

# The Starting Point of Prayer

by Nichiko Niwano

When we put our palms together and pay homage to the gods and the buddhas, we often wish that things were going a certain way or that we could obtain something we want. Of course, we often pay homage to give thanks or because we are happy, but we are more likely to pray when we want to be granted something.

Every year on December 8 we observe the ceremony commemorating Shakyamuni's attaining enlightenment and achieving buddhahood, a day that is profoundly meaningful. One sutra says that on the morning of his full and perfect enlightenment, Shakyamuni remarked, "How wondrous, how wondrous! All living beings, without exception, are equipped with the Tathagata's wisdom and his virtuous attributes." (That is, what a wonderful thing it is that all human beings can attain the same wisdom and compassion, the same spiritual treasure, that is no different at all from what has been realized by the Tathagata.)

To me, these words are the perfect expression of Shakyamuni's strong emotion upon realizing the most important element of human life.

What he realized is the fact that we all receive the gift of life thanks to a marvelous series of conditions, and therefore we are all sustained in our life in this world. And when he realized this fact, Shakyamuni joyfully cried out, "How wondrous!"

In other words, Buddhism began from this feeling of deep emotion. Going back to the roots of our faith, we see that what matters most for Buddhists is being

able to accept all things with gratitude and as a source of inspiration.

It seems clear that Shakyamuni did not rejoice because his wish was granted or because he obtained what he asked for. He teaches us that receiving the wondrous gift of life—this single great thing—should already be enough to inspire us.

When we open our eyes to this fact, we cannot help but undergo a transformation from praying to have our wishes granted to paying homage to express our respect and gratitude.

## The Importance of Looking Within

The great priest Nichiren, who left us the words, "You must promptly discard your false faith," with the purpose of admonishing his contemporaries, teaches us not to get mired in small, selfish desires but instead to lead our lives according to the Dharma.

When we encounter some personal misfortune or a problem that seems insurmountable to us, however, it can seem only natural that as a last resort we turn to the gods and the buddhas and ask for help.

For example, Risho Kosei-kai members voluntarily offer sutra chanting to pray for the safety and well-being of those who have fallen ill or have met with an accident or other calamity. The sentiment of wishing that things go well is our effort to shine at least a glimmer of hopeful light into the hearts of people who feel swamped in suffering and by extension provide them the strength

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to help alleviate their suffering. In doing so, what is most important is that our eyes, which usually look outward, are turned inward.

With the phrase *eko hensho*, Zen master Dogen admonishes us to shine the light of wisdom into ourselves and look within. In other words, in paying homage to the gods and the buddhas, we need to take advantage of the opportunity to look carefully at ourselves and realize that we are blessed. Such introspection can be called a merit of faith.

The greatest virtue of human beings is the ability to realize the preciousness of our own lives as well as the lives of others. Through this realization—experiencing a second birth, so to speak—we can lead lives of great worth and value. I think that therein lies one of the most essential points we can learn from the Buddha.

It is said that long ago, when something seemingly impossible occurred, the expression used by people to give praise to the gods and the buddhas is the origin of the Japanese word *arigatai* (grateful). I hope that we can also pay homage to the gods and the buddhas by always praying gratefully, which becomes possible when each of us realizes the Truth that we are caused to live thanks to all things. □

# DHARMA WORLD

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## The Evolution of Funerals in Japan

*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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# Cemeteries and Changing Lifestyles in Japan

by Norio Yoneda

*About half a century after [Rissho Kosei-kai's] cemetery was established, it began to experience alterations that reflected the changes in the daily lives of the Japanese people.*

Norio Yoneda is the director of Kosei Cemetery in Tokyo.

Rissho Kosei-kai established Kosei Cemetery in 1951 to serve members from other prefectures who came to work and live in Tokyo, who in future wanted to be buried closer to their homes in Tokyo and to fellow members of the Sangha. Japanese people often have family burial plots in cemeteries associated with a local parish temple in their ancestral hometown. Founder Nikkyo Niwano made it a point to maintain cordial relations with traditional Buddhist temples, and he encouraged members living outside the capital to stay on good terms with the local parish temples to which their families belonged. However, it was decided to build a cemetery in the suburbs of Tokyo to serve the needs of members who had left their far-flung hometowns.

In Japan, wakes and funerals are followed by cremation, and the ashes are kept in an urn until interment on the forty-ninth day after the death. This is a final leave-taking, at which family members often break down and start to weep.

By and large, Japanese people have since ancient times been particularly careful of the remains of the dead. This may be why they make repeated trips abroad to find and bring back to Japan the remains of comrades killed in wars in faraway lands. One day not long ago, the two daughters of a Japanese woman

who had emigrated to Puerto Rico and passed away there came to our cemetery, asking if half of their mother's remains could be buried there. When the remains were interred, these two young nisei women wept for joy at having finally been able to fulfill their mother's wish. I think this was also an expression of the particular feelings Japanese people have about taking care of their family's remains.

However, about half a century after our cemetery was established, it began to experience alterations that reflected the changes in the daily lives of the Japanese people.

One of these lifestyle changes involved the manner in which people now work and live. In former times, people seldom moved away from their hometowns, but now more and more do. Japanese people customarily visit their family graves at least once or twice a year, and so more people are moving their family graves from their ancestral hometowns to a cemetery closer to where they are living so they can more easily pay these visits.

Another change is the increase in nuclear families with fewer children, which in time can mean that nobody is left to take care of the graves, leading to an increase in abandoned graves. Also, more parents do not want to burden their children with the responsibility

of caring for their graves after they are gone. These changes are contributing to the increasing popularity of "eternal memorial graves," in which memorial services are held at the same time for a large number of deceased persons whose remains are interred in a common grave. Though there are far fewer abandoned graves in Kosei Cemetery compared with many other cemeteries, we do feel the need for an eternal memorial grave facility and are currently planning to build one.

Interment varies from place to place. Sometimes the remains in a mortuary urn are placed in the burial chamber, but at Kosei Cemetery, the remains are interred without the urn, in accordance with Founder Niwano's belief that the remains should return to the soil. It is of course good to think about your loved ones, but your grief will not be assuaged as long as those thoughts continue to represent deep attachment. When the remains are allowed to return to the soil of the grave, it will become a place where the living will find strength, rather than pain and sorrow, from thoughts of the deceased.

I think that Buddhism is fundamentally a religion for the living. Thus, while Kosei Cemetery is a place of rest for the deceased, I think it should also be a place of healing for survivors to overcome their attachment and bereavement. □

# Changes in Care for the Dead in Japan

by Stephen G. Covell

*Death practices—how we deal with the body, where we dispose of the remains, how we ritualize the passing of another human being—have changed in Japan.*

Two years ago I sat in a small theater at the University of California, Berkeley. I was there with two dozen Buddhist-studies scholars for a special screening of *Departures* (*Okuribito*, the original Japanese title), a beautiful film that revolved around death and care for the dead. By the end of the film, there was hardly a dry eye in the audience. Perhaps Buddhist-studies scholars are particularly emotional, but I think the impact would have been the same anywhere. Death moves us like few other things, and nothing brings the reality of death closer to us than care for the body of the deceased. Death makes us question who we are and why we exist. Most religions seek to supply answers to these questions. Death practices vary from culture to culture and from time to time, and Japan is no exception. Death practices—how we deal with the body, where we dispose of the remains, how we ritualize the passing of another human being—have changed in Japan. Indeed, the modern period, especially the past several decades, has been witness to numerous changes. These changes reveal shifts in how Japanese understand death and the role of Buddhist temples in death care, and even how Japanese understand their relationships to one another.

The film *Departures* is in some ways a perfect example of the changes in death-

care practices in Japan. In the film, we see only rare glimpses of the Buddhist priesthood despite the still-central role priests play in death care. Where have the priests gone? Where has the temple gone?

The fact is that the priest and the temple are still there, still central to death care in Japan. Funerals in Japan are still overwhelmingly Buddhist. The many denominations and individual temples of Temple Buddhism in Japan<sup>1</sup> still see funerals, memorials, and care for the ancestors as a crucial part of what they do. A young priest's training

invariably consists of a heavy dose of ritual practice aimed at perfecting the delivery of funerary rites. For many Buddhist priests, care for the dead at the temple or by the priest represents a primary method for serving the community and spreading the teachings of Buddhism. It is also a key funding source for the majority of temples. So, despite debate among Buddhist practitioners over the validity or usefulness of performing funerals and memorials, and despite vocal accusations of corruption and secularization of Temple Buddhism by the mass media and academics who espouse the "corruption paradigm" (*daraku setsu*)—which I have argued against elsewhere<sup>2</sup>—it is highly unlikely that temples and priests will simply disappear from the realm of death care in Japan.

*During a Japanese Buddhist funeral, a coffin is carried out of the home of the departed to a crematorium. The coffin follows a memorial tablet and a picture of the departed, which are held by the bereaved family. Photographed in the late 1990s in Toyama Prefecture.*



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It is not just the Buddhist establishment that continues to see Buddhism as playing a dominant role in death care in Japan. As Yohko Tsuji notes, for the average Japanese, funerary rites play a pivotal role in confirming, maintaining, and at times challenging individual social roles and personal identity. Tsuji argues that this is one reason why, even though most Japanese do not appear to “believe” in Buddhist funerary teachings, they still seek out Buddhist rites, which have woven their way into the social fabric of Japan over a period of centuries.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, Buddhism does appear to be slowly fading into the background at funerals, even though the priest sits center stage. Just as in *Departures*, the priest and the temple more and more appear to be secondary characters in the care for the dead. There are a variety of reasons for this, including a serious debate concerning posthumous names and funerary rites that continues within the Buddhist establishment and in the popular media, changes in how people understand death and the afterlife, the professionalization and commercialization of death care through funeral companies, and changes in family structures.

Buddhism has dominated death care in Japan for centuries. Perhaps the most notable aspect of that care, certainly the most debated recently, is the granting of a Buddhist precept name (*kaimyō*) to the deceased during the funeral. A survey regarding posthumous precept names reveals interesting aspects of the

*A Buddhist priest recites sutras at a funeral. Priests and temples still play pivotal roles in death care in Japan.*

current debates over Buddhist funerals.<sup>4</sup> Temple lay members (*danka*) responding negatively regarding the necessity of such names numbered 32.9 percent, but 64 percent of students and 77.3 percent of the Internet respondents revealed dissatisfaction, showing a decidedly negative view of posthumous names among the young and tech-savvy.

As to why there appears to be such a negative view of this key component of the Buddhist funeral, a survey of head priests (*jūshoku*) found many (70.7 percent) responding that “the problem lies in the commercialization of faith, in which posthumous precept names are given in response to remuneration.” There are many possible reasons why the meaning and function of posthumous precept names, and the Buddhist funeral more generally, are questioned today and why the priests surveyed believed the perception of commercialization dominates public opinion. Here I will discuss the following: (1) in sectarian and popular literature it is argued that

priests fail to teach the laity about meaning and function, and (2) views of the afterlife and salvation are rapidly changing in Japan.

One critique leveled at the priests of traditional Buddhism, often by the priests themselves, is that they fail to explain the meaning of the ritual services they perform—that is, they fail to preach. However, my fieldwork shows that many do take advantage of the opportunity death care provides to discourse on Buddhist teachings. The perceived lack of preaching may come from differing expectations regarding the teaching. For example, the priest will often take the time to explain the ritual implements or the outline of the funeral process and thus guide the bereaved through the ritual, whereas a growing number of laity appear to seek a more personally meaningful approach to teaching, such as memorializing of the deceased.

Attempts to teach about the meaning and function of posthumous precept names, or to advocate for the continuance of performing funerals as they always have been, face an uphill battle. Japanese views of the afterlife, and of the role of the funeral in death care, are rapidly changing. One problem created by these changes is that posthumous precept names and Buddhist funerals no longer hold the effective meaning they once did. One Tendai priest comments:

“I doubt there are too many people in today’s world that fear spirits. And, I don’t think that talking about classical worldviews like hells and pure lands

Photo: PIXTA

has any power of persuasion. In which case, the meaning of holding a magical service to appease the spirits [of the dead] is denied. . . . What people seek in Buddhism is a ritual to memorialize the dead and express condolences. However, the problem is that today's ritual has become a ritual for the purpose of having a ceremony. The peace of mind, which originally should be sought, is given nothing but lip service."<sup>5</sup>

According to the survey of temple lay members, students, and Internet respondents cited above, only 41.4 percent of temple lay members believed in the existence of a world after death, with students and Internet respondents numbering about the same (40.5 percent and 39.5 percent respectively). A different survey, conducted in 1996, found that only 15.9 percent of respondents believed in a world after death, but another 38.8 percent thought it might be possible.<sup>6</sup> Regarding the existence of spirits or a soul (*reikon*), 47.8 percent of temple lay members admitted believing they exist, compared with 54 percent of students.<sup>7</sup> These numbers suggest that for many contemporary Japanese the granting of a posthumous precept name, or the holding of a funeral ritual to secure some form of postmortem salvation, may hold little meaning beyond social custom. A survey conducted by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government further confirms this. According to this survey, 60 percent of respondents answered "a funeral is a custom for seeing off the deceased" and only 32.4 percent answered "a funeral is a religious act for praying for the happiness of the deceased." This shows, when combined with the survey results cited previously, that many see the Buddhist funeral not as a "religious" act designed for the well-being of the deceased in the world hereafter but as a "customary" act designed to allow the living a moment to say farewell to the deceased. If this is the case, the question is begged, "Why must a funeral be Buddhist?" Though the term

*Buddhist monks chat with young women at Kamiyachō Open Terrace, a café at the temple Kōmyōji in central Tokyo, in August 2006. The temple opened the free café, overlooking the temple cemetery, to encourage young people to visit the temple and learn about the Buddha's teachings.*

*customary* is misleading, since it creates a potentially false division between religion and custom, setting them apart as static opposites, the surveys nonetheless demonstrate that a shift is occurring from needs framed as next-life-focused to ones framed as this-life-focused. Buddhist institutions must address these changes to remain relevant.

And this gets to another factor influencing changes in the roles Buddhist temples and priests play in funerals and death care: funeral companies. Funeral companies have come to play a dominating role in the provision of death care in Japan. Funeral company employees are likely to be the first people (after hospital staff) to begin caring for the deceased. In many cases they, and not the family members, are the ones to contact the temple and make arrangements with the priest. And in a change from the past, it is the funeral company that guides the surviving family through the grieving process. Indeed, in response to the critique that priests fail to preach, many priests complain that funeral companies, which today often schedule funerals down to the time allotted the priest for conducting the ritual, do not allow them any time to preach. Funeral companies work to

care for the needs of the living to mourn their loss, thus usurping what half a century ago was one of the primary roles of the Buddhist priesthood.

Another factor often cited to explain changes in Buddhist death-care practices is the slow decay of the relationship between the priesthood and temple lay members. The future of this relationship is of great concern to officials of the denominations of Temple Buddhism, and most are seriously engaged in programs to reach out to temple lay members.<sup>8</sup> As the relationship weakens, and as functional relationships at funerals between priest and attendees become impersonal service-based relations, the opportunity to encourage understanding of the religious meaning of the funeral or any other part of Buddhist death care becomes limited.

The granting of lay precepts, and precept names, to the living is one way employed by some members of Temple Buddhism to infuse meaning into death-care practices.<sup>9</sup> Given the above numbers regarding the changing views of the Japanese public toward the role of the funeral and the existence of an afterlife, this move to shift meaning to the living might seem an effective route to bring about positive change. In a

sense, the living would become more involved in what has been a key part of the funeral by learning about and taking on a precept name before death. However, changing this association of precept names with death to an association with leading a moral life while alive requires changing basic assumptions about association with the temple: the temple must shift from a place one joins in death to a place one actively associates with in life, from a place that centers on ensuring the welfare of the dead to one that centers on activities to encourage the living to explore and practice the Buddhist teachings. One of the greatest challenges to Buddhist denominations is the "conversion" of temple lay members from believing in the temple as a place for postmortem practices only into active believers in the tenets of Buddhism.

Another road taken by some temples has been to move away from traditional temple lay membership patterns and, while still focusing on death care, seek new relationships with the laity. The effect on the funeral service itself varies, but the effect on temples and their relationships to the laity is significant. The primary change here is in where one is buried and how one is memorialized. A Buddhist-studies scholar, Mark Rowe, points out a variety of new developments within Temple Buddhism, including "eternal memorial" graves. These graves, even when administered and cared for by temples, are often nondenominational. They also do not require that families maintain them. This is a dramatic shift away from the standard form of affiliation with a temple through death care and multi-generational family membership at the temple. Such graves allow temples the opportunity to reach new members of the lay community while assuring a steady revenue stream. Perhaps what is most important is that the temples engaged in offering these grave sites are growing in number and represent what

could eventually become a new model for how people associate with temples through death care. These new associations for burial and memorial clearly demonstrate the changing nature of veneration and the manner in which it is not simply affected by social structures but affects social structure as well. As Rowe notes, priests engaged in these new practices are particularly effective in reaching out to contemporary Japanese who more and more seek ways beyond the traditional family structure to care for the dead. Rowe states, for example, that "the two most common forms of relationship or bond (*en*) in Japan are those of blood and locale. What is fascinating to note about some of these burial groups is the way they are appropriating the *en* bond in new ways. The *En no Kai* offers no modifier for *en*, and becomes thus a 'Society of Bonds.' The use of the term *shienbyō* by the Society for a Women's Monument consciously modifies *en* by adding "will" or "intent" and thus enabling these women to form new types of bonds."<sup>10</sup>

So, what does the future hold for Buddhist death care? One thing is certain: change. Rowe's work points to changes in family structure and personal relations that are putting pressure on the institutions of Temple Buddhism to change how death care is delivered. My own work points to a variety of other pressures as well—from a growing desire on the part of young priests to become more engaged in care for the living to very practical financial concerns—that will continue to bring about changes in how Buddhist temples and priests are involved in death care. Unlike in the film *Departures*, but more like in the book on which the film was based, Buddhism is not likely to fade away into the background of death care in Japan. We are witnessing today the birth of new Buddhist death-care practices, some of which will last and some of which will be short-lived, but all of which point

to a time of change and experimentation in Temple Buddhism. The institutions of Temple Buddhism will change, but Buddhist priests will not become merely the background chanting to a purely secular death-care industry. □

## Notes

1. Temple Buddhism refers to those denominations of Buddhism founded by the seventeenth century and includes such denominations as Tendai, Shingon, Rinzai, etc.
2. Stephen G. Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).
3. Yohko Tsuji, "Memorial Rituals in Japan: The Hegemony of Tradition and the Motivation of Individuals," *Ethos* 34, no. 3 (2006): 391–431.
4. Results of the parishioner/student/Internet survey can be found in *Chūgai nippō* (May 9, 2000): 12. Those for the abbot survey can be found in *Jimon kōryū* (August 2000): 86–89.
5. Hokushindō, ed., *Jiin no gen-zai* [Buddhist temples of today] (Tokyo: Hokushindō), 184.
6. Survey conducted by the Japanese Association for the Study of Religion and Society, 1996. Cited in Kenji Ishii, *Dēta bukku: Gendai nihonjin no shūkyō: Sengo gojūnen no shūkyō ishiki to shūkyō kōdō* [Religions of contemporary Japanese: Their religious consciousness and behavior in the fifty years since World War II] (Tokyo: Shin-yō-sha, 1997), 85.
7. The stronger numbers shown by youth reflect the growth in interest in the occult, afterlife experiences, and the like among Japanese youth. Whereas the denominations of Temple Buddhism tend to promote traditional values and culture, Japanese youth are showing more interest in experiential religion. Bukkyō Nenkan Hensan Iinkai, ed., *Bukkyō nenkan '88* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1988), 22–23.
8. Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism*.
9. The turn to precept reform is nothing new. Calls to reform priestly adherence to precepts have been made throughout history in Japan, and calls to have laity adhere to lay precepts have also been made on occasion.
10. Mark Rowe, "Grave Changes: Scattering Ashes in Contemporary Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 30, no. 1–2 (2003): 112–13.



