



Putting One's Mind in Order

by Nichiko Niwano

The Sutra of the Buddha's Bequeathed Teaching, which records the final words of Shakyamuni, contains this passage: "As people with many desires seek much profit, their sufferings are also many." This certainly rings true for us human beings, who often find ourselves in trouble after we try one thing after another, wanting this and wanting that, and become unable to rein in our desires.

In particular, I feel this most keenly when the change in seasons presents the opportunity to tidy up my things. For example, there are newspapers and magazines from which I intended to clip articles, but never got around to doing. Despite that, I am unable to throw them out, and these materials piling up before me give me a new worry. Of course, the underlying feeling is that it would be a shame to let them go to waste, yet to organize my mental space, nothing seems to work better than putting my things in order.

When the educator Nobuzo Mori (1896–1992) visited the study of a man he respected as his lifelong teacher, the only thing he saw in the perfectly organized space was a single book upon the man's desk. By keeping your personal area neat and tidy, and then putting your body and mind in good order, you can concentrate deeply on your studies.

Many people, however, allow their possessions to pile up and are unable to keep them in order. As the accumulation of unnecessary belongings continues, they become a greater burden, both mentally and physically. Such a situation actually becomes the source of bringing suffering upon oneself.

In fact, the following verse of the Sutra of the Buddha's Bequeathed Teaching, which I quoted earlier, says:

"Those who want to be liberated from suffering should contemplate knowing what is enough. The teaching of knowing what is enough is, namely, the place of riches, happiness, security, and peace."

Human beings are incapable of completely getting rid of desire, but when we wholeheartedly strive to know what is enough, our bodies and minds feel lighter.

The Practice of Benefiting Others

In order to set our minds on something and do it, the many wishes filling our thoughts should be condensed into a single one. For us members of Rissho Koseikai, our purpose is to pursue the Way leading to the Buddha's wish, namely, the happiness of others. Therefore, when we are being tossed about by our desires, one method of regaining our mental balance and "knowing what is enough" is to remind ourselves of this wish.

Also, when we are facing complicated problems that seem to have no easy solution, or when we have received a great shock, it is hard to put our thoughts and feelings in order. Upon close examination we will find that in each situation we suffer because things have not turned out as we expected, and when these problems are viewed in light of such truths as the Dharma of dependent origination, we can clearly see what makes us worry and how to free ourselves from suffering and feel happy.

Becoming attached to or obsessed

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with some event confronting us, however, often clouds our eyes to this truth.

The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings says that it can "make one with attachments give rise to the mind of non-attachment" and "make a miserly one give rise to the mind of generosity."

"Attachments" refers to being obsessed with money and personal possessions, and "miserly" of course refers to being stingy and greedy. To remove these delusions, it is important that we make a habit of putting others first and turn our minds toward the practice of how we can benefit others.

Avoiding attachments means being able to rid ourselves of the ties that involve vanity and appearances, and "generosity" of course means being willing to share the things we have for the sake of others. For instance, one small kindness that everyone can undertake is to close the toilet lid so that the next person will feel better about using it. Being mindful every day of the small ways in which we can benefit others and being thoughtful in each of these practices will naturally change the course of our lives toward knowing how much is enough.

Organizing the things around us, and putting our thoughts and feelings in good order, depends only upon our genuine wish to do so. □

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Transforming Greed

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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Greed, Desire, and the Lotus Sutra

by Miriam Levering

The English word greed is usually defined as the passionate desire to possess more than a person or family needs or deserves, especially at the expense of others. We are taught from childhood that we should not take two cupcakes when the hostess has prepared only one per child. Yet we are not taught not to desire.

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Greed. We all know greed is a problem. US citizen Bernie Madoff's successful investment fund attracted wealthy investors. Every year his returns on investment were much larger than those of other funds. In the end it turned out that he was not investing his customers' money at all. Instead, he was running a Ponzi, or pyramid, scheme, paying off investors with money from new investors. While the Ponzi scheme was going strong, he was the toast of New York City and highly admired by others in the finance world. When thousands of his customers lost large sums of money, he became the poster boy of greed.

The temptation to justify our greed is strong: after all, we are only doing what we have to. Modern market-based societies tend to be winner-take-all societies. The most successful athletes, movie and other entertainment stars, musicians, business owners, and CEOs of large corporations all become exceedingly rich. Less successful athletes, entertainers, musicians, and corporate workers often earn very little. Exorbitant salaries, bonuses, and retirement plans provide an almost irresistible incentive to do what is necessary to be among the most successful, the winners. A large percentage

of the top graduates of the best colleges and universities in the United States enter the financial services industry on graduation, an industry in which one produces and sells financial products that offer no value to society. In the financial services industry in the United States, one can be a "winner" almost from the start: earning millions of dollars per year is what new employees feel they have a right to expect. In most industries apart from financial services, hard work is not enough to make one a winner. What else does it take? When what it takes is dishonesty, fraud, slandering others, exploiting others, hiding mistakes, and other dishonorable actions, we call the motive greed.

But perhaps, like me, you do not readily think that greed is your problem. You and I are not among the big winners, the wealthy elite. Our lifestyles are not those of the rich and famous. We pursue our pleasures, but they do not harm others in any obvious way, not in any way we need to notice. We constantly add to our possessions, but we would not call ourselves acquisitive.

Yet greed can infect even those of us who are not trying to be among the biggest winners. Money is certainly one

thing we care about, and for good reason. Money brings with it all the other good things that we want for ourselves and our families: a good education, a good reputation, generosity, access to the arts, good housing, good transportation, good health care, abundant travel, wide knowledge of the world, a good start in life for our children, financial security, and leisure time. We want enough money to make all of those things possible. Wanting those things does not necessarily make one greedy, but all too often our desires come to dominate our decision making, and our lives become unbalanced, distorted, and unhappy.

In US society, and most likely in European societies and Canadian society as well, we are brought up to avoid outright greed. The English word *greed* is usually defined as the passionate desire to possess more than a person or family needs or deserves, especially at the expense of others. We are taught from childhood that we should not take two cupcakes when the hostess has prepared

only one per child. Yet we are not taught not to desire. In English, to desire is simply to want something very much. Our Western culture does not attach a moral judgment to desire. On the contrary, desire in the romantic sense is celebrated in music, art, and literature.

A desire for material possessions and pleasant experiences is encouraged in US culture, and not just through advertising and marketing. Desiring an expensive car or a second home on a lake is a good thing, as it leads to effort to acquire it. That effort, ideally, produces goods that the whole society needs—except increasingly money is “earned” in ways that do not produce goods that the society needs, while “consumers” are encouraged to buy hundreds of useless items. People who have earned wealth and the possessions that go with it are held up as role models. The idea that wealth comes to people who are worthy of it is still strong in America. Desiring money or things is not “greedy” if we, and others, feel we deserve those things.

From a Buddhist perspective, however, the distinction in English between greed and desire is only one of degree. To want passionately is a hindrance to the religious life and a poison to the mind, whether one acquires the object of desire honestly or dishonestly, or

whether one “deserves” the thing wanted or not. Bernie Madoff’s actions are not the only ones that cause suffering. At the end of chapter 3, “A Parable,” of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha says, in Bunno Kato’s translation:

If there are any living beings
Who do not know the source of
suffering,
Deeply attached to the cause of
suffering,
And unable to forsake it even for
a moment,
[The Buddha] for the sake of them
Preaches the Way [that is, the
Eightfold Path] by tactful meth-
ods, [saying]:
“The cause of all suffering
Is rooted in desire.”
If desire be extinguished,
[Suffering] has no foothold.
(*The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, 101)

The most scholarly English translation of the Chinese, from this same chapter, is by Leon Hurvitz. He also uses the word *desire* in this passage:

If there are persons of slight under-
standing (*bālabuddhayaḥ*),
Profoundly addicted to lust and
desire,

For their sakes
I preach the Truth of Suffering [the
first of the Four Noble Truths],
And the beings rejoice at heart
That they have gained something
they never had before.
The Buddha’s preaching of the Truth
of Suffering
Is reality without falsehood.
If there are beings
Who, not knowing the origin of woe,
Are profoundly addicted to the
causes of woe,
Unable to cast them off even for a
moment,
For their sakes,
By resort to an expedient device, I
preach the Path:
That the origin of all woes
Is desire; which is their basis.
If one extinguishes desire,
They have nothing on which to rest.
(*Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of
the Fine Dharma*, 74–75)

Gene Reeves, in *The Lotus Sutra: A Contemporary Translation of a Buddhist Classic*, translates the last four lines of the same passage as follows:

The cause of all suffering
Is rooted in greed.
If greed is extinguished
There will be no place for suffer-
ing. (130)

Are any of these three translators wrong in choosing the word *desire* or the word *greed*? Both the (in English narrower) word *greed* and the (in English broader) word *desire* convey the Buddha’s point: Wanting, particularly but not only wanting passionately, is the primary cause of suffering. Sufferings depend on greed or desire; without greed or desire they have no basis on which to exist. Most important, they have no basis on which to continue to exist. (In my view, Hurvitz is correct to choose *basis* as a translation of the Chinese term and the Sanskrit term behind it.)

Even desires in which the feeling tone is neutral, desires so subtle that we can hardly detect them, lead to suffering in the same way that greedy desires do. In the Theravada Buddhist commentarial (*abhidhamma*) tradition, when we desire to take the property of another, as Bernie Madoff did, that is clearly called desire and is a breach of the precept against stealing. But every time we delight in something that pleases one of our senses and feel a loss of delight when that stimulus is removed (when we finish our helping of cake, for example) and then replace that stimulus with a new source of delight from perhaps another sense medium (for example, taking a walk in the sunlight on a cool day), we are setting up another cycle of desire, pleasure, suffering, new desire, new pleasure, and new suffering.

Hardly noticing the cycle of pleasure and suffering, we work consciously and unconsciously to keep the cycle going. We crave more pleasant experiences and seek to distance ourselves rapidly from unpleasant ones. That is the definition of conditioning: pleasant experiences condition us to seek them again. We are constantly attracted to things or persons that we think will gratify us. We see such things or persons as better than they are: more completely beautiful, certain to give more pleasure than is realistic to expect.

When our movements toward satisfaction of desires are so rapid and direct that they happen without conscious awareness, as a truly hungry person stuffs food in his or her mouth, we can speak of sticky desire, or “greed”—of being under the control of desires. When we are fixated on a thing or a person we think we need to make us happy, when we believe or hope that that thing is attainable in the future, when we drive forward eagerly to attain it or hate the fact that we cannot attain it, our desires are worthy of the name greed.

The desire worthy of the name greed has been described as like “monkey lime.”

Hunters used a sticky substance called monkey lime to trap monkeys. On that lime the monkey in the wild would put one of its paws, which would stick fast. To get that paw unstuck, the monkey would push at the lime with a second paw, which would also stick fast. First one foot and then the other would be followed by the monkey’s muzzle. When all five were caught, the hunter would claim the monkey and roast it over a fire.

In the Lotus Sutra and other Buddhist writings, the word we usually translate as “greed”—*ton* or *tonyoku* in Japanese, *raga* in Sanskrit, *lobha* or *raga* in Pali texts—is one of a group of words referring to desires. In addition to *ton* we find *yoku*, lust, or sensual desire. This kind of desire is a hindrance to the mental concentration one needs to realize enlightenment.

Further, we have *upadana*, or attachments. Attachments cause suffering and cause us to remain wandering in *samsara*, bound to birth and rebirth. There are four main types of attachments:

- attachment to senses and sense objects
- attachment to views
- attachment to rites and rituals
- attachment to a belief in a permanent self

Likewise, we have “thirst,” or craving. Craving’s three fundamental objects are sense objects, existence, and nonexistence. We want very strongly to continue to exist. But when the pains of existence become intolerable, we want to die.

Next we have stinginess, miserliness (*ken* in Japanese): this is the deep attachment to one’s own possessions that stands in the way of generosity or liberality. Attached in this way, one can never be free of clinging to one’s wealth.

Whenever desires arise and we encourage them in our minds, or we fail to notice them and yet still act on them, the result is suffering. Happiness is the freedom from these desires.

The parable or story of the children playing in a burning house that is the thrust of chapter 3 of the Lotus Sutra is centrally about the Buddha’s use of skillful means to liberate beings from suffering. But it also contains a powerful description of the dangerous realm in which we pursue pleasures without noticing that we are in danger. The house is old, derelict, about to fall in. Like our bodies and minds, it is impermanent. It is filled with dangerous animals, snakes, and insects, “red in tooth and claw.” Even more terrifying, demons infest it. When part of it catches fire, the whole house is soon engulfed in flames in all four directions. And yet the children have no interest in leaving the house.

The dangers of our state are invisible to us because, like the children in the story, we are totally absorbed in seeking pleasure. We ignore urgent warnings. Finally, we are lured out only by the promise of playthings we want even more. As we emerge from the house and ask for the promised playthings, we are still seeking to gratify our desires.

At the end of the story, still in chapter 3, the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni explains why he has taught the Four Noble Truths (Kato’s translation):

If there are any of little wit
Who are deeply attached to desires
and passions,
[The Buddha] for their sake
Preaches the truth of suffering.
All the living with joyful hearts
Attain the unprecedented.
The truth of suffering preached by
the Buddha
Is real without differentiation.
If there are any living beings
Who do not know the source of
suffering,
Deeply attached to the cause of
suffering,
And unable to forsake it even for
a moment,
[The Buddha] for the sake of them

Preaches the Way by tactful methods, [saying]:

“The cause of all suffering
Is rooted in desire.”

If desire be extinguished,
[Suffering] has no foothold.
To annihilate all suffering
Is called the third truth.

For the sake of the truth of extinction
To observe and walk in the Way,
Forsaking all bonds of suffering,
This is called the attaining of emancipation. (101)

What are the signs that one is becoming more nearly free of the sticky and blinding power of desire? A major sign is contentment. American Zen teacher Pat Phelan suggests that one way to diagnose the hold that desires have over us is to look at our state of mind: do we find an underlying quality of dissatisfaction and wanting, or is it characterized by contentment? In either case, she suggests, we should look at the source of it. The underlying state of dissatisfaction is the basis of all suffering.

Dissatisfaction and desires that arise from sense contact and mental fantasy and imagination are such deeply rooted things, rooted in us from past as well as present lives, that extinguishing the hold of desire, the goal of the Buddhist path, is extremely rare. A leap from a life driven by desires to one of liberation is not impossible, but only a few can manage it on their own power. Self-mastery is difficult.

Buddhist sutras and commentaries teach that the best way to begin the path to freedom from desire and suffering is generosity, also called giving or donation. In addition to generosity, the bodhisattva path includes impartiality, seeing beauty and value in everything and everyone, acceptance of whatever happens, and actively working to benefit others. We also have the power to plant other good roots: reciting sutras, seeing and paying homage to buddhas, living in accord with the

precepts, shaping our minds to be like the Buddha's mind, and doing good deeds of all kinds. Like other sutras, the Lotus Sutra itself has inconceivable merit powers that enable one to advance on the path: as the Buddha says in chapter 3 of the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings in Yoshiro Tamura's translation:

“Good sons! Do you want to hear how this sutra [of Innumerable Meanings, but also, by tradition, the Threefold Lotus Sutra itself] has ten inconceivable merit-powers?” The Bodhisattva Great Adornment said: “We heartily want to hear.” The Buddha said: “Good sons! First, this sutra makes the unawakened bodhisattva aspire to buddhahood, makes a merciless one raise the mind of mercy, makes a homicidal one raise the mind of great compassion, makes a jealous one raise the mind of joy, makes an attached one raise the mind of detachment, makes a miserly one raise the mind of donation, makes an arrogant one raise the mind of keeping the commandments, makes an irascible one raise the mind of perseverance, makes an indolent one raise the mind of assiduity, makes a distracted one raise the mind of meditation, makes an ignorant one raise the mind of wisdom, makes one who lacks concern for saving others raise the mind of saving others, makes one who commits the ten evils raise the mind of the ten virtues, makes one who wishes for existence aspire to the mind of nonexistence, makes one who has an inclination toward apostasy build the mind of nonretrogression, makes one who commits defiled acts raise the mind of undefilement, and makes one who suffers delusions raise the mind of detachment. Good sons! This is called the first inconceivable merit-power of this sutra.” (*The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, 19–20)

As Founder Nikkyo Niwano points out most clearly and strongly in his commentary on chapter 21 of the Lotus Sutra in his book *Buddhism for Today*, it is seeing the world and others as not separate from ourselves and not separate from the Buddha that will liberate us from greed. We share the one life of the Buddha; others are one with us. Nothing is really yours or mine. We use what we need as we need it, but it really belongs to all of us. We should treat our possessions and even our body as something we have been given temporarily to take care of and use. We can do this only if we deeply understand that all of us are united in the one life that is given to us from the Buddha. Therein lies liberation from greed.

The Lotus Sutra is written in an imaginative language that invites you to look at your life in a different way. The point is to look at your life. Keep looking at your life, particularly your life in the present moment, as steadily and honestly as you can. What thoughts of desire do you notice? Observe whether you can remain unattached to them, letting them go rather than acting upon them. Do it often. Practice with people and notice and act on the needs of others; we will all be liberated together. To plant good roots you need faith. Practice faith and devotion in the presence of buddhas, through their images when you do not happen to be in the presence of a flesh-and-blood buddha. Arrange your life so that you can help people. Practice contentment and generosity, give often, and fight stinginess by giving away things of which you are unwilling to let go. Act on generous promptings from your buddha-nature. Allow your heart and mind to be affected by the Lotus Sutra by reciting it sincerely: when we read the Lotus Sutra we find ourselves in the presence of the Eternal Buddha. These efforts give us a purpose and a deep joy that lessen the hold of greed. □

Institutionalized Greed

by David R. Loy

Much of our problem with greed today is that to increase corporate profits and keep the economy growing, we are conditioned into finding the meaning of our lives in buying and consuming. In fact, this has become such an essential part of our lives that perhaps it is no exaggeration to talk about consumerism as a new religion.

According to the Pali Canon, Shakyamuni Buddha said little about evil but often referred to the “three unwholesome roots” (also known as the three fires or the three poisons): *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (aggression), and *moha* (delusion). When what we do is motivated by any or all of them (they often work together), we create problems for ourselves as well as for others. This is the Buddhist understanding of karma, which emphasizes the role of intentions. Since a very important part of one’s sense of self is habitual intentions and the habitual actions that follow from them, Buddhism distinguishes between wholesome and unwholesome (*kusala/akusalamula*) tendencies. Negative motivations reinforce the sense of separation between oneself and others. That is why they need to be transformed into their more wholesome and nondual counterparts: greed into generosity, aggression into loving-kindness, and delusion into the wisdom that recognizes our interdependence.

This insight into karma is as true now as it was in the time of the Buddha and presumably always will be. In another way, however, our situation today has

become somewhat different from that of Shakyamuni. We have not only much more powerful technologies but also much more powerful social institutions, which tend to assume a life of their own as new types of collective ego, with their own motivations built into the way they function. Modern institutions have become new forms of the *impersonal*, collective self and are very good at preserving themselves and increasing their power, quite apart from the personal motivations of the individuals who serve them. John Ralston Saul describes this as the “amorality” of modern organizations:

AMORALITY: A quality admired and rewarded in modern organizations, where it is referred to through metaphors such as professionalism and efficiency. . . . Immorality is doing wrong of our own volition. Amorality is doing it because a structure or an organization expects us to do it. Amorality is thus worse than immorality because it involves denying our responsibility and therefore our existence as anything more than an animal. (*The Doubter’s Companion*, 22–23)

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Perhaps this definition is unfair to animals, but we get the point. As history shows, we humans have a tendency to do horrible things to each other, and to the earth, if we believe that someone else is actually responsible for what we do.

