

Revering Ourselves

by Nichiko Niwano

There is an old proverb that says, “Pinch yourself, and you will know the pain of others.” The meaning of this is that when we ourselves experience suffering, maybe for the first time we can recognize the suffering of other people. In other words, no matter what the subject is, we can understand it best if we experience it for ourselves.

Buddhism teaches us, “Difficult is it to be born as a human being”—to receive the gift of life and be born into this human world is very rare and almost miraculous. When we ourselves feel, deep in our very bones, gratitude for this fact and the preciousness of life, we spontaneously feel welling up within us the realization that the life of every other person is just as precious as our own. We then have to respect others, and no longer are able to deny their importance.

Even if we think we understand this, however, we tend to be critical of and be influenced by those around us, and often end up complaining that life treats us unfairly or that we never have enough.

“To revere oneself” may sound arrogant, but in fact that is not the case at all. When we can place our palms together reverently toward ourselves, aware of the sanctity of life, we can also sincerely honor the Buddha with our palms placed together toward him, and also become better able to pay reverence to other people.

“The first principle of bowing is to express respect for others and, at the same time, pay reverence to ourselves by exchanging bows with others,” in

the words of a well-known Japanese writer. When we greet others and they return our greeting, it is an indication of mutual respect. That is the solemn meaning of the act of bowing.

Zen master Dogen (1200–1253) stated, “Learning the Buddha Way is learning one’s self.” By that he meant that because the Buddha Way is the path along which the buddha-nature unfolds and develops, clearly knowing that one’s buddha-nature is one’s true self is knowing the Buddha Way.

In one of the sutras, Shakyamuni states, “We may search everywhere, but we will never find anyone as dear as ourselves.”

This statement comes after the following conversation between King Pasenadi of Kosala and his wife, Queen Mallikah.

When asked by the king, “Mallikah, is there anyone dearer to you than yourself?” the queen responded, “No, there is no one dearer to me than myself.” She asked the king in return, “And is there anyone dearer to you than yourself?” To which King Pasenadi replied, “No one exists who is dearer to me than myself.” Soon after, the king told Shakyamuni about this conversation, and Shakyamuni made the following comment.

“We can search everywhere but will never find anyone dearer to us than ourselves, and this is true of other people as well. This is why people who truly love themselves shall do no harm to others.”

Not harming other people means not to deny them. Our own existence and that of other people is, after all, a

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manifestation of the one life that is the buddha-nature. Therefore, when we look deeply into the roots of the lives of ourselves and others, the sanctity of ourselves and others becomes apparent to us, so we can no longer do harm to others or cause them grief.

While we may understand that we ourselves are worthy of respect, however, we also become aware that we are not perfect. We notice the faults and shortcomings of others because we ourselves have similar failings. We cannot see in others what we do not have in ourselves.

That is why Shakyamuni also tells us, “When you know that you love yourselves, do good.” To “do good” means to respect and revere one another. In other words, it is most important not to be influenced by the opinions of others and to be prejudiced about what is good or bad, or by strengths and weaknesses of other people, and to view everything as objectively as possible, focusing on the positive aspects.

In our daily lives, when we seem to be losing sight of respect for the lives of ourselves and others, the existence of the sangha, that is, our good friends in the Dharma, will surely give us the opportunity to reflect on ourselves anew. □

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The Meaning of Modern Pilgrimage

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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- 1 Revering Ourselves
by Nichiko Niwano
- 3 Group Pilgrimages Unite
Hearts and Minds
by Keiko Yamao
- 4 Buddhism, the Shikoku
Pilgrimage, and Wandering
Saints in Japan
by Ian Reader
- 10 Pilgrims Are Seekers
by Juan Masiá
- 12 Canterbury Trails—Ways
of Twenty-First-Century
Pilgrims
by Peter Kenny
- 16 Pilgrimage and
Interreligious
Understanding: A Case Study of Sri Pada Mountain in Sri Lanka
by Elizabeth J. Harris
- 20 The World Shall Come to Walsingham
by Gaynor Sekimori
- 25 Only Dialogue Can Change the World
An interview with Alberto Quattrucci
- 28 Bearing Witness as an Atomic Bomb Victim
by Akiyo Hada
- 32 The Zen of Mutual Acceptance and Respect
by Jikisai Minami
- 34 Good Encounters Give Us New Life
by Koitsu Yokoyama
- 36 Japanese Buddhism and Christian “Good News”: A Christian
Reflection on Aspects of the Buddhist Approach to Reality
by Cinto Busquet
- THE THREEFOLD LOTUS SUTRA: A MODERN COMMENTARY**
- 44 The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law
Chapter 19: The Merits of the Teacher of the Dharma (2)

Group Pilgrimages Unite Hearts and Minds

by Keiko Yamao

Participants must work together and cooperate, their minds becoming as one, as reflected in the phrase “many in body, but one in spirit.”

There is an old saying that faith arises from the majesty of the temple. I think most of the world's religions have holy places to visit because a peaceful feeling comes over people when they experience a location with a stately, sublime atmosphere, and they are then better prepared to deepen their faith. We members of Rissho Kosei-kai have several special places. The one that plays a central role is the Great Sacred Hall, erected in 1964 in Tokyo. A statue of the Eternal Buddha is enshrined there. Rissho Kosei-kai has Dharma centers in twenty-one countries, and 238 in Japan, where members can visit and study the teachings. Several times a year, as part of their religious practice, members depart from their usual lives to make group pilgrimages to the Great Sacred Hall.

Taking part in a group pilgrimage requires personal adjustments, such as time off from work and understanding and support from one's family. On the appointed day we board buses with a large number of other members and travel long distances. We also take our meals and baths in a group. While such activities can be fun, we are not free to move about at our own convenience. That is when we become aware that our minds are often self-centered. The participants must work together and cooperate. Then our minds become as one, as

reflected in the phrase *itai doshin* (many in body, but one in spirit). The purpose of a Rissho Kosei-kai group pilgrimage is to bring into our lives all that we learn and become aware of in the process of participating, thereby making each pilgrimage an opportunity to help to create a peaceful world.

Our Pilgrimage Group has twenty-five staff members who receive a total of nearly 150,000 pilgrims who take part in some 130 one-day or overnight programs every year. Even with the best of intentions to lend full support to their visits, our need for efficiency unfortunately tends to dominate.

However, through the close connections made with our members who were victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami that struck on March 11 of last year, the staff members seem to have deepened their resolve to be more attentive.

Starting in the month following the disaster, Rissho Kosei-kai put together two-day overnight Yawaragi (Relief) Tours for members from the stricken areas. Because of road damage and concerns over the health of some participants, members of some Dharma centers have not been able to come as far as the Great Sacred Hall. For those centers, we booked hot-spring resort hotels in their vicinity and sent our staff to the hotels to welcome members.

Keiko Yamao is head of the Pilgrimage Group of the Dharma Missions Bureau of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo.

In all cases, we set up health consultations with doctors and nurses from Kosei General Hospital in Tokyo and also called on the services of counselors from the Kosei Institute for Counseling Research, also in Tokyo, as well as massage therapists and the like. The members welcomed are people who suffered painful experiences.

The staff prepared for their arrival while praying they could empathize with the members' anguish and grief. One staff member spent time massaging the feet of a woman with high blood pressure. Everyone struggled to think of ways to ease the visitors' minds and provide a relaxing and pleasant experience. Whenever the tour groups arrived, everyone connected warmly. As the visitors boarded their buses to leave, everyone smiled and shook hands. The staff waved farewell to the visitors as if they were family.

Even if the meeting places for Relief Tours were hotels far away from the Great Sacred Hall, they had the same pure feeling of a sangha. The hotels became holy places of Buddhist practice.

Members from all over the world come to the Great Sacred Hall. When I face the Buddha alone in the hall and place my hands together in prayer, I feel the space is filled with the happiness and spirit of the grateful hearts and minds of those many members. □

Buddhism, the Shikoku Pilgrimage, and Wandering Saints in Japan

by Ian Reader

Until the twentieth century, the only way to do the pilgrimage was by foot, but as Japan modernized and developed increasingly efficient transport systems, the options for pilgrims broadened. There is no stipulated rule that says that pilgrims should walk, and Shikoku pilgrims have always made use of whatever means could enable them to make the pilgrimage in the ways they wished.

Pilgrimage, as a practice associated with temporarily leaving one's home and traveling to specific places associated with core notions in one's religious faith, is a recurrent feature of religions across the globe. The word itself derives from the Latin *peregrinus*—a stranger, someone on a journey, a traveler, or a temporary resident—something that fitted with the Christian ideal of people as merely temporary dwellers on earth prior to entering heaven. Although *pilgrimage* is thus a Western term associated originally with Christianity, in essence it indicates a state of transience and movement toward an ideal. It is a theme that runs through most, if not all, religions. The concepts of pilgrimage—leaving one's home temporarily and making a break with everyday routines to visit places associated with core themes, holy figures, and events connected with the religious tradition one adheres to in order to enhance one's standing and spiritual awareness—are a recurrent feature. Embedded also in such concepts of pilgrimage is the idea that through going to and being in such places, one may encounter at close quarters the presence of holy powers believed to be present there.

Buddhism and Pilgrimage

Such themes can be readily seen in the Buddhist tradition, which has been especially conducive to the concept of pilgrimage because of its focus on the notion of life as a journey toward higher goals and because of its emphasis on transience. The Buddha was the first Buddhist pilgrim, and his life story is one of pilgrimage, in which he leaves home to travel in search of the truth. Indeed, key places associated with his life and significant turning points in Buddhist history—his birthplace at Lumbini in Nepal; his enlightenment at Bodhi Gaya; his “turning of the wheel” in Sarnath, which heralded the start of Buddhism as a transmitted religious tradition; and his death at Kushinagar—provided the model for the earliest Buddhist pilgrimages.

In visiting such places, early Buddhist pilgrims not only walked in the Buddha's footsteps, thereby metaphorically treading the same path to enlightenment while being in his presence, but did so alongside fellow pilgrims walking the same path and hence experienced a sense of community.

As Buddhism spread across Asia, it also created new places of pilgrimage in every region that Buddhism permeated—from sacred mountain sites in Tibet to places such as the Shwe Dagon Temple in the Burmese capital of Rangoon, which according to popular belief houses relics of the Buddha's hair, and the Temple of Tooth in Kandy, Sri Lanka, which also houses a reputed relic of the Buddha.

In such places, it was believed, pilgrims could thus “meet” the holy figure at the center of their religion and acquire his spiritual grace. Pilgrimages were seen as a means of acquiring merit that could enable people to overcome bad karma and ensure better rebirths for themselves and their kin. In Japan, for example, it is widely believed that performing the Shikoku pilgrimage—a circuit around Japan's fourth-largest island that takes in eighty-eight temples along a fourteen-hundred-kilometer route—will bring the pilgrim special spiritual merit that can either help the pilgrim attain entry into the Buddhist Pure Land at death or be transferred to one's deceased kin to facilitate their journey to the next realm.

Pilgrimages serve as a means through which ordinary people can enter the world, even if temporarily, of the religious specialist. This is a recurrent feature of pilgrimages worldwide. The Catholic pilgrims who go to the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela in Spain carry a pilgrim's staff, dress in clothing that marks them as itinerant monks, and identify themselves with Saint James,

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the apostle whose relics are rumored to be in Santiago and who is the focus of the pilgrim's devotion. Likewise in Buddhism, pilgrimage offers ordinary devotees—for whom the monastic ideal of renouncing the family and everyday world is too extreme a step—a means through which they can become like a monk temporarily, leaving home and stepping outside their everyday lives to enter the transient world of travel and prayer.

Shikoku and the Nature of Pilgrimage

The Shikoku pilgrimage (*henro* in Japanese) serves as a striking example

of such themes. Its origins are linked to the figure of Kōbō Daishi. Kōbō Daishi (meaning “the great teacher who spread the law of Buddhism”) is the name posthumously awarded by the Japanese emperor to Kūkai (774–835), founder of the Japanese Shingon Buddhist tradition, who was born in Shikoku and is one of the most revered figures in Japanese Buddhist history. In the centuries after Kūkai's death, a cult of veneration developed around the image of Kōbō Daishi that depicted him as a wandering pilgrim and mendicant wearing Buddhist robes and a monk's hat and carrying a begging bowl and a pilgrim's staff. In such legends he is said to travel through Japan (but especially

Shikoku, the island of his birth) seeking alms, dispensing miracles, saving the sick (especially those who give him alms), and punishing the wicked (notably those who do not give alms). Visits from the early eleventh century onward by Shingon monks to places associated with his early life in Shikoku helped create a pilgrimage cult around him, and eventually a pilgrimage developed that took in eighty-eight temples and involved a complete circuit of the island. A popular legend developed that Kōbō Daishi had actually created the pilgrimage and that he constantly walked it disguised as a pilgrim. In popular belief, he guards every pilgrim, who may if lucky meet him on the route. Miraculous stories

about how pilgrims were saved or cured of illnesses by meetings with him became common in the pilgrim community. Even today it is not uncommon to hear such rumors and tales of miracles circulating among pilgrims. Pilgrims identify with him through their clothing and accoutrements, from their pilgrim staffs to their pilgrims' shrouds, which are usually inscribed with the ideograms for *dōgyō ninin* (two pilgrims together) to signify that they travel together with Kōbō Daishi.

The legend that Kōbō Daishi is constantly walking the pilgrimage has also given rise to a custom known as *settai*, according to which local people give alms to pilgrims to help them on their way. While such almsgiving was based on the belief that any pilgrim might be Kōbō Daishi, and that in giving alms one shares in the merit of the pilgrimage, it is also founded in a genuine local sense that it is important to support pilgrims. Even in the present day, many pilgrims, especially those who go by foot, report repeated cases of local generosity and help as they travel.

The first textual records of the pilgrimage in Shikoku date to the mid-seventeenth century. While they do not

explain why there were eighty-eight temples on the route, the figure is generally associated with ideas about the number of worldly passions that hinder the path to enlightenment and the idea that by undergoing the pilgrimage, one can escape from such hindrances.

While the earliest pilgrims were mostly mendicants, records show that by the late seventeenth century, ordinary people were beginning to make the pilgrimage. Many of them were initially from Shikoku itself, but pilgrims gradually came from all over Japan.

Until the twentieth century, the only way to do the pilgrimage was by foot, but as Japan modernized and developed increasingly efficient transport systems, the options for pilgrims broadened.

There is no stipulated rule that says that pilgrims should walk, and Shikoku pilgrims have always made use of whatever means could enable them to make the pilgrimage in the ways they wished. This again is a common theme in pilgrimages worldwide. British medieval pilgrims traveling to Santiago would usually go by boat from England to northern Spain, thereby eradicating the need to walk long distances. The advent of air services has made the Muslim pilgrimage

to Mecca increasingly accessible and swift for participants.

In Shikoku, the most significant factor in transport terms has been the development of organized bus pilgrimage tours, which started in the 1950s and are now the most common way of doing the pilgrimage. Such tours, along with better roads and lodging facilities, have made the pilgrimage accessible to older and less mobile people. Whereas in earlier times the journey was hazardous and beyond the reach of most people, in the modern day it has become within the remit of the wider public. Nowadays, too, many do the pilgrimage in stages, something that is common among those who want to walk but cannot get enough time off work to do so in one go; thus, they may return to Shikoku time and again to pick up the route where they left off the last time. However one travels, the essence of the pilgrimage remains the same—visiting all eighty-eight temples in the company of and following the path created in legend by Kōbō Daishi. Whether on foot, by bus or car, or by some combination of these means, the pilgrimage is time-consuming: it takes about six weeks by foot or ten to twelve days by bus or car.

Indeed, in many ways the pilgrimage may be more arduous for those on buses. When my wife and I walked the pilgrimage in 1984, it took six weeks and was a massive physical challenge—but we could go at our own pace and rest when we wished. When I later did the pilgrimage by bus as part of my research, the pilgrims got up very early every day. We visited several temples each day and were constantly on the move. The time spent driving between temples involved endless chanting of prayers and invocations. Everyone talked late into the night. So I found the bus pilgrimage more exhausting than going on foot.

Those who go by bus tend to pray more than those who walk. Recent studies show that many foot pilgrims these

days do the circuit as a “challenge” and as a means of “finding themselves” and that they rarely mention Kōbō Daishi in their narratives, even as they continue to be driven by spiritual motivations. For many modern foot pilgrims, indeed, the route has become less a matter of faith centered on a Buddhist holy figure than a challenging long-distance hiking trail by which to test themselves. Often such pilgrims focus their journeys so much on the pilgrimage path that they spend little time and pray only briefly at the temples. By contrast, those who travel by bus tend to spend a far longer time praying at the temples and also engage in numerous ritual invocations to Kōbō Daishi while they are on their buses.

Despite the arduous nature of the pilgrimage, many people do it time and again. A recurrent theme in the narrative accounts of pilgrims not just in Shikoku but from many sacred sites around the world is that they find it hard to return home after their journeys and they often find themselves wanting to prolong the experience of being a transient pilgrim. Pilgrims have often spoken to me of how the pilgrimage is “addictive,” and people in Shikoku have even used the term *Shikoku byō* (Shikoku illness) to refer to such feelings.

