

# Showing Compassion for Those Who Suffer

by Nichiko Niwano

Many bodhisattvas appear in the Lotus Sutra. Among them, one of the best known is the Bodhisattva Kannon who hears the voices of those suffering in the real world and transforms herself into many different forms and shapes in order to liberate them. The Kannon who looks upon people with compassionate eyes is one ideal image of humanity, which put into our everyday terms could be expressed as true friendship, sympathy, and empathy.

However, when we face a disaster such as the massive earthquake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011, we may have no clue about what we should do and remain frozen in place. What actually happened made us reconsider how we come to terms with a difficulty that we have not experienced firsthand, and how we can get close to the feelings of suffering people and stand by them as a companion as they move forward. It seems that since that day, many people have come to think about what they can do to help, that is, how they can put compassion into practice.

As is often said, the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference. Being cut off from connections to other people, being alone and feeling abandoned—that is a condition lacking love or compassion. Thus we could say that being considerate of people who are suffering, never forgetting them, and praying from the heart that their suffering will ease even a little is getting closer to them and putting compassion into practice.

If we can provide assistance in a concrete form, then it is important that

we continue to do so. However, even though we may not be able to participate in volunteer activities or offer as much financial assistance as we would like, all of us can at least continue our practice of compassion by hoping and praying for the happiness of those people who are suffering.

## Widening the Circle of Warmth

When people are experiencing some difficulty, we think about what we can do to help them and, within the realm of the possible, we want to lend them a hand. This arises from the mind of consideration for others that everyone possesses or the mind of donation and benefiting others. From another perspective, such practices could also be called repaying our debt of gratitude for being caused to live.

This world is a realm of gratitude for all things supporting us, where numerous encounters form a network of relationships linked together. When we think about things in this way, we come to see that acting with consideration for others and sharing with them whatever we have is the least we can do to repay our enormous debt of gratitude for the multitude of blessings we are receiving.

When we think about doing something for other people, we may end up being overanxious concerning it. In that case, we may feel discouraged because our efforts seem inadequate, but if we are to repay our debt of gratitude, then without feeling discouraged we can simply go about doing whatever

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small things come naturally. After all, we are all brothers and sisters leading lives that are part of the same great life. And since there is, from the beginning, no distinction between oneself and others, all of us are already walking together on the same path.

In reality, the assistance that each of us can offer may be rather minor. However, when we look at things with an eye toward the source of all life, then even though what we can offer may seem negligible, our hearts and minds that pray and hope for the sake of the world and of humanity are thereby connected to a great system of support. Being considerate toward our own families leads to warming the hearts of many people, the emotion passing from one person to another. The consideration we show others in our daily lives becomes the starting point for widening the circle of warmth in society.

Such hearts and minds are functioning in this way because of the presence of Kannon, who awakens in us the heart and mind of compassion. Kannon may be a family member or a friend, or perhaps even someone seen on television. I think that learning compassion and wisdom from what Kannon teaches us is, indeed, walking the Way together. □

# DHARMA WORLD

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

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# Align Our Values with the Buddha's

by Yasuo Hideshima

When we ask “Where does the Buddha live now?” another question arises: “What is the Buddha?” Many people will recall Buddhist images in temples, but for most Rissho Kosei-kai members, the image that comes to mind is their focus of devotion, the Gohonzon.

A statue of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Great Benevolent Teacher, the World-honored One, was enshrined in the Great Sacred Hall as Rissho Kosei-kai's focus of devotion in 1964. Since 2008 the Gohonzon has been immediately enshrined in new members' homes. All members kneel before it morning and evening, reciting the Lotus Sutra and sitting quietly in meditation with eyes closed. This is one of the most important and basic practices of their faith.

Mahayana Buddhism believes that the Buddha has three bodies: the Dharma-body, the reward-body, and the transformation-body. The Dharma-body represents the great life of the universe, or the Truth, which sustains all that exists. The reward-body is endowed with perfect virtue and is a reward for accumulated religious practice on the path to buddhahood. The transformation-body is the historical Shakyamuni, who attained supreme enlightenment in India. When we speak of the Buddha, we consider the three bodies to be one.

Rissho Kosei-kai members do not recite the Lotus Sutra to have their wishes granted. They do so to grow spiritually, with Kannon and other bodhisattvas as models, and to align their sense of values with the laws of the universe and the

Truth of Shakyamuni's enlightenment. When our sense of values is completely at one with the Buddha's, we feel close to him. Then our values do not bring us into confrontation with others. Our selfish attachments and troubles fade away as we attain a state of mind that is bright and forward looking.

What then is the Buddha's sense of values? To put it simply, it can be summarized in three ways: The first is that everything (all phenomena and existence) is one. The second is that there is nothing useless. The third is that everyone is interconnected. Normally, our common sense tells us that there is profit or loss and things can be good or bad. We tend to make judgments on these bases. In fact, this way of looking at things is self-centered. It is important that we distance ourselves from this. So, if things are not going as we wish, we should ask how the situation would appear to the Buddha and consider whether we are looking at it from our own biased point of view.

When we meet a difficult person, or when something unpleasant happens, we are tempted to flee or stay away. This is when we must think about the Buddha and ask ourselves what we should do or how we should change to bring out the best in the person or the situation. This is because this world has been created in harmony, where everything depends on everything else. People will become happy when they abide by the Truth.

Understanding this theoretically does not mean that we can easily discard our self-centered sense of values.

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People are physical beings and instinctively try to protect themselves, so they inevitably have a selfish outlook. Thus, when Rissho Kosei-kai members kneel before the Gohonzon, it is an opportunity to be keenly aware of the essence of the Buddha. Nevertheless, great troubles and sadness still afflict them, and they cannot put into practice the three ways of looking at things that I outlined above. There are separations from loved ones as well as accidents and disasters. At such times, I don't think we need force ourselves to align our sense of values with the Buddha's. Weep, be as sad as you can. Even people who grow bitter, and feel there are no gods or buddhas, live through the providence of the Buddha. In other words, they are his incarnations. When finally their tears dry, there is a moment when quietness returns to the saddened mind. It might take decades. However, when people resolve to make a new start, the Buddha is always at their side.

Striving step by step to move closer to the realm of the Buddha, which transcends the world of self-centered human beings, and making our own sense of values identical with the Truth and the Buddha's Dharma while we are still alive—that is the goal of members of Rissho Kosei-kai. That is to see the Buddha. □

# The Buddha Is Not Everywhere: Where Does the Buddha Live Now?

by Gene Reeves

***The Buddha does not live everywhere. But this does not mean that there are places from which the Buddha is simply and completely absent. The Buddha is everywhere we look for him, but you and I can never look everywhere. We can only look somewhere.***

I suggested the theme “Where does the Buddha live now?” for *Dharma World* because I think it is terribly important that readers of the Lotus Sutra are clear about the sutra’s most important teaching, a teaching found especially in chapter 16 but assumed throughout the text—the ongoing or everlasting life of the Buddha, a life that depends on the Buddha’s being embodied, being alive, in human beings, just as the Buddha was embodied in the historical man Shakyamuni.

