

Our Smiles Can Open Minds

by Nichiko Niwano

The Benefits of Laughter

When talking to other people, no matter how passionately we speak, we cannot reach them if their minds are tightly closed. Someone once said that such a mind is like “a bowl turned upside down.”

Nothing can get into an upside-down bowl. So first the other person's mind, which is like that bowl, must be turned right side up. To make any heart-to-heart communication possible, both persons must open up about their innermost feelings. At such times, laughter and humor often can play a large role.

This is why, from long ago, many noted priests as well as men of letters have taught us something important by including satirical or humorous anecdotes into their lectures and stories that might otherwise be stiff and formal, making their listeners or readers chuckle and thus turning the bowl of the mind right side up.

Jippensha Ikku (1765–1831), the popular Edo period writer of the work known in English as *Shank's Mare*, left us this comic verse as his dying words: “Without further ado, I take leave of this world, so with the departure of the incense smoke, farewell!” And the Zen master Ikkyu Sojun (1394–1481) composed the following verse that humorously expresses the truth of birth, old age, illness, and death: “So we are born and so we die. This is the same for Shakyamuni and Daruma,* and for the cat and the ladle, too.”

Laughter and humor open the hearts of hardened people, bring

harmony to human relationships, help us accept and overcome difficult realities, and make our thinking more gentle and flexible.

In fact, Dr. Viktor Frankl (1905–77), who survived being sent to a concentration camp by the Nazis, suggested to his fellow inmates that they tell each other one funny story every day to make each other laugh. It may have been this laughter that gave them the strength to go on living.

When people are faced with troubles or hardships, humor and laughter are like a window letting in a beam of light. Humor loosens our heartstrings, encourages us to relax, and gives rise to liberation.

Smiles Show Consideration

Some people, however, are not adept at taking the initiative in telling jokes or making others laugh.

As a matter of fact, I am one such person. I used to leave home every day with a frown on my face, so one day my wife gave me this advice: “Before you leave, look in the mirror and try to smile.” Thanks to developing this good habit, I feel much less self-conscious about smiling in public and I now have more rewarding relationships with other people.

Mention of smiling reminds me that I was impressed by a scene from last year's FIFA Women's World Cup Final in Frankfurt. When at last the final play was at hand, all the members of the Japanese team, their faces beaming,

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formed themselves into a circle. Their smiles broke their tension, relaxed their muscles, and let them exercise their full potential. We should all follow the example of Nadeshiko, as Japan's women's soccer team is known, developing flexible strength, and go through life with smiles on our faces.

Even if at first we do not feel like smiling, by making a conscious effort to do so we will soon find that smiles come naturally to us. And then, because the body and mind are closely interrelated, our mood will brighten and our outlook become more positive.

A smile carries with it the message “I'd like to be your friend,” and helps build harmonious, warmhearted relationships.

Furthermore, smiling is itself being considerate: the “donation of smiling peacefully” is one form of practicing compassion and a form of donation that everyone can do, even without substantial financial resources.

We should never forget to smile since smiling is a source of kindness and consideration, and we should continue, cheerfully and joyfully, to be diligent in our practice. □

* Bodhidharma (known as Daruma in Japanese) is credited as the transmitter of Chan from India to China.

DHARMA WORLD

FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

JULY–SEPT. 2012 VOL. 39

The Significance of Religious Communities

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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Layout and Design: Abinitio Design

Cover photos: PIXTA. Courtesy of the Focolare Movement and Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam.

Photoshop work by Abinitio Design.

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Why We Should Join a Sangha

by Yukimasa Hagiwara

At present, Rissho Kosei-kai has sixty-nine Dharma centers in twenty-one countries, and member families outside Japan number more than fifteen thousand. Roughly speaking, these overseas centers are distributed here and there in East Asia, South Asia, North America, South America, and Europe.

Particularly since around 1990, our organization's sanghas have been rapidly expanding through the efforts of the people in each country. In North America and Taiwan, there are now some ministers of Dharma centers who come from the centers' local communities. This is a sure sign that our teaching has taken firm root in these areas, and this trend is expected to grow further.

This active expansion offers us an opportunity to think about some fundamental issues and ask ourselves, "What is Rissho Kosei-kai? What are its essential elements?" Placed in the contexts of different cultures and traditions, Rissho Kosei-kai outside Japan may not share everything in common with its original form in Japan. As Rissho Kosei-kai takes root abroad, the means it uses according to circumstances (skillful means) necessarily change, while its essential elements remain. For example, our organization's characteristics, such as lay Buddhism and Buddhism in daily life, are sometimes difficult for people to understand in countries with a tradition of Theravada Buddhism. On the other hand, it tends to be difficult for people in the Americas and Europe to understand ancestor veneration.

Likewise, the process of building the

sangha and the reasons people belong to it are different depending on the culture.

In South Asia, there is a strong tendency for people who are already Buddhists to join the Rissho Kosei-kai sangha, quite often followed in succession by other family members and relatives. The motive for joining appears to be the appeal of serving others or reciting sutras, activities that in Theravada Buddhism are reserved for monks. In East Asia, the main motive for joining appears to be to solve personal problems, though another common motive seems to be the appeal of belonging to the warm sangha. In the case of North America, where appreciation of Buddhism is said to be on the rise, the motive for joining is usually the individual's interest in the teachings. Unlike the situation in South Asia, in North America membership in the sangha seldom extends to family members or relatives. In other words, religious activity is at all events seen as individual behavior.

In North America in particular, aside from the recognized Buddhist population of three million, there are said to be an additional 2.5 million people who read Buddhist writings or meditate, often before going to bed, thus the nickname "nightstand Buddhists." To communicate the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and of Rissho Kosei-kai to such people, we have been developing through a process of trial and error lectures and other services made available on the Internet. One of the issues we will need to address in future is the concept of the Sangha as it is understood in North

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America. If Buddhism is characterized by the Three Treasures—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha—the question arises of how can such people, who do not belong to any organization but are interested in the teachings and in solitary practice, be encouraged to join a sangha? It may be that a new interpretation is needed for an American-style sangha.

The name "Rissho Kosei-kai" incorporates the meaning "attaining buddhahood through personal exchanges." I can understand the feelings of people who would prefer to avoid the restraints and problems that arise from being in an organization. However, human beings are creatures that have great difficulty in achieving self-knowledge on their own. People grow and develop when they work hard to maintain respect for each other's existence while making the Dharma their light. Nothing can replace a sangha for this kind of religious training.

Because our organization originated in Japan, I think it inherits a culture and tradition of cooperation based on attaining harmony (*wa*) in the sangha. We need to extend the kind of good friendship that the sangha creates throughout the world. This kind of mutual feeling does not differ even between people of different countries; it is like the security of being family. I think it is a part of Rissho Kosei-kai's essential nature. □

Communities of Life and Dialogue in the Catholic Church

by Brendan Leahy

Although many people in our modern, secularized world have rejected religious ways of thinking or have lost touch with spiritual resources previously available in their religious traditions, they search for a deeper grounding for living and serving that only spiritual disciplines can provide.

Many look for a way to be happy in life. And yet the “art of living” that brings that happiness can seem so elusive.¹ Chiara Luce Badano, a young girl who died just over twenty years ago and who has been declared “blessed,”² had learned in her short life that the art of living is an “art of loving.” This discovery was communicated to her, certainly through her good family and upbringing, but more particularly through her membership in one of the many new communities that have come to life in recent years within the Catholic Church. Her life radiated a joy that was contagious, and so it had a very beneficial effect on many, even after her death.

In this article, I would like to offer a reflection, in the light of the experience within the Catholic Church, on the place of communities and movements in helping faith come alive for people, with beneficial effects both for those who come into contact with them and for the wider society as a whole.

The Catholic Church and Its Mission

To explain the place of communities and movements in the Catholic Church, I need first to offer a brief overview of

the church’s own self-understanding and mission.

As the largest and oldest church, the Catholic Church has more than a billion members. Its central message is the Good News (the Gospel) of Jesus Christ, who founded the church two thousand years ago. Day by day, its members strive to put the Gospel into practice, living a twofold law—love of God and love of neighbor, the synthesis of Jesus’ teaching. Through sacramental rituals and prayers, they let themselves be immersed in the divine mystery. A particularly important moment is their weekly prayer gathering called the Mass. The worldwide unity of the church has a visible expression in the person of the pope and, at a local level, bishops and priests, who are the points of unity in regional units called dioceses and parishes. In the Catholic tradition, the pope and bishops are important in terms of members’ avoiding the dangers of schism and division.

The church’s mission is to continue the presence and teachings of Jesus Christ in the world. An early third-century Christian, writing to his high-ranking friend Diognetus, who had asked for information about the religion of Christians, provides a valuable

pen-picture of how Christians understood their identity:

To say it briefly: what the soul is in the body, that the Christians are in the world. The soul is spread through all the members of the body, and the Christians throughout the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, but is not part and parcel of the body, so Christians dwell in the world, but are not part and parcel of the world. Itself invisible, the soul is kept shut up in the visible body; so Christians are known as such in the world, but their religion remains invisible.³

The rituals, structures, and prayers are not the primary distinctive characteristics of the church. Rather, the life of mutual love that Jesus left as his new commandment is at the core of the church. This is the “soul” that is to animate all the life, activities, and thought of members of the church.

In articulating its focus today, the Catholic Church refers to a major event that took place fifty years ago in Rome—the Second Vatican Council. This was a worldwide gathering of bishops and other representatives of churches and religions (Nikkyo Niwano, founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, was present at a Mass in the Vatican during the council and had a private audience with Pope Paul VI). What emerged clearly at the council was that the church’s mission can be summed up in one word: unity. The church is to be a sign of unity with God

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and among humankind.⁴ It is in the light of the teaching of that council that the Catholic Church embarked along the pathways of dialogue—within the church, with members of other churches, with members of other religions, and with all people of goodwill. Together, all the forces for good can contribute much to the building up of universal fraternity animated by the Golden Rule: do to others what you would like them to do to you; do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you.

Communities in the History of the Catholic Church

Having painted in very broad brushstrokes the overall vision of the church today, we can now focus on the place of the many communities within the church. On the one hand, the parish is the most immediate and visible expression of the church, the place where the church is seen locally.⁵ It is like an ongoing, supportive sacramental-hierarchical access to the gift from God of the Christian faith and teaching, life, and worship.

A review of the history of the church will show, however, that as well as the essential supporting sacramental and leadership structures of the church, spontaneous communities of life have sprung up constantly, offering ways of living out the Christian message corresponding to the needs of particular periods in history.

The monastic communities of Saint Benedict (ca. 480–547), with their stability and motto of “prayer and work,” were important at the time of the collapse of the Roman Empire and the migrations of peoples in Europe. The fraternal communities of Saint Francis of Assisi (1181/2–1226) were significant in medieval Europe when city-states were locked in conflict with one another and the church risked becoming too bourgeois. The Carmelite renewal advanced by Teresa of Avila (1515–82) offered experiences of interior renewal in prayer at a time when subjective,

personal experience was highly valued. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) established the Jesuit communities at a turbulent moment of European history that coincided with the discovery of new world frontiers.

If we were to examine each of the communities, it would be possible to show how they opened up a window onto the Gospel that was important for that time: the followers of Benedict emphasized putting God in the first place in life; Francis of Assisi underlined poverty and fraternity; Teresa of Avila focused on prayer; while Ignatius of Loyola taught obedience as a way of living the Gospel. In a sense, these prophetic and charismatic figures attracted their followers to spiritual pathways that show how, within the one church of Jesus Christ, there is unity in diversity. To use an image, there are many flowers in the church's garden.⁶ Through each of these communities, it is as if the Gospel were unfolding in history. Each founder and his or her community embody a specific aspect of the Gospel. Of course, we need to look at all the flowers in the garden to really appreciate the beauty of this unfolding of the Gospel in the one church of Jesus Christ.

From history we also learn how these founders and their communities gave rise to cultural waves of renewal. Saint Francis and the wider Franciscan family, for instance, made significant contributions to culture in terms of art (Giotto), literature (Dante), and finance.⁷ Even in our day, Francis's message lives on.

conversion. If previously being a member of the church was reduced more or less to a lifeless social routine with perhaps occasional moments of consolation in ritual and, at times, of suffering, people discover through contact with a movement and its spirituality an art of living that renews all of their relationships—with God and with others.

From observing both her own personal experience and that of countless others, Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement, explained that coming into contact with a movement was an encounter with a charism, a gift of the Spirit:

We come face to face with a charism of the church, in other words, with an action of the Holy Spirit, whose primary task is to remind us of what Jesus said and did. And as a result of these gifts, people are invaded by an absolute certainty, an eternal novelty of the Good News: “God, the God revealed by Jesus, is love. He is my Father and he loves me immensely.”⁹

The cofounder of the Focolare Movement, the Servant of God Igino Giordani (1894–1980), is a good example of this.¹⁰ As a married man with a family, a politician, journalist, and author, he came in contact with the Focolare Movement at its early beginnings just after the Second World War. He was struck by the atmosphere of Chiara Lubich and the other young people living the Gospel together in a communitarian manner. Though by then already well known in Italy and internationally for his prolific apologetic writings, Giordani describes his encounter with the movement as a transformation in his life from an idea of Christianity to a life he had longed for: “Something happened to me. . . . Love penetrated and enveloped my ideas, drawing them into an orbit of joy. . . . I understood then what the Lord meant in John’s Gospel

with his images of light, love, rebirth and Spirit. Fire had entered.”¹¹

Giordani went on to embrace the community’s spirituality, and he provided a major contribution in Italy in many fields—dialogue, families, publications, and politics.

Communities and Interreligious Dialogue

By way of conclusion of this article, it is important to underline how many of the new movements and communities in the Catholic Church are involved in dialogue with other Christians, with members of other religions, and indeed with people of nonreligious convictions but committed to peace and universal fraternity.¹² With their spirituality, lay membership, projects, and initiatives, these movements and communities have been bridges of dialogue with members and movements of other churches and religions. In this way, the movements, themselves well rooted in the Catholic Church, strive to be points of unity and reconciliation rather than schism or division. They seek to heal division.

In Ottmaring, near Augsburg in Germany, for instance, the Focolare Movement codeveloped a small town that bears witness to the Gospel lived together by members of Lutheran communities and Catholics. Indeed, members of different churches live together in many of the Focolare communities throughout the world. They respect each other’s church traditions and norms but are united in living a common spirituality and sharing the many elements of the Christian patrimony that all Christians hold in common. In recent years, a Europe-wide network of movements across the churches has developed to promote the spiritual values of Europe. It is called the Together for Europe project.¹³

The Community of Sant’Egidio, following the Assisi meeting in 1986, began holding interreligious international

His appreciation of nature has had an impact on ecology, and his contact with the Egyptian sultan Malik Al Kamil (1180–1238) is viewed as an example of interreligious dialogue.

Today’s Communities

In the past hundred years, the Catholic Church has seen a particularly vibrant blossoming of many new communities, primarily made up of laypeople. This is happening precisely at a time when the church has, in its official teachings, emphasized the importance of laypeople in bringing ahead the church’s mission of unity, peace, and universal fraternity. We can list some of these communities: L’Arche, Sant’Egidio, Communion and Liberation, Focolare, Charismatic Renewal, Faith and Light.⁸

What is it that attracts people to these communities? When describing the impact their encounter with a community or movement had on them, most people speak of their faith coming alive. What strikes them is that they are meeting people who were “alive” in their faith, and this enkindles a deep

meetings in various cities primarily in Europe with the aim of promoting mutual understanding and dialogue among religions. It holds these meetings in different cities around the world. The Chemin Neuf Movement also engages in interreligious dialogue.

Since the 1960s, but especially since 1977, when Chiara Lubich was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, the Focolare Movement has engaged in interreligious dialogue at various levels.

The mutual understanding between Rev. Nikkyo Niwano and Chiara Lubich resulted in an invitation from Rev. Niwano to Chiara to speak of her spiritual experience to thousands of Buddhists in the Great Sacred Hall of Rissho Kosei-kai on December 28, 1981. The contact between those movements has continued and deepened also through the commitment of younger members of the movements. Subsequently, Chiara also developed contacts with some eminent representatives of Thai monasticism.

Worthy, too, of note is the particular friendship that Imam W. D. Mohammed, leader of the American Society of Muslims, enjoyed with Chiara Lubich.¹⁴ In 1997 she was invited by him to speak at the Malcolm Shabazz Mosque in Harlem (New York) and share her Christian experience with three thousand African American Muslims. This led to a large convention, in Washington, D.C., of seven thousand Christians and Muslims, who promised each other that they would continue their journey in the fullest union possible and spread it to others. This has led to many new pockets of dialogue and renewal between Muslims and Christians.

In short, as Robert Catalano comments, “it seems that the birth and development of renewal movements within the various religions has offered fertile terrain for interreligious dialogue also through some common characteristics that seem to facilitate greatly

interreligious contact,”¹⁵ to the benefit of many. □

Notes

1. See Cardinal Ratzinger’s Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers, Jubilee of Catechists in Rome, December 12, 2000.

2. In the Catholic Church, a person is declared “blessed” after death if the person has shown heroic virtue in his or her life and certain miraculous effects can be attributed to the person. Chiara Luce Badano was diagnosed with an aggressive and painful form of cancer that brought her to her early death in 1990. She lived this experience with heroic acceptance and love. See Michele Zanzucchi, *Chiara Luce: A Life Lived to the Full* (London: New City, 2004).

3. Letter to Diognetus, quoted in J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 1 (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1950), 250–51.

4. See *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), chapter 1.

5. See Pope John Paul II’s apostolic letter on the lay faithful, *Christifideles Laici* (December 30, 1988), n. 26.

6. See Chiara Lubich, “Christ through the Centuries” in *Essential Writings: Spirituality, Dialogue, Culture* (London: New City, 2007), 113–15.

7. See Luigino Bruni and Smerilli Alessandra, *Benedetta economia: Benedetto di Norcia e Francesco d’Assisi nella storia economica europea* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2008).

8. For further information on the emergence and significance of these new communities, see Brendan Leahy, *Ecclesial Movements and Communities: Origins, Significance, and Issues* (New York: New City, 2011).

9. Address at the World Day of Peace, Trent, Italy, January 1, 1995, in Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 198.

10. See Tommaso Sorgi, *A Soul on Fire: A Profile of Igino Giordani (1894–1980)* (Rome: Igino Giordani Centre, 2011).

11. Igino Giordani, *Memorie d’un cristiano ingenuo* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1981), 150–51 (translation mine).

12. See Robert Catalano, *Spiritualità di comunione e dialogo interreligioso: L’esperienza di Chiara Lubich e del movimento dei Focolari* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2010).

13. See *Together for Europe* (Rome, 2004), 30–31.

14. On the Focolare’s dialogue with Muslims, see “Mysticism and God-relatedness,” *Islamochristiana* 34 (2008): 79–86.

15. See Catalano, *Spiritualità di comunione*, 149 (translation mine).

The Muslim Community in Japan

by Samir Abdel Hamid Nouh

Though the Muslim community is very small, the Japanese public of today has generally accepted it as part of Japanese society. For the most part, Japanese people accept cultural differences as colorful aspects of the world and understand that other cultures are actually not very different from their own.