Such notions of “illness” or “addiction” are found widely in pilgrimage. Many who go to Santiago de Compostela say that they want to do the pilgrimage again, and they often join Santiago pilgrimage confraternities and/or online pilgrimage discussion boards when they get home so they can continue to meet fellow pilgrims and talk about their experiences. Some even return to Spain to work as volunteers in pilgrim hostels on the route in order to maintain a link with the pilgrimage. Studies of many other pilgrimages—such as to Lourdes, in France, and Walsingham, a

popular pilgrimage shrine in England—indicate that coming back again and again is a common practice. Yet even within the context of repeated and “life-long” pilgrimages, Shikoku is particularly striking. Shinnen, an ascetic who produced the first guidebooks and collection of miracle tales about the pilgrimage at the end of the seventeenth century, walked the pilgrimage at least twenty times. He died and is buried on the route. Since his time, many pilgrims have done similarly, including Nakatsuka Mohei, who initially did the pilgrimage in 1865 after his family forbade him to marry the girl he desired. He then walked Shikoku almost continuously for the next sixty-six years, until he died in 1922 on his 282nd circuit. I have met several “permanent pilgrims,” from a man who pushed his rather sparse worldly belongings in a handcart and had been on the pilgrimage, he told me, for nineteen unbroken years to a couple who had left home and, having walked the pilgrimage, then built a small hut in the grounds of one of the temples and took up residence there to a man whom I interviewed in 1991, who had done 110 circuits. He first walked the pilgrimage in 1927 and did it regularly thereafter until he got too old to walk. In retirement he became a pilgrimage

guide, spending sixty days a year on the road guiding pilgrims and doing five or six circuits each year by bus.

Symbolic Structure and Meanings

Symbolically, in following in the path of Kōbō Daishi, pilgrims enact the notion of pilgrimage as a journey to enlightenment; simultaneously, the pilgrimage is a journey in the realms of death. The white pilgrim's shirt is a death shroud. The traditional pilgrim's hat bears a poem about transience that is traditionally inscribed on coffins, and hence the hat represents the pilgrim's coffin. The staff bears a funeral inscription and represents the pilgrim's gravestone. As such the pilgrim is accoutred for, and symbolically walks in, the realm of death and is temporarily "dead to the everyday world." When pilgrims died on the route (as happened often in premodern times), they would be buried along the pilgrimage route with their staff serving as their gravestone. Those who returned from the pilgrimage were symbolically reborn—again a recurrent theme found in pilgrimage in general.

This association with death has strongly resonated with pilgrims over the ages, and many are motivated by

popular beliefs about how doing the pilgrimage can ensure better rebirths or salvation at death. When I traveled with a group of senior citizens from Osaka on a pilgrimage tour some years back, one woman informed me that her husband had recently died and she was doing the pilgrimage as a memorial to help his soul journey to the next realm. Another woman on the same bus said she was doing it to improve her karma so that she would make a similar journey after death. People may also take signs of their deceased kin with them as they travel, so that the dead also symbolically perform the pilgrimage and gain merit thereby. I have met pilgrims carrying photos or even urns containing the ashes of the dead with them.

Pilgrims frequently have more-worldly wishes as well. In earlier times before modern medicine took hold, many pilgrims came to Shikoku because they were sick and seeking a miraculous cure; or, failing that, they were fired with the belief that if they died on the pilgrimage, their salvation would be assured. With modern medicine, the need for pilgrims to seek such cures has disappeared, but many continue to use the pilgrimage as a means of making requests for all manner of spiritual

help and worldly benefits, by beseeching Kōbō Daishi to grant them happiness and safety and to help them or their children or grandchildren to gain educational success or prosperity. Many see the pilgrimage as a means of participating in a traditional Japanese cultural custom, through which they can find their roots and reawaken a sense of cultural strength while visiting parts of Japan that have remained relatively unspoiled compared with the major cities. In such contexts, the rise of bus tours has been a striking feature. Many of these are now advertised as cultural tours, often incorporating local sights and restaurants as well as temples and pilgrimage places, in ways that seemingly downplay matters of faith while emphasizing the scenic delights of the island and drawing attention to images of tradition through beautiful photographs of pilgrims dressed in traditional clothing set against rural backdrops. Such images, too, have been widely projected in numerous television documentaries, films, and books, including guidebooks (many of them produced in conjunction with the pilgrimage temples), and seek to promote the pilgrimage as a way of gaining insights into the cultural history and traditions of Japan.

Pilgrimages and Tourism

The comforts of modern bus tours, the images mentioned above and projected in modern pilgrimage advertising, and the motives of some modern pilgrims—for whom pilgrimages such as Shikoku are a means of encountering Japanese cultural traditions and visiting parts of Japan they would not normally go to—should not, however, be seen as evidence of modern corruptions of the religious nature of pilgrimage. Pilgrims have always, as noted earlier, used whatever modes of travel are most convenient for them. In reality, pilgrimage, despite its symbolic associations with

journeys of enlightenment and transcendence, has rarely just been an ascetic or even wholly religious practice. Rather, from early times, whether in Shikoku or elsewhere, pilgrimage has provided a means and a legitimation through which people have been able to get away from everyday routines and structures to see new places and gain experience outside their immediate home areas.

In feudal times pilgrimage was often the only way people could get permission to leave home even temporarily. In Tokugawa Japan (1600–1868), permits to travel were usually granted only for purposes of pilgrimage, so in a sense pilgrimage became the means whereby people could escape from their ordinary lives and experience the world beyond the confines of their villages. As such, it offered the opportunity to see new places and let off steam—and provided the scope for the earliest forms of tourism. Pilgrimage and tourism in such terms are inextricably linked. Ise, famed as a pilgrimage center because of its Shinto shrines, was famous in Tokugawa times as much for its entertainment quarters serving the needs of “devout” pilgrims as it was for the sites themselves. Similar themes surrounded most other pilgrimage areas. Shikoku, for example, could boast of Dōgo Hot Springs and many other attractions where pilgrims could relax and enjoy themselves as they traveled. From early on, too, pilgrims could travel in organized groups and be guided around by those who catered for their every need. The pilgrimage guides of Ise were particularly efficient at organizing such tours and at scouring the country to drum up trade. Records of pilgrim lodges in Shikoku show that organized tours were not uncommon in earlier times. Those who organized and led such pilgrimage parties were known as *sendatsu*—a term that indicates someone who “stands at the head of and leads a group.” The descendants of such figures can be seen today in the guise of the ubiquitous tour guides, who can

be seen with their flags leading parties of Japanese tourists on guided tours in countless locations around the world.

In their development of a tourist dimension to pilgrimage, Japanese pilgrimage sites and routes are replicating themes found elsewhere in pilgrimage contexts. Indeed, it is fair to say that the roots of the tourist trade are grounded in pilgrimage. The first tourist offices and the first package tours are believed to have emerged in medieval Venice to cater to pilgrims seeking to get to the Christian Holy Land at a time when the overland route from Europe was deemed too dangerous because of Muslim incursions. As a result, pilgrims made their way to Venice, which at the time controlled the Mediterranean seaways, and from there they would pay an all-in-one sum to get passage, food, and a tour around the Holy Land and be brought back again. Because the pilgrim trade thus became so economically important to Venice, the authorities there set up tourist offices to help the pilgrims and to ensure that they did not get exploited

by unscrupulous merchants who might ruin the city’s reputation. While in Japan there is less evidence of such a regulatory dimension to the tourist/pilgrimage trade, there are distinct parallels with the organized tours mentioned above. In such contexts the modern bus tours of today can be seen not so much as departures from the earlier nature of pilgrimage as, in many ways, simply a modern continuation of them.

Of course, nowadays people do not have to find legitimations such as pilgrimage to justify traveling, and there are many enticing possibilities of travel and tourism to compete with pilgrimage. Yet the continued popularity of places such as Shikoku (which has seen a rise in pilgrim numbers in the first decade of this century) testifies to the enduring power and attraction that going on pilgrimage continues to have for many in the modern day and indicates that even in a modern, largely secular age, pilgrimage continues to resonate and be relevant and attractive to large numbers of people around the world. □

Pilgrims Are Seekers

by Juan Masiá

Pilgrims are seekers searching for the transcendent. And seekers are pilgrims, because they are in search of the ultimate or absolute.

According to the Latin etymology of the word, a pilgrim is someone who travels through the fields (*per ager*). The pilgrim passes through lands as a foreigner or a stranger. But in many religions, since ancient times, the pilgrim has been clearly distinguished from the vagabond or the simple traveler. Pilgrimages have spiritual motivations and objectives, even today, when the behavior, clothing, and lifestyles of these

“walking seekers” often make them look more like tourists or hikers.

The old Roman Catholic catechism used to list one of the works of mercy as “giving lodging to pilgrims,” in accordance with the biblical tradition of hospitality. But hospitality is a word with ambivalent origins. *Hospitality*, *hospice*, and *hospital* all have a common Indo-European etymology: *ghos-ti* means “enemy” or “stranger” (in Latin, *hostis*);

ghos-pot means “host,” one who receives or entertains guests (*host* in Middle English; *hospes* in Latin). The traveler who asks for lodging may be a friend or an enemy; he may engender hospitality or hostility. Is this not just what happens with religious pilgrimages, which can be either a collective symbol of a peaceful community or a fanatic demonstration? Perhaps one should always ask pilgrims why they are walking and what their objective is.

In fact, the metaphor of the path is one of the important symbols leading to the mystery of the sacred. Buddhism is the way of enlightenment. Confucianism is the way of harmony in human relations. Taoism is the return to the primordial unity of the Way. Shintoism bears its name because it is the way of the *kami*, or divinities. All Muslims are obliged to travel the way to Mecca at least once in their lives. The community of John the Evangelist placed in Christ’s mouth the confession of identity: “I am the Way”; and in the city of Antioch, before the followers of Jesus came to be called Christians, they were known as “the people of the Way.”

Religious processions, though they are not without their ambiguities, manifest a search for holiness on a popular level. But sometimes it is just a small step from a procession to a riot, from a gathering of the faithful to a revolt of the masses. That is what happened in Ephesus, when the silversmiths rebelled against Paul. The people who bought the smiths’ objects to offer at the temple (in the process affording the smiths lucrative

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earnings) were manipulated and whipped up by the traders, and what began as a procession to a temple of the goddess Diana ended up as a demonstration against Paul. Luke describes it graphically: “Everyone was shouting something, because they were excited, while the others did not know why everyone had come together” (Acts 19:32).

Whether alone or in groups, members of the faithful with the most diverse beliefs, as well as people without any particular belief but who are in some way seeking meaning, identity, or hope, all travel the routes of the pagodas and relics of the Buddha in India and Sri Lanka, or the road to Santiago in northern Spain, or the paths that lead to Mecca, or the route that passes through the eighty-eight Buddhist sanctuaries on the Japanese island of Shikoku. Is there not a common character in all of these pilgrimages?

Every year as a teenager during the spring and autumn festivals, I made the pilgrimage to the sanctuary of Maria de la Fuensanta (Mary of the Holy Fountain) in the mountains of Carrascoy, five kilometers south of my hometown, Murcia, in Spain. Fifty years later, on the occasion of a trip from Japan back to my hometown, I repeated the same pilgrimage. At that time I reflected on the polysemy of the pilgrimage: walking meditation, which is complementary to *zazen* (seated meditation); walking encounters with fellow pilgrims, sharing the stories of their lives while going on in their pilgrimage; hospitality, offered to each other by the pilgrims and to the pilgrims by the people of the small villages on the

way; healings, reconciliations, spiritual insights or disclosures, and so on, during a journey that can be both self-seeking and seeking for the ultimate. As the theologian Roger Haight says in his book *Spirituality for Seekers*, “Seekers live in the context of the large questions of meaning and purpose in existence. . . . Seekers are not content with the answers to these basic questions as they have been proffered them, and are looking for symbols.” Spirituality as a “dimension of life prior to and more basic than membership in a religious community is compatible with being a seeker.” The pilgrimage is a living symbol of a spirituality of seekers.

Pilgrimage is an emblematic image of spirituality and the search for the meaning of human life. Pilgrims are seekers searching for the transcendent. And seekers are pilgrims, because they are in search of the ultimate, or absolute. As Pascal said, freely quoting Augustine: “You would not seek Me if you had not already found Me and you would not have found Me if I had not first found you.” But when meeting on the way other pilgrims from other religions and cultures, all of us should remember that none of us has the monopoly of the finishing line and none of us has reached perfectly the goal of “the Way.”

Canterbury Trails— Ways of Twenty-First-Century Pilgrims

by Peter Kenny

Not all of the modern-day pilgrims are Anglicans; many of them are Roman Catholics, and some these days are Buddhists. Some may not have any particular spiritual beliefs.

Cathedral. Photo by the author.

Canterbury is a focal point for English Christianity, its name invoking images of pilgrimage. This city in the south-east of England is a place people from all over the world aim for in their quest to experience the Pilgrims' Way.

Those whose beliefs are firmly rooted in faith might question whether post-modern beings who trek the Pilgrims' Way are tourists rather than pilgrims, but perhaps the lines are blurred. Communist atheists have been known to make pilgrimages, so the matter of faith in pilgrimages may not necessarily be spiritual. Yet Canterbury's role in English history of earlier times and in literature helped stamp its pilgrim identity.

"There is probably no other road or trackway in the whole of England that can boast such a literature as does this path, around which myth, legend, history, enthusiasm, and tradition have combined to weave such a tangled web," says the British writer Derek Bright in his book *The Pilgrims' Way: Fact and Fiction of an Ancient Trackway*.

Canterbury is a small, charming city in which many people believe resides the archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, the head of the Church of England, Britain's biggest church. Williams is the spiritual

leader of approximately eighty million members of the Anglican Communion and was enthroned at the cathedral in 2003. Archbishop Williams does not actually live in Canterbury, although he has a residence there. He lives in London but visits Canterbury about twice a month, although he has no direct say in the running of the cathedral.

The city's outstanding landmark is the spectacular tawny towers of Canterbury Cathedral, which has been designated

part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is a place where international visitors line up each day.

Visiting the cathedral at certain times of the day could give the impression that it is just a tourist attraction, with people coming to visit the stunning architecture and the artifacts that the Christian citadel has accumulated over centuries.

Faith

"But this is a place where people also come to pray and express their faith," says Christopher Robinson, the public relations manager for Canterbury Cathedral, noting that two thousand services are held in the cathedral each year. "People do not come here just to look at the building," he adds. The cathedral's own Web site attests that it is "foremost, a place of continual worship. There are at least three services every day: matins, holy communion, and evensong [Anglican evening prayers that are accompanied by singing]."

The cathedral charges a visitor fee, as it gets no state subsidization, as many other churches in European countries do, but locals and those who genuinely want to worship do not have to pay. "We can get up to five hundred or six hundred people in an evening service, although some of them may be visitors who take part in the service," says Robinson.

Some one million people enter the cathedral each year, but that pales

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against the thirteen million Muslims who visit Mecca each year or the millions of Catholic pilgrims received annually at the Papal Basilica of Saint Peter at the Vatican. Still, it is worth noting that the Islamic prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca in 570, at about the same time that Augustine was getting ready to do his mission work in England.

Canterbury Cathedral is the mother church of the Anglican Communion and the seat of the archbishop of Canterbury. It was also the first seat of Christendom in England and played an important role in medieval England. The cathedral precincts account for about nine hectares (nearly fifteen acres), or about one-sixth of the city area, which is in the garden county of Kent, famous for apples and, more recently, for English wine.

The city of Canterbury has a population of only about forty-three thousand, but it has the oldest cathedral in England. Canterbury has three universities and a historic cricket ground for the Kent County team, one of England's top teams. The city is close to the port of Dover, one of Britain's closest points to France, and was settled in Roman times. It has a number of ferry connections with France and is where the tunnel across the channel separating the two countries surfaces.

Historians have recorded that the Black Death hit Canterbury in 1348. At that time Canterbury had a population of ten thousand, making it England's tenth-largest city. By the early sixteenth century, the population had fallen to

three thousand, so this pilgrim center has had its ups and downs.

Missionaries to England

In medieval society, pilgrimage was important for many people, and the definitive destination was Jerusalem. Within England, however, Canterbury is a place where Christianity has been present since 597 CE. That was the time that the kingdom of Kent converted to Christianity and Saint Augustine founded an episcopal see in the city. Augustine became the first archbishop of Canterbury in the days when Rome was sending missionaries to Anglo-Saxon England, considered dangerous at the time.

Local Anglicans boast that Canterbury has more saints associated with it than any other place in England, including Saint Dunstan, Saint Alphege, and Saint Anselm (all archbishops in the early Middle Ages), as well as Augustine, who are all buried in the cathedral.

The modern pilgrimage is considered a benign practice, but Canterbury has had its fair share of strife. In 842 CE and again in 851, many people died in Canterbury during Danish raids. The abbey in Canterbury was rebuilt in 978 at the calling of Archbishop Dunstan, who again started building on the work begun by Augustine, and named it Saint Augustine's Abbey. Yet the Danes attacked again in 991, and again in 1011. The cathedral was razed and Archbishop Alphege was killed.