## Eternal Buddha

In Rissho Kosei-kai we often use the expression *eternal Buddha*. I don’t think this is entirely inappropriate, but it can be very misleading. Beginning perhaps with Plato, Western philosophers have often made use of ideas of eternity. This term has the basic meaning of beyond or above time and space; in other words, a kind of timelessness outside of historical times and places. The eternal is contrasted with the historical or worldly. God lives in eternity; human beings live in history; and the two are totally different.

Of course, in everyday, ordinary English, the word *eternity* is used in

much less expansive and much less technical ways. One can say, for example, that I waited “an eternity” for a package to arrive in the mail. But such usage is a matter of exaggeration rather than a reflection of the philosophical or technical meaning of *eternal*.

So far as I can tell, the authors of the Lotus Sutra, or at least the Chinese

translators, had no conception of eternity, or if they did, they did not make use of it in the sutra. They had something quite different in mind: a buddha who died and was cremated but continues to live, continues to live in our world and in our historical time. Rather than being outside of time, the Shakyamuni Buddha of the Lotus Sutra is present, at least potentially, in all time. In a sense, the Buddha of the Lotus Sutra is the very opposite of eternal: rather than being outside of historical time, he is always present in it.

The Lotus Sutra, however, is a very practical and religious book, not much interested in philosophical ideas of being out of time or of being in all time. Its interest is in the presence of the Buddha for you and me, in our lives, whenever, and wherever we may be.

## The Fantastic Abundant Treasures Buddha

The story in chapter 11, “The Sight of the Treasure Stupa,” is extremely important for the Lotus Sutra as a whole. Though there are twenty-eight chapters in the sutra, in an important sense, chapter 11 is in the middle, at the heart of the sutra.

In this story, a fantastically large and beautiful stupa, a “treasure tower,” emerges from the earth before Shakyamuni Buddha and his congregation of monks and nuns, laywomen and laymen. Immediately a voice emerges from this stupa, praising Shakyamuni for teaching the Lotus Sutra. Everyone



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knows, of course, that stupas are repositories for crematory remains. Only ashes, bones, and teeth should be inside. So the Buddha has to explain that this appearance of a stupa with a buddha in it, the whole body of a buddha, is due to that buddha's vow to go, in his stupa, to anywhere the sutra was being effectively taught. Importantly, Shakyamuni Buddha says, more than once, that this Abundant Treasures Buddha is "extinct." He died long, long ago and his body was cremated.

The point of this part of the dramatic story is that a buddha from the past, even the distant past, still lives in the present. This part of the story is preparation for the claim to be made in chapter 16 that Shakyamuni Buddha, our Buddha, though dead and cremated, is still alive in the present. Just how he is alive is not discussed explicitly but is implicit in much of what the sutra teaches.

We may be tempted to equate this conception of the Buddha with standard Christian conceptions of God. Accordingly, like God, the Buddha would be utterly different from human beings, above ordinary space and time, living in a very distant heaven or otherworldly location. With miracles and such, he would intervene from time to time in the natural workings of our world, but he himself would not be in or of this world.

This is almost exactly the opposite of what the Lotus Sutra teaches. For the Lotus Sutra, this world is Shakyamuni's world. This is where he lives and works. In the next part of the story in chapter 11, Shakyamuni Buddha emits a light

that goes throughout the universe, inviting all the buddhas to come to this world to see him and to see the whole body of Abundant Treasures Buddha. The point of this part of the story is that this world, and its Buddha Shakyamuni, are centrally important for the whole universe.

The buddhas and their attendant bodhisattvas do not, however, come to this world to work, they come to witness and learn. What they see and learn is that a dead, cremated, and extinct buddha can be alive in the present. And later in the story, in chapter 15, when some of those bodhisattvas from other worlds offer to stay behind to help Shakyamuni Buddha with his work in this world, Shakyamuni in effect says "Thanks, but no thanks. We have plenty of bodhisattvas of our own." This is a powerful affirmation of the importance of life in this world.

## **Bodhisattvas of the Earth**

No sooner does the Buddha reject the offer of the bodhisattvas from other worlds than millions and millions of bodhisattvas emerge from the earth. These bodhisattvas from the earth can be interpreted in many ways but have long been understood to be bodhisattvas of the future, bodhisattvas who emerge from everyday life in this world. You and I, at least some of the time, are among those bodhisattvas. To the extent that we are bodhisattvas at all—and the Lotus Sutra insists that we are—our lives emerge from everyday life in this world.

These bodhisattvas of the earth are the primary place in which the Buddha lives now. They are how the Buddha's life is extended far beyond the life of the historical Buddha. But this extended and long-lasting life of the Buddha is not a life in eternity or in some other world. The bodhisattvas are bodhisattvas of this world, here to do the work of the Buddha in his world, which is our world.

This is how our buddha continues to be actually alive though also dead.

Some say that Shakyamuni's death was just a magical stunt to get our attention. According to them he never really died but only pretended to die, like the doctor-father in the parable of the good physician in chapter 16. Accordingly, the Buddha has now gone off somewhere, where he now continues to live. It certainly is possible to interpret the Lotus Sutra in this way. But to do so would be, I think, to miss the central thrust and meaning of this wonderful text.

The Lotus Sutra wants us to know, in the depths of our being, that it is we who can keep the Buddha alive, that those who do the Buddha's work in this world make the Buddha's life long lasting. It is in the deeds of bodhisattvas, who exclude no one, that the Buddha lives and can continue to live.

## **The Buddha's World**

In the Lotus Sutra the buddhas in the ten directions are important. They are the ones who come to this world to witness and hear Abundant Treasures and Shakyamuni Buddha. But what is

more important for the Lotus Sutra is that Shakyamuni Buddha's world is this world. This is where his work is done—or not done.

Thus, for the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha is not found in some distant land or in the depths of the cosmos. The Buddha is not like a great god in the heavens making arrangements from some lofty location. The Buddha is the buddha of this world and in this world. This means, of course, that those who want to do the Buddha's work have to do it in this historical, concrete, and actual world.

## Everyone and Anyone

We can say, correctly I think, that for the Lotus Sutra buddha-nature is in all beings, in everyone. There is a sense in which this is the central teaching running through the entire sutra. But such an abstract truth is not what the Lotus Sutra is primarily trying to teach. The truth that the Lotus Sutra wants to affirm, and wants us to affirm, is that we can find buddha-nature in anyone.

The difference between *everyone* and *anyone* may not seem very great or very important, but it is. To have compassion for everyone is about the same as having compassion for no one, because real compassion cannot encompass everyone, which of course includes mostly people we don't know and never will. But we can have compassion for anyone, that is, for someone, for any someone. In other words, it is not the highly abstract everyone that would benefit from our compassion but rather some real, concrete someone or several such someones. The difference is thus a difference between a very abstract idea (everyone) and a very concrete someone.