That brings us to one of the most important questions for socially engaged Buddhism: do the three poisons also operate institutionally? In other words, have they assumed a structural life of their own? Does our present economic system institutionalize greed, does militarism institutionalize ill will, and do the corporate media institutionalize delusion? If so—and if the Buddha is correct that these three motivations are at the root of our suffering and the suffering we inflict on others—then it is crucial for us to wake up and face the implications. This essay is concerned with the

first of the three: understanding how greed has been institutionalized.

Much of our problem with greed today is that to increase corporate profits and keep the economy growing, we are conditioned into finding the meaning of our lives in buying and consuming. In fact, this has become such an essential part of our lives that perhaps it is no exaggeration to talk about consumerism as a new religion. If religion grounds us by teaching us what is really important about the world and what our role in that world is, consumerism is rapidly becoming the first truly world religion, winning converts more quickly than any other belief system in history, binding all corners of the globe into a worldview and set of values whose religious role we usually overlook because we think of them as secular.

Within economic theory, and within the economic system it promotes, the moral dimension of greed is absent; no distinction is made between genuine needs and the most questionable cravings manufactured by advertising. Today it seems that only traditional religions preserve what is problematic about a human trait that is unsavory at best and unambiguously evil at its worst. Greed is a spiritual problem not only because of the inequitable distribution of the world's wealth that it encourages, or because of its collective effects on the biosphere, but most fundamentally because greed is based on a delusion: the belief that happiness is to be found in this way. Trying to achieve fulfillment by making and spending lots of money amounts to idolatry: that is, a demonic perversion of true religion. This basic insight is consistent with recent sociological, psychological, and economic research into what really makes people happy. Beyond a basic level of sustenance—sufficient food, shelter, and so forth—the most important factor turns out to be the quality of our relationships with other people. The Buddha would not have been surprised.

In short, if consumerism has become our modern religion, it is not a very good one. It works by promising a this-worldly salvation from dissatisfaction that it never quite supplies. It is always the *next* thing we buy that will make us happy.

That suggests a definition of greed: you never have *enough*. If we accept that description, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that corporate consumer capitalism institutionalizes greed in several ways: most obviously, consumers never consume enough, corporations are never profitable enough, and our collective gross national product is never big enough. But why is *more* always *better* if it can never be *enough*?

How does *never enough* become institutionalized? One way to demonstrate the problem is by considering how the stock market works. John Ralston Saul's insight into the "amorality" of modern organizations describes the stock market very well: it tends to function as an ethical "black hole" that dilutes responsibility for the actual consequences of the collective greed that fuels economic growth.

On one side of that hole, millions of mostly anonymous investors seek increasing returns in the form of dividends and higher share prices. That is all

that most investors care about or need to care about—not because investors are bad people but because the way the stock market works does not encourage any other kind of responsibility. In many cases investors do not even know where their money is invested—for example, if it is in mutual funds administered by a manager they do not know and are unlikely ever to meet.

On the other side of that black hole, however, this generalized desire for return on investment translates into an impersonal pressure for profitability and growth, preferably in the short run (in the next quarterly report), a constant challenge for all CEOs. Even if the CEO of a transnational company wants to be socially responsible, he or she is constrained by the expectations of shareholders. If, for example, profits are threatened by his sensitivity to environmental concerns, then he (it is usually a "he") is likely to lose his job. And if that is true for a CEO, who is at the very top of the corporate pyramid, it is even more true for everyone else further down the ladder.

The globalization of corporate capitalism means that this emphasis on profitability and growth is becoming increasingly dominant as the engine of the world's economic activity. Our mother the earth is converted into "resources," and people into "human resources." Everything else, including the biosphere and the quality of life, tends to be subordinated to this anonymous demand for ever-more profit and growth, a goal that can never be satisfied. Other consequences become what economists call "externalities," problems for somebody else to take care of. As Noam Chomsky points out, one such

externality dismissed in market systems is the fate of the species. Systemic risk in the financial system can be remedied by the taxpayer, but no one will come to the rescue if the environment is destroyed. That it

must be destroyed is close to an institutional imperative. Business leaders who conduct propaganda campaigns to convince the public that anthropogenic global warming is a liberal hoax understand full well how great is the threat, but they must maximize short-term profit and market share. . . . If they don't, someone else will. And this vicious cycle could well turn out to be lethal. ("Is the World Too Big to Fail?" at <http://www.tomdispatch.com/archive/175382>)

Who is responsible for this unremitting pressure for growth? That's the point: no one and everyone, because—to say it again—the system has attained a life of its own. We all participate in this process, as workers, employers, consumers, investors, and pensioners, but with little if any personal sense of moral responsibility for what happens. Such awareness has been diffused so completely that it is lost in the impersonal anonymity of the corporate system.

The basic problem derives from the fact that such companies are social constructs. Although "to incorporate" literally means "to gain a body," the body of a corporation is a legal fiction, which means that unlike our physical bodies, it is ungrounded to the earth and to the responsibilities that derive from being part of the earth. A corporation is unable to feel sorrow for what it has done (it may occasionally apologize, but that is public relations, not sorrow). It cannot laugh or cry. It cannot enjoy the world or suffer with it.

Most important, a corporation cannot love. Love implies realizing our interconnectedness with others and living in a way that embodies our concern for their well-being. Love is not an emotion but an engagement with others that includes responsibility for them, which requires us to transcend our own self-interest. Corporations cannot experience such love or live according to it not only because they are immaterial

but also because their primary legal responsibility is to create wealth for their shareholders. It is not that corporations are evil—they do exactly what they are designed to do, according to the way their charters are written. As Henry Demarest Lloyd expressed it in 1894 in *Wealth against Commonwealth*: "We are calling upon [those who wield corporate] power and property, as mankind called upon kings of their day, to be good and kind, wise and sweet, and we are calling in vain. We are asking them not to be what we have made them to be" (517).

One might respond that some corporations (usually smaller ones, often privately owned) take good care of their employees, are concerned about their products and their impact on the environment, and so forth. But the same argument can be made for slavery: there were a few good slaveholders who took good care of their slaves and so on. This does not refute the fact that the institution of slavery is intolerable. "It is intolerable that the most important issues about human livelihood will be decided solely on the basis of profit for transnational corporations" (Herman Daly and John Cobb, *For the Common Good*, 178). And it is just as intolerable that the earth's limited resources are being

allocated according to what is profitable for those corporations.

We cannot solve the problems that corporations keep creating by addressing the conduct of this or that particular example, because the institution itself is the problem. We are faced with the choice between restructuring corporate capitalism in some fundamental way or replacing large corporations with other economic institutions more responsible to the communities in which they function.

Unsurprisingly, traditional Buddhist teachings—the Pali Canon of the Theravada tradition and Mahayana sutras and commentaries—are not very helpful here. Buddhism originated about twenty-five hundred years ago in Iron Age India, and as it spread to different societies, it adapted to a variety of pre-modern economies. There is no simple Buddhist doctrine to be invoked that can give us a clear answer to our present economic predicament. The solutions are not to be found; instead, they must be worked out together—a challenging task but not an insuperable one if men and women of good will work together without the deformations of pressure groups defending special privileges.

If we decide to restructure corporations, the key point is that they have an umbilical cord that binds them to society: to be incorporated they must be chartered by another, more publicly accountable institution: the government. Corporate charters could be required to contain a clause emphasizing that their primary responsibility is not to provide profitable return for a private group of shareholders but to serve the public good. This prescription could be subject to periodic review by a board composed of public citizens as well as government officials. Only a few years ago this idea seemed fanciful, but the more recent economic disasters suggest that it may be an idea whose time has come. □

We Do Not Need to Live Like Rats Fighting for Scraps

by Mark Hulsether

In a society premised on hypercompetition for success and radical insecurity for “failures,” large amounts of stress and suffering are hardwired into the system. It is obvious how this blights the lives of the most vulnerable—homeless military veterans, minimum-wage workers with sick children, people living in unsafe and polluted neighborhoods. But it also causes suffering for the middle class. There is an enormous amount of room for improvement in quality of life”

In their gracious invitation to contribute to this issue, the *Dharma World* editors summarize the premise: that our global economy “sustains itself by constantly fueling consumers’ desires and is based on an economic structure that approves of and even encourages greed, under the guise of the need for economic growth.” (It also uses the guise of enforcing austerity under the rule of implacable economic law.) In this context, “greed has become virtually normal in society as a whole.”

All of this strikes me as true and extremely important. Sadly, I do not claim any special expertise to address the question that emerges: How can we “find antidotes to the poison of greed?” But I will offer some reflections based on many years of studying American religion and society.

A few months ago, driving across the country, I became fed up with radio news reports about Republican politicians who were blocking basic social priorities such as education and health care. They even refused to pay the interest on the debt from wars they had enthusiastically started! And all for a primary goal

of reducing taxes on wealthy people. I wanted to respond, but how?

Of course, I realized that these politicians’ ostensible goal was “freedom” and reducing deficits. They presupposed a variant of trickle-down theory in which growth produced by unregulated capitalism supposedly benefits everyone

in the long run, no matter how much it skews wealth and undermines the social and ecological matrix on which it depends.

Nevertheless, it seemed unlikely that their future vision would prove true, and it is reasonably clear that it severely disadvantages a majority of people—perhaps not every single person in what the Occupy Movement calls the 99 percent, but close enough to make this shorthand serviceable. It also seemed clear that the priorities of these Republicans (and, to be fair, also of many Democrats negotiating with them)—priorities such as wars, prisons, and agricultural subsidies for senators’ home states—were neither being demonized as “government spending”

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nor put on the chopping block. That designation was reserved for benefits important to ordinary people, such as education and health care, which were targeted for privatizing or downsizing to the maximum degree that these politicians could manage. In their vision, people in future generations would be worthy to have quality education only if they could afford private schools, to live without fear of bankruptcy only if they could afford health insurance and had no preexisting conditions, to live in safe neighborhoods only if they could afford a house in a gated community, and so on. They could achieve these things if they worked hard in a worthy career—and if they failed, it was their own fault.

Moreover, the strategy to pay for any remaining public investments was some combination of passing the debt to our children and shifting the burden to the most regressive attainable options, such as payroll and sales taxes, as well as building for-profit prisons, charging fees for government services, privatizing resources such as universities and parklands, and ending deductions for mortgage interest. Such policies would channel more money toward deserving investors to maximize growth.

Thus the ability to take pride in a common good, to imagine collective efforts to address social problems, or to notice a range of experiences that are not reducible to pursuing material advantage—even the ability to conceptualize “need” or “success” as something other than maximizing individual

profit—all disappeared into a logic of individuals’ acting out “human nature” and “economic law” by pursuing their self-interest.

In short: human nature is greed, and greed is good.

Trapped in my car listening to news reports in this vein, I wished that I had enough access to airtime, coupled with enough specialized expertise, to prove something I will state as a hypothesis: If the United States had spent half the resources on conservation and sustainable energy as it did on its wars of choice in Iraq and Afghanistan, the energy it could have saved or produced would have exceeded that of the access to oil it seized through so much money and blood. (Granted, these wars were not fought solely for oil supplies but also to control the access of other countries to Middle Eastern oil in a geopolitical chess game; see David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*.) I wanted to bump conservative demagogues off the air and discuss the benefits we could reap by shifting the emphasis on prisons as a (supposed) disincentive to crime and prioritizing incentives for education and jobs as alternatives. (See Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.) Of course, the term “crime” is a moving target—one riddled with just as many double standards as “government spending.” It looks more like structural white supremacy every day.

Alas, I had no such power and access. All I produced that day was a protest song that few people will likely ever hear,

called “Tax the Bankers and Bail Out the People.” And I fear that this serves all too well as a metaphor for this journal issue. *Dharma World* cannot compete head-to-head with Fox News any more than my song can compete with the conservative American radio commentator Rush Limbaugh and his sponsors.

Moreover, those resources that I do have as a university professor are constrained, first by the time demands of the job (it occupies virtually all of my weekends and deems essays like this one a distraction from real work) and, more important, by the type of person one must become to gain and hold this job in the first place. In my profession, among many others, competition is cut-throat, and this translates into pressure to become a workaholic looking out for number one. One can easily begin by flirting with such careerism as a means to higher ends but get lost along the way and end with a reshaped personality.

I mention these latter points not because I feel underprivileged compared with most people (nor entirely deformed morally) but as one example of a larger problem: in a society premised on hypercompetition for success and radical insecurity for “failures,” large amounts of stress and suffering are hardwired into the system. It is obvious how this blights the lives of the most vulnerable—homeless military veterans, minimum-wage workers with sick children, people living in unsafe and polluted neighborhoods. But it also causes suffering for the middle class. There is an enormous amount of room for

improvement in quality of life and, conversely, a profound poisoning of spirit in our actually existing lives because of a rats-fighting-for-scrap mentalities that is part and parcel of finding good work.

Thus, despite many admonitions to “think positively”—and, of course, much spending on consumer goods—the United States is a notably cruel, heartless, and unhappy society. This is a by-product of a winner-takes-all system with a strong tendency to reward the most ruthless “dogs” and “rats,” while providing a weak social safety net. None of this denies that there is great beauty, energy, and creativity in our culture—and surely some of this is spurred by competition, which is part and parcel of the cruelty. Still, would we be less creative if we simply rewarded creative people rather than threatening “losers” with radical insecurity? Would we be less happy if we divided our aggregate workload so that everyone worked and consumed somewhat less but we had full employment and a strong safety net?

Part of our task is to deepen our understanding of such problems. (I especially recommend David Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism*; Barbara Ehrenreich, *Bait and Switch: the (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream*; and David Loy, “Religion of the Market,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, no. 2 [1997]: 275–90.) But, once again, can we talk about solutions?

Novelist and essayist Marilynne Robinson offers a clue in her response to a Republican governor’s rationale for austerity. He presented this austerity as just and inevitable in light of a deficit based on “decades of indulgence.” But Robinson noted that we had “indulged in two long and costly wars” and embraced many associated homeland security commitments:

“In such matters, securing nuclear sites, for example, it is easy to weigh the cost of what is done against the cost of failing to do it. A sound economics would apply this test in all cases” (“Austerity

as Ideology,” in *When I Was a Child I Read Books*, 49).

In other words, she appeals to basic common sense, whether or not she has the ear of the governor. Looking out for basic needs should be as obvious as fixing one’s roof when it is leaking.

Robinson’s arguments have limited traction in places of power because short-term selfish thinking is hardwired into our system. The pressure of “eat or be eaten”—whether in investment decisions or in career paths—translates into a focus on short-term advantage above all else. Activist and artist Ricardo Levins Morales illustrates this point humorously:

Try convincing your cat to stop hunting birds. It would certainly be in her interest to leave enough birds to reproduce so that there will be birds in the future. You have identified a problem—the decimation of the bird population—which you assume your cat will have an interest in. The cat can immediately see the problem but defines it differently. . . . She must get you to go away so she can get back to killing birds. (“Float Like a Butterfly, Sting Like a Bee: A Political Ecology of Change,” Zspace page, July 9, 2010, accessed via the Portside listserv: <http://www.zcommunications.org/float-like-a-butterfly-sting-like-a-bee-by-ricardo-levins-morales>.)

Similarly, the process of setting socioeconomic priorities in pure capitalism is blind to “need” defined in terms except maximizing the wealth of investors. Within its worldview there can be no upper limit to “enough growth” and no lower limit to what something is “worth.” This is simply determined by what the market will bear.

Yet, as Robinson implies, people within this system do have nontrivial room to maneuver. Economist Julie Nelson argues persuasively that free

market economists and doctrinaire leftists, although they may agree on little else, are both prone to exaggerate how much the market is a perfect machine that inevitably maximizes profit and drives down price. Writing with PhD-level training that fully credentials her to debate head-to-head with the high priests of econometrics, she shows how managers can define *profit* in variable ways and find leeway to sell goods in many forms. She provides a sophisticated rationale for ethical business practices and progressive reforms—with a root image for the economy not as a soulless machine but, rather, as a beating heart (see her *Economics for Humans*). We can orient this heart toward ends other than amassing private wealth.

Levins Morales points to the many resources that corporations presuppose (such as roads and schools) and costs they generate without paying for them directly (such as pollution)—deemed “externalities” if they do not affect short-term profits. He says:

The term “regulation” . . . refers to attempts by civil society to force some of these costs onto the balance sheets of the corporations that generate them. The cost of environmental destruction and of keeping their workforce alive (labor costs) are burdens that corporations go to great lengths to avoid. This is the dirty little secret of capitalism: it’s based on bad math.

Clearly Levins Morales is writing from a standpoint that transcends a “cat’s-eye perspective” on the economy. He is broaching the question of how various stakeholders in our society other than self-interested investors can gain leverage in a tug of war for the ears and arms of our governments, as we collectively set ground rules for the market. Some such stakeholders may try to articulate an overall common good, while others will presuppose greater conflict

and join social movements. Either way, corporate donors are not the only contestants in this tug of war, even if they are the wealthiest.

In Levins Morales's analysis, as in David Harvey's, we must attend to the power of big money as a "gravitational field" structuring the tides of society. We should not be distracted by day-to-day fluctuations of politics (the waves and eddies) or propaganda (the play of light on waves). However, he stresses that swimmers being swept out to sea should not "fight the riptide." They should swim out of the current, parallel to the shore, and let other waves carry them to shore.

According to Levins Morales, we fight a riptide if we emphasize rearguard actions to defend specific privileges against rollbacks in spending. He suggests directly "challeng[ing] the moral vision of the right" with an alternative popular vision, and he begins with "a partial list of core values that reflect the world [he is] fighting for, translated into language that a second grader can understand." Here are some excerpts:

No one gets seconds until everyone has had firsts.
Don't make a mess you can't clean up.
Share.
Don't take stuff that isn't yours.
Everyone gets access to clean water, air, food and shelter.
People should get to make decisions about their lives.
No one is disposable.

Levins Morales notes that "if you asked people you know about running our society along the lines of these principles," most would either agree with you or "wish they could embrace [your position] but don't believe it is possible." This, he says, "is not a bad starting position in an ideological struggle." Of course, he expects bitter conflict with his "gravitational powers," but he has moved slightly out of their riptide and is riding on a different current.

People set priorities all the time, and they do so oriented by their moral sensibilities. True, some people face greater dog-eat-dog pressures than others—especially if they are encouraged in this by families, peers, teachers, employers, entertainers, and so on. But no one is simply a cog in a corporate machine, and nothing more. At many levels of everyday life, one can cultivate *or discourage* a mind-set that says "greed is good" and there is no alternative to it anyway. At each level one can maneuver within the system and debate about its ground rules.

This is a place where people attuned to the compassion of the Buddha or the teachings of Jesus (among other traditions with comparable wisdom) have significant roles to play. Although religions can be part of the problem, they can also countervail it. Hardwired into their traditions, as part of long-standing sensibilities, are teachings about justice, care for the weak, and attention to the common good—teachings that command nontrivial respect in the public sphere.