In more modern times, during the Second World War, a total of 10,445 bombs were dropped on Canterbury during 135 separate raids in which 731 homes and 296 other buildings in the city were destroyed and 115 people killed. The roof of the cathedral was partially damaged in the raids but the archives next to it in the church precincts was totally destroyed.

Today the atmosphere of a market or pilgrim town prevails. Robinson says that not all of the modern-day pilgrims are Anglicans; many of them are Roman Catholics, and some these days are Buddhists. Some may not have any particular spiritual beliefs.

"There is a general searching for spiritual values even if people are not overtly Christian," says Robinson, adding that Canterbury embraces such pilgrims and stating, "We are part of the

Via Francigena route to Rome.” This was the major medieval pilgrimage route to Rome from the north, commencing in Canterbury, which continues to be followed today.

As with many words in the English language that are often global but not specific, *pilgrimage* is one that often conjures up images rather than a precise definition. A journey with spiritual or moral significance is often thought of as a pilgrimage, and concerted movement from one place to another is also associated with pilgrimage.

In medieval times pilgrims would journey to cathedrals that preserved relics of saints, as they believed these held miraculous powers. Pilgrimage was strongly linked with Christian striving to get to heaven after life on earth. Yet engaging in a pilgrimage is certainly not restricted to Christianity.

One saint who had such miraculous powers for Canterbury was Thomas Becket, who was also known as Saint Thomas of Canterbury as well as Thomas à Becket. He lived from 1118 to December 29, 1170. Becket was archbishop of Canterbury from 1162 until his murder in 1170. In the days when church and crown were intertwined, Becket was assassinated in Canterbury Cathedral by knights of King Henry II because of a disagreement with the monarch. The quarrel centered on the rights

and privileges of the church. Despite the Protestant Reformation, which was a revolt against the doctrines, rituals, and ecclesiastical structure of the Catholic Church, both the Church of Rome and the Anglican Communion venerate Becket as a martyr and a saint. Soon after Becket's death, stories of miracles connected to his remains emerged, establishing Canterbury Cathedral as a popular pilgrimage destination.

It was the pilgrimage associated with Becket that provided the material and inspiration for Geoffrey Chaucer's fourteenth-century literary classic *The Canterbury Tales*. The tales were mainly written in medieval verse, although some are in prose. Some say the themes in the tales and some of the bawdiness can be compared to Japan's *The Tale of Genji*, attributed to the Japanese noblewoman Murasaki Shikibu in the early eleventh century, although Chaucer's pilgrims are not normally in the same social echelon as Genji's main protagonists.

The culture of *The Canterbury Tales* provides an inspiration for many of the touristic pilgrims who visit Canterbury, but many spiritual pilgrims also connect the literary with the spiritual, and the city promotes Chaucer in tandem with the religious side.

Christopher Marlowe, a sixteenth-century contemporary of William

Shakespeare's—who was never as productive or as acclaimed as his contemporary, maybe because he was stabbed to death at the age of twenty-nine—wrote plays in the city in the sixteenth century. The son of a shoemaker, he was educated at the King's School, which is said to have been founded in 597 CE by Saint Augustine, who it might be said laid the foundations for Canterbury's pilgrimages, having made a substantial journey himself to get there. Marlowe went on to Cambridge on a scholarship.

“The name Canterbury still has resonance,” says Robinson. “A lot of people who come know the story of Thomas Becket and Henry II and the murder and what went on around it and want to see what is left. Of course, there is not a lot left because it was destroyed in the Reformation,” when Christians who are now known as Protestants broke from the church in Rome.

Bright, in *The Pilgrims' Way*, writes about how the Reformation and the era of Puritanism dramatically changed the nature of pilgrimages. At the time of the Protestant Reformation, monasteries were pulled down and the city's priory, nunnery, and three friaries were closed. Saint Augustine's Abbey, which was the fourteenth richest in England at the time, was surrendered to the English Crown, and its church and cloister were flattened. Over the next fifteen years, the rest of the abbey was taken down, although part of the site was converted to a palace. The shrine to Becket was pulled down, and all the treasures there were taken to the Tower of London. The images of Becket were demolished, and his name and activities were discredited throughout the kingdom of England. Pilgrimages were ended.

Another Reformation casualty was the cathedral's medieval library, which was mostly dispersed or destroyed. Now the cathedral library is managed jointly with the University of Kent and has more than sixty thousand books and pamphlets.

“It is now nearly five hundred years since Thomas Cromwell’s and Cranmer’s contribution to the Protestant Reformation effectively put an end to pilgrimage to Becket’s shrine,” wrote Bright. “Together with the abolition of saints’ days and the display of relics, a new personal relationship between man and God was forged, which precluded a role for intermediaries such as Saint Thomas. So as to ensure that no room remained for confusion, decrees were issued to eradicate all memory of Becket’s existence to the extent that his name was removed from records, his image forbidden, and his bones removed and the shrine destroyed.”

Yet he writes that many people still come to walk the Pilgrims’ Way and visit Canterbury, noting, “Of these modern-day pilgrims, many seek a deeper secular or spiritual meaning from their journey.”

Ecumenical Canterbury

The visit of John Paul II in 1982, the first such visit by a reigning pope to the United Kingdom, attests to the ecumenical nature of contemporary Canterbury. During his visit the pope also met Queen Elizabeth II, the supreme governor of the Church of England.

The city of Canterbury has very close ties with the French town of Bec-Hellouin, in Normandy. Each Thursday the communities pray for each other and for the unity of all Christians. In the times of the Norman conquest of England, two bishops were sent from France, including Saint Anselm. Bec Abbey was the most influential abbey in the Anglo-Norman kingdom of the twelfth century, and it has a Benedictine monastery.

Robinson points out that ecumenical ties are not only with Catholics. A French church was established in Canterbury during the reign of Elizabeth I for Huguenot refugees, Protestants who fled

persecution by Catholics in France and other places in western Europe. Every Sunday afternoon a service in French is held at Canterbury Cathedral. By the seventeenth century, of Canterbury’s five thousand people, two thousand were French-speaking Protestant Huguenots who were fleeing persecution.

Keeping Lead on the Roof

As indicated earlier, members of the public who enter the Canterbury Cathedral area pay a small fee, which assists with the massive maintenance costs. Robinson says Canterbury Cathedral can normally pay its own way, its main sources of income being visitor admission charges, rents, and donations from individuals and charitable trusts. It also gets profits from the cathedral gift shop, while the International Study Centre and the Cathedral Lodge boost funds. But when the cathedral has to replace its lead roof, as it does now, extra funds have to be raised.

The cathedral roof weighs sixteen hundred (British) tons and has twenty-five hundred tiles. This is the equivalent of having twenty-six British army tanks or two hundred double-decker buses parked on it. There are also twelve

hundred square meters (about thirteen hundred square yards) of stained glass in the cathedral, which could almost cover a football pitch.

Writer Derek Bright is skeptical that religion underpins the Pilgrims’ Way; he says, “Today many still come to walk the Pilgrims’ Way and visit Canterbury. Of these modern-day pilgrims, many seek a deeper secular or spiritual meaning from their journey. For the journey can fulfill a basic human need for elemental feelings.”

Robinson states that in 2010 Canterbury Cathedral had fifty-four groups of pilgrims, or about one a week, with the numbers in the groups varying between twenty and seventy. There are also a number of individual pilgrimages, and the number of groups has been growing gradually over the years. “Some of them are almost cultural pilgrims rather than religious,” admits Robinson.

He notes that because the cathedral was a monastery in the early days, it is difficult to use the whole building. “We want to enhance music facilities,” he says, and he also notes that “until a few years ago, people knew better about churches. That cultural knowledge is not there anymore,” so there is a need to explain to people how the ritual of religion works. As at religious sites throughout the globe, people sometimes wander around the inside of the cathedral as if it were an art museum, something worshippers can find offensive.

When asked how he might sum up the essence of Canterbury Cathedral pithily, Robinson says he would like to borrow a quote from Baron Roy Hattersley, a former deputy leader of Britain’s Labour Party, who despite being an avowed atheist is a strong supporter of the cathedral. “This is England set in stone,” is what Hattersley says. Still, Robinson also points out that the most enduring aspect of Canterbury is its community, which has been ongoing since 597 CE. The oldest building still standing is one thousand years old. □

Pilgrimage and Interreligious Understanding

A Case Study of Sri Pada Mountain in Sri Lanka

by Elizabeth J. Harris

Pilgrimage, I would suggest, has the power to unite people of different religions because it deals in the affective, in what is connected with the emotions.

I climbed the mountain called Sri Pada in the late 1980s with two others. We started just as night began. It was the pilgrimage season between January and May, when rain and mist are unlikely to hinder the ascent of more than seven thousand feet.

Gone were the days when pilgrims had to haul themselves up with iron chains during the last part. Steps, carved into the side of the mountain, lit by lamps, aided our ascent. From a distance, these looked like a diamond necklace hung from the summit. Hundreds of people climbed with us, young and old, fit and infirm, some of whom would have cleansed themselves before starting by washing in a river at the foot of the mountain. At certain points, we had to pause at every step because of the crush. Some pilgrims were dressed in the traditional white worn by Buddhist laypeople when they are involved in religious activities and sang religious verses as they climbed. Others, particularly young people, played music on radios, attempting to reach the top for fun rather than for religious purposes. There were also some Hindus—not many, since this was a time of ethnic tension and internal war—and a few Westerners, such as myself.

All of us were united by the effort of climbing, the darkness of the night,

and our goal to reach the top before sunrise. Those who were religious were also united by the wish to gain blessing and to touch a source of the holy. Most of us reached the top before dawn. We pulled on the cord of a vast bell to indicate how many times we had made the journey. We visited the Buddhist shrine at the top and paid reverence. We then waited for the sun to appear, pulling warm clothes around us, talking in hushed tones. When it did, we found we were above the clouds. Swirling below us was a sea of white. The sight was stupendous. Only then was the return journey made, with strained muscles but joyous hearts.

The name Sri Pada literally means “holy footprint.” Sri Pada Mountain is conically shaped and rises from the southern part of the island of Sri Lanka. At its top is a large indentation something like the shape of a foot. To Buddhists, this is the footprint of the Buddha, who is believed to have visited the island three times during his life. To Hindus, it is the footprint of Śiva. To Muslims, it is the footprint of Adam. William Harvard, one of the first Wesleyan Methodist missionaries from Britain, who arrived in Sri Lanka in 1815, claimed that Muslims believed a fountain at its summit was produced by the tears of Adam and Eve, weeping over

the killing of Abel.¹ To some Christians, it is the footprint of Saint Thomas, a belief that could go back to the very early centuries of Christian history, when it was known that there were Christians in Sri Lanka.

Sri Pada has brought pilgrims of different religions together in Sri Lanka for centuries. Buddhists and Hindus who climb Sri Pada believe that they will create merit or spiritual capital for themselves, because the very act of climbing toward the footprint will have good consequences according to the Law of Karma, or Action. Others believe the indentation has healing properties or that prayers offered near it will surely be answered or that touching it will eradicate all their wrongdoings. Some will have made a vow that they would climb Sri Pada if a request to the gods had been answered. All believe it is necessary to climb with a pure heart and pure intentions.

True pilgrims climb with humility and devotion. Sri Pada, however, has seen tussles of power among Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims about who should control the shrine at the top. Buddhists control it at the moment, but there have been times when it has been controlled by Hindus. Pilgrimage sites such as Sri Pada have the potential both to hinder interreligious understanding and to foster it. I would argue, however, that the potential for creating interreligious understanding is greater than the potential for harm.

Let me illustrate this through citing the encounter of three British people

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with Sri Pada in the nineteenth century. Sri Lanka was governed by the British between 1796 and 1948. At first, Sri Pada lay within an independent Kandyan kingdom in the center of the island, but it could be seen from the coastal areas, which were under British control. It became an object of fantasy and myth for the British as they established their rule and attempted to understand the Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam that they found in the country. When they actually conquered the Kingdom of Kandy in 1815, Sri Pada became British territory, as did some of the other important pilgrimage sites in the island, such as Kandy and Anuradhapura. It was Sri Pada, however, that particularly appealed to the imagination of the British, not at first because of its religious significance but because it was such a challenge in terms of physical effort and courage. They began to climb it and used the ascent to test their power. In fact, the mountain became a metaphor for whether the British had the power to rule. In this sense, their presence on the mountain caused tensions for the local people, who saw the mountain as their holy space. However, on the positive side, the British were able to witness, as they climbed, an aspect of Sri Lankan religion that they had not seen before. For some, this gave them a greater understanding and sympathy toward it.

The early British climbers were mainly men, and vivid descriptions of the mountain emerge from their diaries

and memoirs. Some were only concerned with the physical difficulty of climbing the mountain, particularly the last part, which involved using metal chains. Some watched, however, the devotion of the people and learned. Henry Marshall was one. He arrived in Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was then known) in 1808 and from 1816 to 1821 was senior medical officer in the Kandyan provinces. He

climbed Sri Pada in 1819 and wrote this of the pilgrims:

“Some of them were indeed mere children; and others, both men and women, were bent and infirm from old age. They were all obviously dressed in their best clothes. When a party of pilgrims arrived, they generally proceeded to the rock in the centre of the enclosure, which they ascended on the

shelving side. They stood for a short time looking at the sacred impression, making occasionally a number of profound *salaams*, putting the palms of the hands together, and holding them before their faces, bending low at the same time, or raising them above the head. While thus employed, they seemed to be muttering some words of devotion. Each individual presented an offering, which was placed on the sacred impression. The offerings were various, consisting, however, generally of copper coin, rice, betel leaves, areka-nuts, cotton cloth, onions, flowers, a lock of the hair of the head, or a portion of a long beard. . . . The pilgrims then descended the rock, and formed themselves into a row, with their faces towards the foot-print or *Sree Pada*. Here one of the party opened a small prayer-book, constructed of talipot leaves (*banna potta*) and read, or rather chanted, a number of sentences or passages from it. At the end of each passage he was joined by the whole group, male and female, in a loud chorus or response.”²

Marshall wrote factually, wishing to implant in his memory what he saw. It is evident, however, that he was fascinated by it. John Davy (1790–1868), a doctor who worked in Kandy soon after it lost its independence, climbed Sri Pada in 1817. He was not very impressed by the footprint. It was the view from the top that caught his imagination. When he was woken in the morning, however, by some Sinhala Buddhist pilgrims, he was deeply impressed by the emotions he witnessed. In his memoir, he first of all explained that a member of the monastic sangha led the group in the chanting of the three refuges and the five precepts. He then wrote:

“An interesting scene followed this: wives affectionately and respectfully saluted their husbands, and children their parents, and friends one another. An old grey-headed woman first made her salaams to a really venerable old man; she was moved to tears, and almost kissed his feet: he affectionately raised her up. Several middle-aged men then salaamed the patriarchal pair; these men were salaamed in return by still younger

men, who had first paid their respects to the old people; and lastly, those nearly of the same standing slightly salaamed each other, and exchanged betel-leaves. The intention of these salutations, I was informed, was of a moral kind—to confirm the ties of kindred—to strengthen family love and friendship, and remove animosities.”³

Davy was evidently touched and impressed by this. Women did not usually climb Sri Pada. One exception came later in the century. Constance Gordon Cumming (1837–1924) was an aristocratic Scottish woman who traveled to Sri Lanka in the 1870s at the invitation of the then bishop of Colombo, Bishop Jermyn. The bishop was an evangelist and believed mistakenly that it would be easy to convert Buddhists to Christianity. Gordon Cumming was tempted to think in the same way and was evidently influenced by Christian missionaries. She was also a sketcher and was deeply attracted to the aesthetic appearance of the Buddhist monastic sangha, the Buddhist monks. It was her climbing a

of Sri Pada, however, that brought her, I believe, to a deeper understanding of what could unite religions. According to her memoirs, she slept on the summit of the mountain, and when she awoke she heard pilgrims nearing the summit, struggling up through the mists, holding lights and singing. At first she described their singing as “wild and pathetic,” but then she wrote this:

“At last the topmost stair was reached, and as each pilgrim set foot on the level just below the shrine, he extinguished his torch of blazing palm-leaves, and with bowed head and outstretched arms stood wrapped in fervent adoration. Some knelt so lowly that their foreheads rested on the rock. Then facing the east—now streaked with bars of orange betwixt purple clouds—they waited with earnest faces, eagerly longing for the appearing of the sun, suggesting to my mind a strikingly Oriental illustration of the words of the poet-king, ‘My soul waiteth for the Lord *more than they that watch for the morning.*’

“Gradually the orange glow broadened, and the welling light grew clearer and clearer, until, with a sudden bound, up rose the glorious sun, and, as if with one voice, each watcher greeted its appearing, with the deep-toned ‘Saādu!

Saādu!’ which embodies such indescribable intensity of devotion.”⁴

In this piece of writing Gordon Cumming compared Buddhist devotion to the devotion of Jews and Christians by quoting a line from the Bible. She could not have done this if she had not seen deep similarities between Buddhist and Christian devotion. She was thus able to move beyond her own Christian beliefs to see what all religions share in common.