# Recent Trends in Funerals in Cross-cultural Perspective

by Michael Pye

*The question arises whether . . . secularization processes lead to a convergence in the understanding of death rituals as between Japan and western Europe.*

The following reflections on recent trends in funeral practice are based on long-term observations and occasional personal participation in funerals in Japan, Germany, and England. Although vivid memories play a part, references to individuals are excluded out of respect for the dead and their families. Details mentioned are based on actual observations, but it has not been possible to pursue specialized additional research during the preparation of this article. Nevertheless, some of the lines of thought found here may contribute to the theoretical orientation of those who are able to undertake such research in the future.

Broadly speaking, the funeral culture of western Europe today is characterized by two significant trends. First, the role of civil institutions has been strengthened greatly at the wish of those who do not feel bound to the churches through personal faith. Consequently, a general weakening of the role of the churches in ritual culture has given rise to increasing variety in both wedding styles and funeral practices. Second, there has been a steady rise in the statistics of those who prefer cremation to the grave burial of the corpse in a coffin. This trend, particularly strong in northern Europe, has very definite implications for surrounding funeral practice, as will be

seen. In Japan, cremation has of course been almost universal for a long time, but here the main trend to be noted is the weakening of the power of the traditional Buddhist temples over various arrangements, including cemetery provision. Instead, efficient funeral companies are dominating the scene, and so the question arises whether this is just a matter of practicalities and economics or whether it makes any difference in other respects. Since there are definite processes of secularization at work here, in the sense of the loss of power on the part of religious institutions, the

question arises whether these secularization processes lead to a convergence in the understanding of death rituals as between Japan and western Europe, or whether there are underlying assumptions that continue to be influential and different. A tentative answer is that the latter is indeed so, but first some details should be considered.

Stereotypes in movies, light reading material, and so on usually continue to portray churches and church cemeteries as the locus of funerals. In northern Europe, however, city cemeteries have been in use for a long time. The cemetery in Frankfurt am Main in Germany is a good example. Here there is not only a crematorium and a place for viewing the bodies in their coffins before cremation but also a substantial "mourning hall" (*Trauerhalle*), which

*The mourning hall of the city cemetery in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. The family of the departed specifies the rituals to be performed. All photographs accompanying this essay are by the author.*



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*The mourning hall of the city cemetery in Frankfurt am Main is adorned with devout sayings of mainly non-Christian origin.*

can be used for whatever kind of ritual may be preferred. This was built as part of the large entrance structure in 1909 to a design by two Berlin architects.<sup>1</sup> The building is usually referred to as being neoclassical in conception, but it is also influenced inside by the well-liked *Jugendstil* architecture of the period and, in sum, provides an interesting alternative to church gothic or neogothic styles. The mourning hall is decorated with short wisdom sayings of mainly non-Christian origin, such as "Comfort to the mourners—peace to the dead—hope for the living" or "Grief is short but joy will last forever" or "I must be active as long as the day lasts," together with "A useless life is an early death." A single statement of Christian origin is "Blessed are those who sorrow, for they shall be comforted." However, specific references to Jesus or God are avoided. This is to avoid mounting any kind of challenge

to freethinkers and to maintain a general culture of death that is thoughtful but definitely not necessarily Christian. Perhaps the clearest expression of this ambivalence, high over the main arch, is "The touching image of death suggests no fear to the wise and no ending to the faithful."

In the pastoral context of actual funerals, this secularized context is a matter of considerable significance because it enables willing participation by family relatives who reject Christian belief. In other cemetery chapels in Germany, however, which are supposed to be religiously neutral, it is not unusual to see the hall for commemorative services dominated by a large cross, even if there is no other church architecture or decoration. The impact of this in any particular case depends very much on the way in which a service is conducted, and in particular on the address given by a pastor or some other person. It is inevitable that resistance to what is presumed to be Christian belief surfaces at funerals because religious language about death, eternal life, resurrection, and so on is widely used. If a pastor chooses to assert the theme of a life in paradise or heaven after death, then nonreligious persons will experience a mental block

*A hall for funeral and memorial services at a cemetery chapel in Germany.*

of resistance. It is astonishing that pastors sometimes seem to be unaware of this and take no account whatever of the probable presence of nonbelievers among the assembled mourners. Observing this once at a funeral in southern Germany, I noticed from the expressions of some of those attending how the pious language of the rather thoughtless pastor caused his message to be rejected altogether.

Yet it is important to take account of nonbelievers, whether explicitly or not, in order to incorporate them into the process of mourning and remembrance. The existence of secular chapels provides a particularly helpful context in which this can be done, even if the deceased person and close family members are themselves Christian believers, whose sensitivities and understandings should also be respected. Moreover, it is perfectly possible to design a service and to speak in such a way that the messages are inclusive. The writer has experience of this from a case in which he was personally involved,<sup>2</sup> although the matter was admittedly helped by the fact that the deceased herself had ambivalent conceptions of cultural and religious values, summed up for her in the German word *Geist*, meaning spirit. Her confirmation text (*Konfirmationsspruch*) had been Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, chapter 5, verse 25: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit," but of course the resonance of the word *Spirit* here is much more complex in German (as *Geist*), since it has been used by thinkers (such as Hegel) to mean "mind" in a manner that goes well beyond the discourse of Paul.

The increasing preference for cremation over grave burial has significant implications for choice of funeral style for two main reasons. First, the ashes are much more easily moved and can be preserved or disposed of in various ways or taken to other places. Second, there is no particular urgency after the

immediate act of cremation when making arrangements for funeral rituals such as memorial services, and this enables greater participation. In some cases this can lead to confusion. What, after all, is a funeral? In two cases in which the writer was involved, there was a fundamental agreement that after cremation the ashes should be removed to a different place where there could be a memorial service followed by the final committal of the remains. In one case this was to be by burial, and in the other by scattering. This removal of the ashes, in an urn or a box, allows the place of the memorial to be selected and particular people to assemble whose role

*Ashes form a cross in an English cemetery.*

might be important. In both of the cases mentioned the deceased persons were of great age, had been cared for by others, and hence had died far from the hometowns where they had spent much of their lives and where their husbands had died many years before. It was therefore very meaningful to return them to this location. It was also easy to arrange by means of a few long-distance telephone calls. Yet it is interesting to note that the family members in closest proximity, who were present at the crematorium shortly before the burning of the body in its coffin, insisted on having a form of service at that point. Since this was not "the funeral" as such, most of those who were due to attend the second round were not even informed of it. But it took place in a simplified religious

mode. In effect, therefore, there was a double funeral.

While cremation has led to great organizational flexibility, the legal rules for handling the ashes differ from country to country and are subject to change. For example, in Britain the ashes may be handed to next of kin in a wooden box that contains the ashes in a small plastic bag. They can then be preserved or disposed of in whatever manner seems to be appropriate. So it is quite possible to drive away with them by car and take them somewhere else for preservation or scattering. In Germany the ashes can currently be moved only by a professional funeral company, and it

is expected that they will either be preserved in an urn in an authorized place such as a columbarium or interred like a coffin in a grave. The latter is relevant when there is a family grave with space available. As to "scattering," this means setting the ashes free so that they will be dispersed by the winds or, if at sea, by the waves. A place of significance for the departed person may be selected. Usually the scattering is not really informal but takes place under the supervision of funeral directors or crematorium officials. The ashes of many persons may be scattered in the grounds of a crematorium. Here they are not just shaken out of the bag, but the bag is placed in another container, which can be swung to and fro by a professional assistant, releasing the ashes a few at a time. The

ashes can therefore form a pattern on the ground, for example in the form of a cross, but this will be dispersed before long by wind and rain.

The idea that the human body can be reduced to ashes has long been expressed in the traditional phrase “dust to dust and ashes to ashes,” but there has been and still is some resistance to the concept of cremation among conservative Christians, who seem to associate burial in the ground with the prospect of future resurrection. For Europe, the traditional view is stronger in the Catholic south. This is a perspective shared by Muslims, who regularly insist on burial of the full corpse in the ground. Muslim graves typically have little or no decoration beyond a simple inscription. The ornate mausoleums of major sheikhs are an exception, but that is because they have become a center of devotions and attract pilgrims. Normally there are just two small protuberances indicating the position of feet and head, aligned in the direction of Mecca. Thus the dead await the resurrection. Though the number of Muslims in Japan is small, it is obvious that more space is needed for Muslim burials than can easily be found in urban situations. By contrast, cremation is linked to a more figurative understanding of resurrection, and indeed those who need guidance about the status of this kind of religious language could do worse than study the writings of Paul, who, though simplistic in some matters, was very clear that the spiritual body of the resurrection is not the same as the natural body, which is subject to decay and dissolution.

So is there an underlying concept of death and mourning that is nevertheless typical of the Western world? The divide between those who place their loved ones in the hands of God, figuratively speaking, in whatever way, and those who simply mourn their passing and their loss, can probably never be overcome. However, in whatever mode, they have gone before us, and

we are left behind, to follow later. Seen from an East Asian point of view, what may seem remarkable is the absence of an interactive relationship with the deceased. That is, they are not regularly venerated as ancestors, and messages are not usually exchanged between them and the living. In this regard, East Asian funeral and burial culture is different from the European.

In Japan, as in western Europe, we have seen various stages of secularization, which have meant that the Buddhist temples no longer dominate death arrangements as they did from the Edo period (1603–1867) until recent times. Their role is significantly challenged by funeral businesses, which manage everything from the hospital to the cemetery, with the necessary formal meal for guests in between. Because of the lack of space in Buddhist temple cemeteries, new ones have appeared on compact land away from the urban centers as such, run by consortia that clearly declare, for commercial reasons, that they are nondenominational. Similar changes have been taking place in Singapore, where a huge cemetery was recently relocated in order to make way for a highway interchange. During this process it was fascinating to see the difference between the way in which Muslim graves and Chinese graves were handled. In the Muslim case, the remains were all most carefully excavated and systematically numbered, so that they could be relocated in a new home. The Chinese graves, on the other hand, were unproblematic, whether Buddhist, Christian, or other, for they already consisted of urns in columbaria that could be relocated with ease if necessary. There were no longer any of the impressive key-hole-shaped tombs set into the side of a hill or slight incline, formerly typical of Chinese burials.

But do all the changes, especially the weakening of the connection to Buddhism in Japan, really make much difference? It seems to this observer that

they do not. The underlying concern in East Asian culture is the need to *care for* the deceased, who are in the process of becoming ancestors. They are thought to need appropriate *kuyō*, which means something like respectful care. They also need to be maintained as approachable persons who can be addressed, rather like divinities, in order to give a report on any major events or intentions. In Japan this is achieved in the immediate family context, most typically by use of the house altar. In Chinese society, ancestral halls are maintained, looking more or less like any other temples housing divinities, with dragons flying at the roof, but in which the ancestors of whole clans, such as the widespread Lin family, or sections of it, are honored. In Japan the dead are often somehow turned into divinities, *kami* in the Shinto sense. Very widely, also, the dead are revered as *hotoke*, or buddhas, that being a state to which it is assumed they would probably aspire. The underlying point is that these are all beings who can be addressed in mutual relationship. This fundamental understanding, much stronger than anything similar in the Western world, seems to remain completely unaffected by secularization or by competition among funeral service providers. □

## Notes

1. Heinrich Reinhardt and Georg Süßenguth. Since the mourning hall was renovated in 2006, it is not certain that all the details mentioned here are original, but they are believed to be so.

2. The situation arose at the Frankfurt cemetery mentioned above because an external chaplain withdrew at the last minute. The city mourning hall itself has no chaplaincy staff, and it is up to the family to arrange whatever they consider appropriate. Although there is an organ and suitable seating, services do not have to be led by priests or pastors.

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# Rituals for the Dead Today

by Haruyo Inoue

*Privatization, individualization, and the rejection of religion are the three main trends I see in the evolution of rituals for the dead in recent years.*

From ancient times, the Japanese have thought that a living soul dwells within the physical being of a person, and at death, separating from the body, it becomes a dead spirit, for a time existing as a wild and unstable soul. The dead spirit becomes purified as a *kami* (ancestral spirit) through the rites performed for it over a long time by the members of its family, whom, as its descendants, it then watches over and protects. This body-spirit dualism is the basis of the belief in ancestral spirits that underpinned the formation of the funerary rituals that we know today. These rituals were given meaning through Buddhism and through the development of the idea of the “household” (*ie*). The Meiji Civil Code of 1898 stipulated that the ownership of the family’s grave was a “special right pertaining to succession to the *ie*” (Article 987). This meant that the deceased were regarded as the very foundation of the group that was the family and so were venerated by their descendants not as ordinary dead but as “ancestors.” These rites were generally conducted according to Buddhism.

With the growth of the nuclear family, the aging of the population, and the low birthrate that mark modern society, not only are people increasingly less conscious of the *ie*, but the family itself is not functioning as a group in

the same way as previously. There has been a value shift from group to individual. In this essay I want to analyze how mortuary and memorialization rites taking place at funeral services, permanent outdoor graves, and indoor family altars are changing within a society where the individual has become the unit in place of the family.

## Changes in Urban Funerary Rites

I will first examine funerary rites, the very core of rituals for the dead. The ultimate form that has been adopted in urban areas in recent years is the so-called direct funeral (*chokusō*). It is a simplified practice where the body is cremated directly after death, unaccompanied by any of the traditional rituals, such as the wake or a funeral service. The most extreme form of this is cremation only for the disposal of a corpse, but in fact people have quite diverse views about what cremation alone entails. Some people consider that not holding a funeral or only having a cremation means that there is no funeral in the traditional sense. Buddhist priests are not called in, and general acquaintances are not notified. But these people still make time for a farewell to the deceased, attended by the immediate

family and other close relatives. There are others who understand cremation alone as a private family funeral (*missō*), which may or may not be followed by a formal funeral service. Judging from differences in what kind of rituals are added in cases when cremation is more than the disposal of a corpse, who attends the obsequies, and what people are most conscious of when taking their leave of the dead, it is very clear that no firm definition of terminology has been established. In fact, a variety of terms are applied: direct funeral, no funeral, cremation only, private funeral, family funeral (*kazokusō*, *miuchisō*), farewell gathering (*owakarekai*), and memorial service (*shinobukai*), among others.

A survey I conducted at two mortuaries in metropolitan Tokyo reveals that 15 to 20 percent of funerals were direct funerals and that 12 to 36 percent were private funerals (including *kazokusō*, *miuchisō*, and *missō*). Thus direct funerals and private funerals together ranged from some 30 percent to 50 percent.<sup>1</sup>

This trend can also be seen from attitude surveys conducted in Tokyo and the broader metropolitan area. A report on a 2001 survey of funeral costs by the Citizens’ and Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government states that 59.1 percent of respondents replied that they wanted “a small funeral attended by those close to them.” This was an increase over the previous survey of 1995 (47.2 percent). In that year just under 50 percent of the respondents wanted a family funeral, but in 2001

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more than 70 percent did. This trend has probably strengthened since then.

In 2002 the Hakuhodo Institute of Life and Living conducted a funeral awareness survey to assess the changing perceptions of funerary rites among 365 male and female residents of the greater Tokyo metropolitan area aged eighteen to seventy-six. Most (76.2 percent) wanted a new style of funeral, such as an “unpretentious funeral” (*jimisō*) or “musical funeral” (*ongakusō*). Asked about the meaning of funerals, 76 percent said they are “an occasion to bid farewell to those close to you” and 99.5 percent said they wanted family and close friends to attend, while 52.6 percent wanted people they socialize with in pursuing common interests or activities to attend. Also, 70 percent replied they did not need a Buddhist posthumous name (*kaimyō*), which costs on average four hundred thousand Japanese yen.

We can see from the above that in urban areas there is a marked increase in the tendency for people to invite to a funeral only people connected with the deceased. They prefer not to ask people with no personal relationship with the deceased or who did not share the family’s grief, who would come only out of a sense of social obligation. This trend is one of privatization. We see also an aspiration for a more personalized funeral, moving away from family-centered rites to those focusing on the individual. This we can call individualization. There is a further tendency to omit religious elements, which can be viewed as a rejection of religion.

*A row of furnaces with ebony-and-gold-colored doors at the Toda Mortuary crematorium in Tokyo. Photographed in November 2004.*

Rural areas are also witnessing similar trends, though not to the same extent as in urban areas.