It is known that Turk-Tatar immigrants from Kazan, Tatarstan, and from Bashkirstan (present-day Bashkortostan) established the first Muslim community in Japan after they fled their homes in 1922 to Manchuria, then came to Kobe and Tokyo around 1927. Those immigrants, who were given asylum, were followed by the migration of a number of additional Muslims, who settled in several main cities of Japan and formed small Muslim groups. A few Japanese converted to Islam through contact with those Muslims. Turk-Tatar Muslims were welcomed by Japanese authorities. They started participating in special events by presenting their own culture to Japanese society, while practicing the principal duties of their religion.

Before the arrival of Turk-Tatar immigrants, there were already Muslims in Japan. In 1908 a few Muslims in Tokyo planned to build a mosque. One of the early Japanese converts, Kotaro (Umar) Yamaoka, made a hajj to Mecca and traveled to Istanbul to seek approval for the building of the Tokyo mosque. It was granted in 1910 by Muslim caliph Abdul Hamid II. The Tokyo mosque was completed in 1938 with financial support from major Japanese industrial and

financial conglomerates. Meanwhile, in Kobe, the Kansai Muslim community, consisting of Arab and Indian businessmen as well as Turkish immigrants, had built a mosque in 1935, which is considered the first mosque built in Japan. The Muslim community in Tokyo needed to educate its children, so a school was established at the mosque. The Holy Qur'an was first printed in Japan on April 30, 1934, and the Muslim community celebrated this occasion on June 7, 1934. The celebration demonstrated the

Muslim community's integration into Japanese society and its good relationship with Japanese officials.

Religious Communities' Significance for Society

Religious communities play an important role for individuals and society alike. It is not easy to compare the Muslim community in Japan with other Japanese religious communities, as the concept of a religious community may vary according to different religious traditions.

A discussion of the Muslim community in Japan needs first to identify the dates of earlier contacts in the Far East. The first modern Japanese contacts were with Malay Muslims who served aboard British

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and Dutch ships in the late nineteenth century. In 1890, to honor Japan's Prince Akihito Komatsu for his visit to Istanbul several years earlier, Ottoman Turkey sent a naval vessel called the *Ertugrul* to Japanese waters. It was destroyed in a storm along the coast of Wakayama Prefecture on September 16 of that year.

Contacts between Islam and Japan were not constant over the years. There were periods of interruption, because these contacts depended on political circumstances and economic interests that varied from period to period. A line on a graph representing the relationship between Japan and the Islamic world would move up and down over a long time, and fluctuations in the relationship affected the position of the Muslim community in Japan. The presence of Islam in Japan depended on the very few non-Japanese who came to Japan for various reasons, several Japanese who converted to Islam to serve the objectives of Japanese policy, and a small number of Japanese who encountered Islam while traveling outside Japan and meeting Muslims.

Although there were already some Muslims in Japan, it could be argued that Japan's first Muslim communities were formed when most of the Turkish immigrants based themselves in Tokyo and a number of Muslim traders from India and elsewhere reached Kobe to form a Muslim community there. This group established the Kobe mosque with the support of Indian traders in 1935, a few years before the Muslim community in Tokyo founded the Tokyo mosque in 1938.

A mosque is considered a symbol of the existence of a Muslim community, or a gathering of Muslims. It is clear that the Muslim communities both in Kobe and in Tokyo, which included mostly non-Japanese Muslims, were not large. The evolution of the term *Muslim community* to *Japanese Muslim community* happened after the establishment of the Tokyo mosque and the school serving the local Muslim community, signifying the acceptance of the Muslim community as an entity within Japan. The mosque became a symbol of the presence of Islam and of Muslims in Japan. The Muslim community felt that it was necessary to invite delegates from the Islamic world to participate in the opening of the mosque. Its opening sparked the interest of Japanese authorities in Muslims and Islam.

The Tokyo mosque sparked more interest than the Kobe mosque, although the latter was built first. It seems that in every country where there are Muslim communities, the mosques in the capital are preeminent.

It was expected that the Muslim community would grow year after year, but facts and evidence indicate that this did not happen. Perhaps the failure to grow was due to a split between Turk-Tatar members of the community, the destruction of the Ottoman Empire, and Japan's defeat in World War II, which destroyed the dream of establishing the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. This led to the displacement of the leaders of the Muslim community or forced them to escape from Japan. The Greater

Japan Muslim League (Dai Nihon Kaikyo Kyokai), which was founded in 1930 as the first officially recognized Islamic organization in Japan and was supported by Japanese officials and was active in forging links with Muslim leaders, was dissolved after the war.

With the change of circumstances and the lack of Muslim leaders, members of the Muslim community scattered, and Muslim families merged with Japanese society, or melted into it. Moreover, since the number of Japanese Muslims did not increase and the few Japanese Muslims were scattered here and there, they were not able to establish or constitute the nucleus of a new Muslim community.

A New Beginning

In 1952 the first Muslim association consisting only of Japanese nationals was established, called the Islam Friendship Association. The association has faced crises of dissolution many times because of the aging of members and the posting of many members to the offices of Japanese companies in Islamic countries, for financial reasons, and so on.

In March 1952 the total number of members of the Islam Friendship Association (which was later renamed the Japan Muslim Association) was about seventy-four. In 1954 one of its members, Mustafa Komura, formed the Japanese Islamic Fraternity in Kyoto.

As Japan gradually began recovering from the impact of defeat in World War II, Japanese Muslims began contacting the Islamic world, welcoming Muslims coming from outside Japan, and cooperating with Muslim businessmen and Muslim students coming to study in Japan. Japanese Muslims formed a joint committee with non-Japanese Muslim residents in Japan and decided to establish the Islamic Center of Tokyo and a Muslim cemetery.

It is noted that Muslims living in Japan were not a single Muslim community but formed independent associations according to their countries of origin, or nationalities, at a time when the Japan Muslim Association (JMA) announced (in 1964 and beyond) the presence of various independent associations of Muslims in Japan by contacting the Yamanashi Prefectural Government and visiting the mayor of Enzan to study methods of interreligious cooperation and discuss a project for an Islamic cemetery.

Muslims also started using state facilities, and the JMA held the opening session of its General Assembly as an official religious body in the Japan Youth Hall in Tokyo in October 1968. From that date the JMA began to open up to Japanese society through the establishment of social service activities and by explaining Islam in the Japanese media. Moreover, non-Muslim Japanese companies were invited to join the association as associate members. While strengthening relations with the Muslim world by representing Japan at conferences and other events, the JMA also

received kings and other national leaders from the Arab and Islamic worlds.

With the increase in the number of Muslims living in Japan with either temporary or permanent residence status, various Islamic associations have been founded by both Japanese and non-Japanese Muslim residents. These include the Japanese Muslim League, founded in 1985 by Mustafa Komura and Mustafa Okada, and the Japan Islamic Federation Conference, linked to the JMA in November 1993. The JMA officially joined the Japanese Committee of the World Conference of Religions for Peace in 2002 and managed to set up annual youth camps in various Japanese prefectures. The JMA has organized public lectures on Islam and has been active in the field of writing, translating, and printing Islamic publications and distributing them to school and public libraries and universities.

After the 1973 oil crisis, Japan's interest in the Gulf Arab countries and the Muslim world increased, and in turn Arab and Islamic countries started seeking to consolidate their relations with Japan. They competed with each other in this area. Some Arab and Islamic embassies opened cultural offices, and others established schools. Saudi Arabia established a branch of the Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University in Tokyo. The main objective was to introduce Arab Islamic culture to the Japanese.

It is noted that the Muslim community in Japan has depended mostly on aid from the Muslim world, and its activities have depended more or less on the amount of that aid. Without such aid, these activities might come to an end. But some associations and other groups in the Muslim community in Japan, which have been mainly self-sufficient and depended on voluntary contributions from their members, have continued to engage in activities and provide services to the community of Muslims in Japan and abroad. This can be seen by examining the activities of the JMA;

the Islamic Center; and the Indonesian, Indian, and Pakistani communities. The Pakistani community is a good example of self-sufficiency. They fund themselves from within and have contributed to many projects out of their own pockets and have succeeded in drawing Japanese into their charity activities. Their activities after the March 11, 2011, tragedy in northeastern Japan were covered by Japanese TV and newspapers and were appreciated by the Japanese public.

The Importance of a Community for Any Religion

The existence of a religious community applying the teachings of its religion is not only important but also essential. Japanese people came to know about Islam when they saw Muslim immigrants in Japan practicing their religion. Muslims should pray five times every day. Prayer is one of the pillars of Islam. It was necessary from the very beginning to establish mosques in Japan. When there is no mosque, an important element is missing from Muslim life, because a mosque is more than a place of prayer or worship. It plays a central role in the life of Muslim communities everywhere. The mosque is a place for the study of Islam, especially the Qur'an; for collecting donations for charity; and for assisting needy people, not only Muslims but also the neighbors of Muslims. The mosque is the core of the Muslim community.

Before the 1980s the number of Muslims in Japan was small, and there were only two mosques, in Kobe and Tokyo. But in the mid-1980s, during the bubble economy, the number of Muslims in Japan grew rapidly. They formed what we can call a Muslim community. Most young Muslims have families, and their children go to Japanese schools, but their parents also send them to the mosque to learn the Qur'an and the Arabic language.

Scholars say that the number of mosques in Japan has increased more rapidly than the number of Muslims, which has not increased as much as expected despite the passage of many years. The establishment of mosques, associations, unions, and Islamic cultural centers in Japan does not reflect the number of Japanese and non-Japanese Muslims living in Japan. In other words, these organizations do not reflect the size of the Muslim community in Japan. There is no accurate record of the number of Muslim residents in Japan, but scholars estimate the number of non-Japanese Muslims at eighty thousand to one hundred thousand and Japanese Muslims at eight thousand to ten thousand.

We must shed light on the reasons why the number of Muslims in Japan is not increasing and why the lack of growth may affect the survival of the Japanese Muslim community. A decreasing number of Muslims in Japan would affect the stability of the Muslim community itself. The Muslim community faces divisions among its members, and there are divisions or disputes between Muslims even of the same nationality. A few examples can be noted from the beginning of the Muslim presence in Japan. In the very early stage there was a dispute between members of the Turk-Tatar community in Tokyo, and some members were forced to leave Japan

before and after World War II. This led to the disintegration of the Muslim community at that time. The willingness of Japan to forge links with Muslims ended, and Islamic institutions were dissolved. The activities of Muslim community members were considered mere fronts for Japanese war efforts.

In the next stage, the Japan Muslim Association was established, Muslim students started coming to Japan, and Japanese companies opened offices in Arab and Islamic countries. Although the number of Muslims in Japan seemed to increase, they were unable to establish a real Muslim community in Japan because the Muslim students coming to study or receive training went back to their home countries soon after finishing their study or training. In addition, many Japanese Muslims were deployed by Japanese corporations to work outside Japan for long periods, and some of them did not return home. This had a negative impact on the Muslim community, which needed their help. The number of female Japanese Muslims far exceeded the number of males, which created a problem for Japanese Muslim women who wanted to marry and have children and have stability in their lives as Muslims, and they had difficulty finding suitable work.

Add to this the religious freedom of Japan, which allows family members to belong to different religions.

A son and daughter may belong to a religion different from that of their parents and vice versa. Hence it is difficult to form a united Japanese Muslim family within Japanese society. The father may be a Muslim while the mother is a Christian, or a son may be a Muslim while his parents are non-Muslims, and so on. Islam in Japan is not a matter of birth but of faith, and no one is compelled to embrace its doctrines.

Muslims who come to work or do business in Japan face difficulties for reasons that need not be mentioned here. They cannot necessarily continue to live or settle in Japan, but some Muslim men have married Japanese women and found refuge with their wives and their wives' families and struggled to settle in Japan. They succeeded in developing the quasi-static structure of what can be called the immigrant Muslim community in Japan. They represent a large segment of workers in Japanese factories and certain types of trade, such as spare parts and used cars and so on.

Features and Attributes of the Muslim Community in Japan

Marriages between young male Muslim immigrants in Japan and Japanese women is considered the real beginning of groups of Muslim families that live near each other and cooperate in areas close to the workplace of the head of the family or of the wife or her family. This phenomenon is evident in Tokyo and its suburbs, and here we can say clearly that the Muslim community really exists in Japan. This fact has drawn the attention of Japanese officials, who have begun to study this situation in areas where there are many Muslims. They have polled local people on their attitudes toward their Muslim neighbors, and the polls show favorable attitudes.

Mosques Symbolize the Existence of Muslim Communities

Since mosques are the only places exclusively for Muslims, mosques in Japan play a vital, multipurpose role. With the increasing number of Muslim families and the expansion of areas where Muslims are gathering, Muslims have begun to think about building more mosques and schools as well as holding religious ceremonies and reviving Islamic events throughout the year. The number of mosques in Japan has grown rapidly every year. Since both land and construction costs are high in Japan, in many cases office and residential buildings have been converted into mosques, which are used not only for prayer services but also for social gatherings. The Muslim community supports the building of mosques with the help of Islamic organizations outside Japan as well as people who give donations for the building of mosques.

Since mosques in Japan offer Qur'an and Arabic classes, a few mosques plan to register themselves as educational corporations and establish Islamic schools. Some offer day care centers (that have no legal status) for Muslim children. With the presence of small children in Muslim families, there is a need to establish schools suitable for this new

generation of Muslims. Members of the community are eager to establish such schools, which are also keenly committed to the curriculum of the Japanese schools, since they do not want to split the young from their society.

Issues and Problems of the Muslim Community

With the emergence of what can be called a Muslim community in Japan, Muslims have faced some internal and external problems. The internal problems are related to the community itself, which consists of both Japanese Muslims and non-Japanese Muslims living in Japan, Muslims who want to work in Japan, and Muslims who come for a period of study or training. All of them may engage in the activities of the Muslim community.

The Muslim community also includes Muslims from many different countries, such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Arab countries. The Muslim community also includes Muslims of various sects and embracing various doctrines, such as Sunnis and Shiites, and adherents of sects such as the Barelvi, Salafi, Sufi, and so on. Some sects that are attributed to Islam, such as Baha'i and Ahmadiyya, have an active presence in Japan.

Japanese Muslims are few in number, even though they are distributed among the various sects and schools of Islamic thinking. There are Japanese Sunnis and Japanese Shiites, and there are Salafis and Asharis and so on. However, they never engage in sectarian conflict, because the nature of Japanese culture allows differences while maintaining friendliness and respect. This has impacted the members of the Muslim community as a whole. Japanese and non-Japanese seek to integrate into the community by taking advantage of all that is well and good. The members of the Indian, Pakistani, and Bengali communities are a good model, since they are the most actively devoted to their religion, and they are appreciated by Japanese society.

There are also Muslims from Myanmar (Burma) who have a special status in Japan as Rohingya refugees (stateless residents). They are concentrated in Tatebayashi, in Gunma Prefecture, where they work in factories. At present, some 160 Rohingya refugees are living in Tatebayashi.

The Muslim community in Japan is still trying to solve the problem of educating its children, since Japanese recognition of Islam is extremely low in the Education Ministry and local governments, which is basically because they have had little experience of direct communication with Muslims. Therefore most religious education of Muslim children in Japan is supported by individual efforts, without official assistance. That is because Muslims are a small minority, and small minorities do not receive special attention. Private international schools may give more attention to a child's religious background, but a public school is the only choice for Muslim parents with limited means. Muslim parents have objections about Japanese school uniforms, school lunches, and mixed-sex physical education activities, such as swimming. The textbooks used in Japanese schools lack correct information about Islam and Muslim life.

Some kind of more organized approach is necessary to address the specific education needs of Muslims in Japan.

The key issues and problems faced by the Muslim community include the difficult circumstances that arose after the events of September 11, 2001, when the U.S. government stereotyped all Muslims as terrorists and pressured many countries to tighten control on all Muslims, without consideration.

In that situation, the Japanese people faced difficult questions: What is Islam? Is Islam really responsible for what happened on September 11? It was not only the Muslim community that attempted to answer these questions; a number of Japanese researchers tried to explain Islam and its principles as well. They concluded that what happened on September 11 was not related to the religion of Islam, but U.S. pressure made Japanese officials take extra security precautions and monitor Muslims living in Japan. As a result, the Japanese media launched an attack on the counterterrorism unit of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department's Public Security Bureau. The media said it exceeded its jurisdiction by listing as terror suspects many Muslims who had lived and worked in Japan for decades. Apparently the Japanese police, under pressure from U.S. authorities, adopted this attitude toward Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11 in search of intelligence data among the city's tiny Muslim community.

Muslims in Japan have widely retained their sense of religious and cultural identity and have generally become established as members of Japanese society. However, the Japanese police and the Japanese public must continue to accept these religious and cultural differences in order to maintain a functional society in which the rights of all people are protected.

Conclusion

Though the Muslim community is very small, the Japanese public of today has

generally accepted it as part of Japanese society. For the most part, Japanese people accept cultural differences as colorful aspects of the world and understand that other cultures are actually not very different from their own.

There are currently between thirty and forty single-story mosques in Japan, plus another hundred or more apartments used as *musalla* (spaces outside a mosque for prayer). The Japan Muslim Association is planning to establish a Japan Islamic cultural exchange center, including a *musalla*, in the center of Tokyo, to introduce Islam and Islamic culture to Japanese people through various activities as well as to give advice, lessons, and lectures about Islam to Muslims in Japan. The JMA is also a member of Japanese interfaith organizations, as the representative of Islamic organizations in Japan.

The pious activities of the JMA members have made the JMA a core organization among religious organizations in Japan. JMA members are doing their best with the combined efforts of all Muslim groups in Japan to contribute to world peace and the social peace of individual members. Last year, after the tragedy of the earthquake and tsunami, the Muslim community proved that Muslims in Japan genuinely share the joys and sorrows of Japanese society. Members of the Muslim community contributed immensely to the relief efforts, and they continue to help the affected communities in the Tohoku region. Islam teaches its followers to generously offer humanitarian aid wherever the need may arise. Muslims have gone on supporting relief efforts in Japan along with Japanese and foreign relief agencies. One notable Muslim organization is Japan Islamic Trust, which has been supplying food and other necessities since the disaster took place. Other organizations are also visiting the affected areas and victims, helping the residents resettle in areas of their choice. □

Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam: Community Responses to Conflict

by Abdessalam Najjar

Dispute resolution methodologies traditionally appeal to shared values and norms that are universally accepted within a given culture. A different type of challenge is involved when it comes to approaching conflict in a multicultural society or between two separate groups who do not share a common belief system, background, or values.

Given that human society is fraught with competition and conflict, one of humanity's responses has been to group together in communities for mutual protection. Each community is founded on bonds based on nation, ethnicity, faith, ideology, and so on.

Every one of us belongs to multiple communities with broader or narrower definitions, some imposed upon us by birth or circumstance, others adopted by choice.

Each community creates a means to govern various aspects of the life of the individual; sets up an integral system of norms, values, and restraints; and provides the individual with a moral compass.

In traditional societies, the interwoven levels of community to which individuals belonged were usually mutually supportive and noncontradictory. The values of a family would not contradict the values of the community church, mosque, or temple, and the laws of the state would not be out of line with the sermons of its religious leaders.