Similarly, for the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha is found not just everywhere but anywhere, in specific, concrete special moments somewhere. Somewhere can be anywhere, and in this sense the Buddha can be found anywhere, but

such an anywhere is always some very specific, special time and place. The Buddha is with each one of us in special times and places and ways.

Thus we can say, and I think should say, that the Buddha does not live everywhere. But this does not mean that there are places from which the Buddha is simply and completely absent. The Buddha is everywhere we look for him, but you and I can never look everywhere. We can only look somewhere.

## The Many Places of Meeting the Buddha

Thus the Buddha can be met, and is met, in myriad places and ways.

When I was a young theological school student at Boston University, I would sometimes walk across the Back Bay Fens to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, where I would sit in a room in the basement containing only a large statue of Amida Buddha sitting in meditation. Just being in the presence of that buddha had an enormously calming effect on me. In retrospect, I think I was feeling the presence of the Buddha in that statue.

In more recent times, I often go to Rissho Kosei-kai's Great Sacred Hall just to sit for a little while with its great Buddha image.

All such images are just that—images made of materials from the earth: wood and clay and metal and stone. They are not the Buddha, but in them and before them we can feel the calm but also exciting presence of the Buddha, and on some days our hearts, like Shariputra's heart, may dance for joy before this joy bringer.

## Buddhist Practice

I am not much of a meditator in a strict sense of that term. As chanting and recitation do for many, they bring me greater peace and insight. For most Buddhists in East Asia, reciting "Namu Amida

Buddha" or "Namu Myoho Renge-kyo," or reciting from one of the sutras, is one of the most important ways in which people meet the living Buddha.

For other Buddhists, especially in the West, encountering the Buddha may come from practicing deep meditation, primarily sitting meditation.

There are many different such Buddhist practices. None is essential. They are all skillful means that may be appropriate for some people in some situations but not for everyone.

Guanyin (Kannon), following the Lotus Sutra, teaches that the most important Buddhist practice is compassion. This is not the compassion of meditation, a feeling of compassion that remains in the heart and mind, but rather an actually practiced, embodied compassion, a compassion that is always for real, concrete living beings in actual situations. In other words, it is a this-worldly compassion.

Practice of compassion can be compared with bodhisattva practice but is not quite the same. The idea of bodhisattva practice is very broad. Sometimes it is manifest in simple acts of kindness; sometimes it may involve performing surgery requiring great skill. It is doing good in whatever ways we can do good. Probably all bodhisattva practice involves some compassion. But compassion can also be seen as a special kind of bodhisattva practice. Compassion involves reaching out to another with sympathy and understanding. It may entail no more than sitting with someone when the person needs someone to be with him or her or listening to someone when that person needs someone to listen.

Any of these various kinds of practice, too numerous even to mention here, make it possible for us, and for others, to feel the presence of the Buddha. Thus we can say that the Buddha lives not only in images of buddhas and bodhisattvas but, perhaps more important, in the actions of bodhisattvas of the earth.

## Buddha-Nature

While we can affirm the possibility of finding the Buddha in many images and different kinds of image, and in many practices and many different kinds of practice, in the Lotus Sutra the most important place for meeting the Buddha is in the buddha-nature, the potentiality of becoming a buddha, that can be found in anyone and in any situation we meet. While it may be true that buddha-nature is everywhere, what is important is that it can be found anywhere, especially anywhere you seek it or try to discern it.

Often it is found where you would not expect to find it. King Wonderfully Adorned in chapter 27 does not expect to find the Buddha in his own sons, but he does, and he learns from them.

Normally we think of buddha-nature in people, including ourselves. This is appropriate, but buddha-nature is not so limited. We can, if we look, find buddha-nature in all sorts of situations—especially in difficult situations where we think there is no hope, no redeeming element, nothing but darkness on our horizon. But if we look, look under and over and through the clouds of darkness, we may find a silver lining,

something that redeems the situation and makes it possible to go on. Such a silver lining is the buddha-nature in that situation.

Recognizing buddha-nature, whether in other people or in ourselves, whether in nature or in situations of everyday life, recognizing buddha-nature wherever we find it, depends on ourselves. Like the two men in chapter 12, Shariputra and Accumulated Wisdom, who think the Buddha cannot be embodied in a girl, we may be helped in our seeing by a dragon girl, but finally we ourselves have to see the buddha-nature in people with a vision that is given to us. ≥

# Where Does the Buddha Live Now?

by Yasuaki Nara

*If I am asked where the Buddha is, I can only reply that it is the place where we meet the Buddha while walking along the Buddhist path.*

The question “Where does the Buddha live now?” has a distinctly existential feel. As is widely known, Buddhism has numerous buddhas. Just as there is the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, there are buddhas associated with the *dharma-kāya* (Dharma-body), the essence of the Dharma, whose truth the Buddha realized. Personifications of this Dharma include the Eternal Buddha of the Lotus Sutra and Vairocana Buddha. At the same time, there are buddhas who express the *sambhoga-kāya* (bliss-body or reward-body) of the Buddha, like Amida Buddha (Amitābha) and Yakushi Nyorai (Bhaiṣajyaguru, Medicine Buddha), whose bodies have been received as a reward for accomplishing their vow to save living beings. Shakyamuni as a historical personage is a transformation-body (*nirmāṇa-kāya*), taking actual physical form. Basically all of these buddhas are, in the end, the buddha of the Dharma-body. Each has devotees who expound the specific form of belief associated with them. It is up to individual believers which buddha to give their faith to and how to express that faith. This is very closely related to the life of each person, so there is no objective way of answering the question “Where does the Buddha live now?”

For me, the Buddha is, above all, the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni.

Many decades ago I was studying at the University of Calcutta in India. Once when I was walking through a farming village in Bengal, I happened to come across a Hindu ascetic. I was deeply impressed by the serene atmosphere around him and by his intelligent, gentle expression. In that extraordinary encounter, I could not resist seeing in his face the face of Shakyamuni. Ever since, whenever I have read “the Buddha said” in the sutras of early Buddhism, that ascetic’s face has swum into view. Since it is a very concrete image that I see, I ask him many questions. Immediately an answer comes. I have questioned and argued with the ascetic, or rather with Shakyamuni, who has taken form in my mind with the ascetic’s face, and I have been taught and encouraged by him. Through the scriptures, I have been able to hold conversations with Shakyamuni the man.

What I first came to realize was that Buddhism is not only doctrine but a path to live by. Though it is not a philosophy in itself, gradually I have come to see that there is a philosophy within that path. This is shown in an important teaching in the sutra named “The City” in the Saṃyutta Nikāya, in which the Buddha was teaching his disciples about the path to enlightenment. He tells the story of a man speaking to his king:

“Sire, I was wandering in a lonely forest and by chance discovered an ancient road that had been traveled by people of past times. I followed it, and I came across an ancient city inhabited by people of past times. There were parks and groves, and along the banks were beautiful lotus ponds. Sire, rebuild that city.”

“The king had the city rebuilt. It flourished, and many people gathered there. It was prosperous beyond measure.