## The Privatization and Individualization of Funerals

Privatization, individualization, and the rejection of religion are the three main trends I see in the evolution of rituals for the dead in recent years. Space limitations allow me to deal here only with the first two of these. I would just like to mention, though, that by rejection of religion, I mean a breakaway from the religion of the household (*ie*), not necessarily a diminution of religiosity, and I have written more on this point elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

The sociologist Kiyomi Morioka writes that “differentiating the private sphere from communal life, and holding it in higher regard than the public

sphere, is a clear indication of the idea of privacy.”<sup>3</sup> Privatization, as one of the trends in modern Japanese mortuary rites, means funerals with only the grieving family in attendance, and perhaps some close friends, and no one attending only out of obligation, like company representatives or neighbors. This focuses on what the French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch (1903–85) calls “first- and second-person death,” that is, my death and the death of a person close to me, as opposed to “third-person death,” the death of a person unfamiliar to me.<sup>4</sup>

Behind this trend toward privatization is the growth of individualism. Morioka points out that “privatization accompanies individualism, and individualism promotes privatization.”<sup>5</sup> As the expression that certain behavior “brings shame on the ancestors” (*gosenzosama ni mōshiwakenai*) implies, in the past people’s existence was oriented toward

*The tranquillity shrine (annonbyō), or eternal memorial gravesite, at Myōkōji, a Nichiren sect temple in Niigata Prefecture. Photographed in 1998.*

the household ancestors. In an individualized society, where ideas are centered on the household and the ancestors have weakened, and where people form networks with others as individuals, when those individuals die, almost nothing remains of heredity or continuity, even between parents and children, because as each individual is different, so are his or her networks. In other words, a relationship based on one-on-one connections does not survive the death of the individuals concerned. Thus attendance at a funeral, too, becomes limited to those with a connection with the deceased. Actually, with death becoming something primarily associated with old age, funerals are more and more likely to be simply a family affair, since the friends of the deceased either have already died or are often too frail to attend.

## Nonfamily Graves

How have rituals for the dead that are focused on graves changed? The *ie*, as the paradigm of the lineal family in Japan, was the monopoly of patrilineal descent. The household was expected to continue in perpetuity from generation to generation. To enable this, the patrimony passed from father to son. But in the modern family, centered on the married couple, both husband and wife think of their own parents equally,

and when the children leave home, the couple is all that is left. When one partner dies, the other remains living alone, and when that partner also dies, then the family as a unit also dies. Whereas the traditional *ie* is characterized by unilinearity and perpetuity, the couple-centered family is characterized by bilateralism and limitation to a single generation.

There is a structural difference here, too, connected with issues that have arisen over permanent grave sites. During the 1980s, as the old norms governing the family began to be dismantled, the group identity of the family weakened, giving place to the idea that the individual was its basic unit. This was the individualization of the family. As well, the increase in the divorce rate, the number of later marriages, the falling number of children in the family, the growth in the number of people choosing not to get married, and the decision of couples not to have children meant that there has been a vast increase in the number of people without heirs to the family graves.

While the system of hereditary grave sites, sustained by norms of perpetuity based on the survival of a consciousness of the *ie*, has given rise to the kind of "culture lag" described by the American sociologist William Fielding Ogburn (1886–1959),<sup>6</sup> changes have begun to occur in response to circumstances,

as the one-generational family system moves toward even further individualization. A new substitute system has arisen.

Whereas the family grave was characterized by (1) paternal lineage, (2) heredity, (3) use in perpetuity, (4) use of a headstone, and (5) inscription of the family name on the headstone, the substitute system that rejects the *ie* is characterized by a broad division between a tendency to address the difficulties within the system and breaking away from the system completely.

Examples of the first are separate double graves, for both the husband and the wife (a variation on the multifamily grave), fixed-term grave sites, and gravestones not inscribed with the family name (which would enable a daughter with a different married name to be interred in the same grave as the parents). The second includes nonhereditary graves, known variously as "group grave sites" (*gassōshiki bochi*, *gōshi bo*) and "eternal memorial graves" (*eitai kuyō bo*), facilities not premised on inheritance, where both the grave and the memorialization are shared, and doing away with headstones by scattering the ashes (*sankotsu*), conducting "forest funerals" (*jumokusō*), and suchlike, which shows a concern for nature and obviates the need for successors to maintain memorialization.

Since the 1990s in particular, the greatest changes in how graves are regarded relate to a rejection of permanent family graves, a concern for nature, and individualism. Individualism takes the form of an increase in grave sites prepared before death and in "designer" headstones that reflect the personality of the deceased. The one-generational nuclear family, unlike the traditional *ie*, does not suppress a person's individuality. People now no longer rely on their children to arrange their funerals and are more concerned with how they live their own lives—and how they bring those lives to a close.



Sites for nonhereditary graves of people without descendants increased rapidly during the 1990s from just four in the late 1980s to between 450 and 500 in January 2003, according to a survey carried out by the publisher Rokugatsu Shobō. This growth has continued down to the present. The applicants for inclusion in the “tranquillity shrine” (*annonbyō*), or “eternal memorial gravesite” at Myōkōji, a Nichiren sect temple in Niigata Prefecture, included more families with children than families without children (as of January 15, 2003). This shows that even people with sons (which implies that they should have no problems regarding the succession of the family grave) are buying nonhereditary graves in comparatively large numbers. Perhaps the grave-inheritance system itself has become divorced from modern ideas of family structure and the realities of life. Perhaps, too, we can see here in part a state of dysfunction. Thus the substitute system that has emerged in response to this has made necessary ritual forms different from those of the family ancestral rites where perpetuity was a criterion.

## Forest Funerals

The forest funeral, which first emerged in 1999, is a part of the growing interest in natural funerals in Japan. Bones and ashes are buried under trees, which act as grave markers. In 2002 I conducted an attitude survey among 183 valid responses from people who wanted a forest funeral after they died. I wanted to find out how such funerals are connected to traditional Japanese ideas about the soul and what modern people are looking for in them. I then analyzed the distinctive characteristics of forest graveyards.

To find out people's ideas about the soul after death, I asked about their beliefs in life after death. Thirty-nine and three-tenths percent answered that they either believed in life after death or wanted to believe in it; 31.7 percent said

they did not believe in it; and 26.8 percent said they did not know. Almost the same proportion of answers was received for the question about the existence of the soul after death, but the proportion of those who believed or wanted to believe was slightly higher this time.

Those who answered that they believed or wanted to believe in the existence of the soul after death were then asked if they thought their soul would reside in the tree. Of those, 50.6 percent said they wanted to believe so, and another 13 percent said they believed so. Thus 26.8 percent of the whole sample understood that their soul would reside in a tree after death.

While 36.6 percent of the applicants said they did not own grave sites, close to 30 percent already had them. Of these, 17.5 percent said they would inherit family graves, and 9.8 percent said they had bought a grave with their own money.

Respondents were asked why they had chosen a forest funeral. Selecting up to three answers, 76.5 percent said they wanted to return to nature and 43.7 percent said they did not have to worry about whether they had heirs or not. The third most-popular answer was that it was good to plant a tree and sleep

beneath it (41.5 percent). This revealed a preference for having some symbol to mark the grave, as opposed to simply scattering the ashes.

This was confirmed by the next question, which asked why they chose a forest funeral over the scattering of ashes. The second most-popular answer to this was that becoming a tree (or flower) after death seemed poetic (44.8 percent). Twenty-four and six-tenths percent said they wanted some kind of marker for the site of their ashes. This showed that people felt it a good thing for their soul to enter a tree as a marker.

Concerning funerary rites, 46.5 percent said they did not expect them but they would be happy if their relatives did conduct services. A little over 20 percent replied that they did not want or need a funeral or had no opinion.

## The Family Altar

In the 1990s, as it came to be realized that many people were keeping the ashes of family members at home, ways of doing so gradually increased in scope. Some people kept the cremated remains in an urn as they had always done. Others kept them in containers that were art

*This cinerary urn is made of granite. Photographed in July 2005.*

*Pendants made from the ashes of the departed mixed with artificial stone. The pendants, available in nine colors, literally keep the departed close to people's hearts. Photographed in July 2005.*

*A gravesite for forest  
funerals in Machida  
Izumi Jōen in Machida  
City, southwestern Tokyo.  
Ashes have been scattered  
beneath the cherry trees  
shown here. Photographed  
in March 2009.*

objects or pottery containers for ashes. Companies even emerged that make ceramic plates and pendants out of pulverized remains and diamonds forged from the remains at high temperatures. In 2005 a number of companies making and selling such products came together to form a nonprofit organization called Temoto Kuyō Kyōkai to create for these products a culture of *temoto kuyō* (on-hand memorialization).

Some elderly people gradually experience a loss of purpose. They lose their parental role when their children leave home and their role as workers after they retire. Marital companionship plays a very important role at this time, helping them weather the changes in their lives. Thus when a spouse dies, the sense of loss is enormous. At the final stage of the nuclear family, what assuages the last survivor's sense of grief and emptiness is often, ironically, the ashes of the deceased spouse. Those who have lost a loved one are sustained by the feeling that the deceased remains always near, that they can hold on to (even wear) the departed, or that they can divide the ashes among all the family members. These arrangements can be summarized as "companionship," "portability," and "sharing."

In previous research, I have characterized rites according to *temoto kuyō* as a ritual form "friendly" to the nuclear family, which may be described in terms of "companionship," "individualism," "sharing," "portability," and "providing a point of contact between the living and the departed who choose not to build their graves." In 2001 I surveyed attitudes to changes in mortuary rites

of a hundred people whose households purchased "on-hand" memorialization items from the Kyoto firm Hirokuniya. The survey confirmed that the respondents were, in performing *temoto kuyō*, engaging in behavior the same as that performed during rituals for the dead before the family altar (and the mortuary tablets, *ihai*). This included talking to the deceased, offering food and drink, and clasping the hands in prayer (*gasshō*). Of the respondents, 60 percent were parishioners of Buddhist temples and 80 percent already had a household Buddhist altar. This brings to the fore the point that many people today feel dissatisfaction with traditional family altars (Buddhist or Shinto) and the family grave. Space precludes a detailed analysis of my findings, but in brief, the family Buddhist altar can be understood as the site for ancestor veneration at the lineage level, represented by the relationship between parents and children. Here, what the American anthropologist Robert J. Smith termed "memorialism"<sup>7</sup> is manifested by a form of mortuary rite performed with a family.

## Conclusion

Rites for the dead have in the past centered on the traditional funeral service, the grave, and the family altar (and mortuary tablets). These are underlain by ancestor beliefs based on a duality of body and soul and given meaning through Buddhism, centered on the *ie*. Modern society, however, has witnessed a shrinking, and even a loss, of *ie*-type rituals. Society has become structured in such a way as to make it

difficult to preserve an awareness of the *ie* among people, with the result that they are looking around for, and constructing, social mortuary rites that focus on the individual.

Recently, attention has been drawn to a variation of the forest funeral where people are laid to rest beneath cherry trees. This is called the "cherry tree funeral" (*sakurasō*). It was pioneered not in a temple graveyard under the existing parishioner system but in a graveyard planned and run on a membership system by a nonprofit organization called Ending Center at a private cemetery in Machida, Tokyo.

The attraction of nature funerals can partly be ascribed to the return to nature that accompanied people's realization that industrialization has contributed to environmental destruction. Another reason is that while the system of hereditary graves had promised a permanency of human relationships, today people cannot place any expectations on their descendants. As a result, they have been released from the spell that is the permanence of the *ie*. In place of the family ties and permanence within the *ie*, they seem to be seeking relationships with people outside the family and permanence within nature. The time has passed when people were sustained by a strong communal consciousness, made up of the family and the local community. The loose community of those sleeping and memorialized together under the cherry trees is a symbol that the family is no longer sufficient, though it is still the case that an individual, married couple, or family is allotted a section of land to themselves. □

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# Traditional Buddhism and Diversification in Funeral Practices

by Yoshiharu Tomatsu

*Because death and funerals can be explained in many ways, there can be confusion and worry over how to conduct funerals, complicating the dealings between relatives and the temple.*

In recent years, the approach to funerals in Japan has become diversified. There is a shift away from traditional funeral services toward simpler forms, such as natural funerals (to return cremated ashes to nature), family funerals (only family members are invited), and direct funerals (cremation immediately after death, with no rituals). The background of this situation can be found in the long-lasting economic recession, the trend toward nuclear families because of movement of the population to cities, and the resulting limited contact among members of the extended family and with neighbors—a condition that has given birth to the term *muen shakai* (the unconnected society). I must also include in this list a lack of effort by the temples and Buddhist clergy. For most Japanese, funerals have been conducted according to traditional rites based on the relationship between the bereaved families and the local temples of which they were parishioners.

In urban regions, where it is difficult to preserve such traditions, there is a disadvantage to being able to freely choose a service complying with the wishes of the deceased and his or her survivors. Because death and funerals can be explained in many ways, there can be

confusion and worry over how to conduct funerals, complicating the dealings between relatives and the temple.

## Service Economy Funerals Questioned

Without regular association with a shrine or temple, there is no way for people to know the meaning of religious ceremonies, nor is there a feeling of the need to know. Without such

regular involvement, it is only natural that more people would choose a style of funeral that does not call for a priest. Today, with the increasing number of people who have had no involvement with a religious institution, this trend is usually first apparent in wedding ceremonies. No priests are summoned, and no go-betweens are present. The ceremony is often conducted with just close friends as witnesses, in addition to the family.

On the other hand, there are some people who would like to call a priest to preside over a funeral, but they do not know where to ask. I have heard some say they have no idea how to get a Buddhist posthumous name or remunerate priests who preside over a funeral.

*A member of a cooperative association for the welfare of the elderly in Fukuoka Prefecture delivers a box lunch in April 2000 to a woman living alone. During such visits, people from the association always chat with the recipients and inquire after their health.*

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In response to these needs of the people of today, in May 2010 the major national retail corporation Aeon Company began sales of funeral services at uniform prices throughout Japan. Aeon has imposed its own quality standards on funeral services and offers the convenience of charging the funeral costs to a credit card. All costs necessary for funeral services are itemized transparently by category, such as fees to funeral directors for setting up and decorating an altar, the cost of hospitality for the attendees, and religious expenses paid to Buddhist priests for such things as chanting Buddhist sutras or giving a Buddhist posthumous name. These fees are quoted at what are described as “assured national uniform prices,” and funerals are sold the same as any other products handled by Aeon’s giant shopping centers.

Reacting to this, the Japan Buddhist Federation has questioned the pricing for “services” of such things as offerings, sutra chanting, and bestowing a Buddhist posthumous name. Donations, which are the first of the Six Perfections practiced by a bodhisattva, are particularly important. The compassionate donation of money is the same as other kinds of donations in the proper religious sense. It is not possible to put a price on such services, as if they were commercial transactions, treated mechanically with “national uniform prices.”

Aeon’s pricing of funerals is perhaps appropriate for the larger cities, but in reality it is high for rural areas. It may surprise some people that urban funerals

*In a final farewell to the departed, family members pour sake and tea into the sea from a ship’s deck after scattering ashes in the waters off Miura Peninsula, Kanagawa Prefecture, in 2009.*

are so expensive. In the same way that hourly wages for part-time work differ between rural areas and cities, the cost of a temple funeral varies according to the economic environment. In addition, one must also take into account the existing relationships between the temples and their parishioners. The economic foundation of most temples in Japan is donations from parishioners. The amounts of donations to a temple will vary, even for identical funeral services bestowing the same level of a Buddhist posthumous name. The amounts depend on such things as the existing relationship

with the parishioner as well as the background and characteristics of the particular region.

Against this backdrop, in the end Aeon agreed to refrain from displaying in brochures and on the Internet the amounts of donations to temples. Aeon consented to mention them instead only in telephone consultations, courteously taking into account its clients’ situations.

As far as we priests are concerned, what Aeon is offering is an opportunity for the temples to rethink how they have gone about things until now. As secularization and individualism are advancing, we must certainly reflect on the fact that the Buddhist clergy have not taken a proactive stance with respect to the weakened contact that their neighboring residents have had with religion.

## Role of Temples in Funeral Changes

We can say that the fundamental function of the Buddhist funeral service today is the ceremonial posthumous ordination of the deceased into the Buddhist priesthood. This is a very important rite that allows the deceased to continue his or her religious practice and attain enlightenment even after the person has departed this world. Also, in the Pure Land sect of Buddhism, the funeral is the rite that guarantees (or acknowledges) passage into the Pure Land. That is because so few people enter the priesthood during their lifetime. In most situations it is the deceased

Photo: The Yomiuri Shimbun

omitted, and a priest comes directly to the crematorium to chant sutras. Even this is not done at a direct funeral, when people gather only at the crematorium, and only cremation takes place.

There are many reasons for choosing any one way of sending off the deceased. For example, there are cases of parents dying in a nursing home without being visited by their children in their last years. The deceased's economic circumstances and past relationship with the family would determine the type of funeral.

## Lessons Learned from March Disaster

Photo: Kyodo News

The great earthquake centered in northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011, and the tsunami that followed left more than twenty thousand people dead or unaccounted for. I participated in the Japan Buddhist Federation's relief efforts after the earthquake, and what struck me most about that experience was the strong and close relationship that remained between the people and the temples in the disaster area. Family memorial tablets were the first things that many people searched for after

their furniture and household goods were swept away in the tsunami. This was due to the regular close connections between these people and their local temples, and to the depth of faith within their hearts.

After the disaster, a number of priests from Tokyo and other prefectures rushed to the stricken area with the idea of at least offering the chanting of sutras for those who had lost their lives there. When the priests arrived, however, they found that the temples there were all helping each other, regardless of sect, and in turn the local population and the temples were also helping each other. This cooperation resulted in the sutras' already being chanted at memorial services. The people in the disaster area have long had daily, very close contact with their temples. Rather than having sutras chanted by clergy they didn't know, they asked that the memorial services be performed by clergy they knew from the local area. Apparently they did not want just anyone sending off their dead, but rather it was important to them that the priests be those whom they already knew and saw often, priests who could acknowledge and share their suffering, saying

*In early April in Iwate Prefecture, a Buddhist monk walks amid the debris left by the tsunami and prays for its victims.*

who are ordained, and the funeral rite of today provides the necessary ceremony for this.

On the other hand, more funerals have become considered farewell gatherings. Through the rites of funerals and farewell ceremonies for which a priest is invited from the temple to chant a sutra, the bereaved extended family can mark the departure of the deceased. But at many funerals the family is so worried about neglecting other mourners not belonging to the family, who come to offer incense, that the family neglects to take proper leave of the deceased. Or if the deceased withdrew from society long before death, giving up ordinary personal relationships, the trend is for the bereaved to wish only to bid farewell to the deceased, and thus they choose a funeral that involves just one family or an individual. The increase in private funerals reflects social change, as people lose connection with their relatives and local communities.