Today's societies are diverse, multiethnic, and multireligious. Their foundations are less secure, and even long-standing units such as the nuclear

family have begun to erode. Within the same state one can find groups that live in social isolation from one another, lacking the means to communicate or build relationships for mutual benefit.

In our own region of Israel and Palestine, the reality is one of conflict. The divisions are national, ethnic, and religious. Two peoples, each with historical and other claims in the region, are locked in a struggle for land and resources.

Within this reality, a small group of Jewish and Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel took the unusual decision to establish together a joint community. Coming together at the initiative of a Dominican priest, Bruno Hussar, we settled a twenty-hectare tract of land (almost fifty acres). Our motivation was to see if we could build, within our conflictive reality, a community based on equality and shared responsibility. Further, we hoped to influence the broader society by conducting educational work, dialogue, and joint projects.

Today we are a village of about sixty families and have established in principal three important educational institutions: first, a bilingual, binational primary school and early childhood center, which

serves children from the village and from towns in its vicinity; second, the School for Peace, which conducts outreach educational projects throughout Israel and Palestine; and third, the Pluralistic Spiritual Center, which conducts a range of projects, including work with religious institutions, community mediation projects in mixed Jewish-Arab cities, and a cross-cultural program for young persons.

From its inception till today, Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam has been a living experiment in establishing a heterogeneous community based on the ideal of finding new ways to deal with the reality of conflict, which affects each individual member. To be clear: this is not a utopian experiment based on establishing a common identity. The bonds established between people within the community do not erase the ethnic, religious, national, and linguistic divisions between the residents, and they all continue to feel primary allegiance to the same group into which they were born.

Given that the residents of the community of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam are not exceptional people with special qualities (other than the desire to attempt to live together and develop a community together), it is natural that the same challenges to a shared, equal coexistence (within a reality of conflict) that exist in the broader society remain for the residents. Each person who arrives in the community comes with his or her own "baggage," conditioning, prejudices, stereotypes of other people, and so on. Liberal values,

Abdessalam Najjar lived in Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam (Oasis of Peace), the Arab-Jewish village in Israel, from its earliest days. In 1993 its founder, Bruno Hussar, accepted the Niwano Peace Prize on the community's behalf. Before Mr. Najjar's death, on March 22 of this year at the age of fifty-nine, he was director of the village's Pluralistic Spiritual Center. He died before finishing this article, and it was completed by his neighbor and colleague Howard Shippin.

tolerance, and acceptance of the other are often severely tested within the web of relationships that is inherent in any small self-governing community.

Communities, as already mentioned, have traditionally been based on a common nationality, ethnicity, faith, ideology, and so on, and here the challenge is to create a heterogeneous community within a reality of conflict. Obviously, then, the development and sustenance of such a community depend upon vision, learning from shared experience, agreements, and deployment of methodologies and tools found to be useful.

Notwithstanding the desirability of reaching a consensus upon such factors, a community, and especially one like ours, does not function like an organization that can commit its members to rules and provisions. In such a community, agreements must, to some extent, be voluntary. The shared framework should be broad enough to facilitate

integration of new members and families, who must each go through a personal process of acclimatization to the unusual reality (in Israel) of a small, binational, multifaith community.

The self-conception of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam has grown in parallel to its educational work. The first members were involved in dialogue projects between Jews and Palestinians before taking up residence in the nascent community. They went on to develop the educational institutions of the community, and these have remained central to the life of the community. The ideas and methodologies of their work have evolved as the work continued, and they continue to affect and inform the community. For example, prospective members take part in encounter workshops run by the School for Peace. Parents are closely involved in the work of the primary school and are themselves educated by their children as they experience

the festivals and traditions of the other people together in the school. Lectures arranged for facilitators of the School for Peace are open to villagers. Many community members are involved in teaching at the school or have taken facilitator training courses offered by the School for Peace. At various times, the community has engaged in community-building initiatives by expert consultants. Cultural programs are arranged, and the shared experience of the community is imparted to newcomers or second-generation members through presentations, memorial days for the community's founders, and so on.

In recent years, one of the most significant influences upon the community has been the Pluralistic Spiritual Center (PSC). The PSC is based on and takes its inspiration from its other name, Doumia/Sakinah. *Doumia* is a word appearing in the Hebrew Bible: "To thou

Lord, silence [*doumia*] shall be as praise” (Psalms 65:2). *Sakinah* is derived from a line in the Qur’an: “He sends tranquility [*sakinah*] into the hearts of the believers, that they may add faith to their faith” (Surah 48.4). The first building in the PSC was a dome-shaped structure intended for meditation, known as the House of Silence.

However, like the other educational institutions of the community, this center is outward looking: its programs are intended for the benefit of people beyond the community. Yet the community has requested that the center also conduct many of its programs for the residents themselves.

Thus it came to be that this rather secular community made the decision that its community center, that is, the heart of its community life, be the *spiritual* center.

Part of the reason that the community was willing to give the PSC such a role lies in the definition of spirituality here adopted.

The PSC differentiates itself from religious definitions. Echoing Abdul Aziz Said, Nathan C. Funk, and Lynn M. Kunkle in their article “The Role of Faith in Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution,”* the center declares:

We believe that it is important to make a distinction between spirituality and religion, because both refer to matters of faith. The term religion refers to an institutional framework within which a specific theology is pursued, usually among a community of like-minded believers. Spirituality, on the other hand, transcends the boundaries of religion, suggesting broader human involvement that comes from the inner essence of a person.

In a heterogeneous and divergent society that lacks uniformity with regard to matters of faith (and where some persons define themselves as atheists or

agnostics), a spirituality based on each person’s “inner essence” can have an important role in managing or resolving conflict.

The PSC does not present the community members with an escape route from the conflict. Instead, its activities are aimed to provide a safe space in which the conflict, and the role each person plays in it, can be explored. It does so by creating community events and activities that touch upon various aspects of the conflict and stimulate honest and heartfelt discussion. Activities sometimes employ art, music, or drama. Young community members are also invited to attend. For example, at a recent year-end celebration of Christmas, Hijra, and Hanukkah, the young people were invited to light candles while relating their New Year’s wishes for social justice, equality, peace, and so on.

Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam bases all of its educational work upon the experience of living in a binational community. In the same way, the PSC exists because of the small community but defines its goals in terms of the broader regional context. It lists its aims as “supporting dialogue between the followers of religions and cultures, enhancing dialogue, respect and cooperation between nations, encouraging peace, justice and reconciliation, and countering the justification for violence and conflict under any cover.”

The PSC provides a framework for encounter activities, study, and reflection based on values of equality, justice, and reconciliation. Its activities draw inspiration from the resources and spiritual traditions of the Middle East and the world at large. It conducts interfaith and cultural dialogue programs and conflict management and resolution projects that focus on open, interreligious, and intercultural dialogue for the advancement of peace and peaceful coexistence between Palestinians and Jews in our region. Many of these are conducted in partnership with other organizations and institutions.

Among these activities is a multicultural community conflict resolution and mediation program. We will discuss the underlying ideas of this program more fully because they are relevant to the main theme of this article. Dispute resolution methodologies traditionally appeal to shared values and norms that are universally accepted within a given culture. A different type of challenge is involved when it comes to approaching conflict in a multicultural society or between two separate groups who do not share a common belief system, background, or values. To a large extent, this is true of the conflict between Jews and Arabs.

In order to investigate this subject, we conducted a study aimed at developing a new perception of nonviolent conflict resolution in a multicultural context—a concept that would suit our reality. To do this, we wanted to learn first:

- How cultural differences affect our behavior
- Whether the power relations between the two groups affect the dynamics of conflict resolution between the two groups
- Whether the imbalance in power relations issues from the cultural differences between the sides, and if so, in what way

Our main aim was to arrive at a conflict resolution methodology that could be useful in our multicultural context.

The resources available to us were the lessons from our experiences as a community, the knowledge derived from our educational work, and theoretical material available in the field.

When two or more groups with different cultures exist together in the same space, there may take place a conflict over resources, status, and so on (the social psychologist Muzafer Sherif’s realistic conflict theory). A strong justification given for this rivalry may be cultural differences between the groups.

The social psychologist Henri Tajfel, in his social identity theory, says that we shape our behavior and our identity according to various sets of values and beliefs. Usually, we attribute positive values to these. Conversely, we assign negative values to modes of behavior seen as inappropriate in our culture. This is true even though these same modes of behavior may be viewed as positive in other cultures. Thus, in evaluating other cultures, we assign the same significance to modes of behavior as we would if these were manifested in our own culture. For example, in Western culture, individual freedom is a supreme value and rises above the needs of the group. On the other hand, in Muslim Arab culture, the needs of the group (society), hegemony, cohesion, and warm relationships outweigh the needs of the individual.

The concept of culture contains more than a set of values and beliefs that produce norms and certain forms of behavior. The culture into which we are born programs our analysis of a particular event and our reaction to it. This programming becomes the basis for intuition and common sense. To all of those born to the same culture, there is a similar line of reasoning and joint rationale, which determine how events and the motivation behind them are analyzed.

Conflict resolution models developed within one culture prove deficient when applied to another, despite attempts to modify or adapt these programs in order to adjust to cultural differences. The theorist J. P. Lederach, in his book *Preparing for Peace*, describes this very well. He suggests that models for conflict resolution must emerge from the culture experiencing conflict. This is based on a belief that every society contains the knowledge to produce solutions to conflictive situations arising within that society.

In our reality, the Jewish-Palestinian conflict is not contained within a single

culture or society. It is waged between interest groups from different cultures. The conflict is difficult and ongoing and is characterized by inequality of power relations, the dynamics of majority-minority relations, relationships of dominance and subjugation, and dehumanization of the other. What is viewed as justice by one side will be seen as a burden by the other. Similarly, concepts of justice and mercy are often seen in an opposite light.

Justice, it is often assumed, requires determining the truth and punishing the guilty party. Does mercy, on the other hand, imply forgiveness? Thus, if one prosecutes and punishes the guilty, can mercy at best involve leniency in the sentence? Punishment, however, seldom results in either reconciliation or restitution. Thus, the resulting justice is illusory. The challenge, according to Lederach, is “to pursue justice in ways that respect people, and [at the same time] to achieve restoration of relationships based on recognizing and amending injustices” (*Preparing for Peace*, p. 20). Thus, Lederach argues that reconciliation involves the identification and acknowledgment of what happened (that is, truth), an effort to right the wrongs that occurred (that is, justice), and forgiveness for the perpetrators (mercy).

The end result is not only reconciliation but peace.

Aided by this literature from the field and our experience from conducting mediator training projects, and enriched by contacts with organizations such as Mediators Beyond Borders (United States), we have begun to conduct multicultural mediation projects. A thirteen-week program was concluded last year in the mixed (and tension-fraught) Arab-Jewish city of Acre. Afterward, the group asked to continue. The PSC also provides consultation for other mixed groups.

This engagement with the regional conflict as a whole was the original vision of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam's founder, Father Bruno Hussar, as he describes it in his autobiography, *When the Cloud Lifted* (1989): “People would come here from all over the country to meet those from whom they were estranged, wanting to break down the barriers of fear, mistrust, ignorance, misunderstanding, preconceived ideas—all things that separate us—and to build bridges of trust, respect, mutual understanding, and, if possible, friendship.” □

The Crucial Role of Community for Holiness and a Universal Vision

by Peter Feldmeier

Community is crucial because in it you enter a great mystery that is not your own. You're tapping into the divine but not as a separate self. You lose your separateness, and the walls between you and others and you and God get thinner.

In authentic Christianity, you are either a member of the church or you are not a Christian. There is no such thing as an individual Christian without regard to the community. Commitment to this understanding has characterized Christianity since its inception, and even the most isolated members of our eremitical tradition embrace this commitment. While these hermits were off in the wilderness, they always regarded themselves as members of a larger monastic and ecclesial world, and they were honored by the church at large for their radical *ecclesial* witness to the gospel. Consider Saint Antony, the great hermit saint. Living deep in the desert, he was always meeting with pilgrims seeking spiritual direction and providing hospitality. And during stormy times for the church, he returned to Alexandria to support the orthodox bishop against heresies of the day. So, even during the extreme circumstances of hermits, we find a deep identification with the church. Saint Augustine's broadly embraced axiom expresses this unity between one's inner life and one's community engagement: "A man possesses the Holy Spirit in the measure in which he loves the church."¹

I see faith and community identification weakening in some forms of

modern Christianity. Today we find megachurches with little community life or historical tradition, and even "drive-in" churches where people literally drive their cars to a converted drive-in movie parking lot on Sunday morning and listen to the preacher from their cars. After the sermon, they drive home. The worst example is probably Christians who watch televangelists on Sunday morning and consider this sufficient. Many Christians simply see little need for an intentional community. I was recently talking to a colleague who was considering returning to Catholicism, and he asked me why he needed to go to services on Sunday if he was already praying daily and didn't get much out of the sermon. I pointed out that entering skillfully into the sacred rite of the Eucharist could be quite transforming. I also suggested that he may be surprised and inspired by some of the witness of faith in a parish community. Ultimately, my argument was: there is no such thing as an isolated Christian.

At this point, we might ask: what, then, are *Christian community* and the *church*? They are really interrelated terms. The New Testament word for community is *koinōnia*, which means "fellowship" or "sharing in." It connotes both close personal relations

and mutual engagement. The term for church is related: *ekklesia*, which literally means "assembly." Collectively, these two terms provide us with great insight into the nature of Christianity. The church is fully itself when it gathers together and expresses its wholeness; it is fully itself when collectively involved in a mutually engaged worship and mission to advance the kingdom of God. This is one important reason for gathering for worship on Sunday. It is here where symbolically and literally the church acts as church, an assembly of fellowship.

Saint Paul's great image of a "body of Christ" gives us an even greater sense of the nature of Christianity. The church represents the fullness of Christ's body (Eph. 1:23), with Jesus the head and believers the limbs (Col. 1:18; Eph. 5:30). Christians are baptized into that body, and all of our spiritual gifts are designed to build up the life of the body (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:12). Interestingly, Saint Paul frequently describes Christians as "saints," but never in the singular. They are saints only as a body of saints, called to be holy together and needing each other to realize their own personal holiness. The Catholic Church teaches exactly this: "It has pleased God, however, to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges him in truth and serves him in holiness."² Happily, the Catholic Church embraces authentic souls of all traditions in this vision.³

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I see the same dynamic in Buddhism. What does it mean to *take refuge in the Sangha*? This third of the Three Jewels has traditionally meant the monastic community. It is here that the most intense expression of the Dharma was understood to be traditionally lived out. Historically, the members of the monastic community preserved the sutras in memory and were most responsible for preserving the faith and extending it as missionaries. While householders offered monks *dana*, itself a merit-making enterprise, the monks offered something more valuable: *dharma dana*, the gift of the teaching.

Today the meaning of the term *sangha* is often broadened to include laypeople who practice together as members of local groups. It wouldn't be unusual here in the United States for the members of a Dharma center to refer to themselves collectively as a sangha. This may cause a bit of chagrin to monastics, particularly in the Theravada tradition, but to me it seems appropriate. Here the sangha represents an intentional community of teaching and support, necessary to significantly advance on the path. In the Buddhist circles I am familiar with, the necessity of belonging to and being deeply involved in a sangha is preached as if a dogma.

Some of this just makes sense anthropologically. Humans are social creatures

who need each other for support. If this is true in our daily lives, how much more so in our religious lives. In fact, one of the things that I said to my colleague who wanted to know why he needed

a community if he could pray to and love God just fine without it was, "I've never met a genuinely holy person who didn't belong to a spiritual community, and intensely so."

The Deeper the Community Life, the More Universal the Vision

Interestingly, intense community life needn't make us myopic but should even ground a universal spiritual vision that extends well beyond any and all religious lines. On the more mundane level, it is simply a sociological fact that more-devout believers are more likely to be religiously sympathetic to others.⁴ This may be counterintuitive to some, who would simply assume that the more immersed one is in a same-thinking community, the less open one is to the religious other. But if religious community is ultimately meant for a transformation in holiness, then it makes sense that members would be more sensitive to other authentic expressions of holiness.

Classic texts even insist on this connection, and Buddhism, perhaps, leads the way. In Mahayana, one can become a bodhisattva only if one belongs to a community intensely committed to awakening. It is through the wisdom that comes from such an intentional life with others that one is able to see clearly the interrelatedness of all beings, and such clear seeing drives one's compassion for all beings. In his *Way of the Bodhisattva*, Shantideva describes this universal vision and compassion: "May I myself become for them the doctor, nurse, the medicine itself" (3.8); "May I be an Isle for those who yearn for land-fall, and a lamp for those who long for light; for those who need a resting place, a bed; for all who need a servant, may I be their slave" (3.19); "To free myself from harm and others from their sufferings, let me give myself away, and cherish others as I love myself" (8.136).⁵

One of the most intense, sectarian religious groups of which I am familiar is Hasidic Judaism, made widely known by Martin Buber. In his writings, Buber discusses how Hasidism has broadly embraced the Jewish mysticism of the

Kabbalah, and in particular the creation myth that comes from the Lurianic school. According to this tradition, God self-contracted in order to make space for creation. In contracting, God's light remained as his immanent, underlying presence in creation. This light then filled the vessels that would structure creation. The first three of the ten vessels were able to retain the divine light. However, the next six burst. The physical earth, being the last, cracked but did not break up entirely. Most of the divine sparks of this supernal light returned to the Godhead, but some were trapped in the fragments of the burst vessels. The order of creation and the possibility for life and love come from these divine sparks.

That the world is partly disordered reflects the breakup of the vessels in the created universe. Repair is the challenge of devout humans, Jews and non-Jews alike. For many Jews, the task of humanity, until the coming of the Messiah, is to raise the divine sparks and restore them to their appropriate place in the divine realm. This process will come to its final conclusion in the messianic age.

Buber took this idiosyncratic mystical creation myth and saw in it the radical spiritual unity of all creation. Since each spark was originally a part of the primordial divine unity, each person embodies a part of that divinity and is linked to all other beings by means of their divine sparks. Buber writes, "As the primal source of the divine is bound with all his soul-sparks scattered in the world, so what we do to our fellow men is bound with what we do to God."⁶

Hasidic wisdom saw the world as an interpenetrating collective reality. One Hasidic master had to put on slightly distorted spectacles in order to restrain his spiritual vision, "for otherwise he saw all individual things of the world as one."⁷ Buber writes, "It is told of one Zaddik (holy person) that he has so sanctified all his limbs that each step of his feet weds worlds to one another."⁸

Buber sums up the Hasidic ethos: "Hasidism is one of the great movements of faith that shows directly that the human soul can live as a whole, united in itself in communication with the wholeness of being . . . a multitude of souls bound into a community. The realms that are apparently separate from each other by necessity recognize the illegitimacy of their reciprocal delimitation and fuse into one. The clear flame of human unity embraces all forces and ascends to the divine unity."⁹

What we see in this religious example is that intense community involvement, even in its most restricted, potentially myopic world of Hasidic Judaism, can actually be the condition of possibility for a large universal vision—one that Mahayana Buddhism recognizes as well.