Pilgrimage, I would suggest, has the power to unite people of different religions because it deals in the affective, in what is connected with the emotions. Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam can appear very different from one another when beliefs are compared. Buddhism is nontheistic. Christianity and Islam are theistic. Buddhism believes in rebirth; Christianity and Islam do not. However, people go on pilgrimage not so much because of structures of belief but because of something connected with the heart and the emotions. As I’ve explained, it is connected with the desire for blessing, for forgiveness, for wholeness, and for strength to continue the journey of life. These emotions are not restricted to one religion. They stretch across the religions of the

world. Therefore, in pilgrimage all who walk or climb together can be united in aspirations that can be communicated through gesture, dress, posture, and facial expression.

The presence of the British on Sri Pada, as imperialists, may have caused tensions for some people, but I would suggest that more good was done than harm, in terms of the interreligious understanding it nurtured. Pilgrimage can be a practice that unites and strengthens people, whatever their religion. □

Notes

1. William Harvard, *A Narrative of the Establishment and Progress of the Mission to India and Ceylon Founded by the Late Rev. Thomas Coke under the Direction of the Wesleyan-Methodist Conference* (London: W. M. Harvard, 1823), xxiii.
2. Henry Marshall, *Ceylon: A General Description of the Island and Its Inhabitants, with an Historical Sketch of the Conquest of the Colony by the English* (London: William Allen, 1846), 235.
3. John Davy, *An Account of the Interior of Ceylon, and of Its Inhabitants: With Travels in That Island* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1821), 345.
4. Constance Gordon Cumming, *Two Happy Years in Ceylon*, vol. 2 (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1892), 338.

The World Shall Come to Walsingham

by Gaynor Sekimori

The modern reconstruction of Walsingham began in the middle years of the nineteenth century, a product of Victorian romanticism and antiquarianism and, more important, nostalgia for the medieval Catholic past within certain Anglican circles.

Five hundred years ago, before the turmoil of the Reformation that changed the face of religion in Britain, the land was webbed with sacred places visited by larger or smaller numbers of pilgrims. The greatest of these sites were Canterbury and Walsingham. The name of Canterbury remains alive to us today, thanks to Geoffrey Chaucer and the pilgrims with whom he populated the road to the tomb of Saint Thomas Becket and to the fact that the cathedral still towers

above the fields of Kent, witness to the pre-Reformation past. Pilgrims continue to visit Canterbury, and in 2008 the British Broadcasting Corporation covered the London-Canterbury route in a program dealing with the lasting appeal of pilgrimages. Modern pilgrims are both secular and spiritual: there are “pilgrimage” holidays that focus on the journey—the natural surroundings and the culture and history to be found en route—and a cycling club in

London even calls its annual cycle ride the Canterbury Pilgrimage, but there is also a keen religious interest. In 2011, for example, students from Kings College London went there on foot at the beginning of Lent; a Roman Catholic society organized a three-day pilgrimage from Rochester, ending with a blessing in Canterbury Cathedral; and sixteen members of a Tunbridge Wells Russian Orthodox church sang services at the sites of the tombs of two early saints within the cathedral. The cathedral provides, in its own words, “a wide range of facilities from private services to specially tailored guide tours” to “make your pilgrimage a special occasion” but has made no attempt to re-create its past by restoring the tomb of Thomas Becket as the focal point of pilgrimage; its identity as Mother Church of Anglican Christianity precludes any necessity to situate itself in the pre-Reformation world as a means of establishing its authority. Today only a single candle marks the place where the great gold-plated and jewel-encrusted shrine once stood.

The situation at Walsingham is very different. It had no poet to make its name familiar throughout the land, and when its great church was dissolved and its holy image taken to London and burned by royal command in 1538, there was nothing left to draw people to the tiny isolated North Norfolk village. Yet for three hundred years kings and nobles, as well as ordinary people, had flocked to its shrine of the Virgin Mary, seeking, in the words of Erasmus, who visited it

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in 1511, the health of their family, the increase of their estate, a long and happy life in this world, and eternal happiness in the next. Even Henry VIII, whose religious policies were to result in the dissolution of the monasteries and the destruction of pilgrimage sites, visited at least twice, and he continued to support it monetarily right to the end.

What was the power of Walsingham to attract pilgrims? Though today it is located in an isolated rural corner of North Norfolk, it was in medieval times in the middle of one of the richest areas in the land, whose main town of Norwich was second only to London in size and wealth. Evidence of the riches that the wool and cloth trade brought to East Anglia, of which Norfolk is a part, is apparent in the number of large churches and monastic ruins that still dot the landscape. In medieval times there were many pilgrimage centers in the region, like Bromholm Priory, with its remnant of the True Cross, and the shrine of the Virgin Mary in Ipswich, but none was greater than that of Our Lady of Walsingham. By the middle of the fifteenth century, it was one of the most important centers for the cult of the Virgin Mary in all of Europe.

At the center of the Walsingham cult was its statue of the Virgin, whose allure was later heightened by its location within a shrine called the “Holy House.” According to legend, the shrine had been founded sometime in the twelfth century by the widow of a local landowner called Richeldis; a great church and monastery were later built around it,

housing a community of Augustinian canons, who provided all the necessities that pilgrims required—access to sacred images and relics, miraculous healing, souvenirs such as pilgrim badges and holy water, accommodation, and spiritual consolation. Richeldis’s shrine was first identified as Mary’s Holy House in Nazareth around the mid-1400s, probably influenced by the tradition associated with the Loreto Shrine in Italy that angels had transported the actual Holy House there. The Walsingham founding legend, set out in what is now known as the Pynson ballad (ca. 1460), has become a central aspect of the revived cult today. It describes how Our Lady appeared to the widow Richeldis in a dream and told her to build a replica of her Holy House in Nazareth so that “all who seek me there shall find succor.” The ballad called Walsingham the “new Nazareth” and described England as “the holy land, Our Lady’s dowry.” These ideas have become important elements in today’s pilgrimage story as a metaphor for atonement for the

despoliation of the shrine through the restoration of a lost Marian-centered spirituality.

The shrine was located in the grounds of the priory, on the north side of the church and surrounded, like that in Loreto, by a protective building. According to Erasmus, it was “built of wooden planks admitting the devotees at each side by a narrow little door.

The light is obscure, indeed scarcely but from the wax candles, and a most delightful fragrance meets the nostrils. On entrance, it seems like the seat of the blessed, so glittering is it on all sides with silver, gold and jewels." The modern replica in the Anglican Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, built in 1931, follows this description closely. The priory also possessed two holy wells, reputed to cure headaches and stomach disorders; a number of relics such as Saint Peter's knucklebone; and a crystal vial of the Virgin's milk.

Pilgrims' offerings made the priory very rich. A 1345 document says that the gates of the priory had to be closed at night to keep secure the valuable jewels donated to the Virgin, and consequently late-arriving pilgrims had to spend the night outside the grounds. Erasmus compared the canons of the priory to toll collectors on bridges, always on hand to receive donations from visitors, but also described how some visitors "were so devoted to the Virgin" that on the pretense of making an offering, they "filch away what someone else has

placed there." In 1534 alone the chapel earned more than 250 pounds, and even when dissolution was looming in 1536, 113 shillings were offered between one particular Saturday and Sunday. While during the early Reformation years committed Protestants attacked the "feigned miracles" of the "witch of Walsingham," royal commissioners were just as concerned to garner its wealth for the king: in July 1538 they took away the image and all the gold, silver, and jewels from the chapel, and two months later they took hold of the church and all of its possessions as well, which they sold to a local man for ninety pounds. The shrine slowly passed from memory, to be mourned in the next generation as a place where "heaven turned is to hell" and where "Levell levell with the ground / The towres doe lye / Which with their golden, glittering tops / Pearsed once to the sky."

The modern reconstruction of Walsingham began in the middle years of the nineteenth century, a product of Victorian romanticism and antiquarianism and, more important, nostalgia

for the medieval Catholic past within certain Anglican circles. In 1847, when a group of "archaeological pilgrims" visited Walsingham, they commented that "there were no busy hostelryes, no throng of strangers, the town is now a quiet village, the glittering shrine was leveled to the dust, and its site restored to the hands of nature." Fifty years later, though, it was a different story. In the course of the nineteenth century, the legalization of public Roman Catholic worship in Britain and the rise of Anglo-Catholicism within the Anglican Church refocused attention on the Virgin Mary, paralleling an outpouring of Marian devotion and a spate of visions of the Virgin all over Europe. Appropriately, shrines to Our Lady of Walsingham appeared in both a Roman Catholic and an Anglo-Catholic context—the first (Anglican) in 1887 in the parish church in Buxted, built to the dimensions of Walsingham's Holy House, and the second (Roman Catholic) in 1897 in the Church of the Annunciation in King's Lynn, as a small replica of the Holy House of Loreto. Around the same

time, a convert to Catholicism called Charlotte Boyd bought a derelict former chapel a mile from Walsingham called the Slipper Chapel, with the intention of restoring Marian worship there. The first pilgrimage to Walsingham in modern times took place between King's Lynn and the Slipper Chapel in 1897 (though apparently only the last portion, from Walsingham station to the Slipper Chapel, was on foot).

In 1921 an Anglo-Catholic called Alfred Hope Patten, assistant priest at Buxted, became vicar of Walsingham. Despite opposition from his bishop, he immediately installed in the parish church a statue of Our Lady of Walsingham, modeled on a 1534 priory seal. Ordered to remove the statue, he raised funds to build a separate shrine building in the village opposite the priory ruins, and this was dedicated in 1931, the nucleus of the present Anglican Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. Whereas the Catholic-occupied Slipper Chapel is a genuine medieval building, Hope Patten's shrine building, with a reproduction of the Holy House situated at the north end, is an imaginative re-creation of medieval Catholicism, consciously symbolic of repairing the wounds of the Reformation. Medieval romanticism, typical of Anglo-Catholic aspirations of the time for revived pre-Reformation ritual and devotional practices, is apparent, too, in the "medieval whimsicality" with which, according to a modern commentator, Hope Patten "decked out" members of the College of Guardians he set up to administer the shrine.

Once the Anglicans established their own presence in Walsingham in the 1920s, the Catholic Church transferred the shrine at King's Lynn to the Slipper Chapel, which in 1934 was inaugurated as the National Shrine of Our Lady with the first National Pilgrimage of Reparation between the Slipper Chapel and the priory grounds. A new statue, also based on the priory seal, was commissioned

and placed in the chapel. Ironically, the interior of the chapel today seems more Protestant in its post-Vatican II simplicity than Hope Patten's brightly decorated church. This applies even more to the large Roman Catholic Chapel of Reconciliation built adjacent to the Slipper Chapel in 1981.

Today most pilgrims to Walsingham come by coach or car, either in parish groups or individually. Both shrines provide accommodation to visitors and a round of activities: Masses, stations of the cross, torch-lit processions with the statue of the Virgin, confession, healing ministries, and intercessory prayer. At the Anglican shrine, there is also a daily sprinkling at the holy well located beside the Holy House, where the priest gives pilgrims water from the well to sip, makes the sign of the cross on their foreheads, and pours the water over their hands. Pilgrims to the Catholic shrine customarily walk in procession from their lodgings in the village to a Pilgrim Mass in the Chapel of Reconciliation, singing "Ave Maria" and reciting the rosary. Anecdotes by modern Anglican pilgrims suggest a nostalgia for a time when Anglicans, too, walked barefoot from the Anglican to the Catholic shrine singing hymns all the way.

Longer walking pilgrimages are not unknown—among others, the Latin Mass Society holds one annually over three days in August from Ely to Walsingham, a distance of fifty-five miles, and Student Cross walks have been held at Easter since 1957 from a variety of starting points. In fact, the first Mass in the priory grounds after the dissolution was held in 1948 to mark the completion of a cross-bearing pilgrimage with a Mass for five thousand people. Today the grounds, though in private hands, are used by Catholics and Anglicans alike for large open-air gatherings, the ruins giving weight to the constant theme stressed at Walsingham, that the Reformation was a tragic rent in English Christianity and that only

reconciliation between the churches can restore England to her rightful state as "Our Lady's Dowry."

A microcosm of modern Walsingham pilgrimage is the National Pilgrimage held by the Anglican shrine annually on the last Monday of May in the priory grounds. People come from all over the country, individually as well as in parish groups. It is a time of affirmation for Anglo-Catholics, now a somewhat beleaguered minority in the Anglican church. Last year there were apparently fewer participants, both clergy and lay, than in the past. This was due, I was told, to the establishment in January of the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham by the Catholic Church as a way for priests and congregations disaffected by the ordination of women to leave the Anglican Church while retaining a married priesthood and their own liturgical practices. About one thousand Anglicans have so far joined. In fact, one such parish—the Sevenoaks Ordinariate—has already made a pilgrimage to the Catholic National Shrine of Our Lady. By contrast, a habitual presence, rather than an absence, at the National Pilgrimage is a group of ultra-Protestants from Northern Ireland

who harangue the “idolators” in their “annual witness to the mariolators of the Anglo-Catholic Church” for placing a “dead human being” (Mary) over Jesus. Walsingham is also abhorred by Low Church evangelicals within the Anglican Communion, and the present archbishop of Canterbury was accused by them of being an idolater when he announced plans to visit the Anglican shrine a few years ago. Pilgrimage to Walsingham is a contested issue.

Nevertheless, for the Anglo-Catholic individuals and parish groups who attend the National Pilgrimage, the day is one of pageant, conviviality, reconciliation, joy, and probably as many other emotions as there are participants. The core of the celebration is a Pilgrim Mass in the priory grounds. Shrine guardians, visiting clergy, and bishops make procession from the Shrine Church singing a number of hymns, equally divided between the Christocentric and Mariocentric, perhaps as an answer to the protestors who attempt to drown out the singing as the procession passes by. But the core of the procession for many who have waited in anticipation is the appearance of the statue of Our Lady of Walsingham carried along on a bier. After lunch a sermon is given, followed by a procession

of all participants through the village, singing the “Walsingham Pilgrim Hymn” (composed by Father Hope Patten to the tune of the “*Lourdes Hymn*”). The final benediction is given at what is considered the site of the original Holy House. Now three hymns are sung, all centered on Christ and Mary is not mentioned at all, perhaps an indicator of the determination of the Guardians of the Shrine to take up the challenge long leveled at Anglican Walsingham that, as in medieval times, Mary has been elevated over her Son.

It is estimated that about three hundred thousand people visit Walsingham each year. Like the pilgrims of old, they visit the shrines, buy souvenirs, sample

the local brews, seek healing or relief from anxiety, delight in the surroundings, enjoy the company of their fellows, and find peace in the surroundings. Compared with those who visit modern Canterbury, they are probably more focused on the religious actions available to them, specific to the place, since the object of the pilgrimage—Our Lady of Walsingham—is so clearly defined. Moreover, modern Walsingham exists almost entirely through its religious identity. Perhaps it is not the respite from worldliness the American poet Robert Lowell meant when he wrote “The world shall come to Walsingham,” but in every sense, the pilgrim has surely returned. □

Only Dialogue Can Change the World

An interview with Alberto Quattrucci

Alberto Quattrucci is the secretary-general of International Meetings Peoples and Religions, the Department of the Community of Sant'Egidio for Interreligious Dialogue. Sant'Egidio is a Rome-based worldwide Catholic lay organization recognized by the Vatican. The community is involved in a wide range of peace activities, including the mediation of armed conflicts, care for the elderly and homeless, and relief for disaster victims worldwide. Professor Quattrucci visited Risho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo in June 2011 before a fact-finding tour in northeastern Japan, where nearly twenty thousand people had died in the March earthquake and tsunami. Dharma World interviewed him and asked him how people of religion can promote world peace and help people around the world overcome their hardships.

You will visit the areas afflicted by earthquake and tsunami this weekend. With your experience as one of the leaders of Sant'Egidio's peace activities, what do you think you should do first?

In my work for the Community of Sant'Egidio in 2006 and 2007, I helped the victims of the tsunami in India and other parts of South Asia, which was caused by a massive earthquake in Indonesia on December 26, 2004. I made seven trips after March 2005 to the southern area of Tamil Nadu affected by the tsunami. It was very surprising that the day after the earthquake, on December 27, our community's office in Rome received a lot of phone calls from all parts of Italy, and some from other parts of Europe as well. People who wanted to help India or Sri Lanka said things like: "Can we do something to help the situation?" "We'll donate one thousand euros." "We'd like to donate money through you because we trust you and because we know that if you receive our money, you will spend all of

it on the poor." We were surprised by this show of trust as well as by the show of warm solidarity. Within a month we collected one and a half million euros from throughout Italy. We used the money to build sixteen primary schools in the affected areas. One primary school in the Tamil Nadu area accommodated twelve hundred children. We gave nets to fishermen. We rebuilt some hospitals, and so on.

This year, over a period of a week to ten days, the world learned from media reports what had happened in Japan. But no one called us to say, "We would like to help." I asked myself why. One possible answer was the difference in location. India and other South Asian countries are very poor, but Japan is "rich," according to public opinion.

