not long ago, so the freedom to quest for new lives, to develop potential, to follow one's dreams, is a truly inspirational new reality. Yet it can also be destabilizing, because it means that what once seemed fixed and certain no longer is so. Recognizing this tension is an important first step: an equal world where every human being can develop his or her potential is an exciting world. But it also demands new responsibilities of us all. The canvas of the future has the backdrop of our history, of cultures and traditions, yet it also has blank spaces to write what we hope will be better, fairer cultures. □

# A Perspective for Creating Local Communities Promoting People's Happiness

by Takayoshi Kusago

*This author offers two detailed suggestions, but warns of the need for caution in designing socioeconomic development programs to achieve the goal.*

In 2010 the Japanese government conducted a “survey on happiness.” It found that the average score of happiness among Japanese was 6.5 points on a scale of 10, that women, on average, scored higher than men, and when viewed by age group, people in their thirties had higher scores. Comparing these results with those of similar surveys in Europe, Japan scored lower than Britain but higher than Hungary.

Interest in individual happiness is growing worldwide. In 2004 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development began its Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies, focusing early on the quality of life and the level of happiness. In September 2009 the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, whose members included Amartya K. Sen and Joseph E. Stiglitz, published a report proposing that sole reliance on GDP as a socioeconomic development index should be reviewed and that subjective measurement of happiness and sustainability indicators should be considered.

Not only Japan but most advanced nations have begun to focus on the issue of people's happiness. Why is this happening now? The advanced industrialized nations have pursued

and steadily increased their economic wealth. Why, in spite of this, is there all this fuss about happiness in particular? It may be that, after all, by focusing on happiness it is possible to get a better picture of the condition of a society.

I would like to focus in this essay on the connection between socioeconomic development and people's happiness, paying close attention to how local communities could support the individual pursuit of happiness. To start with, I would like to look back on the outcome of Japan's postwar development and introduce some research findings relating to society, the economy, and happiness. Then I would like to propose a plan for creating communities where individuals can pursue own happiness.

## **Japan's Postwar Socioeconomic Development: The Pros and Cons of the High Economic Growth Model**

Because of Japan's remarkable postwar socioeconomic development, the lives of the Japanese have improved. The per capita GDP multiplied eightfold, rising from a mere half a million yen in 1955 to over four million yen in 2005. On the education front, the high school enrollment rate improved from 51.5 percent in 1955 to 96.5 percent in 2005, and on the health front, average life expectancy rose from 50.1 years for men and 53.9 years for women in 1947 to 78.5 years for men and 85.5 years for women in 2005.

If we look at the change in the level of people's overall life satisfaction, however, based on the survey data collected every three years by the central government of Japan, the combined percentage points of people who responded “satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” has declined steadily from 64.2 percent in 1984 to 39.4 percent in 2005.

Postwar Japan achieved steady economic recovery and growth and realized a society with a good education system and increased longevity, but it can also be said that it has built a society in which the overall degree of satisfaction with life is declining.

## **Insights from Research on Happiness**

What is social progress? In my view, social progress means that people in the society can enhance their level of well-

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*Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen (second and third from left) on September 14, 2009, at the Paris-Sorbonne University (Paris IV), where they reported their findings in a study commissioned by French president Nicolas Sarkozy on measures of economic performance and social progress.*

being. If that is true, it becomes important to sort out the relationships between social economic conditions and the individual's sense of well-being and degree of life satisfaction. Recently, there has been research on happiness in many fields, such as psychology, sociology, medicine, and economics, and little by little it is becoming clearer what is needed for the pursuit of happiness.

First of all, some research has focused on the relationship between income and a sense of well-being and degree of life satisfaction. Richard A. Easterlin, an American economist, found that income above a certain level fails to make people happier, and their feeling of well-being stagnates or declines, although higher income increases economic well-being, rather than the unilinear, positive relationship between income and a sense of well-being that is assumed by economics.<sup>1</sup> This is referred to as the "Easterlin paradox" or the "happiness paradox." Although Japanese data support this paradox, what's interesting is that Britain and the United States show similar trends.

Easterlin explained that the reason why changes in the degree of happiness deviate from a meaningful rise in income is that the standard for measuring happiness changes. In other words, in a time of low income, because a rise in income will satisfy life's necessities, the degrees of satisfaction and happiness will also rise. When a certain earning level is reached, however, people's standards for self-assessing their degree of satisfaction and happiness level were supplanted by relative, no-longer-absolute necessities, comparisons to others. In other words, when comparing their income or promotions with those who graduated from school in the same class or joined a company at the same time, or with neighbors, the level of satisfaction and well-being was corroborated by an acquired "awareness of superiority."<sup>2</sup>

Frey and Stutzer (2002) focused on the connection between unemployment and the level of happiness, and made it clear

that job loss conclusively lowers an individual's level of happiness.<sup>3</sup> In other words, it has become clear that unemployment makes people unhappy. They suggest that discussing the importance of employment solely in terms of wages is superficial, and if anything, they recognize that unemployment deepens unhappiness.

There has also been more research on how social relationships influence happiness. Helliwell and Putnam (2004) have pointed out that the strength of a social network of family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers greatly influences a person's happiness.<sup>4</sup> This point is also identified in psychology, indicating the importance of the introduction of a government policy that is centered on social connections.

There have been reports of research results that found a positive correlation between happiness and the degree of participation in local activities as well as positive correlations, between longevity and happiness, and the rate of recovery from illness and happiness.

Although these various research results are very thought-provoking for future study of proposals for the ideal society and the economy, the problem becomes whether or not such a progressive approach can take shape.

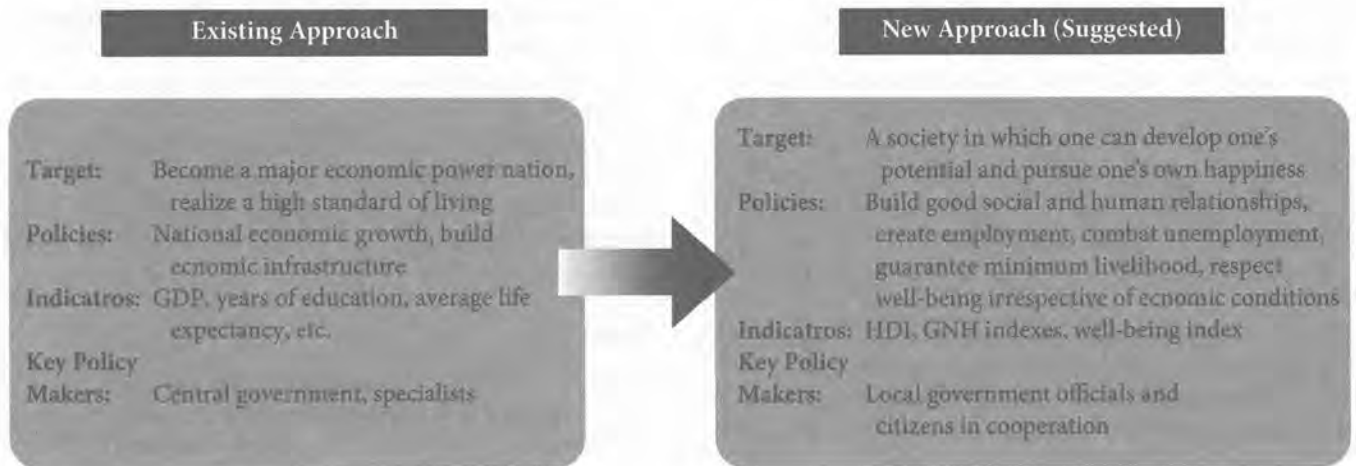
### **The Socioeconomic Development Approach to Individual Happiness**

Up to now, the approach to countries' socioeconomic development has aimed to raise the standard of living by promoting overall economic growth centered on an industrial policy. In other words, national economic policies have been discussed from the standpoint of raising the economic level of the entire country. Aiming for a society where individuals can pursue happiness, however, will require changing direction to a socioeconomic development approach different from the conventional one.

Caution is needed in designing socioeconomic development to focus on an individual's subjective well-being. Even if people give a high assessment of their well-being, that does

*Traders on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange November 3.*





### A Proposed New Approach to Socioeconomic Development

not guarantee they are in a good social and economic situation. For example, there are times when even very poor people rate their sense of well-being or feeling of life satisfaction unexpectedly high. In assessing socioeconomic development, instead of just relying on the fluctuation of individuals' sense of well-being or life satisfaction, it is essential, when making practical use of these subjective data, to confirm whether or not individuals are offered a living environment in which they can secure their decent livelihoods and exercise their full potential. In other words, now the new, desirable approach to socioeconomic development would shift focus from the society as a whole to individual members of the society, and promote a social environment in which they can independently make lifestyle choices to raise their level of happiness or life satisfaction.

When seeking an approach that is centered on the point of view of individuals, the concept of human development and the human development index (HDI) advocated and developed by the United Nations Development Programme can be useful. This concept is based on Sen's "capability approach."<sup>5</sup> The capability approach is a line of thinking that aims for a society in which all people can independently choose and realize a lifestyle of high value to themselves. In other words, it means getting away from the existing fixed concept of the individual that is predicated on "economic rationality" and instead trying to improve, from the viewpoint of what sort of lifestyle is possible for the individual, the economic environment in a way that increases, if even just a little, the individual's possible lifestyle choices and self-determination.

With the existing way of thinking, economic policies are based on trends in the available amount of goods and services, without any regard to individuals' circumstances. With the capability approach, however, the focus is on maintaining a socioeconomic environment for increasing the lifestyle options available to individuals. Individuals differ in many ways, in age, gender, neighborhood, culture, health (including disabilities), ideology, religious faith, and so on. The

capability approach devises ways to create and offer opportunities for people to earn income, increases job options by providing educational opportunities, guarantees access to medical care, and always helps people respond to any opportunity to choose freely from among a wide range of options for making the most of themselves. Thus, policy selection by the capability approach is to minimize constraints that hamper people's spectrum of life choices. In the case of people with disabilities, wheelchair provisions or special access for them could improve their life choices and increase their well-being.

### Suggestions for Creating a Society That Promotes People's Happiness

I would like to offer two concrete suggestions for what is needed to create a society that increases individuals' potential, that helps them free choice in the use of their capabilities, and that focuses on making them happier and more satisfied with their own lives.

#### 1. Build a "life-panel database" and create new indicators for assessing well-being

Up to now, the strengths and weaknesses of economic conditions and society have been assessed using a combination of economic indicators and separate social indicators. It is difficult with this approach to obtain a comprehensive picture of the quality of life based on such things as economic, educational, health, environmental, and social relationships. Thus I propose a system for assessing individuals' quality of life that monitors socioeconomic trends based on (1) objective economic and social indicators and (2) subjective life evaluation of key life domains (health, education, economy, culture, environment, social relations, and so on). I propose creating different indicators of socioeconomic development. We can refer to efforts in recent years, such as the reforms of the human development index in the United States,<sup>6</sup> the GNH index in Bhutan, and the Canadian index of well-being.

## 2. Revise policy selection standards

To build a society based on individual well-being, one needs to do more than simply devise indexes and data. What sorts of policies are designed and selected is critical. It involves taking advantage of what is learned from research on well-being and changing the order of priorities in policy selection. For example, at the time a list of policies is made up, priority should be given to policies that support strengthening people's capabilities, such as employment policies for those who are unemployed or are temporary workers, which makes the difference between happiness and misery; to social policies that stimulate networking among people; as well as to those that guarantee educational opportunities and provide dependable medical services as basic human rights. Furthermore, these policies must encourage such things as time with family, community volunteering, and activities that encourage horizontal connections; and they must remove obstacles to participation in such activities. While economic-growth policies are considered important, policies should be introduced that create a balance between work, family time, and community time.

Although development based exclusively on economic growth has brought about high earnings due to advanced industrial technology, intense economic competition drives companies to downsize to increase profits in the global economy. This harms people and the social ties among them that form the basis of a good community and society. Today, the urgent requisite for people's happiness is, while affirming the importance of person-to-person bonding, a change of direc-

tion toward rebuilding a society, that stops doing things that destroy these key elements of greater well-being; a society in which people can call out to each other. For us to build a society in which we can live happily, where we can feel hope for the future and feel satisfied, it is essential that we discard current ideas focusing on national economic development and set ourselves a goal of making people self-reliant, enlightened citizens. □

## Notes

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2. R. A. Easterlin, "Will Raising the Incomes of All Increase the Happiness of All?" *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 27, no. 1 (1995), 35–48.
3. B. Frey and A. Stutzer, *Happiness and Economics: How the Economy and Institutions Affect Human Well-Being* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).
4. J. Helliwell and R. Putnam, "The Social Context of Well-being," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Series B*, 359, pp. 1435–46, 2004.
5. A. K. Sen, *Inequality Reexamined* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
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# Beyond Wealth: Toward a “Slow Life” and Well-being

by Keibo Oiwa

*This author describes a “slow life” as the intellectual, practical, and spiritual pursuit of a new lifestyle that goes beyond the present global economic level of awareness. This is a revised version of a keynote speech delivered at the 2010 International Cittaslow Assembly of Korea in Seoul, June 28, 2010.*

Many of us know that we are living in an age of crisis when we look at global issues like terrorism, conflicts, wars, poverty, famine, oppression, and, of course, environmental breakdown. But that’s not all. We are faced with social, mental, and spiritual illnesses that are so common in places like Japan and South Korea: communal breakdown, alienation, bullying, suicide, violence to others and oneself, hate crimes, poverty, stress, overwork, and so on. I believe that the roots of all of these problems are intertwined.

What does *crisis* mean? In Chinese, two characters form the word for crisis. The first means “danger” and the second “chance,” or “opportunity.” So, *crisis* can mean “a dangerous time” and “a time of opportunity” at the same time. Albert Einstein said, “Problems cannot be solved at the same level of awareness that created them.” But that exactly is the mistake that we have been making. We still act as if we can fix crises at the same level of awareness that created them. So, what is the level of awareness that created all of these problems?

To address this question, I would like first to focus on the notion of wealth.

The environmental crisis is a strange thing. We human beings have steadily been destroying the very foundation of our own existence, the Earth. We are strangling not only our own but future generations’ basis for life. How is this possible? There must be a good reason. Something very strong and attractive is at work driving us to do this.

One answer is the notion of wealth. We somehow feel that wealth is worth everything, worth even the whole Earth, and even more. Why wealth? What does it bring us? Economists never give us answers. They say that how to attain wealth is their only concern, and nothing else. Politicians and economists are never willing to listen to the wake-up calls from scientists and environmental activists. Their excuse has always been simple: dealing with environmental problems would damage the economy. Many have argued that destruction is inevitable and even necessary for economic growth. Some have even argued that economic growth is a requirement

for solving environmental problems. These ideas still seem prevalent in places like South Korea, Japan, and many other countries, as well. It is true that South Korea and Japan have both been quite successful in the race for economic growth and in pumping up GDP and GNP. But what is the reality of these wealthy societies today?

There was a time when people could naively believe that creating wealth was not only morally acceptable but desirable, as it would be good not only for oneself but for the rest of the world. However, we are now living in an age of disillusion; we now know that creating wealth often causes serious problems and requires an immense sacrifice that has grown too big for the whole of humanity and the ecosystem to bear.

Mahatma Gandhi said, “The world has always enough for everyone’s needs but never for anybody’s greed.” The current situation, with all kinds of crises—environmental, social, psychological, spiritual, and so on—might be acceptable to those who happen to live in wealthy societies, if they are truly enjoying happy, fruitful, fulfilling lives and feel that their well-being is the fruit of their wealth. But who can be so sure?

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*Senator Robert Kennedy stands on a car in light rain as University of Kansas students surround him after a speech in Lawrence, Kansas, on March 19, 1968.*

All of us need to ask ourselves whether we are truly happy. Is our society a happy one? Is this world a happy place? Is this planet a happy planet?

We used to believe naively that those who lived in rich countries were better off and happier than those who lived in poorer countries. This basic assumption or belief, however, has been proved wrong by much recent research. Does this news come to us as a surprise? You may remember this quotation from the Bible: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25). The voice of this ancient wisdom echoed through the twentieth century and continues to the present time.

It was nearly a century ago that Mahatma Gandhi started to criticize the ideology of economic growth. To him, the problem was not poverty but wealth itself. But considering how passionately we have been fighting over the poverty issue, we have rarely questioned the virtue of wealth itself. We now need to relearn from Gandhi and start walking the path toward the economics of well-being, instead of the economics of wealth, shifting from the economics of greed to the economics of need, from the economics of possession and domination to those of sharing.

In 2008 a historic presidential election was held in the United States. Forty years before that, Robert Kennedy, who was widely expected to be the next president, was assassi-

nated during his primary campaign on June 6, 1968. About two months before his death, he gave a remarkable speech, criticizing the simplistic adoration of economic growth, questioning what the GNP index can and cannot measure. He claimed that an increase in GNP can only tell us the amount of money spent anywhere in the economy, no matter if it is for good or evil. America, he said, boasted the world's highest GNP, but this figure included money spent on tobacco, alcohol, drugs, divorces, car accidents, crime, and environmental pollution and destruction. He said, "It [GNP] counts napalm and the cost of a nuclear warhead, and armored cars for police who fight riots in our streets. It counts Whitman's rifle and Speck's knife, and the television programs which glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children."