If religious groups wish to claim a leading place amid a wider constellation of efforts to reimagine our priorities, most of them need to earn this place with a better track record than they have compiled lately. Sadly, religious people are often more invested in individualism than are nonreligious people. Still, however easy it is for religious sensibilities to drown in a stream of consumerism, profound parts of these traditions remain alive and strong. They help to shape the common sense of even the most self-centered Christians and Buddhists, and at minimum they should create some cognitive dissonance for such people. Beyond doubt, it is possible to tap into these traditions as touchstones of vision and resources for change.

Common sense plus the moral legacies of our religious traditions add up to a combined weight that is not trivial. We may not be able to fight a riptide,

but if we can fund a war, then surely we can fund a school. If we can grasp the wisdom of fixing our roof (even if this lowers our short-term bank balance), we can consider the consequences of mass unemployment and poisoning our groundwater. Not only can we rise above the intelligence of Levins Morales's cat, it is possible to be as smart as his second graders in orienting the heart of our economy. If our senators can manage to evade the market's "inexorable" logic when they support government spending in the form of wars, prisons, and security guards at nuclear plants, perhaps we can become equally ingenious in evading this logic to improve our quality of life. We might even become as ingenious in evading "inexorable" market logic in order to improve our quality of life as our senators are when they risk increasing the dread disease of "government regulation" by funding wars, prisons, and security guards at nuclear plants.

It is time to push unapologetically for compassion and common sense in decisions about our economy. There is no reason to feel defensive about this and every reason to go on the offense against a mode of production that systematically reshapes our beautiful world as more, not less, poisoned by greed. □

Wisdom, Greed, and Generosity: Christian and Buddhist Perspectives

by Leo D. Lefebure

Both the Buddhist and Christian traditions have long viewed uncontrolled greed as a deadly poison whose allure arises from ignorance. Both traditions see the promises made by greed as illusory and challenge their followers to true wisdom that nurtures lives of generosity.

The relentless drive to accumulate ever-more material wealth, goods, and services shapes much of contemporary life. Though greed promises to bring lasting happiness, studies have shown that once human needs are met, continually increasing levels of material affluence fail to bring the expected increase in happiness.

Tragically, rampant greed brings great suffering not only to humans but to other forms of life and also damages the physical environment. In many societies, the process of globalization has brought dramatic increases in the level of economic disparity, as the rich amass ever greater fortunes while the poor all too often are forced into increasingly desperate destitution. Even those who already possess fabulous wealth often use dubious or dishonest practices to amass even greater riches in a race that seems to have no limit.

Unbridled greed threatens the entire community of life on earth. At the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1993, physicist Gerald Barney made a dramatic plea to the leaders of the world's religions to bring the resources of their traditions to bear upon this crisis. Both the Buddhist and Christian traditions have long viewed

uncontrolled greed as a deadly poison whose allure arises from ignorance. Both traditions see the promises made by greed as illusory and challenge their followers to true wisdom that nurtures lives of generosity. There are, of course, many important differences between the Buddhist and Christian traditions that would require attention in a longer discussion; in light of the serious crisis facing the world, in this essay I will focus mainly on the areas of convergence.

Biblical Perspectives on Greed and the Quest for Wisdom and Happiness

The Bible views wealth that is honestly earned and responsibly used as a gift from God, promising that those who live in accord with the wisdom God implanted in creation will prosper (Ps. 1:3; Prov. 3:2, 4:1–10). The foolish may believe that they can evade the demands of justice, but in the long run their folly will become apparent (Ps. 1:4–6; Prov. 11:3–11). Amos and other biblical prophets fiercely excoriate the wealthy who cheat the poor in order to live in luxury (Amos 4:1–2, 8:4).

Jesus warns: “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15). To illustrate this point, Jesus tells a parable of a rich farmer who has a successful harvest and decides to build larger barns to store the grain so he will be secure for years to come, thinking to himself, “I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” Jesus comments on the man’s folly: “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God” (Luke 12:19–21).

The Bible views greed as based on the illusion that we can secure our own lives through material possessions. The only lasting treasure comes from love of God and neighbor, as Jesus warns: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:19–21).

Instead of relentless greed, the Bible teaches that generosity brings blessings from God and harmonious relations with other humans. Like the earlier Jewish tradition, Jesus commends almsgiving: “Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to

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borrow from you” (Matt. 5:42). In stark opposition to greed, Jesus reaffirms the traditional Jewish commands to love the Lord God with all one’s heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Mark 12:30–31; Matt. 22:37–40; Luke 10:27–28).

Augustine of Hippo

One of the most influential interpreters of the biblical teachings on wisdom, greed, and generosity was Saint Augustine of Hippo, a bishop and theologian from northern Africa during the late fourth and early fifth centuries CE, who shaped the entire Western Christian tradition with his insights into sin and grace. In his *Confessions*, Augustine reflected deeply upon the mistakes and sins of his own life and upon his conversion through God’s grace, drawing lessons that resonate across centuries, cultures, and religious boundaries. The foundation of Augustine’s theology is faith in the God of Jesus Christ, who creates and redeems the world. While these beliefs differ in many ways from the worldview of Shakyamuni Buddha, the two figures nonetheless share many concerns and values, particularly regarding the search for happiness, the futility of grasping at material wealth, and the wisdom of generosity.

Like Shakyamuni Buddha, Augustine of Hippo believed that all humans seek to be happy and that happiness requires knowledge of the truth (*Confessions* 10.21.30). Again like Shakyamuni, Augustine observed that ignorance

generally prevents humans from living happy lives. He warned that we frequently go astray because we do not know who we really are or what will bring us lasting happiness; thus we grasp at transient realities. Augustine commented: “The happy life is joy based on the truth”; however, many people are not happy “because they are more occupied in other things which make them more wretched” (*Confessions* 10.23.33). Augustine learned from his own experience that a deep-seated ignorance warps our view of what will satisfy us, leading us to grasp at material goods and pleasures. For Augustine, apart from God’s grace, ignorance clouds our minds and makes it impossible for us to see the good or to act in virtuous ways. In the state of sin, our freedom is only that of a prisoner free to walk around a prison cell.

The process of grasping at material goods to make us happy begins when we are very young. Augustine recalled that as a youth, he and his companions stole the fruit from a pear tree not because they really needed it but because of the sheer pleasure in doing in a group what was forbidden (*Confessions* 2.4.9). For Augustine, this is a fundamental mistake in the ordering of goods. He commented on the choice we face:

There is beauty in lovely physical objects, as in gold and silver and all other such things. . . . Yet sin is committed for the sake of all these things and others of this kind when, in consequence of an immoderate urge

towards those things which are at the bottom end of the scale of goods, we abandon the higher and supreme goods, that is you, Lord God, and your truth and your law. These inferior goods have their delights, but not comparable to my God who has made them. It is in him that the just person takes delight. (*Confessions* 2.5.10)

For Augustine, the problem lies not in material realities themselves but in our view of them and our coveting them.

Augustine's mature understanding of greed and generosity is grounded in the belief that God created the entire material world and saw that it is exceedingly good (Gen. 1:31). President Nichiko Niwano of Rissho Kosei-kai expresses an analogous sense of wonder at the gift of life: "An extraordinary power is at work here. We were given life by a power far exceeding human volition. Some call this the power of the Buddha; to others it is the power of God. Human beings, in fact all living things, are given life by the divine grace of God and the Buddha" (*Cultivating the Buddhist Heart*, 49).

However, Augustine noted, we can be tempted to seek our ultimate security and happiness through the possession of material goods. As his life progressed, he vainly sought happiness in many forms, until eventually he acknowledged to God: "Our heart is restless until it rests in you" (*Confessions* 1.1.1). After his conversion, he looked back on his relationship to God: "Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you made" (*Confessions* 10.27.38).

While Shakyamuni Buddha did not teach faith in a transcendent, creating God, he and the entire Buddhist tradition recognized that all things are impermanent and thus unable to give us lasting security and happiness. Indeed, President Niwano identifies transience as the central teaching of the Buddha (*Cultivating the Buddhist Heart*, 16). Augustine personally learned the bitter suffering of impermanence when a dear friend of his died and he was inconsolable (*Confessions* 4.4.9). For both Augustine and the Buddhist tradition, to be wise is to recognize that lasting happiness cannot be based upon transient, changing realities. For both, greed is based on ignorance.

In the Buddhist tradition, there is a fundamental choice that all humans make between craving (*tanha*) and compassion (*karuna*). Shakyamuni Buddha challenged his followers to move from the folly of craving and grasping to the wisdom of universal compassion. Augustine taught that each of us makes one fundamental decision underlying the countless daily choices of our lives. At root, we center our lives either on *caritas*, charity, the self-giving love of God offered in Jesus Christ, or on *cupiditas*, cupidity or covetousness, which is the distorted love that grasps at something other than God in a vain quest for lasting happiness. True charity "binds people together with the knot of unity" (prologue to Augustine's *Teaching Christianity*). Charity is the true Wisdom that is our ultimate home. Charity orders all of our loves and desires toward their ultimate end, which is God: "So all who love their neighbors in the right way ought so to deal with them that they too love God with all their heart, all their soul, all their mind" (*Teaching Christianity* 1.22.21). Charity leads us ever more deeply into the only good that will last forever, which is the love of God.

The Buddha warned that craving leads to immeasurable unnecessary suffering. Augustine warned that cupidity or covetousness promises happiness but in practice drives people apart from each other and from God. In analogous ways, for both Augustine and the Buddhist tradition, greed is a manifestation of covetousness or craving, which proceeds from ignorance of our true good and leads inevitably to suffering. Augustine distinguishes: "This, indeed, is the difference between temporal and eternal things, that something temporal is loved more before it is possessed, but loses its appeal when it comes along; this is because it cannot satisfy the soul, whose true and certain abode is eternity. But anything eternal is loved more fervently when acquired than when just

desired" (*Teaching Christianity* 1.38.42). True wisdom, for Augustine, means to see material goods as ever changing and as unable to secure our lasting happiness. Because they are created by God, they are good in themselves, but they are not ultimate goods. They are to be used on the path of return to God; God alone is to be enjoyed for God's own sake (*Teaching Christianity* 1.3.3–1.5.5). President Niwano likewise warns: "No matter how affluent we may be, no matter how good our health, without knowledge of the Truth and the Dharma there can be no genuine happiness" (*Cultivating the Buddhist Heart*, 88–89).

When we are dominated by greed, we divide other people into those who have what we want and those who do not; we then seek the possessions of those who have them and shun those who do not have what we crave. In contrast, Augustine affirms that Christians should extend compassion and love to all humans without exception, commenting that "anyone is our neighbor to whom the duty of compassion is to be extended when needed. . . . But anybody can see that no exception is made of any to whom the duty of compassion can be denied, when the command is extended even to enemies, with the Lord also telling us, *Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you*" (*Teaching Christianity* 1.30.31). Augustine sets forth the stark challenge: "All people are to be loved equally" (*Teaching Christianity* 1.28.29). Similarly, the Buddhist tradition urges us to have compassion upon all sentient beings without discrimination (*Cultivating the Buddhist Heart*, 168–69).

According to Augustine, the only lasting good that will never disappoint us is the everlasting love of God: "If, however, you cling to [something] and remain fixed in it, placing in it the end of all your joys, then you can be said really and truly to enjoy it. But this should not be done except with that divine Trinity,

that is with the supreme and unchangeable good” (*Teaching Christianity* 1.33.37). For Augustine, the dual love of God and neighbor is the sum total of the message of the Bible: “So if it seems to you that you have understood the divine scriptures, or any part of them, in such a way that by this understanding you do not build up this twin love of God and neighbor, then you have not yet understood them” (*Teaching Christianity* 1.36.40).

Buddhist and Christian Perspectives

While there are many important differences between Buddhist and Christian perspectives, the two traditions can mutually confirm and reinforce each other’s concerns and values in the face of the global crisis of greed and acquisitiveness. Buddhism sees greed as flowing from ignorance and as constituting, together with anger and ignorance, one of the three poisons. Augustine of Hippo similarly saw greed as flowing from a fundamental ignorance of who we are and how we should relate to the material goods of the world. For the Christian tradition, God is goodness itself, the source of all goodness in all other realities. Goodness is diffusive of itself (*bonum diffusivum sui*), and so God’s love overflows in the creation of the world and in the sending of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to redeem and sanctify humankind. Humans are called to imitate the prodigal generosity of God. Jesus urged his followers to give generously because they had received from God’s generous bounty, promising God’s generosity would reciprocate in turn: “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back” (Luke 6:38). Buddhists and Christians can agree that folly leads to greed; wisdom leads to generosity. □

A Path to Heal Our Troubled World

by Kamran Mofid

A fundamental reappraisal of our place in reality is urgently called for in order to break the iron grip of materialism, consumerism, selfishness, greed, and individualism, thus freeing us to lead a life with heart and soul.

*He that seeks the good of the many
seeks in consequence his own good.*

—Saint Thomas Aquinas

We are privileged witnesses of a great paradox: on the one hand there is an unparalleled outburst of innovation in the field of science, technologies, including information technology, transportation, telecommunication, plus the hype of social media and networks, and the forceful emergence of Brazil, Russia, India, and China shaping a new geopolitical world order. On the other hand there is an equally unprecedented and

unparalleled multitude of simultaneous crises (ecological, financial, economic, social, institutional; in pandemics, governance, democracy, capitalism, education, leadership; with corruption, fraud, greed, spiritual and moral crises, and so on).

What we are going through is nothing but a sheer crisis of the spirit, and what we are desperately longing and craving for is meaning and meaningfulness, stability and sustainability, contentment and the common good: a time for spiritual awakening.

In this respect, the following words

and sentiments of a young German executive ring so true: “Now it’s all about productivity, pay, performance, and profit—the four Ps—which are fueled by the three Fs: fear, frustration and failure. Just sometimes I wish that in the midst of these Ps [and Fs], there was some time left for another set of four Fs: families, friends, festivals and fun.”

A fundamental reappraisal of our place in reality is urgently called for in order to break the iron grip of materialism, consumerism, selfishness, greed, and individualism, thus freeing us to lead a life with heart and soul, thus halting the ongoing process of dehumanization in modern, consumerist society, enabling and empowering us to control the immense forces now held in frail human hands.

The current multitude of global crises provides a unique opportunity to chart an alternative to the complicit collusion of central states and free markets that characterizes the liberal political economy today. From this perspective, the proposed shift of focus from a self-interested pursuit of power or wealth (or both at once) to the quest for the common good should open the way for transforming modern economics, economy, business, society, and community.

Change Is Needed and the Time Is Now

Modern economics assumes that human beings are fundamentally self-interested and have no regard for the impact of their

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decisions on others as long as "number one" is cared for. Here it is my firm intention to challenge that assumption.

I wish to argue that economic and business decisions impact many aspects of our lives, while they also raise important moral and ethical concerns that call into question what it is to be a human being. I will argue that decision makers need also to concern themselves with the world of the heart, mind, and spirit (contrary to what is mostly practiced today).

Moreover, I wish to present my thoughts in an easy-to-read and jargon-free style. I see my role as that of a storyteller in a heart-to-heart dialogue and conversation with the reader—nothing less, nothing more. We are facing some major crises. For me, the answers lie in simplicity. No need to complicate matters more. It is all of those impossible-to-understand theories and devices that have brought the neoliberal house of capitalism down, and we need not make the same mistake.

Therefore, it is time to be contemplative and take action for social justice, of which sustainable economics and business for the common good are an essential part.

In all, since the beginning of the financial and economic meltdown in September 2008, many books and articles have been written on why such scandals, frauds, and crashes took place, on what went wrong. They all agree on the role of one vital element: dishonesty fueled by greed. We forget at our own peril that honesty and

greed are essentially spiritual and moral issues and that spirituality and morality are essential to human life, not least the sphere of business, finance, and commerce.

The greed-motivated neoliberal world has spun out of control and, like a headless chicken, is spinning round and round with nowhere to go. So, what is to be done? What should we all do? What can we do? What are the answers and what steps should we take?

Perhaps it is time for us to redefine our values. Should we enact more laws and regulations? Will they be broken again? Will they be ignored again, as they have been in the past? Or is this the time for us to examine our cultural and spiritual norms and the fact that it is not the laws and regulations only that create great banks, businesses, and economies, or great nations. People do.

Should we not begin to regain the basic values of what society is all about? Should there be a difference, as there is now, between the values of finance, business, and economics and those of families and communities? Should there be competition between these values or a convergence? Is it time to discard the market fundamentalism, the false belief that the market knows best, and instead begin to believe that the market was made for human beings—not human beings made to serve the market? Should we equally not discard the false values of modern economics and begin to understand that the only things that have value in themselves are love, beauty, and the pursuit of knowledge?

In short, the neoliberal, free market-based development paradigm—with its message of "greed is good"—has taken a battering, with the continuing and deepening financial market meltdown turning the world into a wasteland.

Like the imaginary clothes created by the two weavers in Hans Christian Andersen's story "The Emperor's New Clothes," neoliberalism's moral-free, spiritless economic system cloaks the world today and has duped and fooled many into avoiding the truth about it, in order to continue plundering the people and the earth. It is a system that uses quasi-scientific theory and language to reinforce and protect the wealth and power of the 1 percent while exploiting and abusing the 99 percent by privatizing the profits for the few and socializing the costs for the masses.

The neoliberal, free market economy of capitalism, with no values but profit maximization and cost minimization, is at the heart of corporate and individual greed and a glaring lack of social justice and concern for the common good, encouraging not legitimate profit but excessive greed, individualism, selfishness, and disregard for the greater good.

The time is now to begin to work for a new paradigm, where collective outcomes are not from individuals pursuing their individual greed but from communities whose individual members work collectively for the common good. This I will call our Promised Land, a land of hope, vision, and inspiration, enabling us all to move from despair to

hope, darkness to light, and competition to cooperation.

To conclude my observation on this topic, we should note that, as has been remarked before, this is precisely what the “crisis of capitalism” is all about. “It is nothing less than the crisis of humanism as a religion being played out in economic life. If freedom is made an absolute, as it is for example in the writings of Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek, such that it is impossible on intellectual grounds to place limits on the exercise of freedom, the result is an economic system shorn of justice; . . . both the injustice and inhumanity of capitalist societies result inevitably from the failure to assert certain absolutes and so place proper limits on the use of freedom” (Brian Griffiths, *Morality and the Market Place: Christian Alternatives to Capitalism and Socialism* [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982], 29).

In summary, although I defend certain positive benefits of a well-controlled, regulated, accountable, and transparent market economy, I also maintain that there can be no civilized marketplace if the economy and business are not value led. I will also argue that the solution to the current socioeconomic global crisis is not technical. It needs to be looked at again in a fresh way that will embrace human values of wisdom, morality, ethics, justice, sympathy, empathy, accountability, responsibility, trust, integrity, cooperation, and the common good.

Here the wise words of R. H. Tawney ring so true: “Modern society is sick through the absence of a moral ideal. . . . The essence of all morality is this: to believe that every human being is of infinite importance, and therefore that no consideration of expediency can justify the oppression of one by another. . . . It is only when we realize that each individual soul is related to a power above other men, that we are able to regard each as an end in itself” (Quoted in Anthony Wright, *R. H.*

Tawney [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987], 19).