Furthermore, there are cases where the wake and funeral ceremony are

*Children watch as Buddhist priests pray in April at Sensoji temple in Tokyo during a memorial service for victims of the earthquake and tsunami that hit northeastern Japan on March 11.*

Photo: AP/AFLO



*This Buddhist temple in Kesennuma City, Miyagi Prefecture, became a shelter for earthquake and tsunami victims soon after the disaster. Photographed on March 25, 2011.*

things like “I know, I know, it’s a terrible thing!” in the local dialect.

Realizing this, the Japan Buddhist Federation devoted its efforts to providing logistical support to the temples and clergy of the disaster area. It can certainly be said that the functions that the temples performed under such critical conditions were very important. Temples everywhere will certainly need to have a close, long-term connection with the local populace from now on.

While the great disaster in March left more than twenty thousand people dead or unaccounted for, many more lost their homes. Most of us today share the feelings of sorrow, distress, and difficulty experienced by the people in the stricken area. But to those of us who are not from the disaster area, death is an unusual event. As we go back to our regular lives, we start to forget those feelings. When that happens we may feel

somehow dissatisfied with our ordinary lives and feel self-centered. Buddhism teaches that all our lives are subject to the processes of birth, aging, sickness, and death. Most of us live long enough to experience old age and sickness. Death is not only in the last stage of life, however. It starts when we become chronically ill. A fatal disease strikes, and we have to withdraw from society. Our social death starts at that point.

To think about how to face death is also to think about how to live life. One doesn’t suddenly come to grips with the problem of death; we must prepare for it by routinely facing its inevitability.

If before your death you have routinely discussed with your family what sort of funeral you want and where you want to be buried, then the ones who are left behind are not thrown into confusion just before your death. As to the question of the kind of offering to the

temple, you should either visit the temple to discuss it while you are still in good health or consult someone from your area. When you decide on the arrangements you want, you can inform your relatives.

The role that Buddhism can have, even in the advancing “unconnected society,” is to encourage families to come to the temples regularly. The priests can reach out and give counsel in times of difficulty. It is important for the temples to be deeply involved in their local communities and to build a relationship of mutual trust with the local populace.

The priests should take part in the process of dying as much as possible, as well as in its aftermath, and share the sorrows and tears of bereaved family members. I hope that every priest will become the only kind of person bereaved families will want to preside at funerals. □

# Truly Feeling Connected to Eternal Life

by Shinmon Aoki

*What one experiences at the scene of a death is a deep recognition of perpetuity and eternity.*

For a long time I worked at a Japanese funeral home, washing and preparing the bodies of the deceased to be placed in their coffins. The washing and preparing involves wiping the bodies of the deceased with alcohol, dressing them in Buddhist shrouds, arranging their hair and applying makeup to the faces, joining the hands together so that they are holding prayer beads—everything leading up to placement of the body in the coffin.

In the course of coming into contact with some three thousand deceased bodies, I developed something like my

own personal philosophy, which is what I would like to discuss here.

Most people fear death and try to avoid it. The ancient Roman philosopher Seneca said the reason people feared death was that the sight of a decomposing corpse terrified them. That is absolutely true.

The fact is, however, that the faces of people who have just died of natural causes, whose bodies are still warm, all bear pleasant expressions. If you view the serene expression on the face of someone who has just died, you will have a quite

different attitude about death than if you have not.

One cannot know the true aspect of death until one witnesses the exact moment when a death occurs. What I am trying to say is that a person who has been present at the time of death will later act completely differently from someone who has not.

What one experiences at the scene of a death is a deep recognition of perpetuity and eternity that is like the passing of the relay baton of life from one person to another.

Unfortunately, though, as opportunities to be present at a death become fewer and fewer, we develop an attachment only to our own lives, the finite lives that last only from the time we are born until we die.

*Shinmon Aoki was born in Toyama Prefecture in 1937. After leaving Waseda University in Tokyo, he managed a restaurant in his native prefecture while aiming at a literary career. The restaurant failed, and he went to work at a funeral home. His bestselling book, Coffinman: The Journal of a Buddhist Mortician, was set in such a funeral home. A Japanese film loosely based on the book, titled Departures in English, won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film of 2008.*

## Without Exception Everything Shines

When I was starting this line of work, I was treated like a pariah because I was constantly involved with the dead. I had a low opinion of myself, as well. I thought of quitting many times out of consideration for my wife and children.

Each time I would get ready to write a letter of resignation, however, something strange and unexpected would happen to keep me from quitting my job. One such incident was the approaching death of an uncle.

This uncle had cut off all ties with me because of my line of work. Frankly, I also felt ashamed of having become a lowly “coffinman” and disappointing people like my uncle. Then one day his wife notified me that my uncle would probably pass away that evening from his terminal cancer, and so I reluctantly headed to the hospital where he was a patient.

When I entered his room, however, the uncle who had coldly said, “Don’t bother contacting that one,” extended a shaky hand as soon as he saw me, and with tears streaming down his face offered his thanks. He had such a tranquil look on his face that at that moment tears welled up in my eyes, too, and without thinking I fell to my knees. In one instant all the ill will I had felt toward my uncle blew away. He died peacefully not long after I had returned home.

Some time later, a friend gave me a volume of the collected writings of the late Dr. Kazukiyo Imura, published

posthumously. I was deeply struck by the description in the book of what Dr. Imura felt when he learned that his terminal cancer had metastasized throughout his body.

Dr. Imura had resolved to keep walking as long as he could, even if the cancer spread, and on that particular day he saw a strange sight. He wrote, “Customers heading to a supermarket to shop appeared to be shining, little children running about appeared to be shining. Dogs, the drooping heads of stalks of rice, weeds, even tiny pebbles, all appeared to be shining. When I returned home, my wife appeared to be shining, to such an extent that I wanted to put my hands together in reverence.”

I thought that Dr. Imura saw what he viewed either because his life and his death were coming closer to each other or because it was the point at which he accepted the fact of death 100 percent. My uncle, on the brink of drawing his last breath, probably also saw everything shine. This is the radiance of the world that we who cannot accept the inevitability of death do not see, the world where life and death are two sides of the same coin.

It dawned on me that the work of washing the bodies of the deceased and placing them in their coffins was actually helping them journey to a world in which everything shines without exception. I realized that this was the reason I do my wholehearted best to make the deceased beautiful. That is one of the starting points.

## A Gentle, Harmonious Atmosphere

The entire truth is revealed only at the place and time of a death. If one of your parents is at death’s door, it is wrong to think that it is enough for you just to attend the funeral. By the time the funeral is held, it is too late; the face of the deceased will have become a death mask.

Those of us who have worked a long time in the funeral business can tell what the family situation is like in a home the moment we enter it. If we can sense that if a family shares a gentle, harmonious relationship even in their grief, it is because they all were able to gather around the deceased before death occurred.

I would like to close with a poem I wrote after visiting my uncle’s deathbed.

All people must die,  
Death is a passing of the baton in  
life’s relay race.

The people who have faced death  
and are passing on say,

“Thank you.”

The people left behind reply,

“Thank you.”

And the baton passes like that.

Those who avert their eyes from  
death may not see it,

But there is a baton pass that takes  
place

Eye to eye

At the moment of death. □



# Funerals and Japanese Buddhism: Between Doctrine and Popular Custom

by Kokan Sasaki

***Buddhist doctrine and popular custom, which in logical terms should be considered contradictory . . . , have in fact been skillfully joined together to form the composite religious form that we call funerary Buddhism.***

Many Japanese, if asked the question “What is Buddhism?” may very well wonder why you bother to ask, since Japan, after all, is a Buddhist country. But if we go one step further and inquire of them what Buddhism is as far as they are concerned, then what will they say? How many people, even those with quite a deep knowledge of Buddhist doctrine and history, will be able to answer? Or will they be completely at a loss for an answer? If they say in reply to the first question that, according to textbooks, Buddhism is the teachings of the Buddha Shakyamuni and that its purpose is to gain enlightenment, then the second question will probably leave them nonplussed. Even a Buddhologist does not find it an easy task to answer the question of what exactly Buddhism is. In his *Bukkyō nyūmon* (An introduction to Buddhism), Mitsuyoshi Saigusa writes, “There is no doctrinal dogma in Buddhism, and the idea of suppressing heresy is very weak. Conversely, Buddhist doctrine itself—what Buddhism should be—is open to interpretation, so it is difficult to define Buddhism in terms of a single meaning; in fact, it is close to impossible,” and he quotes the expression “the eighty-four thousand teachings” to describe its historical development.<sup>1</sup>

In Japan, we often hear people say, “My family’s sect is such-and-such.” As this implies, traditional Japanese Buddhism is sectarian. Before World War II, the government legally recognized only thirteen sects and fifty-six lineages, but with the enactment of the Religious Corporations Law in 1951, which required religious organizations to register under the supervision of the Agency of Cultural Affairs, the situation became more complex as new religions proliferated and groups also broke off from established religious institutions.

The word *sect* originally refers to the fundamental doctrines and practices of a particular religious group, but most Japanese use it merely in terms of an affiliation. So that to say you have changed your sect does not mean you have changed your ideas about a particular doctrine or practice but that you have moved your family registration to a temple of a different sect.

How is this possible? At the very least, as it stands now, people’s associations with a sect, which in effect means having an affiliation with a temple, are in almost all cases concerned with mortuary rites for immediate family members or other relatives, and the choice of temple is in no way consciously connected

with the doctrine taught by that particular sect.

Understandably, people do not choose their sect (temple) as they like. In most cases the choice is made because forebears or someone connected with the person has been a parishioner (*danka*) of the particular temple. The interest is always in the temple, not the sect. This tendency reveals the deep influence of the Edo-period (1603–1867) temple-affiliation system (*danka seido*).

Why is it that people rely on temples to hold services for the repose of the spirits of the dead? Simply put, people share a common feeling and understanding that temples and their priests derive power from the Buddha and his teachings and that priests’ practices can calm the newly deceased and the spirits of the dead.

Japanese Buddhism has been called funerary Buddhism. The causes and background of this unique religious configuration and culture are truly complex and cannot be explained easily. This is probably why people do not find it easy to answer the question “What does Buddhism mean to you?”

Even today, participants in funeral processions often carry four decorative banners inscribed with the Verse of Impermanence from the Nirvana Sutra: “The Buddha—All that exists is impermanent,” “The Law—All that arises must perish,” “The Community—When there is no more clinging to birth and death,” “The Treasure—This is the tranquillity of nirvana.” This verse, known also as the Snow Mountains Verse, is

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*This funeral procession took place in Shimozuma, Ibaraki Prefecture, in September 1972.*

an excellent demonstration of the core of Buddhist doctrine. This verse means that Shakyamuni Buddha was enlightened to the law that this world is impermanent, that everything is subject to birth and death, and by gaining liberation from this law by denying the reality of the self, he attained a state of supreme tranquillity. Raising banners bearing these words during a funeral service clearly conveys that the funeral is a ritual enabling the deceased to enter a realm of tranquillity and peace, as did the Buddha. The Buddhist priest, who conducts the ritual, is an indispensable figure at the funeral service because people have accepted the idea that he possesses a power derived from Buddhism (*hōriki*) to lead the dead closer to the realm of the Buddha.

But if Buddhism is a teaching showing people how to attain a state of supreme tranquillity, should it not surely focus on the living rather than the dead, since it is the living who are suffering in the present and need to be led to the realm of the Buddha? Criticism of funerary Buddhism has grown because there are many today who think in this way, and I venture to say, such critics belong to a large extent to the intelligentsia. Thus I predict that in a country like Japan, where higher education is expanding all the time, such criticism will only grow.

However, if we ask whether a change can occur and many Japanese will break away from funerary Buddhism and turn in the direction of doctrine, in other words, toward doctrinal Buddhism, the

answer will never be a simple yes. Why is this? As I have mentioned already, requesting Buddhist temples and priests to conduct funerals has nothing at all to do with a personal belief in the teachings of the particular sect to which the temple and priests belong. But by having the temple and its priests conduct mortuary rites, people are expressing a deep-rooted readiness to embrace the idea that if the spirit of the deceased is pacified, it will become an ancestor and protect the family or clan.

Through the funeral, the priest conducts the dead person from the "castle of the three realms," that is, this world of illusion, to the unobstructed emptiness of the world of enlightenment. Ordinary people, on the other hand, hope that the spirit of the deceased will live on

and protect them, as a family ancestor, symbolized by the mortuary tablet and the grave. Thus the priest conducts the funeral on the basis of doctrine, while the mourners relate to it to the backdrop of what I call popular custom (*min-zoku*). This term most commonly refers to traditional patterns of belief and manners associated with particular regions or societies, and in many instances it is employed to describe customary practices and mores that contrast with the doctrines of foreign religions, including Buddhism.

For example, from the point of view of Buddhist doctrine, the idea that the spirit of a dead person can bring down curses on people and harm them is immediately rejected as impossible. On the other hand, the understanding arising out of popular custom regards it as very possible that the spirit of the deceased, actually dwelling in the grave and remaining attached to this world, will bring down curses if it is not venerated properly. Buddhist doctrine and popular custom, which in logical terms should be considered contradictory and in opposition to each other, have in fact been skillfully joined together to form the composite religious form that we call funerary Buddhism.

The funeral combines the “buddha” of Buddhism and the “spirit” of popular beliefs and practices. For example, the significance of memorial services is that “such-and-such a person (known through his or her Buddhist posthumous name or as part of the composite ancestral spirit of the family) dwells peacefully in the form of the new mortuary tablet or the gravestone and, receiving veneration, becomes a buddha and protects his or her descendants.”<sup>2</sup> This means that the ancestral spirits of a particular family are called upon to lodge peacefully in bodies such as mortuary tablets and graves and become buddha bodies through the memorialization received from their descendants, whom they then protect. The person who so calls upon

them is of course the Buddhist priest, who stands between doctrine and custom and mediates between the two.

The great scholar of Japanese Buddhist history Taijō Tamamuro wrote, “The common people looked for three things in [Japanese] Buddhism: funerals, the curing of illness, and the bringing of good luck. Seen from an historical perspective, first came the curing of illness, then the bringing of good luck, and finally, from around the fifteenth century, funerals. Once Buddhism began dealing with mortuary rites, it became successful in establishing a monopoly on popular belief.”<sup>3</sup>

This can mean that for the majority of Japanese, belief in Buddhism has formed through funerals and even that mortuary rites themselves are what make up their belief in Buddhism. But however we look at them, it is a fact that rites for the dead have been an important factor in the popularization and indigenization of Buddhism in Japan. According to Professor Tamamuro, funerals were what people looked for in Buddhism.

In recent times there has been a noticeable increase in interest among the various Buddhist organizations (sects) over the question of funerals. It has been taken up enthusiastically by many research bodies within those organizations as well as by lay scholars. It is a complicated issue that does not permit a simple summary but, if I dare to decide on its most important elements, I would suggest the following. First, there has been a decline in people’s awareness of their ancestors because of the breakup of the traditional household, the *ie*, within which the ancestral spirits were venerated, as a result of rapid changes in Japanese social structure, and people’s awareness of funerals has weakened. Second, a significant number of young priests who have studied modern Buddhology appear to be troubled with questions about their role as mediators between doctrine and popular custom.<sup>4</sup> Whatever the views, it is

an issue that is typical of contemporary Buddhism.

A solution to the question may be approached by interrelating the above two points. I feel it is difficult to do so if we think only in terms of alternatives, like doctrine or popular custom. What religious history has shown us is that the more widely held a doctrine is, the more it has been maintained in various forms through a complicated relationship with popular custom. Thus the starting point for resolving this question has to be a deep insight into the importance of the interstices between the two.

I asked above why temple parishioners and people in general request Buddhist priests to conduct mortuary rites and suggested that it was because priests are seen as having a particular power and nature as practitioners to calm the deceased and the spirits of the dead and make them secure. Let us consider this point a little more.

Today there is a tendency among so-called intellectual priests to be less than affirmative in talking about the *power* of a priest. Why is this? Though this question has deep implications and it is dangerous to make a simple generalization, I would venture to offer three possible answers.

First, priests who study modern Buddhology and have learned its way of thinking tend to understand Buddhism as having originally been an extremely intellectual and rational religion. Since from this point of view religious power seems to be a reflection and a product of irrational and unscientific thought, they tend to try to stay aloof from such ambiguous and mystical ideas.

Second, priests appear to fear that by associating Buddhist doctrine with power, they are reducing the highly developed system of Buddhist thought to an inferior magic, a realm of magical power. We can perhaps see here the influence of the nineteenth-century evolutionary approach to the study



of religion, where religion is a higher form in evolutionary terms, being rational and universal, in contrast to magic or magical power, an irrational lower form.

Third, there are a large number of religious groups that are popularly called “spiritualist new religions,” which attract people by advocating the efficacy of spiritual power. Their activities are often labeled as the fraudulent sale of unsubstantiated supernatural benefits, and they are severely censured by much of society. The reluctance of priests belonging to Buddhist organizations to bring forward the idea of Buddhist power and its workings is often based on a conviction that Buddhism should not be seen in the same light as these spiritualist religions. These three points may be considered to be factors in, and the background of, the hesitation of priests to claim religious power.

None are more concerned than intellectual priests with systematically teaching an intellectual Buddhist view of the world and humankind and working to propagate this view as the ultimate way to deal with the problem of the impermanency of human life. Holding meetings to study the Buddhist scriptures and conducting Zen meditation sessions are in line with this way of thinking. Such activities are perfectly correct and are among a priest's responsibilities, since the Buddhist sutras and their commentaries, as well as sectarian teachings, provide plentiful courses of action to deal with the human problem according to intellectual ways of thinking. But nevertheless, if we try to undertake religious activities based on doctrine alone, various problems unexpectedly arise.

Priests who speak systematically about dependent origination and impermanence may be highly thought of by the intellectuals among their parishioners and the population, but in fact, an overwhelming number of people, while they accept intellect in the modern sense of the word, seek something over and

above it in a priest. They will not, and cannot, be satisfied simply with a logical explanation about human life and a particular way of living that Buddhism teaches.

What is it that cannot be satisfied by religious intellect and logic alone? Perhaps what ordinary people have always sought in religious specialists from the time religion began is, to put it plainly, the power that ordinary people believe accrues to the specialists, and the specialists' ability to wield it. It is this power that differentiates priests from laypeople, and it is their special distinguishing feature. Many laypeople know more about Buddhism than priests, can discuss it systematically, and have written a great many books about it. But however respected they are as intellectuals, they will never be revered in the same way as priests. Priests are revered because, besides their specialist knowledge, they are believed to possess spiritual powers that transcend reason. The powers that Buddhist priests have as religious practitioners is *sacred* power. It is of a different dimension from secular power (political, economic), both in character and in function. It is this, as it is commonly understood, I believe, that sustains priests and ensures the survival of Buddhism. It is because of this power that people gladly accept the preaching and rituals that priests offer and entrust to them the fate of the deceased.