While the Bible surely reflects neither Eastern cosmology nor the strange cosmology of Jewish Kabbalah, the New Testament is really quite filled with allusions to interrelatedness. Ignored by fundamentalist interpretations of apocalyptic destruction is the teaching by Saint Paul that suggests a very different vision. In Romans, Paul writes that the entire created world will eventually participate in universal restoration, for it is all of a piece. "For the whole creation is waiting with eagerness for the revelation of the children of God . . . ; the whole creation itself will be freed from its slavery to corruption and brought into the same glorious freedom as the children of God" (Rom. 8:19–21).

Interestingly, Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church has explicitly embraced the way that Paul speaks of the end times in Romans 8. For Paul, the action of the resurrected Christ is to draw all things together into his own glory. This cosmic Christ "is in everything and is everything" (Col. 3:11), "uniting all things in heaven and earth" (Eph. 1:10), "that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

If this is the case with all of creation, it is all the more true that Christ

has united all human beings in himself. Consider, for example, Jesus's Last Judgment parable: "Whenever you have done this for one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you have done this for me" (Matt. 25:40). Here Jesus does not simply attribute love for others *as if* it were love for him. Rather, he identifies himself in the experience of love and care. So our interrelatedness with one another is caught up in God's very interrelatedness in our lives and destinies.

In her profound essay "Life, Love, and Community," Mary Rousseau writes, "In a paradoxical way, the range of love is without limit—all love, any love, extends not only to the one beloved other self, but to all other beings as well, including God himself. And yet, the love that is total from its first moment can endlessly grow. The infinite range of community can be infinitely extended. Such a range for love and community, global and even beyond, is the natural foundation for the communion of saints."¹⁰

Community is crucial because in it you enter a great mystery that is not

your own. You're tapping into the divine but not as a separate self. You lose your separateness, and the walls between you and others and you and God get thinner. Because you're doing this in community, you have an experience that is not possible to have on your own.

One might imagine the fusion of an intense grounding in a religious community with this extraordinary vision that blurs all distinctions to be quite paradoxical. After all, the more intentional the community and the more intense one's involvement in it, the more one is molded in a specific, singular way of engaging the spiritual life. This would create clear marks of difference from other paths, particularly as they profess beliefs that mutually conflict with one's own. For me, there is really no paradox and no mystery. We need community; we need support, training, and the kind of formation that can come only from an authentic tradition. This constitutes a virtual first principle for spiritual transformation. It is this very transformation that frees us for such a universal vision. From a Christian point of view,

only through such a transformation will our souls be the natural expression of a universe aflame with the presence of the risen Christ, *uniting all things in heaven and on earth* (Eph 1:10). □

Notes

1. See *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 35, p. 1,646.
2. *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), chapter 9.
3. Ibid, chapters 14–16.
4. Robert Putman and David Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010.)
5. Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, trans. Padmakara Translation Group (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2003).
6. Martin Buber, *Hasidism and Modern Man*, ed. and trans. Maurice Friedman (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1958), 241. See also Arthur Green, ed., *Jewish Spirituality*, vol. 2 (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 413.
7. Ibid., 70.
8. Ibid., 79.
9. Ibid., 248.
10. Mary Rousseau, "Life, Love, and Community," *Communio* 15 (1988): 213.

Why the Sangha Exists, and Its Limits

by Ryumyo Yamazaki

Only a true Sangha, with the light of the Buddha Dharma at its core (separate from the frameworks of government, the economy, society, and so forth), can truly confront the multiple real-world issues that we face.

The massive earthquake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011, were an unprecedented catastrophe. That and the subsequent accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant did irreparable damage. Amid this overwhelming situation, as a follower of the Buddha Dharma, I could not but reflect on the problems of the Sangha and the significance of its presence.

During the disaster I was touched by the profound meaning of the words “the impermanence of a burning house.” Just as in the Parable of the Burning House in the Lotus Sutra, we were all engulfed in reality, and we lost sight of ourselves.

Furthermore, if a Buddhist term were used to describe the nuclear accident, the most appropriate one might be human delusion. The accident’s cause seems to have been the human desire for gratification. Ideas of economic growth and development have cast a spell on us. There is a connection between the accident and our single-minded pursuit of prosperity and convenience. The accident was based on a business logic that values money over life, and profit over safety. The Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry; the Cabinet Office; the Nuclear Safety Commission; the

Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency; and the Tokyo Electric Power Company have all united in insisting that Japan’s nuclear power plants are safe. But it has been revealed that they have handled the matter of safety with astonishing carelessness and engaged in shady relationships.

The Sangha Is a Community of the Self-Reliant

There are three essentials, called the Three Treasures, for those of us who live by the Buddha Dharma: the Buddha (the Awakened One), the Dharma (Truth),

and the Sangha (the community of believers). The Buddha Dharma cannot be detached from any of them. It is through the reciprocal actions of all three that the world we call the Buddha Dharma is formed.

My understanding of the Three Treasures is as follows:

Buddha = the Awakened One = awakening

Dharma = Truth (the true teachings) = encountering

Sangha = circle of friends (a gathering of the self-reliant) = connecting

We take refuge in the Three Treasures. In Japanese this act of faith is generally professed in the *sankiemon*, or “the verses on the three refuges.” I have translated the verses, from scroll 6 of the Avatamsaka Sutra (*Taisho shinshu daizo-kyo* [Taisho Tripitaka], vol. 9, 430c–431a), as follows:

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I make the Buddha (the Awakened One) the support of my life. Together with all people, I will possess truth and continue walking the True Path.

I make the Dharma (Truth) the support of my life. Together with all people, I hear the truth and continue walking the path that overcomes suffering.

I make the Sangha (a harmonious community of good friends) the support of my life. Together with all people, I seek a world of harmonious cooperation.

As I said earlier, making the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha the basis of our lives is both the point of departure for the Buddha Dharma and its consequence. At this point I would like to think about the question at hand, the Sangha. The Sangha is not a group of clerics; it is the community of those who live in the Buddha and the Dharma. Gyoyo Kodama, a former director of the Shin Buddhist Research Institute (Shinshu Otani-ha), once described it as “a community of the self-reliant.” A community of the self-reliant consists of people who follow their conscience, rely on their own judgment, and make the Dharma their light and foundation. They are their own masters in any situation.

In other words, a community of the self-reliant is made up of people who do not look to anything in the ordinary world as their authority. The Sangha is a community of this kind of independent people, and it can generally be called a religious community. I frequently meet people who say to me,

“I am someone who listens only to the teachings of the Buddha, or the founder of Buddhism, and I have no need for anything else.” They say the Buddha Dharma consists of the Buddha and the Dharma and that there is no need for the Sangha.

But I believe that it is through the Sangha that the Buddha Dharma achieves universality. I said earlier that “the Buddha” means “awakening,” “the Dharma” means “encountering,” and “the Sangha” means “connecting.” To awaken to the Dharma is to encounter one’s own self, and it is from there that we connect to others. This connecting is the basis of what is called the Sangha. It is in the context of being connected that people can be questioned and can grow. It is where one finds the joy of living in the universality of the Dharma, and where one can feel the solidarity of life. That is the Sangha.

The Sangha’s Limits

It is well known that in the aftermath of the massive earthquake and tsunami, there was an outpouring of amazing activity by people affiliated with religious groups all across Japan. I was certainly not the only one who felt that this was once again a manifestation of the power of the Sangha.

On the other hand, there are some serious limits to the Sangha. It may well be a community of people living according to the teachings of the Buddha, but obviously there is also human stupidity and the working of greed. We see

no few acts that true members of the Sangha would find unthinkable. These are striking in religious orders with particularly long traditions, many of which have become so organized and extremely bureaucratized that it would be more appropriate to call them organizations than religious communities.

I have seen some members of the Sangha descend to the level of constituents of organizations, squabbling over status and rights. Far from being parts of the Sangha, these groups do not even have either the Buddha or the Dharma in their midst. As a result, there is no

natural self-purification and only a mere shell of faith.

I must say that it is not my intention to criticize the Sangha. It's just that the sangha that I am close to is going in the direction of abandoning its true nature and being buried by secularism, so I would like to point that out and include some self-criticism.

The Sangha is, after all, an extension of the work of mere mortals. Naturally, mistakes will be made. There will be wrong moves. The important thing is to recognize them. When this self-awareness fails, an organization becomes arrogant. The Chinese Buddhist scholar Shan-tao (613–81) wrote, “The scriptures and the teachings are like a mirror. Examine yourself in them repeatedly, and your mind will open up to wisdom.” He says that the sutras and teachings are a mirror that unsparingly reflects the believer's self. Looking at the reflected self, can one feel shame and repent? That is where the self can be tested in its faith. Shan-tao said, “Each and every voice that chants the Buddha's

name [Jpn., *nembutsu*] is a voice that grieves and repents our errors.” When members are capable of doing this, the Sangha demonstrates self-purification and becomes something that shines. An understanding of Buddhist studies and the teachings will testify to the truth of the Sangha. We are surrounded by many sanghas. To determine whether a sangha is worthy of the name is an ultimate issue of belief that must be continually tested by its members. A sangha can be said to be a moving, changing body of faith.

Why the Sangha Exists

Finally, I would like to touch on the significance of the existence of the Sangha. The Buddha Dharma is both theory and practice. In practice, it is manifested in the acts of individuals who, by “connecting,” influence one another in the practice of their faith. This can be called the “socialization” of Buddhist teachings. While the teachings are one with society, they also transcend society.

In other words, the Sangha's dignity and mission are to transcend and reform the secular world while remaining part of it. But isn't the Sangha of today no more than part of secular society? Nothing distinguishes the Sangha from any other secular community. Unless the Sangha points out the fallibility of governmental, economic, and societal structures, it remains subordinate to them.

Only a true Sangha, with the light of the Buddha Dharma at its core (separate from the frameworks of government, the economy, society, and so forth), can truly confront the multiple real-world issues that we face, such as war, discrimination, poverty, destruction of the environment, and suicide. Only this kind of Sangha can be called a true Sangha. There is no final goal along its path. Steady progress is what faith is all about. The true Sangha faces inward to achieve spiritual peace and enlightenment and outward to expose society's falsehoods and pursue social reform. That is where the dignity is. So, how is our own sangha doing? □

The Sangha

The term *sangha*, meaning a group or a community, was used in pre-Buddhist India to refer to a merchants' or artisans' guild or to the ruling council of a royal family. It also designated a religious community, a usage that Buddhism adopted. In Buddhism the term denoted the community of ordained men (*bhikṣu-saṃgha*, *bhikkhu-sangha*) together with the community of ordained women (*bhikṣuṇī-saṃgha*, *bhikkhuni-sangha*).

The Nature of the Sangha

The standard definition of the Sangha as one of the Three Treasures is found in the Dīgha-nikāya and the Aṅguttara-nikāya:

The community of the Buddha's followers walks the Way well, honestly, truthfully, and correctly. Thus it is composed of those who have accomplished the eight *ārya* [noble] stages of effort and attainment to achieve sagehood. The community merits veneration, respect, donation[s], and respectful greetings from ordinary people, for it is a supremely rich field that yields a rich harvest to all people.

The Chinese Āgamas contain an almost identical passage, although

some of them add five further items to the stages of practice: possessing the virtues of morality, concentration, wisdom, emancipation, and perfect knowledge of the state of emancipation.

This definition of the Sangha limits the original community to those disciples of the Buddha who have attained one of the eight *ārya* stages of effort and attainment but does not specifically exclude lay people. Since no mention is made of limiting the community to the ordained, lay sages can be included. Primitive sutras agree that a lay person can attain *saikṣa* (*sekha*) enlightenment, the stage below *arhat* enlightenment. The point here is that lay people, though sages, do not live the group life of the Sangha, and so in reality the community signifies only the Order of ordained sages, who merit the respect of all as part of the Order treasure. We could say, however, that anyone worthy of such respect must be considered a member of the Sangha.

Excerpts from Kogen Mizuno, *Essentials of Buddhism: Basic Terminology and Concepts of Buddhist Philosophy and Practice* (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Company, 1996), 89, 91–92. The diacritical marks originally used for several Sanskrit and Pali terms are omitted here for easier reading.

Harmony and Peace

by Rosalina Tuyuc Velásquez

The Niwano Peace Foundation awarded the twenty-ninth Niwano Peace Prize on May 10 to Ms. Rosalina Tuyuc Velásquez, a human rights activist and political leader in Guatemala. It was the first time for a practitioner of an indigenous religious tradition (in her case, Mayan) to receive the prize. Ms. Velásquez was honored for her unflagging work, which has exemplified the great potential and wisdom of indigenous peoples in marking paths to peace. She also has highlighted the critical role of women's work for peace. The presentation ceremony took place in Tokyo. In addition to an award certificate, Ms. Velásquez received a medal and twenty million yen. This is her acceptance speech.

On this occasion in 2012 of the presentation of the twenty-ninth Niwano Peace Prize, it is an honor and a privilege for me to receive this award, as a Kaqchikel Mayan woman and as a mother and a genocide survivor. I was born in San Juan Comalapa, a town that engages in agriculture, trade, and handicrafts, where there is respect for life, and which has influenced the recent history of my country in the struggle for respect for human rights, including women's rights, especially those of widows; in the struggle against the militarization of our society and the use of the military against our people; in the search for truth, justice, and the right to compensation for damage suffered from armed conflict; and for the right to live in peace and harmony.

I want to express my deepest gratitude once, twice, and three times to our Mayan ancestors, who were great connoisseurs of time, architecture,

mathematics, and astronomy; creators of an extraordinary calendar; and deep lovers of the cosmos and nature. I also thank the indigenous Ainu people of Japan for allowing me to get to know their history.

On our Mayan calendar, today we mark the sacred day Oxlajuj Tz'ikin, which has a deep meaning, because it teaches us about spiritual essence, material form, and our cosmovision. From my view as a woman full of great hopes for a future of peace, I am thankful for my life together with my children and grandchildren; for the memory of my father, who was kidnapped and disappeared on July 5, 1982; and my husband, Rolando Gomez Sotz, who was kidnapped and disappeared in May of 1984. These two people were my inspiration, and examples of service to others. I also remember the more than 250,000 people left dead by genocide, one of the cruelest and greatest injustices committed

Rosalina Tuyuc Velásquez came from a very poor, religious agricultural family in Guatemala. Mayan religion has always guided her, and since her youth she also has been part of the Christian movement. Guatemala suffered violent internal strife between 1960 and 1996. Of a population of about 10 million, over 250,000 died during the war, and 45,000 people are still missing. Over 240,000 orphans and 50,000 widows survived. In 1988 Ms. Velásquez founded the National Coordinating Organization of Widows of Guatemala (CONAVIGUA), now a leading Guatemalan human rights organization. She has served in many posts, in Guatemala and the region, including as a congresswoman in the National Congress.

against my people in the 1980s, in my country of Guatemala.

I speak on behalf of "women and men of the corn," who carry in the deepest parts of ourselves the hope of being a people that seeks respect for human dignity and harmony among the people of my country and the world, and on behalf of the women of the National Coordinating Organization of Widows of Guatemala, CONAVIGUA. This is an organization through which we, with determination and courage, in a very difficult and painful time of our lives, decided to organize ourselves as widows and open the path of searching for the people who disappeared into clandestine cemeteries; defending our children against obligatory military service;

searching for justice and respect for the dignity of women; and denouncing human rights violations, especially the rape of indigenous women by military and paramilitary groups.

At this solemn ceremony, I express our gratitude, with humility and simplicity, and I pay homage to Rev. Nikkyo Niwano who was the founder of the Niwano Peace Prize, given to encourage the achievement of peace and harmonious coexistence in the world. From Guatemala, the land of the Mayas, I want to thank you for having given me this award. I assume and will carry out the responsibility to continue contributing to the development of a culture of peace, to promote with more energy respect for the life and human rights of a people who want to be respected for who we are, for what we want to be, and for what we want to achieve to have a full life.

I also pay tribute to the victims of the atomic bombs in Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and of the earthquake and tsunami last year in northeastern Japan, an event that shocked all of humanity. I want to share my solidarity with all Japanese. In addition, I want to share the hope that the environmental movement will assume a greater commitment to contributing to the defense and protection of the land, mountains, water, and air. Since the lives of humans, animals, and plants depend on them, we should not continue to pollute the little we have left to live on right now.

I am grateful to the members of the Niwano Peace Foundation, who make extraordinary contributions to the

promotion and pursuit of world peace. This effort is worthy of imitation, so that no country or region of the world will continue to promote war, contempt, hatred, intolerance, violence, and racism. At this time, as a person receiving the honor of this award, I want to share my thoughts on harmonization and peace.

With the permission of the Creator and Maker of the life and the energies of the universe, and in memory of the martyrs for peace, I want to address the topic of harmonization on this occasion of the awarding of the twenty-ninth Niwano Peace Prize, and to share with you the meaning of harmony and peace. There is a tremendous need in the world today for harmony and peace, so it is important also to share what we as Mayans believe, understand, practice, and see, according to our cosmovision, culture, and the reality of life in our communities in relation to these topics and values.

Before I share my thoughts about harmonization and peace, it is important to share my thoughts about the lack of harmony and peace both in my country and in the world.

In Guatemala, for example, despite the signing of a firm peace agreement in 1996, neither peace nor harmony has yet been achieved. Today we live with a lot of uncertainty, almost in chaos as a society and as a country. There is a struggle between life and death. Fear, pain, and familial, social, economic, and political imbalances prevail. Although there was an end to armed conflict, today there is a lot of death and desolation. There is little space for internal harmony among

individuals, and collectively, little trust between people and the state. There is a lot of violence, hunger, poverty, misery, inequality, injustice, and confusion. It is as if these were lifelong illnesses. There is a lot of ambition and selfishness, and much great wealth and accumulated power. There is great inequality between the haves and have-nots.

On a global level, these problems also exist in many parts of the world. There are inequalities between countries. There is a lot of wealth with selfishness and tools that make greater misery for the majority. On a global level there is a financial crisis, but at the same time there is a lot of accumulated wealth that is the result of a global system that is conducive to imbalance, including political imbalance, fear, and chaos. There is excessive pollution, climate change, and global warming.

Exclusion policies, genocide, and the destruction of cultures, especially the cultures of indigenous peoples, are policies that do not allow for harmonization between peoples, industries, states, and societies around the world. Using arms and bombs destroys people's lives, communities, and families, leaving innocent victims. Using bombs and arms pits brother against brother, and people against one another.

Peace and harmony is not the absence of war. There is no peace for individuals, for families, for communities, for the country, or for humanity if there are hunger, disease, and frustration; if there are trauma and economic, social, and political imbalances; if these cause an imbalance of nature; if there aren't solidarity, respect for human rights, the rights of peoples, women's rights, and youth rights. In short, there is no peace and harmony without honoring the values of equality, love, and respect. You can say that these are the values that our ancestors have been building and for which we were created.

The question is whether humanity has suffered enough pain, enough

war, enough hunger. Why have we not achieved harmony, and what prevents it? A good part of that is because we are driven by selfishness and material ambition, as peoples and as groups of people, as countries and as groups of countries.