All in all, the more I observe, the more it becomes clear to me that people everywhere, all over the world, young and old, are hoping for economics, business, and a way of life that is value-led and people- and nature-centered. They want, once again, to be able to trust. They want to see integrity and respect. They want to see accountability and transparency at all levels. They want to see more equality and justice. They want a fair playing field. They want to see people with high moral compasses lead politics, economics, business, finance, and media, among other things. They want a value-led education and health care system. They want to be in a situation where they are in control of their lives, where they can plan and dream about a better future. They want to be free of the fear of getting old, sick, jobless, and homeless. They want to be free of the pressures of modern life, consumerism, materialism, selfishness, and more. They want to see stronger family values of love, sympathy, empathy, compassion, altruism, cooperation, giving, and sharing. They want more respect for Mother Earth, the environment, and nature. They want to see no more wars of “convenience,” destruction for the sake of future lucrative reconstruction contracts. And they want to see more dialogue of civilizations, religions, and cultures, and more consideration for the common good.

Steps to the Promised Land

Here are steps we can follow to the Promised Land.

1. Begin a journey of self-rediscovery. In order to heal ourselves and Mother Earth and to propose solutions to global crises of business, economics, ecology, education, and more, we must learn, once again, the art of living in a loving

and caring world. We cannot begin this journey without, first and foremost, finding inner peace and contentment ourselves. We should acknowledge that a truly genuine and sustainable world is grounded in what is most valuable in life: love, meaningful relationships, family, friendship, well-being, contentment, freedom, sufficiency, comradeship, volunteerism, altruism, cooperation, kindness, generosity, sympathy, and empathy.

We must reorient economics, business, and the world of education and work toward a truly meaningful and value-based development of human well-being, in balance with the well-being of nature, not simply continue the pursuit of unbridled economic growth, consumerism, and materialism. The world of socially negligent economics and business must change, and only then can we claim that we are genuinely pursuing a wealth-creation model that will provide well-being and a good life for all.

2. Admit that modern economics and neoliberalism have failed us. I wish to suggest that now is the time to acknowledge the failures of current economic models and theories, as well as the narrowness of market fundamentalism. The times demand a revolution in economic thought as well as new ways of teaching economics, business, and management, among others. In many respects this means a return to the soil in which economics was initially born and to moral philosophy amid issues and questions of broad significance involving the fullness of human existence.

To begin this process, I suggest the following step.

3. Begin a journey to wisdom. We should acknowledge that economics and business should be all about human well-being in society and that this cannot be separated from moral, ethical, and spiritual considerations. The idea of an economics that is value-free is totally false. Nothing in life is morally neutral.

outcomes—financial collapse, ecological degradation, lower morals, higher corruption and nepotism, and so on—can you see any alternative but to pursue the common good?

The theological and philosophical origins and sources of the common good are very well documented. The common good is an old idea with newfound vitality in the global public discourse. Its direct lineage includes philosophers, theologians, and statesmen from various ethical traditions. Debates about the common good allow participation by diverse schools of thought and provide a unique opportunity to build the broad political will necessary to meet today's international moral obligations.

For our purpose and intentions, we can define the common good as “widely beneficial outcomes that are never preordained but instead arrived at through mindful leadership and active followership.” These outcomes involve a “regime of mutual gain; a system of policies, programs, laws, rules, and norms that yields widespread benefits at reasonable cost and taps people's deepest interest in their own well-being and that of others” (Barbara C. Crosby and John M. Bryson, *Leadership for the Common Good* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005], 360).

In short, the principle of the common good reminds us that we are all really responsible for each other—we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers—and must work for social conditions that ensure that every person and every group in society is able to meet their needs and realize their potential. It follows that every group in society must take into account the rights and aspirations of other groups and the well-being of the whole human family.

4. *Now is the time for a revolution in economic thought.* Here I am guided by the wisdom of Keynes, who once remarked that the only things that have value in themselves are love, beauty, and the pursuit of knowledge. Therefore, the focus of

economics should be on the benefit and bounty that the economy produces, on how to let this bounty increase and how to share the benefits justly among the people for the common good, removing the obstacles that hinder this process. Above all else, the purpose of the economy is to meet basic human needs as well as provide the means of establishing, maintaining, and nurturing human relationships while dealing justly with future generations (sustainability) and ethically with all life on earth (ecological balance).

Moreover, economic investigation should be accompanied by research into subjects such as anthropology, philosophy, theology, politics, ecology, the environment, and ethics, to give insight into our own human mystery, as no economic theory and no economist can say who we are, where we have come from, or where we are going. All human beings and all species must be respected as part of the web of life and not relegated to narrow short-term economic interests, commodification, or exploitation, as has been the case for the past many long decades.

5. *We must become bridge builders and encourage a dialogue of civilizations.* We must undertake the task of building a bridge between East and West. We must encourage a dialogue of civilizations, cultures, and faiths. We must encourage a multidisciplinary approach to problem solving. Above all, our path must be one of uniting love and intellect. This, in my view, can be a great path of dialogue between East and West and between “the modern” and the indigenous or aboriginal. Pursuing such a dialogue would lead to a more relevant and true economic model, in harmony with the deepest human values.

In addition, the so-called modern world (both East and West) has much to learn from the spiritual and cultural values of the worlds of many indigenous peoples, both past and present. There

In the end, economics cannot be separated from a vision of what it is to be a human being in society. In order to arrive at such understanding, my first recommendation is for us to begin a journey to wisdom, by embodying the core values of the Golden Rule (the ethic of reciprocity): “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” This, in turn, will prompt a journey of discovery, giving life to what many consider to be the most consistent moral teaching throughout history. It should be noted that the Golden Rule can be found in many religions, ethical systems, spiritual traditions, indigenous cultures, and secular philosophies.

Another necessary step in this journey to wisdom, which is complementary to the Golden Rule, is to discover, promote, and live for the common good.

Renewing our faith in the universal character of human values while directing the decision-making path toward the common good must now be at the heart of all we do. Look all around you: after decades of pursuing the values of neoliberalism, such as individualism, selfishness, egotism, greed, consumerism, and materialism, to name but a few, and the subsequent and consequent

exists much wisdom among the indigenous, containing lessons in sharing and equality and justice that can help draw “modern” people into engagement with the deeper realities of their own dominant cultures. Also, people who live close to the earth, who possess an earth-based spirituality, typically view themselves as part of nature, part of the earth, and part of a community of species as well as members of the human community.

Among the indigenous, not only do human beings derive tremendous benefits (physical, psychological, and spiritual) from nature, but they also regard all the elements of nature (people, animals, plants, forest, rocks, and streams) as living beings to be respected, revered, and related to. These are the types of insights the world needs today in order to construct an environmental ethic that will allow us to enable an abundant flourishing of biodiversity on earth not only because we benefit from such diversity but also because it is right and moral.

In all, it is now clear that capitalism for the twenty-first century needs a fundamentally renewed morality to underpin it, urgently requiring a new and more relevant definition of a value-based “bottom line,” to which I turn next.

6. *Now is the time for a new definition of the bottom line.* We should acknowledge that the new bottom line must not be all about economic and monetary targets, profit maximization and cost minimization, but should involve spiritual, social, and environmental consideration as well. When practiced under these values, business is real, viable, sustainable, efficient, and profitable.

Therefore, the new bottom line that we should tell students about now could read as follow: “Corporations; government policies; our educational, legal, and health care practices; every institution, law, social policy, and even our private behavior should be judged ‘rational,’

‘efficient,’ or ‘productive’ not only to the extent that they maximize money and power (the old bottom line) but *also* to the extent that they maximize love and caring, kindness and generosity, and ethical and ecological behavior and contribute to our capacity to respond with awe, wonder, and radical amazement to the grandeur and mystery of the universe and all being” (“Thanksgiving 2009,” the Network of Spiritual Progressiveness, <http://www.spiritualprogressives.org/article.php?story=20091113093240694>).

7. *Now is the time for globalization for the common good.* We must recognize that our economic problems are closely linked to our spiritual problems and vice versa. Moreover, socioeconomic justice, peace, and harmony will come about only when the essential connection between the spiritual and the practical aspects of life is valued. What is necessary for this journey is to discover, promote, and live for the common good.

However, discovering common ties among varying belief systems is hardly the most arduous part of bridging religious, ethnic, and geographical divides. The greater challenge is to apply the ideas of the global common good to practical problems and forge common solutions. Translating the contentions of philosophers and religious scholars into agreement between policymakers and nations is the task of statesmen and citizens, a challenge to which Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative (GCGI) adheres. The organization’s purpose is not simply to talk about the common good or simply to have a dialogue: it is to take action, to make the common good and dialogue work for all of us, benefiting us all.

Guided by the principles of hard work, commitment, volunteerism, and service, and with a great passion for the dialogue of cultures, civilizations, religions, ideas, and visions, the GCGI and the GCGI Annual International

Conference series were founded at an international conference in Oxford in 2002.

What the GCGI seeks to offer—through its scholarly and research program as well as its outreach and dialogue projects—is a vision that positions the quest for economic and social justice, peace, and ecological sustainability within the framework of a spiritual consciousness and a practice of open-heartedness, generosity, and caring for others. All are thus encouraged by this vision and consciousness to serve the common good.

Perhaps GCGI’s greatest accomplishment has been the ability to bring *globalization for the common good* into the common vocabulary and awareness of a greater population, along with initiating the necessary discussion as to its meaning and potential in our personal and collective lives.

In short, at Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative we are grateful to be contributing to that vision of a better world, given the goals and objectives that we have been championing since 2002. For that we are most grateful to all of our friends and supporters that have made this possible.

Ubuntu in the Xhosa Culture Means “I Am because We Are”

I would like to close with a story that illustrates “common good” to perfection: An anthropologist proposed a game to children in an African tribe. He put a basket of fruit near a tree and told the children that whoever got there first would win the sweet fruits. When he told them to run, they all took each other’s hands and ran together, then sat together enjoying their treats. When he asked them why they had run like that, since one of them could have had all the fruits for himself, they said: “*Ubuntu*, how can one of us be happy if all the others are sad?” □

Transforming *Greed*: An Interfaith Common Word

by Martin L. Sinaga

Greed is said to describe a desire to acquire more material goods than necessary for human well-being. Greed is about exceeding the limit of basic human needs for a good life. It is about possessing all of a culture's greatest riches and then exceeding the limits defined by the society itself.

Greed is the main word used today to express people's feeling about the global market. Greed is also considered as the main backdrop in the course of the current economic crisis. We hear that a huge amount of money was transferred as a bonus to a person who is actually responsible for the debt and bankruptcy of his or her corporation. At the same time, we know that inequality of income is at the bottom of this global economic meltdown. We hear then, today, a global outcry against that widening income gap, the 99 percent against the 1 percent.

Greed is said to describe a desire to acquire more material goods than necessary for human well-being. Greed is about exceeding the limit of basic human needs for a good life. It is about possessing all of a culture's greatest riches and then exceeding the limits defined by the society itself.

However, as the crisis itself has widely expanded, greed clearly has not been an individual flaw alone but one that has led to the formation of formidable political and economic structures that enable a few people to seek unlimited material and financial gain. Here we see structural greed operating in our society.

Yet people of faith are living with the advancing of these practices and feel that

their religious values should transform this condition, which is undergirded and measured in monetary terms. They can no longer pretend to live as if they have not actively participated in these structures; the silent acceptance of the status quo will only preserve the unjust structure, which in the long run will crush the faith communities themselves.

This crisis, nevertheless, creates an opportunity for interreligious collaboration to challenge the existing structures of greed by promoting another possible way of living together. The extreme difficulties caused by the global economic crisis, and the continuing worldwide attention to the climate crisis, provide an opportunity for the religious common voice to be heard again.

Christian-Muslim Concern

Historically, one long-standing challenge offered by both Christians and Muslims against greed is their critical position on usury. In the case of Muslims, through their "worldly and spiritual office," Muslims try to protect their community from usury and expect that through this practice, their communities' economies can be sustained and

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even enjoy growth. The root of an Islamic economy lies in its constant criticism of usury (*riba*), which is opposed because of how it tends to exploit the poor. Distress-driven credit is believed to violate the basic tenet of the Islamic faith in what is just. Sharing what Muslims have, that is, gifts (*zakat*), with the weaker members of society becomes a means by which economic sovereignty is protected.

In the modern context, Islamic banking is believed to be the way to mediate this anti-usury (noninterest) principle by promoting a profit-sharing system. The bank is a joint project wherein business partnership is pursued through an agreement on a fair profit to be gained from investments. This is how the investment of the money is controlled. This is also one way to deal with the selfish *homo economicus* and to promote realistic mutual gain.

Similar to this is what a small Christian community of the Rhineland area of Germany proposed as a not-for-profit cooperative institution called a credit union (CU), with the proposal

initiated by the devout, pietistic Lutheran Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen in 1849. The CU seeks to encourage thrift among its members so that the savings they build up can become a fund from which they can borrow. This is important for small businesses seeking to become self-sufficient and wanting to be free from the illegal loan shark, who charges exorbitant rates for credit. The members then enjoy the subsidiary principle—the motive of a CU is to promote the economic and social goals of its members, not profit for the CU itself.

This is actually consistent with the 2009 Vatican document *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth), which advocates solidarity as key in today's economic crisis. It emphasizes the dignity of labor as well as the need to discern and transform the glaring inequalities in economic life. Further, Pope Benedict XVI added that each of us has a vocation to promote interreligious ways of mutually dealing with the crisis. The credit union is a clear example of this call for intercommunal solidarity and growth for the sake of an economy that serves the needs of all while limiting any greedy economic systems.

Buddhist Insights

Lately, in the context of the global economic crisis, voices of the faithful from the Buddhist tradition are being heard again. In March 2009, about six months after the global financial crisis hit the United States and subsequently the rest of the world, the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), an advisory body of the World Council of Churches (WCC), meeting in Matanzas, Cuba, reflected on the crisis. The report of its Working Group on Interreligious Cooperation offers an open plea for an interfaith approach to structural greed and recognizes that religions in general, and Buddhism in particular, have deeply reflected on the question of greed and have significant

wisdom to offer. It acknowledges that Christianity alone does not have the resources to resolve these problems and that it must seek the ethical wisdom of other traditions, in both its analysis and its action. (CCIA, "Report of the March 2009 CCIA Meeting," <http://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/international-affairs/commission-on-international-affairs-policy/report-of-the-march-2009-ccia-meeting.html>.)

Therefore a consultation was held in Thailand in 2010, hosted by the WCC and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), titled "Buddhists and Christians Engaging Structural Greed Today: A Consultation Addressing a Spiritual and Moral Crisis." At the very beginning, the participants sensed that a Buddhist-Christian "common word" (some faith perspectives derived from both Buddhist and Christian teaching which enrich the understanding of the issue of greed as well as inspire the faithful to act in collaboration) should be proposed during the consultation, since they all experience the common economic crisis today.

If something common is to arise for both faiths, then a fruitful dialogue requires that participants await the insights arising from the midst of the dialogue group. At this consultation Buddhists and Christians shared many good and valuable ideas and insights. In the discussions that followed each presentation, consultation participants asked questions, agreeing or disagreeing, and the presenters responded or defended their theses. A discussion will only become a dialogue when new insights that arise from the presenters are observed and grasped by the other consultation attendees. This is not the same as the alternative perspectives that Buddhist and Christian presenters offered, and participants agreed with or argued over, but it is a third option that occurs when participants become aware of the emergence of a new

common word. (See Martin L. Sinaga, ed., *A Common Word: Buddhists and Christians Engage Structural Greed*, 8.)

A Common Word

The Christians present at the above-mentioned consultation generally agreed that the global crisis resulted from greed and that while it had individual manifestations, it was primarily a structural issue. It was, however, acknowledged that according to a strong Christian tradition, greed is considered not so much a structural problem as a personal failing or sin, the remedy for which would be conversion: a genuine confession of sin and reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ.

Many of the Buddhists present at the consultation were of the opinion that greed is primarily the individual's problem. Because of the three poisons, *lobha*, *dosa*, and *tanha* (inadequately translated as "greed, hatred, and delusion"), individuals are unable to overcome their condition of *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness, or suffering). The remedy for this would be to follow Buddhist practices that lead to emancipation. Other Buddhists, particularly those with the perspective of engaged Buddhism, agreed with the Christian participants at the table that structural greed is a reality that urgently needs to be addressed.

The consultation concluded that Buddhists and Christians can no longer ignore current monetary practices and pretend to live as if they had not actively participated in these structures; all are interconnected in this system, and it has created a culture in which there can never be enough. Common words and strategies were then introduced: promoting generosity and cultivating compassion for others and encouraging effective preaching and teaching as well as spiritual practices such as meditation and prayer to motivate Buddhists and Christians toward personal and social transformation.

Counteracting the structural greed embodied in political and economic power structures also requires new strategies. They include instituting antigreed measures such as the development and enforcement of adequate regulation of financial transactions and the establishment of policies that promote the equitable distribution of wealth.

Since market-driven global economies have become harmful to small businesses and devastating to local communities, efforts to create alternate economies at the local level must be encouraged. Four examples of such efforts are identified from around the world: a local exchange and trading system (LETS), in which trading is done in local and regional currencies; cooperative banking; decentralized energy; and localized production and exchange of basic commodities such as water and food. As structural greed also threatens the earth's sustainability, it is urgent to safeguard the "commons" for all people in participatory ways of organizing and managing the earth's resources. Therefore, collective and spiritual powers ought to be enhanced when Buddhists and Christians work together. This will give the people perseverance, release from their egos, compassion for those who suffer, and the inner strength to love and deal nonviolently with those whom they have to oppose.

Common Mammon

In light of this interfaith agreement on a common word transforming greed, one important issue needs to be engaged thoroughly, that is, the meaning and use of money. Apichai Puntasen urges us to analyze what has become the main tool of greed itself, that is, money (see "The World's Crises and the Response to the Crises by Buddhist Economics," in *Buddhist Approach to Economic Crisis*, vol. 4, ed. Dion Oliver Peoples, 1–27). Money as a medium of exchange is not a bad thing, he says, but when it

is seen as "a store of value," and when greed steps in to encourage accumulation, problems arise. His analysis of how money works offers clarity on the question of structural greed. This occurs as money becomes "disembodied" from productive life and is traded on the speculative, global financial markets. The way money is now understood is paired with the idea that consumption will bring life to *sukha* (happiness or ease), but it only brings us closer to *dukkha*, as greed only generates the anxiety to have more (money and cultural goods) for apparently no good reasons. Therefore global effort is needed, according to Puntasen, in changing especially the triad of capitalism-industrialism-consumerism, which is composed of money.

This dominion of money—facilitating greed's reaching cultural

supremacy—has much to do with Karl-Heinz Brodbeck's saying that money is becoming the global power of an illusion (<http://www.khbrodbeck.homepage.t-online.de/illusion.pdf>). Money is now a universalized form of thinking, as money enters the psyche of humans today. With the introduction of money, human beings started to communicate not only by speech but through calculating, in the form of counting nearly everything. According to Brodbeck, this brings money to the level of an illusion: we *accept* money in exchange for performances or products (which means that we believe in its value) and take its unit as a basis for our *calculations*. This cognitive calculus points to the fact that money is based on a *mental process* or, in other words, on a delusion of thought. We handle our relationships with other people by calculating their performances or products in terms of the fictional monetary unit and relate them to it. People are interdependent in producing, but this interdependence is not consciously realized because it is conveyed by monetary calculation. Thus, calculating in money becomes an illusory foundation of more and more social interactions.