What about now? Last summer, the tragic oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and the record heat in Japan surely pumped up our GNP and GDP.

Kennedy also pointed out what is not included in GNP: the health of our children, the quality of their education, the joy of their play, the beauty of our poetry, the strength of our marriages, intelligence, integrity, courage, wisdom, learning, compassion, and devotion to our country. These qualities are never included in GNP. Nonetheless, GNP and GDP have been the most common ways to measure a nation's wealth, and still are.

As all of you know, the P in GNP stands for "product," and GNP means the monetary sum of exchanges of goods and services. In Bhutan, a small country in the Himalayas about the size of Japan's island of Kyushu, the king coined a witty term, "gross national happiness," or GNH. It was in the late 1970s that the young king said in a speech that GNH is more important than GNP. The people of Bhutan took this idea seriously. They have been trying to put it into practice for more than thirty years. Bhutan's first constitution, which was ratified three years ago, includes GNH as its main governing principle. Its principle of state policy in section 2, article 9 declares, "The State shall strive to promote those conditions that will enable the pursuit of Gross National Happiness." You can find the Buddhist worldview and philosophy as the backbone of this idea.

In recent years, GNH has started to attract the world's attention and has come to represent a challenge to the ideology of economic growth that has not only dominated mainstream economics but captivated the hearts and minds of people all around the world.

Now let us look further at the idea of wealth. It seems to me that the concept is rooted in the origin of civilization and its five-thousand-year history. In other words, the pursuit of wealth is an essential part of civilization.

Thus the nature of civilization requires the setting aside of moderation and temperance and the overcoming of restraints imposed by the natural world. Civilization in this sense represents the "level of awareness" that Einstein was referring to. Isn't it at this level of awareness that we have been creating so many problems and crises? And yet, at the



same level of awareness, we are acting as if we can solve these problems. So, we have to reexamine the very nature of our civilization.

One good way to do so is to look at culture and contrast it with civilization. Culture, as I define it, is a mechanism that integrates into society a system of temperance, moderation, and self-imposed restraints. This should not be surprising to many of you who are familiar with ancient philosophies of the West or East, such as Buddhism and Taoism, or the Stoic school of ancient Greece. Unlike civilization, culture, by definition, is three things at the same time: local, communal, and ecological, and within those limits it always works toward a stationary state where everything is well and just enough: pace, scale, and size that are well and just enough. Culture, as a result, is essentially three things at the same time: slow, small, and simple.

This is where the notion of a slow life comes in. A slow life, by definition, is a local, communal, and ecological life. It is an intellectual, practical, and spiritual pursuit toward a new lifestyle that goes beyond the present global, economic level of awareness. Remember that the idea of eternal growth is an oxymoron; it is an illusory idea.

From “excess” to “well and just enough”: this is the shift that we have to go through. The age of crisis actually is the age of a great shift, and I believe this shift is characterized by resurgence of culture.

A Japanese philosopher of the eighteenth century, Miura Baien, who was not only a farmer and medical doctor in a

small rural community but also a brilliant philosopher, said, “What we should be really amazed by is not flowers on a dead tree, but flowers on a living tree.” In the words of Thich Nhat Hanh, a leading Buddhist philosopher of our time, “the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth.” In a similar vein, E. F. Schumacher, the author of the great book *Small Is Beautiful*, says, “Nature always . . . knows where and when to stop. Greater even than the mystery of natural growth is the mystery of the natural cessation of growth.” There is no eternal growth in nature. It is as if nature always knows where to stop and how to create a well-balanced state of the “just enough and no more.” That is a real miracle. Schumacher continues, “There is measure in all natural things—in their size, speed, or violence. As a result, the system of nature, of which man is a part, tends to be self-balancing, self-adjusting, and self-cleansing.”

In contrast, as Schumacher says, modern civilization violates these laws of nature. Its idea of eternal growth recognizes no self-limiting principle and it is unable to balance, adjust, or cleanse itself. In contrast, culture, by definition, is a self-limiting, self-balancing, self-adjusting, and self-cleansing mechanism that equips humans with temperance, the power of knowing when things are well and just enough. If so, the environmental crisis that we are talking about is, in fact, a breakdown of society’s self-limiting mechanism. It represents the loss of an appropriate slowness, smallness, and simplicity. Environmental destruction is actually a problem of cultural decay. Our environmental movement should therefore also be a movement toward cultural regeneration.

In 2000 the book *The Cultural Creatives* came out in the United States. According to the authors, Paul Ray and Sherry Ruth Andersen, “cultural creatives” are the people who are, either voluntarily or not, involved in this movement of cultural regeneration, and I believe that all of you here are also cultural creatives.

In the following year, 2001, I published a book in Japan titled *Suro izu byutihuru* (Slow Is Beautiful). As you can guess, I was inspired by Schumacher’s famous *Small Is Beautiful*, whose title came from the following passage: “I have no doubt that it is possible to give a new direction to technological development, a direction that shall lead it back to the real needs of man, and that also means: to the actual size of man. Man is small, and therefore, small is beautiful.”

Humans are small. That is to say, humans live in socially, culturally, and naturally defined communities, bound by space and time. Human life can only be sustainable within biological and cultural communities. I believe that what Schumacher said about space appropriate for humans can also be said about time: the appropriate pace and rhythm for humans. Hence, my book is titled *Slow Is Beautiful*.

Slowness is essential to each and every culture. Culture is a web of interdependent relationships, ecological, social, and spiritual. In each relationship, there is a befitting pace, rhythm, and tempo: in the soil, air, animals, and plants; the seasons that come and go; the movement of the sun, the

moon, and the stars; the ebb and flow of the tides. On this great natural tapestry, human souls and actions embroider new meaning through mythology, festivals, rituals, dances, and songs. Every human community has its own temporal framework. Each watershed and each valley has its own musicality, and that musicality distinguishes its inhabitants from others. Similarly, every human community, every town, is unique. Hence, "cittaslow"; every city is characterized by its own slow pace.

Let me summarize. Why slow, small, simple? It should be obvious by now; because we are now in a big mess. Our civilization with its imperative to pursue wealth is about to collapse. A race to get faster, become more, and grow bigger has brought us to a world full of all kinds of clutter. First, there is spatial clutter. Think about the clutter in your home, our community, our city, and the whole Earth. These are our environmental problems. Second, there is temporal clutter. We are all busy, aren't we? Why? Because there are so many things to do in the limited time. In our limited lifetimes, we are trying to do more and more. Third, there is psychological clutter. There is a clutter in our minds, in our psyches. There are always so many worries and problems to deal with, and for many people these are becoming just too much.

With so much to do, we are no longer "human beings" but have become "human doings." Our societies are now what I call "do-do societies." We used to do things in order to "be," but now we are alive in order to "do" things. Thich Nhat Hanh said: "We have a tendency to think that action is more important than being. We assume it is a waste of time unless we do something. It is a wrong idea, as our time is for us just to be."

What shall we do, then? To drop out of the wealth-pursuing game, and to get out of the messy world, I must say, let us be sloths. In 1999 I founded an organization called the Sloth Club. The three-toed sloth, the beautifully slow and peaceful animal living in the jungles of Central and South America, is our icon symbolizing the great shift toward slow, small, and simple. To be a sloth means to subtract. Didn't we all learn not only addition but subtraction in elementary school? We then must relearn slowing down, scaling down, down-shifting, simplifying, and also relearn how to do less and be more.

This is the Taoist teaching of *wu-wei*, or "nondoing." It is only through subtraction that we turn away from the clutter of doing and again become human beings, returning to our true nature.

The real wisdom, I think, as philosophies since ancient times tell us, is to know when things are well and just enough.

At the outset of this essay, I referred to an age of crisis, reminding you that the Chinese word for *crisis* means both danger and opportunity. Similarly, the ancient Greek term *krisis*, the origin of the English word, means turning point. According to the Buddhist philosopher and ecologist Joanna Macy, we are now in the age of the Great Turning, which is occurring on three simultaneous levels: environmental movements, anti-globalization and relocalization activism, and personal spiritual awakening.

Is that Great Turning going to save the future of human beings? Macy is not optimistic, but her answer is deeply consoling: "Even if the Great Turning fails to carry this planetary experiment of ecological revolution onward through linear time, it still is worth it. It is a homecoming to our true nature." □

*Members of the Cittaslow inspection team experience the salt-making process at a salt farm in Shinan County, Jeollanamdo Province, South Korea.*

# How Can True Wealth Be Achieved?

by Kathy R. Matsui

*Religion, which equals immeasurable wealth, is one way, but most people in modern society tend to focus their interest on material well-being.*

**W**ealth, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, means richness, prosperity; property, resources; capital, fortune; abundance. Wealth holds an image of economic richness and power that allows people to enjoy a prosperous life achieved by a prestigious education and career.

Is this true wealth? Behind such a life of indulgence, people with “wealth” live in constant fear of losing their status, their fortune, and their property. The continuous competitive environment may devour the health and wealth of those trapped in greed and pleasure. Surviving to win may lure some rich people to unethical activities that harm others. Such evil activities may distort their spirit and soul and eventually cause them to commit inhumane deeds. They may seek to get recognition for their achievements instead of caring for and protecting the welfare of those surrounding them. Others may search for materialistic abundance, without realizing that such wealth displays richness only on the surface, but denies the fortune of sincere human warmth. This is the mainstream image of “wealth.”

The meaning of true wealth can be pursued from two different perspectives. One is based on economic wealth that is distributed equally to all the citizens of the world. Globally shared wealth indicates that the resources of this planet are shared by all living things. The other is immeasurable wealth, which cannot be measured but is considered valuable and priceless. Immeasurable wealth includes spiritual wealth.

What is true wealth? Global issues of poverty and human deprivation of health services, food, and education still prevail on this earth. There are 925 million people who are hungry.<sup>1</sup> The world can provide its bountiful produces equally to every woman, man, and child. And yet, in reality, unequal distribution of wealth has caused poverty and hunger for nearly a billion people. Government and nongovernmental organizations have made efforts to eradicate poverty, but there is still a disproportionately large population of people who live on less than US\$1.25 a day. This reality is caused by rich people in rich countries. What causes this disparity? Rises in food prices, inequitable access to resources, and

climate change are a few of the causes of hunger and poverty.

Nelson Mandela said on November 1, 2005, at Trafalgar Square, London, where thousands gathered to hear him speak, “Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. I say to all those leaders [of the G8]: do not look the other way; do not hesitate. Recognize that the world is hungry for action, not words.” Everyone has the right to the fulfillment of basic needs. Yet poverty and hunger still exist because people with power have constructed a system where only the rich can prosper. As global citizens of this beautiful and bountiful planet, it is possible for us to make poverty and hunger history of the past. It is possible for us to seek true wealth.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted by 147 members of the United Nations in the year 2000 as a universal framework for development. The goals also serve as a means for developing countries and their

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development partners to collaborate in pursuit of a shared sustainable future for all living beings on this earth. By the target year of 2015, nations hope to tackle global issues of poverty, hunger, gender inequality, education, health, water, sanitation, and the environment. Improvement is possible if the rich countries have the responsibility to use their money and power for those in need and stop harming others for their own profit. Some actions have already been taken to make this world a better and fairer place.

World leaders gathered at the United Nations in New York in September last year to review the MDGs. The decisions these leaders make can give hope and opportunity to a billion people in the world. According to an Oxfam report,

If leaders today invest enough to achieve the MDGs and meet their aid promises, it would mean that five years from now, millions more mothers will survive childbirth, children will survive infancy, boys and girls can go to school, adults can earn enough to care for their families, and countries can grow their way out of poverty.<sup>2</sup>

Policy change is also the key to overcome these social and economic issues. World leaders met in Tianjin, China, to talk at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNCCC). The leaders met again at the conference (COP 16) in Cancun, Mexico, in December. Establishment of a new Global Climate Fund was suggested by Oxfam to affirm that the developed nations keep their promise made under the Copenhagen Accord, namely to fund countries in need. It is time for these nations to take responsibility for generating more than half of the world's accumulated carbon emissions. It is time for the rich countries and poor countries to find alternative ways to trade so that the world economy involves participation of all the countries of the world. It is time to cooperate and work toward realization of a shared wealth system where all the countries could have fair access to all the resources on this planet.

Thus, the mainstream of the economic system is structured to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. Unless governments, the civil society, and individuals work together to make changes toward a paradigm shift from a win-lose mind-set to a win-win culture, globally shared wealth cannot be realized.

What is the other true wealth? Globally shared wealth is not possible without immeasurable wealth. Plato defined the meaning of justice and explored what true happiness is in the following quotation selected from his book *Republic*:

In truth then, and whatever some people may think, a real tyrant is really a slave, compelled to engage in the worst kind of fawning, slavery and pandering to the worst kind of people. He's so far from satisfying his desires in any way that it is clear—if one happens to know that one must study his whole soul—that he's in the greatest need of most things and truly poor. And if indeed his state is like that

of the city he rules, then he's full of fear, convulsions, and pains throughout his life (IX, p. 250, 579 e).

This quotation suggests that true happiness cannot be attained by those who live as tyrants. A tyrant here is described as a slave to his desires, as someone who is never satisfied and who lives in fear.

Thus, immeasurable wealth introduced here is happiness, achieved from a healthy soul free from appetitive desires. The truth in this quotation still lives to this day. Characteristics of a tyrannical person can be seen in all of us, in an organization, and in a country. The key is to admit this human weakness in us and practice altruism.

How can true wealth be achieved? True wealth can be

*UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon receives the 1GOAL Petition from Queen Rania of Jordan (center) and Nthabiseng Tshabalala, 12, of South Africa, on September 22 at UN Headquarters in New York. The petition demanded immediate education opportunities for 69 million children.*

pursued through religion. Religion is immeasurable wealth. However, in most of modern society, people tend to focus their interest on material well-being. People no longer have faith in other fulfillment. In the past, people sought to resolve problems through religion. Now they are concerned about raising their standard of living. Religion currently faces a challenge to reunite with those who have moved away. An effort to emphasize the importance of immeasurable and spiritual wealth is demanded of religious organizations. Religion builds the character and spirituality of an individual. Religion offers us the ethical foundation to lead a spiritually prosperous life. A healthy mind and body can be achieved through religious practices. Various religious traditions per-



ceive wealth differently from the materialistic world, where wealth is measured by economic value.

The Buddhist perspective on wealth suggests that the greatest wealth is contentment and that material wealth cannot bring happiness to everyone. Contentment is achieved when even the basic needs of life are being appreciated. People, who can perceive life positively even in the midst of the darkest moment of their life, will enjoy contentment. Such a skill would be a valuable asset to a person's life. Ralph J. Doudera described a Christian perspective on wealth: "God's model of wealth was a communal ownership of wealth, where everyone had an equal share on the abundance of his blessings."<sup>3</sup> From an Islamic perspective, wealth is a possession of Allah. The Qur'an says, "Righteousness is in one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the Angels, the Book, and the prophets; and gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask for help and for freeing slaves" (2:177). Most faith traditions suggest that shared wealth brings contentment to living beings on this planet Earth.

Kabir, the Hindi poet, stated that worldly wealth cannot be taken to life after death. "True" wealth is not worldly wealth but one that is possessed in one's inner self that gives strength to follow the path to liberation. A soul free from anxieties enjoys calmness and contentment. A mind and soul free from evil enables the person to live with right diligence, thus protecting the individual from unnecessary temptations. Thich Nhat Hanh cited Buddha's words on what right diligence means: "Maintain your health. Be joyful. Do not force yourself to do things you cannot do." He explained the meaning of this citation: "We need to know our physical and psychological limits. We shouldn't force ourselves to do ascetic practices or lose ourselves in sensual pleasures. Right Diligence lies in the middle way, between the extremes of austerity and sensual indulgence."<sup>4</sup> The balance of keeping the "middle way" may be challenging, but how well do we understand what "right diligence" is? We often overexert ourselves and do not take care of our physical and psychological health. Thus the work we once began with joy and hope somehow transforms into stress that gradually eats away our aspirations and health. We need to stop and relax and listen to the cries of our mind and body every once in a while to release the immeasurable wealth that dwells within us. All human beings have potentials to better themselves.

If wealth is about quantity, then true wealth could be about how many people around us appreciate our presence. People who find the meaning to live are often surrounded by people they love. Such people who support us and respect us are a part of our "wealth." A network of like-minded people is our important asset to form solidarity groups to collaborate and work together for the well-being of ourselves and others.

Henry David Thoreau defines wealth as an ability to experience life. Ability is an asset that opens the person to various opportunities. An ability to resolve conflict constructively will give the individual means to form better relationships

with others. An ability to tolerate will deepen multicultural understanding among people from diverse cultures and religious traditions. Confucius also mentioned a similar saying: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." An ability to experience life will offer a person immeasurable wealth, as the person continues to build his or her wisdom, knowledge, and skills.