That's a possible answer, but I don't think it is the most important answer. The first case was in 2004, and the second was in 2011. The sense of common solidarity has given way to individualism. Now we live in a time of economic crisis, and spiritual crisis as well. People feel they have to take care of

themselves before they take care of others. All over the world, even in the so-called rich countries, there is poverty. If you are hit by an earthquake or tsunami, even if you were rich, now you are poor.

Because of this we decided to do something for Japan. First, because Japan has been our good friend for a long time. We feel very close to Japan and are well informed about its situation, so we would like to do something. Confronted with the sufferings of people in northeastern Japan affected by the tsunami, we thought we should do something together as religionists to relieve them. We had to bring them joy and hope for the future.

I would like to meet the mayor of Rikuzentakata. I learned just last night through one of my friends that he lost his wife in the tsunami. We would like to discover through him the situation in this city. Fifty thousand people are homeless, and so on. I heard that most of them are elderly people. I would like to interview some of the people. My first objective is to study

the situation, take pictures, and then talk with people, mostly the elderly who remained alone, to gather information so that we can launch a campaign in Italy and in Japan to collect donations for aid, and to accomplish something good, modest perhaps, but also very significant, as a sign of friendship or solidarity.

This is very important, because this is the special role of religions. Only religions in today's world have a long-term vision for the future of the world. This is a very important gift, but at the same time, this is a very important responsibility of religions, to play this role within society, not outside it, at two levels: those of concrete daily life and of spirituality. We follow our own religion in the daily life of our communities, but we also have to involve ourselves with people

of other religions to give people joyful hope for the future.

At the same time, we'd like to promote some forums, that is, some time for discussion and dialogue, because only through dialogue can we find solutions. Solutions can be found through discussion, cooperation, and solidarity with other people.

The Community of Sant'Egidio has been called "the United Nations of the Trastevere," referring to the district in Rome where the community has its headquarters. This is because Sant'Egidio's work for world peace centers on cooperating with everyone, including members of different faith communities as well as secular people. Please tell us the significance of being open to everyone.

In general, I firmly believe that people of faith, especially in Buddhist regions such as Japan and Asia in general, have an important role. Its importance has increased in the last more or less twenty years since the failure of the world ideologies. The world ideologies had a vision for the future; right or wrong, good or bad, but they had a vision. Now, no one has a vision. The only vision is consumerism, in which people seek only daily success, very brief and short-term success, without thought of the future.

Religions have strong energy because they are not interested in consumerism and money, nor are they interested in concrete gains. They are interested in humanity. People of faith are the artists of humanity.

There are many spiritually empty workplaces in the world, and religions are called on to fill these workplaces with a new spirit of humanity. This is very important. A man once said, "Peace is too important to be left in the hands of politicians." We, as the Community of Sant'Egidio, know we are very open to cooperation with everyone. With you, of course, Rissho Kosei-kai, and other people, we feel that we are more than friends. But we also seek to cooperate with the people not so well known. We can cooperate with everyone, including politicians.

Italian politicians have often asked why Sant'Egidio did not choose to become a political party. For instance, they twice invited Andrea Riccardi, the founder, to become a politician. He said, "It's very important to politically lead the country, but I prefer to do what I do because I believe that we can change the world as people of faith, through the work of Sant'Egidio. We can cooperate with politicians and we can cooperate with everyone, to be very frank with you." We have cooperated with everyone, with the right wing, with the left wing, but always maintaining our spiritual identity and autonomy as Community of Sant'Egidio.

Would you tell us something about Sant'Egidio's plans for the future, especially in terms of interreligious cooperation?

We work on many different levels. One is the level of tradition, which includes the annual international meetings for peace and other international gatherings. This year is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi in 1986, and the International Meeting will be held in Munich (Germany). Next year (2012) the Inter-religious Gathering will be in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

One of the activities of the Community of Sant'Egidio all over the world is work with children. Hundreds of thousands of poor children all over the world gather at so-called Schools of Peace—in Africa, South America, Central America, and Europe. In the Third World, we have about 4,500 Schools of Peace. In many cases they are very simple facilities. They are places where hundreds of children gather three to four times a week to study together. They also learn about peace, solidarity, and values of life. Most of them are abandoned or living with their families in difficulty. Some of them have no official existence because they are undocumented. Every year fifty-one million children worldwide are not registered. We have a program called BRAVO in which we have registered—up to now—900,000 children: if children are not registered, they can easily be exploited. They can be sold. They can be used as child soldiers.

In Indonesia our schools welcome Christian and Muslim children together. This is a good sign. Muslims know this very well, and they appreciate it very much because they know that although we are devout Christians and they are devout Muslims, we are all children of God, and we can cooperate. This is concrete interreligious dialogue for peace—working together for the sake of children

and future generations. In Indonesia we are also working with Muslims and other people of faith to build houses for the elderly. We can also work in this way to change society and give a very clear example of how to go about it.

We are working a lot now in North Africa, on the occasion of the so-called “Arab spring.” We’ve sent some missions to Egypt, Tunisia, and other countries. We also met Libyan representatives, and we built a bridge between the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and these Libyan representatives to study future possibilities. We are free as the Community of Sant'Egidio. We are not linked to any political party. We can build bridges with all parties. Various officials of the Italian Foreign Ministry asked us to help them in this field.

At another level of interreligious cooperation, throughout southern Africa we are promoting projects against HIV/AIDS. We’ve been cooperating with people of other faiths in ten southern African countries for some twelve years. When we begin cooperation at the interreligious level, we don’t try to exclude political representatives. We work together. If we seek to change the situation in a country, we have to involve all the

energies, all the parts of the country, not only people of religion but also lay people—all the people who can act in some sense to influence the course of events in the country.

There is one kind of interreligious dialogue and cooperation that I respect very much. I am now participating, for instance, in talks about the UN Decade for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace. I remember its launch in 2006 and I also participated in the planning committee for the Decade’s establishment in Geneva in 2006. But these things are intellectual, not concrete. They’re very good, but they’re not everything. We also need daily dialogue. Dialogue can change the world. We also have to include all the energies but without confusion or syncretism.

We need to make this new decade a peaceful one, especially since the first decade of this century was very sad. It was a decade of conflicts and wars. After 9/11, many people claimed, “Dialogue is useless,” “We need war,” “We need conflict to change the world.” But this has failed. Now, on the tenth anniversary of 9/11, we must open a new decade in which we will choose dialogue as the only path to world peace. □

Bearing Witness as an Atomic Bomb Victim

by Akiyo Hada

I have come to realize that the reason I was the only person in my family to survive the bombing was so that I could live to bear witness to the bombing.

In March of 2011 a strong earthquake reduced some towns in northeastern Japan to rubble. In August 1945 Hiroshima was turned into empty fields by the explosion of an atomic bomb. Thoughts of these two events fill me with a sorrow that words cannot express. From the bottom of my heart I pray for the repose of those who lost their lives in the March earthquake and tsunami and for a quick recovery and the coming of untroubled times.

I was born into the Goto family, the youngest of five sisters. At the time the atomic bomb fell, my next-to-eldest sister had already died of an illness, so there were only four of us. Our home was

about half a mile from where the bomb exploded. I was eight years old and in the third grade. At that time, schoolchildren had been evacuated from the city but then had been permitted to return to their homes for the first time in four months. I returned home on August 5. To this day I remember the happy family reunion of that day and the beautiful night sky filled with stars. Nestled between my parents, I fell asleep on Mother's arm, without knowing it would be the last night I would do so.

When I awoke on the morning of August 6, my father had already left for work, and my mother had gone out to help with the demolition of buildings

to prevent the spread of fires caused by incendiary bombs. My sixteen-year-old sister was sick and didn't go to work that day, so all four of us sisters were in the house. Around 8:00 a.m. my sixteen-year-old sister was roasting soybeans for us, and I remember my other two sisters getting into an argument about something while we were waiting. Then, at 8:15, there was a blinding flash of light, followed an instant later by a huge *boom* and a shockwave so strong it felt like my internal organs were jumping out of my body, and I lost consciousness.

When I came to, the four of us were under the house, which had collapsed on us. We all started shouting, "Help, help!" but nobody came. I could see that my clothing was drenched in red, and realizing I had been injured, I began groping around my body. There was a hole in my neck that made a squishing sound when I stuck my finger into it. I could hear fire beginning to crackle, and in desperation I crawled out from under the rubble. I was the only one able to do so. Outside, the light was dim, like evening, and eerie. As I looked around, the scene was like nothing I'd ever seen, like some sort of hell, and my body started shaking in terror. To this day I can't forget the voices of my sisters calling to me, "Get someone to come help us quickly!" There was nothing I could do but call back, "I'm sorry! I'm sorry," and flee from there. The fact that I left my sisters behind and ran away is still extremely painful to me, more than sixty years later. Our parents were never

accounted for, and no remains were found. I was alone in the world.

As I was going this way and that, trying to get away, I saw groups of people trudging along like ghosts burned so badly over their entire bodies that the skin was hanging off. The ones who had collapsed and could not move begged me for help, clinging to my legs, and cried out, "Water! Water!" Someone else said, "I'm So-and-So. Please take a message!" None of them had normal faces. I felt frightened and helpless and could do nothing but weep with them.

When night fell, the scene became even more desolate. I believe I spent two or three days wandering about looking for my parents and sleeping outdoors. Following the fleeing people, I finally managed to reach a refugee camp, where my neck wound was treated. There was no anesthesia, so medics sat astride me, holding down my head, hands, and legs as the wound was stitched. People were dying in that camp every day. People without hair and hideously burned were laid out in rows. Right next to me I saw many people die, howling like animals. I was afraid the same thing would happen to me, and it was too terrifying and unbearable to watch.

Later, I left the camp and just happened to come across one of my elementary school teachers, who took care of me for several days. Before I knew it, it was August 15, the day the war

ended, and an older half sister (by a different mother), whom I had never met, and her husband came and took me to their home to care for me. Since food was scarce, I tried to refrain from wanting much food in their home, and I felt small. I kept thinking the entire time that my missing parents would be coming for me. Every day, until the last train of the day had arrived, I would think, "Maybe Mother will be on this one," and my loneliness was indescribable. The half sister who took me in was going through a cycle of business failures and piling up debts, so I was sent out as a live-in servant to help work off the debts, and I came close to being sold outright. Those were very hard times for me.

That was the situation when, just before I was to graduate from middle school at the age of fifteen, my half sister arranged for me to marry against my will. Nonetheless, even though my future mother-in-law had told me, "An atomic bomb orphan who came from nobody-knows-where is a poor match," it made a child like me very happy to be able to call someone "Father-in-law" or "Mother-in-law," even though I was treated badly. I showed respect to them and tried to learn all I could from them. However, one way or another, my husband would say things like "Get out!" or "I'm going to divorce you!" He became angry whether I was laughing or crying.

After I put up with this for two years, we left his parents and moved into our own place. My husband became increasingly oppressive after that and started to become violent. He would boast to his friends that he had "picked up an atomic bomb orphan," which was very hurtful for me. If I didn't show a smiling face, even though I was crying inside, I would be slapped. He gave me practically no money for our living expenses, so it was very hard to make ends meet.

I first heard about Rissho Kosei-kai when I was twenty-one and my daughter was four and my son two. When I attended services held by Rissho Kosei-kai in a nearby house, I heard that accumulating merit from ancestor appreciation and honoring our parents brings happiness, so I joined. I was tormented by the fact that no remains of my family were ever found after the atomic bombing, so I had a Buddhist home altar installed where I could make offerings to my ancestors. With my feelings of bitter regret and guilt over abandoning my sisters and running away by myself, I felt slightly relieved after expressing my devotion and gratitude to them.

Eventually, however, I visited the Hiroshima Dharma Center less often. My desire to leave my husband grew until, when my daughter was sixteen and my son fourteen, I finally couldn't take it anymore, and I left. I thought I would be killed if my husband caught

me, so I went into hiding. I looked for live-in jobs and worked very hard. My friends and many others helped me, and after a tremendous amount of work, I opened a restaurant serving Japanese savory pancakes. I decided to visit the Dharma center once again after meeting some members who came to the restaurant. I started my practice of offering the proceeds of the first sale of the day. I bought a small detached house I had coveted.

While I was receiving religious guidance and putting it into practice, in 1980 arrangements were made for me to be reunited with my children, after living apart from them for ten years. On the day of our reunion, the moment I opened the door of my son's house, my daughter who was also there placed my first grandchild in my arms. My heart was full of gratitude for my children's warm reception.

I remarried after that, but debts stemming from an illness without a known cause that my new husband contracted and from his gambling debts forced us to sell the house that I had worked so hard to buy. Furthermore, I was also diagnosed with Sjögren's syndrome, which stops the flow of tears and saliva.

When I heard it was incurable, I was shocked, to be sure, but I told myself that my true religious practice would start then. I quit working and started going to the Dharma center in earnest. I was assigned the responsibility of area leader, but as my disease progressed, I had to give that up.

At about that time, staff in charge of Rissho Kosei-kai's peace study program at the Dharma center asked me if I would speak in public about my experiences as an atomic bomb victim. That was exactly on the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing. Recalling that time brought back a flood of very painful memories, and I could not sleep for days on end. Though it was hard, I was speaking about my experience of the bombing for the first time. Afterward, the day before my memorial service for the fiftieth anniversary of the death of my parents and sisters, for the first time in fifty years I finally met someone who knew what happened to my mother. Although I was very sad to have my fears of her death confirmed, I also felt great joy in feeling her spirit nearby. I thought, "This has happened not because of my efforts but because Mother has been close by me all along since that day, constantly

encouraging me." This thought made me very happy. In that fiftieth-anniversary year, it was arranged for me to speak about my experiences five times. I felt as if I were dedicating a memorial service to each of the five persons I lost, and I was moved to feel this had been arranged by the Buddha.

Seventeen years have now passed since I first testified about my atomic bomb experience to a gathering of young people who were visiting Hiroshima from Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma centers all over Japan. For more than ten years, some of the Dharma centers have called on me to speak, for which I am very grateful. It gives me great joy to read elementary school pupils' comments on my talks, such as: "I thought it must have been a hard life for Ms. Hada after exposure to radiation, and even more painful for her to lose her family and be the only one who lived. That is why I will follow what she told us at the end, which was 'Cherish your family and friends.'" All the comments are wonderful, and I am very happy that they listen so well and get the message. When people come to join the peace study program, it is I who am encouraged, and I feel almost overwhelmed with gratitude and inspiration.

In October 2010, Israeli and Palestinian young people came to Hiroshima as part of Rissho Kosei-kai's peace project to foster understanding and reconciliation between them. I was honored to speak to them of my personal experiences as a victim of the bomb. In the middle of my testimony, the interpreter suddenly choked up and began to weep and took a few moments to recover and continue. When my talk ended I was given a standing ovation, which overwhelmed me with emotion.

In November of that year, for the first time, I spoke to a group of elementary school pupils on a field trip about my experience as an atomic bomb victim. I later received a booklet of comments written by all fifty-nine of the

children and was pleased to see that they had completely understood what I was trying to convey.

Then, unexpectedly in May 2011, as a result of an introduction by an interpreter for a BBC report about me seven years earlier, I was honored to give a public lecture organized by the Faculty of Social Studies at Doshisha University in Kyoto. At the end of the lecture, a female student came up to me and told me that there were troubles in her family but that “when I heard what you had to say, Ms. Hada, I became aware of how important and precious my family is to me. I intend to think positively from now on.” This made me very pleased.

The day after I returned from the university, I had a wonderful, blessed dream. I was back in the old days, sitting around with my family. I couldn't see their faces, but I could hear their voices and feel a sweet, very nostalgic atmosphere and sense the family bonds of childhood. I was extremely happy. Until then I had been suffering from the heartless words of my half sister, who had told me, “It would have been better if *you* had died.” She said I was a bad person for leaving my sisters and fleeing. I had thought that I was not meant to be happy, and I lived despondently. Even today, when I'm happy I also get an uneasy feeling, wondering if it's actually all right to feel that way. But the encounter with the people in the peace study program changed my mind in a big way. Whereas I had always thought negatively, now I realize that it is first and foremost essential for my mind to be at peace and that I should live my life cherishing each moment. I believe this is due to the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai. I have come to realize that the reason I was the only person in my family to survive the bombing was so that I could live to bear witness to the bombing. And I, who was left all alone by the bomb, have been blessed with two children and now have four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

I am deeply grateful and moved by the fact that I am blessed with the link of life with them.

My granddaughter married a citizen of the United States, the country that dropped the atomic bomb, and she lives in Oklahoma. At one point she sent me an e-mail telling me that my experiences as an atomic bomb victim had been related to members

of the Dharma center in Oklahoma. This filled my heart with gratitude. I wish my granddaughter to be a bridge of peace between Japan and America from now on. One of my favorite sayings is “The past is a treasure, the present is full of emotion, and the future is bright.” I think this describes me as I am now. In 2009, when President Nichiko Niwano visited the Hiroshima Dharma Center, he said to me, “My heart goes out to you because of the hardships you have experienced.” And at that moment, all my troubles and fatigue up to that point melted away, and I felt as if my surroundings had brightened. I will treasure President Niwano's words for the rest of my life.