“Bhikkhus! In the same way I too discovered the ancient path, the ancient road traveled by the buddhas of past times.

“Bhikkhus! What is that ancient path, the ancient road traveled by the buddhas of past times? It is this noble eightfold path. . . . This is the ancient path, the ancient road traveled by the buddhas of past times. I followed that path, and following it, I gained knowledge of old age and death, knowledge of the origination of old age and death, knowledge of the cessation of old age and death, and knowledge of the path leading to the cessation of old age and death.” (Saṃyutta Nikāya 12.65)

What is called here the “ancient city” is the aim of religious training, the truth that is the goal of seeking the Way. To attain that truth, to gain knowledge, is nothing other than enlightenment. However, the sutra is silent about what the ancient city and enlightenment actually are. Rather, it speaks of an eightfold



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path as the way to reach them. Someone walking along the ancient path to the ancient city comes to know old age and death, those things that give rise to disquiet and suffering, what causes them, that they can be extinguished, and the way to do so. That is to say, the sutra is speaking here of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

These are truly the means to enlightenment. At the same time, though, we must not ignore the fact that they are also the practice of enlightenment itself. The Buddhist sutras say over and over again that the Noble Eightfold Path is the Way that should be practiced throughout one's life. Enlightenment is becoming a buddha, and it also means living as a buddha. Thus the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path are simultaneously the "path to buddhahood" and nothing other than the "path of the Buddha."

If I am asked where the Buddha is, I can only reply that it is the place where we meet the Buddha while walking along the Buddhist path.

Zen master Dōgen (1200–1253) taught exactly the same thing.

I am affiliated with the Sōtō sect of Zen Buddhism. When I returned to Japan after studying in India, I became a lecturer at Komazawa University in Tokyo. I had a knowledge of Dōgen, the founder of Sōtō Zen, but now I had to deal seriously with Dōgen's religion. Just as I had done when coming face-to-face with Shakyamuni, I began to question Dōgen, listen to his answers, and question him again. I knew of no

other way than this to come close to him. In doing so I learned that Dōgen expounded the meaning of walking the Buddhist Way far more clearly than Shakyamuni.

Dōgen wrote in the *Shōbō genzō* (The eye and treasury of the true Dharma) about the perfections (*pāramitās*), the foundation of the practice of the Dharma in Mahayana Buddhism: "*Pāramitā* means 'reaching the other shore.' . . .

The 'other shore' is 'what is manifested' [*genjō*], and 'reaching' is 'what is fixed without fail' [*kōan*]. Do not think that practice leads you to the other shore, for there is practice on the other shore. If you practice, you have reached the other shore" ("Bukkyō" [Buddhism]).

*Pāramitā* is Sanskrit for "perfection," and it was commonly translated into Chinese by a compound expression meaning "reaching the other shore" (Jpn.,

*tō-higan*). The “other shore” is used in contrast to “this shore,” which refers to the world of ordinary human beings, and it denotes the world of enlightenment, reached through religious practice and training. It is to know Dharma, the Truth. This is precisely the reason that “reaching the other shore” is used. Dōgen, however, deliberately reconstructed the Chinese grammar, transposing the verb and reinterpreting the phrase as “the other shore has been reached” (Jpn., *higan-tō*). “Perfection” makes us think of the six (or ten) perfections that are a ubiquitous aim of religious practice and training in Mahayana Buddhism. There is no difference in terms of practice between the perfections and the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path in the early Buddhist scriptures. They are all ways to live in the Truth that is the Dharma.

Here, *Truth* (that is, Dharma, the Buddha’s Way, and so on) incorporates everything that exists (phenomena), without exception, including us human beings. It is the activity of the universe that has brought everything into existence, whose spontaneous working is expressed specifically in words such as dependent origination, impermanence, nonself, non-self-nature, and emptiness. It was this that Shakyamuni discovered to be the absolute religious truth. He realized that gaining insight into this truth and abiding by it are ways to manifest one’s true self and bring oneself and others liberation from suffering. He taught that there is an absolute truth on which we can depend for our way of living, that is, the Buddhism he expounded.

Dōgen expressed this idea using the beautiful metaphor of the boat of the Dharma:

[This self of mine, my life, is mine; it is my individual thing, but it is not my possession. If I did not live, I would not have life. However, my life is sustained by the Dharma, the

Truth of the universe.] Life is like riding in a boat [called Truth]. I set the sail, I take the rudder, I pole the boat. [The boat thus carries me along.] The boat and I are one; there is no “I” that is outside the boat. That I sail in the boat makes the boat a boat. [That I am enabled to live within the Truth makes the Truth the Truth.] Do your utmost to keep on learning the various facets of your own true existence that never changes. (*Shōbō genzō*, “Zenki” [Full functioning])

From the time we are born, we are riding in the boat of the Dharma. Here *Dharma* may be considered to refer to the Buddha of the Dharma-body. From the very beginning, we are one with the Dharma, one with the Buddha. Nevertheless, it is I who am actually sailing the boat; if I did not do so, it would be as if there were no Dharma and no Buddha.

I understand Dōgen’s saying that the other shore “has been reached” in this sense. Walking the Way of the Buddha (religious practice) is a means to enlightenment, but it is not something that finishes with the means. We continue to walk until we die. Dōgen tells us that “there is practice on the other shore.” At the same time, when we walk the Way “here and now,” “the other shore has been reached.”

In another place in the *Shōbō genzō*, Dōgen said that walking the Buddhist Way unsteadily is as different from living with a firm conviction as a spark is from a *kalpa* (aeon) fire that burns up the universe. The difference is not in the essence of walking the Way itself but in whether or not a person has advanced along the Way. This is why Dōgen said “initial training and true enlightenment are one.”

I understand the Buddhist way of living to be underpinned by faith in walking the Way of the Buddha (the aspiration to enlightenment), so we live true to ourselves and true to the Dharma (that is, the

Buddha). This faith is also a dialogue with the Buddha, but we should not expect the conclusions to be the same for every person. Ten people may have ten different dialogues. Living in the present, I ask “the Buddha” questions, receive replies, and live accordingly. This may be said to be “returning to the Buddha.” Or perhaps it could be called having the Buddha live in the present.

At this point, it does not matter who this “Buddha” or what the “Dharma” is. In a similar vein, Dōgen too called the Truth by various names: the Buddha, the Buddha and the patriarchs, all the buddhas, Kannon, Bright Jewel, and so on. All of them, though, ultimately go back to Shakyamuni. Dōgen wrote: “All the buddhas spoken of here mean Shakyamuni Buddha. Shakyamuni Buddha is exactly one’s very Mind being the Buddha. When all the buddhas of the past, present, and future become buddhas, they become, without fail, Shakyamuni Buddha” (*Shōbō genzō*, “Sokushin ze butsu” [The Mind is none other than the Buddha]).

I agree with this definition. To me, there is no contradiction between the Shakyamuni whom I met in India, and am still continuing to meet, and the Buddha of the Dharma-body.