Lastly, another immeasurable wealth is education. Education can enable students "to understand global problems, have the skills to resolve conflict constructively, know and live by international standards of human rights, gender and racial equality, appreciate cultural diversity and respect the integrity of the Earth."<sup>5</sup> Education teaches students to think critically of the events that occur around them and in the world, and of the knowledge acquired in the classroom. It offers students the knowledge and skills to have diverse perspectives, to be creative, to form their own thoughts, to be aware that there are alternatives, to know that they have a choice, and to take action. Education offers immeasurable wealth, which the students could apply later in their life to contribute to society and the world.

From another perspective, the Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan has developed an index, gross national happiness (GNH), to measure human well-being. Bhutan is considered one of the "economically challenged" countries in Asia. The GNH index connotes Bhutan's perception of true wealth. Could we assume that GDP is the only index to measure the well-being of a country's population? Are we obsessed to think that the well-being of the citizens is not guaranteed unless there is economic growth? Aren't we living in a world of illusion, to think that people who are poor are unhappy and that money, power, and status are the only means to be happy?

It is time to reconsider the mistakes of the past that brought in current economical, environmental, and social issues so that we can live sustainably. We can involve ourselves as global citizens by supporting organizations that fight in the forefront of this struggle toward a just world. We are a part of this structure that causes poverty. We are a part of the civilization that shares a common future. We can develop immeasurable wealth within ourselves and act toward achieving globally shared wealth. □

## Notes

1. Oxfam America, *Oxfam Fact Sheet* (October 2010).
2. Ray Offenheiser, "Putting Poor People First" (September 2010), Oxfam America.
3. Ralph J. Doudera, "Wealth, a Biblical Perspective: The Teachings of Jesus; Can a Christian Have Wealth?" (November 1985), <http://www.spectrumfin.com/images/PDFs/Wealth%20Perspective.pdf>.
4. Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999), p. 101.
5. Global Campaign for Peace Education (2000), Hague Appeal for Peace. Retrieved on October 18, 2010, from <http://peace-ed-campaign.org/statement.html>.

# The Wealth of a Community: A Sri Lankan Reflects on What It Means to Be Rich or Poor

by Harsha Kumara Navaratne

*When he thinks back to his childhood, the writer recalls that his family lacked many material things but had a different kind of wealth. If any problem arose, others would be there to offer support.*

When I was small, I did not know that I was poor. My family lived in a small fishing village on the southern coast of Sri Lanka. We had rice from the paddy fields and fish from the sea. Our house was simple, but it kept us dry when it rained. The local temple was the center of social activities in the village. The children would meet there after school, and everyone, old and young, came together to observe important events: full moon days, new births, marriages, and deaths. We did not have television, but there was plenty of entertainment. People sang and danced. There were drama performances, puppet shows, and festivals. I remember lying on the beach watching the stars at night. I remember old people and young people pausing to enjoy the sunset.

There were problems, of course, but we never felt alone. If we faced a difficulty, we knew others would be there to furnish support. If someone died, the rest of the village would magically mobilize to provide food and take care of all of the funeral arrangements. The mourning family did not have to worry about a thing. If a father was sick or injured, others would assist until the family was able to support itself. People looked after each other's children. Mothers would prepare extra dishes of favorite curries to share with neighbors.

In my village, there was a family that lived in a big house surrounded by a high wall. We used to climb the wall to go

and pick their mangoes. I do not remember envying that family. They were stuck behind the wall and did not seem to be having as much fun as the rest of us.

When I was twelve years old, I took a national examination and earned a place at a big boarding school in the capital, Colombo. My mother took me to the village temple on the way to the train station, and I still remember the lecture I received from the head monk. He told me, "Today you are leaving your family, your temple, and your village to enter a big school. You will meet new people and have new experiences, but do not forget where you came from. Never forget the values you learned here and never forget your daily spiritual practice. That is your wealth. You must protect it like your life."

It was only after I entered the school in Colombo that I learned I was poor. Most of my classmates were from very wealthy families. My new friends were more concerned about what I did not have than I was. They took me shopping for modern underpants and proper shoes. They paid for me to join them on trips and adventures.

The monk was right. I met new people, had new experiences, and learned about a confusing new value system. This value system was based on the accumulation of material things. In my village, there was a limit to needs. You can only eat so much. You can only sleep in one bed. You can only wear one set of clothing at a time. But in this new system, there was no limit. People always wanted more: more money, more property, a bigger car, a bigger house.

The whole society was changing. It started in the cities. It began with the wealthy families of my school friends, but it soon spread. There were advertisements telling us about needs that we didn't even know we had. There were movie theaters with actors in the films showing us the latest fashions to wear. Before long, there was television bringing these messages right into our homes day after day. Expectations and aspirations were changing.

The political situation began to change as well. When the British withdrew from my country, their former colony, they left behind a majority-rule electoral system in the hands

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of a wealthy urban minority. The people in power did not have much in common with the majority of the people in the country, but they needed those people's votes to stay in power. Initially, they accomplished this by appealing to people's national identity and sense of community. They spoke of traditional values and restoring Sri Lanka to its precolonial glory.

As people began to want and expect more and more, the link between material wealth and power became more visible. Political leaders used their money to provide material benefits in exchange for votes. You needed more money to get more votes. Money brought power. Of course, the equation went the other way too. If you had a position of political power, there were many opportunities for personal profit through favors, contracts, and other channels. Power brought money.

When I was growing up, the monks taught that we are all interdependent. We are linked with other people and with our environment. If I cause suffering, it will directly or indirectly have negative consequences for me. If I help others, it will contribute to my well-being. If I look after my environment, it will look after me. We were taught to consider the consequences on the broader community before taking action.

When some of my friends began to enter politics, I received a firsthand look at this money-power cycle. Even those who started with genuine motives were rapidly pulled into this system. It is difficult to compete against those who are motivated by personal gain without adopting some of their tactics. Political leaders were struggling for more resources and more power without considering the consequences for the broader community. The consequences emerged as violent conflict. People who did not have money to compete for resources and power began to compete with guns.

When I was a boy, my country was known internationally for its spices, its gems, its tea, its tropical beaches, and its Buddhist stupas. Today it is known for war. According to international news reports, the war in Sri Lanka was an ethnic conflict, but the situation was never so simple. Our society was divided along many different lines. I have lost Sinhalese friends to Sinhalese gunmen and Tamil friends to Tamil gunmen.

This experience has taught me an interesting lesson about wealth. A main driver of this new value system, a system based on the accumulation of material things, is the belief that material wealth and power will bring freedom, security, and happiness. If I have money, I can have my own vehicle and avoid the risks of public transport. If I have money, I can pay for high walls and security guards and alarm systems for my house. If I have money, I can leave the country or send my children to study abroad. It is easy to get caught up in this way of thinking.

Of course, experience shows us that material wealth and power do not bring freedom, security, and happiness. In fact, they may bring the opposite. The wealthiest and most

powerful people I know cannot walk freely on the street. They cannot go to their favorite roadside stand for a meal. They worry about kidnapping. They worry about robbery. They worry about losing their money or losing their power. They worry that their children will have less money and power than they do. They feel alone.

I think back to my childhood. We did not have many material things, but we had a different kind of wealth. We could move freely from place to place without fear. If any problem arose, we knew that others would be there to offer support. We felt connected to each other and to our environment. There was a sense of belonging.

I may not have thought about poverty when I was young, but discussions on poverty and wealth have now become part of my daily life. I work with a Sri Lankan organization called Sewalanka. In English, we are called a nongovernmental organization, an NGO, a nonprofit, and a development agency.

We have a slightly different understanding of our role. The word *sewa* (or *seva*) originally comes from the Sanskrit word for string, and in ancient texts, it was used to refer to the connectedness of all things. In the two main languages of modern Sri Lanka, Sinhala and Tamil, the word *sewa* is commonly used to mean service, but in historical texts, the roots of the word are more evident. *Sewa* is selfless service, service that is done without any expectation of direct personal benefit. It is service that is motivated by the recognition that

*These war-affected children participated in a psychosocial program coordinated recently by Sewalanka in northern Sri Lanka.*

*Community leaders from throughout Sri Lanka gather for the annual festival at Sewalanka's Islander Center, near Wilpattu National Park in Anuradhapura.*

all things are connected. Sewalanka was formed to catalyze *sewa*: selfless service based on the awareness that we are all interdependent.

Sewalanka partners with many international development agencies to provide services to rural communities in Sri Lanka. For most of these organizations, success is measured in terms of material wealth and economic growth. A family is poor if its daily income is below a certain level. Because Sewalanka works with international development organizations, we have learned this terminology and the related tools like participatory needs assessments, capital studies, and wealth ranking. Our partners need quantitative measurements of success. They want to know the change in people's material assets or monthly income over time.

These numbers can be useful, but it is important to remember that they provide only a partial picture. According to income and asset measurements, my family was poor when I was a child, but we were happy. Our basic needs were met. We had food and shelter. We had clean air and water, a strong social support system, and an enriching spiritual life. Many people in Sewalanka share my experience. They come from families that were poor by conventional measures but were wealthy in other ways.

People should have the space to define their priorities on

their own terms. This is the rationale behind Sewalanka's mission statement: enhancing the capacity of rural communities to identify and address their own development needs. We focus on mobilizing voluntary membership organizations around issues of common interest. These issues vary over time and from place to place. In a war or natural-disaster situation, people will understandably be focused on basic needs like water, food, and shelter. In a more stable context, priorities are not limited to material needs. Groups may decide to organize a religious event, build a community center, host a sports meet for children, or come together for an environmental cleanup.

This type of collective action rebuilds social networks that have been broken apart by decades of violent conflict and competition over material resources. With each new achievement, people become more confident and more motivated to take on new issues, like funeral aid services or community banks. By working together, they learn how to resolve internal conflicts, take decisions, manage resources, and motivate others to volunteer their time and *sewa*.

These activities may not always increase personal income or assets, but they contribute to a deeper community wealth, the kind of wealth that the head monk from my village tried to explain to me so many years ago. □



# Discover Your Hidden Treasure: An Invitation to the Contemplative Path

by Ruben L. F. Habito

*As we learn to stop and see in a habitual and sustained way, our eyes are  
opened to the countless treasures that lie right within our reach.*

One of my favorite Zen koans is about a monk named Qingshui (pronounced Seizei in Japanese), who says to his teacher, Caoshan, “Master, I am alone and poor. Help me to become prosperous.” Caoshan responds, addressing him: “Venerable Qing!” To this Qingshui replies saying, “Yes, Master.” Thereby Caoshan proclaims, “There! You have just drunk three of the finest cups of wine in all of China, and you say you have not yet moistened your lips?”<sup>1</sup>

A casual reader is tempted to ask, now what in the world is the Zen master talking about here? What cups of wine? Where can they be found? And that is precisely the kind of question that this koan is meant to provoke. The master is telling Qingshui, and also each and every one of us, “You say you are alone and poor. Don’t you realize that you possess treasures in abundance, right there before your very eyes? Stop for a moment, open your eyes and see!”

There is another story of a seasoned Zen monk who was commissioned by the abbot of a temple to transport a small golden statue of the Buddha, adorned with jewels, to another temple where it was to be placed on a newly constructed altar.

On the way to that other temple, this monk happened to be ambushed by robbers. They beat him up badly and took not only the golden Buddha with the jewels but also the bullock cart on which he was riding and his clothes and everything else he had with him, leaving him lying unconscious in a ditch by the side of the road. When this monk regained consciousness, body aching all over, it was night, and the moon was shining with resplendent light against the background of a starlit night. Looking up at the sky, the monk exclaimed, “Oh, those poor robbers. I wish I could have given them this beautiful moon as well!”

What an unusual way to respond in the midst of such tragic circumstances, one might say. This monk’s remark reveals the mind and heart of one who has found his true treasure, one that cannot ever be taken away by robbers or by anyone else. This is a lifelong treasure that never diminishes but, on the contrary, only increases in quality and depth through the years. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus calls our attention to this kind of treasure on earth, “where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matt. 6:19–20). One who comes upon this kind of treasure earnestly wants only to share it with each and every one around.

The verse appended to the koan on Qingshui by Women describes the hearts and minds of those who have made this treasure their very own:

Poor as the poorest,  
They are as brave as the bravest.  
They can hardly sustain themselves,  
Yet they dare to compete with one another for wealth.

This is intriguing indeed, and we are led to ask, “What kind of treasure is this all about?” And more important, “How may I gain access to this treasure?” Qingshui is us, feeling all alone and poor and earnestly wanting to be “prosperous.”

As we go through this earthly life of ours, whether we may actually be materially impoverished or be somewhere in the middle class or even be on the affluent side, we feel

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“alone and poor.” Even those few among us who may have abundant resources and live in palatial mansions, have huge bank accounts, and have scores of people at our beck and call cannot evade that feeling of being “alone and poor,” knowing that money can only go so far, and we realize that it cannot buy what we *truly* long for deep in our hearts. What is it then that we truly yearn for in this life, our true heart’s desire, that *one thing necessary* that Jesus alludes to (Luke 10:42)?

Reflecting on the way we live our lives, we may notice that instead of devoting ourselves to seeking that *one thing necessary* that can fill our hearts with true peace and joy, we spend our time and energy in the pursuit of *many things* we are led to *think* are “necessary” for us. The consumption-driven economy of our contemporary global society feeds, and conversely feeds on, people’s desire to have, and to have more and more at that. An underlying assumption that propels this consumer culture is that “you are what you have.” Your value as a person is thought to depend on the kinds of things that you possess. It is only natural therefore to want those things that everybody else seems to want, like a big house, a flashy car, fashionable clothes, the right kind of designer handbag or shoes, and so on. Having these things may seem to give us the feeling that we are “somebody” who can match up with anybody else out there. So we continue trying our best to keep up with the trends, to be able to buy the latest in those “must-have” items blown out of proportion in the media or that we hear friends and coworkers talk about.

Swayed by this attitude, we notice that the more we have, we want still *more*. And then at some point we may come to realize that we can *never* be truly satisfied with what we already have, because there is always something else out there that we don’t have yet. This feeling of acquiring some things and perhaps obtaining some momentary satisfaction in getting hold of them, and then after a short while wanting something else, and in all this remaining deeply unsatisfied, is an aspect of what the Buddha identified as the First Ennobling Truth: *dukkha*. This term is a Sanskrit/Pāli compound referring to a wheel that is not rightly set on its hub, and is thereby not rolling properly as it should. The term *dukkha* then describes the human condition that is *dys*-functional and out of sync, a condition of *dis*-ease and dissatisfaction. Incidentally, its reverse is the term *sukha* (a wheel that is centered on its hub and revolving smoothly), which is translated as “ease” or “contentment” or “happiness.” This term appears in the *Metta Sutta* (Treatise on Loving-kindness), in a phrase that Buddhists throughout the world often recite: “May all beings be at ease.” “May all beings be happy.” The question then is, how can we turn our lives around from a state of *dukkha* to one of *sukha*?

The Buddha, in the second of the Four Ennobling Truths, invites us to examine the root cause of our dissatisfactory state of being. It can be summarized in one word: *craving*. In short, it is this very desire to have, and to have more, and *still more*, that seems to be causing our *dis*-ease and messing up our lives.

The Buddhist philosopher David Loy writes how our feeling of being driven to want more and more comes from a deeply felt sense of *lack* and points out that this is a characteristic of our human mode of being in this finite world.<sup>2</sup> What we think, say, and do tend to be motivated by this need to fill in this inner lack that gnaws at us at the very heart of our mortal being. And yet, the more we seek to fill this lack by acting on our craving to have more and more, the less we are truly satisfied and instead are plunged more deeply into a vicious cycle of unfulfillment and dissatisfaction.

Underlying this *lack* is the delusory idea of “I, me, mine” that we presume to exist and that we identify with our person, which we perceive as distinct and separate from other “I’s” and from the rest of the world and which thereby feels alienated, isolated, “alone and poor.” This isolated and impoverished “I” needs to prop up its insecure foundations and seeks to overcome this feeling of alienation and impoverishment. It does so by grasping at all kinds of things, material as well as nonmaterial, driven to possess and thereby identify with things that it can call its very own and thus bolstering itself against those feelings of insecurity and poverty that threaten it from all sides.

How do we uproot this sense of lack, connected with the delusory idea of “I, me, mine” that continually drives us more deeply into the cycle of dissatisfaction? What practical steps can we take in this regard? The Buddha’s prescription here is straightforward and clear. He advises us: *stop and see*.<sup>3</sup> That is, to stop the machinations of our discursive mind and see through this delusory “I, me, mine” and see “things as they really are.”

These two words, *stop* and *see*, encapsulate the entire scope and extent of Buddhist meditation.<sup>4</sup> There are different schools of meditation that have developed and blossomed in the Buddhist family of traditions through the centuries, but underlying the differences in emphases and technical aspects of meditative practice presented by the various schools is this common strand summarized in these two words.

What happens when a person takes this invitation of the Buddha to take up the formal practice of meditation, that is, to *stop and see*, and do so in a sustained way? There are numerous books that anyone can pick up and read in this regard, and these can provide valuable guidelines. But reading books about meditation is like looking at a menu and having one’s mouth moisten in imagining the delicious dishes described. Here let me just offer a couple of appetizers, and then conclude with a practical suggestion.