This global illusion is so prevalent precisely because most people believe this "mammon." The domination of money can be broken the moment many people stop accepting it, begin to talk about what kind of society they want to live in, and start to act in alternative ways. Therefore religious belief now gets its opportunity to inform people of some other reality than money for care and trust. Any faith tradition that endorses compassion and solidarity should then extend its power so that money can again be confined to its limited function in life. Today we begin to realize that not only our understanding but also the survival of humanity and nature depend on such compassion, solidarity, and mutual participation. □

Issues of Dharma Missions in Different Cultures

by Brook Ziporyn

The author gave a presentation in November 2011 on Rissho Kosei-kai's cross-cultural dissemination of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, at the International Dharma Missions Symposium held at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo. The following essay is based on and amplifies the content of that presentation.

An organization like Rissho Kosei-kai, which endeavors to make Lotus Sutra Buddhism available to people in maximally diverse cultural contexts in all parts of the world, must ask itself this question: How do we distinguish what is essential to this tradition as opposed to what is *upaya* (skillful means), added at one time or another specifically to suit traditional Japanese society and culture? What must remain always present, and what can change in different times and places? This is a question that does not admit of an easy objective answer. The slippery all-inclusiveness of the idea of *upaya* makes anything that is fixed and determinate, anything with definite form, eligible for relegation to the status of *upaya*. Indeed, strictly speaking, in Mahayana thought, *anything* definite is ipso facto *upaya*, conventional truth. In the Lotus Sutra traditions, as interpreted in the light of Tendai (Ch., Tiantai) teachings, however, we do not say that it is *upaya* *merely*: it is not a downgrading of an institution to call it an *upaya*, rather it is a compliment, and in Tendai at least, all *upayas* are themselves also ultimate truth. But it does mean that this particular form is not obligatory

for all presentations of the teaching to all audiences.

This is a matter we can and should all give our opinions on, but none of these opinions can be the final word on the question. My own opinion on this question is as follows:

The essence of the Lotus Sutra is the Buddha's statement in chapter 2, "I teach only bodhisattvas." This means that all who are taught by a buddha are bodhisattvas. Since this statement is itself a teaching of the Buddha, whoever hears or reads or thinks about this statement is being taught by the Buddha. This means that whoever hears or reads this statement is a bodhisattva. Since you have now read this statement, in the previous sentences, you are a bodhisattva.

The teaching of Never Disrespect Bodhisattva, a past incarnation of Shakyamuni Buddha, in chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra spells out the implications of this more completely: to talk to and interact with people as a buddha does is to regard them all as bodhisattvas, which means never to disparage or disrespect them. But this does not mean simply respecting some abstract inner essence hidden within them (for example, their buddha-nature) as opposed

to their ignorant or pointless or wrong present practices and ideas. The latter *are* the buddha-nature itself, and none can be simply "wrong." It means never disrespecting their present activities, their present beliefs, their present proclivities, their present desires, their present practices. As the bodhisattva says in that chapter, "You are all practicing the bodhisattva way, and all will be buddhas."

The first part of this statement is more important than the second. This is the teaching of the One Vehicle (Ekayana): all activities and all beliefs and all mental and physical states, just as they are, can potentially *be seen as* aspects of, parts of, expressions of the One Vehicle, the bodhisattva path that leads to buddhahood, a path that manifests itself in all forms, including the form of its apparent opposites (as in the *shravaka* path, the practices that are disparagingly called the "lesser vehicle," which explicitly denies that it is engaged in the pursuit of bodhisattvahood). All of your idiosyncratic delusions and mistakes and neuroses are themselves *upayas*, which is to say, they are the seeds of buddhahood (*upayas* are the means by which buddhahood is achieved) and at the same time also the expressions of buddhahood (*upayas* are the *content* of a buddha's enlightenment, what he or she is enlightened *about*, and also what a buddha *creates* in order to enlighten all beings). According to the Lotus Sutra, your activity right now, however pathetic and worthless it might appear to you, appears differently

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to a buddha: to a buddha, it is worthy of the highest respect. The Buddha does more than love you: he *respects* you. You too will be a buddha, the teacher and enlightener of all living beings in all worlds; your way of being right now is a new way of being a buddha. The present Buddha can learn from you, just as you can learn from him. He rightfully looks up to you, just as you rightfully look up to him. To be a buddha is to be able to see the way in which every other person is a buddha.

It is in this sense that “the Lotus Sutra is about encounter,” as is often said in Rissho Kosei-kai: it is about dialogue, the meeting of differences that come to recognize themselves in each other, thereby expanding their understanding of what they themselves are. Practically speaking, this means practices must be devised starting from wherever we already are, from our preexisting delusions and desires, and working outward

from them toward the inclusion of all other deeds and values and thoughts, seeing all of them eventually as extensions and versions of that original unenlightened practice, thereby also revealing that itself was always much more than it had originally taken itself to be. It means accepting each thing just as it is because each thing, in being itself, is always also much more than what it appears to be. What had originally appeared to be an unenlightened practice—that is, whatever we are doing and thinking and being right now—turns out in retrospect, because of the ways in which it is capable of expanding and ramifying in its dialogue with other meanings and implications, to have always been a form of enlightenment.

What teachings are temporary *upayas*? In my view: quite a few of the most cherished traditional teachings. For my part, I would be very suspicious of anyone preaching allegiance

to anything for which there are obvious ulterior motives, anything that serves the interests of the people preaching it, and indeed anything that flatters the values of conventional social order generally, which would serve as good advertising for any prospective religious practice in that it would make that religious organization look more acceptable to its potential host societies, offering itself as a kind of internal policing system. This would probably have to include things like family values, unquestioning obedience, hierarchy, authority, patient endurance of wrongs, devotion, hard work, effort, self-denial, discipline, most of the “parental” rhetoric and the safety of group membership as a bulwark against loneliness and insecurity, and the sense of the Buddha or the organization as a personal guide, parent, or companion. To note that these are *upayas* is, again, not a disparagement. But it means that they

may not be assumed as appropriate to every social context and every individual to which the Dharma is preached.

Sometimes this question is posed in terms of the necessary adaptations for a tradition emerging in traditional Asian societies to suit the needs of postindustrial European or North American societies. It is interesting to pose this question abstractly: Assuming that a religion is wanted, what sort of religion would be wanted in those societies nowadays? Here again I can give only my own impressions.

I believe one thing that is sorely needed in these milieus is a religion that resolves the cultural impasse between monotheism and atheism. This would have to be a “middle way” beyond two extremes: (1) the dichotomous either/or of monotheistic “meaning” in all of its guises, rooted in a single authoritative plan or purpose of the universe, with a single commander, a single designer, a single meaning, and (2) a meaningless world. Ironically, it can be argued that both meaning and meaninglessness derive from the same assumption, which is itself ultimately derived from monotheism: the idea that one particular view of the universe trumps all others, that there is such a thing as objectivity. The either/or imposed by this assumption implies that if no one meaning is able to win total acceptance or absolute dominance, be valid in all contexts, or have the power to explain everything and anything, it is ipso facto invalid. We must have either one meaning or significance to all things, one single consistent system, or no meaning at all. The solution to the impasse between meaning and meaningless lies in *infinite meanings*. (The latter term is derived from the text and even the title of the “opening sutra” to the Lotus in the Rissho Kosei-kai tradition, the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings [Muryōgi-kyō].) Not one meaning, not no meaning; infinite meanings. “One meaning” also implies “one purpose,” one common goal,

one shared set of beliefs, one chain of command, everyone agreeing, everyone thinking the same thing, and everyone doing the same thing. This is precisely what top-down forms of authoritarianism are meant to enforce, and it is by appeal to the necessity of this kind of fatuous “unity” that these forms gain their legitimacy. Indeed, the very notion of following any set of rules that are meant to apply universally and necessarily, whether imposed by oneself or by others, requires this commitment to the desirability of a “single meaning,” a single purpose, a single order, a single significance.

The embrace of infinite meanings implies that the means by which the religion of the future would solve the impasse in modern society should not involve the traditional *upayas* listed above, for they are, by chance or because of their creation to answer similar needs, too reminiscent of the single-order cosmos of the authoritative God from which contemporary religion is striving to liberate itself. What is needed is a form of religion that does not appeal to a source of command and authority. No God as planner and creator of the universe. Voluntary endeavor, not coercion. No threats of hell or promises of Heaven. Consequences but not punishment. Errors but not shame. No obedience, no commands, no constraints. No otherworldliness that denies either the senses or the health of bodily life and even legitimate selfishness, for self-centeredness is the source of diversity of goals and diversity of meanings. I see things differently from you because what I want is different from what you want. This must be fostered, not anathematized. To traditional concepts of “unity,” this will sound like a recipe for chaos. The Lotus Sutra, however, has another view of the matter.

It must be remembered that a religion newly introduced to an alien culture will tend to attract those who are dissatisfied with the existing traditional

religions already present in that society but who also perhaps miss the stable sense of meaning that the old structures gave them and that has now vanished. They want the overlap of *two opposite things*: liberation from tradition and existing meanings and access to tradition and meaning. This can be accomplished only by *access to infinite meaning making*, and this is indeed the great strength of the Lotus Sutra, for this is just what it offers. The relevant essence of religion, I would suggest, is not belief in a God or gods, nor belief in compulsory rules or rituals, nor hierarchical chains of command. It is simply in giving *meaning* to everyday life by connecting it to a larger narrative context, which is specifically religious if and only if this larger context is something *beyond and more than* the ordinarily perceived determinations of things as experienced by everyday common sense or accessible to empirical methods and offers solutions to the deepest existential problems, which, by definition, cannot be solved by any amount of empirical information. The Lotus Sutra offers a ceaseless disclosure of new narrative contexts for each of its protagonists, showing them that they are part of a longer story than they initially believed, with an earlier past and a later future: you are not only who you think you are in the context of this brief story, you are also so-and-so from the distant past and such-and-such a buddha of the distant future. The most powerful implication of this teaching is that each event in any person’s life is an incident that forms a part of *infinite stories* and therefore always has infinite meanings. There is indeed something rather magical about the effect of this simple teaching. It means that nothing is exactly what you think it is—and that you yourself are never merely what you think you are. You are always more than anything you could know about yourself. Such a teaching offers liberation from any difficulty—for that difficulty is not what you think

it is; nothing is as you think it is. It is the companion that is with you in every situation—for it is the “more” that is “with” every situation. It provides protection—whatever is threatened is not all there is. It provides guidance—there is always another way to go. It provides inspiration—there is always something more that one can do, more that one is already doing, more than what you’ve already thought of.

It is in this way, I think, that the Lotus Sutra can offer a religion of the future for these societies: its Buddha is not a God, and this difference should be stressed in all Dharma missions in historically monotheistic lands. Phrases from traditional Japanese that link “God and Buddha” must be dropped in this context, for they are fatally misleading. To speak of *divinity* and buddhahood, or *the gods* and buddhas, would be fine. But divinity as such, undistinguished as to singular and plural, is very different from the monotheist God. “Oneness” and “manyness” of meaning is the central issue here. The spurious oneness of monotheism implies a single distinct being who is *not you* and is not anyone else but himself, and must not be confused with the oneness of the Ekayana, which is everyone and every way. As the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai has said clearly enough in his own commentaries, the eternal Buddha is given a personality only provisionally, as a way in which to relate to the eternal “life” of the universe. Life is actually neither personal nor impersonal. What crucially distinguishes it from the monotheistic notion of God is that it is not *one single* personality: it can manifest as infinite personalities, plural. It is not a single meaning, it is not meaninglessness: it is infinite meanings, the infinite meanings of each particular thing, of each person. Each individual has not infinite value but infinite values, infinite meanings, infinite identities, infinite stories. It is not the definite presence of a personality nor the definite

exclusion of personality, it is the capacity to be either personal or impersonal. This is the oneness and eternity of the Eternal Buddha, and its qualitative difference from any possible monotheism must be stressed again and again. No single mind creates the world, and the world has no single purpose or meaning. You yourself are not created by any single mind, not even “your own mind” construed as a single entity, but by infinite minds and infinite mental acts and volitions of all beings throughout endless ages of the past, and it is *these* that constitute the Ekayana. This is the connection to larger narratives (plural!) that make these sorts of meanings (plural!) truly religious and capable of fulfilling the desire for religious meanings. The world is *always more* than it appears to be. It exceeds any conception of it. Your own actions are always more than they appear and exceed any conception of

them. You yourself are more than you appear and exceed any conception of you. Your present activities teem with meanings, are part of infinite narratives stretching back into the infinite past and forward into the infinite future.

What seems crucial is to find a simple way to communicate this, a practice that is easily grasped and easily remembered and that can be deployed at any time and any place. The past successes of Soka Gakkai as a competing but somewhat successful Japanese religion abroad, with points of sharp contrast and yet also some common cultural roots with Rissho Kosei-kai, is worth studying as both a positive and a negative model. I believe that what made Soka Gakkai’s presentation appealing were the following three elements: (1) the association of the Lotus Sutra ideas with a “life force” theory of the universe (a term that is new to Buddhism beginning in the nineteenth century and probably rooted in vitalist movements in the West); (2) the positive assessment of secular and selfish desires and passions as legitimate aspects of religious practice (simply stated, the idea that you could get a new car or more money or a prettier girlfriend by chanting the *daimoku* [“Namu Myoho Renge-kyo”] but that this was at the same time somehow connected to the greater, less selfish and less material ideals of bodhisattvahood and buddhahood), and (3) the *daimoku* as a simple practice, presented as something with mysterious depth and power. What made Soka Gakkai unattractive, and made many people fall away from it, were: hierarchical authoritarianism; tendency to petty schism and dogmatic rigidity; exclusiveness and condemnation of heresy; obsessive attitude toward chanting, which led to addiction and guilt over laxity—and probably many more things as well.

I think what Rissho Kosei-kai can gain from considering this case study is emphasis in its Dharma missions on a modified version of all three of the

attractive elements of the Soka Gakkai approach while avoiding its many pitfalls: (1) The idea of a life force that is not an intelligent designer but expresses itself in all forms of life from within has powerful appeal. It is a good, simple, intuitive way to present the idea of pure energy, pure potential, pure power—something with no one fixed form that, however, can therefore express itself in any and all forms: not meaning, not meaninglessness, but the ability to *make* infinite meanings and values. However, I think the term *life* is better than *life force* and further stresses that this can never be something with a single purpose, direction, or tendency and is not some second thing, a force, *behind* life but is life itself, all life, immanently. (2) Moreover, the idea that material selfish desires are themselves a legitimate motivator and also means that transcend themselves, that lead toward greater, more spiritual, and less selfish accomplishments, is precisely the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, as the children in the burning house (chapter 3) pursue their own specific petty desires and yet thereby attain the great ox cart, or as the poor son (chapter 4) pursues his meager minimum wage and yet thereby attains his original inheritance. (3) The *daimoku* is a powerful vehicle for spreading the Dharma, an easy and attractive shorthand overview of the doctrine that at the same time provides a simple, straightforward practice that can be taken up at any time or place. It allows for a quick shorthand way to contemplate the teachings of the Dharma, as each word in the *daimoku* has a very specific meaning, which is explained in detail in the Tendai (Tiantai) and Nichiren traditions. The Soka Gakkai explanation of the *daimoku*, however, is rooted in a very selective reading of Nichiren's very selective reading of Tendai sources. Soka Gakkai therefore explains *myo* to mean "spirit" and *ho* to mean body or the physical, and *ren* to mean "effect" and *ge* to mean

cause. Finally, it takes *kyo* to mean primarily "sound," that is, the chanting of the *daimoku* itself, which it treats in a somewhat idolatrous way. This is not incorrect, but it is partial. It gives only one small corner of the implication of the *daimoku* as explained in the Tendai traditions. I will here give a more complete explanation, derived from Zhiyi's *Fahuaxuanyi* (*Hokkegenki*):

Myo means the same thing as "inconceivable." This means whatever is beyond what we see, hear, and feel, of course, but more important, it is what is beyond what we *think*. It is not just "spiritual" as opposed to "physical": *determinate* mental events are excluded just as much as palpable physical things. *Myo* means: everything is other than, more than whatever you think it is or whatever you *could* imagine it to be. *Myo* means: This cup is not merely this cup. You are not merely "you"—that is, what you conceive yourself to be, what you imagine yourself to be. Your desire for money is more than what it appears to be, greater than it appears to be, other than it appears to be: it is the bodhisattva path and many more things besides. Even an infinite number of names and descriptions could never exhaust what anything is: this cup, your selfish desires, your suffering. The world is not merely

the world. Everything is more than, other than whatever it seems to be, more than whatever it *can* seem to be.

Ho means the exact opposite: everything appearing exactly as it appears, determinately as this rather than that. *Ho* means: This cup is precisely and merely this cup. My desire for money is my desire for money, you are just you, each thing is "regulated," determined, set, and fixed as what it is, exactly itself and nothing besides. Tendai teaching specifies three types of *ho*, or dharmas: buddhas, sentient beings, and one's own mind. These are all individual things, in their separate ranks and positions.

Ren means the effect of all practices, the "fruit" of practice, namely, buddhahood. It means the ultimate truth, the ultimate reality, final awakening, the perfected state, which is permanent, blissful, and pure.

Ge means the cause, namely all practices, namely the other nine realms besides buddhahood, all of which are causes leading to buddhahood. *Ge* means, in short, *upaya*, the flower that lures us forward with its beauty even though it is not the ultimate fruit. *Ge* is your present state considered as an *upaya* leading toward buddhahood, wrapped in color and desire, in impermanence, pain,

nonself, impurity, but all of these functioning to lure us ever onward.

Note that *renge* is a restatement and expansion of the meaning of *myoho*. *Myo* is *ren*, *ho* is *ge*. The inconceivability of all things is precisely their buddhahood, beyond their appearance as merely finite, conditional suffering, which is their necessary upayic presentation.

Note also that, as the Tendai writings like to point out, the lotus flower is unique in that its fruit and its flower are present simultaneously. Most flowers produce a flower first, which then withers and falls away before the fruit appears. The lotus flower has its fruit wrapped up inside its flower bud, which then opens to reveal the fruit that had been hidden within it all along. The two are copresent from beginning to end, the only difference being between whether the flower is open to reveal the fruit or closed to conceal it. This is the case, according to Tendai, with the cause and the effect, with *upayas* and buddhahood, with delusion and enlightenment. They are always copresent, coexistent, and neither one actually precedes the other. Enlightenment is always present within its “cause,” delusion, which is thus always really *upaya*. Every single event has more than one meaning: it is both delusion and enlightenment.

Kyo means “thread, connection,” and “sound,” but most centrally it means “all-pervasive,” “omnipresent,” which is to say, unconditional. This refers to all the four previous terms: *All* of them are omnipresent, present in all times and places. This means that both inconceivability and conceivability are copresent everywhere, that both cause and effect are copresent everywhere, that both ultimate truth and *upaya* are copresent everywhere without exception. Every single deed, every single person, every single desire, every single experience, is at once beyond conception and yet specifically just this, is at once both buddhahood and the *upaya*

leading toward buddhahood, both delusion and enlightenment, both samsara and nirvana, both ordinary life and the life of the Buddha. This is the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, and it is completely contained in the *daimoku*.