I am still immature as a human being. I continue to hold to my faith in Shakyamuni while at the same time revering Dōgen, but I remain far from what we call “enlightenment.” However, through the long years of my relationship with the Buddha, my conviction about the truth of the teachings has been, in its own way, affirmed for me. I am living as a person in the modern world, facing the various issues of the modern day. For me, this is in itself the “path to the Buddha” as well as the “path of the Buddha.” There is no other path by which to live.

In this sense, as far as I am concerned, the Buddha is with me.

Buddhism is the path that all people walk with the Buddha. □

# Where There Is Peace, There Is Buddha

## The Sublime Attitudes in Daily Living

by Ruben L. F. Habito

***[One's appropriate] responses [in daily situations] arise from the heart of one filled with peace, a heart overflowing with loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. As we ourselves learn to live in this way, we are given a glimpse of where the Buddha resides in our day and age.***

In our contemporary global society, characterized by so much violence and discord among human beings and so much woundedness on the personal, social, and ecological levels of our being, where can we find the Buddha?

In pursuing this question, let us take a hint from a well-known short scriptural text called the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* (found in the collection entitled *Sutta Nipāta*). It is included in one of the earliest layers of texts preserved in the Pali scriptures and has been used as a chant for recitation among Buddhist communities in Southeast Asia. I fondly recall the occasion when I first heard this text being recited in Pali at a local village community gathering in Sri Lanka many years ago. It was in the company of women and men young and elderly—plus small children and infants in their mothers' arms—who were all chanting wholeheartedly and from memory, palms joined in reverence. The visit there was made possible by friends in the Sarvodaya, a Buddhist-inspired socio-ecological movement founded by A. T. Ariyaratne, an awardee of the Niwano Peace Prize, well known for his vision of global peace through community building and cooperative action beginning at the village level.

The text opens with this line: "One who is well-versed in goodness, seeking, having attained the place of peace [*santampadam*], lives and acts in this way." The *sutta* then goes on to describe the characteristics of one who precisely lives this way of peace: that person is "able, upright, truly upright, kindly of speech, gentle and without conceit . . . content, easily satisfied, having few wants and simple tastes, with composed senses, discreet, not arrogant nor greedy."

The implication here is that one who walks the path of the awakened is one who walks the path of peace. How may we recognize the Buddha? Where there is peace, there we will find the Awakened One.

Having named some observable qualities of such a person of peace, the *sutta* then focuses on the central feature that underlies all of these: such a person steadfastly holds in his or her heart the all-embracing aspiration: May all beings be happy. It describes the wide range of diversity of sentient beings for whom this happiness is wished: "weak or strong, tall or short, seen or unseen, dwelling far or near, born or yet-to-be-born . . . may *all* beings be happy! [*sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā*]"

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The word translated as *happy* in English comes from the Pali *sukhitattā*, in turn derived from the more simple form *sukha*. Recall that the Buddha's path of awakening was launched with the realization that our human condition is marked by dissatisfaction, frustration, and suffering (*dukkha*). The word *dukkha* comes from a Pali compound indicating a wheel that is unaligned and off center and is thereby unable to roll on smoothly and function properly as a wheel. The inversion of this condition is *sukha*, giving the image of a wheel that has now found its center and thus is able to roll on smoothly and carry out its function properly as a wheel. In short, someone who has overcome this dissatisfactory state of ill-being—marked by lack of peace and steeped in the three poisons of greed, ill will, and ignorance—is in a state of well-being and happiness. This gives us a richer picture behind the word *happy* in the short aspiration "May all beings be happy." In other words, "May all beings attain



the fullness of well-being: freed from *dukkha*, arrive at the place of peace, and be able to transform greed into generosity, ill will into goodwill, and ignorance into wisdom.”

Such indeed is an awakened one, who walks the path of peace. And as this short scriptural text emphasizes, the heart of such a person is marked by loving-kindness (*mettā*). “As a mother would give her life to protect her only child, let one cherish all living beings with a boundless heart.” The fondest wish a mother can have for her only child is that the child grow up to attain the fullness of well-being throughout his or her life. And this is also the wish of one who walks the path of peace for each and every being in this universe. Such a heart and mind replete with loving-kindness “radiates over the entire world, spreading upwards to the skies, and downwards to the depths.” Such a heart and mind is referred to as a “sublime attitude,” or a place of “divine dwelling” (*brahmavihāra*).

Other texts from early scriptures expound on this place of divine dwelling as bearing four marks. In addition to loving-kindness, compassion (*karunā*), sympathetic joy (*mudithā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) are also included, together called the four immeasurables.

Let us look more closely at these

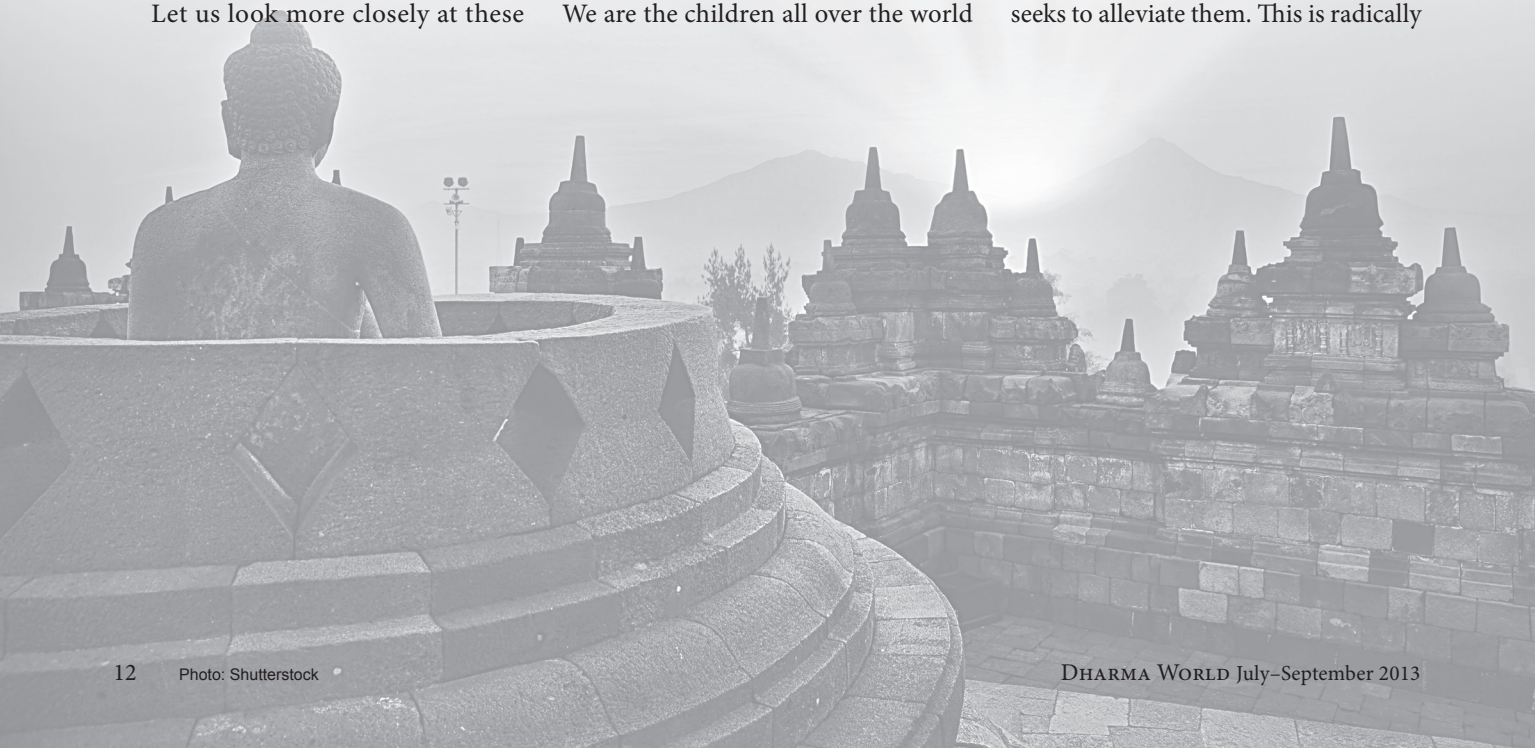
four marks of one who walks the path of peace. They are regarded as immeasurables (*appāmanā*), that is, something that can never be thoroughly fathomed by our puny human minds, something totally beyond our finite ways of thinking and measuring. Loving-kindness, already described, spreads out far and wide across the entire universe, embracing every sentient being in an infinite horizon. The Pali word *mettā*, from which it is translated, derives from the Sanskrit *maitrī*, a feminine noun meaning “affinity,” “kinship,” “kindliness,” “friendship,” or a combination of these. To look at all beings, or better, at each and every being, with a heart of *mettā* is precisely to see each and every person as close kin to oneself with whom one’s own destiny is bound—indeed, as one’s very own self.