Alan Clements, a meditation teacher who lived in Burma as a monk for a number of years and is now based in California, offers us this description of what can happen to one who takes up the practice of meditation.

The practice of meditation became a wonderful new way of life. I was amazed to see how awareness put eyes and ears where there had been none. It enhanced perception and revealed greater nuance and dimension. Sounds were

accentuated. Colors became brighter. Tastes, more subtle and sweeter. Smells more fragrant. At times it felt like every cell in my body was undulating with orgasmic bliss. Watching the fog lift in the early morning was a dance in itself—the play of photons, like tiny prisms refracting thousands of infinitesimal rainbows on the eye. The smell of the gardenia bush just outside my window became a symphony of textured scents. I fell in love with the simplicity of just being.<sup>5</sup>

In short, as we learn to *stop and see* in a habitual and sustained way, our eyes are opened to the countless treasures that lie right here within our reach, which can fill our hearts

Photo: Alamy / PPS

Caoshan earnestly, “Master, I am alone and poor. Help me become prosperous.” The master replies, addressing him, “Venerable Qing!” The monk responds, “Yes, Master.” Notice the Zen master’s skillful way of guiding, pointing directly to the student’s heart and mind, as if ringing a bell to awaken him. “Venerable Qing!” The sound pierces Qingshui’s heart and resonates throughout the universe. Qingshui, fully at attention, sheds all thought of “I, me, mine” and hears. From the depths, with no place for the “I, me, mine” to intrude, he responds, loud and clear: “Yes, Master.” It is a sound that reverberates through all time and space. *Just that.* Qingshui and Caoshan, each in his own way, is fully at attention, listening with his entire being, and responding in that same fullness and, one might note, emptiness (that is, from a state totally devoid of the thought of “I, me, mine”). And in doing so, they are bringing to full light the hidden treasures of the universe, right then and there. That is what Master Caoshan is referring to when he says, “There! You have just drunk three of the finest cups of wine in all of China, and you say you have not yet moistened your lips?”

Master Caoshan addresses us by name too, as do all the Zen ancestors and masters of old and of late, inviting us to a turnabout in the way we live our lives. A consumer-oriented, “acquisitive” mode of being, centered on the “I, me, mine,” keeps us imprisoned in a world of dissatisfaction, in a state of feeling “alone and poor.” We are invited to step out of that kind of life and instead to enter a mode of being wherein we are able to *stop and see* and behold the treasures that are right there in the midst of those “ordinary” things in our day-to-day life. This is called the *contemplative path*, a way of life and mode of being that allows us to discover, behold, partake of, and enjoy the treasures teeming all around us and share them with one another, in wonder, gratitude, and joy. We may embark on this way of life by taking the very practical step of seeking out and joining a community of practitioners and finding a teacher who can walk with us and guide us along this path. It promises to be a path of surprise and discovery, of treasure upon treasure to our heart’s content, enough for a lifetime and beyond. □

## Notes

1. The tenth koan in the *Wumenguan* (Mumonkan; Gateless Barrier, or Gateless Gate). See Kōun Yamada, *The Gateless Gate* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004) for a translation of and commentary on the koan, which begins on page 53. I have used my own translations in the citations for this essay.

2. David Loy, *Lack and Transcendence: Existentialism, Buddhism, and Psychoanalysis* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1996).

3. The seventh and eighth items of the Eightfold Path, the Fourth Ennobling Truth, are about “right mindfulness” and “right concentration,” which relate to this practice of stopping and seeing.

4. *Samatha* means “calming the mind,” that is, stopping its discursive activities, and *vipassana* means “insight,” that is, seeing things just as they are.

5. Alan Clements, *Instinct for Freedom: Finding Liberation Through Living* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2002), p. 108.

*The sale signs in these store windows reflect society’s economics of possession and its temporal clutter.*

with untold joy and deep peace. Meditation enables us to see through the prison of that delusive “I, me, mine” which makes us grasp for things that only leave us unfulfilled and frustrated. It opens us to an infinitely refreshing and exciting horizon that we had hardly noticed but that had been and is there all the time.

In the koan above, the monk Qingshui implores Master



# Mindfulness in the Rehabilitation Setting

by Jane Perri

*A member of Rissho Kosei-kai in the United States describes her personal experience in helping substance-abuse victims recover from their addiction through teaching meditation and mindfulness.*

I cannot speak for other cultures, but in the United States, we have an extremely strong culture of addiction. We are addicted to our coffee in the morning, soft drinks in the afternoon, and wine or beer in the evening. We are addicted to our large single-occupancy gas-guzzling cars, highly mortgaged homes, and buying things that are just a bit better than those of our neighbors. We are addicted to being “independent,” doing things our way or no way, to being the “boss of ourselves.” We rush here and there, spending money, borrowing money to spend more money, making money to pay the heavy price of having it all. The cycles never end. Even if we can sleep at night with the help of hypnotic aids, it does not relieve the stress that we cause ourselves. We know all of this is unhealthy; however, we cannot break free of our culture of addiction.

A couple of years ago, the district manager of a national chain of court-mandated residential drug and alcohol addiction rehabilitation facilities telephoned our Dharma center in Klamath Falls, Oregon. He asked if someone would come over to teach meditation and mindfulness to the local residential facility on a weekly basis. I replied, “Sure, I can teach meditation, but I don’t know much about mindfulness.” He said that was not a problem because they already had a four-

module program designed for use in all of their facilities. So I had one day of training and then was on my own.

I had no idea what I was getting into. I thought my Dharma training, undergraduate degree in psychology earned more than thirty years ago, and graduate training and experience as a teacher would be sufficient to do the job. I had studied meditation with teachers for years, so I was ready. I was delusional.

The first day, I walked into a group of twenty-three residents that were at varying stages of their twenty-eight-day court-ordered confinement. The newcomers were still trembling from withdrawal and walked about in a daze. Most of those that had been there a couple of weeks were still angry and resentful at being incarcerated. Those nearing the end of their confinement either were just counting down the days to freedom or were afraid to leave for fear of lapsing back into their drug- or alcohol-soaked lives or had acquired a sense of peace with themselves. The angry ones made it very clear to me that they were in the circle only because they were forced to be there and not to expect anything from them.

In our small town and surrounding basin area, the Native American population is quite large, but the number of Native Americans in the facility was disproportionately high. There was a young Native American father around thirty years of age who had arrived just two days before. He was convinced that the “white system” put him there “to get rid of color from the streets.” The fact that he had beaten up his girlfriend when he was drunk, and that his sons were deathly afraid of him, did not register with him as a problem. He immediately announced that he would not participate, so I should leave him alone. There was another man from the same tribe who was in his late fifties. He was midway through the program and was looking for something to help him when he was released. I focused my attention on the older man and the others who were open to this new technique.

The program is designed to be taught in four sixty-minute sessions over a four-week period. With this format, regardless of when people come in, they will experience the entire program. Session one taught what stress is, how it harms the body, and the basic concepts of meditation and mindfulness.

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It ended with an exercise designed to focus on breathing, how the breath feels in the nostrils, brain, lungs, chest, and so on, when inhaling and exhaling. This ended with a ten-minute silent meditation allowing thoughts to come into the mind but then returning one's attention to the breath. Residents were then asked about their reaction to the exercise.

Session two began with a discussion of the Five Hindrances that prevent mindfulness: attachments, aversion, sloth and torpor, restlessness, and doubt. We also talked about taking responsibility for our own feelings, thoughts, and actions. I invited the residents to tell their story about what caused them to be arrested, and in almost all cases for the men, it was for harming someone when they were drunk or high on drugs. This opened the door to a discussion about looking

them through the use of these tools in conjunction with the Ten Suchnesses that they had already learned. Then I asked for their stories to be told.

The session ended with an exercise in mindful eating; focusing full attention on what it feels like to eat a piece of fruit. The recommended fruit was grapes, but after one of the clients said it was a trigger for his wine addiction, I changed to apples. When a client said he had no teeth and could not bite into an apple, I changed to bananas. When a client said her favorite drink was banana daiquiris, I brought in a grocery bag of mixed fruits!

Session four was the most powerful and frightening one of the program. It began with humorous examples of excuses people give for why they crashed their cars. The story of

Photo: SPL / PPS

very deeply at the core cause of the events. Without identifying the Ten Suchnesses, I walked them through how to diagnosis the seed of the problem. (Since it is a state-owned facility, religion cannot be mentioned.) This was impossible for the newly committed residents to accept, but some of them that were near the end of their treatment understood that their ego was the "seed" and were grateful for having a new tool to help them.

Following this, we had a discussion on how to do walking meditation and thirty minutes of exercises focusing on what it feels like to rise from a sitting position and walk at different paces, from a normal gait to excruciatingly slow steps. There was strong encouragement to keep the mind focused only on the act and sensations of movement and nothing else. The exercise was framed as a way of walking away from their old habits that bound them and gradually walking into a new way of viewing themselves and their lives.

Session three talked about calming the mind, getting the self-sabotaging chatter under control. One of the exercises had them count and label the thoughts that flowed through their consciousness. We talked about how our minds make up stories that we then believe to be true. We talked about suffering, the causes, conditions, and results. Without identifying the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, I walked

*An artist's conception of alcohol abuse.*

the "Sensitive Ox" named True Happiness, whose owner wagered he could pull one hundred heavily laden carts, was told. When the owner, who had always been gentle and kind to the ox, feared he might lose his substantial wager, he lost faith in his friend the ox and began calling the ox names and whipping him. In return, the animal refused to budge. Later that night, the ox asked why his master had treated his friend so cruelly and the master was ashamed.

The next day another wager was made. This time the master very kindly asked his friend to pull the carts, which of course the ox did and won the wager. The ox then said to the gathered crowd, "Kind and gentle words can move heavy loads. Insults and cruel words move nothing, but hurt feelings." A discussion of this followed with their stories of how they hurt others or were hurt by careless words. The session exercise was to repeat over and over many loving and kind phrases of forgiveness to an assortment of individuals in their lives and to themselves. The session ended with the playing of a couple of Olivia Newton-John songs about forgiveness; by then the room was always in tears.

Let me go back to the two Native American clients mentioned previously. The older man was searching for solutions. He earnestly joined in the exercises. He told me that during the week between sessions, he continued to practice the exer-

cises. The last week of his confinement, I picked him up on Sunday and brought him to the Dharma center for service and *hoza*. He told me that he was in torment when he arrived at the rehabilitation center; he felt that he had wasted his life on alcohol and lived in a haze. He told me about his repeated arrests and jail time, all fueled by alcohol. He had been sentenced to rehab twice before, but those treatment sessions were not effective. After practicing mindfulness and meditation, with great difficulty initially, he felt a sense of calm that was foreign to him. When he left, he promised to continue practicing, and he wanted to teach the other members of his tribe what he learned. A year later, he had not returned to the rehab center.

The younger angry man did not complete his program in four weeks; instead it took him ten. During the first three weeks he refused to participate. He just glared at me or slept. The fourth session of love and forgiveness broke him down. He finally dropped his facade and cried. We talked at length afterward, and he told me that he was carrying too much guilt to let himself off the hook. He did not want to still his mind because it was always yelling at him about all the horrible things he had done. He said, "Now I think I can let it [guilt] go. I have to go apologize to a lot of people in my life, starting with myself for ruining my life." After that day, he was a full participant in the sessions.

Seven weeks into the young man's confinement, a new resident arrived, the one with no teeth. I had passed out the apples, and he looked forlorn and told me about his lack of

chewing power. The rest of the group laughed, and he looked downcast. The young Native American man was sitting next to him. He leaned over and said something into the other man's ear while patting him on the back. The older man's face brightened. With a tear in his eye, he quietly thanked the young man. That day, the young man became a leader, encouraging others to fully participate, saying "This stuff works."

During cigarette breaks, he quietly talked with the new residents, giving them encouragement. During his graduation ceremony, the therapy staff talked of his complete reversal of attitude. He promised to take what he learned back to the tribe and work to help others avoid becoming what he had. He promised to apologize for all of his past deeds and then move on. He did not return to the rehab center.

These are extreme examples of how addiction can destroy one's life. The addiction to power, fame, food, and material goods is no less damaging—it is just legal. The self-loathing of a gambler, shopaholic, or morbidly obese person is no less than that of an alcoholic. Mindfulness training is not emphasized in most of the dharma centers in the United States; meditation is much more common. Mindfulness training used in combination with the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the Ten Suchnesses provides powerful tools to help guide others and ourselves to relieve suffering. Adding mindfulness to the mix is like having the Dharma "on steroids." Try it; it will make a difference in your daily practice. □

*Dr. Jane Perri (right) and other participants in the seminar for Rissho Kosei-kai's overseas leaders held at the Tokyo headquarters in July, pose for a commemorative photo with Rev. Kosho Niwano, president-designate of Rissho Kosei-kai (center, front row).*

# Japan's Religions Should Become Aware of Socially Responsible Investing

An interview with Mizue Tsukushi

*The Good Bankers Co., Ltd., is Japan's first independent investment advisory company devoted to social investment research in Japan. In the Japanese market, The Good Bankers Co., Ltd., is a pioneer with the first investment product based on the concept of socially responsible investment (SRI). In September DHARMA WORLD interviewed the company's founder and president, Ms. Mizue Tsukushi, about the religious background of SRI and its increasing significance in today's society.*

***The Good Bankers Co., Ltd., was the first investment advisory company to introduce the concept of socially responsible investment, or SRI, to Japan. What sort of principles is SRI based on?***

I believe there are two aspects to corporate social responsibility. The first is that corporate behavior should never be anti-social. I think this is a social responsibility that should not change according to time or place. The other is that corporate practices should aim at solving or relieving the problems of the times and society. That is a responsibility that changes with society. As for Japanese society today, this means being involved with such issues as efforts to solve environmental problems, declining birthrates coupled with an aging population, and providing workplaces in which women can work with peace of mind. SRI is investment activity that in addition to evaluating a company financially also examines how a company responds to such issues and evaluates the company on that basis.

SRI dates back to the eighteenth century and resulted from initiatives by religious groups in North America. At that time, when the slave trade was flourishing, Philadelphia Quakers were buying slaves and setting them free. Many Quakers were successful in business and strongly felt the importance of social responsibility, refusing to do business with anyone in the slave trade. This is said to be the origin of SRI.

Then, at the beginning of the twentieth century, in Prohibition-era America in the 1920s, SRI was started by Christians who realized not only that involvement in the liquor and tobacco business and gambling was against their religious beliefs but also that such activity was a bad influence on society because such businesses supplied capital to the Mafia. So they decided not to invest in such companies, and this is said to be how modern-era SRI started.

In other words, socially responsible investment began originally as a way to invest on the basis of religious convictions. SRI also included classifying savings banks. Later, the

behavior that had arisen from a religious conviction spread after drawing a favorable response from even those with no religious convictions, and today it is said that there are about twenty-two trillion dollars of SRI-related funds at work in the global markets. That sum makes up more or less 10 per-

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*Ms. Tsukushi interviewed at the office of The Good Bankers in Tokyo.*

cent of the worldwide financial markets according to a September 28, 2010 news release by Principles for Responsible Investment. So, viewed historically, there has always been an ethical side to caring about a company's social responsibility. And I believe it is the religious sensibilities of a society that dictate what is ethical.

The decision whether to invest in a company is determined by its own business activities. Because this is a big issue for companies, they have begun informing society of their business ethics and social responsibilities, and in some ways companies may become more transparent and their business activities may become more ethical as a result.

***How have the Japanese financial world and corporations reacted to SRI?***

I don't think the Japanese business community will shift its attention to socially responsible investment in earnest until sometime in the future. The reason for that is that after the Second World War the Japanese forgot ethics and religion. I believe there was an American policy during the Occupation to make the Japanese forget religion, especially the spiritual values of Shinto. And within that context, Japan singularly pursued efficient economic activities and became hugely successful as a result, with no consideration of business ethics.

Japanese businesspeople become very nervous when

subjects such as corporate social responsibility or ethics is brought up. In my opinion, businesspeople themselves should be doing business ethically, but because they are not accustomed to ethical considerations in their individual daily lives, when they are suddenly asked about business ethics, I think they are taken aback. I think this is because all of Japanese society has stopped thinking about business ethics or social responsibility; I also think, however, that this situation is changing.

***On the other hand, how has the Japanese religious community reacted to SRI?***

Frankly speaking, the members of Japan's religious community have little awareness of socially responsible investment. I believe that is because, although using money ethically or using it effectively for society is a matter of religious faith and personal ethics, they have stopped thinking at all about these things. I get the sense that they think that they will somehow be corrupted if they think about money management, or that they avoid thinking about it at all. I wish the religious community in Japan would study SRI and put some effort into it.

In countries other than Japan there are some twenty-two trillion SRI dollars at work. I believe the reason this started with a religious initiative and then grew dynamically is that people overseas had a strong religious awareness. Many of the people overseas involved in SRI have their own religious views, whether they are institutional or individual investors, and through SRI they try to steer corporate activities and society as a whole in a better direction. But in the case of Japan, it seems the religious groups themselves don't seem to be catching on to SRI.

In the end, I'm afraid that members of religious groups in Japan are not catching on to the SRI method of managing money, and the institutional investors who have an abundance of capital have not caught on to ethics.