I suggest that the *daimoku* be used as a simple teaching device to be presented to new members of Rissho Kosei-kai.

The *hoza* meeting (a form of group interaction based on the Buddha’s teachings) is another great Rissho Kosei-kai innovation with much promise for development and great potential appeal in the West. Here we see the teachings of “encounter” and “respect” and “infinite meanings” all beautifully realized in a simple social and religious practice. The premise that should be stressed is the idea that every member of the group can and does at times and in certain ways speak for the Buddha, that one’s own personal opinion and biased view is at the same time also the word of the Buddha. We are all bodhisattvas to one another. Hence if we all let fly whatever our own opinion is, however one-sided and unauthorized it may be, together we will be speaking the word of the Buddha. This is a powerful teaching that depends on the “double identity” that is the core of the Lotus Sutra teaching: that one is simultaneously

an “ordinary deluded person” and a “bodhisattva” at every moment. In a *hoza* meeting, although each person may be speaking from limited wisdom and selfish motives and a twisted perspective, once those words leave that person’s mouth and are recontextualized by the framework of the *hoza* meeting, the premise that any word can be the teaching of the Buddha, their meaning changes and expands. At the same time, they also impact the listener in a totally unforeseen way, with deeper meanings than those intended. As the Lotus Sutra says, the Buddha’s words come out of our mouths without our knowing or intending it: “We attain it without even deliberately seeking it” (chapter 4). Or as the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings says, “The words and phrases are the same, but the meaning is different.” This is precisely what happens in *hoza* meetings: someone intends a banal platitude, but it becomes a great revelation to the hearer: the words are the same but the meaning is different.

These are my suggestions for Rissho Kosei-kai missions in different cultures: a religion of infinite meanings; life expressing itself in all forms, encounter, and respect; affirming the infinite values even in secular desires; expressed in practices of *daimoku* and *hoza*. □

Practice and Learning: The Two Ways

by Nikkyo Niwano

In March 1999 an autobiography by 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.

The Manifestation of the Truth did not simply reveal to Rissho Kosei-kai its true focus of devotion but also pointed to a new direction for both members' activities and the structure of the organization. As far as I was concerned, the most urgent issue then was to make sure all members had a thorough knowledge about how to view the focus of devotion.

From the time of the organization's beginning in 1938, the Threefold Lotus Sutra had been the main scripture of our faith. This Lotus Sutra is the essence of all the teachings imparted by Shakyamuni throughout his life. His teachings are based on the truth that this is a world of suffering, that the origin of this suffering is nothing more nor less than our desires, and that by controlling those desires we are liberated from all suffering.

From the time I went to Tokyo, when I was sixteen, seeking to find out how to bring people happiness, I trained with various kinds of groups, learning directional and nine-star divination as well as onomancy, a kind of name interpretation. I also performed austerities such as abstention from the five cereals, giving up everything that had had contact

with fire, and standing in a waterfall [a traditional form of ritual purification] in midwinter on Mount Takao near Tokyo, all the time continuing my regular job. When I served as an assistant master in the Tengu Fudo group, every day I would perform esoteric magico-religious prayer rituals for up to sixty people. At times the results of my incantations were immediately obvious. Most people who

had such success would put it down to their own spiritual power, but for me it only increased my doubts. As far as I was concerned, it was not right to give my all to such uncertain systems, and I increasingly felt they were not for me. Surely somewhere there was an unalterable law that could bring liberation to all. I found this law fully set out in the Lotus Sutra.

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.

When I first met Mr. Sukenobu Arai, the man who became the great teacher in my life, and heard for the first time his lectures on the Lotus Sutra, I was bowled over by the scale of the sutra's teachings and immediately captivated by them. I remember as if it were yesterday how from that time I never failed to go and listen to the lectures of Arai Sensei [Teacher Arai] every day, in all weathers, even on New Year's Day.

My meeting with Arai Sensei came about through a note passed to me by Mrs. Iizuka, a midwife. She had come to the place where I was busily working and handed me a slip of paper, saying, "Human beings cannot live in continual happiness. If something troubling happens, come and visit this address." Exactly a week later, my second daughter, Kyoko, then one year old, fell ill with Japanese sleeping sickness.

Worried sick and at a loss about what to do, I remembered the slip of paper Mrs. Iizuka had given me. I hurried out in the pouring rain to visit the person whose address was written there to beg his help. And so it was that I met Arai Sensei and came in touch with the teachings of the Lotus Sutra for the first time.

A person without any prior contact with Buddhism who develops an interest in its teachings is said to have "established a relationship" with it. This relationship is deepened when someone else copies a sutra and gives it to that person. Today when we hand out a leaflet explaining our teachings, we are actually helping people who did not know about Buddhism form a relationship

with it. The note that Mrs. Iizuka gave me was truly the "sutra" that established my connection with Buddhism. From that one slip of paper was born today's Rissho Kosei-kai; through it, a spiritual relationship has been established between me and all of its members. I really want everyone to know that when we speak of our faith to a stranger or hand out a single book, it is an unmissable opportunity to create the possibility of bringing another person into a relationship with Buddhism.

From the day my relationship with the Lotus Sutra was established through that small piece of paper, I was like a sponge, visiting Arai Sensei incessantly. He had been a student of the Confucian classic the *Analects*, but when he was fifty-one, he suddenly became paralyzed and bedridden. Unable just to lie in bed and do nothing, he asked his wife to bring him a copy of the Lotus Sutra that was in her parental home. Because he could not move his arms, she held the sutra in front of him and turned the pages as he began to read. This was the first time he had come in contact with the Lotus Sutra.

As he continued to read, he was overwhelmed by the breadth of its teachings and became absorbed in them. At some point during this time, his paralysis just seems to have vanished. It was impossible for him to remain silent about the wonder of the Lotus Sutra after such an experience. This was Arai Sensei's state of mind when I first visited him in 1935, when I was twenty-eight. It was a meeting of like minds—mine, which

was eager to learn, and Arai Sensei's, which was eager to teach. Both speaker and listener completely forgot the passage of time, and we spent every day immersed in the Lotus Sutra.

Arai Sensei's wife would say with a wry smile, "My husband doesn't say a word in the house, but when you come, Mr. Niwano, he just talks and talks." I, too, came to realize the shallowness of the religious faith that I had been practicing, and I was enthralled by the ocean-like depth of the Lotus Sutra.

Zen master Hakuin (1686–1769), who restored Japanese Rinzai Zen, reread the Lotus Sutra in the autumn of his forty-second year. When he came to the passage in the third chapter, "A Parable," that says, "Now this triple world is all my domain; the living beings in it are all my sons. But now this place

abounds with distresses; and I alone am able to save and protect them,” he was said to have suddenly penetrated the ultimate meaning of the Lotus Sutra and awakened to its magnanimity and value. His first doubts were overcome, and he became aware that his understanding of Buddhism was mistaken. His emotions at that time, which were so deep that he cried aloud involuntarily, are recorded in his biography, *Hakuin nenpu*. I can certainly understand the excitement and delight that comes with encountering the Lotus Sutra, for it clearly answers our questions “Why are we born?” and “What is the right way to live?” Knowing that twenty-five hundred years ago these teachings had so deeply penetrated the condition of the human heart and mind and set out a way to resolve the question of suffering made me a complete captive of the Lotus Sutra.

I had studied many kinds of practices and techniques, as I have mentioned, such as directional and nine-star divination, onomancy and physiognomy, and geomantic rules for erecting gravestones, but these were all random and unorganized. A teacher of directional divination would say that his own method was the best, and a teacher of physiognomy would declare that his own reading of a person’s character and temperament was second to none. I first realized this when Arai Sensei explained to me that from one meaning (the universal Truth) arise a million meanings, which can again be condensed into one. The things I had until now studied randomly resolved into one, as it is written in the chapter “Preaching” in the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings: “The Innumerable Meanings originate from one law,” and I realized that all of them were expedients for revealing one’s buddha-nature. The joy I felt then is indescribable.

If we forget the crucial point that directional divination and onomancy and so on are simply expedients for revealing one’s buddha-nature, they can

actually lead to delusion. I may seem overemphatic on this point, but it is the same as the need for a craftsman to remember that while the resilience of bamboo is ideal for craft work, handling freshly cut bamboo carelessly can cause one to be injured by its splinters. If we employ these techniques knowing very well they are skillful means, then they serve a useful purpose. However, if we think they are everything, we will lose sight of all the other paths.

A National Pilgrimage of Dissemination

With Rissho Kosei-kai’s declaration of the Manifestation of the Truth in 1958, I turned my attention to nationwide dissemination of the teachings.

Early on the morning of January 3 that year, I set out for the Rissho Kosei-kai training hall in Yokohama. It was a sunny day but bitterly cold, and I remember that ice covered the road in many places on our way to Yokohama. At eight o’clock, when devotionals began, the hall was filled to bursting with members. Those unable to enter stayed in the garden. Here is what I said to them:

“This year, with the declaration of Rissho Kosei-kai’s Manifestation of the Truth, I am determined to visit all of our training halls in Japan. Today I am taking my first step here at the training hall in Yokohama.”

My records from that time show that I spoke there about the importance of perseverance, the third of the Six Perfections. The Lotus Sutra speaks repeatedly of the significance of perseverance, but this does not simply mean putting up with things.

Shakyamuni did not judge people’s worth by their birth, as did the Indian society of his day, with its strict differentiation by class and status. What determined their worth for him was their actions. He said it did not matter how humble a home people were born into, they were ennobled by the

righteousness of their deeds. For the time, that was a momentous statement. We can easily imagine that he suffered much opposition and endured a lot of pressure as a result.

My heart is engraved with the fact that perseverance is necessary in any age when teaching the Truth. Today, unlike the time of Shakyamuni, there are no particular hardships or persecution associated with teaching, so perseverance has another aspect. I remember being told by Arai Sensei, “Perseverance does not just mean enduring what is difficult. It is also exercising self-control over your own tendency to fall into arrogance or self-satisfaction because you are saving people.” It is this kind of perseverance that is probably more important for us living in modern times.

After visiting the Yokohama training hall, I went to the training hall in Chiba on January 6 and then on the following day to the one in Kisarazu, and to Ashikaga on the eighth. All of these are in the Kanto area. On January 11, I visited the Kobe training hall, then an eight-hour train journey from Tokyo.

This hall is halfway up a small hill between Mount Rokko and Mount Maya, both part of Setonaikai National Park. Water had been sprinkled on the stone steps leading to the entrance, and the garden looked beautiful. Unusually for January, it was a mild morning. Inside, the atmosphere was cheerful, just as you would expect in the time of the New Year, and smiling members called out greetings.

Members from groups in Osaka, Kyoto, Okayama, Himeji, Shikoku, and Toyooka, among others, had rallied from far and wide, and I felt their enthusiasm aroused by my talk.

That night I decided to stay in the training hall rather than in a hotel as on the previous night. I was traveling with Teijiro Okano, head of the doctrinal department of Rissho Kosei-kai. When we arrived, the people on duty there gave us padded kimonos to wear. I am a tall

man, and the kimono was too short. On the other hand, Mr. Okano was on the portly side, and his kimono hardly reached around his body. Laughing, I invited him to go to the public bath with me, and we went out of the hall.

The atmosphere in the crowded bathhouse and the feeling of friendship engendered by everyone bathing together allowed Mr. Okano and me to talk freely, and I came away with a very good opinion of his character. Since he had built up his own company and employed a large number of people, he was a dynamic man who did not tolerate those who went about things in a halfhearted way in their religious life. "Since you're going to do it, it's no good going about it in a lukewarm sort of way. If you come to the training hall each day, you should make the fact that you've come worth it."

He was honest and truly good-natured. He told me that a fund had been set aside to finance the proposed new organization under Myoko Sensei [Myoko Naganuma, cofounder of Rissho Kosei-kai] and asked what should be done with it. This was a measure of

how frankly he was able to talk to me.

Even though our ideals were the same, his personality, outlook, and way of thinking were quite different from mine. We cannot persuade people who have their own ideas about things to agree with us by speaking to them only once or twice. I asked Mr. Okano to accompany me on the nationwide campaign to bring all members throughout the country to an awareness of the Manifestation of the Truth, because I hoped that by spending each day together we would gain a good understanding of each other's way of thinking.

For a Beautiful Bloom

On January 16 we set out for the Nagano training hall. When we arrived that evening, it had begun to snow. As I was returning to my room after taking a bath, the sliding glass door to the corridor opened and a young man rushed out. He had a favor to ask of me, he said. I looked into the room and saw that ten or so young people were sitting there, preparing signboards and placards for the conference the next day. The Nagano

chapter already had a youth group, and its members were very enthusiastic in their activities.

As soon as I entered the room, some of the young people brought out a large *hibachi* (brazier). I sat down beside it and the young people gathered closely around me, and so we began our *hoza* session. As soon as I said that I would be willing to answer any questions they might have, one young man immediately asked, "Isn't there a great difference between going forward knowing the way and just ambling along without knowing where we are going?"

"That's a very good question," I said, and facing the young man, I began to speak. They all stared fixedly at me, nodding at my words. Their reactions made me think of the way the desert sands absorb water.

These young people were Rissho Kosei-kai's future.

By the following morning, a silver world spread around us as far as the eye could see. The peaks of the mountains surrounding the city were all white. Some fifteen hundred red-cheeked members thronged into the hall, which was filled to capacity. I spoke about the importance of both study and practice and about carrying out the practices of a bodhisattva.

For nearly six months, I was on the road whenever I was not required at the headquarters for ceremonies, traveling south to Kyushu and Shikoku and north to Hokkaido. By the time my first teaching campaign ended, at a meeting in Sapporo on May 11, I had been to forty-eight places, and I had the distinct feeling that members were little by little coming to understand the aims of the Manifestation of the Truth.

Thinking back on Rissho Kosei-kai's great turning point, some people tell me, "It was due to your integrity that the issue of the written compact presented in 1956 did not create a problem for the future and that we have come as far as we have." There are scholars of

religion, too, who study the incident and say, “The fact that no accusations were made over the incident is related to the later growth of Rissho Kosei-kai.” Such words gladden my heart, but looking at it in religious terms, the written compact was not an issue that should have been taken seriously. However, there is no guarantee that the same thing won’t happen again if we don’t guard against it.

I have one thing in particular that I would like people whose task it is to preserve Rissho Kosei-kai in the future to keep in mind: people of religion should look on all that happens to them, however personally disadvantageous or unacceptable, as an assignment set them by the Buddha, as a sign of his compassion, designed to raise them higher and thus have the strength to convert bad karma into good karma.

Morning glories do not bloom because the sun bathes them with light in the morning. What causes them to open their beautiful flowers, scientists say, is the night’s chill and the deep dark that comes before sunrise. Similarly, the dark of hardship is necessary for a person to mature.

Some of the senior leaders seem to have been worried that they would be punished in some way for what they had done over the written compact. However, they had performed with all of their might to establish the Dharma as actors in the drama laying the groundwork for Rissho Kosei-kai. Everyone was committed to creating an organization truly able to bring liberation to others. Thus, after the incident, I kept

the senior leaders in their existing roles, without any change. Casting off this and that person as no good helps no one develop his or her full potential. No matter how many people there are, they are still not enough.

The Sangha, the community of Buddhist believers, is not a place in which to judge people but a place to encourage them to mature through awareness of their mistakes. It was the unity of purpose achieved by the senior leaders that enabled them to become the foundation stone for Rissho Kosei-kai’s future. On the occasion of the completion of Myoko Sensei’s grave, I stood before it and took from the inside of my coat the compact that had caused so much concern for the senior leaders and burned it. Everything literally went up in smoke, and that was the end of the incident.

When we understand what others are thinking and this understanding echoes within the buddha-nature deep in our hearts, all vexations and ill feeling vanish, just as the morning dew disappears when the sun shines forth.

From the time of that first teaching tour, Mr. Okano vowed to devote himself entirely to dissemination work. “I will live spreading the Dharma and die spreading the Dharma,” he said. He went to Okinawa and, giving no thought to his own life, immersed himself in dissemination work. After he had estimated how and when the training hall would be constructed in Okinawa, he closed his remarkable life at the place where he was teaching, having given Rissho

Kosei-kai long and distinguished service during its formative period. Other senior leaders also continued to perform their important roles with no change, energetically acting as leading figures in the organization.

Knowing the Path and Moving Along It

Though we talk of the Manifestation of the Truth, it was nothing special. Until the time of the declaration of the Manifestation of the Truth, we had trained under the principle that single-minded practice would give positive results. The new direction symbolized by the Manifestation of the Truth simply clarified the idea of guidance for large numbers of people by explaining to members the meaning of their practice in doctrinal terms and why they had received positive results from it.

It was important for members to understand that their practice had a definite objective and if they followed the Way they would without fail attain liberation. Unless they understood where they were heading, it would be very difficult for them to practice the Six Perfections (donation, keeping the precepts, perseverance, diligence, meditation, and wisdom) in their daily lives. Once members understood the meaning of their various practices in the light of Buddhist doctrines, they would joyfully accept them as the way to lead people everywhere toward happiness. These were the Dharma practices that all could follow with understanding, with truth as its foundation.

I decided that the quickest way for members to understand this was initially through the young people, with their flexible thinking. The very basis of the Youth Group was restructured in the seven-year period from about 1951 to 1958. Previously, a large number of the young people in the organization were suffering from tuberculosis or some other illness. Since I was involved in

guiding young people, I wanted to create the Youth Group for those who had no specific health problems, and I sent out a call for young people who were not motivated to join because of their health. When I taught them the doctrines of Buddhism, I found that they picked them up very quickly. Once they understood the doctrines, they grew in confidence. Bemused chapter heads asked me why I did not teach them, too. They were embarrassed to realize that the young people's knowledge was greater than theirs. Once they had realized their need to be taught, they very quickly understood the doctrines after only brief instruction.

When members began studying the teachings in this way, the whole organization became invigorated. Realizing that the faith they had been practicing was such a wonderful teaching filled them with pride. The Manifestation of the Truth gave rise to an amazing vigor, at the very time Rissho Kosei-kai was facing perhaps its most difficult period since its formation. Troubles came one after another from within and without, as the organization was criticized and attacked from without during the Yomiuri Incident [the public criticism Rissho Kosei-kai had received for its practices and methods of dissemination] and as members reeled from the loss of their beloved Myoko Sensei. I was confirmed in my resolution that in order to weather this critical juncture, the immediate necessity was to establish the doctrines of Rissho Kosei-kai.

In the light of the religious practices that Rissho Kosei-kai had so far been teaching (which was none other than the single-minded practice of the bodhisattva way expounded in the Lotus Sutra), we started teaching the doctrines intensively, using materials that incorporated the teachings of early and primitive Buddhism, and explained in diagrammatical form the teachings of the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Six Perfections, the Twelve

Causes and Conditions, and the Ten Suchnesses.