This is a very spontaneous and natural sentiment for all of us, wishing all beings the very best that is possible for them. It is rooted deeply in each of us at the core of our very being. You hear of the children suffering and dying from hunger in Africa and in so many other places in the world. We realize they are us. We are the people who died in the tsunami, and we are their kin in Fukushima, lives ruined by the nuclear accident, still continuing to live in uncertainty. We are the children all over the world

running around playfully with their parents close by; we are also those children who are separated from or have lost their parents.

“We are the world, we are the children.” So goes a very popular song from the 1980s. It is a heart of *mettā* that conveys to us how that is indeed true. One’s heart wells up with loving-kindness for all beings, knowing that they are me and I am they. In his journal, Thomas Merton relates an experience he had while standing at a street corner on Fourth and Walnut in Louisville, Kentucky, when he saw the people walking in the streets and realized “they are me and I am them!” He goes on to write how at that moment he saw that “we are manifestations of the same glory” that comes from the divine source. Seeing each and every one of my fellow sentient beings in this light moves me to want to bow down to each one in gratitude and respect, filled with a heart of loving-kindness.

The second of the four sublime attitudes, or divine dwellings, another feature of the place of peace wherein the Buddha resides, is compassion (*karunā*). Loving-kindness is the heart that wishes for the well-being of all, whereas compassion is the heart that bears the sufferings of all who suffer and thereby seeks to alleviate them. This is radically



different from the emotion of pity, which entails a sense of superiority and even smacks of smugness in observing others suffer. Compassion, or perhaps more clearly, com-passion, is a state of *suffering with*. One seeks to do all that one can do to alleviate the suffering of one's fellow beings because it is one's very own suffering, because we ourselves suffer the pain of one another.

The third of the sublime attitudes is sympathetic joy (*mudithā*). This is a heart that shares the joy of everyone who is celebrating something in life, whether it be a childbirth or the simple joy of watching the natural scenery and being grateful for it. All of the joys that are part of being human are our very own also, which we are able to share with one another. With a heart of sympathetic joy I am able to celebrate another person's success as my own rather than feeling envious in a petty way and thinking "Why couldn't it be me?"

The fourth sublime attitude can be seen as being at the core of the other three: equanimity (Pali, *upekkhā*), a heart that finds itself at peace in all conditions and all situations. The Sanskrit word for equanimity is *upeksā*, from the verb compound *upa+iks*, which literally means "to see at close hand." This means seeing things as they are, without

any obstruction. And if we see things as they are, an injury is an injury. It is of course something that we need to address, to cure it, but first, *see the fact clearly*: it's an injury. A pain is a pain, a death is a death. It doesn't mean that we don't grieve over someone's death, the death of someone we love, or the death of a friend. Indeed, we grieve. And that is also a fact. Just as it is. With a heart of equanimity, deep within we know it's the way things are, and we are at peace.

This is what Zen teachers refer to as the quiet mind. That quiet mind is something that pervades no matter what happens. The ground may crumble from under us, things may turn out contrary to our expectations, we may find ourselves in a very tragic situation. These are eventualities that are part and parcel of our human life. We also grieve and feel pain and sorrow just as much as anyone else in such situations. And yet, deep within there is equanimity amid all of this. This doesn't mean that we are numb to tragedy but simply that we have found acceptance and peace. Equanimity also allows us not to be destroyed by that tragedy and thereby be driven to despair. Rather, we are able to see our situation with clear eyes and take it from there, whatever it may entail, and begin rebuilding our life from that point.

These four sublime attitudes are four characteristics of living in the light of the infinite, living in the place of peace, living the heart of the Buddha. These are presented as an invitation for each and every one of us.

Now, how do we spell this out in concrete terms? I'd like to take a hint from a Zen koan from a collection used in the Sanbo Kyodan Zen lineage that may help us in this. It is helpful first to note that koan practice in the Zen context is a way of seeing and experiencing the life of the Buddha in dynamic action in our day-to-day lives. The proper "answer" to a koan is not like solving a puzzle nor understanding what it means intellectually but, rather, to embody the Buddha's dynamic action in concrete ways.

When the wind blows through the willows, the downy seed balls float away.

When the rain beats on the pear blossoms, a butterfly flies away.

These are the third and fourth items of a four-part koan. The first item reads, "The leaves of the lotus are round, round, rounder than a mirror," and the second goes, "The edge of a water nut is sharp, sharp, sharper than an awl." Here "round" and "sharp" refer not just to physical





attributes but primarily to the interior disposition of an individual who, having arrived at the place of peace, lives in the total freedom of his or her true nature. We will not look at these first two in detail but will focus only on the latter two, above.

“When the wind blows through the willows, the downy seed balls float away.” Whatever happens in our lives, we live with the freedom of allowing ourselves to go with the flow, blown by the gentle winds that carry us along. When hungry, we take something to eat. When tired, we take a rest. A baby is born, we rejoice. A loved one dies, we mourn. And all of this in the complete freedom of the heart of the Buddha.