***How did you start working with SRI?***

When I was a child I was baptized in the Catholic Church. After studying in France, and marrying and raising a family in Japan, I entered the financial world in 1988. While working in finance, I was astounded to realize how powerful the thing called money is.

At the time I entered the financial world, I thought of what the Bible says: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God," and I also thought that money was something dirty and that I did not want to be corrupted. But as I worked at my job, I learned that money was not in itself bad, that only the way it is used is good or bad.

The fact is, soon after I entered the financial world I considered quitting, but then I thought that if I could use this powerful thing that is money for good things, I could change



the world for the better. And when it occurred to me that, by all means, I wanted to do such work, I learned of SRI, that it had its beginnings in Christian religious convictions, and I thought I would definitely want to try it in Japan.

***It has been more than ten years since SRI financial products were developed in Japan; how do you view the changes up to now?***

Well, at the beginning, the concept was new to Japan, and at the time the only investment products followed the line of thinking that if a company's earnings rise, so will its stock prices, so let's invest accordingly. But then products called eco-funds were developed in response to the line of thinking that earnings are important, but let's also check how we're dealing with social responsibilities such as environmental issues. Even though the brokerage houses thought that there was no way these would sell, they sold like crazy and without any advertising at all, and in a matter of ten days, they sold twenty-three billion Japanese yen's worth.

Ninety-nine percent of the people who bought them were individuals, and many were wealthy, but on the other hand, there were also many women and young people. Most of those people did not have accounts with a brokerage house; in other words, they were unfamiliar with investing in equities. These people don't think that money is everything. They value corporations that place social responsibility above profits, and by investing in them a new movement has emerged through which they can take part in solving environmental issues.

It then became a hot topic, and eco-funds contracts reached one hundred billion yen in six months. And somewhere around eight months into this, other companies followed suit, and contracts reached two hundred billion yen. But then the stock prices started to fall, and now, ten years later, the scope of Japan's SRI funds appears to be four hundred billion to five hundred billion yen. But in contrast to ten years ago, most brokerage houses today sell at least one or two SRI-related products.

***How will the future be affected by a large proportion of SRI subscribers' being women and young people?***

SRI in Japan, and for that matter in all countries, is a market cultivated by women and young people. It's thought that there is a correlation between the growth rate of women's economic power and the growth rate of SRI. Even among different generations in Japan, there are many households where the housewives hold the purse strings, so I think that the trend will strengthen.

And when women with economic power want to put their savings to work, they seem to behave differently from men. Women buy dreams. That is to say, it's not about money, money, all the time. I think this is because, for one thing, it

*An investment bank staff member explains eco-funds to a customer in Tokyo.*

is women who give birth to the next generation and connect lives. And therefore they are highly aware, for example, of environmental issues and the issue of low birthrate coupled with an aging population. Because no matter how much money there is, if the earth can't last, there is no sustainability. And it's also only natural for young people to be sensitive to what their future may be like. I think that the key to SRI's taking root in Japan is for women and young people to continue participating in the planning of activities that raise questions about corporate social responsibility. For our part, at present we are developing funds that invest in businesses that are creating workplaces that are easy for women to work in, that are working toward protecting timber resources, and also that are involved in activities in the fields of education, culture, and the arts. We're marketing them to financial institutions.

***What are your thoughts on how SRI and the religious community can interact?***

Religious groups are innately a part of the social system, so if one wants to make society better, then I think it's better—rather than to remain a spectator at a distance from the economic systems—to utilize those economic systems to lead society in a better direction.

There is an organization called 3iG, an abbreviation for International Interfaith Investment Group. It's an organization based on the spirit of dialogue and cooperation between religions that was founded in 2005 in Amsterdam for the purpose of joining forces to properly build a sustainable society through SRI. I am the Japanese advisor for this group, and I want the members of Japan's religious community to know that this development exists and for them to be inspired by it. □

# Finding a Life Worth Living

by Nichiko Niwano

**I**t is tragic news indeed that the number of suicides occurring in Japan has exceeded 30,000 annually over the past twelve years. Shakyamuni said, “All things in this world are characterized by suffering (events do not occur according to our wishes),” and as one person who believes in and accepts the teachings of Buddhism, I am deeply saddened to learn that so many people keep taking their own lives.

What bothers me most is that this continuing phenomenon seems to cast a suffocating sense of helplessness over people’s view of the world, as if they are living in a hopeless society that hypnotizes them into losing a reason for living. Everything is taken as a negative indication that things are getting worse and worse, which makes the world seem a dark and depressing place.

According to the teaching of the Buddha, this world is certainly a place of suffering, but what matters is whether we try to find the meaning of life by recognizing the severity of the world as it is, without being swayed by undue feelings of pessimism or optimism.

Viewing current social conditions from that viewpoint, we can see that we are being given a great opportunity to change our sense of values. The Buddha teaches: “Everyone should change their perspective and way of thinking in order to build a world in which all can live together happily.” It seems to me that this teaching is directed to the many people today who are tired of chasing after economic wealth, constantly comparing themselves to others and competing with them.

For example, in a competitive society those who dislike pushing others aside are apt to fall behind and lose confidence in themselves. However, a gentle heart is one of the basic values that constitute the precious virtue which human beings can possess. The people who choose to avoid competing with others can be good at understanding the inner pain

others feel, at lending a sympathetic ear to the woes of people in trouble and in need, and good at easing the minds of those feeling melancholy and oppressed by suffering.

Once we start thinking this way, a world in which kindness and consideration are as highly valued as competition looks much more appealing than a world in which always winning is considered ideal. This teaches us that even people who have lost sight of their purpose in life can find a reason for living by turning their minds toward the true value of existence instead of superficially always comparing themselves to others.

The Sutra of Forty-two Chapters contains the verses: “To go on seeking the Way is to suffer. However, to never have the desire to seek the Way is to suffer all the more. We are born in this world, grow old, fall ill, and die, and there is no limit to such suffering.” As I have already noted, in this life “all things are characterized by suffering,” and that is precisely why people do not quit seeking the Way.

The Way is knowledge of the universal truth—the law that pertains to everyone, everywhere, at all times—and putting it into practice, in other words, living according to the teaching of the Buddha. This means that when we practice and study the teaching, we distance ourselves from worries and are able to lead more cheerful lives.

This is directly connected to the reason for living. If we now learn just how we are existing in this world, we come to understand that all of us are existing as part of the whole, and we sustain each other’s lives and lead our own lives with the support of others.

Everything in this world being in harmony while sustaining the lives of others, a world in which our own work is for the sake of others, and by helping others live fully our own lives will also become fulfilled—that is our ultimate reality, the way things really are.

Although we may not be aware of this every day, when we please other people we are happy, too. For human beings, this is the meaning of life.

When cheerful, kind interactions help to spread smiles, we are building a world of full of benefits for ourselves and for others that simultaneously achieves both our own joy and the happiness of others. This is the true meaning of a life worth living, something that cannot be achieved as long as we are ruthlessly obsessed with winning or losing.

Let us always be grateful for the wisdom and compassion of Shakyamuni, who declared, “Everyone in the world, each of them, is worthy of respect.” Let us together deeply grasp the value and meaning of having received the lives we have now in this world. □

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

# Religions for Peace's 40th Anniversary Commemorated in Kyoto and Nara

*Events commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the World Conference of Religions for Peace took place in Kyoto and Nara, September 20–27, 2010. The events included several conferences, and speakers addressed the overall theme, “To Inspire the Concept of ‘Mahoroba [a beautiful place]’ throughout the World: A Message from Japan, the Last Outpost of the Silk Road.”*

*Some of the main events included the Islam Religious Leaders’ Discussion and the Conference of World Religious Leaders on the “Vision of Mahoroba.” The events in Nara were held in partnership with the Association for Commemorative Events of the 1,300th Anniversary of the Nara Heijo-kyo Capital.*

*The Islam Religious Leaders’ Discussion convened September 20–22 to draft a message of peace and nonviolence based on Islam and to promulgate it to the world. Twelve Islamic leaders from nine countries took part and adopted “The Message of Islam for Peace and Coexistence.” The full text, slightly edited for publication, is as follows.*

## In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful The Message of Islam for Peace and Coexistence

We—Muslim leaders and scholars from Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Pakistan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, together with Japanese religious leaders and scholars—convened in Kyoto, the old capital of Japan, with our sincere and strong wish for reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan and other parts of the world, to convey the message of Islam for peace and coexistence.

This high-level consultation followed from the Roundtable Discussion on Reconciliation and Peace: Prospects for Shared Security in Afghanistan held in Tokyo (November 23–25, 2009), which included a recommendation that the World Conference of Religions for Peace Japanese Committee (WCRP/Japan) convene prominent Muslim leaders and scholars to reiterate the message of Islam for peace and coexistence.

We confirm that Islam is a religion of peace and mercy for all humankind. It respects the sacredness of life and inherent dignity of human existence, which is the foundation of all human rights without any distinction as to race, color, language, or religion. It teaches a fundamental principle that human beings were created into different nations and tribes that they might know each other based on human brotherhood.

We believe that Islam promotes tolerance, moderation, and the unity of the human family based on truth and justice. It emphasizes universal brotherhood and solidarity not only among Muslims, but also with peoples of different faiths. It also recognizes the need for harmony with nature and the environment.

*The Opening Session of the Islam Religious Leaders’ Discussion, held in Kyoto on September 20.*

We are convinced that *jihad* is one of the important teachings of Islam and therefore it must be understood in the comprehensive context of the universal teachings of Islam that instruct Muslims to establish peaceful relations with others based on truth and justice. The greater *jihad* is indeed a struggle to transform oneself in accordance with the commands of the Supreme Creator and to work for the betterment of His creation and for the development of a just, prosperous, and peaceful society. The lesser *jihad* is for legitimate self-defense based on Islamic Law. It does not condone aggressive war against others or the killing of innocent people by any means, including suicide bombing.

We believe in the right of peoples to self-determination and we consider occupation as oppression and a source of violence. Therefore, we call for an end to occupations in any place in the world, including Palestine.

Islam protects the security and well-being of persons and societies and proscribes all practices that would harm them, such as cultivating, stockpiling, trafficking, and usage of illicit drugs.

We recognize that Islam is misused through misinterpre-

tation inside the Islamic community and misunderstanding outside of the Islamic community. This may arise from either ignorance or the pursuit of self-motivated, political, social, and economic objectives that propagate hate, discrimination, injustice, and intolerance. We request the media to be careful in its coverage of terrorism and to avoid linking it to any religion, including Islam.

Based on Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, we call on all states to take measures to fulfill their responsibilities to protect their citizens from religious and racial hatred. This would include the desecration of holy texts—such as the burning of the Holy Quran—and discrimination against followers of Islam over their values, beliefs, and outlook in the non-Muslim world. Freedom of expression includes the obligation to respect the feelings of others.

We express our deep appreciation to our hosts, WCRP/Japan, for their hospitality and for their partnership in our common pursuit of peace, justice, and shared security.

We pray for God the Almighty to guide us on the right path.

*Concluding the eight-day event, the Conference of World Religious Leaders on the “Vision of Mahoroba” was held in the Nara Prefectural New Public Hall. Some 400 people, including overseas religious leaders, took part and discussed the role of people of religion in solving the world’s problems. On September 27, the participants adopted unanimously the Mahoroba Statement, which declares that spirituality valuing diversity should become the basis of a world of harmony, and calls for prayers and action by people of religion for the achievement of world peace. The full text, slightly edited for publication, is as follows.*

## Mahoroba Statement

This year, 2010, marks the 40th anniversary of the establishment of Religions for Peace. Religious leaders—including a special delegation of Muslim leaders and scholars as well as international religious leaders from other religious traditions from fifteen countries—attended the commemoration hosted by the World Conference of Religions for Peace Japanese Committee (WCRP/Japan). The theme of the commemoration was: “To Inspire the Concept of ‘Mahoroba’ throughout the World: A Message from Japan, the Last Outpost of the Silk Road.”

As we celebrate this memorial year, WCRP/Japan would like to respect the vision, determination, and courage of its esteemed founders. With their strong spirits and irrepressible hope, they founded Religions for Peace and they continue to give us great encouragement and inspiration. We sincerely

recall and recollect their beneficial memories with sincerity. We also give heartfelt thanks for all those who have faithfully and creatively followed their examples up to our present.

Since its founding, Religions for Peace has been committed to addressing the major threats to human dignity and well-being: war, poverty, and the destruction of the earth. Concrete projects in conflict resolution, disarmament, development—including poverty, hunger, and disease reduction—the promotion of human rights, and the protection of refugees have been advanced through multireligious cooperation. Nonetheless, various conflicts and threats—with their complicated ethnic, social, political, economical, cultural, and religious factors—continue to emerge around the world. In the East Asian region, including in Japan, we face challenges that threaten security and human flourishing.



TIG1 *The Opening Ceremony of the Conference of World Religious Leaders on the "Vision of Mahoroba," held in Nara on September 26.*

Beginning 1,300 years ago, people referred to the Nara area as *mahoroba*, an image of fostering life and faith, abundance, beauty, and harmony. The rich diversity which arrived by the Silk Road was fused into the traditional Japanese culture. With respect for diversity and the harmonious spirit *wa*, this process cultivated the historical "*mahoroba* mind."

However, we must admit that we have at times regrettably forgotten the "*mahoroba* mind" and created unfortunate history. No other time in history more desperately needs the "*mahoroba* mind." We are facing many types of violence, conflicts, antagonisms, and disputes. These horrendous threats are severely impacting human life and dignity and the natural world. To confront these threats, we should recall our common vision of "confronting violence and advancing shared security," which was pledged mutually at the 8th World Assembly in Kyoto, on August 29, 2006.

We strongly reject the misuse of any religion in support of violence. We must work together across all religious boundaries against such misuse. In this regard, we note with admiration and gratitude the remarkable Islamic religious leaders and scholars who convened in the Islam Religious Leaders' Discussion—For Better Understanding of Islam: Peace and Nonviolence, held in Kyoto (September 20–22, 2010).

In dialogue with Japanese religious leaders and scholars, the Islamic leaders issued a profound and far-reaching message that confirms foundational Islamic teachings on building holistic peace for all. WCRP/Japan will join in widely propagating these authentic teachings of Islam as a genuine basis for multireligious cooperation for peace. On September 23, an open symposium was held on the Spirit of Mahoroba and Peace in Islam. This symposium was the first step in conveying worldwide The Message of Islam for Peace and Coexistence adopted in the Islam Religious Leaders' Discussion.

The Arms Down! Campaign for Shared Security led by the Religions for Peace Global Youth Network and under-

taken in 126 countries, coincided with the 40th anniversary of Religions for Peace. It has already mobilized more than 11 million signatures in Japan, calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons, the reduction of overall defense spending by 10 percent and the re-allocation of the saved funds to achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In addition, among the Religions for Peace youth networks around the world, the Northeast Asian Youth Network—working together to advance mutual understanding and multireligious cooperation for *shared security*—has issued a significant statement, which should be highly evaluated. The Northeast Asian Youth Network—despite the inability of the youth leaders from the People's Republic of China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to participate in the gathering this week—pledged that "we, as youth leaders, cannot endure nuclearization, militarization, territorial dispute and conflict, demoralization, and the environmental degradation in our region anymore. With humility and strength of prayer, we are convinced that youth must play a leading role in addressing these challenges and advancing *shared security* in Northeast Asia."

We face a common future. The "*mahoroba* mind" offered a foundation that advanced harmony by fostering spirituality based upon a respect for religious, cultural, intellectual and social diversity. Each culture and every religion has its own way of respecting and understanding the "*mahoroba* mind." To advance it, let each pray in accord with his/her own tradition and the prayer advanced by the Religions for Peace Global Youth Network:

*For those who are wounded by violence,  
For those who suffer from poverty, hunger, and isolation,  
For all life  
Let us together pray.*

# Farewell Ceremonies—for Things

by Riccardo Venturini

*Even in modern Japan, memorial services are still conducted for some everyday objects that have served human beings long and well but can no longer be used.*

Tonino Guerra, the Italian writer, poet, screenwriter, long-term collaborator of the late film director Federico Fellini, recalls that once, on a reverential visit to the painter Giorgio Morandi (1890–1964), he asked the master for a few of his old used paintbrushes to keep as a memento. Morandi, in a nearly reproachful tone, answered that those paintbrushes had to be buried. I am unaware if other artists have shown a similar form of respect toward their tools, but in Morandi's case, his own style provides an explanation for this. In fact, in portraying as “still life” everyday objects such as bottles, vases, and jugs, without weight and perspective, in their essential geometric volume, he tended to permit the emergence of structures susceptible to numerous interpretations, with a representation that from the metaphysical becomes religious, whereby even a used paintbrush transcends the sphere of functionality to attain the sacred.

The strength of this analogy takes us from the anecdote on Morandi to the Japan of the Edo period (1603–1868), when brushes used for writing or painting were the object of memorial services (*fude kuyo*), in the context of a broader practice of “farewell ceremonies” dedicated to inanimate objects used in everyday life, as well as for work and in religious practice.