Belief in and reverence for religious power can be traced back to the very beginnings of religious culture, long before Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam came into being. This power has flowed throughout the length of human history, down to the popular religions of modern times, and forms their core. The power that people seek from Buddhist priests in fact predates Buddhism, having been born of and nurtured by primitive (original) religion. How then is this religious power found in Buddhism, called variously the “power

of the Dharma,” “ascetic power,” the “power of the Buddha,” and the “divine authority and power,” attained?

The Japanese word *sōshoku*, or *sōshoku-sha*, meaning a member of the priesthood, refers to the duties of the Buddhist priest—conducting rituals such as memorial services, precepts ceremonies, and consecrations and managing temples. *Sōshoku* can also mean the head priest of a temple. By contrast, the word *seishoku-sha*, meaning a member of a sacred profession, has a far broader meaning, encompassing all those engaged in holy work, like Buddhist priests, Shinto priests, and Christian ministers. Thus *sōshoku* and other terms denoting those working in a religious profession are subordinate in concept to *seishoku*. The Chinese character for *sei*, meaning sacred or holy, is used to refer to Shakyamuni Buddha as well as to the priesthood as a whole. What does it imply? European scholars, particularly the French sociologist Émile Durkheim and his followers, have contributed greatly to our understanding of the meaning of the sacred. Making a distinction between the sacred and the profane, Durkheim wrote in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) that sacred things are “things set apart and forbidden.”<sup>5</sup> *Sacred* therefore refers to conditions and phenomena that are separated from the ordinary and the everyday and that deny and forbid them. Religious practitioners who withdraw from ordinary life and devote themselves to their training are regarded as sanctified, buildings and spaces that are nonordinary are seen as sacred, and mountains to which access is forbidden are considered holy. Some scholars criticize this explanation of the sacred as being based on Christianity, but when we consider that Buddhism, too, uses the same kind of duality between ordinary and nonordinary,<sup>6</sup> the concept of sacred and profane is extremely helpful.

Buddhist priests are thought of as being endowed with the sacred because they spare no effort in assiduously following the way set forth by Shakyamuni, the embodiment of the holy, both physically and mentally, going beyond the ordinary and the everyday. Just as Shakyamuni's holiness was perceived by people as power, Buddhist priests who set out to emulate him are also regarded as possessing sacred power. In Southern Buddhism, monks who withdraw from the world to forest hermitages are revered by people for their powers. The more that people withdraw from the everyday world, the more other people swarm around them, drawn by their sacredness (power) and yearning after it. Forests and other secluded places are called *aranya* in Sanskrit, which means a place suited for practicing the Buddha Way. It is of great interest that in its Chinese translation it means a far, detached place, since this is in line with Durkheim's concept of the sacred. There are many monks today in Sri Lanka dwelling in *aranya*; they are *vanavāsins* (forest monks) who live a life of meditation following in the footsteps of the Buddha. However, when rumors of the presence of a *vanavāsin* spread, lay believers from various places flock to the *aranya* to give alms, in the process invading the monk's solitary life and destroying his sacredness.<sup>7</sup>

This example well exhibits the dynamic but perilous relationship between the religious and the layperson, and between religion and society. Most Buddhist priests in modern Japan have studied Buddhology and sectarian studies at sect-affiliated high schools and universities and have trained at monasteries of their head temples or regional monasteries. For these priests, these monasteries, which they call "mountains" (*oyama*), are the equivalent of the *aranya*; they are the "far, detached places" of Japan. The Zen monastery that is a "mountain" is a space set apart from this *sahā*-world, where the traditions of

*As part of their Zen training, young monks wearing samue (work clothing) clean a building at Eihei-ji, one of the two main temples of the Soto sect of Japanese Zen Buddhism, in Fukui Prefecture.*

Zen Buddhism have been passed down in an unbroken line. After years of a life of asceticism and mindfulness based on the Buddha Dharma, it is highly probable that Zen priests find themselves greatly changed in character. After practicing for a number of years in this way, these priests gain a certain presence and acquire the professionalism of Zen practitioners. This gives them a personality, a feeling, and a way of behavior different from those of ordinary people—in other words, sacredness and power. In an essay about the religious life in a training temple, Dōken Shibata writes, "A person who enters the monastery is changed in a religious way. The monastery is believed to be a place of mysterious function, where one becomes a buddha and a patriarch; in other words, it is the training hall of all the buddhas. Believers supported them, as places of religious merit and objects of faith."<sup>8</sup> The mountain is the source of religious worth, that is, sacredness, which is power.

Today, places set apart like *aranya* draw the attention and interest of laypeople for the very reason that they support a life very different from that of the secular, everyday world. As more and more people want to see the "mountain," the fame and fortune of such temples will increase, but this also has its dangers. For, as the Sri Lankan case shows, the profane has the potential to destroy the sacred. The perilous connection between the sacred and the profane is in fact an apt subject for research into Buddhist culture at the present time. □

## Notes

1. Mitsuyoshi Saigusa, *Bukkyō nyūmon* [An introduction to Buddhism] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1990).
2. Sōtōshū Tōkyōto Shūmusho, ed., *Shasui, tengen, hakken sahō* [The rites of purification, invocation, and leave-taking of spirits] (Osaka: Seizansha, 1993).
3. Taijō Tamamuro, *Introduction to Sōshiki bukkyō* [Funerary Buddhism] (Tokyo: Daihōrinkaku, 1963).
4. Yuishin Itō and Masao Fujii, eds., *Sōsai bukkyō: Sono rekishi to gendai-teki kadai* [Funerary Buddhism: Its history and present-day problems] (Tokyo: Nonburusha, 1997).
5. Émile Durkheim, *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, 1991 (1912). Carol Cosman, trans., *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 46.
6. Buddhism divides the supramundane world (*shusseken*) from the mundane (*seken*) and the priest (*shukke*) from the laity (*zaiko*).
7. Gananath Obeyesekere, "Theodicy, Salvation, and Rebirth in a Sociology of Buddhism," in *Dialectic in Practical Religion*, ed. Edmund Leach, 7–40; Cambridge Occasional Papers in Social Anthropology, no. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).
8. Dōken Shibata, "Zenshū shinkō no shisō kōzō—Dōgen no shūkyō o chūshin ni" [The intellectual structure of Zen belief, centering on Dōgen's religion], in *Shūkyōgaku ronshū* [Essays in religious studies], vol. 3 (Tokyo: Komazawa University Religious Studies Research Group, 1969).

This essay originally appeared in Japanese in a book by the author titled *Butsuriki: Seikatsu bukkyō no dainamizumu* [Buddha power: The dynamism of living Buddhism] (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 2004).

# The Lotus Sutra and Confucianism: A Report on the Fifteenth International Lotus Sutra Seminar

by Joseph M. Logan

*Participants in the fifteenth International Lotus Sutra Seminar and staff members of Rissho Kosei-kai pose during a courtesy call on March 4 at Engakuji, a Buddhist temple of the Rinzai sect of Japanese Zen Buddhism in Kamakura, Kanagawa Prefecture.*

Confucius said: “I dare not claim to be a sage or a *ren* (virtue) man. But I strive for these without being disappointed, and I teach without becoming weary. This is what can be said of me.”<sup>1</sup>

The “philosophical” sayings that my friends and I used to attribute to Confucius when I was a young boy were from an altogether different philosophical school: “Confucius says: ‘Insult the crocodiles after you cross the river.’” Or “Confucius says: ‘War does not determine who is right; war determines who is left.’” We only knew of Confucius as a wiseguy—we knew nothing of the “ism” suffixed to his name that indicated the moral and philosophical system of thought originated by a wise man.

With the passage of time I came to know what the term *Confucianism* represented, but that was about as far as it went. The opportunity to fill that empty

corner in my closet of understanding arose when I was invited to report on the fifteenth International Lotus Sutra Seminar, held this year from February 28 to March 6 at the Shonan Village International Center in Miura, Japan. Twelve scholars specializing in various aspects of Chinese, Asian, or religious and ethical studies were invited to gather and discuss the topic, “The Lotus Sutra and Confucianism.”

The Lotus Sutra seminar series was initiated by Rissho Kosei-kai as a mechanism to foster wider recognition of the Lotus Sutra in the academic realm. Each seminar theme invites participants to establish a connection between the Lotus Sutra and some other discipline within the religious or philosophical arenas. Participants receive copies of all the papers written for each seminar prior to its occurrence. At the working sessions each author gives only a brief

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summary of his or her presentation, and a designated respondent comments on the paper; thus the bulk of each session is devoted to open discussion.

Inasmuch as having familiarity with the Lotus Sutra is not a hard-and-fast rule, it is often the case (as it was for the fifteenth seminar) that some of the invited scholars are not highly conversant with it, and they are thus challenged to find some aspect of their particular field that may relate to it while also fitting under the umbrella of the seminar’s theme. Yet even though such creative efforts may barely find cover under the umbrella, all perspectives enlarge the pool of shared knowledge and provide additional flavor to the discussions.

## A Confucian Primer<sup>2</sup>

Confucius (Jpn., Koshi) is the name by which the Chinese sage Kongzi (551–479 BCE) is known in the West. People usually referred to him as Kongfuzi (Master K’ung). Jesuit missionaries, upon hearing the name, Latinized it as “Confucius.” He was a cultural conservative, respectful of what preceded him, often refusing to put forth a teaching as his own—saying



*Twelve scholars of Chinese, Asian, religious, or ethics studies are gathered to discuss "The Lotus Sutra and Confucianism" at the Shonan Village International Center in Miura City, Kanagawa Prefecture.*

instead that he was just regurgitating what the sages of the past had taught: "I am a transmitter, rather than an original thinker. I trust and enjoy the teachings of the ancients."<sup>3</sup> Confucius is credited with and traditionally respected as being the first educator in China to make knowledge available to common people: "From the one who brought a bundle of dried meat (the poorest person) upwards, I have never denied a person my instruction."<sup>4</sup> His method of teaching was through conversations rather than through a concrete articulation of specific principles. If someone asked, for example, "What is *ren*?" in answer he might only have said, "to love others." If, on another occasion, a student asked "What is *ren*?" he might have given a totally different example or answer. Because he taught by dialogue, what he said could thus be based on immediate circumstances—a parallel to the way the Buddha taught.

In Confucianism, the way to the ultimate truth is achieved through learning a kind of moral self-cultivation that seeks moral truth and principles through "investigating things." Confucius taught *ren*, which is the expression for the ideal of a human being. For Confucius it was a combination of character and action. The word escapes hard definition but is "commonly translated as 'benevolence,' 'goodness,' or 'humanity,' occasionally

as 'humanheartedness,' and less occasionally by the clumsy and sexist 'manhood-at-its-best.'"<sup>5</sup> He taught his disciples how to practice *ren*, rather than about what it was. From his perspective, *ren* was something that could and should be attained, and whether or not one attained it did not depend on reasons from outside oneself but reasons from inside oneself. His teachings were formalized in the *Lunyu* (The Analects). Analects are collections of sayings or teachings, and the *Lunyu* is the collection of his conversations and dialogues with followers that was put together by his disciples.

In addition to *ren*, Confucius also emphasized ritual, ceremony, and propriety in behavior—if one wanted to attain *ren*, one had to attain it in the correct way. Because Confucius taught about this world, his teachings are sometimes described as secular, and whether or not Confucianism is a religion is a subject of debate. If students asked about gods or ghosts, he replied that he didn't talk about such things because if one doesn't yet understand one's own life, how can one understand an afterlife?

Two major figures in the evolution of Confucianism were Mengzi (Mencius; Jpn., Mōshi) and Zhu Xi (Jpn., Shūshi). Although Mengzi (371–289 BCE) never studied directly under Confucius, he was a dedicated disciple

of Confucius. Confucius never talked about why one has to be moral, humane, and benevolent. It fell to Mengzi to try to answer that question. Mengzi developed Confucianism along a line that emphasized the internal foundation for virtue—that virtue is inherent but that one must look at the mind and search within oneself to find that basis or foundation and cultivate it. His argument for inherent virtue was that all human beings have natural feelings that arise in response to some situation, and those feelings prove that a dimension of good nature exists within them. If, for example, one sees that a child is about to fall into a well, the immediate feeling that arises is that one must endeavor to save the child. Even if, for whatever reason, one cannot rescue the child, this initial feeling of commiseration proves human beings actually have that good nature within them—the only problem is that it has somehow become obstructed. Thus, to claim one's personal virtue, one needs to clear the obstructions away, and his method of self-cultivation was to intensively search within until the foundation of good nature was revealed.

Confucianism flourished in the classical period (sixth to third centuries BCE) and during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). However, in the disunity following the Han dynasty, Confucianism lost its dynamism. Buddhism was well established in China by the first century CE, and Daoism had blossomed into a full-fledged religion by the late second century. Neo-Confucianism, a revival of Confucian ideals, emerged around 900 CE as a reaction to these developments and was growing strongly by the eleventh century. Zhu Xi (1130–1200) systematized the Neo-Confucian teachings with an emphasis on *li* (principle, order) and intellectual cultivation instead of simply moral cultivation (although both were necessary). His system became the standard for Confucian study and interpretation and remained so for hundreds of years.

## The Lotus Sutra and Confucianism

The working sessions of the seminar were spread over three days, March 1 through 3, with two papers presented and discussed each morning and two more each afternoon. The following are thumbnail sketches of each paper.

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### **"Two 'Confucian Revivals' and Two Cases of 'Defense of Buddhism': What the Lotus Sutra Offers"**

Miriam Levering, *University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and Rissho Kosei-kai, Tokyo*

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In her paper Miriam Levering addressed both the contemporary revival (since the 1980s) of Confucianism (New Confucianism) and the Confucian revival (Neo-Confucianism) that occurred during the Northern Sung dynasty (960–1127). In connection with the latter, she focused on the activities of Qisong, a Sung dynasty monk who mounted a defense of Buddhism against those who were criticizing it as part of the Confucian revival of that period (which shares some features in common with the current cultural national Confucian revival in the larger Chinese world), saying in their criticisms that "Buddhism seemed to usurp traditional ideals, and that to restore good government, the practice of Buddhism must be extinguished and Confucian rites and righteousness restored." In rebuttal,

Qisong argued, among other things, that Buddhism encourages good behavior and makes subjects easier to govern and is thus more productive of social harmony—that Buddhism, too, can shape the hearts and minds of people in a positive way.

Dr. Levering commented that in the modern-day Confucian revival there are no attacks on Buddhism but also noted that Buddhism is not generally recognized as a long-standing dimension of Chinese culture that can be valuable in today's society. She suggests that what the Lotus Sutra can contribute to Chinese people, culture, and society is its stress on universal buddhahood, which means that all must be given an equal opportunity for education, self-development, and respect.

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### **"Confucianism: Beyond a Philosophical Past toward a Feminist/Humanist Future"**

Vivian Nyitray, *University of California, Riverside*

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Having experienced that Confucian responses to modern inquiries always seem to come from the Confucian perspective of the pre-Han period, Vivian Nyitray seeks to bring attention to the question of whether or not the Confucian tradition is evolving or transcending time. Commenting about her paper, Dr. Nyitray noted that such issues are similarly applicable when reading from the Lotus Sutra and perhaps can be brought into a reflection on how one thinks as a Lotus Sutra follower.

In her presentation she sought both to raise the notion of "dislocating Confucianism and liberating it from

some imprisonment in the pre-Han past" and to "rescue Confucianism from the clutches of the philosophers" because of her belief in the richness and potential of the Confucian tradition. She also invited a consideration of the ways in which language, imagery, and "appropriation of texts" mutually reinforce certain habits of perspective with regard to thinking about gender, with a goal of enlarging the "company of conversation partners" for people who are engaged in the work of either "constructing or reconstructing" some feminist understanding of the Confucian tradition.

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### **"Synthesis: 'The One and the Many' in the Lotus Sutra and Zhu Xi"**

Joseph Adler, *Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio*

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This paper compares synthesizing aspects within the Lotus Sutra to Zhu Xi's synthesizing work in the development of Neo-Confucianism. The concept of One Vehicle was early Mahayana's attempt to make sense of the variety of Buddhist texts and doctrines. Skillful means, and the explanation that the *sravaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, and *bodhisattva* vehicles were the preliminary means of leading to the One Vehicle of full buddhahood, are described as a way of synthesis that is inclusive and hierarchical. Zhu Xi, the preeminent "Neo-Confucian" of the Sung Dynasty, is known as the great synthesizer of Neo-Confucianism in that he selected elements from the many Confucian theories that had come forth in the eleventh century, along with some Daoist and Buddhist elements, and wove them into a coherent system of thought and practice. It was an exclusive synthesis but nonhierarchical in that all of the various elements he selected were of equal importance in the system.

The paper points out that the Lotus Sutra and Zhu Xi are alike in that they are synthesizers, but one way (among others) that they differ is that Zhu Xi is a known historical person choosing to include some texts and to exclude others, while the Lotus Sutra is a single, anonymous text with multiple authors. But despite their differences, both reflect a fundamental theme in East Asian thought: the highest truth is not to be found in a transcendent realm beyond the everyday world but in the ordinary process of daily human life.

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## **"The Worship of Guanyin and the Building of Lineage in the Meixian Area"**

Peter Yik-Fai Tam, *Pennsylvania State University, University Park*

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In outlining his paper, Peter Tam talked about his fieldwork in Meixian, the area of the Hakka people of China. He described how the people pick up ideas, symbols, and messages that can be useful, meaningful, and sensible concepts for their lives from Confucianism and Buddhism, and more particularly from the Lotus Sutra. Without using the sutra as a holistic text, they render its images in their own context. It is commonly thought, for example, that Guanyin (Jpn., Kannon) came into the Chinese religious mentality as a personal savior. But in fieldwork it was found that the subject people subtly and creatively transformed Guanyin's role from that of a passive regaller into that of an entity

who actively predicts future events to someone and then requests that person to advise neighbors to act in a certain way so that they might avoid impending troubles. Furthermore, Guanyin evolved for them into a protector of their lineage, which became justification for them to be dominant in the local society, and which coincides with the New Confucian use of lineage to mold and protect dominant groups in local societies. Another aspect of the paper was a focus on a Buddhist funeral rite—the Incense and Flowers ritual—in which Guanyin is the primary active entity, and which the Buddhist monks in the area continuously reinvent in order to make it fit the New Confucian ritual model.