Harmony means being at peace with yourself and with other human beings, with Mother Earth, animals, plants, and every kind of energy that comes from the cosmos. Harmony is joy, happiness, freedom, and enjoying the bounties of nature, as well as satisfying all material, spiritual, emotional, and social needs, such as health, education, work, housing, and an environment free of pollution. In our culture, all of this is what we call a full life, or the fullness of life. This is what we seek and want for all human beings, for all countries, and for all of humanity.

Speaking about and explaining harmonization is an enormous responsibility because it goes hand in hand with the respect and care we should have for one another; it is the reciprocity between human beings and Mother Nature. Our ancestors, those who came before us and are in another dimension of life, taught us that we should live with all life in all its dimensions. This lesson should guarantee the continuity of life for all that exists—from the smallest creatures to the largest, including all life on our planet Earth and in the cosmos.

Harmonization should be understood as the highest social, spiritual, and material expression, and as social action by human beings as thoughtful people capable of differentiating between good and bad. Also, the stages of life offer us the ability to serve and help those who suffer from inequality and injustice, as well as those who suffer from an inability to satisfy their basic needs, and those suffering from the consequences of wars. In the Mayan vision of the world, the purpose of existence is maintaining balance and harmony. These are the fundamentals of Mayan

thought, to be able to live according to principles of equity, equality, and harmonious human and communal coexistence, without disregarding any individual human being.

Today humanity is experiencing a very acute global crisis that is social, economic, and political and includes military and environmental devastation, such as global warming. This is what we are going through. We cannot close our eyes to this palpable, inevitable reality. However, my Mayan ancestors and other indigenous peoples of the world tell us that a new era will come from a stricter study of the cosmos and its energies and from societies and their behavior. This new era is tied to a new cycle of time that marks the Mayan calendar. In the Western calendar it will start on December 21 of this year.

It is a new era that also should begin with the understanding of human destiny. That destiny is a fulfilled life; people and societies acting ethically. Our grandparents said it, and we harbor the deep hope that the future life of our people and humanity will be in harmony with all dimensions of both men and women, as well as the planet Earth, Mother Nature, and the universe. The new era should be in search of balance, justice, and respect, as important elements of harmonization and peace. In many places in the world, there is a stronger awareness that questions the actions of humanity, and

above all, the powers and causes of chaos, fear, injustice, and imbalance. This was affirmed and embodied by our Mayan grandparents.

The fate of the people, consistent with the signs of the times, should be tied to the dawn that our ancestors have provided. The current situation offers an extraordinary opportunity to think about that destiny, and to create processes that allow humanity to renew itself. At the same time it offers an opportunity to each of you to find unity with both your origin and your destiny. In that sense it is fundamental to prepare yourselves for the new coexistence between cultures, respecting people's spirituality and learning from the past in order to make possible changes. Humanity has the opportunity to change, receiving and giving a new meaning of life, bringing its vital energy to all that makes a fulfilled life possible. This decision also implies a different attitude that has to be consistent with deep spirituality. Only in that way will humanity forge renewal by transcending time. It is not a transformation project, but a process of transformation to achieve harmonization and peace in our countries and the world. This is our dare and our challenge. All of us are builders of life, respect, and work; we all have qualities and abilities. Our mission is to develop them to contribute to peace and harmonization for a future full of happiness, hope, love, understanding, and peace. □

The Bodhisattva Way in Rissho Kosei-kai and the Lotus Sutra

by Gene Reeves

In the Lotus Sutra, a bodhisattva is one who is wise enough to know that he or she cannot be saved unless everyone is. A bodhisattva is well aware of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things.

Climbing the stairway to the Great Sacred Hall of Rissho Kosei-kai¹ in Tokyo, glancing up you can see magnificent paintings of three of the most familiar Mahayana bodhisattvas: on the right, riding on his lion and symbolizing wisdom, is Manjushri. On the left, mounted on a cow and symbolizing compassion, is Maitreya. And in the center, riding his white elephant with six tusks, is Universal Sage Bodhisattva, symbolizing embodiment of wisdom and compassion in everyday life.

The wisdom of Manjushri is to be understood not as something highly esoteric and abstract but rather as something closer to intelligence. It includes practical knowledge—knowledge of how to do things that can be helpful to others, including highly developed skills such as brain surgery or psychological insight into the behavior and motivation of others. The wisdom of a bodhisattva, in other words, is useful, practical wisdom.

But a bodhisattva needs to be more than just wise. One could be wise sitting in a cave somewhere, not utilizing wisdom at all. A bodhisattva is moved by compassion for others. Bodhisattva wisdom is not cold and detached but driven by a genuine, deeply felt desire to help others that is rooted in a profound sense of togetherness with others.

Still, if intelligence and compassion are not embodied in some concrete ways, they don't amount to much. Universal Sage can be called a sage because he is both wise and good. He represents the ideal of bringing the bodhisattva way to life in everyday actions and relationships.

There are, of course, many ways to symbolize such things. If you go around or through the Great Sacred Hall and enter the great hall of the Horin-kaku, the Dharma-Wheel Hall, you will find yourself in the presence of still another of the great Mahayana bodhisattvas—Guanyin, called Kannon in Japanese, the Regarder of the Cries of the World.

This magnificent statue of Guanyin, a so-called Guanyin of a thousand hands, was introduced to me on my first visit to Tokyo by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Nikkyo Niwano. Each of the thousand hands, usually represented by forty-two hands, holds a symbol of some skill or special ability. Sometimes Guanyin is treated by her devout followers as a kind of goddess, and the powers she holds in her hands are understood to be powers with which she can help those in trouble. But Niwano told me a bodhisattva should not be treated as a god who can do favors for us; rather, a bodhisattva should be seen as a model of what we can be. If Guanyin has a

thousand different skills with which people can be helped, this means that we should develop a thousand skills for helping people!

Like Manjushri, Maitreya, and Universal Sage in the front of the Great Sacred Hall, Guanyin is understood to have deep compassion and intelligent wisdom, and since this statue is standing, it symbolizes the embodiment, the putting to work, of intelligence and compassion in our everyday lives.

Rissho Kosei-kai's members' vow says, "We pledge ourselves to follow the bodhisattva way, to bring peace to our families, communities, and countries and to the world."

Helping Others

In the West it is often said that a bodhisattva is someone who is able to enter the bliss of nirvana but postpones his or her own happiness in order to return to the world to help others selflessly. Such an idea of postponement is definitely not found in the Lotus Sutra or in any other sutra of which I am aware. In the Lotus Sutra,² a bodhisattva is one who is wise enough to know that he or she cannot be saved unless everyone is. A bodhisattva is well aware of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things. He or she is not completely selfless but is intelligent and compassionate and, therefore, continues to work in the world to help others.

Helping others, however, should not be taken to be only a matter of helping individuals with their personal

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problems, though that is very important. The Lotus Sutra repeatedly speaks of bodhisattva practice as two things: transforming individuals and purifying lands. In other words, we should recognize that people are profoundly affected by their social and natural environments. This, I believe, is why Founder Niwano gave so much importance to working for world peace and became a founder of the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

Nowadays, thanks to Thich Nhat Hanh, Sulak Sivaraksa, and others, we have an international engaged Buddhism movement in which Buddhist teachings and practices are related not only to individual issues but also to issues of common or social or political import. From the perspective of the Lotus Sutra, this is as it should be, but we should not assume from it that we can first have a Buddhism that is not socially engaged and then add social engagement as a kind of secondary or tertiary matter. From the perspective of the Lotus Sutra and that of Founder Niwano, Buddhism is necessarily socially engaged.

Buddhist Practice

Somewhere along the way—I don't know where and how—for many people, Buddhist practice came to be closely associated with meditation, or even defined as meditation. Meditation is one of India's great gifts to humanity. It can do wonders for all sorts of human conditions. Probably most people could benefit from practicing it. And because it

was during meditation that the Buddha became awakened, it has special importance for Buddhists. But there is nothing peculiarly Buddhist about meditation. And the vast majority of Buddhists never meditate. For them, Buddhist practice may be many things, but it is not primarily meditation.

Meditation and concentration are important in the Lotus Sutra, but they are not given special prominence. It is also said that even a million aeons of meditating does not produce as much merit as hearing about and accepting, even for a moment, the everlasting life of the Buddha, which means embodying the Buddha in one's own life.

But if meditation is not the primary Buddhist practice in the Lotus Sutra, what is? Many practices are recommended, especially receiving and embracing the sutra, chanting it from memory, copying it, teaching and

explaining it, and living in accord with its teachings. But preeminent among the practices advocated by the Lotus Sutra is the way of behaving toward others generally termed *the bodhisattva way*. This bodhisattva way is the Lotus Sutra's encompassing vision of Buddhist practice.

A Way of Action

In a key passage of the Lotus Sutra we find:

Distinguishing the real Dharma,
The way of action of bodhisattvas,
[The Buddha] taught this Dharma
Flower Sutra³

In verses as numerous as the sands
of the Ganges (202).⁴

We see here that the bodhisattva way is a way of doing, of action. What

kind of action? Basically it is whatever action works to save or liberate or even help living beings.

For the sutra, the most important way of serving others is to lead them to embrace the Lotus Sutra itself. The Buddha says:

Medicine King, though there are many people, both laypeople and monks, who walk in the bodhisattva way, if they are not able to see, hear, read, recite, copy, embrace, and make offerings to this Dharma Flower Sutra, you should know that they are not yet walking well in the bodhisattva way. But if any of them hear this sutra, then they will be able to walk well in the bodhisattva way. If any living beings who seek after the Buddha way either see or hear this Dharma Flower Sutra, and after hearing it believe, understand, and embrace it, then you should know that they are nearer to supreme awakening (230).

But it would be a mistake to understand this sutra as teaching that leading people to itself in any narrow sense is the only way to save others. The Lotus Sutra is replete with parables, used in part to illustrate the use of appropriate means in practicing the bodhisattva way. A father gets his children out of a burning house by promising them a reward. Another father gets his kids to take an antidote for poison by pretending to be dead. Still another father guides his unambitious son toward greater and greater responsibility. A tour guide conjures up a city in order to give people a needed resting place during a hard journey. A man sews a valuable jewel into the garment of his poor friend. A very powerful king holds back an extraordinarily precious and unique jewel that he keeps in the top-knot of his hair until he sees a soldier of great merit.

A Way of Appropriate Action

What the stories illustrate is practical, appropriate help for others. What we are told over and over again in the sutra is that these acts need to be skillful, appropriate to the condition of the hearers. It is because people are different and their situations are different that—just as in the simile found in chapter 5, where the rain nourishes a great variety of plants according to their different needs—the buddhas give the Dharma to people according to what is needed.

What is it that makes an action appropriate? In the parable of the carriages, a father manages to get his kids out of a burning house by promising to give them carriages, but he actually rewards them with a much more luxurious model. At the end of the story, the Buddha asks Shariputra whether the father has lied or not, and Shariputra responds that the father has not lied and would not have been lying had he given the children even very tiny carriages. Why? Simply because the strategy worked. It got the kids out of the house in time to save their lives.

Two things are relevant here: the action worked, and it worked to save lives.

Some people apparently think that Buddhist ethics is primarily a matter of what's inside oneself, that it is primarily a matter of internal consciousness and/or compassion. But there is hardly a hint of this in the Lotus Sutra. The ideal in the Lotus Sutra is a combination of wisdom or insight, compassion, and practice. But in contemporary jargon, this sutra is also very results oriented. Of course it is important that the fathers in the sutra's stories are concerned about their children and want to save them, but it is more important that they are smart enough to figure out ways to be successful at doing so. Skillful, appropriate action is effective action.

The story of Devadatta found in chapter 12 of the sutra is very instructive. Even our enemies, regardless of their intentions, can be bodhisattvas for us if we regard them as such. Devadatta, the embodiment of evil in so much Buddhist literature, in this sutra is thanked by the Buddha for being helpful. "Thanks to my good friend Devadatta," the Buddha says, "I was able to become fully developed in the six transcendental practices, in kindness, compassion, joy, and impartiality" and so on (249). The Buddha, we are told, learned from his experiences with Devadatta, making Devadatta a bodhisattva, but it is not suggested that this was in any way a function of what Devadatta himself intended. Good intentions may be good in their own right, but they may not always be what is most important. Often what's more important is effectiveness, effectiveness in helping, or saving, others.

Buddhism as Skillful and Appropriate Means

There is much ambiguity in the Lotus Sutra about the nature of salvation. We are told that the Buddha has vowed to save all the living. But the nature of that state, variously termed becoming a buddha, supreme awakening, and so on, is not unambiguously clear. Yet if we look at the stories in the text, the matter is not, or at least not always, so complicated. Lives are saved. Sometimes they are saved from fire or poison, literally from death. In other cases, they are saved from a mean existence, from poverty and from an attitude that is complacent about poverty. In all cases, what is involved is overcoming a failure to achieve one's potential to become a bodhisattva and buddha.

Basically, in the Lotus Sutra, being a bodhisattva means using appropriate skillful means to help others. And that, finally, is what Buddhism itself is. It is an enormous variety of means

developed to help people live more fulfilling lives, which can be understood as lives lived in the light of their interdependence. This is what most of the stories in the Lotus Sutra are about: someone—a father figure or a friend or a guide—helping others gain more responsibility for their own lives. “Even if you search in all directions,” it says, “you will find no other vehicles—except the skillful means of the Buddha” (128).

As Founder Niwano puts it, “The fundamental spirit of the bodhisattva practice is [unity] between oneself and others.”⁵ Though the unity is never perfect, there are times when the mind of a bodhisattva is not one of compassionate giving but rather one of spontaneous empathy. Disputes and quarrels do arise because people don’t realize that even though we seem to be independent of one another, at a basic level there is unity of all human beings, and a unity of all living beings.

Thus, bodhisattva practice through appropriate skillful means is at once both a description of what Buddhism is, or what Buddhist practice primarily is, and a prescription for what our lives should become, a teaching about how we should behave in order to contribute to the good. It is prescriptive not in the sense of being a precept or commandment but in the sense of urging us, for the sake of both our own salvation and that of others, to be intelligent, imaginative, even clever, in finding ways to be helpful. The Lotus Sutra, accordingly, is a prescription of a medicine or religious method for us—and, therefore, extremely practical.

As I understand the Lotus Sutra, it would be a serious mistake to think that skillful means are lesser teachings that can be replaced by some higher teaching or truth. There is, of course, a larger purpose that they serve. They are, after all, means not ends. But the encompassing purpose or truth that they serve is not another teaching. It is a Dharma that can only be found embodied in concrete

teachings, including actions that are instructive, just as the Buddha can only be found embodied in Shakyamuni, in images, and in people—in you and me.

World-Affirming Practice

This teaching of bodhisattva practice is radically world affirming. By this I mean simply that it is this *saha* world of suffering that is Shakyamuni Buddha’s world. It is in this world that he is a bodhisattva and encourages us to be bodhisattvas. This world is our home, and it is the home of Shakyamuni Buddha precisely because he is embodied in it, not only as the historical Buddha but as the Buddha in all things. Thus, things, ordinary things, including ourselves and our neighbors and the trees that are our neighbors, are not primarily to be seen as empty, though they are; not primarily to be seen as phenomenal, though they are; not primarily to be seen as illusions, though in one sense they are; not primarily to be seen as evil, even though they may be in part. It is only in things, “conventional” existence, that

the Dharma exists at all. It is in transient, changing things that the Buddha lives. This whole world, therefore, is to be treated with insight and compassion and respect.

It is something of an irony that a sutra that affirms a cosmic Shakyamuni Buddha, one who is in every world and every time, does so not to reject the historical Shakyamuni or the temporal world but, as Nichiren saw so clearly,⁶ precisely to affirm their supreme importance. And their importance is nothing more nor less than that this world is where we, having been taught by the historical Buddha, are called to embody the life of the Buddha in our own actions and lives. This is why a part of the everyday liturgy of Rissho Kosei-kai is the so-called Dōjō-kan (Contemplating the Place of the Way): “You should understand that this place is the place of the Way. This is where the Buddhas attain supreme awakening. This is where the Buddhas turn the dharma-wheel. This is where the Buddhas reach complete nirvana.”⁷

It is relevant in this connection to notice that there is not much use of the notion of emptiness in the Lotus Sutra. Of course, all things are empty of independent existence. But it is because they are empty that there is space, so to speak, for the development of their potential to be a buddha. If things were substantial, they could not truly grow or change. But because they are without substantiality, they can be influenced by and have influence on others. Undue emphasis on emptiness can easily become a kind of nihilism in which nothing matters, while in the Lotus Sutra everything matters. The Buddha works to save all beings. Even poor Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva, going around telling everyone that they are to become buddhas, though initially not very successfully, eventually “transformed a multitude of tens of millions of billions, enabling them to live in the state of supreme awakening” (339). And this is to say nothing

of the account that he later became the Buddha Shakyamuni!

Hoza

So, from the perspective of the Lotus Sutra, full Buddhist practice is necessarily action oriented and social. Everything else—the chanting, the ceremonies, the preaching, the meditation, the institutions—everything else is instrumental to saving others and to creating a kind of peaceful and beautiful world in which all are buddhas.

Of course, followers of the Lotus Sutra believe that they should practice the bodhisattva way all the time. Always being kind and helpful to others should become a habit. But the practice of *hoza* is a special, and especially intentional, application of the ideal of the bodhisattva in religious practice.⁸ In *hoza*, Rissho Kosei-kai members and guests sit in relatively small circles in order to help one another with very ordinary but very important issues and problems of everyday life, often of an interpersonal nature, such as one's relationship with one's mother-in-law or with one's boss or with one's spouse. Whatever the issue brought to the *hoza*, people in the group, as they are able, become bodhisattvas for each other, with genuine caring and practical help.

Bodhisattva as Becoming a Buddha

Sometimes *bodhisattva* is understood to be a kind of position or rank, the rank just below buddha. And very often in the Lotus Sutra and elsewhere, a bodhisattva is an attendant of a buddha. These ideas can be useful, but it is more important, I think, to see that being a bodhisattva is much more a kind of activity, a way of being and acting, than it is an achieved status. Just as a teacher is not really a teacher unless he or she is teaching and someone is actually taught, a bodhisattva is not

really a bodhisattva unless he or she is actually practicing the bodhisattva way. Being a bodhisattva, in other words, involves a reciprocal relationship; it is a relational activity, something done only with others.

When Shariputra is assured by the Buddha that in a distant time he is to become a buddha with his own buddha land and era, Shariputra realizes for the first time that he is not merely a *shravaka* but also a bodhisattva (101–10). Here *bodhisattva* is not a rank but a way of being and living indicating that one is on the way to becoming a buddha. Thus the Lotus Sutra often uses the term *Buddha way* as an equivalent alternative to *bodhisattva way*.

What you are practicing
[the Buddha says to his disciple
Kāśyapa]
Is the bodhisattva way.
As you gradually practice and learn,
Every one of you should become a
buddha (168).

This is entirely consistent with the earliest uses of *bodhisattva*, where it meant Shakyamuni Buddha before he became a buddha. But in the Lotus Sutra the Buddha says that he has lived in this world for innumerable countless

aeons, from the beginning practicing the bodhisattva way (193).