These practices are still followed today in modern Japan. Burial rites or memorial services in honor of writing brushes, pencils, name seals (*inkan*), and so on, take place, for example, in Tenjin Shinto shrines, dedicated to the memory of Sugawara Michizane, eminent scholar and politician of the Heian period (794–1185), after his death deified as Tenjin or the Shinto divinity of scholarship, and hence very popular among students preparing for examinations. Similar ceremonies in honor of used brushes are held annually at the Buddhist temple Tofukuji in Kyoto.

The “burial” of old dolls is called *ningyo kuyo*. During this ceremony, dolls that have ended their “earthly” life customarily are cremated in a special incinerator dedicated to the objects to be honored—a doll that has been taken care of for years, still with a pleasing aspect and associated with beauti-

ful memories, cannot be thrown away among the everyday rubbish but fittingly is given up through a ritual farewell.

Other farewell ceremonies are adopted for cups and ceramic utensils (*donabe*), lacquered objects such as precious combs (*nurikushi*), and so on. In the last century, in the era of rapid economic development and in the interest of professional associations, new rituals were introduced to the benefit even of eyeglasses, shoes, clocks, technological products, and the like, but one that is still very popular is *hari kuyo* or memorial service in honor of used needles (*hari*).

Until perhaps a decade ago, needles and sewing were characteristic elements of feminine ability, but today needles are not used a lot if at all by most women, therefore farewell ceremonies for used needles that take place in Shinto shrines or in Buddhist temples are primarily organized by firms or professional groups involved with sewing. There are also rituals for syringe needles or for those used in acupuncture and even for fishing hooks.

Where and how do these ceremonies take place? If a memorial or a stone with a personalized inscription has already been erected in honor of an object, these monuments become the site where such rituals are performed, or similarly, a work environment can be selected (i.e., in a com-

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in front of which one stops in meditation. The participants, wishing to express gratitude, besides depositing needles in tofu and offering incense, sing and sometimes dance and recite prayers. They also pray for the success of the collective to which they belong, for the enhancement of their ability, and to work without impediment. The ritual therefore becomes a propitiatory act and a homage to the tools to which a particular activity is linked. At the end of the ritual, or at a later time, the needles are buried either at land or at sea.

The care taken in the production of the objects (particularly if they are handmade) and the interaction with those who have used them end up by giving a spirit even to those material objects (see the Buddhist question of the enlightenment of nonsentient beings<sup>3</sup>). It would therefore be sacrilegious to throw them away without showing respect, forgetting the unity of all the phenomena of life. We can thus state that there are three levels involved in these ceremonies. One, material, that wants to avoid the untidy dispersion of refuse in the environment; a second, psychological, that permits ending in harmony, gratitude, and peace our relationship with the discarded objects; and a third, spiritual, that allows a thankful and tidy restitution to the cosmic life of the matter and energy concentrated in the objects that have accompanied and served us. Awareness, prudence, order, respect, payment of debts of gratitude, are all Japanese characteristics that are present in this ritual, certainly marginal and in a certain sense *démodé*, which, however, express an elevated spiritual attitude.

Destruction and sacredness of life are often reasons for conflicts in Western culture; on the contrary, ceremonies like *hari kuyo* can become, even for Westerners, precious opportunities for reflection. In our habit of first producing and then acquiring, often with craving, a great quantity of objects destined to be thrown away like useless, harmful,

*A memorial service for dolls is held at Osu Kannon temple in Nagoya, on October 6, 2005, where discarded dolls are burned annually.*

pany or a sewing school) or, if the religious meaning is to be emphasized, a shrine or temple (for example, the Sensoji temple at Asakusa in Tokyo).<sup>1</sup>

Sutras are recited and the needles, which have suffered in the course of their existence by having to penetrate fabrics or tatami mats with a certain amount of effort, are now thrust as a form of compensation into a block of *tofu* or *konnyaku*,<sup>2</sup>

*Left: A memorial service is held for discarded needles at Shojuin temple in Tokyo. Below: Young women express gratitude for discarded needles by thrusting them into blocks of tofu at Sensoji temple, Tokyo. Photos: Haga Library*

and cumbersome rubbish shortly after their acquisition, are hidden the germs of attachment and hate that, together with nescience (*avidya*)<sup>4</sup>, form the sad trio of spiritual poisons. We generally believe we are good custodians of the environment when hurriedly, even with a bit of resentment, we throw in the rubbish bin all that has been discarded. In transforming “removal” into “restitution,” the getting rid of useless objects can instead become a stimulus, and not a mere gesture of refusal, for considering our relationship with activities, objects, and the environment, by carrying out, through decorous and at times melancholic farewell ceremonies, daily exercises of kindness and giving. □

## Notes

1. The dates on which these rituals are celebrated are usually December 8 or February 8. It must be borne in mind that the number 8 is full of meaning in Asia and has many Buddhist echoes (April 8, birth of the Buddha; December 8, parinirvana; the Noble Eightfold Path, and so on).

2. *Tofu*, produced from soy beans, is well known in the West; *konyaku* is similar to a jelly and is produced from a tuber of Indonesian origin.

3. Many Buddhist sects question themselves about the enlightenment of beings lacking an emotional and conscious life, like plants or even the nonliving, such as rocks and the earth itself. According to the Nichiren sect, nonsentient beings can attain buddhahood in two ways. The first, through the influence of sentient beings: when the sentient being reaches enlightenment, the same state extends to his or her environment, as life is one even through its different manifestations—the environment in which the enlightened ones move acquires its own splendor and harmony. In this sense humankind enlightens things because the world is the place of the awareness of things. The second way is when something becomes the object of our admiration or our veneration and in this manner contributes to our enlightenment.

4. *Avidya* means unawareness of the Four Noble Truths and of dependent origination, that is, lack of understanding of the nature of the world and of human existence. It is a fundamental concept of Buddhist thought. Its opposite is right view, one of the items of the Eightfold Path.

## Japanese Buddhist Folktales

### The Man Who Met Enma (Yama), the Lord of the Underworld

Long ago, in a mountain temple in Yamato, one of the more amazing things in the world happened; a nobleman called Fujiwara no Hirotari died and came back to life. Hirotari told a close friend the following story.

“I suddenly felt faint, and I noticed it getting very dark all around. Then a man with bristling sideburns appeared, clad in armor and terrifying to look at, who said to me, ‘So, you’re Hirotari! Come with me!’”

Hirotari was led to a room in a castle, where, to his surprise, his wife, who three years earlier had died while pregnant with Hirotari’s child, stood with her eyes downcast. Further inside the room sat a giant of a man one could only look up at, who spoke in a majestic tone of voice.

He said, “This woman was sentenced to six years hard labor for sins committed during her lifetime. But because she died from an illness caused by her pregnancy with your child, she has

asked that you serve the remaining part of her sentence. That is why you have been summoned here.”

Being told this, Hirotari realized that he had been neglectful in holding memorial services for his wife. “I understand,” he said. “I shall copy the Lotus Sutra for my wife, and offer sutra chanting in her memory every morning and evening.”

“Very well. You should go back and pursue the path to buddhahood. You must do this without fail.”

His wife smiled as if she was relieved, and it occurred to the freed Hirotari to ask the giant what his name was.

“I am the Great Enma! In your country I am known as the bodhisattva Jizo who guides and liberates people. I’m going to place a magic mark on you so that you won’t lose your way later. You will get back safely.”

“With that, he stroked my head with his massive hand, and the next thing I knew, I was in the mountain temple.”

*A statue of Enma at Hojoin temple in Tokyo with a smaller statue of Jizo in front.*

Thereafter Hirotari devoted himself to offer chanting of the Lotus Sutra and held memorial services for his wife. □  
(A story from Nara Prefecture)



# The Nonduality of Ecology and Economy

by David R. Loy

*A Buddhist voice is needed to foster the political will to solve the world's present eco-crisis.*

**T**he American way of life is not negotiable." So declared President George H. W. Bush at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. It was his response to what everyone else there had realized: that the earth's ecology is endangered and "that nothing less than a transformation of our attitude and behavior would bring about the necessary changes" to protect it, according to Maurice Strong, secretary-general of the conference.

In 2002 a ten-year follow-up to the Earth Summit was held, but President George W. Bush did not bother to attend. When his White House press secretary, Ari Fleischer, was asked whether the new president would encourage Americans to reduce consumption in order to reduce pollution, he said no: "The American way of life is a blessed one."

What happened during those ten years? Unfortunately, not very much. After the Earth Summit it seemed that the world had finally awakened to the eco-crisis, and for a couple of years I noticed that almost every media report on the oil industry referred to global warming. And then . . . the world seemed to fall asleep again. The environmental crisis was not really forgotten, but the linkage between ecology and economy was deemphasized—and so very little was achieved, because not much can be achieved without addressing their interconnectedness.

Why did so little happen during that decade? It's only a guess, but I suspect that two different reactions reinforced each other. Corporations, especially oil companies, realized that the new green movement was a threat to their profit margins, and rather than restructure they decided to fight, with a massive advertising and propaganda campaign designed to muddle the issue by denying climate change. (Jim Hansen, head of NASA and the world's most respected climatologist, has called their misinformation campaigns "crimes against humanity.") At the same time, consumers began to realize the same thing—that the eco-crisis is a serious challenge to consumerism, and rather than change the "blessed American way of life," it was easier to ignore the problem. After all, the experts disagree, don't they? The result was mass denial. At some level of consciousness, many if not most people were aware that the environment is deteriorating, but that didn't

have much effect on our day-to-day lives. As the economy boomed, most of us consumed more than ever.

As a result, much valuable time has been lost, and the need for drastic change has become even more urgent. Yet that will not happen until we realize the nonduality of ecology and economy. Although most people still see the issue as merely a technological problem, to be solved by lowering carbon emissions, atmospheric carbon is only the visible tip of a much more ominous iceberg. According to the United Nations Environment Program, one in four mammalian species, one in eight bird species, one in three amphibian species, and 70 percent of all the world's plant species are now endangered. Global warming, along with deforestation, agriculture, and urbanization, could drive half of all species on Earth to extinction by 2100, according to eminent biologists such as Edward O. Wilson of Harvard University. Ninety percent of all large fish species have been driven toward extermination. Depleted water tables are becoming a global problem, and since 1950 the world has lost about 30 percent of its arable land and soil fertility.

Most of us are familiar with these grim facts, but too often such statistics remain abstract and disconnected from our own lives. We overlook the institutions that mediate between the biosphere and our own patterns of consumption: the

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world's globalizing economic system, which today is *seven* times as large as it was in 1950. The fact that 20 percent of the Amazon rainforest ("the lungs of the earth") has been cut down in recent decades needs to be connected with our "need" for more soybeans to feed the cattle and pigs that provide our beef and pork. The fact that almost all large fish species are endangered is a consequence of the high-tech ship factories that trawl the oceans with enormous drift nets. Most fresh water is used for agriculture and manufacturing; vast amounts of topsoil are lost because of industrial farming. And so forth.

It would be a serious mistake to blame everything on capitalism. Most of us (at least in the "developed world") have benefited much from the affluence provided by its innovative dynamism. The old Soviet Union was not capitalist; it was a classic example of "command socialism"; and its ecological record was perhaps the worst of all developed nations. What capitalism and state socialism have in common is a preoccupation with industrialization, which has accelerated and taken on a life of its own.

Today, however, socialism is more or less dead, and globalizing capitalism is the only game in town. Our collective relationship to the biosphere and its ecosystems is largely mediated by what its corporations do, and what they do is largely determined by what is most profitable quite apart from its ecological consequences, which still tend to be ignored or "externalized" when possible.

The consequence is an unsustainable economic system and a deluded worldview that supports it. All the world's economies are wholly owned subsidiaries of the earth's biosphere, but we still have great difficulty understanding what that implies. Yes, it does mean the end of business as usual. It means the greatest possible challenge to consumer capitalism, whose corporations must either mutate into something very different or be replaced altogether. And this is a transformation that Buddhists should embrace and encourage, because it is also implied by the teachings of the Buddha.

The news media have been telling us that the financial crisis—which is far from over—is due to the excessive greed of Wall Street speculators and the unbridled spending of Main Street borrowers. Yet the problem goes much deeper, and our predicament is much worse. Greed is not a virus that has infected the economic hard drive; it has become the software that runs our economy.

Buddhism does not say much about evil itself, but it emphasizes the *three roots of evil*: greed, ill will, and delusion. The basic problem with our present economic system is that it institutionalizes the first of those roots. As George Lakoff put it, "The economic and ecological meltdowns have the same cause: the unregulated free market and the idea that greed is good and that the natural world is a resource for short-term private enrichment. The result has been deadly, toxic assets and a toxic atmosphere" (*Huffington Post*, May 22, 2009). Two sides of the same coin.

Greed also takes two forms, according to our means. "In a

consumer society there are two kinds of slaves: the prisoners of addiction and the prisoners of envy" (Ivan Illich).

The Buddha's first noble truth identifies *dukkha*, or dissatisfaction, as inherent to the human condition. It is the nature of an unawakened mind to be bothered by something. We usually experience this as the feeling that "something is wrong with me." Our economic system (which includes the media megacorporations that make their profit from advertising) takes advantage of this and conditions us to understand our sense of lack as "I don't have *enough* . . ."—especially *not enough things* and *not enough money*. The consequence is that we always want ("need") more. This individual lack is institutionalized into a collective craving that can never be satisfied. Investors seek increasing returns in the form of dividends and higher share prices. This puts pressure on business executives, who must think this way if they hope to rise to the top. This general expectation translates into an impersonal but constant demand for ever more profit and growth, which requires ever more production and consumption, and ever more sophisticated advertising to make us want things that often didn't even exist last year.

Here's one way to point out the basic difficulty. Capitalism is about using capital (money for investment) to create more capital. Since the *goal* is to end up with more money, everything else becomes a *means* to that end. "Everything else" in this case includes Mother Earth ("resources"), human life ("labor"), and society itself (we must continually adapt to the changing requirements of the economy).

The ultimate irony is that money in itself is literally *worthless*: whether pieces of paper or numbers in bank accounts, money has value only because it is our socially agreed medium of exchange. A \$100 bill is just a piece of paper. We can't eat it, drink it, ride on it, and so on. We forget that money is a social construct—a kind of group fantasy. The anthropologist Weston LaBarre called it a psychosis that has become normal, "an institutionalized dream that everyone is having at once."

This dream can become a nightmare. Psychologically, the danger is that means and ends become reversed, so the *means* of life becomes the *goal*. The philosopher Schopenhauer called money "abstract happiness"—that is, not genuine happiness but something that now represents it in our culture. Another way to say it is that money becomes "frozen desire": not desire for anything in particular but a symbol for the satisfaction of desire in general. And what does the Buddha say about desire? Frozen or not, it remains the root cause of suffering.

Collectively, this means that what motivates our economic system is *the drive to use anything and everything* (now "natural resources," including "human resources") *to create something that is really nothing*. We don't usually notice the absurdity of this because we are preoccupied with the *more and more* that the system produces. The fact that so many of us already have more than we need is addressed by manipulating our awareness, in increasingly sophisticated ways, so

that we always want something else that we don't yet have. It's always the *next* \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank) that will satisfy us.

Max Frisch said that technology is the knack of arranging the world so that we don't have to experience it. That's why modern technologies fit so well with consumer capitalism, which works to transform the whole biosphere into consumer goods. Together they are making Mother Earth into a gigantic Walmart.

This system is unsustainable because it involves a growth obsession that, left to itself, will not cease until the whole of the biosphere has been converted into profit—which, of course, will then be useless. Capitalism made more sense a couple of centuries ago when the earth seemed infinite and capital was relatively scarce. Today the obvious metaphor is cancer on a planetary scale. Cells become cancerous when they mutate into uncontrolled growth and spread throughout the body to disrupt its healthy functioning. Unfortunately, that is not a bad description of our collective situation now.

Ultimately, does it come down to a choice between our present economic/financial system and the survival of the biosphere? Our current system is doomed no matter what, in

the same way that a cancer is always doomed: if it's successful enough to kill its host, it kills itself. If the biosphere gets sick, we get sick. When ecological systems collapse, so will human civilization as we know it.

Despite what the Presidents Bush declared, the "blessed American way of life" is negotiable—or it becomes a suicide pact.

This means that the financial meltdown is actually a wonderful opportunity to address a much deeper problem. No one should make light of the economic pain that we can expect to continue and deepen over the next few years. Many, perhaps most, people are also disgusted with the present system and becoming more open to possible alternatives. Such a crisis would be a terrible thing to waste because this sort of opportunity does not happen very often. There is no better time to address the fundamental challenge of our times: the intimate relationship between an out-of-control, self-destructive economic system and the ecological crisis.

No other nation is in a position to begin reforming that relationship, which is why Obama's leadership on this issue is so important to the whole world. Admittedly, this is an extraordinary challenge. According to the Center for Public Integrity, in 2008 more than 770 corporations and interest groups have hired an estimated 2,340 lobbyists to influence federal policy on climate change. That number is more than three times what it was only five years ago and means that Washington now has more than four climate lobbyists for every member of congress.