“When the rain beats on the pear blossoms, a butterfly flies away.” This is the opposite direction of the downy seed ball. This is now to take steps that “go against the flow.” The butterfly flies away to protect itself from the pounding of raindrops on its delicate wings. If we find ourselves in an abusive or coercive situation, we move away and seek refuge elsewhere. If we feel trapped in an unfulfilling job that is not really giving us the nourishment that we need in life, or if we find ourselves in circumstances of conflict and violence, we may need to take some bold steps to ensure our own well-being and the well-being of those around us. For this we need to discern skillful means grounded in wisdom and compassion to prevent the escalation of violence or to divert it toward a more peaceful and harmonious course of action.

The scenes laid out in this koan describe situations we often find in our daily lives and suggest appropriate responses to those situations. These responses arise from the heart of one filled with peace, a heart overflowing with loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. As we ourselves learn to live in this way, we are given a glimpse of where the Buddha resides in our day and age.

The Zen ancestors from Shakyamuni down to the living Zen teachers of today are one in proclaiming: Stop, and see. Open your eyes. Discover that the Buddha is in you, and your own life will be the Buddha’s living presence in the world.

A central image conveyed in the Lotus Sutra is that of the Buddha likened to a

lotus flower blooming in the midst of the murky waters of a pond. Our earth, with all the misery and messiness, the pains and travails of all of our fellow sentient beings, is like the pond with its muddy waters. To transform this wounded earth into Lotus Land is to allow the Buddha in each of us to blossom in full beauty in the midst of this. □

# Seeing the Buddha in Our Midst

by Paula Arai

***On my path of seeking, I have learned it is easy to see the Buddha in flowers. It is more difficult to find the Buddha among the weeds. . . . Where the Buddha lives is not a question of where to look but how to see.***

Remnants of the injustices of the slave trade were seething and erupted onto the streets of Detroit in the summer of 1967. I was only six when I saw black plumes of smoke billowing ominously over the city where I had been born to an Anglo-American father and an especially dark-skinned Japanese mother. I was not aware of any buddhas living around there. We had, however, been blessed the year before by the presence of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who addressed an overflowing throng at our Gothic-style Methodist church one Sunday. Just as its spire towered in the center of downtown Detroit, this church stood out against injustice. Holding my mom's hand that morning, I felt her excitement as I peered over the balcony to see every inch of every pew filled with people I did not recognize. I sensed that something momentous was happening. My mother walked with a proud gait I had not seen before. Hope laced with tension filled the air. I do not remember King's words that morning, but even now excerpts of his "I Have a Dream" speech evoke a visceral memory of what it felt like to have his sonorous voice reverberate in my heart. If I had been able to see then as I do now, I would have recognized him as a buddha, one who devotes his life to alleviating suffering

through nonviolent protest and acts of justice.

Many white people fled to the suburbs after the army tanks stopped parking in the alley behind our homes during that summer of riots. In solidarity with those who sought racial justice, my mixed-race family remained for several years. Unfortunately, the violence around the neighborhood did not subside. I vividly remember several occasions when I was jumped on the way home from school or on the way to the public library two blocks away. I never got more than scratches and bruises and the wind kicked or pushed out of me. Since I came from a supportive family, it was easy to see that the groups of kids who would pursue an elementary school girl were not as fortunate. In 1972 we moved to a safer neighborhood with good schools. Dearborn, home to the world headquarters of the Ford Motor Company, had the best public school system tax dollars could buy. Mayor Hubbard was dedicated to limiting this benefit to white people, so it was with some dismay that our new neighbors saw that we had managed to purchase a home there. My mother's dark skin was not welcomed in this town, especially by our next-door neighbors. Racial animosity infused our daily lives, giving us

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a chance to see the dynamics of ethnic prejudice from the other side. No matter how many cherries, apples, or ears of fresh corn my mom delivered to the neighbors' doorstep, the tension continued. Sometimes we returned home to find weeds strewn across the property line and onto our driveway. I did not see any buddhas living in that neighborhood.

It was clear that the people in both neighborhoods wanted peace, love, and justice. Yet greed, anger, and delusion reigned. These societal dynamics were echoed by dynamics in my own family and even in my own heart. Determined to make some headway with this conundrum, I spent ten years in graduate school exploring human religiosity. I started learning about the vast spectrum of idealistic aims and horrific events throughout world history. I was drawn to the Buddhist vision of

interrelatedness. I studied, among other things, salient moments in Buddhist history, different styles of Buddhist art, and a range of philosophical trajectories. I became especially fond of the teachings of Dōgen (1200–1253), the founder of Sōtō Zen. He taught: “All existents are buddha-nature.” I didn’t see any buddhas at Harvard either, so I began to wonder if people actualized their buddha-nature anymore.

During a stay in Bodh Gaya, India, the site of Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment, I met an elderly Japanese Zen nun, Kitō Sensei. This momentous encounter led me to a Zen nunnery in Nagoya, Japan, where I was trained to see the buddha-nature of rags and cushions. The instructions on rags were very specific:

- Use the thin, tightly woven cotton cloths to clean the altar.
- Use the larger thin cloths to clean all other raised surfaces.
- Use the thick terry cloth rags only on the floor.
- When washing rags out in the bucket, wash the cleaning cloths for the altar first.
- Always wash the rags used on the floor last.
- When finished, quietly pour the water on the moss garden.

Treating the cleaning cloths so mindfully, I began to feel intimate with the rags that I wrung out every morning and afternoon while living in the nunnery. Gradually I saw that these rags were buddhas and they manifested their compassion by making the temple clean. The instructions on airing

the meditation cushions in the sun were less detailed but easy to remember: “Take all the meditation cushions and place them on the tarp laid out in the front garden.” Aiming to be efficient, I stacked five cushions and carried them out of the meditation hall. I slipped into my hall slippers, walked to the front door, and slid my feet out of the slippers while stepping down a level into outside sandals, all the while taking care to keep the cushions balanced. I made it to the tarp with the cushions and stepped out of the sandals before moving onto the tarp. When I bent down to begin placing the cushions in a row, however, one rolled off the pile and was about to hit the ground. Instinctively, I used my bare foot to break the fall and push it so it would fall on the tarp instead of the ground. A sharp “Ouch!” cut through the sun-drenched air, uttered by the nun supervising the sunning of the cushions. I was confused. I thought preventing the cushion from landing in dirt was surely worth a little clean-foot save. How could I have done any better? Besides, why was it so important? The expression on my face revealed that I was more perturbed than perplexed. The supervising nun spelled it out for me: “The cushion is a buddha, so treat it with respect.” I had to figure out the rest for myself. I realized that I should carry only four cushions at a time, because that was the maximum number I could balance while bending down. It dawned on me that the meditation-cushion buddhas actualized their compassion by giving their support without complaint, no matter who sat on them or for how long.