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## **"Precious Scroll on Bodhisattva Guanshiyin from Xiangshan in Jingjiang (Jiangsu, China) and Confucian Morality"**

Victor Mair, *University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (with Rostislav Berezkin, Academia Sinica, Institute of Modern History, Taipei.)*

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This paper was based on fieldwork and on a text that was transcribed from local storytelling traditions. The subject story is from the genre known as *jiangjing*, or scripture telling, and texts used in scripture telling of this type are called precious scrolls. The subject text, *Precious Scroll of Guanshiyin*, is a written version of an oral narrative performed in this tradition. Narratives such as this one primarily relate religious subjects and are performed at religious meetings by folk storytellers to mostly illiterate and semiliterate audiences. The religious perspective that is expressed is a mixture of Buddhist, Confucian, Daoist, and sectarian elements, and it is said that

the art probably originates from lecturing on Buddhist sutras.

Examining the origins and special features of this text, the paper suggests that its significance lies in the way it demonstrates the transformation of originally Buddhist narratives as they became heavily influenced by Confucian ideas in the folk religious culture of China. The paper highlights this influence on different levels, including the content, the ritual frame, and the context of the performance of the narratives and, with regard to the story examined in the paper, demonstrates the infusion of Confucian values, especially those of filial piety and loyalty, into this form of popular Buddhist literature.

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## **"Compassion in the Lotus Sutra and Benevolent Love in the Analects: A Comparative Study"**

Xinzhong Yao, *King's College, London (with Dong Qun, Southeast University, Nanjing, China)*

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In summarizing his paper, Xinzhong Yao commented that the examination of the similarities and differences between compassion in the Lotus Sutra and benevolent love (*ren*) in the Analects also served as an approach to answering the question of why the Lotus Sutra became so popular in China, taking the perspective that the sutra was perhaps attractive because of the seemingly moral virtue of its compassion. The compassion of the sutra and the benevolent love of the Analects are similar in many ways—they both involve some sense of how to treat other people, and they both employ different pathways of doing so. In the Lotus Sutra, compassion is to bring joy to people and eliminate their suffering; in the Analects, loyalty, altruism, and consideration are emphasized. A difference is that the compassion of Buddhism makes no differentiation in practice or extension; it has a spiritual openness—one sees people suffering and endeavors to save them. The *ren* of the Analects, on the other hand, is for moral character—to cultivate oneself—and loyalty, altruism, and consideration must start with, and branch out from, one's own family.

On the surface these seem like two concepts, two virtues, but in the end they also seem to be like a miniature of the workings of Buddhism and Confucianism in China—how these two traditions converge and diverge, how they sometimes embrace each other, and how they sometimes fight. These are the same dynamics that can be found in the differences and similarities between the compassion in the Lotus Sutra and Buddhism and the *ren* of benevolent love in the Analects.



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## **"A Tale of Confucius from the Lotus Terrace Temple"**

Deborah Sommer, *Gettysburg College, Pennsylvania, and Visiting Fulbright Lecturer at Vilnius University, Lithuania*

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A Buddhist cave library, discovered near Dunhuang in western China in 1900, contained thousands of manuscripts, paintings, and documents, most of which are Buddhist but some of which are related to the Confucian tradition. In this paper Deborah Sommer discusses an unusual and violent folktale, called "Questions between Confucius and Xiang Tuo," and its relationship to the Buddhist environment at Dunhuang where manuscripts of it were found. The story, which she discovered while engaged in a larger study of odd depictions of Confucius, portrays Confucius as slow-witted, lacking in insight, unfilial, and inclined to murder. He kills Xiang Tuo, the child prodigy who

continually bests him in the story both morally and intellectually. Xiang Tuo was known in the Han and early medieval period as a teacher of Confucius. In depictions of Confucius in Han-era stone inscriptions or bas-reliefs, the child is always with him; yet the story is relatively unknown by modern classical scholars, probably because of the way Confucius is portrayed.

The story unfolds in both prose and verse. In the prose, Confucius asks the child various questions, which he answers skillfully. When Confucius attempts to lead the child to non-Confucian pursuits (playing, leaving home to travel, gambling, etc.) the child answers according to ritual, filial piety, and responsibility. After each

correct answer, the master applauds the child and says that he now knows that the young can be held in awe—an allusion to the *Analects* in which the master said the same. The verse seems like a different story, as the master turns violent and eventually murders Xiang Tuo, who, when his blood is poured on a manure pile by his mother, is transformed into an army of warriors. This story is widespread in folk tradition, and even today one can find depictions of Confucius and the boy in calendars. But these portrayals are not those in which the boy is murdered—rather, they are versions used for educating children to show them just how smart they can be, even when young.

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## **"The Lotus Sutra and Modern Confucian Thought"**

Robert M. Gimello, *University of Notre Dame, Indiana*

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When looking at religions, one often searches for a common truth underlying them all, but Robert Gimello looks for encounters between religious traditions that end up being mutually respectful but do not necessarily lead to the conclusion that at some deep level, they are really the same. He asks, for example, What does the Lotus Sutra's advocacy of the need for and rescuing value of the "canny fictions" of skillful means have to do with the Confucian insistence that the world is accessible to earnest rational inquiry? What does the Confucian idea that the things of this world are solid and have moral weight have to do with the sutra's consistent claim that the world is empty? What does the sutra's vision of the world as a burning house have to do with

the Confucian vision of the universe as a "harmonious and secure familial unity"? And what does the sutra's idea that all beings are equal and have equal claim on each other's compassion have to do with the Confucian conviction that "genuine love is necessarily discriminate"?

The agent for Dr. Gimello's discussion was Mou Zongsan (1909–95), a principal twentieth-century philosopher who lived in both China and Taiwan and was the "founding 'patriarch' of the Chinese philosophical renaissance commonly known as 'The New Confucianism.'" This paper focused on what Mou found compelling in Tiantai Buddhism (a major offspring of the Lotus Sutra) and what role his thoughts on Tiantai played in

his rethinking of Confucianism. Mou wanted to create perfect Confucianism. To that end, Confucianism would have to be fully faithful to its most fundamental insights, just as Zhiyi (Jpn., Chigi, founder of Tiantai) thought that Tiantai Buddhism had to be completely faithful to the implications of the Lotus Sutra. What Mou found of value in looking at Tiantai and the Lotus Sutra was the pattern of uncompromising fidelity to the foundations of the tradition. He found that Zhiyi, in the Sung dynasty (960–1279 CE), was a model of how Buddhists achieved that intellectual fidelity, which in turn was an inspiration for his own contemporary efforts to find and maintain, without variation, the essential vision of Confucian tradition.

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## **"The Bodhisattva Way in Risshō Kōsei-kai and the Lotus Sutra"**

Gene Reeves, *Renmin University of China, Beijing, and Risshō Kōsei-kai, Tokyo*

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When discussing his paper, Gene Reeves noted that he was substituting himself for an invited scholar who could not attend because of late complications, and although his paper was not directly related to the topic, he wanted to take the opportunity to focus on the bodhisattva way as one of many approaches to "get a handle" on the Lotus Sutra. He noted the variety of uses of the term *bodhisattva* in the sutra: in the classic use reflected in a name, as in Manjushrī Bodhisattva; as a reference to monks such as Śāriputra who were assured of becoming buddhas in the future—a way of saying that a bodhisattva is someone on the way to becoming a buddha—or as a reference to anyone who demonstrates some type of acknowledgment, as is well detailed in chapter 2 of the sutra.

The bodhisattva way also has many aspects in the sutra, but for Risshō Kōsei-kai, the bodhisattva way can be looked upon as an appropriate way of action that serves to better the lives of others. There is a strong sense in which the interior of a person should be reflected in the manner in which he or she conducts him- or herself in everyday life. In the paper Dr. Reeves writes, "Is a bodhisattva a Confucian *junzi* (ideal person)? Probably not. The ideals are different in many ways. Anyone can be a bodhisattva for others, but being a *junzi* requires cultivation and presupposes a relatively high level of education, if not social status. Yet, obviously, if anyone can be a bodhisattva, then surely a *junzi* can be a bodhisattva. And, almost as obviously, with cultivation any bodhisattva can become a Confucian *junzi*. The models are different, but there is nothing to prevent both being embodied in the same person."

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## **"The Lotus Sutra and Mou Zongsan"**

Jason Cower, *California State University, Chico*

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As indicated by the title, Jason Cower's presentation offered an in-depth discussion of Mou Zongsan and what the makeup of his "relationship" to the Lotus Sutra was. In discussing his paper, Dr. Cower noted that the fundamental purpose underlying Mou's scholarship was his desire to rekindle people's interest in and respect for traditional Chinese culture—which can be summed up as Buddhism, Daoism, and, especially, Confucianism—and that he wanted to engender respect for those things among Chinese people and also among foreign people. The paper discusses figures such as Zhiyi, who influenced Mou's ways of thinking and his approach to analyzing Buddhism and how it compared with

Confucianism. Cower writes that Mou had a very "philosophical and naturalistic treatment" of the Lotus Sutra. He didn't go through and narrate the Lotus Sutra as a story; rather, he abstracted from the sutra some conclusions that accorded with Chinese philosophy as he construed it. When, in chapter 2 of the sutra, the Buddha declares, "Or those who have done obeisance to images, / Or merely pressed their palms together, / Or raised a single hand, or nodded their heads, / Will in due time see immeasurable Buddhas. / They will attain the highest path / And extensively save innumerable sentient beings,"<sup>6</sup> Mou finds the Buddhist analog to his own fundamental idea that "anyone can be a sage."

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## **"Two Versions of Desire-Based Subjectivism: A Comparative Study on the Analects and the Lotus Sutra"**

Haiming Wen, *Renmin University of China, Beijing*

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Haiming Wen turns to the realm of ethics to establish a foundation for his comparison between the Confucian Analects and the Lotus Sutra. He begins with the premise that "moral subjectivism means that desire determines moral fact, and our subjective desires determine the existence of moral facts."

Both the Lotus Sutra and Confucianism are vehicles through which one strives to access the highest wisdom, and in both, one must begin by having a personal subjective desire to attain the goal. In the Analects, the desire/motivation is directed toward one's attainment of *ren* (virtue). In the Lotus Sutra, the desire/aspiration is directed toward one's quest for buddhahood. Both, therefore, reflect a

subjectivism that is desire based.

However, within that framework of similarity, there is a subtle difference between them. Confucianism says that *ren* is a moral property of the mind, inherent within us, and not moral fact outside of one's mind. In the Analects, Confucius says that it is possible to attain *ren* as soon as one reflects on oneself. When one desires *ren*, practices *ren*, does *ren* things, then one is *ren*—one realizes oneself to be that moral property. Thus Confucianism is a desire-based moral subjectivism, while the dynamic of the mind questing to attain the highest wisdom through following the practices of the Lotus Sutra shows the sutra's version of desire-based subjectivism to be ontological.

*Lotus Sutra seminar participants pose on March 4 for a commemorative photo in front of the Great Buddha of Kamakura, a monumental outdoor bronze statue of Amida Buddha at Kotoku'in, a Buddhist temple of the Jodo sect of Japanese Buddhism, in Kamakura.*

## Postseminar Events

An unwinding period was in order after the main work of the seminar was completed, and March 4 was dedicated to a leisurely full-day tour of the Kamakura area, including the Hasedera temple, known for its wooden statue of the Eleven-headed Kannon; the Engakuji (Zen) temple; the popular Tsurugaoka Hachimangu (Shinto) shrine; and the renowned Kotoku'in temple, where the Great Buddha of Kamakura is located. Then on Saturday, March 5, the seminar group was invited to the Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma center in Ofuna, a short train ride from Kamakura, to attend the seventy-third-anniversary celebration of Rissho Kosei-kai's founding. Through the magic of computer technology, we enjoyed a live broadcast of the main ceremony that was conducted at the Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters complex in Tokyo.

Following the formal program, Rev. Etsuko Fujita, minister of the Ofuna Dharma Center, along with several other executive directors, hosted a luncheon meeting for the seminar participants. Perhaps in recognition of the span of

seventy-three years since the organization's founding, conversations turned to current-day applications of Rissho Kosei-kai practices as compared with its approach when the organization was first founded. The directors commented that society typically faced problems of poverty and internal turmoil in the late 1930s. And while the challenges societies face often change with the passage of time, they still produce internal turmoil. But for Rissho Kosei-kai, faithfulness to the basic practices to "improve ourselves as human beings, to seek resolution to our sufferings, and to share the tools of resolution with others" remains fundamental.

## (Quite a Few) Last Words

As is the norm in these seminars, the general discussions following the presentation of each paper were detailed and rich and often pointed. However, in this conference I found that the response by Vivian Nyitray to Robert Gimello's paper was unique in that, even though coming after the second presentation of the

seminar, it framed every discussion of the seminar in a context that both scholar and layperson could relate to in terms of the Lotus Sutra and Confucianism and, as such, serves as a very apt closure for this report.

"I think that Dr. Gimello's questions give us another good entrée to the work of the seminar, which will be to examine thinkers and texts wherein the connections between Confucianism and the Buddhism expressed in the Lotus Sutra are, indeed, often difficult to discern. But I suggest that the connections may be particularly hard to tease out if the starting point—and our focus—is Confucian thought. So I very much appreciated our initial discussion this morning of religious imagination.

"The way in which I responded to Dr. Gimello's paper was to try to think, as with imagination, of something other than thought. And I would like to suggest that if we focus on considering the lives of the many people for whom the starting point of their own religious imagination or religious thinking is tied to the Lotus Sutra, then, in effect, we see devotion to the Lotus Sutra as already an integral and embodied aspect of daily life that is practiced alongside any kind of thought. And then [we see that] the connections between Lotus Sutra Buddhism and Confucianism are not so far apart; that, in fact, these two traditions are already operating together every day in the lives of these people. Thus, an individual may embrace the Lotus Sutra even if he or she negotiates the terrain of somehow being Confucian.

"I think that the world from the standpoint of the Lotus Sutra is phantasmal and empty, but it must be lived in—and so we see that the traditions work together there. I think that Confucianism and Lotus Sutra Buddhism may indeed offer two disparate visions of the human place in the world, but I believe that both are engaged in discerning the means by which humans can understand that place.



So, my response is that if we are thinking about thought—about those lovely questions that Dr. Gimello posed at the beginning of his draft—it is difficult to see [the two] coming together. But they do somehow, already, in the lives of those people for whom the Lotus Sutra is not just another object of study or category of inquiry, but is [something] deeply meaningful in their own lives.

"I think Dr. Gimello is right to reject moves toward papering over differences in the name of false or ecumenical inclusivity. And I agree that there are crucial issues on which the sort of Confucian view and the view presented in the Lotus Sutra are mutually incompatible, and even mutually contradictory. But I would ask, When has incompatibility or contradiction ever stopped human beings from attempting, or even feeling compelled, to somehow bring disparate views together?

"And so the simultaneous consideration of Confucianism and the Lotus Sutra—or of fashioning a life in the reality of these dual influences—I think does allow a range of what Dr. Gimello called "consequential encounters." They are not consequential encounters just in terms of a more abstract realm of thought, but they are consequential encounters for many people for whom the Lotus Sutra is a defining spiritual focal point. They happen every day, and on every datum of daily life. What emerges, I think, is some cohesive way in which they come together [that is] not necessarily coherent. Very often people are looking for ways in which they can make things work and stick together—and which are sensible and reasonable. But if we were to apply some strict systematic analysis to them, they would fall apart.

"When we look at systems of thought, we are looking for some kind of coherence, but when we are looking at people's lives, we are looking at techniques for cohesiveness—just a kind of sticking things together. And I think we can see this in so-called Confucian societies,

whether historical or contemporary, and it really doesn't matter whether or not people identify themselves as Confucian. It doesn't matter whether or not someone defines Confucianism as a religion. There are ways in which what we call and perceive as Confucian or Confucian religious practice can stick together with what we see in the Lotus Sutra.

"Two of the most enduring stories that come of the Lotus Sutra are those of the burning house and the prodigal son. In both of these instances, the reader who has a Confucian-influenced view will see, for example, the knowledge of the father as having arisen from his relationship with each child. And also they will see the commitment to fulfilling that relationship—that to be the father is to save the child; to be the father is to forgive the child. The point that I would like to make is that the Confucian reader is going to receive that story in Confucian terms and understand; perhaps [that reader would] not even initially understand compassion, or the dispassionate nature of compassion, or not understand skillful means, but would understand the urgency with which the father responds to the son in every case.

"So I think that when we look at the Lotus Sutra, we can see these kinds of familial metaphors, and they speak to people in Confucian and Confucian-influenced cultures where they are. The fact that the ultimate goal being presented by the Lotus Sutra supersedes familial identification is not up for consideration; it's not sticking to that story at the moment. What is sticking to the story is the relationship of the Buddha to the faithful, the relationship of the father to the children—that is what is sticking together. And if we want to move aside and talk about the relationship of the Buddha to the faithful, then what sticks to that would be things like skillful means, compassion, and other sorts of things.

"So what I am hoping to suggest here overall is that, in our work this week,

we're focusing very often not just on the Lotus Sutra, of course, but on Confucian thought and Confucian texts. And so my response to Dr. Gimello's paper is not so much a response, but it is rather a nudge for us to reserve some of our thought for the fact that there is an already existent cohesiveness of Confucianism and the Lotus Sutra in the lives of many people beyond this room.

"Looking at these papers, we're looking historically at how people analyze; how did Confucians analyze the Lotus Sutra; how did Buddhists who are engaged in copying texts seem to readily embrace this terrible image of the Sage, the Master, as murderer? As we look at all of these different kinds of things, underneath, behind, and around them are people who have already managed to put these things together in their lives. So, in terms of thinking about whether things are all-encompassing, or how we are looking at various kinds of divisions of argumentation in our discussions, I simply put it to us that there is more than thought afoot."

Zilu said, "What are your wishes, Teacher?"

Confucius said, "I would like to give comfort to the aged, trust to my friends, and nurturance to the young." □

## Notes

1. *The Analects of Confucius*, 7:34, trans. Charles Muller; cited online, <http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/analects.html>.
2. Compiled from information presented in the seminar papers and during the discussions, and from a crash course given me by Jiang Wu, one of the seminar participants.
3. Muller, *Analects*, 7:1.
4. *Ibid.*, 7:7.
5. Quoted from Haiming Wen's paper for this seminar, "Two Versions of Desire-Based Subjectivism: A Comparative Study on the *Analects* and the Lotus Sutra."
6. *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Tsugunari Kubo and Akira Yuyama (Berkeley, CA: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1993), 44.
7. Muller, *Analects*, 5:26.