That puts the onus on the rest of us to emphasize the nonduality between ecology and economy. So far, at least, Obama's economic appointments have not been encouraging. Some of the people most responsible for the financial crisis have been appointed to fix it. No wonder the only solution they can think of is to try to patch up the present system. But they only represent a much bigger problem: the people who benefit the most from our present economic system—and who therefore have the least incentive to change it—are the ones who control it and (through their lobbyists) much of the political process as well. As Will Rogers put it some eighty years ago, we (still) have "the best congress money can buy."

Nevertheless, Obama has given us reasons to hope that he might rise to the occasion and grow to meet the challenge. Yet even with the best will in the world, this is not something Obama (or anyone else) can do by himself. Very little will happen without broad public pressure, based on a new understanding of our perilous situation. This does not mean a Buddhist movement, but there is need for a Buddhist voice in such a movement, to emphasize our nonduality with the earth, and the karmic effects of greed and delusion, both individual and institutionalized.

The Lotus Sutra speaks of bodhisattvas springing forth from the earth, to preach the Dharma. Is it time for new types of bodhisattvas to rise up from the earth, to manifest the Dharma that defends her? □

NASA satellite images from September 21, 2005 (top), and September 16, 2007 (bottom), and released on September 21, 2007 show the extent of Arctic summer sea ice in 2005 and 2007. Arctic sea ice had melted to its smallest extent ever in the week of September 16, 2007, shattering a record set in 2005 and continuing a trend spurred by human-caused global warming, scientists said on September 20, 2007.



# People of Faith Need a Passion for Reform

by Nikkyo Niwano

*This essay is part of a continuing series of translations from a volume of inspirational writings published in the latter years of the last century by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai. DHARMA WORLD will continue to publish these essays because of their lasting value as guidance for the daily practice of one's faith.*

Ashoka, now considered the greatest emperor in India's history, is said to have been originally an extremely cruel and callous man. From his childhood through his adolescent years, he frequently acted violently, and even his father, the king, came to detest him. It is said that when the powerful realm of Taxila took up arms in rebellion, the king put together an army with Ashoka at the head to go and quash it, secretly hoping that his son would meet his end on the battlefield. But against all expectations, Ashoka led his men to a resounding victory and rose quickly in authority and power. When his father died Ashoka gained the throne by murdering all of his brothers who stood in his way and, as king, piled conquest upon conquest until he had brought most of the Indian subcontinent under his rule. Even when, three years into his reign (some say seven), he embraced Buddhism, he persisted in his warmongering ways. But then, eight years into that reign, he had a momentous change of heart. His armies had just annihilated the kingdom of Kalinga in a war that took the lives of 100,000 soldiers, and the civilian death toll was many times that. When, finally, he witnessed the mass deportation of 150,000 prisoners of war, the colossal tragedy of it all overwhelmed him into resolving never to fight again but to govern with clemency in accordance with the Buddha's teaching.

It was a remarkable 180-degree turn. From that point on, I am sure you are well aware that he ruled with justice and dedicated himself to the promulgation of Buddhism. Even today, Ashoka's benevolence continues to touch the lives of India's people, and if you visit the country you may sometimes see mango trees lining a road. Ashoka originally had these trees planted as a gesture of goodwill from the king to his people, in the hope that they would provide shade for travelers and fruit for the hungry. After more than two thousand years, people still benefit from his virtuous deeds.

I think the profound ways in which religion can touch a person's heart are clear for everyone to understand from this historical example. Though King Ashoka had been a Buddhist for some time, it seems he was not a very devout believer

at the start, judging by the relentless carnage he wreaked on his armies. But the Buddhist spirit had infiltrated the very depths of his spirit and taken firm root, despite the fact that he continued to live such a violent life. While the salvation offered by Buddhism is available equally to all, differences in the capacity of individuals to accept it, as well as their karmic condition and the environment in which they live, will affect how and when the seed of their salvation sprouts and grows. Even though it is exceedingly difficult with some people to tell when their salvation will come, the crucial element is that the seed be planted within them.

It may not be possible for humankind's warring instinct to disappear, but it is possible to "control such instinctive eruptions through raising our power of reasoning," to "foster a natural hatred of human cruelty that makes others suffer through a heightening of our finer emotions" and to "redirect our fighting instinct to serve civilization and, in turn, the improvement of humanity." Buddhism has the essential qualities to expedite these three endeavors. It helps us raise our power of reasoning through such truths as dependent origination, all things are impermanent, and all are devoid of self, and naturally fosters within those who gain an understanding of these truths a profound love for all people and

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*Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, was an honorary president of the World Conference of Religions for Peace and was honorary chairman of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan) at the time of his death in October 1999.*



things. What is more, it teaches us the actual method to turn our personal defilements, just as they are, into the seeds of enlightenment. For this reason, followers of Buddhism must not be discouraged by the things that obstruct the course of peace in this world. We have no excuse for wallowing in feelings of powerlessness. Peace is not something that can be given or taken away by someone else. It is essential for the "light of peace" to burn in everyone's heart, and from there true peace will begin. Without this fire burning in our hearts, genuine peace can never really come to our world.

In our various religious activities, we must constantly ask ourselves whether we can genuinely contribute to the peace and happiness of humankind. I hope that we will all always fix our sights on the true spirit of religion and not fall into such futile activities as self-serving practices and favoring form over spirit. We must therefore work to relieve political, social, and economic tensions by creating better human relationships, by forging bonds of cooperation, and by active involvement in the cleansing of society and politics. Buddhism progresses with the changing times. We too must burn with an unceasing passion for reform and a sense of courageous endeavor to support those responsible for guiding future generations.

Rissho Kosei-kai will be recognized as a religious organization at the world level if we strongly disseminate the Buddhist teachings based on a spirit of compassion. Doing this requires us to focus our gaze on the realities of the world and push forward our activities with people of faith who possess the necessary abilities in both the political and religious

fields. Religious activities in the global sense must excite the understanding of people of good judgment from all around the world and elicit their support for us in our aims.

Religion at all times must be closely related to actuality, as it both originates and develops from within the everyday life of people, but this does not at all mean that we have to compromise with the demands of the lowest elements of society or yield to its most difficult aspects. To blithely conform to a society that follows confused and corrupt tendencies is equal to abandoning our religious duties. In fact, we can say that it is in the very dedication to explore the spiritual heights that the life force of religion lies. All around the globe, leaders in all walks of life understand that hopes to better the world are futile unless people are first willing to embrace a reformation of their hearts. They agree that regardless of origins and customs, human beings are all in need of a moral and spiritual awakening.

Religion can elevate our hearts and give us the ability to rescue humanity from its conflicts. A meaningful religious life is one in which we use that ability to do everything in our power to contribute to world peace. When individual people change, society begins to change. Therefore, in order to guide the world to peace, we must first teach ourselves to change from within, to reform our hearts by way of the Buddhist teachings. As members of a religious organization that is appropriate to these changing times, we must strive diligently to provide mental and emotional support to all people and make a genuine contribution toward promoting peace in the world. □

Photo: Isamu Maruyama

*A modern memorial in Lumbini Garden, where Shakyamuni was born. An edict pillar erected in the third century BCE by Emperor Ashoka stands beside it. Photographed in 1998.*

# The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

## Chapter 17

### Discrimination of Merits

#### (1)

*This is the 103rd installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.*

**INTRODUCTION** In the preceding chapter, "Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata," we have reached a clear understanding that the Buddha is with us at all times and in all places. Comprehending this, for the very first time true faith establishes itself within our hearts.

Before we have attained true faith, we are apt to be secluded in the darkness of insecurity, and we are unable to hold on to a firm self-confidence and bright hope for life.

Of course, this does not mean that until that point we absolutely had never experienced feelings of happiness, self-confidence, or hope within our lives. There are many people who by dint of personality, station in life, or age seem uncontrollably cheerful and possess a mental state full of hope and confidence. However, such light-heartedness, hopefulness, and self-assurance are quite fleeting, for under the weight of some misfortune, such feelings will vanish like bubbles on the surface of water.

Then there are the completely carefree types who consider nothing very deeply, not even pondering why they are alive, and who think only that today is today and tomorrow will come what may. People of this type generally lack a strong sense of purpose or responsibility toward society, their own families, or even themselves. If such people did have a strong sense of purpose or responsibility, they certainly would not be so easygoing.

Such people may be thought of as fortunate, but such happiness belongs to them alone, and that happiness extends no further than life in the present world. Misfortune will undoubtedly come to such people one day, because they lead lives of little value and do not accumulate good karma in this world.

Those who attain a true faith, however, have a brilliance of spirit and a sense of confidence and hope in life that is neither transient nor superficial. Their genuine confidence and hope are deeply rooted and unwavering, and from them springs real cheerfulness. In other words, these people can depend on the assurance that no matter what, they are under

the protection of the Buddha, whose existence is absolute, and they are sustained by the Buddha, a strong, eternal foundation that neither fire nor water nor blade can destroy.

Naturally, when we achieve this state of mind our lives change beyond all recognition. It would hardly be possible for our minds to change and our lives to not change as well. This change is inevitable. Our state of mind changes because of faith, and with this change in our mind our life itself changes. That is the merit of religious practice. Therefore, in faith there is always merit.

Merit is not manifest only in our spirits but also in our physical bodies and in our material lives. Because the human mind, the human body, and the material things around it all affect one another appropriately, it stands to reason, no mystery at all, that when changes take place in the mind the body will change and that the surrounding material things will change, too. Hence, the view that affirms only mental merits and denies physical or material merits does not stand to reason.

Medicine has in recent years made significant progress in the study of the relation between the mind and body. Psychosomatic medicine has shown that a person's mental state may actually cause a variety of illnesses that at first glance would seem to have no relationship at all with mental factors. Among these illnesses are diseases of the eyes and skin, heart disorders, gastrointestinal disorders, high blood pressure, hives, asthma, morning sickness, and menstrual disorders.

That a change in one's mental state could cure an illness is not at all a matter for wonderment, in that physical and mental factors are nondual. There are many actual instances of this, even within my own limited experience. For example, someone who could not even stand up, after hearing just a few words of the Buddha's teaching, was able to stand up and walk home. We do not think of such occurrences as miraculous at all.

Nor is it the least bit strange that because of a change of mind resulting from entering a life of faith we are blessed

with money or material things. When our mental attitude changes, we inevitably change our attitude toward work and daily life. And it is perfectly normal that as a result of such changes our lives in general will improve.

If people are wholeheartedly devoted to true faith, their whole aura changes. They become more optimistic, are filled with confidence that is truly positive, and take an attitude of self-sacrifice. This change will naturally show in the expression on their faces, the way they speak, and the way they act. Accompanying this will be a change in the way other people look at them. Others will feel within them an inexpressible magnetism and put confidence in them. As a matter of course, their work will progress smoothly and as a result they will be blessed with material wealth.

The long-held view that honest poverty is an indispensable part of faith holds true for those who enter the priesthood and lead an ascetic life. Occasionally, very devout lay believers virtually set aside their livelihood and cross the threshold into honorable poverty, and that is admirable in and of itself, but that is virtually the same as renouncing the world. Such people can no longer be called laypersons.

The consistent ideal of Mahayana Buddhism is that all human beings be tranquil of spirit, that their lives be bountiful, and that they live in peace. The lay believer has to be the nucleus, and accordingly, the idea that one's material conditions are of no importance as long as one is pure in spirit is not the ultimate teaching of Mahayana Buddhism. It is very important to understand this point.

The merit that I have been describing is manifested as a result of true Mahayanist faith, and if such a result comes forth, one ought to accept it gratefully and with good grace. We need not maintain a stubborn view that faith is a matter for the mind alone so that other merits are entirely nonessential, that they will somehow taint the life of faith. Such thinking reflects an impure and distorted attitude.

Yet having said this, people of this type are rare. Far more common are those who have "biased faith." These people do not simply interpret divine favors in this world as the result of religious practice; from the outset they practice only in the hope of receiving such benefits.

Most of those who enter into faith do so because they are distressed by something. Naturally, they want to free themselves from such sufferings, so there is no reason to condemn them for it. But when they are continuously concerned about escaping from concrete sufferings and attaining concrete comforts, their minds remain unliberated and they cannot enter the realm of complete freedom. On the contrary, they are unable to attain the goal of their faith.

By setting aside for the moment their present sufferings and anxieties and entering the selfless state of entrusting everything to the Buddha, the Eternal Original Buddha, they will attain spiritual freedom and their suffering and anxiety will spontaneously fade into the distance.

Those who believe merely to gain divine favors in the present life are quick to slacken in their zeal. The reason for this

is that they do not completely believe in the Buddha. Consequently, they can only think about what is right before them, and if a clear material merit does not immediately become manifest, they begin to harbor doubts about the teachings and grow weary.

Some people enter into correct faith, purify their hearts, and devote themselves to bodhisattva practices on behalf of humankind and the world and yet are still unable to erase their karma and unable to manifest immediately a clear merit, because the karma of their past existences is so heavy. In such cases, those who truly believe in the great compassion of the Buddha and are able to believe firmly both that the Buddha's life is infinite and that the buddha-nature they possess permeates all life will be able to live with the deep confidence that if they progress along this path, their karma will ultimately and definitively be extinguished and they will move step by step toward buddhahood.

For example, even if an illness is not quickly cured or material rewards are not immediately forthcoming, the mind possesses a particular composure. In other words, even though some people may appear to be leading a life of suffering, from the perspective of an outside observer, those people themselves have already been delivered of that suffering. This, we must say, is the attitude of true believers.

In the final analysis, even in merit, what matters is the possession of integrity of character and gentleness of spirit taught in chapter 16, "Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata." Without giving consideration to worldly benefits, we need only revere the Buddha from the bottom of our heart. Guided by the teachings of the Buddha, we need only act truthfully. If as a result our daily lives take a turn for the better, this natural phenomenon is produced because our minds and actions have been set in the direction of truth, and we need only accept the fact with gratitude.

In the "Discrimination of Merits," "The Merits of Joyful Acceptance," and "The Merits of the Preacher" chapters, which we are about to take up, we will learn about the merits of religious practice, and I hope that you will read these chapters keeping in mind what I have said above about the significance of merit and the principles underlying its modes of manifestation.

The chapter "Discrimination of Merits" describes twelve types of merit achieved through firmly believing that the life of the Buddha is infinite. Further, it teaches us in great detail about the proper way to live the life of faith. The merits which appear in this chapter are not worldly benefits, but mainly the mental merits the believer can obtain. People who do not yet know the Buddha's teachings may not understand what "merit" means, but readers who have progressed in studying the Lotus Sutra this far will appreciate the value of such merit.

Now let us turn to the text.

TEXT At that time when the great congregation heard the Buddha proclaim that such were the number of kalpas and



the length of his lifetime, innumerable, boundless asamkhyeyas of living beings obtained great benefit.

**COMMENTARY** *Great benefit.* This term refers to the deep joy that the congregation experienced as a result of attaining assurance that they are continually sustained, protected, and guided by the Buddha.

**TEXT** Then the World-honored One said to the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva Maitreya: "Ajita! While I proclaimed the duration of the Tathagata's life, sixty-eight hundred thousand kotis of nayutas of living beings, [numerous as] the sands of the Ganges, have attained to the assurance of non-birth;

**COMMENTARY** *Assurance of non-birth.* "Non-birth" is a contraction of "non-birth and non-death." "Birth" and "death" here refer to the production, extinction, and change, so "non-birth" signifies the neither appearing nor disappearing of all things. "Assurance," related to recognition, means the firm establishment of a state of mind which never vacillates. Hence "assurance of non-birth" means awakening to the non-appearing and non-disappearing of all things and not wavering from that understanding. In other words, not to be swayed by the changes in human life, but to constantly maintain a state of mind that is in accord with the truth.

The gist of this passage is that even though individual circumstances or the general state of affairs in society may change, people who are truly able to believe that the existence of the Buddha is unborn and undying extricate themselves from the vacillating state of mind that is swayed by each and every one of the changes, alternating between joy and sorrow. They can attain a deep confidence in life that is not affected by superficial changes, and moreover their confidence in life is not transitory but an invincible assurance that can last a lifetime.

**TEXT** again a thousand times more bodhisattva-mahasattvas have attained the dharani power of hearing and keeping [the Dharma]; again, bodhisattva-mahasattvas, numerous as the atoms of a world, have attained the faculty of eloquent and unhindered discourse;

**COMMENTARY** *The dharani power.* The Sanskrit word dharani means the power to uphold all that is good or the power to drive away and prevent any evil from arising.

• *Numerous as the atoms of a world.* The original passage refers to a "world" as conceived of in ancient India, but for all practical purposes we may understand it as a world in our sense of the term. As in the "Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata" chapter, the term "atom" means the smallest particle to which the world can be reduced.

In the following section we will find the description of numbers as numerous as the atoms of "a three-thousand-great-thousandfold world," "a middle-two-thousandfold domain," "a small-thousandfold domain," "four four-conti-

nent worlds," "three four-continent worlds," "two four-continent worlds," "one four-continent world" and "eight worlds." These should be taken as indicating very large numbers and will not be explained in further detail.

• *Have attained the faculty of eloquent and unhindered discourse.* "Discourse" means to teach of one's own accord, neither begrudgingly because one has been told to do so by someone nor because one simply feels it to be a duty. One does not teach because of a secret desire to be highly esteemed and of course not out of selfish motives. Rather one wants to share the teachings with others because doing so gives one joy. This is the ideal state of mind of one who would disseminate the Buddha's teachings.