I am full of gratitude for all the wonderful things around me right now, which I feel are undeserved. I would like to express my appreciation for the many people who have helped me and guided me up to this day. I truly thank you. As I continue to be blessed in meeting more people in the future, I shall live with gratitude day by day. As one witness, I shall try to communicate the preciousness of life and the folly and tragedy of war as long as I live. □

The Zen of Mutual Acceptance and Respect

by Jikisai Minami

I find that if I listen quietly and patiently to what the other person is saying over an extended period of time, his or her words may catch my heart.

As a Buddhist monk, I often hear people suddenly tell me about their grave personal troubles. I get this from people of all ages and both sexes, even when I am meeting with them in my work. Before I am prepared for such sudden confessions, they often launch into them with no warning. “My husband . . .” they will say, or “My wife . . .” “My child . . .” “My work . . .” Probably the fact that I am a monk encourages them to open up to me in this way.

When this happens, I never try to understand the other person. I just listen to what he or she is saying, generally for three or four hours, occasionally voicing a syllable or two to indicate I am listening.

If I try to understand, I am apt to interpret the other person in a way that fits the framework of my own thought patterns. More often than not, this interpretation is off. And if I give simplistic advice, the counterpart is bewildered and pained to receive an answer that misses the mark.

But I find that if I listen quietly and patiently to what the other person is saying over an extended period of time, his or her words may catch my heart, overlapping some part of my own experience. I find myself thinking, “I can understand that.” This is the moment at which I resonate with the other person:

she must feel isolated; he must be suffering. And when I have resonated, I start talking about what the other person’s words make me feel.

Next, the other person starts to talk more frankly and emotionally. Sometimes people—even young men—will break down and cry. This is probably because they feel they have gotten through to somebody. Perhaps they have never been able to tell anyone what they were feeling and have simply been enduring. Even those with groups of good friends may find that getting along well with these friends actually makes it harder for them to open up about delicate topics.

People seem to sense relief when somebody else understands what they are saying. The realization that one is not entirely alone after all may come as a saving grace.

Taking a Step beyond Despair

In this world there are some who seem to be able to love themselves, but others cannot come to terms with their own being.

When I was a child, I felt tremendous worry and confusion about death, wondering how such a thing could possibly exist in the world. I suffered from serious asthma, which put me in terror of

my own demise. “Why can’t I be healthy like other people?” I asked myself. I was both worried and bewildered in this way.

“I didn’t start myself, so why should I have to keep living as myself?” This question obsessed me and would not go away. At times it gave me a fascination with death.

As an adolescent I encountered the following words of the thirteenth-century Zen Buddhist teacher Dogen: “Forget the self.” This was my salvation. If I had not encountered those words, I think I would not be here now. As I understand it, Dogen’s words mean that nobody can settle the problem of his or her own existence.

None of us started ourselves. The state of “being me” is actually imposed on us by somebody else.

So who imposed this “me” on us? We can never know. I believe that it is only by enduring the despair of not knowing this that we can accept “being me” squarely and can find the path toward using “me” with skill.

To a greater or lesser extent, everybody is apt to experience personal troubles at some point. Perhaps your family suddenly breaks up. Maybe you have a setback of some sort. When something like this happens, your comfortable worldview is shaken, and your life may become unstable. At times like this, you get a searing sensation of the “me” that has been imposed on you as a heavy load to bear.

When people despair completely, they cannot go on by themselves. But if

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they have the opportunity to encounter the words and character of a sympathetic person, it may provide the opportunity for them to pick themselves up.

And if people have the chance to find a sympathetic person, somebody who affirms the totality of the “me,” they will gain the basic strength to live. This is the sense of affirmation that comes from being told, “You can just be you; that’s plenty.”

With this, one becomes able to accept even the imposed “me” as something with meaning.

Mutual Acceptance

Everybody else is presumably living, like me, with various cares. It is precious to sense the weight of their burdens.

To put it in Buddhist terms, everybody carries his or her own karma:

“You have yours, just as I have mine.” So I believe it is important not to judge others as being this sort or that sort of person. This goes even for those close to us, including our parents, spouses, and children.

Keeping in mind that everybody else is living in the face of circumstances unknown to us—this, I think, can serve as a major starting point for respect for others. □

Good Encounters Give Us New Life

by Koitsu Yokoyama

Deep mind contains the seeds of love for others and the desire to make them happy. To encourage the growth and development of these potential forces, you have to pursue positive encounters actively. . . . That is why we put others first and ourselves last.

I have been studying the Yogācāra (Consciousness Only) tradition of Buddhism for more than forty years, but when I first started university, I was enrolled in a fisheries science course and carried out research on fish blood.

This research involved observing life as only an object, and before I knew it, I had come to feel that the study of it was pointless. I began to think that I would rather be studying the life in myself.

Around this time I developed a grave inferiority complex and sequestered myself at Engakuji in Kamakura, one of the more important Zen Buddhist temples in Japan, and plunged into a course of *zazen*. With my teacher's injunction to "become completely blank, seek nothingness" ringing in my ears, I attempted to search for spiritual liberation with all of my heart and soul.

As I continued with my practice, my ego began to gradually break down, and my spirit felt cleansed. Quite unexpectedly, this led me to turn a kinder eye toward others. One day as I was on my way home from the *dōjō* (training hall), the landscape unfolding before my eyes appeared to be glowing with a beautiful light such as I had never seen before. At this moment I understood

deeply that when I change, the world also changes.

With the help of experiences like these, I decided to dedicate myself to understanding the meaning of life, and at my university I changed my major to Indian philosophy. This brought me into contact with the Yogācāra tradition, and to this day I continue to seek the meaning of life while serving others.

The Nonexistent "Me"

Sometimes we suddenly stop in our tracks and look back with a feeling of disgust at how everything we have thought or done throughout life has always been "all about I, me, my."

In contrast to this is the notion of eschewing the ego, one of the fundamental concepts of Buddhism. When we are without an ego, we can be cleansed of worldly passions and arrive at a peaceful, quiet state of mind. Despite appearances, humans originally do not, in fact, have egos. Let's see if you can realize this here and now.

Hold out your hand and look at it. Whose hand is it? Naturally you will say, "It's my hand." While you are looking at your hand, you can confirm its existence. Because "things" have names to identify

them, what you are seeing is an object that can be expressed in words. Now, close your eyes and try to perceive the "me" that can be expressed in words.

Can you locate the "thing" that is meant by the word "me"? I don't think you can. What do you mean when you say "me" or "I"? This "me" is nothing more than the echo of a word and, in fact, does not essentially exist. This is why we say that humans are ultimately without ego.

Thus, because "I" essentially do not exist, if someone calls me an idiot, I can just laugh. What on earth is supposed to be the thing being called "an idiot"? Is it a function of my brain being idiotic? The problem there is that because "I" have no real existence, despite appearances there is no such thing as "my" brain.

In the Yogācāra tradition, objects perceived by sight are considered to have been created by the mind, and the world perceived by sight is thought to be different for every person because every person senses it in a different way. This we call "one person, one universe."

When our spirits are clean and pure, we live in a quiet, peaceful world. But when strong feelings of attachment well up in us and our spirits become muddy and turbid, the world immediately becomes a place of suffering. In this sense as well, we need to make spiritual cleansing a part of everyday life.

If we can sit for just thirty minutes in *zazen* and become nothing but our breath, or if we can unthinkingly and in a disinterested way reach out a helping hand to someone in need and make

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an offering of kindness, an immeasurable amount of filth will fall away from our spirits.

Putting Others First and Ourselves Last

In the Yogācāra tradition, the deep mind is termed the *ālaya*, or storehouse, consciousness. This deep mind contains the seeds of love for others and the desire to make them happy. To encourage the growth and development of these potential forces, you have to pursue positive encounters actively.

One example is to recite, read, and listen to noble words. However, when

you are in the midst of suffering, the best and most effective thing to do is be with people who make you feel warm and comfortable.

Since my youth I have been blessed with many teachers. I encountered my present teacher twenty years ago. Sometimes when I am meditating together with this *rōshi* (elder master), he says amazing things.

“All right, it’s all right. Breathe in, breathe out, and become that breath; become the here and now, and you can go as far as the places you wish to reach.”

Where is this place it is possible to go? When he said this, I felt it must be nowhere other than the place as

expressed in the Heart Sutra by the character pronounced *kū*, meaning “emptiness.”

The self that is no more than the echo of a word is the product of a variety of external encounters and environments in the here and now. As a result of countless encounters that constitute an “external force,” you and I are being given life here and now. That is why we put others first and ourselves last. That is, we give precedence to the other person and take care of our own interests afterward. A thorough understanding of this fact will bring your own warmth to life.

People naturally gravitate toward a person with warmth. □

Japanese Buddhism and Christian “Good News”

A Christian Reflection on Aspects of the Buddhist Approach to Reality
by Cinto Busquet

Being faithful to one's own religious convictions and at the same time remaining radically open to the other's truth—this is what assures that together we may experience a deeper presence of God, the Ultimate Truth.

In a short article, it is not possible to touch, and still less to deepen, our understanding of all the aspects and facts that would be necessary to present the subject of Buddhist-Christian dialogue exhaustively. Therefore, my humble intention is just to offer a few indications, from my own experience as a Christian in contact with the Japanese Buddhist tradition and especially from my recent research work¹ on a contemporary Japanese Buddhist, Nikkyo Niwano (1906–99), founder of Rissho Koseikai, a Japanese lay Buddhist association founded in 1938. Niwano was very active in the interreligious field from the early sixties, with his Buddhist faith rooted in the universalistic approach of the Lotus Sutra—one of the most important scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism and the most outstanding in the Japanese Buddhist context. He recognized and stressed the value and significance of all religious traditions. Moreover, he was particularly open to Christianity, and he maintained many contacts with the Catholic Church. For this reason, I think it is meaningful to reflect on his thought and his experience, considering him as a kind of window through which we can catch some glimpse of the complex and rich landscape of Japanese Buddhism.

Buddhism arrived in Japan in the sixth century from China through the Korean Peninsula. In the eighth century, while Nara was the imperial capital, six Buddhist schools, initiated in China, were established on Japanese soil: the Jojitsu, Sanron, Hosso, Kusha, Kegon, and Ritsu schools. At the beginning of the ninth century, with Kyoto already the seat of the imperial household and the government, the Tendai school was founded by Saicho in Japan and the Shingon school by Kukai, and both schools spread quickly throughout the country from Mount Hiei and Mount Koya, respectively. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Pure Land Buddhism, based on faith in Amida Buddha's saving power, took root in Japan with two new schools, Jodo and Jodo Shin, founded respectively by Honen and his disciple Shinran. Zen Buddhism took hold in Japan in the same period, with the establishment of the Rinzai Zen school by Eisai and the Soto Zen school by Dogen. Nichiren is also a prominent figure in the thirteenth century, and the school that takes his name and his devotion to the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Dharma have strongly influenced posterior Japanese Buddhism. From Nichiren's stream, several new Japanese Buddhist associations emerged in the twentieth century.

Considering the wide range of ways of interpreting and practicing Buddhism in Japan, as I said before, it is quite difficult to speak in general about Japanese Buddhism. For this reason I will concentrate on a single figure that characterizes it well in our age: Nikkyo Niwano. Through a few of his quotations, I will try to reflect as a Christian theologian on some aspects of the Buddhist approach to Reality, as the subtitle says.

Fundamental Unity

Speaking about why interreligious cooperation is essential, Nikkyo Niwano says: “In its essence religion does not reject others but instead allows us to think of others with the same regard we have for ourselves. The oneness of self and others is fundamental to religion. Thus even when it is fractured into differing sects and groups, it is not natural that they should fight one another. People of religion should, rather, study each other's doctrines and practices, discuss issues of religious faith that are of mutual concern, and on that basis, work together to establish world peace.”²

In these words, Niwano has already clearly pointed out a very important truth: the fundamental unity and equality of human beings. Although this unity and equality may be interpreted and explained differently by the two religions, we can consider it a common ground of Buddhism and Christianity.

Everything and everyone is linked with everything and everyone else in an endless succession of causes and effects,

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in a continuous interaction among all the elements of the phenomenological world. That's the law of interdependence of all that exists. Nothing exists for itself; everything exists in its relation to the outside world. Every human being is called to awaken to the same Universal Law that sustains the whole universe. In every person the same Dharma is at work. If we were to summarize the Buddhist approach to the world and to human existence in a few words, we could possibly express it in this way.

For Christianity, instead, the essential equality and unity of all human beings is based on their common dignity, having been created by God in his own image and likeness. Jesus reveals the face of God as a loving father who cares for every man and woman with infinite love, and as a logical consequence of this faith, Christianity teaches that all human beings must live as brothers and sisters, as children of the same Heavenly Father. The Gospel according to John tells us that the day before his death on the cross, Jesus prayed for the perfect unity of his disciples: "That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). Jesus is one with the Father. In the Christian faith, he is the Son of God: God who gives himself completely to humankind in the humanity of Christ. And as God is one, humanity is called to be perfect in unity, one family, where reciprocal love renders oneness real and almost tangible.

Shared Ethical Commitment

In September 1965, Nikkyo Niwano was invited to attend the opening ceremony of the fourth and last session of the Second Vatican Council. On that day, September 14, he was probably the only Buddhist in Saint Peter's Basilica. He was very impressed by the whole event, but in a special way he was struck by Paul VI's words on universal brotherhood and love: "The love that animates our communion does not set us apart from other men and women . . . does not make us exclusivists or egoists. On the contrary, because it is a love that comes from God, it gives us a universal dimension; our Truth leads us to Charity. . . .

While other currents of thought and action proclaim quite different principles for building human society—power, wealth, science, class struggle, vested interests, or other things—the Church proclaims love. The Council is a solemn act of love for humanity."³

Nikkyo Niwano wrote in his autobiography: "The love of God of which the pope had spoken in his opening message to that session of the Second Vatican Council is the same thing as the compassion advocated by Buddhism. The pope insists that the love for the neighbor taught by the New Testament must be interpreted to mean love for peoples everywhere, no matter what their nationality or

race. Shakyamuni taught the same thing about compassion.”⁴

Here we already have another possible strong link between Buddhist practice and Christian practice. The fundamental truth of the ontological unity of all human beings leads to the ethical commitment toward others, out of compassion and love for fellow beings.

The day after attending the ceremony in the basilica, Niwano was received in a private audience by the pope. He explains that on that occasion Paul VI said to him: “I know what you are doing for inter-faith cooperation. It is very wonderful. Please continue to promote such a wonderful movement. . . . In the Vatican, too, the attitude toward non-Christian religions is changing. It is important for people of religion not to cling to factions or denominations but to recognize each other and pray for each other.”⁵ Many times, Niwano said that he could not forget the warm hands of Pope Paul VI and that he believed that their firm handshake “put blood into the cooperation, friendship, and mutual understanding between Christianity and Buddhism.”⁶ From that encounter, Niwano deepened his “determination to be a bridge between the two religions, and extend this bridge to various other religions, as well.”⁷

Universal Truth

Buddhism and Asian religions in general are often interpreted as having a relativist religious approach. Nevertheless, Mahayana Buddhism proposes a “great vehicle,” a path to reach enlightenment suitable for everyone. It speaks of *ekayana*, in Sanskrit, or *ichijo*, in Japanese: the “one vehicle,” “the only vehicle.” This concept, central to the Lotus Sutra and other Mahayana scriptures, can be understood in an exclusivist way or, on the contrary, from an inclusive and comprehensive outlook. Usually Buddhist tradition interprets it from a holistic and all-encompassing point of view: eternal

and universal Truth must be above every particular grasp of it, and at the same time many paths can lead to it. Niwano asserts that “the Lotus Sutra, in its deepest meaning, is not a proper noun but a common noun meaning the highest and most real teaching, which teaches the truth of the universe to all human beings and leads them to the true way of living. But the real and the highest teaching can never be two. Though it can be expressed in various ways, in its fundamental meaning it is one.”⁸

The Zen master Renpo Niwa, abbot at that time of Eiheiji, the main monastery of the Soto Zen school, during the Interreligious Meeting of Prayer for Peace convened by John Paul II in Assisi in 1986, said: “Generally the faith of human beings is universal: beyond race, sex, or social class. . . . The life of people who communicate intimately in a religious mode is equal without any distinction of rank. . . . Universal truth is reflected in a different way in the diverse religious teachings; fundamentally all the religions are connected with one another.”⁹

This deep interconnection between the different religious traditions is what is meant in the Japanese expression *ban-kyo dokon*, “all religions spring from the same root.” It is a key saying for understanding the basic Japanese approach to religious diversity and plurality.

The Catholic Church professes her faith in Christ as “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life and in whom God has reconciled all things to himself. At the same time, as the Second Vatican Council declared, “the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy” in the non-Christian religions and “regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones [the Catholic Church] holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.”¹⁰

Therefore, we can agree that there is one Truth, a universal Truth toward which we can converge. According to Niwano, what is the final, the profound truth? For him, “it is the finding of the infinite life of humankind within the eternal life-force of the universe.”¹¹ True human nature, in its union with the eternal life force of the universe, is the so-called buddha-nature. All beings possess this potential for enlightenment, and the noblest form of Buddhist practice is the way of the bodhisattva, who devotes himself to attaining enlightenment not only for himself but also for all sentient beings.