# Buddhist Economics for a Sustainable World

by Sulak Sivaraksa

***The Niwano Peace Foundation presented the twenty-eighth Niwano Peace Prize to Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa of Thailand in recognition of his unflagging contribution based on the core principles of his Buddhist faith to a new understanding of peace, democracy, and development and to his advocacy for environmental protection. The prize was presented in Kyoto on July 23. The following is the recipient's acceptance speech.***

When a tree falls, it makes a thunderous sound. But who listens to trees as they grow?

In the same way, we are bombarded by news of war, environmental destruction, market exploitation, income inequality, and most profoundly, the recent earthquakes, tsunami, and ongoing nuclear disaster in Japan. When we hear news about actions for peace, freedom, and justice, we somehow feel threatened by it, as though our world were already the best of all possible worlds.

Notwithstanding our fear of change, peace movements continue to grow quietly, continuing the legacy of Gandhi's *satyagraha* (truth power) and *ahimsa* (nonviolence). The Sloth Club here in Japan is one example. It embraces the practice of Slow Is Beautiful in the spirit of E. F. (Fritz) Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful—Economics as if People Matter*. Schumacher brought forth his book forty years ago, yet mainstream economists still act as though unlimited growth were desirable and possible.

While engaging Buddhist principles, Mr. Nikkyo Niwano worked for world peace long before the era of Fritz Schumacher. Mr. Niwano manifested

peace through both his words and his deeds, with the steadiness of a tree growing tall and strong. Rissho Koseikai is an outstanding lay Buddhist organization, known throughout the world for uplifting individuals and societies. Mr. Niwano also helped create the World Conference of Religions for Peace and the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace, and both continue to play a vital role in promoting peace through interreligious cooperation and dialogue.

Mr. Inazo Nitobe is another leading Japanese man who dedicated his life to world peace, confronting the powers that be. Although I never met him (he passed away the year I was born), I knew his disciple Mr. Shigeharu Matsumoto and his wife very well. Matsumoto-san established the International House of Japan in Tokyo to promote cultural exchange and intellectual cooperation between the people of Japan and other countries. As a socially engaged Buddhist and cofounder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, I feel honored to stand in the shadow of these great figures. However, I feel that our movement should not be directly involved

Sulak Sivaraksa is cofounder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists and founder of more than a dozen international organizations. He was a Thai Buddhist monk for two years, and then completed his higher education in Great Britain, where he also worked as a writer and commentator for the BBC. He is considered by many to be the intellectual voice of his generation in Asia and has published numerous books and monographs, including *Seeds of Peace: A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society*.

in politics but should work on a spiritual level to benefit all members of the movement.

We need to be culturally sensitive, politically concerned, and socially committed and have the courage to tackle questions of the common good and point out situations of abuse. To be able to see clearly, to be truly aware of the state of the world, we must begin by deprogramming ourselves and becoming free of prejudice toward those we criticize. Working together with others of goodwill, we can identify and confront abuses of power. It is critical for people of all faiths and ideologies, as well as atheists and agnostics, to listen to each other as we promote justice and balance through nonviolent means. And we must uphold equality in all situations. It helps to stay in touch with the poor and oppressed.

To continue the work, we need to inspire the younger generation. We must

help them to develop freedom, self-reliance, contentedness, compassion, and generosity; to learn to collaborate rather than compete; and to appreciate quality rather than excess. And the younger generation needs accurate information, not just the propaganda of governments and media. The present financial crisis is an opening for us to encourage these essential values.

For our children to realize their potential and come forth as leaders of their generation, we ourselves must be good models. We must be *Homo sapiens*, not *Homo hypocriticus* or *Homo oeconomicus*. We must see through neoliberal economics and free market fundamentalism. Today in Greece, austerity measures, which mean privatizing state-owned enterprises, are being implemented, not for the benefit of the people, but for the superrich to own even more. We must help the next generations develop the critical thinking we have lacked and the capacity for reflection taught by the Buddha to build a sustainable future. We must confront our own greed, hatred, and delusion and transform our societies into models of justice and peace.

Buddhist meditation teaches proper breathing as the most important element

of life. When we learn to breathe in and out mindfully, greed, hatred, and delusion naturally transform into generosity, compassion, and wisdom. We are all connected to one another, and we can learn to breathe from that place.

Throughout the ages, nature has caused a lot of suffering, but today natural disasters are exacerbated by the arrogance of industrialists and scientists. We must respect nature and not regard other living beings as resources to be exploited. Technological developments are not always in our best interest, as seen so clearly with the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, and we must learn to discern which advances to accept and apply and which ones to monitor closely or discard.

With humility and caring, not just for ourselves but for the next seven generations, we can bring about an era of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*. We can learn from Gandhi, Prince Shotoku, and even Emperor Ashoka. Gross national product was once the universal measurement of economic well-being. Today, gross national happiness is gaining wider acceptance, with Bhutan, Ladakh, and Kerala leading the way.

Although the economic theory of unlimited growth and nonstop accumulation of capital continues to dominate the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, and nearly every government, in recent years there have been high-profile defections. Amartya Sen, Joseph Stiglitz, Jeffery Sachs, and others have expressed their recognition that mainstream economics, if left unchecked, will destroy the world and its peoples. Last year the organizers of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, invited Matthieu Ricard, a French Buddhist monk, to deliver a keynote address on

*The Niwano Peace Foundation's honorary president, Rev. Nichiko Niwano, presents the prize certificate to Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa during the presentation ceremony at Rissho Kosei-kai's Kyoto Fumon Hall on July 23.*

gross national happiness. Let us hope this was more than a public-relations stunt by the rich and powerful. A think tank at Schumacher College in the United Kingdom has joined with the New Economic Foundation in London to propagate the idea that Buddhist economics be taught at the university level. The University of Pennsylvania is considering including gross national happiness in its masters' curriculum.

The powers that be will not give up their privileges voluntarily. They will defend them to the bitter end. Violent structures will not crumble by themselves. They need to be pushed—non-violently. The way forward requires refraining from violence, even as a means to an end. The United States in its perpetration of violence in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and elsewhere; China in Tibet and Xinjiang; the military dictatorship in Burma; and other perpetrators of violence are on the wrong side of history. Like Aceh, Indonesia, the three southernmost provinces of the Thai kingdom must be granted a greater degree of self-rule. There is no way to bring this about except through nonviolence.

*Mr. Sivaraksa delivers his acceptance address.*

Mahatma Gandhi employed *satyagraha* to expose the lies of the British Empire. China and many other countries still deceive their people, but the deceitfulness of the ruling classes cannot last forever. Although the mass media as a whole brainwashes us to be addicted to capitalism and consumerism, new technologies offer opportunities for new sources of information, and a world beyond capitalism is possible.

Although he came to power through armed struggle, Fidel Castro now condemns mindless violence and has stated that he prefers nonviolence. Despite decades of American terrorism against Cuba, Castro still sees the American people as friends of Cuba and sees young Americans' tilt toward nonviolence as a move in the right direction.

Former president José Ramos-Horta of Timor-Leste also upholds the virtues of nonviolence and forgiveness. He is willing to forgive and even cooperate with Indonesia despite the latter's bloody invasion and occupation of his country. He is inspired by Nelson Mandela, who was ready to forgive the crimes of apartheid. Former president of Indonesia Abdurrahman Wahid declared that Gandhi was his role model.

The politics in Cambodia, as in many other countries, is full of violence and deceitfulness. But the Dhammayatra movement, founded by the late Maha Ghosananda, a Cambodian Buddhist monk and Niwano Peace Prize laureate, is a vital and influential force in his country. We can also refer to the Saffron Revolution in Burma, when Buddhist monks struggled for democracy and responded to the military dictatorship's counterrevolutionary brutality with deep meditation and prayers. Likewise in Tibet, monks have nonviolently resisted the Chinese occupation for more than five decades, and the Dalai Lama recently embarked on a path to democratize Tibet nonviolently.

In the academic world, many books have followed along the trail blazed

*Mr. Sivaraksa flanked by leading members of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok.*

by Schumacher's Buddhist economics, such as Glenn Paige's *Nonkilling Global Political Science* and David Loy's *A Buddhist History of the West: Studies in Lack*—not to mention the works of the Mind and Life Institute under the guidance of the Dalai Lama—to shed light on the common insights of science and spirituality.

Globalization, the latest phase of capitalism, is a facade of neoimperialism. More than ever we need self-rule—beginning with personal transformation—and the creation of a new collective subject. To bring this about requires, first of all, internal spiritual change. If we are able to transform greed into generosity, hatred into loving-kindness, and delusion into wisdom, we have self-rule. Peace in the world requires the cultivation of seeds of peace within. As the Dalai Lama points out, this is difficult, but it is the only way to achieve world peace.

I would like to end my commemorative address by quoting from the Dalai Lama's *Toward Compassion and Equality*:

"Peace and survival of life on earth as we know it are threatened by human activities that lack a commitment to humanitarian values. Destruction of nature and national resources results from ignorance, greed and lack of respect for the earth's living things. This lack of respect extends even to the earth's human descendants, the future generations who

will inherit a vastly degraded planet if world peace doesn't become a reality and if destruction of the natural environment continues at the present rate.

"Our ancestors viewed the earth as rich and bountiful, which it is. Many people in the past also saw nature as inexhaustibly sustainable, which we now know is the case only if we care for it. It is not difficult to forgive destruction in the past that resulted from ignorance. Today, however, we have access to more information. It is essential that we re-examine ethically what we have inherited, what we are responsible for, and what we will pass on to coming generations.

"Clearly this is a pivotal generation. Global communication is possible, yet confrontations take place more often than meaningful dialogues for peace. Our marvels of science and technology are matched, if not outweighed, by many current tragedies, including human starvation in some parts of the world and extinction of other life forms. Exploration of outer space takes place at the same time the earth's own oceans, seas and freshwater areas grow increasingly polluted, and their life forms are still largely unknown or misunderstood. Many of the earth's habitats, animals, plants, insects and even microorganisms that we know as rare may not be known at all by future generations. We have the capability and the responsibility. We must act before it is too late."□

# Religion's Response to the Earthquake and Tsunami in Northeastern Japan

by Keishin Inaba

*People of faith are . . . acting to comfort the sufferers, collaborating with each other across religious lines.*

Great numbers of people fell victim to the powerful earthquake and ensuing tsunami that hit the Tohoku region of northeastern Honshu on March 11, 2011. The response to the disaster was immediate. Among those who became involved in the relief efforts were people of religion, and some religious organizations set up disaster response centers on the very same day, quickly dispatching the first contingents of relief workers. The Shinnyo-en Relief Volunteers and the Tenrikyo Disaster Relief Hinokishin Corps, which have their own specialized organizations

for responding to disasters, swung into action, and the Donate-a-Meal Fund for Peace of Rissho Kosei-kai promptly decided to donate 500 million Japanese yen for aiding the victims. The various Buddhist, Shinto, Christian, and other religious organizations soon became engaged in efforts to ascertain the safety of their followers and give them support. The surviving temples, shrines, and churches in the stricken region became places of temporary refuge and facilitated efforts by patrons, parishioners, and local residents to support one another.

On March 13 I launched the Web site Faith-Based Network for Earthquake Relief in Japan (<http://www.facebook.com/FBNERJ>) on the Internet. My objective was to provide a place for sharing information on rescue operations and support activities transcending religions and denominations.

Over the first three months after the Kobe earthquake of 1995, an estimated 1.18 million people worked as volunteers in the afflicted region. Religious organizations also orchestrated volunteer activities to provide emergency assistance. The jobs they undertook were of various types, such as transporting and distributing relief supplies, making food available, and even cleaning toilets in evacuation centers. Many victims were suffering psychologically, but religious groups for the most part held back from a leadership role in the provision of counseling out of concern that their involvement might be construed as missionary work. While many religious groups played an active role in the relief efforts, few reports appeared on the contributions they made. Acting in the spirit of providing charity secretly, they endeavored to supply reliable assistance without calling attention to themselves.

Despite the fact that Japan's religious organizations carry out many social welfare activities, the public is not widely aware of them and does not have high expectations of them. In 2008 the Niwano Peace Foundation conducted a survey of attitudes toward the social contributions of religious organizations. When

*These ashes were kept temporarily at a Buddhist temple that sheltered parishioners and other local residents in Higashi Matsushima City, Miyagi Prefecture. Photographed by the author on June 14.*



*Keishin Inaba is an associate professor in the Graduate School of Human Sciences at Osaka University. He obtained his PhD in the sociology of religion at King's College, University of London. He is the author of several English and Japanese books on religion and altruism, and he is one of the organizers of the Japan Religion Coordinating Project for Disaster Relief, launched in response to the massive earthquake in northeastern Japan on March 11.*

*People fled to the roof of this high building to barely escape the tsunami that destroyed much of Kesennuna City, Miyagi Prefecture, on March 11.*

asked whether they knew of the activities these groups were undertaking to contribute to society, only 35 percent of the respondents said yes. This low level of recognition indicates that the Japanese social context is not one where people of religion can easily forge strong bonds of trust in communities and bring local residents together through intimate relationships with them.

When the Tohoku tragedy occurred, it seemed likely to me that religious organizations and individuals in Japan would carry out numerous relief activities and that their social power would surely gain

greater recognition. After all, following the Kobe earthquake, various religious groups became more socially active, and religious NGOs stepped up their operations. Over recent years, moreover, the movement known as socially engaged Buddhism has gained momentum, and the Shien-no-machi Network, an interfaith network for supporting social and interpersonal connections, and other groups have actively addressed such issues as poverty. In short, people of faith in Japan have already begun collaborating, and the media are paying increasing attention to what they are doing.

There are some 78,000 temples and 85,000 shrines in Japan. In addition, Christian denominations, new religions, and the assorted other religious entities have a total of more than 180,000 places of worship, a number that is four times larger than the number of convenience stores and nine times larger than the number of community centers. Many temples, shrines, and other religious facilities suffered damage in the disaster, but they have been able to function as evacuation shelters and centers for relief activities.

Photo: The Yomiuri Shimbun

*The tsunami wrecked this cemetery at a Buddhist temple in Miyako City, Iwate Prefecture. Photographed by the author on June 13.*

Articles posted on the site of the Faith-Based Network for Earthquake Relief in Japan were viewed more than one hundred thousand times within the first ten days or so. Currently the number of page views is in the five thousand to eight thousand range per day. Most of the discussions on the site are grouped in the following categories: (1) damage to religious organizations and information on their safety, (2) disaster response centers and relief activities, (3) calls for financial contributions and reports on donations by religious groups, (4) the acceptance of evacuees, (5) prayers and memorial services, and (6) counseling.

The site confirms that religious organizations and individuals are involved in all sorts of activities. In addition to collecting information for conducting volunteer work in the stricken regions, religious groups are providing support for relief and reconstruction by, for instance, coordinating the acceptance of volunteers—a task assigned to the local chapters of the Japan National Council of Social Welfare—and offering accommodations to volunteers. They are also collaborating with other NGOs. Buddhist priests are engaged in assorted activities, such as transporting supplies to places where they are needed and providing memorial services

at crematories. In addition, some temples have taken in evacuees. People of faith are also acting to comfort the sufferers, collaborating with each other across religious lines.

At the same time, there has not been a flood of calls for Buddhist priests to work at public facilities, such as by holding memorial services. Buddhist clergy are acutely aware of this limitation, a reality they must accept. We need to ask, How deep are the connections they have built up with people in their daily lives?

Japanese society is going through radical change. In January 2010 NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) aired a special program titled “Muen shakai,” which might be translated as “the unconnected society.” It is a place lacking the relationships that have traditionally tied individuals together. Besides suicides, each year more than thirty thousand individuals die without anyone’s knowing, much less anyone’s being present. These lonely deaths, which are as numerous as suicides, have emerged as a social concern. Ties among neighbors, coworkers, and family members have all grown weaker, leading to an increase in people who live in isolation. About 20 percent of all households were single-person households thirty years ago, but the share has now risen to 30

percent and is expected to reach 40 percent within two decades.

The life of the isolated individual in the unconnected society overlaps with a life of indifference to others. Truly, modern Japanese society is under the sway of neoliberalism and self-reliance, and it has a strong current of egotism, of the thinking that “all is well as long as I get what I want.” Or at least it used to be such a place. I would like to use the past tense here because my intuition tells me that a process of fundamental change has now begun. Indeed, such a change is to be highly desired.

A 2010 opinion poll on social attitudes conducted by the Cabinet Office found that 38.9 percent of the respondents agree that the current age is one in which people put their own interests first, whereas only 12.4 percent perceive it to be an era of compassion. As I see it, however, these percentages can be expected to change greatly. Having been confronted with an unprecedented catastrophe, people have awakened to the compassion lying dormant within them, and I think they have begun to respond again with empathy, with the recognition that they are all in the same boat. After all, is there not an unconscious religiosity deep within their hearts?

Only a minority of Japanese belong to the so-called organized religions—religious organizations with a visible face—and practice their faith daily. Even so, the spiritual foundation of the Japanese is firmly connected to religion on a deep level. While more than 70 percent of the Japanese say they have no religion, about 70 percent engage in such rituals as visiting family graves and going to a shrine or temple on the start of the New Year. Both individuals and groups erect cenotaphs or monuments in honor of the dead. Within religious rites for ancestors, a sense of thanks for the chain of life remains vaguely alive.

Numerous people hold shared attitudes of thanks and appreciation along with a sense that they are all in the same

situation. What I see as the unconscious religiosity of the Japanese is this amorphous sense of being connected to something transcending the self and of gratitude to the ancestors, divine beings, and people in general. This sort of religiosity is alive even within those who say that they have no religion.

The year 1995, when the disastrous Kobe earthquake occurred, is seen as Year One of volunteer activities in Japan. People turned their minds toward building a society of mutual support. The nation had reached a decisive turning point in the wake of the collapse of the bubble economy of the late 1980s, and businesses were managing only a sluggish performance. The sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway by the Aum Shinrikyo cult also occurred that year.