The twenty years from the founding of the organization was a time of constant and rigorous religious training. This training revealed its true value when members began to study and understand the teachings as doctrines. The basis of training gave rise to great strength. Some people think that Rissho Kosei-kai changed direction by stressing doctrinal study, but there was no sudden shift at all. Whereas previously the emphasis in religious training had been on practices to the detriment of theory, we had merely returned to complementary study of the teachings as both practices and doctrines.

The public criticism Rissho Kosei-kai had received for its practices and methods of dissemination arose because training was given priority over doctrinal study. When I think about it, the Yomiuri Incident played a large role in getting the organization's activities on the right track. When all is said and done, it was precisely because Rissho Kosei-kai had gone through a period of such strict training from the very beginning that senior leaders came to understand the doctrines, ranging from the Four Noble Truths to the Eightfold Path and the Six Perfections, comparatively easily. There is absolutely no doubt on this point.

Since there was no change in the purpose of religious effort or how it was undertaken and practices continued as they had previously done, members were not unsettled. More than anything, the great benefit we received was that everyone could practice with a broader understanding of what he or she was doing.

The faith that until now had been prone to the dramatic or miraculous now came to comprehend the true nature of liberation as a result of members' thinking deeply about Shakyamuni's teachings. The tears we had until now shed for ourselves alone were being shed for others, and whereas before we had simply clung to the Buddha, now we began

to make an effort to understand the will of the Buddha and to realize his will in our society. People who had thought only about their own salvation now wanted it to be the means of bringing happiness to others.

In the Ekottara Agama, Shakyamuni says, "There are many kinds of power in this world, but the power of happiness is supreme. Wherever you go, there is nothing greater. The Path of the Buddha is attained through happiness." How do we seek out that happiness that all long for, and how should we guide people to it? This, I think, is our most important question. If we try too impatiently to switch from one type of practice to another, we will create a problem for the future and end up by killing the bull as we try to straighten its horns, finding that the cure is worse than the disease. I think that in changing our way of guidance to quietly getting people interested, we reach a happy medium. It is very important that we learn to know this by personal experience.

I think this experience was very useful for me later, when I began to play a role in the formation of organizations such as Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan), the Brighter Society Movement, and the World Conference of Religions for Peace. The spiritual training I received helped me to deal somehow or another with tasks that others just could not manage.

One person alone cannot do anything. And one religion alone cannot change society. How can we unite the strength of many people to change society as a whole? More than anything else, we have to wait patiently for the right moment. In Japan we have an expression that means literally "stay foolish." It is exactly because we dare to "stay foolish" that we can usually manage to do everything that needs to be done. My experience in many different spheres has taught me how important it is to "keep being foolish."

To be continued

Peaceful Coexistence through Reconciliation

An Interview with Rosalina Tuyuc Velásquez

The Niwano Peace Foundation awarded the twenty-ninth Niwano Peace Prize on May 10, 2012, to Mrs. Rosalina Tuyuc Velásquez, a human rights activist and political leader in Guatemala. She was honored for unflagging work that exemplifies the great potential and wisdom of indigenous peoples in marking paths to peace. The following interview was conducted with her on May 11 at the International House of Japan in Tokyo, by Rev. Kinjiro Niwano, chair of the Niwano Peace Foundation. They discussed how people can live in ways that nurture all life.

Niwano: Rosalina, you have devoted yourself to joining women who have lost their husbands through civil war or the oppression of government troops. You have aided their efforts for mutual assistance and worked to restore human rights to indigenous peoples. For your incomparable courage and energy, and for your activities for peace based on Mayan spirituality, I was proud to present to you the twenty-ninth Niwano Peace Prize on behalf of the Niwano Peace Foundation.

Tuyuc: Thank you very much. When it was decided that I would be coming to Japan, my first thoughts were of the people victimized by the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and of those who perished last year in the massive earthquake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan. I prayed for the heavenly bliss of these people and thought about their contributions to the world.

This Niwano Peace Prize that I have received, I accept on behalf of all people who devote their lives and energies to making the world better and with gratitude for the gifts from our ancestors.

Niwano: In 1988 you and some friends founded CONAVIGUA. What was the situation for Mayan women victimized by the civil war in Guatemala?

Tuyuc: In our Mayan culture, the men primarily work in the fields, planting and harvesting crops. Although women also help out in the fields, their main role is housework. As for childrearing, fathers train the sons and mothers train the daughters.

During the civil war, however, the indigenous men were killed in the army's crackdown. The women left behind with small children had the burden of dealing with the household issues without help, and they had no choice but to cultivate the fields themselves. At the same time, they had to search for the fathers and husbands who had been taken from them. They had to play many roles—seeking truth, demanding justice, and raising children—at the same time.

Niwano: The circumstances were different, but soon after Rissho Kosei-kai was founded, my father [Founder Nikkyo Niwano] sent our mother and us children from Tokyo to his home village of Suganuma in Niigata Prefecture so

that he could dedicate himself solely to his religious training, and we lived apart from our father for ten years. It is an unusual amount of work for one woman to take care of a household. It is heart wrenching to contemplate the tragedy of this civil war that affected Mayan women so terribly and to consider their hardships.

Tuyuc: At the time, most of the women were demanding the recovery of their family members' remains, and they cried all the time. In the midst of this, we were able to share our pain through our activities and came to learn how to pull together for the sake of hope. We learned the importance of all of us combining our strengths to overcome the causes of our suffering.

And then, rather than simply moving forward by ourselves, we encouraged others as well. By sharing our experiences, we learned the importance of activities that can overcome the problems of the community and the country as well as the consciousness building that comes from them. Over the course of twenty-three years, these activities have reached the regional and national levels. We have even started to turn our

Rosalina Tuyuc Velásquez was born into a religious agricultural family in Guatemala. That country suffered an extended civil war between 1960 and 1996, during which more than 250,000 people died and 45,000 went missing. The conflict created more than 240,000 orphans and 50,000 widows. In 1988 Mrs. Tuyuc founded the National Coordinating Organization of Widows of Guatemala (CONAVIGUA), now a leading Guatemalan human rights organization. She has also served as a member of the Guatemalan congress.

Chiapas, received the nineteenth Niwano Peace Prize in 2002. He passed away last year. Did you ever meet him?

Tuyuc: Of course I met him. Once, I visited Father Ruiz's diocese to see his activities. Father Ruiz assisted not only the indigenous people of Chiapas but also refugees from the civil war in Guatemala when that was going on. We even visited a community of refugees together.

Niwano: Following the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, there has been a movement in Japan to reexamine how our society works and how we live in relation to nature. The resulting nuclear power plant accident, in particular, has definitely raised a major issue. When we think about how people should live, how do you think we should approach the natural environment?

Tuyuc: We humans are also a part of nature. It would be nice if we were always aware of this, but unfortunately we don't realize it unless there is some major disaster or accident. Put another way, until a major problem comes up, we tend to concern ourselves with our desires, destroy nature, and continue to pollute.

There is a concern that because of global warming and climate change, unimagined disasters and other phenomena will occur. From now on there will be greater anxiety about the environment because of the nuclear power plant's accident in Japan.

The work and lifestyles of people today have overtaxed nature's original

resilience. The portent of problems and the nuclear accident must be taken as a message to the advanced nations and nations that have developed technologically and economically. Behind this is the issue of the huge market mechanism that drives the world to seek mainly economic benefits. It is essential that we view the whole of human existence rather than just the economic aspects.

Niwano: Buddhism teaches that everything in the world arises from dependent origination, that nothing arises of itself. Human existence is possible with all kinds of support. For this very reason, the true message of this teaching, I believe, is that we must live in a manner that tries to be mutually helpful and sharing. What about the Maya?

Tuyuc: The spirituality of the Maya is based on three essential elements. The first is producing food, and the work

attention to societal issues, such as indigenous peoples' land, the global environment, and natural resources.

Even with all of these activities, however, there are some things that I cannot get back. The love of the father I lost, his advice, and his teaching, for example. My father was abducted when I was twenty-six years old. When my husband was taken from me, our children were one and two years old.

There is a large emptiness in me that can never be filled. The wounds my family and community suffered are deep, and we cannot get back what we have lost. I would not want a civil war to happen in any country.

Niwano: Many Maya also live in the Mexican state of Chiapas, bordering Guatemala. Father Samuel Ruiz García, a Catholic priest who fought to defend the human rights of the indigenous people of

that goes into it, the physical. The second is spirituality, that which is spiritual, and we are taught to strengthen our own divine nature and approach the physical with a firm spiritual intent. Last, there is community, which, besides our relationships with others and our surroundings, includes taking action on social problems.

Moreover, Mayan spirituality teaches that we must balance all of these elements. We work to maintain a balance in accordance with this teaching.

Globally speaking, I feel that there is a strong tendency to focus on just one element of a problem, as if it were only physical or only spiritual. I think that our tendency to exhaust nature in spite of the blessings and gifts of Mother Earth and nature comes from such a way of thinking.

Niwano: When I was young and thoughts of changing our society excited me, my elders advised me to aim for actions that followed the right process and were balanced, rather than focusing only on physical objectives. They taught me that when thinking of a better society or happiness for people, we must stress the importance of the process by which we get there.

Tuyuc: Human happiness is an overall matter. Having a home to live in, food to eat, or a job to do, having no problems in the family between husband and wife or parent and child—we can feel happiness from all of these. Another

important thing that also brings happiness is not allowing anyone around us to suffer. If there is someone, a neighbor or an acquaintance, near us who doesn't have work or something to eat or is otherwise troubled, we cannot be happy.

There is an important connection between our well-being and our surroundings. We must make efforts to ensure that we do not harm other people or nature by the way we live. The presence of distressed people in our midst, or of problems with the natural environment, can be said to be an indication, a message, that we are in an unbalanced situation.

People pray for health and security, but when they do this it is important that they also offer thanks and pledge contributions to the entity to which their prayers are offered. In our case it is Mother Earth and nature. Through their ceremonies, the Maya are conscious that they are a part of Earth and space, grateful for the blessings they receive from nature and the support of others; sharing the joy of living together is something they hold dear.

Niwano: I am keenly aware that we bear a responsibility for future generations. Our interpreter today is Ms. Tomoko Ishikawa, who has been working at CONAVIGUA since 1993 with Rosalina and other Mayan women. I have been told that Ms. Ishikawa approached CONAVIGUA to become an “accompanying activist,” whose role as a foreign

observer is to accompany groups or individuals that have been threatened with violence and try to prevent it. As a fellow Japanese, I would like to express my respect for Ms. Ishikawa, who has continued her international cooperation activities in the face of acknowledged danger.

Tuyuc: At the start I don't think she knew a lot about Guatemala. By working with us, she became acquainted with not only CONAVIGUA's activities but those of other organizations as well. Now she has become thoroughly familiar with the issues of public health, education, and development. Most important, she understands our identity, our Mayan way of thinking, and our beliefs. As the opportunities have come up, she has been playing a truly important role, telling a broad audience about the Maya and their culture.

Niwano: Finally, I would like to know if you have a message for the members of Rissho Kosei-kai.

Tuyuc: In Guatemala today, many organizations and groups are infested with crime and corruption. While power and wealth are in the hands of a few, many people live in poverty. It is a situation in which the sense of common humanity has been lost, and people have become used to living with a feeling of helplessness in the face of rampant violence.

I feel that receiving this award has given us a big chance to bring change to this society. We can now renew our vow to work for and concentrate our powers on peace.

While confronting crises of values and the environment, Rissho Kosei-kai members have promised with eyes wide open to remain aware of the issues that afflict humanity and to walk with the people in the world who are suffering. There is still a long way to go, but I would ask them to continue to work together for peace for humankind. □



The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 20

The Bodhisattva Never Despise

(3)

This is the 111th installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.

Another important teaching in the story of Never Despise is that although he did actually flee from physical persecution, he held fast to his beliefs and never renounced the Dharma.

Here lies the essential difference between weakness and flexibility. Weak-minded people easily act against or discard their beliefs when they encounter even a little outside pressure. But believers with true courage maintain their faith and continually follow the Dharma, whatever happens. The purpose of flexibility is always to keep the faith.

Although he escaped when physically attacked, the Bodhisattva Never Despise never ceased the bodhisattva practice of paying respect to the buddha-nature within others. In the end, he brought out their hidden buddha-nature. Such a person can be called truly brave.

The Bodhisattva Never Despise attained a very high spiritual state through the sole practice of revealing others' buddha-nature by respecting it. But when he was near death, he heard the teachings of the Lotus Sutra from the sky, which the Buddha King of Majestic Voice had formerly preached.

The expression "from the sky he heard" means that he heard the Buddha's voice resounding in his mind; in other words, he enlightened himself. He realized the truth intuitively. To say that he awoke to the truth on his own may sound mysterious, but actually there is nothing at all mysterious about it. It is quite natural that the truth can be discovered by anyone in this way.

As I mentioned earlier, the truth must have existed from the infinite past if it is really the truth. In the past some truly remarkable people may have discovered the truth without it being recorded by history. Here it is said that the Buddha King of Majestic Voice discovered the truth and preached it.

Since that happened in the distant past, however, the truth (the Lotus Sutra) was not known or taught before the birth of the Bodhisattva Never Despise. However, because the truth is eternal and imperishable, whenever an outstanding person appears in the world, it is possible that he can rediscover that truth. The Bodhisattva Never Despise was just such a person.

Some may think that this story is implausible in our day and age, when communication and culture are so highly developed. But such an opinion is shortsighted. At times in the history of the universe, something similar to human civilization may well have appeared and disappeared more times than we can possibly conceive.

Viewing the history of the universe from time immemorial, it would certainly not be unusual for innumerable buddhas called King of Majestic Voice to have appeared one after the other and preached the Lotus Sutra (the truth), and for the Bodhisattva Never Despise to have awakened to that himself as he approached death.

How did the Bodhisattva Never Despise live after that? The answer to this question also contains a great lesson for us all. The Bodhisattva Never Despise mastered the teachings of the Lotus Sutra on his own. By embracing them wholeheartedly, he gained the merit of a longer life. During this two hundred myriad kotis of nayutas of years, he preached the Lotus Sutra widely for the sake of many people. In other words, he moved forward from the basic bodhisattva practice of honoring others to the stage of active bodhisattva practice. The result of this is preached in the following.

TEXT Then the haughty four groups of bhikshus, bhikshunis, upasakas, and upasikas who had slighted and condemned this man and given him the [nick]name Never

Despise, seeing him possessed of great transcendent powers, of power of eloquent discourse, and of power of excellent meditation, and having heard his preaching, all believed in and followed him.

COMMENTARY *Great transcendent powers.* These are the extraordinary powers possessed only by buddhas and bodhisattvas, that enable them to see what ordinary people cannot see, to hear what ordinary people cannot hear, to see clearly into other people's hearts, and to see all the paths that others have followed in the past.

In regard to transcendent powers, please refer to "the six divine faculties" in the July/August 1992 issue of *Dharma World*, and "the five transcendent faculties" in the September/October 1996 issue.

- *Power of eloquent discourse.* "Eloquent" means inspired preaching of the Dharma. This is possible when one is not forced or obligated to preach it, but does so spontaneously.

"Power of eloquent discourse" means persuasive eloquence that all people can understand, and can bring them to the Buddha Way.

- *Power of excellent meditation.* This term suggests a state of immutability and immobility producing an extraordinary power which does not change or deviate from goodness. In simpler terms, it means that no matter what pressure or temptation comes from outside, and no matter what impulse comes from within, one possesses the wisdom to remain unmoved by defilements, and is always determined to do right.

In passing, it seems that Japanese people are often misled by the Chinese characters for Buddhist terms, and misinterpret them. A conspicuous instance of this is the tendency to misinterpret the word "impermanence" in a nihilistic, depressing sense.

There is a similar tendency to misunderstand the Chinese character for "tranquil," as in the expression "Land of Tranquil Light," in an extremely passive, negative way. True enough, the Chinese character meaning "tranquil" connotes solitude or quiet. Furthermore, in Buddhist terms, it means "death," so the phrase "Land of Tranquil Light" suggests a world of silence, totally submerged in a lonely light.

But "tranquil" in "Land of Tranquil Light" refers to the restfulness and peacefulness of immutability and immobility. Therefore, the Land of Tranquil Light means a world constantly filled with the light of grace, which remains regardless of however many ages pass or however much people change. This is not a world that has fallen still as death, but rather a vigorous, energetic world which is drenched in brilliant light that enlivens, warms, and encourages all that exists. It is also a world where all human beings hard at work shine a bright light on their fellows.

When we say that our ideal and grand purpose is to create the Land of Tranquil Light within our own world, it is this kind of world that we are hoping for. It is far from being a land of quiet repose.

- *Believed in.* The original Chinese for this term is a compound written with two characters, one meaning "believe" and the other "prostrate." The first character means unconditionally accepting a person or teachings with all one's heart. The second means devoting oneself to that person or teachings. In religious faith, such belief is essential. Merely to understand someone or something intellectually will not transform the believer. It is here that religion differs from scholarship.

TEXT This bodhisattva again converted thousands of myriads of kotis of beings to Perfect Enlightenment.

COMMENTARY *Converted thousands of myriads of kotis of beings to Perfect Enlightenment.* To be more precise, this means filled multitudes completely with a longing for eternal, perfect enlightenment.

TEXT "After the end of his lifetime, he met two thousand kotis of buddhas who were all entitled Sun Moon Light, and under their Dharma he preached this Dharma Flower Sutra. Because of this cause and condition, he again met two thousand kotis of buddhas, all equally entitled Sovereign Light King of the Clouds.

COMMENTARY *After the end of his lifetime.* This phrase means in the next world.

- *He met two thousand kotis of buddhas.* This does not mean that he met such a large number of buddhas at once, but successively.

As indicated in the text, "because of this cause and condition," the merit he gained from the good deeds of preaching the teachings of the Lotus Sutra to many others enabled him to meet a buddha. By listening to that buddha's teachings, he deepened his own understanding, which became the basis of his preaching to many people. As a result of that merit, he met another buddha. In this manner, through the unlimited cycle of self-discipline, giving instruction, and the merits of doing these things, he eventually was able to live entirely according to the Dharma. While ceaselessly deepening his awareness of the Dharma, he lived one significant life after another, eventually achieving supreme enlightenment and buddhahood. This is what is meant by meeting two thousand kotis of buddhas.

- *Under their Dharma.* That which each of the buddhas Sun Moon Light preached was the Lotus Sutra. The Bodhisattva Never Despise heard it each time he was reborn and preached its teachings to many people.

So “under their Dharma” means at firsthand, in accord with the teachings expounded by each of the various buddhas named Sun Moon Light. In sum, it means “in accord with the teachings of the Lotus Sutra.”

TEXT Because under the Dharma of those buddhas he received and kept, read, recited, and preached this sutra to all the four groups, he obtained clearness and purity of the common eye and of the organs of ear, nose, tongue, body, and thought, and among the four groups preached the Dharma fearlessly.

COMMENTARY *Fearlessly.* Purification of the six sense organs allows the perception of all things as they really are. In particular, if the mind, or thoughts, is pure, there is no petty, ugly self-interest. For this reason, we can preach the Dharma without inhibitions. This is the reason for “fearlessly.”

TEXT “Great Power Obtained! This Bodhisattva-Mahasattva Never Despise paid homage to such numerous buddhas as these, revering, honoring, and extolling them; and after cultivating the roots of goodness, again he met thousands of myriads of kotis of buddhas and also under the Dharma of those buddhas preached this sutra; after acquiring all these merits, he then became a buddha.