It is absolutely central to the Lotus Sutra that Shakyamuni Buddha is, first of all, a bodhisattva, one who has been doing bodhisattva practice, helping and leading others for innumerable aeons. Whenever the enormously long life of the Buddha is described in the sutra, it is not meditation that he has been doing, at least not primarily, but teaching and leading others, thus transforming them into bodhisattvas, followers of the bodhisattva way.

Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva

But practice of the bodhisattva way certainly is not limited to buddhas or even to bodhisattvas in the conventional sense. Six of the last chapters of the Lotus Sutra, generally believed to have been added last, as a kind of appendix, in the compilation of the Lotus Sutra, are fairly self-contained accounts of individual bodhisattvas, including Guanyin. In a sense, these bodhisattvas, though not exactly models for us, are understood to be suggestive of what we can be as bodhisattvas ourselves.

Among them is one not well known outside of the Lotus Sutra, a monk

named Never Disrespectful.⁹ Why was he named Never Disrespectful? That monk bowed humbly before everybody he met, whether monk, nun, layman or laywoman, and praised them saying, “I deeply respect you. I would never dare to be disrespectful or arrogant toward you. Why? Because all of you are practicing the bodhisattva way and surely will become buddhas” (338).

Here, then, everyone is, to some degree, practicing the bodhisattva way. Thus *shravakas* are also bodhisattvas. Most, of course, don’t know they are bodhisattvas, but they are nonetheless.

And, of course, most important, you and I are bodhisattvas. No matter how trivial our understanding or merit, no matter how trivial our practice, we are, to some extent, perhaps only a tiny extent, already bodhisattvas. And we are called to grow in our practice of the bodhisattva way by leading others to realize that potential in themselves.

The Buddha Way

Thus the bodhisattva way is the Buddha way in at least two senses: it is both the way in which one becomes a buddha and the practice of the buddhas. These two senses, however, are two in appearance only. That is, the Buddha is always at work, in every time and place, seeking to fulfill his “original” or “primordial” vow to save all living beings. But how he is at work in the world is not through supernatural intervention but by being embodied in the concrete actions of bodhisattvas.

Being respectful to others, not merely in the rather superficial way of Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva but in ways that are more effective, involves genuine listening to others and attending to both their sorrows and their opportunities, helping them in whatever ways are appropriate to develop their buddha-nature, but equally important, learning from them, being open to their being bodhisattvas for us.

In chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra, Guanyin Bodhisattva is said to be able to take on many forms according to what is needed to help others. For example, if someone needs someone in the body of a buddha in order to be saved, Guanyin appears to this person in the body of a buddha and teaches him or her. Likewise, Guanyin may appear as a king or a general of heaven, as the Indian gods Indra or Ishvara, as a rich old man or the wife of a rich old man, as an ordinary citizen, a government official, a priest, a monk, a nun, a layman or laywoman, as a boy or girl, or as a heavenly being of any kind.

This means not only that we have to adjust our approach to those we want to help but, just as important, that anyone can be a bodhisattva for us—if we have the eyes to see. If we can, even for a moment, put on the eyes of a buddha, we will see buddhas everywhere; we will see that the world is full of bodhisattvas, beings from whom we can learn, who can help us in countless ways. Thus we can understand the bodhisattva way as both helping others and being open to being helped by others.

The Buddha does many things in the Lotus Sutra, but perhaps most important among them is his ability to see the buddha in others. Thus, the Buddha way is not only a matter of being a bodhisattva for others but also of recognizing the bodhisattva in everyone we encounter. □

Notes

1. Rissho Kosei-kai is among the new Japanese Buddhist organizations founded in the twentieth century based on the Lotus Sutra and Tendai and Nichiren interpretations of it.

2. The Lotus Sutra has been central to East Asian Buddhism from the very beginning of the reception of Buddhist teachings in China, Korea, and Japan. It is a tradition whose historical and contemporary importance is so great that to claim to have an understanding of Buddhism without taking it into account

is to make extremely light of the empirical realities of Buddhism, of what Buddhism actually is. The Lotus Sutra perspective is only a perspective, but it is an extremely important, even essential, one for understanding Buddhism as a whole.

3. Though usually called “The Lotus Sutra” in English, this text never calls itself that, nor is that term used in Chinese or Japanese to refer to the sutra. The full name, in the most widely used Chinese version, word for word, is “Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra,” *Miao-fa-lian-hua jing*, pronounced in Japanese *Myō-hō-ren-ge kyō*. The shortened version most often used in the text is *Fa-hua jing*; *Ho-ke kyō* in Japanese. In English this is “Dharma Flower Sutra.”

4. References to the Lotus Sutra are taken from my own translation: *The Lotus Sutra: A Contemporary Translation of a Buddhist Classic* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2008). Hereafter page numbers are inserted parenthetically after each reference.

5. Nikkyo Niwano, *Buddhism for Today: A Modern Interpretation of the Threefold Lotus Sutra* (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Company, 1976), 330.

6. See “The Selection of the Time,” in *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Nichiren Shoshu International Center, 1985), 79ff., or in *Selected Writings of Nichiren*, ed. Philip B. Yampolsky (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 181ff.

7. *Kyoden: Sutra Readings* (bilingual version in Japanese and English) (Tokyo: International Buddhist Congregation, 2009).

8. The term *hoza* is composed of two Chinese characters literally meaning “Dharma sitting.”

9. The name of this bodhisattva is a curious matter. In the Sanskrit versions we have now he is called *Sadāparibhūta*, which means “always held in contempt” or perhaps “always despised.” But in the Chinese translation he is called *Ch’ang Pu-ch’ing*, meaning “never treated lightly.” By itself this name could be taken to mean “never despising,” which is why his name is sometimes translated into English as “Never Despise.” But few people despise one another, and the clear intention of the chapter itself is to teach that we should never disrespect others, never put them down or make light of them.

Rissho Kosei-kai's Second Step Forward

by Nikkyo Niwano

In March 1999 an autobiography of Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (1906–99), the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, was published in Japanese under the title Kono michi: Ichibutsujo no sekai o mezashite (The path that we have walked: Aspiring to the world of the One Buddha Vehicle). The book is a lively account of the life of Founder Niwano as a leader of an international lay Buddhist association and a pioneer of interreligious cooperation, who dedicated himself to liberating all people from suffering with firm faith in the Lotus Sutra. Dharma World will continue to publish excerpts from the book in installments.

In the sixty years of Rissho Kosei-kai's history, I think 1958 marked the greatest turning point. In the first issue of the newspaper *Kosei Shimbun* that year, I affirmed that the focus of devotion for Rissho Kosei-kai members is the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, the Great Benevolent Teacher, the World-honored One. This declaration is known as the Manifestation of the Truth. This may

seem completely unsurprising to those who only know Rissho Kosei-kai as it is today, but at that point, the organization had already been in existence for twenty years. It had taken two decades of preparation before the truth could be made manifest.

I had known in my heart already from the time Rissho Kosei-kai was founded that the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni

should be its focus of devotion, and in 1945 Myoko Sensei [Myoko Naganuma, the cofounder of Rissho Kosei-kai] had a divine revelation confirming this. This identity was completely natural in terms of the aspects of the teaching within the Lotus Sutra, and I often alluded to it. Why did I need to announce it formally to members?

This is what I wrote in the January 5,

Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, was an honorary president of the World Conference of Religions for Peace and was honorary chairman of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan) at the time of his death in October 1999. He was awarded the 1979 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.

not something that can necessarily be taught from the very beginning. Even during Shakyamuni's time in this world, more than forty years of preparatory teaching was required before the True Dharma could be revealed. During that time many people fell away from the teachings, like the five thousand arrogant monks who left the great assembly, refusing to hear the Buddha preach the Lotus Sutra. There were also others who could not understand the teachings and so criticized them. Despite this, the Dharma was able to manifest itself, surmounting such defections and tribulations.

Explaining why he had not taught the Truth as it was revealed in the Lotus Sutra from the very beginning, Shakyamuni stated, "I knew that the natures and desires of all living beings were not equal" and "living beings' powers of attainment are too different to accomplish supreme buddhahood quickly."

Even if the Buddha had revealed the profound nature of his enlightenment at the beginning, people would have had difficulty grasping it, because their understanding had not reached a degree able to comprehend it. In fact, teaching the profound truth would only have confused them and made them turn their backs on it. And as we know, even when Shakyamuni finally decided to teach the Lotus Sutra, it is said five thousand people stood up and left the assembly.

Incidentally, there is one theory that the episode of the five thousand who left the assembly has its origins in the

schismatic movement of Devadatta and his five hundred followers. The point here is that it is entirely reasonable to interpret the fact that the exit of the five thousand from the assembly was mentioned in the Lotus Sutra as a warning against the self-conceit of someone who has yet to attain enlightenment claiming to have done so.

Rissho Kosei-kai can be said to have passed through the same kind of history. The long period of preparation was the twenty years between its founding in 1938 and the Manifestation of the Truth in 1958. And at times it, too, suffered public criticism, such as the Yomiuri incident of 1956 when twenty-two thousand households left the organization. It was after such a long period

1958, issue of *Kosei Shimbum*: "According to Nine Star astrology, this year, 1958, is a time when everything reaches completion and the truth becomes manifest. For the last twenty years, members have been waiting in great anticipation for the year the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Great Benevolent Teacher, the World-honored One, is made manifest. That year has finally come. The date of the invocation and the time of its announcement within and without Rissho Kosei-kai has been due to the deep benevolence and care of all the buddhas and heavenly deities, far surpassing my own will."

Whatever the things are, the truth is

of religious training and preparation that Rissho Kosei-kai's true focus of devotion was revealed at last.

A Time of Trial

When Rissho Kosei-kai began it had fewer than thirty members, and its headquarters was simply an upstairs room of my milk shop in Shinmei-cho, in the Nakano ward of Tokyo.

From the time I founded the organization, I was constantly thinking about what a true religion should be. It is no good if the members whom I guide as president feel anxiety about the future. Guiding others brings with it a great responsibility, and I could never forget that.

Since everything we did had to be according to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, I was determined that we should all study the meaning of the sutra and practice its teachings together, forming a "harmonious sangha." By around 1955, though, I felt that Rissho Kosei-kai was moving in a direction slightly different from that which I had in mind.

I am of course referring to what came to be called the Yomiuri incident of January 1956. Over a period of around two months, the newspaper

Yomiuri Shimbun published a series of articles criticizing Rissho Kosei-kai over a number of things, such as the purchase of real estate, the nature of its beliefs, and the way the organization was managed.

It was a time when Rissho Kosei-kai had been growing by leaps and bounds. In 1949 its membership numbered 32,000 households, but this had grown in 1951 to 91,000 households, in 1953 to 192,000 households, and in 1955 to 320,000 households. In view of such a rapid growth, it was not to be wondered that some people thought there was something suspicious about it. When the articles criticizing Rissho Kosei-kai first began appearing in the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, the organization had more than one million members.

We realized that with so many members taking part in dissemination activities, things might have gone a little far on occasion. Thus we were determined to change what needed to be changed. We looked into each of the charges that the *Yomiuri Shimbun* leveled against us, and it was clear that most of them either had arisen out of misapprehension or were just sheer slander. The land that had been mentioned in an article about cornering real estate was a field of just

over four acres that had been bought as a baseball ground for members of the Rissho Kosei-kai Youth Group. This purchase had been misinterpreted by local residents. We made a report of the results of our investigations and submitted it to the Standing Committee on Judicial Affairs of the House of Representatives, the lower house of the Japanese Diet [parliament]; to the Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association; and to the Yomiuri Shimbun Company. I also appeared before the Judicial Affairs Committee as a witness and explained things clearly to its members. I addressed members of Rissho Kosei-kai, saying, "This criticism of Rissho Kosei-kai has arisen out of a misunderstanding about the sincerity of our overriding concern to guide those who are suffering toward a happy life. Nevertheless, we will humbly respond to the criticism of the general public that the *Yomiuri Shimbun* has expressed and make it the fuel for our religious training in the future."

After that, we referred to the *Yomiuri Shimbun* as "Yomiuri Bodhisattva." After all, its criticism in one sense acted as a warning to us about going too far, and so we were even grateful to it. □

To be continued

The Lotus Sutra and Human Suffering

by Stefan Grace

This is a report on the 2012 International Lotus Sutra Seminar, sponsored by Rissho Kosei-kai and held March 6–11 at the National Women's Education Center of Japan in Musashiranzan, Saitama Prefecture. This year's theme, "The Lotus Sutra and Human Suffering," commemorated the tragic events of March 11, 2011.

One of the problems that religion faces today is that any action that it takes in society is considered illegitimate, yet religions are expected to be ethical and to somehow—despite this limitation—contribute to their broader society. One of the main themes that came up in the conference was how Buddhists have challenged this limitation and tried to find ways to relieve suffering in all of its forms.

—Jessica L. Main, seminar participant

In addition to the many complex scholarly discussions at this year's seminar, a deceptively simple idea brought forward by Dr. Hiroshi Munehiro Niwano on the first day received wide attention, namely that of "simply being there for people." The participants discussed what this means not only metaphysically and in terms of religious practice but also ethically and practically in a wider sense. Although the idea seems almost too simplistic when first confronted, one cannot overlook the important implications it suggests. For example, as Jessica Main pointed out during the seminar, if only money is given to those in need, it may create a hierarchy where the giver

takes on a position of power, and this may deepen the sense of victimization for those that are already suffering. Of course, a combined approach in attempting to alleviate suffering—including donations both financial and physical—must be employed in a real-life situation. However, we must not forget that simply offering our presence alone can play a very important yet largely overlooked role in helping those in need. This is particularly true as time passes, when the suffering of those only indirectly affected begins to fade but time has done little to ease the pain of those directly affected.

I am reminded here of the tanka poem "Maboroshi no isu (The invisible chair)" by Japanese poet Tamiko Onishi (1924–94), who was born in Iwate Prefecture—an area badly affected by 2011's tsunami. I would like to translate her poem, said to be inspired by Vincent van Gogh's painting called *Gauguin's Chair*, as follows:

That single invisible chair I place
by my side;
Those nights spent waiting for you
with a burning heart—
I don't even have those now.*

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Although financial assistance from the government and other groups may have provided victims of the tsunami with the absolute basics of life, many are still left with no means to provide for themselves and no capital with which to restart their lives. What is more, they are left with fading memories of those nights they sat with burning hearts hoping to have their loved ones returned to them. The hope that their families might return, and the physical presence of enthusiastic workers and financial donations, is slowly weakening to a trickle. Where do these people look for help now? It seems that for many, they, too, no longer even have those lonely nights of sad hope to keep them pushing forward.

However, despite the difficult nature of this year's seminar theme, it was also a

* Katawara ni oku, maboroshi no isu
hitotsu, akugarete matsu yoru mo nashi,
ima wa.

Contents of the Seminar

“On the Buddha’s Own Sufferings”

John S. Strong, Bates College, Lewiston, Maine

celebration of the joy of life and camaraderie. As Mark Unno and Dan Leighton pointed out at various times throughout the seminar, we must learn to see the greater interrelated forces at play in the sufferings of others and within ourselves. With hope and understanding, there is a way forward, no matter what obstacles we might face; and Buddhist concepts, including those found in the Lotus Sutra, hold important lessons from which we can learn.

Attending the Seminar

Unseasonably mild weather, coming as a good omen, welcomed the participants to the 2012 Lotus Sutra Seminar in Musashi-ranzan on the night of March 5. The group—along with me as rapporteur and two tirelessly helpful staff members from Rissho Kosei-kai, Shizuyo Miura and Natsuki Kudo—enjoyed a simple yet tasty home-style Japanese meal before resting up for the following days of tightly scheduled seminars, discussions, and tours.

Early the next morning, after warm coffee was poured and snacks were distributed, a representative from the National Women’s Education Center, which was hosting the seminar, gave a presentation on the center’s history and its current activities. I was pleasantly surprised to hear of the wide range of support services that the center offers for both women and men, and a friendly precedent was set for a series of discussions that were extremely

open, respectful, and convivial. As Sarah Strong later pointed out:

The Lotus Sutra was looked at from the viewpoints of practice, philology, gender, and cosmology, et cetera, so the seminar was incredibly rich due to those different perspectives. I also felt that there was a wonderful synergy amongst the members, so that people actually listened to one another and they weren’t just waiting to give their spiel. I was really moved by that quality of the Lotus Seminar, and I thought that that might be because it was sponsored by a religious group, Rissho Kosei-kai, and that while they are scholars, many of them are also practitioners. I thought perhaps that’s why it had more of a quality of earnest and genuine communication.

Despite the complex nature of much of the discussion, dealing with ancient texts, abstract philosophical themes, and academic work based on highly sophisticated research methodologies, there was a constant feeling of inclusivity and mutual respect that perfumed the days to come. Many of the participants, in particular Mark Blum, held that the lovely mood of the seminar also derived greatly from the modest and friendly atmosphere created by Miriam Levering, professor emerita of the University of Tennessee and current international advisor to Rissho Kosei-kai, who oversaw the organizing and running of the seminar.

Professor Strong was the first to introduce his research paper, which, along with all the other papers, the participants had read in advance in order that the time might be more efficiently spent in discussion rather than in listening to long recitations.

Strong’s article touched on an interesting yet not widely focused-on aspect of the Buddhist dialogue, namely that of the Buddha’s *own* personal sufferings. Although suffering is the first of the Four Noble Truths, and arguably the central aspect of the entire Buddhist tradition, little focus is placed on the actual physical sufferings of the Buddha and the significant role these play in the wider context of the thought system that grew out of his teachings. Strong divided the various explanations given in the scriptures for the Buddha’s sufferings into four categories, ranging from a scriptural view that the Buddha’s sufferings were entirely real, in a physical sense, through to a stance that his sufferings were merely an illusory *upayaic* tool that he provisionally used in order to guide his followers. Strong concluded by pointing out that although one of the central themes of the Lotus Sutra is that of *upaya*, or “expedient means,” little mention is made of the Buddha’s own sufferings unless one views the Buddha’s death as symbolic of all of his combined sufferings.

Each presenter at the seminar was assigned an official responder, and in this case Dr. Melissa Curley raised some interesting points in regard to the Buddha’s sufferings as expedient means and pointed out that it is regular people, rather than the Buddha himself, that appear to do the lion’s share

of suffering. Strong counterresponded that the exacerbated sufferings of regular people is due to their own mental attachment to suffering, which functions to double the effects of their pain.

In the discussion that followed, Professor Mark Unno, pointing to a section from Dr. Hiroshi Niwano's paper, emphasized the usefulness of laying karmic blame on oneself as a religious tool but how one must be careful in applying this tool to others. Unno also offered the deeper philosophical question, "If mind and body are not separate in the world of Buddhism, can one say that there are both karmic and nonkarmically related events?"

Professor Strong, as a leading authority on Indian Buddhism and on the life of the Buddha in particular, gave a stable grounding to the discussion and went on to be a touchstone of information and insight for the remainder of the seminar.