But has Japanese society really changed much over the decade and a half since then? In fact, it is still a place where profits and efficiency are pursued above all else, where people are used as objects and discarded when they cease to be useful, and where individuals shoulder excessive loads in the name of self-reliance. It is a divided society that separates winners from losers and an unconnected society that has severed neighborhood, workplace, and family ties. So why did the Japanese, who seemed ready to create a society of mutual support in response to the Kobe disaster, wind up in this situation?

Though modern values and beliefs are now growing outdated, they continue to persuade people that humankind can control nature, that efficiency should be the foremost concern when undertaking something, that everything has a monetary value, that each person is an independent being, and that society will function smoothly when things are left to the market. This modern way of thinking has penetrated so deeply into society that the possibility of change after the Kobe earthquake lasted only momentarily, fading away before anything changed. People thinking in this

way simply cannot stop racing along, because if they took a minute to stop and reflect, they would come face-to-face with the poverty of their way of living. Such thinking also underlies a society dependent upon nuclear power, in which people put their faith in the myth of nuclear power's safety even while recognizing its dangers.

Since the March earthquake and tsunami, people have risen up to deal with a stupendous natural disaster, and new feelings of solidarity have come into being. For a society that has been severing the ties among its members, should we not say that this is a momentous change? With the puncturing of the myth of nuclear power's safety, fundamental rethinking has begun on the way in which modern people look upon and interact with science and technology.

In Japanese society at present, there are those who do not feel they are making a sacrifice when they act to aid others and engage in altruistic behavior. A sense of solidarity, of the kind of reciprocal relationship that emerges from identifying with others, has been born. This is a desire within us to draw closer to and feel empathy for those who are suffering hardship. In a society where all sorts of other ties are weakening, ties of

empathy welling from our unconscious religiosity have strengthened anew.

Many papers have been written about the empathy-altruism hypothesis, which holds that identification with and empathy for those in a difficult situation provide a motive for altruistic behavior. The theory posits that when we feel empathy for disaster victims, the homeless, and other such unfortunate people, identifying with the circumstances they have been placed in, we desire a lessening of their difficulties and an improvement in their unfavorable situation. Over the long course of history, religion has been drawn toward hardships of all sorts. This is the spirit of sharing others' sadness and suffering. For people of religion today, the birth of ties of empathy represents an important issue they must address.

All religions teach altruism and compassion. People are humble in their reverence and gratitude for being able to live under divine protection, and this may lead them to treasure the lives of others just as they treasure their own. Acts of compassion can be motivated by the feelings of appreciation expressed in words of thanks and repayments of favors. Truly, religion in Japan has been given a crucial role to play. □

*Volunteers help clean up a temple cemetery in Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture, in April.*

Photo: AP/WFO



# The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

## Chapter 19 The Merits of the Teacher of the Dharma (1)

*This is the 106th installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra  
by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.*

The previous chapter details the merits of the initiate, one who has just embraced the teachings. The present chapter expounds the merits of a believer who has moved to the next level above the initiate, which is the teacher of the Dharma.

The teacher of the Dharma is not necessarily a Buddhist monk or nun, but can be anyone—including a layperson—who believes, practices, and expounds the Buddha's teachings and endeavors to spread them throughout society.

As has been fully explained in chapter 10, "A Teacher of the Dharma," the five practices of teachers of the Dharma are receiving and keeping the sutra, reading it, reciting it, expounding it, and copying it. The stages of our gradually deepening faith are clearly shown as we consider each of these five practices.

If we believe and understand the teachings after hearing

them, and if we embrace them with joyful acceptance, we proceed to keep them firmly and then we fix them in our memory by reading the sutra more attentively and reciting it. Up to this point, practice has been for our own selves, to establish the foundation of our faith as a believer.

Yet when our faith reaches this stage, we cannot help passing on the teachings to others. So we move to the practice of expounding the sutra for the sake of others, copying it, and disseminating the teachings through our writings.

In this chapter, the World-honored One turns to the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva Ever Zealous to teach the merits of one who has reached the depth of belief of a teacher of the Dharma.

As in the previous chapter, various physical merits are preached here, but we should follow the interpretation previously given and not take them literally.



**TEXT** Then the Buddha addressed the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva Ever Zealous: "If any good son or good daughter receives and keeps this Dharma Flower Sutra, or reads, or recites, or expounds, or copies it, that person will obtain eight hundred merits of the eye, twelve hundred merits of the ear, eight hundred merits of the nose, twelve hundred merits of the tongue, eight hundred merits of the body, and twelve hundred merits of the mind; with these merits he will dignify his six organs, making them all serene.

**COMMENTARY** *He will dignify his six organs, making them all serene.* The six sensory organs are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. This means making the function of all six organs beautiful and pure. The details are given below.

The figures eight hundred and twelve hundred indicate "perfect attainment" of the merits and do not have to be taken literally.

First of all, the Buddha preaches the merits of the eyes.

**TEXT** That good son or good daughter, with the pure eyes of flesh received at birth from his parents, will see whatever exists within and without the three-thousand-great-thousandfold world, mountains, forests, rivers, and seas, down to the Avici hell and up to the Summit of Existence, and also see all the living beings in it, as well as see and know in detail all their karmic causes and conditions and the states of effect and retribution into which they are reborn.

**COMMENTARY** Because the eyes one is born with can, with the progress of faith, be purified of delusion, one will become able to see the true aspect of everything in this world.

- *The Avici hell.* This is one of the realms of hell, and is a frightening place where there is no moment of relief.
- *The Summit of Existence.* In the ancient Indian world view, the highest heaven was the highest place in the triple world.

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

"If one, in the great assembly, / With fearless mind,  
/ Preaches this Dharma Flower Sutra— / Hearken to his merits.

**COMMENTARY** *Fearless mind.* This refers to mental attitude of preaching what one believes with dignity, without fear or reserve.

Such a fearless mind has been described and analyzed in many ways since ancient times, but we refer to the Buddha's fearless mind as the four kinds of fearlessness of the Buddha,

as explained in detail in the July/August 1992 issue of *Dharma World*. The text here refers to four kinds of fearlessness of bodhisattvas listed below.

The first fearlessness is in "total grasp and recall": preaching the Dharma fearlessly, after a bodhisattva has learned all the teachings by heart and can never forget them.

This seems simple enough, but it is not easy to put into practice. When people hear the teachings, they concentrate their whole minds upon them, and when they have questions about them they do not hesitate to ask the preacher until they have understood everything to their satisfaction. They endeavor to remember the teachings by reading and reciting them morning and evening. They cannot attain this state unless they persevere in this endeavor constantly.

The second fearlessness is in "thorough knowledge of all Dharma medicines": preaching the Dharma fearlessly, by thoroughly knowing the medicine of the Dharma and also the capacities, inclinations, natures, and minds of all living beings. Just as a physician prescribes medicine according to the nature and severity of the patient's disease, a bodhisattva can preach the Dharma confidently in accordance with the differences in each person's capacity, inclination, nature, and mind.

In other words, people who are worthy of being called bodhisattvas not only remember the teachings well, but also cultivate their ability to preach them freely as tailored to each individual situation.

The third fearlessness is in "skill in asking and answering questions": preaching the Dharma fearlessly with good and sufficient questions and answers. If it were sufficient just to teach the Dharma on the spur of the moment, anyone with a general knowledge of it could do so. True teachers, however, must have the ability to answer clearly questions about what they have taught and overcome objections.

Their answers and refutations must not merely gloss over the issues. Nor should they sweepingly declare, "It has been so since ancient times, and that is sufficient proof." What they say must be in accord with the truth, and their answers are good if they accord with the Buddha's teachings.

However correct their answers may be, people can be good teachers only if they know how to preach the Dharma skillfully so that their listeners will understand completely and recognize their own mistaken views. The word "skill" refers to this persuasive power.

In short, one who can answer any question and overcome any objection explicitly and persuasively in accord with the Buddha's teachings will preach the Dharma without fear.

The fourth fearlessness is in "ability to resolve doubts": preaching the Dharma fearlessly through sufficiently resolving doubts.

*Rissho Kosei-kai youth group members make a pilgrimage to Mount Minobu, where Nichiren spent his last years. As they climbed the mountain, they rededicated themselves to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and prayed for the purification of their "six sensory organs" (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind). Photographed in 1974.*

The Buddha's teachings are profound, vast, and boundless, so many doubts and questions arise about how to interpret them. Every person has a different interpretation, giving rise to the saying "One hundred Buddhist monks, one hundred interpretations of the Dharma." People must be very clearheaded and decisive in their interpretation of the Dharma, but above all else they must be superior in virtue. They must be filled with compassion.

This is because when facing so complex a problem as choosing from a variety of interpretations of the Dharma, one cannot perceive the true intention of the Buddha through intellectual understanding alone. Since the ultimate purpose of the Buddha's teachings is the liberation of all living beings, only a person who senses the Buddha's great compassion can determine the Buddha's intention in elucidating the delicate nuances of doubts. A bodhisattva who can sufficiently resolve doubts in this way will preach the Dharma fearlessly.

When we look at the difficulties of preaching the Dharma, some of us may grow timid. However, we must not be afraid. The four categories are those of the ideal teacher, and whoever qualifies as an ideal teacher has already become a great bodhisattva. But no one begins as a great bodhisattva. One becomes one only after long, ceaseless effort and repeated trial and error.

Therefore, those of us who train ourselves in the bodhisattva practice must always bear these four ideals in mind

and make them our four precepts when we attempt to preach the Dharma. When we encounter a difficult problem or are asked a question that we are unable to answer properly, we ought to say so frankly: "This question is beyond my ability to answer, so I will examine it more carefully, if necessary ask someone more qualified than myself, and then I will answer you." We must not dream up a reply on the spot just to get by.

To admit that we are not certain does not lower others' estimation of us as teachers, but rather increases their confidence in us.

**TEXT** That man will obtain eight hundred / Merits of surpassing vision; / Because of these endowments / His eyes will be entirely serene.

**COMMENTARY** *Merits of surpassing vision.* These are the merits of a particularly excellent ability based on moral values.

- *Because of these endowments.* This literally means that his great ability gives him excellent eyes.

- *His eyes will be entirely serene.* The explicit meaning is that his eyes will be entirely clear, but the deeper meaning is that he can see everything unclouded, as it really is.

**TEXT** With the eyes received from his parents / He will see all within and without / The three-thousandfold world— / Mount Meru, [Mount] Sumeru, and [Mount] Iron Circle, / And the other mountains and forests, / Great oceans, rivers, and waters, / Down to the Avici hell, / Up to the Summit of Existence; / The living beings in its midst / All will be seen by him; / Though not yet having attained divine vision, / His eyes of flesh have powers like these.

**COMMENTARY** The expression "though not yet having attained divine vision" corresponds with the expression "with the pure eyes of flesh" in the previous prose passage. Though living beings do not yet possess divine vision (see the May/June 2002 issue of *Dharma World*), seeing what the ordinary eye cannot, they can perform a similar function.

They can do so because they can see things unclouded by delusion. Put more simply, their minds become so pure that they are devoid of self and can view things in their true aspect, without the distortion of prejudice or subjectivity. They see the true nature of things because their minds are always calm and they are not tossed about by the rough waves of emotion.

In another sutra, the Buddha says, "A thing is not reflected as it is in water boiling over a fire. A thing is not mirrored in water covered by plants. A thing is not reflected as it is

on the surface of water running in waves stirred up by the wind.” The Buddha teaches us here that only after we dispel selfish thinking—in which our mind’s eye, like the surface of seething water, roils and ripples—and dispel the delusions of emotional turmoil, can we see things as they really are.

Then the Buddha preaches the merits of the ear.

**TEXT** “And again, Ever Zealous! If any good son or good daughter receives and keeps this sutra, or reads and recites or expounds or copies it, he will obtain twelve hundred merits of the ear. With this serene ear he will hear, within and without the three-thousand-great-thousandfold world, downward to the Avici hell, upward to the Summit of Existence, all various words and sounds, the sounds of elephants, of horses, of oxen, of carts, of wailing, of lamentation, of conchs, of drums, of gongs, of bells, of laughter, of speech, of men, of women, of boys, of girls, of the righteous, of the unrighteous, of sorrow, of joy, of common people, of holy people, of pleasure, of displeasure, of gods, of dragons, of yakshas, of gandharvas, of asuras, of garudas, of kimnaras, of mahoragas, of fire, of water, of wind, of the hells, of the animals, of hungry spirits, of bhikshus, of bhikshunis, of shravakas, of pratyekabuddhas, of bodhisattvas, and of buddhas—

**COMMENTARY** The meaning of the individual words should be fairly clear. The explanation of the demons from dragons to mahoragas was provided at the beginning of the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings. (See the November/December 1991 issue of *Dharma World*.)

All sounds occur as a result of something moving. People who have found serenity by deepening their faith can clearly grasp the slightest movement of things from the sounds they produce.

Among the various sounds mentioned in this passage, those of fire, water, and wind are natural sounds. With a serene ear, one can grasp distinctly the movements of nature in the crackle of fire, the murmur of water, and the whistling of wind.

When such people hear quiet, natural sounds, they can enjoy them as beautiful music. When they hear any unusual sound of nature, they can acutely sense its true nature and save others as well as themselves from the dangers of strong blasts of wind, tornadoes, tsunamis, floods, and other natural disasters.

Moreover, they can easily recognize the sounds of conchs, drums, gongs, and bells, and from them readily sense the feelings of the people who sound them. Despite having well over a hundred musicians in his orchestra, playing a wide variety of instruments, an outstanding conductor can tell which musicians are playing out of tune or do not have their hearts in the performance or are overdoing it.

This is also true of machinery and the movement of inanimate objects. An expert, for example, can hear subtle differences and changes in sound. A skilled mechanical engineer can go into a factory and, amidst the deafening roar of a large number of machines, tell which machine is wearing out or needs adjustment.

When it comes to the sounds produced by living beings, it is only natural that a teacher of the Dharma, who is an instructor in life, can sense their feelings in the sounds they make, such as their voices.

Needless to say, some of the sounds made by living beings express feelings and intent. There are times when the human voice is filled with strong emotion—happiness, sadness, pain—or someone is trying to convey ideas through speech. The cries of birds and beasts must be similar.

One who has developed sufficient religious faith can understand all those sounds: the cries of anguish from beings in hellish states (the sounds of the hells), the sounds of living beings prompted by instinct (the sounds of animals), the sounds of food being hungrily devoured (the sounds of hungry spirits), and the sounds of feuding and fighting (the sounds of asuras).

He learns to understand the words of those who live in the realm of heaven. He will learn to recognize the voices of bhikshus and bhikshunis practicing the Buddha Way and even understand the words of the Buddha and the bodhisattvas as they expound the teachings.

**TEXT** essentially speaking, whatever sounds there may be within and without the three-thousand-great-thousandfold world; though he has still not obtained the heavenly ear, yet by the natural pure ears received at birth from his parents all these he will hear and know. And thus he discerns all these various sounds without harm to his organ of hearing.”

**COMMENTARY** *The heavenly ear.* This phrase refers to the ability to hear what is normally inaudible, and the supernatural power to hear any distant sound inaudible to ordinary people.

• *Without harm to his organ of hearing.* This literally means not damaging the auditory sense. In other words, the auditory sense is not harmed or in any way confused by hearing all of the various sounds.

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

“His ears, received from parents, / Are serene and untainted. / By these ordinary ears he hears / The sounds in the three-thousandfold world, / The sounds of elephants, horses, carts, and oxen, / The sounds of gongs, bells, conchs,



and drums, / The sounds of lutes  
and harps, / The sounds of pipes  
and flutes, / The sounds of pure and  
lovely song; / He can listen without  
being under their control.

**COMMENTARY** *He can listen without being under their control.* Even if he hears the sounds of beautiful music, such as a singing, he does not become attached to them. He may be charmed by the rich tones, but not permanently captivated by them, and they do not make him forget anything important. This is a good caution against attachment to amusements.

**TEXT** He hears the voices of countless kinds of people, / And can understand all he hears;

**COMMENTARY** We recall that the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World (Avalokiteshvara) is the incarnation of such an ability.

**TEXT** He hears also the voices of gods, / And mystic voices of singing; / Hears the voices of men and women, / And the voices of boys and girls. / In mountains, streams, and gorges, / The sounds of kalavinkas, / Jivakajivakas and other birds, / All these voices he hears.

**COMMENTARY** *Kalavinkas.* This is a species of sparrow whose song is the most beautiful of all.

• *Jivakajivakas.* This bird is said to be a variety of pheasant or partridge; legend has it that it has two heads.

**TEXT** The bitter pains of the hosts in hell / And the sounds of torments; / The hungry spirits driven by hunger and thirst / And the sounds of their begging for food and drink; / The asuras and others / Inhabiting the ocean shores, / When they converse together, / Bellow forth their cries. / Such a preacher as this, / Calmly dwelling amidst this, / Hears from afar all these sounds / Without harm to his organ of hearing.

**COMMENTARY** *The sounds of torments.* The original Chinese words here refer to the sounds of striking with brambles, canes, or whips and causing damage and injury. In short, they are the sounds of one suffering from such torments.

*A statue of the Eleven-headed, Thousand-armed Kannon Bodhisattva enshrined in the Horin-kaku Guest Hall in Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters complex in Tokyo.*

**TEXT** In the worlds in all directions, / Birds and beasts cry to each other, / And the preacher here abiding / Hears them in every detail. / All the Brahma heavens above, / From those of Light Sound and Universal Purity / To the heaven [called] the Summit of Existence— / The sounds of their conversation / The preacher here abiding / Hears in every detail. / All the host of bhikshus / And of bhikshunis / Reading or reciting the sutra, / Or preaching it to others, / The preacher here abiding / Hears them in every detail. / Again there are the bodhisattvas / Who read and recite these sutra teachings / Or preach them to others, / Collating [many teach-

ings] and expounding their meaning— / All such sounds as these / He hears in every detail. / The buddhas, great and holy honored ones, / Those having instructed all living beings, / Who, in their great assemblies, / Proclaim the subtle Dharma— / He who keeps this Dharma Flower / Hears in every detail.

**COMMENTARY** Whoever masters the essence of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra can understand the teachings of all the buddhas.

**TEXT** In the three-thousand-great-thousandfold world, / Its sounds within and without, / Downward to the Avici hell, / Upward to the heaven of the Summit of Existence, / All these sounds he will hear / Without harm to his organ of hearing, / And because his ears are acute, / He can discern and know them all. / He who keeps this Dharma Flower, / Though not yet possessed of heavenly ears / And only using his natural ears, / Has already such merits as these.

**COMMENTARY** The Buddha next discusses the merits of the nose.

*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.