"Unhindered" means "unobstructed." One should spread the teachings of the Dharma and not be disheartened by ridicule from others, by being thought ill of, nor by being persecuted.

Hindrances can come not only from outside but also from within oneself. When people have money and leisure, they may devote themselves to bodhisattva practices, but when they are lacking time or money to spare they do not care about others. When this happens, they are hindered and obstructed by their own minds and circumstances.

A person who has achieved a true, deep faith, however, is able to diligently carry out the mission of disseminating the true Dharma, unhindered even if they lead a hand-to-mouth existence or are beset by personal worries.

"Unhindered" does not only have this meaning of "not giving in to hindrances from without or within" but also another of "having the power to break through the mental resistances" of the hearers of the teachings of the Dharma. There are some who do not try to believe and understand the teachings, some who try to negate the teachings from the outset, and others who listen intently but are unable to grasp their meaning. The ideal preacher is one who has the unrestricted power of persuasion to make them listen, make them understand, and guide them to believe sincerely without their being aware of it. Such persuasiveness is called unhindered eloquence.

Therefore, to "have attained the faculty of eloquent and unhindered discourse" means always to be able to teach the true Dharma to others with pleasure, giving in neither to internal nor to external impediments, and to be able to persuade anyone and everyone.

**TEXT** again, bodhisattva-mahasattvas numerous as the atoms of a world have attained to hundreds of thousands of myriad kotis of [endlessly] rotating dharanis; again, bodhisattva-mahasattvas numerous as the atoms of a three-thousand-great-thousandfold world have been enabled to roll forward the never-retreating Dharma wheel;

**COMMENTARY** *[Endlessly] rotating dharanis.* The "rotating" of the dharani (the mystical power to halt evil and promote good) means acquiring the generative power that is extended



without cease from one person to another, then from that person to another. These merits are very great because innumerable bodhisattvas will become the unlimited driving force behind the dissemination of the teachings.

• *Roll forward the never-retreating Dharma wheel.* To roll forward the Dharma wheel means to spread the Buddha's teachings, like the wheel of a vehicle that rotates forever. Since rolling the Dharma wheel is "never-retreating," no matter what obstacles and hardships bodhisattvas encounter, they continue to disseminate the teachings, never retrogressing even for a moment.

TEXT again, bodhisattva-mahasattvas numerous as the atoms of a middle-two-thousandfold domain have been enabled to roll forward the pure Dharma wheel; again, bodhisattva-mahasattvas numerous as the atoms of a small-thousandfold domain after eight rebirths will attain Perfect Enlightenment;

COMMENTARY *Roll forward the pure Dharma wheel.* To be able to carry out the pure bodhisattva practice of preaching the Dharma with a sincere spirit, with no selfish desire for any reward. This is rather difficult for ordinary people, but for those who have achieved the highest perfection of faith it is an exercise that they can carry out spontaneously.

TEXT again, bodhisattva-mahasattvas numerous as the atoms of four four-continent worlds after four rebirths will attain Perfect Enlightenment; again, bodhisattva-mahasattvas numerous as the atoms of three four-continent worlds after three rebirths will attain Perfect Enlightenment;

COMMENTARY *Numerous as the atoms of four four-continent worlds.* In India long ago the four quarters of Mount Sumeru were known as "the four-continent world," and the number in this passage is as large as the number of atoms contained in four such worlds. The following sections echo this.

TEXT again, bodhisattva-mahasattvas numerous as the atoms of two four-continent worlds after two rebirths will attain Perfect Enlightenment; again, bodhisattva-mahasattvas numerous as the atoms of one four-continent world after one rebirth will attain to Perfect Enlightenment; again, living beings numerous as the atoms of eight worlds have all aspired to Perfect Enlightenment."

COMMENTARY The fact that the lifetime of the Buddha is infinite means that no matter how often we are reborn, the Buddha is always in this world leading us toward the true Dharma. Once we understand this, we will realize that one day we will attain those matters we thought ourselves unequal to, such as the wisdom of the Buddha, by passing through the cycle of birth and death, and therefore we will determine to seek them by means of practice. This is the meaning of aspiration for enlightenment.

The foregoing section concerns the twelve merits that can be acquired through the firm belief in the infinite life of the Buddha.

In effect, we are being taught that if we but grasp the basis of faith—which is that we are sustained by the Eternal Original Buddha who exists everywhere in the world without beginning or end—we will receive unlimited power, deepening our faith even more and extending it to others. And we are promised that if we progress devotedly in deepening our own faith, we will be able to attain the supreme merit, that is to say, someday we will be capable of reaching the same ultimate realm of enlightenment as the Buddha achieved.

It goes without saying that reaching the state of mind of a buddha is no easy task. As this chapter mentions, some bodhisattvas are only able to attain this state after practicing earnestly through eight more lives. It is almost impossible to fathom how long and how much effort would be required of for ordinary people such as ourselves to achieve the same elevation.

The fact that, if we have correct faith and endeavor to practice it, we will someday become like the Buddha surely provides a great hope to us as human beings. As long as we embrace this hope, our lives will have true purpose and be filled with happiness.

Making money only to lose it, falling in love only to be heartbroken, spending long years to gain an influential position only to lose it over some trifling matter—a whole lifetime passes by in repeating vain feelings of joy and sorrow. Even if we may feel that each moment is substantial and significant, when we stand on the brink of death and look back over our lives, we will for the first time realize that all we have done is busy ourselves pursuing a phantom, driven by self-interest, and we will feel an inexpressible sense of emptiness.

Someone's life may seem to be nothing more than a cycle of sufferings, anguishes, and joys, but how different it is if lived with the strong backbone of faith supporting it. Even when we experience the same pattern of ups and downs, joys and sufferings, if we firmly believe that we are always climbing step by step toward the Buddha's state of mind, then no matter how hard life is, we will be able to live happily and also die happily.

Human life is not limited to this world. We are reborn into the next world, and again into the one that follows that. But if we understand that in the next world and the one after that we forever alternate back and forth between joy and sorrow due to the occurrences of our daily lives, the mere thought would make us weary. "I've had enough," we would be tempted to say. Most people, however, do not recognize this, and in the same state of ignorance they repeat the same tribulations in the next world and the next. Indeed, though one would be fortunate just to be reborn in the human world, one's sufferings would be all the worse if one were born in the evil realms (hell, the realm of hungry spirits, the realm of animals, and the realm of asuras).

In contrast, people who attain true faith will never grow

weary no matter how long the journey may be because they know that they are always approaching the stage of buddhahood, step by step. They will lead a full life, replete with hope. This is the greatest merit, one that can only be attained by believers in the Buddha.

People of true faith should strive not only for the purpose of making their own ascent into the buddha realm but also for having as many companions as possible join them there. The more people of true faith increase in number, the more the lot of humankind will improve, and the more closely this world will approach the ideal world—the Land of Tranquil Light.

This may be taken as a condensation of all the various merits which have been explained in this chapter up to this point.

Now let us proceed.

**TEXT** When the Buddha had told of those bodhisattva-mahasattvas obtaining [such] great benefits of the Dharma, from the sky there rained down mandarava and maha-mandarava flowers, scattering over the innumerable hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of buddhas on lion thrones below the jewel trees, scattering also over Shakyamuni Buddha and the long-extinct Abundant Treasures Tathagata [seated] on the lion throne in the Stupa of the Precious Seven, and also scattering over all the great bodhisattvas and the host of the four groups;

**COMMENTARY** We are reminded of the scene in chapter 11, “Beholding the Precious Stupa,” because that scene continues here.

The scattering of flowers over someone is an expression of gratitude still seen in India today. In certain Buddhist sects in Japan the rite of scattering flowers is included in religious ceremonies.

The raining down of flowers from the sky symbolizes the gratitude of the realm of heavenly beings for the teachings of the Buddha. The scattering of flowers over not only the Buddha but also the bodhisattvas and the host of the four groups (bhikshus, bhikshunis, upasakas, and upasikas) indicates that both the Buddha who preaches the Dharma and the disciples who hear it are equally honored.

We too should imagine, when we listen with a singleness of mind to the teachings of Buddhism, that petals of the beautiful mandarava and maha-mandarava flowers rain down on us from the sky, even if these flowers are invisible to us.

**TEXT** it also rained incense of fine sandalwood, aloes, and so forth; in the sky the heavenly drums resounded of themselves with exquisite deep resonance; there rained down also thousands of kinds of celestial garments, and in every direction there hung down necklaces, pearl necklaces, mani necklaces and felicitous-pearl necklaces; censers of many jewels, burning priceless incense, moved everywhere of their own accord to pay homage to the great congregation.

**COMMENTARY** *Incense of fine sandalwood, aloes.* Both of these fragrant woods are ground up into extremely fine powder.

• *Heavenly drums.* The sound of heavenly drums resounding through the sky reflects the energy with which the teachings of Buddhism spread in the world.

Tradition says that there are two kinds of heavenly drums that spread the teachings, the “Dharma drum” and the “poison-painted drum.” The Dharma drum is the ordinary, gentle manner of teaching the words of the Buddha just as they are, which causes a resonance in people’s hearts. The “poison-painted drum” is the opposite severe manner of teaching which awakens people and smashes their mistaken ideas.

• *In every direction.* In the original Chinese text, this phrase refers to nine of the ten directions of space, according to Buddhism, with the sole exception of “downwards.” In other words, it indicates everywhere the eye can see, except underground.

• *Mani necklaces.* These are long strings of jewels.

• *Felicitous-pearl necklaces.* “Felicitous pearls” are pearls said to possess the power to grant all desires.

• *To pay homage to the great congregation.* “Congregation” refers to the large number of people who have assembled to listen to the Buddha’s teaching. A floating mist of incense, the echo of the drums of heaven, the fluttering of celestial garments, exquisite necklaces dangling in the air, precious incense burning—the description shows gratitude and spiritual devotion toward the Buddha, to the teachings of the Buddha, and to those who earnestly listen to them. Such actions are held in esteem as is repeatedly explained.

**TEXT** Over each buddha, bodhisattvas held banners and canopies, one above another, right up to the Brahma heaven. All these bodhisattvas with exquisite voices sang countless hymns extolling the buddhas.

**COMMENTARY** Holding a canopy over the Buddha signifies revering him and protecting him, and raising banners near him shows to the people of the world his great virtue.

• *Hymns.* Needless to say, this means songs which praise the virtue of the gods and buddhas.

This long line of bodhisattvas continuing all the way to heaven indicates that the Buddha’s teachings fill the triple world to its farthest extremes and that all living beings are saved by them.

**TEXT** Thereupon Maitreya Bodhisattva rose from his seat and humbly bared his right shoulder, folded his hands toward the Buddha, and spoke thus in verse:

“The Buddha has preached the rare Dharma / Never heard [by us] before. / Great is the power of the World-honored One / And his lifetime is beyond estimation. / Numberless Buddha sons, / hearing the World-honored One in detail / Tell of those who obtained the Dharma benefit, / Have been filled with joy.

COMMENTARY *The rare Dharma.* This signifies teachings that are seldom heard.

TEXT Some are steadfast in the never-retreating stage, / Some have attained to the dharanis, / Some to unhindered eloquence / Or to myriads of kotis of rotating dharanis. / There are bodhisattvas numerous as the atoms / Of a great-thousandfold world, / Each of them able to roll / The unre-treating Dharma wheel;

COMMENTARY These verses can be easily understood if we have grasped the preceding prose passage.

- *Steadfast in the never-retreating stage.* This refers to the same concept as we saw earlier in the phrase “assurance of non-birth.”

TEXT And bodhisattvas numerous as the atoms / Of a middle-thousandfold world, / Each of them able to roll / The unsullied Dharma wheel; / And bodhisattvas numerous as the atoms / Of a small-thousandfold world, / Each of whom, after eight rebirths, / Will accomplish the Buddha Way. / Again there are bodhisattvas, / Numerous as the atoms of four, three, two / Worlds of four continents like this, / Who will become buddhas after those numbers of rebirths. / Or bodhisattvas numerous as the atoms / Of one four-continent world, / Who after one more birth / Will accomplish perfect knowledge [of the Buddha].

COMMENTARY *Perfect knowledge [of the Buddha].* This signifies the Buddha’s transcendent knowledge of the ultimate reality of all things.

TEXT Such living beings as these, / Hearing the duration of the Buddha’s life, / Will obtain infinite, perfect, / And pure reward. / Also there are the living, numerous / As the atoms of eight worlds, who, / Hearing the Buddha’s announcement of his lifetime, / Have all aspired to the supreme [truth].

COMMENTARY *Infinite.* Literally, “immeasurable,” this term modifies “perfect, pure reward.” In other words, to obtain infinite reward which is both without fault (achieving a state of mind with no delusions) and pure (of genuine belief).

- *Aspired to the supreme [truth].* This phrase refers to the resolve to enter upon the supreme Way, that is, the resolve to attain the same stage of ultimate enlightenment as the Buddha.

TEXT The World-honored One, by preaching the infinite / And inconceivable Dharma, / Has benefited many, / Boundlessly as space. / Divine mandarava flowers rain down / And maha-mandaravas. / Shakras and Brahmas [numerous] as sands of the Ganges / From countless buddha lands have come, / Raining sandal and aloes, which / Fall blended and commingled; / Like birds flying below the sky / They reverently scattered over the buddhas. / The celestial drums in space / Roll forth of themselves their wondrous sounds. / A

*The frontispiece to scroll 6 by Ryūsen Miyahara (1899–1984), in which chapter 17 is included from the ten scrolls of the Threefold Lotus Sutra copied by Rev. Nikkyō Niwano.*

*The end of chapter 16 and the beginning of chapter 17, from scroll 6 of the Threefold Lotus Sutra as copied by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.*

thousand myriad kinds of divine robes / Whirl around in their descent. / Exquisite bejeweled censers, / Burning priceless incense, / Move all around of their own accord / In homage to the world-honored ones.

COMMENTARY *Reverently scattered over.* This means to honor, by sprinkling flowers and incense.

TEXT Hosts of great bodhisattvas / Hold banners and canopies of the precious seven, / Of wondrous height and of myriads of kotis of varieties, / One above another up to the Brahma heaven. / Before each one of the buddhas / Are jeweled streamers / From which hang victorious banners; / Also with thousands of myriads of stanzas / They [celebrate] the tathagatas in song.

COMMENTARY *Streamers.* Tied to the top of poles hang these long strips of cloth.

• *Victorious banners.* In ancient India it was the custom of Brahman monks to carry on religious debates and to place before the gateway of the winner a banner symbolizing victory. This was common in ancient India, and consequently this expression appears often in the Buddhist scriptures.

Be that as it may, belief in the infinite life of the Buddha is the highest perfection of faith, and because it stands above all the teachings, when the World-honored One preached this, these jeweled streamers and victorious banners were placed before each of the buddhas in the great assembly, as proof that the teachings preached by the Buddha are supreme.

TEXT Such a variety of things as these / We have never known before. / Hearing the Buddha's lifetime is infinite, / All beings are gladdened. / The Buddha's fame throughout the universe / Widely benefits living beings. / All are fully

endowed with the roots of goodness, / Which aid their desire for supreme [truth]."

COMMENTARY The essence of the first half of this chapter is epitomized in these words: "All are fully endowed with the roots of goodness, which aid their desire for supreme [truth]."

As a result of hearing that the lifetime of the Buddha is infinite, we come to know that the Buddha is always with us. Since we recognize this, our hearts are bound to seek goodness and our deeds are bound to be good ones. This is because if we thought our lives were fifty or even seventy years long and that there was nothing thereafter, we might be tempted to behave immorally as long as we could take life easy and enjoy ourselves during our limited time on earth.

If we become aware of the fact that the Buddha is always with us in the following world and the world after that as well as in this world, guiding us to buddhahood—and if we realize that failing to recognize such beneficence obliges us to continue transmigrating within the six realms of existence—then we will be unable to lead an irresponsible life. It surely becomes frightening to continue being caught up in the trifles of an indulgent, selfish lifestyle. It becomes entirely natural to have a desire to do good and to realize that desire through one's actions. With this object in mind, we naturally want to gradually accumulate merit. This is the meaning of possessing the roots of goodness.

As we continue living in this way, we can gradually draw nearer to buddhahood. This is "aiding their desire for supreme [truth]."

Once we understand this, we must follow the path of self-improvement. Just try to imagine not improving yourself at all, but being forever trapped in infinite transmigration within the six realms of existence. It will surely make your hair stand on end, like looking into a dark, bottomless pit.

In this case, what exactly is the ultimate goal of human improvement? That is buddhahood. To ordinary people like ourselves, this lofty stage seems far, far away, entirely unattainable. That is perfectly fine, because since it is such a distant destination, we can take a long journey to get there. However far in the distance, our destination is a brilliant world that casts light upon our route, giving us hope at each and every step. With each step courage wells up within us. How different this is from peering fearfully into the dark abyss!

Such is the great merit of knowing the eternity of the Buddha's life. Meditating upon this is to be earnestly encouraged.

*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.