"Living in Suffering: In Bernard Lonergan and in the Lotus Sutra"

Hiroshi Munehiro Niwano, Rissho Koseikai Gakurin Seminary, Tokyo

Dr. Niwano's paper discussed the concept of suffering and explored avenues toward an escape from such through the philosophy of Bernard Lonergan (1904–84) and the Lotus Sutra. From the point of view of Lonergan, the Judeo-Christian God does not cause evil but he permits it in order that, through their suffering of this evil, human beings may perceive the glory of God. Human consciousness is organized into various levels, the most advanced of which allows the subjects to perceive that "the creative fiat cannot but be good," elevating subjects to a consciousness according to which they exist in a state of being-in-love with God and are able to transcend their suffering. On the other hand, in the case of the Lotus Sutra, individuals experience suffering because of their greed and desire

to possess objects, wealth, and status. By relinquishing one's ownership of these objects and by seeking the One Path of the Bodhisattva of doing good solely for the sake of universal salvation with no thought of one's own spiritual advancement, one is able to understand that suffering is a gift from the Buddha that one may use in order to advance toward one's goal of saving all of existence. The gift of suffering may be interpreted as a sort of "white lie" that leads one out of delusion despite its surface reality of negativity. Coming to an understanding of the ultimately empty nature of suffering is encouraged by the Buddha's "gift" of additional suffering that individuals may make use of in advancing their spiritual well-being. Niwano was careful to point out, though, that when one is deep inside suffering, this great truth may be too profound and painful to comprehend, and that in order to help others, one need not pass this truth on to them but rather should silently stand by with those that are searching for the way.

The discussion that followed, opened by official respondent Dr. Yifa, revolved around a consideration of interpretations of the Buddha, on the one hand, and the Judeo-Christian God, on the other, as a parent figure. While Taigen Dan Leighton stated that he viewed the word *God*, in the context of Niwano's paper, as being analogous to the word *dharmakaya*, or "Dharma body," of the Buddhist tradition, Unno commented that while *dharmakaya* appears to be subject to causation, on the other hand it may be interpreted that *dharmakaya* is at the same time *synonymous* with causation. And, as Professor Mark Blum offered, the theory of the Twofold Truths in Buddhism offers a matrix for understanding this paradox.

The concept of "simply standing silently by those who are suffering" that Dr. Niwano offered in the afterword to his paper as a comment on the status of those still suffering in northeastern Japan became a recurring theme of the

seminar and in many ways was symbolic of the camaraderie that the participants felt.

"The Karma of Bodhisattva Devadatta: The Story within the Story, the Sutra within the Sutras"

Mark Unno, University of Oregon, Eugene

Professor Unno's paper described the different accounts of the story of Devadatta and some of the modern analyses of the soteriological significance of the vastly different critiques the sutras give of him. On a connected theme, Unno pointed out the similarities between the Buddhist concept of the period of decline of the Dharma and modern scientists' bleak observations that, in many cases, it appears unlikely that mankind will be able to undo the environmental damage that it has done—if natural causes do not destroy the planet first. This situation in the sciences is, according to Unno, the karma of failing to take positive steps decades ago when human beings had the chance. Unno points out that this issue of karma is complicated when looking at it from a Western perspective, where time is viewed as linear and "real," whereas in the Buddhist tradition it is usually seen as cyclical and illusory. Unno challenges the traditional Western view of "historical fact" and implies that there are great positives to be found in taking a wider view of history—in regard to both the lengths of time and the karmic responsibilities and consequences involved in growth, change, and decay.

Miriam Levering offered the interesting observation that, although there seems to have been a serious decline in terms of compassion and ethics among the worldwide corporate and ruling classes, on an everyday level one can still witness regular people treating each other with love and compassion.

Professor Unno's sharp wit and philosophical insight were an important

part of the seminar and gave the discussions energy and life.

“The Conception of Suffering and Lotus Sutra Faith in Two Stories by Miyazawa Kenji”

Sarah M. Strong, Bates College, Lewiston, Maine

Professor Sarah Strong’s paper pointed out the important role that faith in the Lotus Sutra played in the literature of the poet and storywriter Kenji Miyazawa (1896–1933), while focusing on two of his stories on which the Lotus Sutra had a discernible influence. The first, “The Shining Feet,” describes the journey of two young brothers, first into a world similar to one of the hells described in Buddhist scriptures and then into a world like that described in chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra. The suffering of the children in the earthly realm and the greater suffering in the hell-like realm are explained in the story as deriving from their karma in this or previous lives. An implication is made that an external guiding force leads one of the boys into a Pure Land-like realm and that this force is available to assist us all. In the second story Strong discussed, “The Diamonds of Ten Powers,” a similarly themed story sees two boys visiting a buddha realm-like place in the wooded area of a mountainside. In this story a metaphorical buddha power appears as a jewel-like dew that nourishes the plants but that is unassuming and akin to the nourishing power of manure—reminding the reader that the pure buddha-nature only needs to be noticed in order to bring its glory to light. Strong, having published a translation of “The Shining Feet” as well as a number of other stories by Miyazawa, expertly showed through her paper and the resulting conversation how his style was greatly influenced by Buddhist themes, including those in the Lotus Sutra.

“No Depression in the Pure Land”

Melissa Anne-Marie Curley, University of Iowa, Iowa City

Dr. Curley’s paper discussed the relationship between the *saha* world of suffering and the pure land of the *dharmakaya* as depicted in the Lotus Sutra. The first half of the article focused mainly on Nichiren’s and Daisaku Ikeda’s interpretations and examined the ontological and epistemological ramifications of different sorts of transcendental and immanence-based interpretations. The second half of the paper dealt with modern—in particular nationalistic-leaning Meiji period (1868–1912)—interpretations of the Pure Land with a focus on two of Chigaku Tanaka’s disciples: Masaharu Anesaki and Kenji Miyazawa. Although Tanaka saw Japan as a manifestation of the Pure Land, Anesaki took a slightly less direct approach in understanding Japan as the Pure Land, where the idea of “Japan” did not refer to the country as a nation-state but as a geographical location with a given climate and topography. This ideal, according to Anesaki, will come about through the actions of a “reformer” who will redirect the sufferings of the masses into creating a positive environment with that energy people invest into reacting against their own suffering. The paper concluded with an examination of Miyazawa’s views and showed that while his conception of the Pure Land shares similarities with the conceptions of Anesaki and Tanaka, it suggests a conception of a dreamland-like transnational space rather than one being narrowly defined as Japan, while at the same time being based on Miyazawa’s home of Iwate.

Curley’s paper raised some interesting issues on how one might interpret the Pure Lands found in Buddhist texts. Professors Blum and Unno also discussed the difficulties of strictly defining where and what the Pure Land of the Jodo Shinshu tradition is, noting

that while for many scholar-practitioners of the tradition, the Pure Land is interpreted as being none other than this *saha* world, for many lay practitioners this sort of interpretation may be rather too abstract to be relatable.

“How Doth the Lotus Bloom in Nirvana?: On the Relationship between the Mahaparinirvana and Saddharmapundarika Sutras”

Mark L. Blum, State University of New York at Albany

In his paper Professor Blum discussed the similarities and differences between the Lotus and Nirvana sutras and hypothesized that the relationship between the two might be likened to that of a father-son relationship. Blum argued that Prince Ajatasatru’s relationship with his father, King Bimbisara, might be interpreted as a simile for the way in which the writers of the Nirvana Sutra regarded the Lotus Sutra. In the same way that the son attempts to overtake the father, partially through reverent imitation and partially through criticism/destruction/reconstruction of the father’s authority, the Nirvana Sutra takes the concept of *upaya* as one of its central themes but rejects the incomplete description found in the Lotus Sutra and asserts that Shakyamuni Buddha’s entire supposedly physical existence was actually nothing more than an expression of teaching through expedient means—one-upping the Lotus Sutra, according to which only the Buddha’s death is directly pointed to as an expression of *upaya*. A similar doctrinal relationship between the two sutras may also, according to Blum, reveal itself in the sutras’ treatment of the concept of *puja*, or acts of worship. Blum points out that the Lotus Sutra is one of only a small number of sutras directly referred to by name in the Nirvana Sutra and surmises, because of this and the many linguistic similarities between the two sutras, that the Nirvana Sutra viewed

explained how it originally meant “a wheel that is off center” and offered that perhaps rather than “suffering,” “out of alignment” or some such might better explain the original meaning.

“An Application of the Four Noble Truths in the History of Rissho Kosei-kai: How Has Rissho Kosei-kai Struggled with Human Suffering?”

Michio T. Shinozaki, Rissho Kosei-kai Gakurin Seminary, Tokyo; Chuo Academic Research Institute, Tokyo

the Lotus Sutra as a parent figure that demands respect but that the Nirvana Sutra strove to assert itself as the rightful inheritor of doctrinal authority in its own age.

The respondent, Professor Zhiru Ng, expressed her great interest in the connection between these two sutras and briefly discussed her experiences with ancient Buddhist relics in China that highlight the intimate relationship that existed between them. Ng then went on to question whether or not a Freudian model of thought may have affected Blum’s methodology and argued that a parental relationship may be harder to establish in the context of the time that the two texts were written.

The resulting discussion centered on gender issues in the sutras and focused largely on the story of the enlightenment of the Naga Dragon King’s daughter and the fact that the enlightenment of women in the Buddhist tradition, despite being relatively unexplored in modern research, is a complex issue that still affects practitioners today.

“Suffering in the Tiantai Commentaries on the Lotus Sutra”

Yifa, Woodenfish Project

Dr. Yifa’s paper, while commenting that the theme of suffering does not play as large a role in the Lotus Sutra as it

does in other sutras, went on to point out that it is mentioned briefly in several places, particularly in the Chapter of Metaphor (chapter 3). Through an investigation of Tiantai commentaries on the Lotus Sutra, Yifa provided explanations of several examples of suffering and discussed the many interpretations of the various types and their causes. Special focus was placed on three kinds of suffering: (1) the suffering caused by displeasure, (2) the suffering caused by deterioration, and (3) the suffering caused by change. Yifa went on to show how these three types of suffering are interrelated with other concepts, such as the Twelve-Linked Chain of Dependent Origination. Yifa’s paper also included an afterword outlining some of Taiwan’s contributions to the relief efforts for those affected by the March 11 tsunami in northeastern Japan and opined that the great suffering seen there must be taken as an object of contemplation in order that we might break the illusion of happiness and permanence to work together for a more awakened international community.

Respondent Professor Leighton pointed out that while he agrees with Yifa that the Lotus Sutra is a “happy sutra” with little direct discussion of suffering, it is implied in many places. Leighton also discussed the etymology of the Buddhist term we have come to widely translate as “suffering” and

In his paper Dr. Shinozaki discussed the way in which Rissho Kosei-kai has combined the traditional Japanese veneration of ancestors with the bodhisattva ideals of the Mahayana and the practical concepts of Theravada in order to create a model based on both the Lotus Sutra and the Four Noble Truths that addresses human suffering in a practical manner. According to this model, the Four Noble Truths are arranged in a sort of four-step program according to which adherents may progress from ignorance to self-benefit and then on to other-benefit. Thus, where they originally do not realize the causes of suffering because of their own grasping, they can progress to a stage where they work for the awakening and salvation of all of the people in the world. And by this other-benefiting, they transfer the merit of their good deeds on to their parents, ancestors, and the Buddha.

Sarah Strong, responding to Shinozaki’s paper, led a discussion on modern Japanese interpretations of karmic responsibility and the effects that ancestor worship is supposed to have on the karma of their living descendants. Shinozaki went on to explain that one may see ancestor worship as a sort of expedient means that allows practitioners to remove the focus on themselves and move toward a more altruistic lifestyle, which in turn will positively affect the karma of the practitioners themselves.

“Bodhisattva Joy amid the Lotus Sutra ‘Evil Age’: Nichiren and Joanna Macy”

Taigen Dan Leighton, Ancient Dragon Zen Gate, Chicago; Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California

Professor Leighton, in his paper, discussed the Lotus Sutra’s forecast of a “future evil age” and bodhisattvic responses through the comparative lens of the work of Joanna Macy and the thought of Nichiren. Leighton suggested that there is ample evidence to support the idea of our present age being an “evil” age, or at least a time of serious trouble, pointing to the huge economic disparities manufactured by parasitic megacorporations and the erosion of civil liberties, as well as threats to the climate and environment. Leighton points out, however, that many in the Japanese Kamakura period (1185–1333) felt that theirs was a time of *mappo*, a period of decline, but that this was also used as a motivating factor in Buddhist practice and works of compassion for thinkers such as Nichiren. Leighton pointed out that there was, of course, war and cruelty in Shakyamuni’s time, too, and that taking not a linear but a cyclical perspective of time—one deriving from Buddhist thought and relying on a more interdependent view of the self—might be beneficial in dealing with the many evils one encounters in modern-day life. He showed how this deeper understanding of self also highlights many of the positive aspects of our modern age and how challenging times were energizing as bodhisattvic opportunities for both Nichiren and Macy. The variety of traditional Buddhist temporal perspectives supports Joanna Macy’s work of “reinhabiting time,” including interacting with future generations. One impetus for Macy’s related thinking is the inconceivably long life span of lethal nuclear waste, now poignant as we consider the meltdowns at Fukushima, much worse than Chernobyl, and the ongoing perils of nuclear power.

Respondent Professor Levering oversaw an interesting discussion that led into a questioning of what one might concretely call “evil,” when Leighton pointed out the heavily Judeo-Christian-influenced aspect of this word when used in Western discussion of Buddhist terms. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, evil means to go against the will of God; however, one must be careful in using this word in connection with Buddhism, as its meaning can vary greatly depending on the context in which its equivalents appear.

“Reducing Suffering with Reinterpretation: Modern Struggles with Discriminatory Terms in Japanese Buddhist Sacred Texts”

Jessica L. Main, University of British Columbia, Vancouver

Jessica Main’s paper discussed language present both in scriptures and in the scriptural commentaries by modern and premodern religious thinkers and groups that has come to be considered discriminatory in modern times. It went on to discuss the effects that that language has on both the targets of discrimination and those organizations that are responsible for the distribution of the offending literature. In particular, the paper focused on language in the Pure Land sutras and the Lotus Sutra and the responses from representatives of the Nichiren and Shin Buddhist schools to criticism from groups supporting the rights of leprosy sufferers and the *burakumin* in Japan. The first half of the paper dealt mainly with Ryōon Takeuchi’s impassioned reimagining of words thought to discriminate against “inferior” social classes in Japan in an indirect response to strong criticisms toward the Buddhist establishment from the *burakumin* rights group Zenkoku Suiheisha (National Levelers’ Association). The second half of the paper looked at Nikkyō Niwano’s treatment of the issue of leprosy as seen

in the Lotus Sutra as a sort of karmic justice and showed the weakening of discriminatory language in his work as time progressed. The article concluded by showing (in an interesting viewpoint on the concept of suffering in connection with actual Japanese Buddhist groups) that Buddhist sects are most likely to adapt themselves to alleviate the suffering that they themselves are causing through their own discriminatory practices only when faced with strong and well-organized external pressure.

Jessica Main, along with Dr. Curley, was widely praised for doing scholarly work that is highly relevant in the modern era and that seeks to address real world issues that religious organizations and practitioners face in today’s environment. Respondent Mark Unno pointed out that religious groups, in their response to important issues, in recent times have shifted away from proactivity and that research of this type is valuable not only in an academic sense but also in what it has to offer society in concrete terms.

“Sounds, Suffering, and Salvation in the Lotus Sutra”

Zhiru Ng, Pomona College, Claremont, California

After beginning her presentation—the final one in the seminar—with a moving story of her personal experiences with suffering in her family and its close connection with the sense organ of hearing, Professor Ng introduced her paper, one

that describes the various ways that the name of the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Jpn., Kannon) is represented in China. In her paper she seeks to unravel the implications of the choices made in representing that name on the soteriological techniques employed in seeking liberation for oneself and others. Generally speaking, the name Avalokitesvara had originally meant “the lord who looks down,” but the name used to represent this in Chinese translations of the sutras and in the Chinese commentaries often dealt with the concept of sound. For example, one of the more common renderings of the name in Chinese is “Guanshiyin,” which may be literally interpreted as “one who observes (or contemplates) the world’s sounds.” The paper concludes by suggesting that the name Guanshiyin in China has offered a conduit for an elaboration of a Buddhist theory of sounds and hearing.

Professor Ng ended the seminar perfectly with a presentation that reverberated with all of the participants, symbolically tying together the intellectual, practitioner-related, and human aspects of the universal theme of human suffering that had been the central focus of the previous days’ discussions. I feel that Professor Ng’s genuine warmth touched everyone there.

Visits to Supporters and Affiliates

Following Professor Ng’s presentation on that Friday morning, the participants boarded a bus for the Kawagoe Dharma Center of Rissho Kosei-kai. The participants were greeted like celebrities with joyful applause from the center members and a trail of umbrellas to protect them from the rain. After a faultlessly conducted ceremony and a deeply touching sermon from one of the members on her own path in overcoming personal suffering, the participants were treated to a fabulous meal and stimulating discussion with veteran members of the

center. The meal was prepared by a local chef who is in the process of opening his first restaurant. The participants were all delighted by his skillful use of beautifully fresh local produce. The Dharma center members were very open with their discussion on the philosophical stance of Rissho Kosei-kai as they understand it, and the seminar participants were able not only to enjoy great hospitality but also to learn a great deal about modern everyday lay Buddhist practitioners in Japan. In the afternoon, members from the center were kind enough to share their time in guiding the participants around the beautiful streets of Kawagoe with its “Penny Candy Lane” and charming Edo-style architecture.

On the following day the participants were treated to tours of the Rissho Kosei-kai facilities in Tokyo and of Shinshoji, a Shingon temple in Narita, Chiba Prefecture, where they were allowed access to many areas that are normally off-limits and had the opportunity to ask questions and engage in debate with their hosts. And then, on the last day, Sunday, the majority of the participants made the long flight home, just in time to arrive for work on Monday morning and a return to the suffering of everyday life—only with a heart somewhat lighter than usual.

Reflections

After the conference, Professor Zhiru Ng commented:

I was very deeply touched by Dr. Niwano’s message in regard to the tsunami incident that what people really need in times of trouble is for you to be there—just for your very physical presence. And I think that was also the case for us here at the seminar: all of us were right there, and we felt each other’s genuine contributions and genuine support for one another. In this time of greater global crises, what really matters is

human-to-human support, as well as understanding. We must walk with each other through whatever kind of problems we may face. The seminar was a rich learning experience for me, especially having been able to see the Japanese people’s strength in meeting the troubles that they have encountered thus far and any troubles that are yet to come.

In closing, a heightened awareness of suffering led the founder of Buddhism, Shakyamuni Gautama, to initiate a series of events that would lead to his perfect and complete understanding of the interconnectedness of all humanity. His search for a way to end suffering taught him that the path toward spiritual freedom

was best traversed while anchoring one’s heart in the Three Treasures: the way of the Buddha, the teachings of the Dharma, and the company of the Sangha. Perhaps we, too, could make giving our time and resources to those in need our “way of the Buddha”; we could share our knowledge and information about those in need and make that our spreading of the “teachings of the Dharma”; and, finally, we could join with Dr. Hiroshi Niwano in “simply being there for people”—not a shoulder to cry on, just someone to sit next to or to walk along with—and make that our being in the “company of the Sangha.”