The Ineffable Ultimate Reality

Niwano explains that the Lotus Sutra expounds the idea that every human being is a child of the Buddha: “The Buddha in this sense means the great life of the universe, which is the very root of all phenomena. In other words, the Lotus Sutra teaches that even though the individual person appears to live a detached existence, fundamentally everybody is an offshoot of the one great life of the universe.”¹² He was convinced that “the basis of all religions is the belief that all human beings are the children of the Buddha or of God” and that “all religions must transcend the limits of individual organizational differences in order to achieve the goal of religion itself.”¹³

The Buddha that Nikkyo Niwano speaks about is no longer simply the historical Buddha. It is the Original and Eternal Buddha, the personification or visualization of the Eternal Dharma that can be recognized in Shakyamuni, the Indian prince Siddhartha Gautama, but whose existence would extend far beyond the historical figure of the founder of Buddhism. In the Mahayana tradition, the Ultimate Reality is invoked and reached through the image of the Buddha, but it remains something formless and vague,

beyond any conceptualization and any personified image.

Niwano wrote: "There are many ways of naming this biggest, most absolute thing. Some call it the Law that creates and moves the universe. Others call it Truth or universal life-force. No matter what it is called, . . . the absolute is the basic force or rule that makes our existence possible and that gives us life. . . . The universal Law . . . controls the lives of all things and does not, therefore, give special treatment to any one living creature or any one human being. Managing everything in the universe means maintaining harmony among all things, all of which are constantly and dynamically in action."¹⁴

As is clearly expressed in the quotation I have just cited, the Ultimate Reality in the Buddhist understanding remains an indefinite principle or force. It is the Dharma that rules the whole universe. It is not the personal ontological entity that calls the world and the human being into existence, as it is in Christianity and in other monotheistic traditions. Buddhism stresses that the eternal and immutable Truth, the absolute and ultimate Reality, "will never be found in the material world, for things are not permanent. They are constantly changing."¹⁵ However, Niwano explains: "Religion is what enables human beings, living in the relative world of things, to perceive the world of the absolute. Religion makes the world of the absolute the mainstay of our hearts, allowing us to walk the path of life with sure-footed confidence."¹⁶

And walking ahead on this inner journey toward the deepest layer of their own existence, human beings are set free from the illusion of their possessive self and become radically aware of their interdependent nature.

Always Far Beyond

An old koan attributed to Zen Master Linji, the founder of the Rinzai school,

says: "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him!" I think this aphorism summarizes well one of the stimuli that come from the Buddhist religious practice to the Christian faith. Of course, the saying is a koan, an enigmatic and paradoxical phrase that is proposed to encourage further meditation in order to reach a deeper wisdom about the mystery of life, and therefore there is not a univocal single interpretation. But I like to interpret it as an invitation to be thoroughly and constantly open to the infinite and ineffable reality of God, the mystery that upholds everything and everyone and at the same time transcends always our limited capacity of understanding. Human beings have been tempted from ancient times to create idols, distorted and inadequate images of the divine. The Hebrew scriptures strongly forbid the making of idols and exhort with insistence the adoration only of God, the only one God, the creator of heaven and earth and the father not only of Israel but of the whole of humankind. Jesus Christ, speaking to his disciples, admonishes: "None of you should be called a teacher. You have only one teacher, and all of you are like brothers and sisters. Don't call anyone on earth your father. All of you have the same Father in heaven" (Matt. 23:8–9). The Buddhist koan "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him!" is maybe, in its way, stressing an aspect of this teaching. On our earthly journey, all of us are travelers walking the same road. Some are ahead on this road, others have walked far beyond, but no one must be considered above the others, because we are all children of the same Father, we are all brothers and sisters, and we must go on helping each other to advance more and more toward that infinite fullness that abides only in God himself. At the same time, for his disciples, Christ is the teacher, and he is not just a historical figure of the past, an ancient master whose teachings we listen to. He is the Risen Lord

who promised to be with us always until the end of the world. Then, even though only in a spiritual way, we can really meet him on the road. The Christian experience is well symbolized in the scene of the disciples of Jesus who were going from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus and met him on the road, the day of his resurrection, as described in the last chapter of Luke's Gospel.

In Relationship with the Mystery of Life

The basic expression of Buddhist faith, common to all Buddhist schools, is to take refuge in the Three Treasures: the Buddha, the Dharma (interpreted as Buddhist doctrine, expression of the Universal Law), and the Sangha (the Buddhist community). According to Nikkyo Niwano, taking refuge in the Buddha means "attaining a selfless state and entering directly into union with the great life" of the universe; the profound meaning of taking refuge in the Dharma "is the casting off of the ego to reach a state of complete accord with the Truth and the Law of the universe"; and the meaning of taking refuge in the Sangha is "to revere harmony as the highest virtue in human society, to rely on it in one's own life, and to devote one's body and soul to trying to bring it to real life."¹⁷ The main aim of the Buddhist path, therefore, is to be liberated from the illusion of the self and to become fully aware of being called to express in our lives the cosmic harmony in which we exist. The Buddhist religious experience, however, does not usually reach the point of experiencing the transcendent as a personal God with whom we can establish a personal relationship, as someone whom we are invited to open our hearts to, to listen to, and to whom we can pray and entrust ourselves, as it is in the Christian experience of faith. In the Buddhist religious path, the practitioner is not led to meet the one who is the source of existence and to enter

into dialogue with him, but the practitioner is trained to become aware of the oneness in which he exists and to reach the wisdom of a non-self-centered insight that guides him to a compassionate life.

Genkai Sugimoto, a Japanese Zen monk who participated in the East-West Spiritual Exchange program between European Catholic monks and Japanese Buddhist monks in the eighties, reflecting on his experience in the Benedictine monastery of Santa Maria de Montserrat, in Catalonia, which lasted for a few weeks, wrote: "I think that one of the essential differences between the two religions consists in the fact that the Buddha was a human being, not God. Through his own efforts Buddha reached a state of peace which was fully realized. And he lived as a master who guides others to reach this state of peace. . . . Instead, in the monastery I saw how the Catholic monks diligently endeavor to become humble and obedient before God, praying and praising his holy name. Their greatest concern is God, while ours is our own hearts."¹⁸

Nevertheless, in Niwano's writings we can sometimes detect a personalistic approach to Ultimate Reality. He affirms, for instance: "If one knows the personal experience of being together with God or the Buddha at all times, waking and sleeping, of maintaining a constant dialogue with either of them in one's heart, of being certain that they support one's life, then can we say one is unhappy? Certainly not. . . . This is because either God or the Buddha fills the universe with his reality. They are the basis of life, the truth. By experiencing unity with them, by always knowing that one is together with them, one is assured of great cheer and courage and of great peace."¹⁹

In this English translation of Niwano's words, the use of the words *God* and *Buddha* in parallel can easily lead to some misunderstanding. In Niwano's mind, they are not separate realities, as

in a polytheistic comprehension of the divine sphere, but just different ways of referring to the same one Ultimate Reality. The melding of Shinto categories and Buddhist categories in the Japanese religious experience throughout the almost fifteen centuries of coexistence of Buddhism and the traditional religion of Japan on its soil has produced a manifold and typical Japanese way of describing the realm of the sacred. For instance, the very characteristic Japanese word *shinbutsu*, which refers indistinctly to the transcendent without specifying the religious comprehension of it, is written with two ideograms: one for *kami*, the Japanese word referring to the Shinto divinities and "superior spirits," and the other for *hotoke*, the Japanese word for Buddha.

The sense of the divine and of the sacred remains strong in Japanese religiosity but rather indistinct and undefined, as Saigyō, a twelfth-century Japanese poet, very well expresses when he describes his feelings while being in a Shinto shrine: "I don't know what mystery inhabits this place, but I cannot refrain from weeping in gratitude for it."

Solidarity and Kindness as Religious Values

In any case, I think we can say that the Japanese approach to religion, and in general the Buddhist approach to religion, is more practical and ethical than metaphysical and doctrinal. Let me cite a few quotations taken from Niwano's books that confirm what I have just affirmed:

"Although ways of expression and nuances in the way of thinking differ according to the land, time, and race into which a religion was born, the fundamental teaching is, in its essence, the same. If we were to dispute over details, we could find minor differences between the *agape* of Christianity, the compassion

of Buddhism, and the *makoto* of Shinto. But when we examine their roots, all are human sentiments that are, simply and purely, the great life of the universe. . . . To live on good terms with the others is the way of living that coincides with the truth."²⁰

"Caring or worrying about someone else, or being cared or worried about, is what gives happiness in human life. . . . With this caring, we communicate heart to heart, and such an exchange engenders a profound sense of belonging, of oneness. In the Buddhist canon there is a definition of humanity as that which lives between one person and another. The true meaning of this is not what exists merely physically between people but what moves from heart to heart, what thrives on mutual help and a feeling of solidarity. And this, I believe, is the first key to unlocking the mystery of human happiness."²¹

Even Christianity is understood by Nikkyō Niwano mainly in its ethical and anthropological dimensions:

"Christ said that he came not to be served but to serve. In the Sermon on the Mount he said, 'Always treat others as you would like them to treat you' (Matt. 7:12). This is known as the Golden Rule and is a guiding principle for human harmony. Some proclaim that the golden age of humanity will arrive when the Golden Rule is always observed. Serve others. Be kind. Help those in need. The practice of helping others is in the end the fastest means of making oneself happy."²²

And it is precisely when they put into practice these principles that Christians and Buddhists will recognize each other as religious people, and they will be able to encounter each other profoundly. Moreover, they will discover their shared responsibility to promote these values in society and to educate people to solidarity and mutual understanding.

Four years ago in Rome, addressing the bishops of Thailand, Benedict XVI said: "The coexistence of different

religious communities today unfolds against the backdrop of globalization. Recently I observed that the forces of globalization see humanity poised between two poles. On the one hand there is the growing multitude of economic and cultural bonds which usually enhance a sense of global solidarity and shared responsibility for the well-being of humanity. On the other there are disturbing signs of a fragmentation and a certain individualism in which secularism takes a hold, pushing the transcendent and the sense of the sacred to the margins and eclipsing the very source of harmony and unity within the universe. The negative aspects of this cultural phenomenon, . . . in fact point to the importance of interreligious cooperation. They call for a concerted effort to uphold the spiritual and moral soul of your people. In concordance with Buddhists, you can promote mutual understanding concerning the transmission of traditions to succeeding generations, the articulation of ethical values discernable to reason, reverence for the transcendent, prayer and contemplation. Such practices and dispositions serve the common well-being of society and nurture the essence of every human being.”²³

Buddhism and Christianity in Dialogue

Interreligious cooperation and dialogue, therefore, can no longer be regarded as optional but are required by the needs of our times not only from a practical point of view but also in the theoretical reflection on the big issues that the world is nowadays facing. Nissho Takeuchi, a monk and a scholar of the Nichiren school, after having participated in a Christian-Buddhist symposium held in Castel Gandolfo in 2008, affirmed: “In this twenty-first century, humanity has to face a great variety of very complex problems. The natural and

human sciences have to give answers to very serious issues and it’s as if it finds itself up against a wall which it cannot climb over. There is need for a global vision which gives light to the individual questions, which harmonizes the overall vision with the concrete issues in the various fields. The integration of knowledge is an urgent need. This is the direction toward which Christian theology and Buddhist philosophy must work so as to give a substantial contribution to the twenty-first century. Science alone cannot give the answers, it needs religions. . . . I think that Christianity and Buddhism together, in a harmonious way, like two wheels moving in the same direction, can engage the civilizations of East and West in profound dialogue and assist humanity in progressing toward a future where the differences are integrated from the very roots, to reach unity.”²⁴

Arnold J. Toynbee (1889–1975), a great British historian, once said: “When a historian one thousand years from now writes about the twentieth century, he will surely be more interested in the interpenetration which occurred for the first time between Christianity and Buddhism than in the conflict between the ideologies of democracy and communism.”²⁵

The encounter between Buddhism and Christianity, first of all, is not the encounter between doctrines or religions in the abstract, but it is carried out when Buddhist practitioners and Christian believers meet each other with reciprocal interest and esteem. In this sense, I think the relationship that Saint Francis Xavier established in Japan in 1549 with a Buddhist monk in the very first period of the Christian mission is emblematic. A few weeks after landing in Kagoshima, in a letter sent from that city, he wrote: “I spoke many times with the wisest of the bonzes, especially with one for whom all of those living here have great respect, for his scholarship, his life and the dignity he possesses, as

well as for his venerable age of eighty years; he is called Ninshitsu which in the Japanese language means ‘Heart of Truth.’ . . . It is wonderful to behold how this Ninshitsu is a great friend of mine. Many people, lay and monks, are very happy in our company and they are astonished to see that we come from countries which are very far away—Portugal and Japan are six thousand leagues apart—just to speak about the things of God and how people should save their souls by believing in Jesus Christ; besides, they add that the reason why we have come to these places is something ordained by God.”²⁶

After this initial good impact with the Buddhist Japanese world, we know that several misunderstandings and mistrust unfortunately arose between the European Christian missionaries and the Japanese Buddhists, and after a relatively quick diffusion of the church in the second half of the sixteenth century, Christianity was strictly banned in Japan for almost three centuries. Nevertheless, since the establishment of religious freedom in modern Japan in 1873, we can observe that an atmosphere of trust and dialogue has prevailed among the different religious groups to this day.

I think it is significant that many Japanese were present at the World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi in October 1986 and that in August the following year, inspired by the prophetic gesture of Pope John Paul II, Ven. Etai Yamada (1895–1994), head of the Tendai Buddhist denomination, convoked on Mount Hiei a religious summit that gathered religious men and women from all over the world. I had arrived in Japan just a few months before, and I remember how impressive that event was for me. Saicho (767–822), the Buddhist monk who initiated the Tendai school on Mount Hiei at the beginning of the ninth century, wrote: “Take upon yourself that which is bad and pass on to the others that which is good. Forget yourself and do good to others [*moko-rita*];

of friendship with the followers of other religious traditions. In Japan, in the last decades, many examples of this kind of dialogue could be pointed out, both on the institutional level and from private initiatives.

In fact, I could mention the close friendship between Rissho Kosei-kai, the Buddhist lay association founded by Nikkyo Niwano, and the Focolare Movement, a worldwide Catholic lay movement based in Italy, in which I am personally involved. Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement, visited Japan twice, invited by Niwano in 1981 and 1985. The well-known Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, following Chiara Lubich's second trip to Japan, answered in this way a journalist's query about the dialogue between Christians and Buddhists: "If we question ourselves on the meaning of good, we arrive at the definition of love, which is more than only justice. . . . If you speak about love and you bring it to its extreme consequences, you are speaking as a Christian because God is love. I would like to show you what I mean by giving an example. And I have one which deserves to be known. I am referring to Chiara Lubich. She went to Japan and spoke to Buddhists, and they understood. The negation of self, the negation of egoism, self-denial: this is the center of Buddhism. . . . By doing so, the wise man arrives at self-negation . . . and enjoys a peace in which there is no longer concupiscence but a kind of benevolence towards all that exists. But if you say to this wise man: 'Yes, it's true, we must deny ourselves. . . . Yes, I must overcome the concupiscence of being myself, but . . . because I belong to Another, because there is Another who loves me.' If

you tell him this, he will understand. He will begin to see that there is a link between Buddhism and Christianity. Chiara Lubich did this. I believe it can be a model of dialogue. And the dialogue with Buddhism is perhaps the most difficult."²⁸

Hence, the point is not about comparing beliefs or religious practices but of living radically according to one's own faith and being attentive to and interested in the other's. In her diary written during her stay in Japan, Chiara Lubich says: "If the Buddhists have the extinguished candle as their symbol, a sign that all desires have been suppressed, we Christians have the lighted candle because we are the followers of Love. In fact we have another light in us which must live; it is the light of God in us. If it lives, it is the death of the self."²⁹

Interaction between Buddhists and Christians, out of true faith and generous religious commitment, is always a two-way street that brings further light and love to both sides. Being faithful to one's own religious convictions and at the same time remaining radically open to the other's truth—this is what assures that together we may experience a deeper presence of God, the Ultimate Truth, who gives himself to us when we are united in love.

this is the supreme expression of compassion." According to Etai Yamada, in these few words we can grasp the very essence and the heart of the Buddhist practice and of any true religious commitment. John Paul II himself quoted and commented on this saying of Saicho's during his meeting in Tokyo with representatives of the different religions in February 1981.²⁷

Buddhists and Christians United in Love

As the Second Vatican Council declared in *Nostra Aetate* 2, "The Church exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men." The Catholic Church, therefore, encourages Christians to value every good found anywhere and to establish sincere bonds

Together Toward the Truth

Buddhists and Christians have many things to learn from each other. We are not religious competitors in the marketplace of spiritual supplies. All of us are seekers and witnesses to the Truth. For us Christians, Jesus Christ is the Truth itself, but we do not possess him; we are just his followers. He does not belong to us; rather, we feel called to belong to him. Trying to live as he did and striving to put into practice his teachings is, we know, the way to be more and more dwelled in and led by his spirit, the Holy Spirit, God himself, who will guide us to the fullness of Truth if we persevere in his love.