COMMENTARY *After acquiring all these merits, he then became a buddha.* Thanks to the merit of cultivating the roots of goodness, the Bodhisattva Never Despise again met a large number of buddhas, and receiving their teachings, he continued to preach the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Through these merits he again met many more buddhas and was instructed by them. In this way, he continually alternated between practicing the buddhas’ teachings himself and instructing others in practicing them. Through the accumulation of uncountable merits, he then became a buddha.

The greatness of the religious life of the Bodhisattva Never Despise lies in bravely persevering until he accomplished his original intention. We can see that he was neither reckless or violent, but tenacious and brave as he progressed step by step toward his goal.

He certainly walked the path to buddhahood by learning, practicing, and gaining merits one by one by offering and receiving instruction.

We should learn from his spirit and follow in his footsteps.

At the beginning, we may enter the path to buddhahood by performing just one kind of bodhisattva practice. If we continue to perform that practice wholeheartedly, we will grasp many truths based on the one truth of that practice, because the foundation of the Buddha Dharma is

essentially one. In other words, we can meet innumerable buddhas in succession.

When we meet new buddhas and learn their Dharma, we ought not to keep it to ourselves, but share with many others. By sharing it, we not only confer its merits on others, but also deepen our own understanding of it, and it becomes engraved ever deeper in our minds.

To know and understand the Buddha Dharma is called “awakening,” or “enlightenment” (*chiao* in Chinese). To abide by the teachings of that Dharma on one’s own and share them with others is called “practice” (*hang*). Awakening and practice forming a harmonious whole and the state of its perfect accomplishment is buddhahood.

The path that the Bodhisattva Never Despise followed more successfully than any other bodhisattva shows us the very real way in which our own practice of teaching others deepens our awakening so that we eventually attain buddhahood. He gives us an indispensable example of great significance.

That is as it should be, for the Bodhisattva Never Despise was none other than an earlier incarnation of the only Buddha, Shakyamuni, in this *saha* world.

TEXT Great Power Obtained! What is your opinion? Can it be that the Bodhisattva Never Despise was at that time somebody else? He was [really] I myself. If I in my former lives had not received and kept, read and recited this sutra and preached it to others, I should not have been able so soon to attain Perfect Enlightenment. Because under former buddhas I received and kept, read and recited this sutra and preached it to others, I so soon attained Perfect Enlightenment.

COMMENTARY *Great Power Obtained! What is your opinion? Can it be that the Bodhisattva Never Despise was at that time somebody else? He was [really] I myself.* The meaning here is fairly clear, but if we analyze the passage in greater detail, it can be paraphrased as follows:

“Great Power Obtained! There may be doubts that because the Bodhisattva Never Despise was instructed during that long period by innumerable buddhas one after another, there must have been many bodhisattvas named Never Despise, but there was one, and only one. That is, I myself was the Bodhisattva Never Despise.”

The idea of practice through kalpas (practicing not only for one lifetime, but continuing to practice through successive rebirths) is clearly explained here.

TEXT “Great Power Obtained! At that time the four groups, bhikshus, bhikshunis, upasakas, and upasikas, with angry minds slighted and contemned me, therefore

for two hundred kotis of kalpas they never met a buddha, never heard the Dharma, never saw a samgha, and for a thousand kalpas underwent great sufferings in the Avici hell. After their sin was brought to an end, they again met the Bodhisattva Never Despise, who taught and converted them to Perfect Enlightenment.

COMMENTARY *They never met a buddha, never heard the Dharma, never saw a samgha.* This passage explains the Buddhist idea of punishment so that we can understand what it really is. In other words, we should note that the passage does not say that a god or buddha inflicts punishment. It says simply that for two hundred kotis of kalpas, anyone who resents and scorns those who pursue the worthwhile practice of revealing other people's buddha-nature, will never meet a buddha, hear the Dharma, or see believers in the Buddha Dharma.

During that time they never will meet a buddha or hear the Dharma because their minds are closed. They will never see believers in the Buddha Dharma because they are too wrapped up in themselves. The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Samgha are always present, but because those people are full of wrong ideas, they remain unaware of the existence of the Three Treasures and have no interest in them.

For those reasons, their defilements cannot be purged by the teachings or enlightenment. Faced with the evils that assailed them from without, they can only continue their struggles and experience lives of human suffering, as in the Avici hell.

This is the Buddhist idea of punishment. However, the Buddha does not punish, but always liberates people in his great compassion. But even if people have no desire to see the Buddha or hear anyone who imparts his teachings, he never forces liberation on them. If he tried to force liberation on them before they were spiritually transformed, it would all come to nothing.

The Buddha calmly waits for the right moment, that is, when bad karma is expiated. People can expiate bad karma, however bad it is, by suffering retribution, and their bad karma will disappear along with their suffering. In other words, suffering ends when karma ends. It is like the intense heat given off when something burns. This is the natural working of bad karma to destroy itself. The fundamental principles of this have been treated in great detail in the May/June 1994 issue of *Dharma World*.

This moment of bad karma's disappearance is the most favorable one for awakening. At such a time most people open their minds. This is because they have long been troubled by their great sufferings and conceive a great desire for true liberation. They long for absolute truth. In short, their buddha-nature awakens.

This deep meaning is implied in the passage "After their sin was brought to an end, they again met the Bodhisattva Never Despise, who taught them and converted them to Perfect Enlightenment." In this way, once people encounter the Buddha's teachings, even if they ignore them completely at first, they will in the end surely be liberated from suffering by those teachings.

The arrogant people in this chapter were also repeatedly taught by the Bodhisattva Never Despise in his former lives that they possessed the buddha-nature. But because they did not accept his teaching obediently, they underwent a long period of suffering. After they had been soundly defeated by their sufferings, they suddenly recalled what they had heard about their buddha-nature and at last entered the way of liberation.

Hence, if a person honors other people's buddha-nature, whatever kind of people they might be, and teaches them that they possess this buddha-nature, his merit will be great. Even if that person cannot help them immediately to gain liberation, his instruction will remain engraved in their subconscious and will someday lead them to liberation.

A certain prison chaplain said that if a criminal heard even a few of the teachings of the gods and buddhas as a small child, the criminal will invariably be liberated after hearing the chaplain's preaching of the Buddha Dharma, however evil his life has been. The chaplain said the situation is entirely different for those who have never encountered religion. This is an extremely significant fact, and one which we must consider carefully.

Nothing can be more meritorious than to seek the Dharma and sow the seeds of encounter with the Buddha. Therefore, even though someone might not immediately respond in any way, we should always remember not to lose hope or zeal, but constantly and patiently sow the seeds of truth whenever we can.

This is one of the essential points of this chapter.

The text says, "They never met a buddha, never heard the Dharma, never saw a samgha, and . . . underwent great sufferings."

Earlier, in the July–September 2010 issue of *Dharma World*, we noted that the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Samgha are the Three Treasures in which all Buddhists take refuge. We also noted the significance of devotion to these Three Treasures as a whole.

However, taking refuge in the Three Treasures is so fundamental in determining our attitude as Buddhists that we should take this opportunity for a thorough commentary on it.

After attaining enlightenment at Buddhagaya (now Bodhi Gaya), Shakyamuni went first to Deer Park, near the town of Varanasi (now Benares), where for the first time

he preached the Dharma to the five ascetics with whom he had previously practiced austerities. On the spot, these five were led to the truth and became his disciples. That was the beginning of Shakyamuni's community.

From then on, people near Benares came one after another to honor the Buddha, hoping to renounce the world and receive his teachings. When these people came, the five bhikshu disciples led them before the Buddha, who immediately accepted them as followers.

Things went along this way until his disciples numbered sixty, and the Buddha thought, "If the situation remains this way, it will be impossible to inspire devotion to the teachings in innumerable people in the days to come. I must consider a way for my disciples themselves to accept renunciation of the world by those they have instructed."

Yet if people's commitment to taking holy orders and renouncing the world were not verified, the results might not be good. So the Buddha declared the three fundamental vows of his followers. He determined that if people took these three firm vows, they would qualify as his followers, even if he did not accept them personally. The three vows are as follows:

I take refuge in the Buddha.
I take refuge in the Dharma.
I take refuge in the Samgha.

In other words, they make their spiritual foundation the Buddha, his teachings, and the community of believers who practice his teachings, and devote themselves body and mind to following the teachings.

Without such a serious frame of mind, it is impossible to have true faith and carry out true practice.

The Seventeen-Article Constitution of Japan promulgated by Prince Shotoku (574–622) was the first body of Japanese law governing the state and the populace, and we may go so far as to say that Japanese civilization prospered under this constitution, which is imbued with the spirit of Buddhism, and particularly of the Lotus Sutra.

The second article says, "Sincerely reverence the Three Treasures. The Buddha, the Law, and the religious orders are the final refuge of all beings and the supreme objects of reverence in all countries. It is a law honored by all, no matter what the age or who the person. Few men are utterly bad; with instruction they can follow it. But if they do not betake themselves to the Three Treasures, how can their crookedness be made straight?"

For over 1,300 years since that constitution was adopted, the spirit of devotion to the Three Treasures has ceaselessly pulsed through Japanese veins. We must once again ponder deeply on this truth.

Just what are the Buddha, Dharma, and Samgha? They are said to have three different significances, both profound and concrete.

The first is the Three Treasures in Concrete Forms, such as images, scriptures, and communities of believers. They are so called because they visibly represent the Three Treasures as Special Manifestations (which will be discussed later), instilling them in people's hearts.

Art depicts the Buddha visibly, such as statues and paintings of the Buddha, used as focuses of devotion.

Ultimately, what we should take refuge in is, as I shall explain later, is the Eternal Original Buddha. But to say, therefore, that the historical Shakyamuni, who lived in India, is a mere cast-off shell, or to hold that there is absolutely no need of Buddha images or other depictions of him, is an insensitive, mistaken view that disregards natural human feelings.

The human world is not one in which everything is governed by reason alone. If reason alone were sufficient to solve all issues, then common sense, morality, and law would be sufficient. With these alone, however, people cannot be freed from suffering, and the world would not be at peace. This is the reason for religion's absolute necessity.

Religion's purpose is to purify and elevate us. For religion to do this, we must cultivate a yearning for goodness, truth, and beauty. We venerate Shakyamuni Buddha, who imparted the supreme teachings for the good of all humanity and who, in his actual self, set an example of human perfection. We also worship him in the form of Buddha images. These are entirely natural expressions of religious sentiment.

Therefore, to say that because a Buddha image is only made of metal or wood, it is unnecessary to worship or venerate it, is to ignore true human sentiment. It is an entirely trivial way of thinking.

The Dharma of the Three Treasures in Concrete Forms includes scriptures, which set down the Buddha's teachings. The Absolute Truth (Thusness) is precious, and ultimately what we ought to take refuge in is that truth. However, someone had to make that truth known, and if there were no scripture setting down the teachings, it would be extremely difficult for those of us in the modern age to know them completely and keep them in our hearts.

Therefore, we must deeply revere the scriptures because of their priceless role in instilling the teachings in people's hearts.

As mentioned frequently to this point, the next term in Sanskrit, *samgha*, originally meant "close affiliation," is the term we use for the clergy. In other words, the union of people who believe in and practice the Buddha Dharma is the original meaning of "samgha."

The Samgha of the Three Treasures in Concrete Forms is

virtually identical with the meaning of the original Sanskrit, “a group of closely bound members who believe in and practice the teachings of the Buddha.” This is surely a realistic view. As long as the Buddha Dharma exists, in any age, it continues to be universal.

Why is it then that in our actual life of faith we must take refuge in samgha in the sense of a community of Buddhist believers?

Setting aside for the moment certain exceptional people, ordinary people are apt to be swayed by things that happen in daily life or by self-delusion. Our world is so complex, and various evils are so rampant, that solitary practice of the faith might expose people to doubts about the Buddha Dharma and allow them to stray from the correct path, and be overcome by doubts or temptation.

When people of the same faith meet harmoniously, they can encourage, admonish, assist, and teach one another. Not only are they admirably able to overcome any doubts, but they can deepen their faith and attain a higher spiritual state.

So the Samgha of the Three Treasures in Concrete Forms is absolutely essential, and the prime reason for this is that it serves as a spiritual foundation and support.

There is one more important point.

If individuals quietly maintain their religious faith, they can all find happiness. But many other people might still be unhappy. Consequently, the world as a whole would grow no better in the least.

If the world at large does not improve, then even individuals will not find true happiness. For instance, even if you obey traffic laws perfectly yourself but others do not, you never know when you might be in danger. You yourself may not lie or steal, but as long as there are people in your society who do, you can never be sure when you might be victimized.

Therefore, the ultimate purpose of the Buddha’s teachings is to ennoble all people and create human happiness. That is why the Buddha Dharma does not allow the selfishness of caring only for our own happiness and not that of others. Such an attitude violates the spirit of the Buddha. When we find happiness, we want to guide as many other people as possible along the way to happiness. This is the Buddha Dharma, the fundamental truth.

However, unless people are exceptional in many ways, their individual strength is feeble. It is quite difficult for one individual to move many others. However much someone wants to lead many others to the path of true happiness, the power of that individual is limited. Yet even people of limited strength, when gathered in large numbers, can become a force of unexpected power. This is the strength of solidarity. So those who believe in and practice the teachings of the Buddha ought to come closely together

and with the newfound energy of that union make the world a better place and bring happiness to many others.

The Samgha of the Three Treasures in Concrete Forms is essential, and this is the second reason one must take refuge in it.

In historical terms we refer to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Samgha together as the Three Treasures as Special Manifestations. This means that the Three Treasures in the most profound sense (the Three Treasures Unified as One, which will be discussed later) were manifested in special ways in particular times and places, according to causes and conditions.

The Eternal Original Buddha appeared in India two thousand five hundred years ago as Shakyamuni Buddha, the World-honored One, the historical Buddha. Shakyamuni is the Buddha of the Three Treasures as Special Manifestations. The reason for taking refuge in this Buddha should require no additional comment here as it has already been discussed in the section on the Buddha of the Three Treasures in Concrete Forms.

The Dharma originally meant universal truth, and the fundamental Dharma (*tathata*) and the Dharma of the Three Treasures as Special Manifestations are the teachings that Shakyamuni imparted in ways easy to understand.

If we tentatively classify mental processes as those of the heart (emotional) and those of the mind (intellectual) taking refuge in the Buddha would be a matter of the heart. So however dull people might be, if they set aside the ego and devote themselves to the Buddha, they will be spiritually purified and invigorated, and find spiritual joy.

Since that is an emotional experience, even if someone can communicate its wonders to others, it is almost impossible for ordinary people to analyze and coherently explain the process by which they achieved it.

Those who have heard about the wonders of this state, once they themselves desire to achieve it themselves, must by their own efforts enter a meditative state of concentration (*samadhi*). In sum, each person must begin at the very beginning.

However far one goes, it remains within the realm of personal experience. Those who do not attempt it will not be liberated, and even those who do attempt it will not be liberated without purifying their minds.

In practical terms, this is zazen, which is sitting calmly in meditation in the hope of eventually attaining buddhahood. Those who practice perfect zazen will, like the exalted Zen priests of all ages, become what can reasonably be called living buddhas. However, those who cannot rise to such heights through zazen cannot be liberated at all.

That is why ordinary people need to acquire wisdom in order to understand the fundamental Dharma, so that

they need not resort to special religious discipline to find happiness. For this reason, it is absolutely essential that the teachings that make up the fundamental Dharma should be easy to understand.

In other words, understanding the true aspect of all things and helping many others live according to the fundamental Dharma become absolute requisites for liberation.

Whereas taking refuge in the Buddha is a matter of the heart, devoting oneself to the Dharma is taking refuge in the fundamental Dharma, that is, the universal truth and Dharma, and belongs to the realm of the intellect. Accordingly, preaching clearly in ways that are easy to understand can reach a universal audience.

The Buddha, who saw the true aspect of all things and was enlightened to the fundamental Dharma, preached the universal teachings in the way just described throughout his lifetime, and it is this that we call the Dharma of the Three Treasures as Special Manifestations.

Living according to those teachings will free us entirely from error, so we can rest easy, taking refuge in them, leaving everything to them.

The Samgha of the Three Treasures as Special Manifestations refers to the historical figures or communities of believers who absorbed Shakyamuni's teachings, practiced them, preached them to others, and embodied the grandeur and wonders of the Buddha Dharma.

In terms of individuals, the Samgha of the Three Treasures as Special Manifestations included distinguished priests in India, China, Japan, and other Buddhist countries who protected and disseminated the Buddha Dharma.

In terms of groups of believers, we must mention first Shakyamuni's Samgha, or the community of followers which formed to learn and practice at Shakyamuni's side. Generations of similar groups formed in various countries. They constitute the Samgha of the Three Treasures as Special Manifestations.

Those individuals and their communities, who displayed the magnificent fruits of faith, are irrefutable evidence of the grandeur of the Buddha Dharma. This sense of people embodying the Dharma, as exemplars of the Dharma, is one more significance of the Samgha. So we modern followers of the Buddha must also take refuge in the Samgha in this sense, and take those forerunners as models for our own religious practice. We too must endeavor to become exemplars of the Dharma.

This is why we must devote ourselves to the Three Treasures as Special Manifestations.

Now, we will examine the Buddha, Dharma, and the Samgha from the ultimate, or most profound, viewpoint, according to which they are called the Three Treasures Unified as One.

The Buddha of the Three Treasures Unified as One is the Eternal Original Buddha, that is, Thusness (*tathata*) manifested in personified form.

The Dharma is Thusness, the fundamental Dharma itself.

The Samgha is the virtuous aspect of union, or harmony, and embodies the fundamental Dharma, Thusness, or the Absolute Truth.

The Three Treasures in this sense are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Samgha in their essence, one and the same, so that they are indistinguishable. Consequently they are referred to as the Three Treasures Unified as One.

To take refuge in the Buddha in this sense means to be absorbed body and mind in the Eternal Original Buddha; that is, to become one with him. To completely enter and abide perpetually in such a state as a usual condition is to enter the realm of the buddhas, the ultimate state of awakening. It is the realm of supreme freedom.

Moreover, taking refuge in the Dharma in this sense means entirely abandoning the "small self" and living wholly according to the fundamental Dharma, the universal truth and law. In other words, it means nothing more than taking refuge in the Buddha. This is precisely why these are called the Three Treasures Unified as One.

What then is taking refuge in the Samgha in terms of the Three Treasures Unified as One? It means to honor union as the highest noble virtue, to make it one's mental support, and to make efforts with one's whole self to realize it.

Doing that is taking refuge in the Buddha and the Dharma. This is because the Buddha makes union a fundamental virtue and the Dharma is the law of union of all people and things.

Earlier I mentioned that those who became angry and scorned the Bodhisattva Never Despire for his revering the buddha-nature in others brought punishment upon themselves, and for two hundred kotis of kalpas they were unable to encounter the Three Treasures. As a result, they endured the sufferings of the Avici hell.

After expiating their bad karma, they again encountered the Bodhisattva Never Despire preaching the Dharma. Recognizing his great transcendent powers, his power of eloquent discourse, and his power of excellent meditation, they finally listened and heeded his preaching, and followed him.

Who were these people? Quite an unexpected group.

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.