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 20

The Bodhisattva Never Despise

(1)

This is the 109th installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.

INTRODUCTION Before we discuss this chapter, it may deepen our understanding to recall what was said in chapter 4, “Faith Discernment.” At first glance there would appear to be no connection between these two chapters, but when we look carefully at the sutra as a whole and seek what underlies it, we can see how tightly connected they are.

What binds them together is their treatment of the buddha-nature. Dr. Giei Honda, a prominent scholar of the Lotus Sutra, writes: “The term ‘buddha-nature’ does not actually appear in the Lotus Sutra, but the words ‘You . . . are to become buddhas’ in chapter 20, ‘The Bodhisattva Never Despise,’ include the meaning of the passage ‘All living beings are endowed with the buddha-nature’ from the Nirvana Sutra.” Of course, the entire Lotus Sutra teaches the manifestation of the buddha-nature of all human beings, so why is it that Dr. Honda particularly mentions the chapter we are about to deal with? My interpretation is as follows.

Among the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra, the buddha-nature in human beings is clearly set out first in chapter 3, “A Parable,” which says: “Now this triple world / All is my domain; / The living beings in it / All are my sons.” The Parable of the Poor Son in chapter 4, “Faith Discernment,” also preaches the buddha-nature inherent

in people as children of the Buddha. The parable vividly portrays the process through which a man who is poor and servile and who has lost all confidence in life gradually awakens to his own dignity as a result of the boundless compassion of the rich man (the Buddha).

In other words, there is direct communication between the mind of the Buddha and the mind of each living being. As in the conclusion of this parable, the ultimate faith is to possess the assurance that the Buddha and oneself are truly parent and child and are as one. It is precisely because of this assurance that one obtains great and true peace of mind and perfect freedom.

If that is the case, then how can all living beings possess this direct spiritual communication with the Buddha? This is certainly a major concern. When we look at social conditions and the many people around us, we cannot help feeling keenly that this is a problem of major significance. What are we to do? How are we to make the innumerable people who are unaware become enlightened to the truth that they are children of the Buddha? The answer should be obvious. We come to the firm conclusion that this role must be filled by human beings who actually live in this world.

Yes. Living human beings are required. Practitioners

who live and breathe are necessary to act as messengers of the Buddha, to deal with many people, and to bind individuals to the Buddha. It is these practitioners that we call bodhisattvas. Those of us who believe in the teachings of Buddhism must all become bodhisattvas. Unless we do, we do not live up to the Buddha's expectations. The Lotus Sutra emphatically preaches this kind of practice.

It was the Lotus Sutra that gave the believers who had been despised by the Mahayana group as "followers of the two vehicles," shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, the awareness that they were equally children and messengers of the Buddha. It was also this sutra that urged them to participate in a great movement to lead people to the Buddha Way. In this sense, the Lotus Sutra teaches that all believers in the Buddha can be bodhisattvas and help all human beings acquire religious faith.

When it comes to generating a great movement directed at the general public, however, raising profound philosophical principles or imposing difficult practices must be avoided. We ought to boil down these deep principles as far as possible and preach by crystallizing them in teachings that can evoke a response within the hearts of ordinary people. We must also teach others in as simple a way as possible how to practice the teachings so that they will be able to practice them in their daily lives straightforwardly and without hardship.

Seven hundred years ago, when Nichiren, the founder of the sect bearing his name, encouraged ordinary people to chant the *daimoku*, "Namu Myoho Renge-kyo" (I take refuge in the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma), and when Honen, the founder of the Jodo sect, and Shinran, the founder of the Jodo Shin sect, preached that whoever merely intoned the *nembutsu*, "Namu Amida Butsu" (I take refuge in Amitabha Buddha), could be liberated, they were surely motivated by this desire to make the teachings and their practice as basic as possible. This should not be taken to mean that we can perfectly practice the teachings of the Buddha by mere mechanical chanting of the *daimoku* or the *nembutsu*. Even if we were to liberate ourselves from suffering, this sort of practice by itself would certainly not be powerful enough to extend that liberation to others. Indeed, because the present age seeks the liberation of society before that of the individual, and the liberation of all humankind before that of society, such isolated faith, faith without works, is gradually losing significance. One must discern teachings and practices that are relevant to this day and age.

If we boil down the philosophical principles of the Buddha's teachings to their absolute essence, what is left? We are left with the truth that all living beings are endowed with the buddha-nature. How can anyone and everyone act upon this

truth in daily life? Fix your eyes upon the buddha-nature within yourself and revere the buddha-nature within others.

Even if we leave the defilements alone, so long as we keep our gaze upon the buddha-nature inherent in us, the defilements will be naturally transformed into energy for goodness. For lay people who lead ordinary lives, it is close to impossible, no matter how great their efforts, to remove the defilements. The more conscious we become of trying to suppress these defilements, the more preoccupied with them we become, resulting in poor mental health. Rather than allow that to happen, it is more proper and also easier to set defilements outside our consciousness and focus solely on our buddha-nature and refining it.

The same is true of our approach to other people. Certainly one way to improve the world is to point out the evil in others and subdue it (the forceful means), but this is a secondary skillful means and is not the royal road of Mahayana.

When one sees evil in others and argues against it, unless one is possessed of considerable virtue, one's own consciousness focuses on evil. Because of this, the flames of the asuras (combateness) blaze forth in the mind, and feelings become confused. Even if things do not go this far, there is still within most people a tendency to look down on others or to feel superior—what we refer to as arrogance. They think, "I am enlightened, but those fellows are no good." The result is actually a diminishing of character. Moreover, unless the other people have considerable character, they will not be pleased at having their faults pointed out. Even if they are able to grasp the fact of their faults rationally, they will resist it emotionally. Because of this emotional resistance, even though the correct path is shown to them and they know it is correct, they will turn away from it. This is something that can occur repeatedly in every aspect of life.

When, however, others overlook our outward faults and point out the goodness within us, showing proper respect for our goodness, we naturally begin to feel as if we ought to reexamine ourselves. At times we may mistake what others say as flattery, but deep in our hearts we will be pleased. Such a feeling is natural. Before we know it, we will feel that we are not a complete loss, after all. This is the beginning of our awakening to our buddha-nature.

Chapter 4, "Faith Discernment," teaches the process of awakening to the buddha-nature within each of us. But in actual fact, it is impossible by that alone to save all the people in the world and turn this world into a pleasant land. It is simply not possible for the Buddha Way to be perfected in this world without people who actively reveal this buddha-nature and lead others to become aware of it. The Bodhisattva Never Despise, the subject of this chapter, is just such a person. Please keep this in mind as you read this chapter.

It is not supposed that all the disciples who listened to the Buddha's preaching in chapter 19, "The Merits of the Preacher," understood the true meaning of his encouragement and admonition. Some of them may have grown discouraged, thinking, "We cannot possibly practice all the teachings of the Lotus Sutra perfectly." Others may well have become complacent, thinking, "We can obtain merit if we simply follow the five practices of teachers of the Dharma." Still others may have momentarily felt conceited, thinking, "Unlike the followers of the two vehicles, shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, we bodhisattvas will possess this kind of supernatural power."

All the Buddha's sermons are perfect and leave nothing to be desired. Whenever he perceives the slightest delusion in the minds of his disciples, he offers them instruction sufficient to lead them to Perfect Enlightenment. He is doing the same in the preaching of this chapter. Up to this point he has preached in detail the right attitude of one who practices the teachings, the way to practice them in everyday life, and the various merits of those practices. Here he suddenly changes his approach and begins to preach just one fundamental path.

Let us now turn to the text itself.

TEXT At that time the Buddha addressed the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva Great Power Obtained: "Now you should know that if bhikshus, bhikshunis, upasakas, and upasikas keep the Dharma Flower Sutra, and if anyone curses, abuses, and slanders them, he will receive such great punishment as before announced;

COMMENTARY *The Bodhisattva-Mahasattva Great Power Obtained.* This bodhisattva is called Mahasthamaprabhata in Sanskrit. As one of the attendants of Amitabha Buddha—the other being the great bodhisattva Kannon (Kwan-yin, or Avalokiteshvara)—this great bodhisattva is quite familiar to us.

- **Abuses.** The Chinese word translated as "abuses" is written with two characters: *ma*, meaning "directly speaking ill of a person," and *li*, meaning "insinuating" or "making cutting remarks."

- **He will receive such great punishment.** As already explained (see the May/June 1994, November/December 1998, and July/August 2001 issues of *Dharma World*), this is the principle that one's sins rebound on oneself as retribution. Also in chapter 16, "Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata," the Buddha preaches, "All those sinful beings, / By reason of their evil karma, / Throughout asamkhyeya kalpas, / Hear not the name of the Precious Three." Later in chapter 20, we will read: "For two hundred kotis of kalpas they [the four groups—bhikshus, bhikshunis,

upasakas, and upasikas] never met a buddha, never heard the Dharma, never saw a samgha, and for a thousand kalpas underwent great sufferings in the Avici hell," so we will deal with this in detail at that juncture.

- **As before announced.** This refers to the explanation of the retribution for the fourteen types of slandering the Dharma, found toward the end of chapter 3, "A Parable."

TEXT but those who attain merits such as those previously announced, their eyes, ears, noses, tongues, bodies, and thoughts will be clear and pure.

COMMENTARY *Those who attain merits.* At first we may be baffled by the intended referent, since the first half of the sentence refers to punishment, but the Buddha means those practitioners of the Lotus Sutra who obtain merits.

- **As those previously announced.** This refers to chapter 19, "The Merits of the Preacher."

TEXT "Great Power Obtained! In a past period of olden times, infinite, boundless, inconceivable, and asamkhyeya kalpas ago, there was a buddha named King of Majestic Voice Tathagata, Worshipful, All Wise, Perfectly Enlightened in Conduct, Well Departed, Understander of the World, Peerless Leader, Controller, Teacher of Gods and Men, Buddha, World-honored One, whose kalpa was named Free from Decline and his domain All Complete. That buddha, King of Majestic Voice, in that world preached to gods, men, and asuras. To those who sought to be shravakas he preached response to the Dharma of the Four Noble Truths for escape from birth, old age, disease, and death, [leading] finally to nirvana; to those who sought to be pratyekabuddhas he preached response to the Dharma of the Twelve Causes and Conditions; to bodhisattvas he by means of Perfect Enlightenment preached response to the Six Paramitas for the perfecting of Buddha wisdom.

COMMENTARY *Shravakas.* This refers to those who are endeavoring to eliminate all delusions and achieve peace of mind by hearing all of the Buddha's teachings and those who have already done this.

- **The Four Noble Truths.** See the March/April 1997 issue of *Dharma World*.

- **Pratyekabuddhas.** This refers to those who are seeking enlightenment through meditation and practice of the teachings for themselves or those who have already done this.

- **The Twelve Causes and Conditions.** See the January/February 2004 issue of *Dharma World*.

- **Bodhisattvas.** This refers to those who seek buddhahood by persevering in their religious practice, acting as the Buddha's messenger by teaching all living beings for the

sake of their liberation. Bodhisattvas are also holy people who have perfected their religious practice and might even be accurately called buddhas.

• *The Six Paramitas*. See the March/April 1994 and January–March 2007 issues of *Dharma World*.

Let us briefly consider why it is that the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths is appropriate for those seeking to become shravakas, why the Dharma of the Twelve Causes and Conditions is appropriate for those seeking to become pratyekabuddhas, and why the Six Paramitas are preached to the bodhisattvas. The first of the Four Noble Truths is the truth of suffering, which concludes that human life is marked by suffering. This is the teaching that human beings are subject to the four fundamental sufferings of birth, old age, disease, and death; the three sufferings caused by emotional desires and wants, represented by contact with that which we hate, separation from that which we love, and failure to get what we want; and finally the eighth suffering of instinctively clinging to the five aggregates (all the physical and mental elements of human beings).

Next we are taught that once we awaken to the fact that human life is marked by suffering, we should search for the cause of that suffering and reflect upon our actions. If we do so, we will inevitably discover that suffering is based on greed. This is the truth of the cause of suffering. The Buddha then preaches that if we abandon greed, we will be liberated from it, and suffering will be naturally extinguished. This is the truth of the extinction of suffering. He then preaches the Eightfold Path as a concrete way of extinguishing suffering through right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. This is the truth of the way to the extinction of suffering.

If we ponder the meaning of the Four Noble Truths, we perceive that they truly constitute a complete teaching for eliminating delusions, deliverance from suffering, and self-perfection. As a consequence, we must certainly say that it is an appropriate doctrine for those who seek to become shravakas.

The teaching of the Dharma of the Twelve Causes and Conditions delves much deeper into the cause of suffering. This teaching describes in minute detail precisely what causes suffering as well as the process by which it develops and grows, and concludes that the source of all delusions and suffering is fundamental ignorance. The stages of an individual's life from conception to death perfectly match the twelve stages of the Dharma of the Twelve Causes and Conditions.

The doctrine of the Four Noble Truths primarily teaches how to rid the conscious mind of delusions and how one is delivered from suffering. But there is another, larger

consciousness (the subconscious), and until one cleanses and purifies it deeply, one cannot speak of true liberation. How then should one cleanse and purify the mind? It is impossible to eradicate fundamental ignorance through intellectual comprehension of the truth and an effort of will alone. Inevitably, one must concentrate the mind deeply and free it from the physical constraints of the body (which has form), finally reaching a state of nonperception. This state is called “nonself,” and unless one attains such selflessness, one will be unable to dispel fundamental ignorance.

Pratyekabuddhas are those who attempt to attain liberation by means of their own meditation and practice. Practice here refers primarily to *zazen*, or seated meditation. This seated meditation is practice for attaining selflessness. Its great purpose is to awaken to the buddha-nature that is one's precious true nature by achieving selflessness. Some people misunderstand this and practice seated meditation for a secondary kind of enlightenment or fall into the arrogance called “fake Zen.” Pursuing enlightenment through one's own practice carries major risks that one will become sidetracked. Therefore, for such people it is, as one might expect, necessary to have fundamental guidance. I believe that this is why the Buddha taught the Dharma of the Twelve Causes and Conditions for the pratyekabuddhas.

The shravakas and pratyekabuddhas pursue self-perfection and liberation from suffering. These aspirations and the efforts to realize them are splendid. Yet when it comes to the question of whether all people on earth can attain this state, the answer must be no. Supposing that it were possible, we confront a major contradiction when we consider the world as it would become. We cannot avoid doubts about the steady and vigorous development of the world if indeed everyone were to reduce all their desires and ambition to a minimum, achieving liberation from suffering, and seemingly attaining enlightenment.

Human beings have various instinctive desires. In that these desires are instinctive, they are entirely natural and cannot be judged to be good or bad. Therefore, the Buddha does not preach the extinguishing of even these desires. What is evil is insatiable greed, which swells that desire to selfish ends. This is what the Buddha indicates is the source of human suffering. Still, it is quite difficult to distinguish whether one's own desires are natural or have crossed the line into insatiable greed. That is why the Buddha teaches those practitioners who have renounced secular life, like the shravakas and the pratyekabuddhas, to reduce desire to a minimum. This may be said to be the teaching of Hinayana. A handful of practitioners who abandon the transitory world will thus be saved, but it is impossible to demand this of the ordinary people making up the vast majority of the human race. It is an unnatural demand that would halt

social activities and impede the steady and vigorous development of humankind.

Inevitably there must be teachings for a way of life that is progressive and developmental for all humankind, both laity and clergy. This is the Mahayana teaching. The quintessence of Mahayana teaching is the Lotus Sutra. To transmit that correct way of living to all humanity, as I have said before, requires a large number of living people who can act. Bodhisattvas are necessary. Because there are not enough bodhisattvas among the clergy, who are specialists in religion, to complete this great undertaking, it is essential that large numbers of lay people also become bodhisattvas. As with “the merits of the fiftieth person who in turn hears the Lotus Sutra and accepts it with joy,” expounded in chapter 18, “The Merits of Joyful Acceptance,” a person who has heard the teaching becomes a minor bodhisattva and must communicate that to others. The most important thing for such bodhisattvas is the spirit of loving and benefiting others, and the practical action that springs from that spirit. This action is called “donation.”

Because the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas are practitioners who have left the secular world and are a kind of elite, it is fine for them to start right out studying and practicing the virtues of right view, right thought, right speech, and so on, or to commence with such practices as philosophical contemplation and concentration. Bodhisattvas, however, live ordinary lives, and because their main aim is to liberate as many of those around them as possible, and to be liberated together with them, the order of their practices will differ as a matter of course.

These practices begin with action to benefit others in the spirit of love (donation). While doing this, we must endeavor to live correctly among others (keeping the precepts). In daily life and in disseminating the teachings, we will inevitably experience various advantages and disadvantages and both praise and blame. We must cultivate our minds so that our feelings will not be disturbed by those things (perseverance). We should have full understanding of our mission and endeavor to devote ourselves to it (assiduity). At the same time we should separate from the small self, awaken to the buddha-nature that is our true nature, and practice so that we can enter the realm of the concentrated mind wherein we are one with the Original Buddha (meditation). Through the practice of these five merits of the way of the bodhisattva, we master true wisdom as human beings (wisdom). These are the Six Paramitas.

When we compare the Six Paramitas with the doctrines of the Four Noble Truths (including the Eightfold Path) and the Twelve Causes and Conditions, we find that the five paramitas of keeping the precepts, perseverance,

assiduity, meditation, and wisdom are included in all of them although the words used to describe them may differ. Only the meritorious practice of donation is limited to the bodhisattva practice of the Six Paramitas, and it is distinguished by being placed first.

According to research in anthropology, when human beings were still primitive the brain developed the capacity to imagine things. Due to this, emotions developed, and because emotions enabled human beings to consider others, rationality evolved. When we compare the order of those developments with the order of the six merits of bodhisattva practice, commencing with donation (loving and benefiting others) and concluding with wisdom, we see how carefully designed the Six Paramitas are as a method of practice for ordinary people.

When we consider that the Buddha was not only a great philosopher but also a superb scientist, psychologist, and sociologist, we are bound to bow to him in awe. Moreover, the fact that the compassionate practice of loving and benefiting others is first among the Six Paramitas is not simply for the reason just stated, that this is the easiest practice for ordinary people. There are two other important reasons.

The ultimate aim of the bodhisattva is to attain buddhahood, and because the Buddha embodies absolute compassion, the practice of compassion must be both the point of departure and the goal for the bodhisattva. Therefore, all practice must be based on and filled with a spirit of compassion. This is the second reason.

The liberation of all humankind and the transformation of the world into the Land of Tranquil Light through the Buddha’s teaching would never be accomplished if we waited for the relief of each individual separately. It is precisely the horizontal connections of love for others and practice that benefits others, connecting everyone in an infinite web, that make it possible. As a result, accomplishing the ultimate ideal of Buddhism demands the active, dynamic practice of compassionate donation. This is the third reason.

It should now be clear why the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths is appropriate for those seeking to become shravakas, the Dharma of the Twelve Causes and Conditions is appropriate for those seeking to become pratyekabuddhas, and the teaching of the Six Paramitas is appropriate for those seeking to become bodhisattvas.

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.