Shakyamuni Buddha, explains Nikkyo Niwano, “advocated flexibility when he taught that one must be candid and open and obedient to the truth. . . . One must be ready to accept new truths when they are discovered. . . . There can be no absolute incompatibility among human beings. This is a truth to which we must all become enlightened. . . . To follow the way of truth is to have spiritual and mental flexibility. The person who has these traits can grow in all directions,” concludes Niwano.³⁰

Romano Guardini, another outstanding Catholic theologian of the twentieth century, several years ago wrote about the initiator of the Buddhist path using the following words: “There is only one individual who could be placed in a position close to Jesus: the Buddha. This man is a great mystery. He stands there in a frightening, almost supra-human freedom, at the same time he demonstrates a goodness, mighty as a world power. Maybe Buddha will be the last with whom Christianity will have to argue. What for Christians he signifies, nobody has pronounced so far. Perhaps Christ did not have only one precursor in the Old Testament, John, the last prophet, but also one at

the bottom of antique culture, Socrates, and a third one who has spoken the ultimate word of eastern-religious knowledge and overcoming, Buddha.”³¹

To understand something we must try to grasp what is at the root of the given thing, the facts that led to that result. To understand the Buddhist path in depth requires an understanding of the experience that transformed Siddhartha Gautama into the Buddha, the Enlightened One, twenty-five hundred years ago. To understand what is at the core of the Christian faith, we are required to look at Jesus of Nazareth, who gave his life on the cross out of love and who is professed as the Risen Lord by his disciples. But this will become possible not merely with an individual rational effort of our intelligence but mainly through the vital encounter among true committed followers of the Buddha and of the Christ. Interreligious dialogue is not about exchanging information and knowledge but about communion of hearts in the deepest layer of human existence. It is a shared experience of the Universal Truth that visits us. □

Notes

1. Cinto Busquet, *Incontrarsi nell'Amore: Una lettura cristiana di Nikkyō Niwano* [Meeting in love: A Christian reading of Nikkyo Niwano] (Rome: Città Nuova, 2009).

2. Nikkyo Niwano, “Why Interreligious Cooperation Is Essential,” *Dharma World* 33 (July–September 2006): 33.

3. Paul VI, “Opening Address to the Fourth Session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council” (Vatican City, September 14, 1965).

4. Nikkyo Niwano, *Lifetime Beginner: An Autobiography* (Tokyo: Kosei, 1978), 225.

5. Nikkyo Niwano, *A Buddhist Approach to Peace* (Tokyo: Kosei, 1977), 87.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., 88.

8. Ibid., 68.

9. Renpo Niwa, quoted in Michael Fuss, J. López Gay, and G. S. Fazion,

Le grandi figure del Buddhismo (Assisi: Cittadella Editrice, 1995), 342–43.

10. Second Vatican Council, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, Nostra Aetate 2* (Vatican City, October 28, 1965).

11. Nikkyo Niwano, *Shakyamuni Buddha* (Tokyo: Kosei, 1980), 113.

12. Niwano, *Buddhist Approach to Peace*, 77.

13. Niwano, *Lifetime Beginner*, 261–62.

14. Nikkyo Niwano, *The Richer Life* (Tokyo: Kosei, 1979), 104–5.

15. Nikkyo Niwano, *The Wholesome Family Life* (Tokyo: Kosei, 1982), 79.

16. Ibid., 80.

17. Ibid., 138–39.

18. Genkai Sugimoto, “Japanese Buddhists in the Monastery of Montserrat,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 10 (1990): 194.

19. Niwano, *Wholesome Family Life*, 20–21.

20. Niwano, *Buddhist Approach to Peace*, 78–79.

21. Niwano, *Wholesome Family Life*, 17.

22. Nikkyo Niwano, *Invisible Eyelashes* (Tokyo: Kosei, 1994), 137.

23. Benedict XVI, “Address to the Bishops of Thailand on Their ‘Ad Limina’ Visit” (Vatican City, May 16, 2008).

24. Nissho Takeuchi, unpublished interview recorded in Osaka, Japan, by C. S. Chiara Productions (Rocca di Papa, Italy), April 27, 2006.

25. Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 9, *Contacts between Civilizations in Time (Renaissances); Law and Freedom in History; The Prospects of the Western Civilization* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), quoted in Niwano, *A Buddhist Approach to Peace*, 114.

26. Saint Francis Xavier, *Le lettere e altri documenti* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1991), 325.

27. John Paul II, “Address to Japanese Representatives of Non-Christian Religions” (Tokyo, February 24, 1981), n. 3.

28. Cf. E. Fondi, “The Focolare Movement: A Spirituality at the Service of Interreligious Dialogue,” *Pro Dialogo*, Bulletin 89 (1995/2): 158.

29. Chiara Lubich, *Incontri con l'Oriente* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1986), 75.

30. Niwano, *Richer Life*, 33–35.

31. Romano Guardini, *Il Signore* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005), 404.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 19

The Merits of the Teacher of the Dharma (2)

This is the 107th installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.

TEXT “Moreover, Ever Zealous! If any good son or good daughter receives and keeps this sutra, or reads, or recites, or expounds, or copies it, he will attain eight hundred merits of the nose;

COMMENTARY The nose is the least developed of the human sense organs, yet it directly influences human physiology and emotion. When one smells an unpleasant odor, one may lose one’s appetite or even develop a headache, while one can be completely captivated by a delightful perfume.

The sense of smell is quite difficult to grasp, but someone who follows the teachings of the sutra can freely discern the true nature of all things by their smell.

TEXT and by means of this serene organ of smell, in the three-thousand-great-thousandfold world, zenith and nadir, within and without, he will smell all kinds of fragrance, the fragrance of sumanas flowers, of jatika flowers, of mallika

flowers, of campaka flowers, of patala flowers, of red lotus flowers, of blue lotus flowers, of white lotus flowers, of flowering trees, of fruit-bearing trees, of sandalwood, of aloes, of tamalapattras, of tagaras, and of thousands of myriads of blended perfumes, powdered, granular, or in unguents. He who keeps this sutra, while abiding in this place, can discern all these.

COMMENTARY *The fragrance of sumanas flowers.* This is the essence taken from the flowers of the sumanas tree.

- *Of jatika flowers.* This is the essence taken from the flowers of the jatika tree.

- *Of mallika flowers.* This is the essence taken from the flowers of the mallika tree.

- *Of campaka flowers.* This is the essence taken from the flowers of the campaka tree.

- *Of patala flowers.* This is the essence taken from the flowers of the patala tree.

- *Sandalwood.* This is the wood of the Indian sandalwood

tree, which is white and very fine-grained with a wonderful aroma, so it is often used in carvings of Buddhist images. The bark is used in perfumes and medicines.

- **Aloes.** The wood of this tree is dense, so it sinks in water. It is buried in the ground and allowed to decompose in order to create perfume, the most excellent of which is called aloeswood.

- **Of tamalapattras.** This is the essence taken from the leaves of the tamalapattra tree.

- **Of tagaras.** This is the essence produced from the root of the tagara tree. Only the root has an aroma.

TEXT Again, he will discern the odors of all living beings, the odor of elephants, of horses, of cattle, goats, and so on; of men, of women, of boys, of girls, and of grass, trees, bushes, and woods; near or far, whatever odor there be, he will perceive it all and discern without mistake. He who keeps this sutra, though abiding here, will also perceive the odor of the gods in the heavens, of parijata and kovidara, of mandarava flowers, of maha-mandarava flowers, of manjushaka flowers, of maha-manjushaka flowers, of all kinds of powdered sandalwood and aloes, and of many mingled flowers—all the odors exhaled from such mingled celestial perfumes he will never fail to perceive and know.

COMMENTARY *Of parijata.* This is a very large tree said to be in the heavens and visible from anywhere.

- **Kovidara.** This is a tree said to be in the garden where the god Indra strolls.

- **Of mandarava flowers,** of maha-mandarava flowers. These are flowers of trees that are said to grow in the heavens. Maha means “great.”

- **Of manjushaka flowers.** These are flowers that are said to bloom in the heavens.

TEXT And he will perceive the odor of the bodies of gods, the odor of Shakra Devendra in his Surpassing Palace, indulging in his five desires and disporting himself joyfully; or when he is in his Wonderful Dharma Hall preaching the Dharma to the gods of the Trayastrimsha; or when he wanders for pleasure in his gardens; also the odor of the bodies of the other male and female gods; from afar will he perceive them all. Thus proceeding to the Brahma worlds, up to the Summit of Existence, he will also smell all the odors of the bodies of the gods. Besides, he will smell the incense burned by the gods;

COMMENTARY *Shakra Devendra.* This refers to the god Indra.

- **Wonderful Dharma Hall.** It is located within the Trayastrimsha heaven, where Indra resides; a hall for

preaching the Dharma. Though called “gods,” the gods of the Trayastrimsha have not yet attained buddhahood, so of course they must hear the Dharma preached and practice it.

TEXT and the odor of shravakas, of pratyekabuddhas, of bodhisattvas, and of the bodies of buddhas—from afar will he smell all these and know where they abide. Though he smells these odors, yet his organ of smell will not be harmed nor mistaken; and if he wishes to discern them and preach them to others, his memory will not err.”

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

“The nose of this man being serene, / [The odor of] everything in this world, / Be it fragrant or be it fetid, / In full detail he smells and knows. / Sumanas and jatika flowers, / Tamalapattra and sandal[wood], / Aloes and cinnamon, / Odors of flowers and fruits, / Odors of all the living, / Odors of men and women: / The preacher, dwelling afar, / Smells them and knows their location.

COMMENTARY *Cinnamon.* This is the same as the fragrance of tagaras.

TEXT All-powerful wheel-rolling kings, / Minor wheel-rollers and their sons, / All their ministers and courtiers: / He, by smell, knows their location. / The jewels they wear upon them, / The treasures [hidden] in the earth, / The precious queens of wheel-rolling kings: / He, by smell, knows their location. / From the things adorning people, / Their clothes and necklaces, / And the perfumes they use for anointing, / He, by smell, knows their persons. / The gods, whether walking or seated, / Their playing and mystic powers, / He who keeps this Dharma Flower, / By smell, can know in every detail. / The scent of tree flowers and fruits / And the fragrance of ghee oil: / He who keeps this sutra, / Abiding here, well knows their location. / Mountain gorges and cliffs, / Diffusion of sandal-tree blossoms, / And all the beings there dwelling / He, by smell, can perfectly know. / On Mount Iron Circle, in the oceans, / And in the earth are the living: / He who keeps this sutra / By [their] smell knows their location. / Asuras, male and female, / And all their retinue and followers, / When they quarrel or play together / He, by smell, is able to discern. / Prairies or ravines where [roam] / Lions, elephants, tigers, wolves, / Bison, buffaloes, and their kind: / He, by smell, knows their location. / If there be a woman with child / Who discerns not yet its sex, / Male, female, organless, or nonhuman, / He, by smell, can discern it. / By his power of smell / He knows if the newly pregnant / Will succeed or not in being / Joyfully delivered of happy children. / By his perceptive

power of smell / He knows the thoughts of men and women,
/ Their minds of tainted desire, foolishness, or anger, / And
also knows the doers of goodness.

COMMENTARY *Tainted desire.* “Tainted” means defiled. This is because by defilement we mean that the originally pure, unblemished mind is dyed diverse colors as a result of various internal and external experiences.

TEXT All the treasures hidden in the earth, / Gold, silver, and jewels / Heaped in copper vessels, / By smell he can clearly distinguish. / All sorts of [jeweled] necklaces, / Of price beyond all knowledge— / By smell he knows their value, / Their source, and their location. / The flowers of the [various] heavens, / Mandaravas, manjushakas, / And parijata trees, / By smell he can clearly distinguish. / The palaces of the heavens, / Whether upper, middle, or lower, / Adorned with every precious flower, / By smell he can clearly distinguish. / The heavenly gardens, groves, surpassing palaces, / Lookout platforms, and Wonderful Dharma halls, / And those who take their pleasure in them, / By smell he can clearly distinguish. / Whenever the gods are hearing the Dharma, / Or indulging in the five desires, / Coming, going, walking, sitting, lying— / By smell he can clearly distinguish. / The garments the goddesses wear, / Adorned and perfumed with beautiful flowers, / As they ramble about for pleasure, / By smell he can clearly distinguish. / So is it in turn ascending / Even up to the Brahma worlds; / Those in meditation and out of it / By smell he can clearly distinguish. / From the heavens Light Sound and Universal Purity / Up to the heaven of the Summit of Existence, / From the [gods’] birth to their disappearance: / By smell he can all distinguish. / All the host of bhikshus / Ever progressing in the Dharma, / Whether seated or walking about, / Reading and reciting these sutra teachings, / Or, beneath trees in the forest, / Devoting themselves to

meditation— / The keeper of [this] sutra, by smell, / Knows their every location. / Bodhisattvas firm of will, / In meditation, or reading the sutra, / Or preaching the Dharma to others— / By smell he can all distinguish. / The world-honored in every direction, / By all beings revered, / Who pity all and preach the Dharma— / By smell he can all distinguish. / The living who, in a buddha’s presence, / Hear the sutra and rejoice together, / And practice according to the Dharma— / By smell he can all distinguish. / Though not yet possessed of a bodhisattva’s / Faultless, Dharma-begotten organ of smell, / Yet this keeper of the sutra / First obtains this faculty of smell.

COMMENTARY *Faultless, Dharma-begotten.* This literally means to be born of the absolute, or sacred, Dharma; that is, born from a pure awakening to Thusness, or *tathata*, that is without defilement.

The Buddha next discusses the merits of the tongue.

TEXT “Further, Ever Zealous! If any good son or good daughter receives and keeps this sutra, and reads, or recites, or expounds, or copies it, he will obtain twelve hundred merits of the tongue.

COMMENTARY The merits of the tongue are of two types: the first is that food will taste delicious, and the second is that what one preaches will move others.

Concerning the first merit, it is natural for whatever one eats to taste good when one has a high degree of faith and calmness of the mind.

The second merit requires no further explanation.

TEXT Whatever pleasant or unpleasant, sweet or not sweet, bitter or astringent things meet his tongue will become of the finest flavor, like celestial nectar; nothing will be unpleasant.

COMMENTARY This is something that we can actually experience. A hermit or a devout Buddhist priest isolated deep in the mountains may eat wild grasses and nuts which ordinary people generally never eat and find these foods truly delicious.

Even in our daily life, when we are suffering or worrying about something, even the greatest delicacies may taste like sand, yet when we are cheerful and lighthearted, even a bowl of rice mixed with barley or a bowl of simple miso soup makes us smack our lips.

“Nectar” is the drink of the gods, and in addition to being spellbindingly delicious, it is said to bestow immortality.

TEXT If, in the assembly, he uses his organ of the tongue to preach, it will send forth a profound and wonderful voice that can enter their hearts, giving them joy and pleasure.

COMMENTARY *A profound and wonderful voice.* This means not only a beautiful voice, but one characterized by spiritual elevation, profundity, and subtlety.

TEXT and celestial sons and daughters, Shaktas, Brahmas, and the gods, hearing what this profound and wonderful voice proclaims and the order of his discourse, will all come and listen to him; dragons also and female dragons, yakshas and female yakshas, gandharvas and female gandharvas, asuras and female asuras, garudas and female garudas, kimnaras and female kimnaras, mahoragas and female mahoragas will all come to hear the Dharma, to approach, revere, and pay homage to him;

COMMENTARY *The order of his discourse.* His speech is reasonable and coherent, and its order is persuasive.

• *Dragons . . . female mahoragas.* These refer to varieties of demons. They have been explained earlier, so we need not dwell on them here.

TEXT bhikshus also and bhikshunis, upasakas and upasikas, kings and princes with their ministers and

followers, minor wheel-rolling kings and great wheel-rolling kings with their seven treasures and their thousand children, and their internal and external retinue, riding in their palatial chariots, will all come to listen to his Dharma. Because this bodhisattva so excellently preaches the Dharma, Brahmins, citizens, and the people in his country will follow, attend on, and pay homage to him to the end of their bodily life.

COMMENTARY *Their seven treasures and their thousand children.* In India a king of great virtue was said to be granted by heaven seven treasures and a thousand children.

• *Riding in their palatial chariots.* This phrase means “together with their households.”

• *Bodily life.* This means the life of a being with form, that is, the lifespan in this world.

TEXT And shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, and buddhas will always delight to see him. In whatever quarter this man abides, the buddhas will all preach the Dharma toward him, and he will be able to receive and keep all the Buddha Dharma and also to utter the profound and wonderful sound of the Dharma.”

COMMENTARY From the fact that the buddhas themselves wish to see him, one can gather how worthy he is. Because the buddhas, one and all, turn toward him and preach the Dharma, their various teachings focus on him. Hence, he will be able to comprehend all the Buddha Dharma and receive and keep it. This is truly a wonderful state.

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.