Kitō Sensei invited me along with two other senior Zen nuns on a one-day pilgrimage to Buddha relics enshrined on the peak of a mountain outside Nagoya. Of these three nuns, two were tea-ceremony teachers and one was a teacher of ikebana (flower arranging). It was a rare privilege and a high point of my life to spend the day with these highly cultured and spiritually advanced women. They remain the wisest and kindest women I have ever met. Spring was blooming along the trail, and a large swath of light-purple wildflowers captured our attention, providing levity as we climbed steadily upward. On reaching the site where the relics of the Buddha were consecrated, we brought incense and flowers out of our bags. We bowed with our hands together in *gasshō* as we made the offerings. While we were chanting the Heart Sutra in practiced rhythm, my mind wandered. I suspended my suspicion about whether they were really relics of Shakyamuni Buddha, who walked the earth in the fifth century BCE. I relished the thought that by standing in front of these relics, I just might possibly be as close to a real human buddha as I would ever be. My ponderings continued with the thought that if rags and cushions could be buddhas, then perhaps a few people, even today, could be enlightened too.

Completing the chant, we bowed and walked toward the trees surrounding the mountain peak. They beckoned us to take refuge under their limbs, extending their embrace with their new spring-colored leaves. Kitō Sensei led us to a low weathered “picnic” table that had a lean-to shed nearby where previous pilgrims had left a blackened teakettle, some newspapers and matches, a few roughly thrown tea bowls, an old bamboo tea whisk, and a stick crudely carved into a shallow spoon for scooping matcha tea powder into the bowls. Kitō Sensei knew to bring our own water, tea, and sweets. As we brought the rudimentary tea implements out and made

a small fire, no one needed to interrupt the silence to remind us about the phrase often carved into stone basins where one purifies one's hands before entering a tea hut that embodies the refined aesthetics of *wabi* culture: "I only know satisfaction." Sublime fulfillment permeated the fresh air as we finally sat down from the strenuous morning hike. After the water boiled, Kuriki Sensei, one of the tea-ceremony teachers, delighted in the naturalness of the spoon. She commented on how it was more true to the spirit of tea than spoons that garner extraordinary sums. Kitō Sensei enriched the calm with a quiet exhalation: "Ichi go ichi e" (One time, one meeting). We all felt the preciousness of the present moment. Though a native of Nagoya in her eighties with ever-weakening knees, Kuriki Sensei had never climbed this peak. Being atop this Japanese mountain that hallows the Buddha relics from India had all the gravity and thrill of being a once-in-this-lifetime event. The earth steadfastly supported from below while birds sang tribute from above. I thought, So this is how it feels to know only contentment, no desires pulling or aversions pushing, no complaints or disappointments. Stress melting off, I felt peace, inside and out. I started seeing these nuns for who they really were: buddhas.

A few years later, I was again in Asia, for the 1993–94 academic year. During that time, my parents cared for my golden retriever, Kin-chan. I know everybody thinks his or her dog is the best, but Kin-chan was indeed a rare dog among dogs. Upon meeting him, a Zen adept would surely be persuaded to answer the Zen koan riddle "Does a dog have buddha-nature?" with an enthusiastic "Yes!" This dog was born to please. And true to his breed, he loved to retrieve. He would chase tennis balls for as long as someone would throw them. However, if one of his cherished tennis balls went beside a sheet of newspaper lying on the living room floor, he would

not pick it up if it required stepping on the paper. He would silently wait until his predicament was noticed. Although taught only once as a pup, Kin-chan sat at each and every curb without prompting. He could even stop himself from a full bolt after a tennis ball if it rolled beyond the curb. I never did inform him that some "curbs" were really driveways.

When I was in the final stretch of twelve months of preparation for my General Exams for the PhD, I contracted an intense flu. You know, the kind where your raging fever makes you feel so cold nothing will make you feel warm? I went to bed one evening with that feeling and was unable to rise out of bed for close to thirty-six hours. I was too sick even to think about taking some fever-reducing pill. Kin-chan—a dog who would humor me by jumping on the bed only when called and would always retire to his dog bed after I fell asleep—not only came onto my bed unbeckoned but also got under the covers and pressed his silky-soft furry body against mine for the duration. I finally felt some warmth while weathering out the fever. When the fever eventually broke, I realized that I had not let Kin-chan out the entire time. It had been more than a day! He never even whimpered. He just stayed with me, alleviating my suffering in the best way he could, quietly warming my sick body with his. How did he know I felt cold when I had piled up so many blankets? Somehow he knew, too, that it would be a hardship on me to get out of bed and pad to the door to let him out into the backyard. I reflected that if the situation were reversed, I would not have been so patient and kind.

So it was with peace of mind that for a year I left my well-trained and kind-hearted dog with my aging parents, who still lived in the home we had moved to twenty-one years before. Kin-chan, of course, did not know the history we had with the neighbors. Trained not to cross streets and, by default, driveways, he would often sit on my parents'

front lawn unattended. Apparently he noticed the elderly woman next door looking sad. Had he sensed her husband had just passed away? He boldly crossed the driveway to lick her hand gently and nudge her to pet his soft fur while he wagged his silky tail. Over the next several months, he crossed the border into her yard with regularity. Kin-chan's ministrations thawed the ice that had built up for decades. It was not just my inflated imagination after all. Dogs do have buddha-nature.

A little more than a year later, I gave birth to my son. My mother came to Nashville to share this idyllic time, treasuring the special joys of three generations under one roof. After three months, my mother was diagnosed with cancer. She had five more sublime months with her beloved grandson. She lived to see him sit up on her bed. On her death, in keeping with Japanese Buddhist tradition, she became my "personal buddha." With her I feel an intimacy I do not feel with more-famous buddhas, such as Shakyamuni or Amida. I feel her presence with me when I light incense and offer flowers to her on my home altar. She continues to guide me in the ever-changing needs of her growing grandson.

Back in Dearborn, my father struggled as a new widower. Familiar with the rhythms of grief, the next-door neighbor recurrently brought over cooked food and kindly offered a listening ear. Kin-chan had generated a bridge of friendship in time for her to cross the driveway and be there for my father in his time of acute mourning. Indeed, death sometimes makes it easier to see the Buddha in our midst.

On my path of seeking, I have learned it is easy to see the Buddha in flowers. It is more difficult to find the Buddha among the weeds. With concentrated practice, one can cultivate the refined art of seeing the Buddha in a thorn that has drawn blood.

Where the Buddha lives is not a question of where to look but how to see. □



# Where the Buddha Lives Now

by Taigen Dan Leighton

***Where can we find the Awakened One and the relief of suffering in our own world and in our own lives? With the Buddha somehow still alive and underground bodhisattvas at work right now, we must take responsibility and join the buddha-work and the flowering of Dharma encouraged by the Dharma Flowering Sutra.***

How may we find the Buddha today in our modern world? In the spirit of chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra, at times when our troubled world is in need of support and succor, bodhisattvas spring forth from out of the space under the earth, from the openness in the ground of our being, emerging to help suffering beings right in the middle of the most difficult situations of distress. In the spirit of chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha, our great historical founder in India, when he passed away into nirvana in the fifth century BCE, in some important sense did not leave this world, for his lifespan actually reached back into the vast depths of the past and will last much longer into the future.

When we settle into the practice of awakening, we begin to trust and gain confidence in these visions of the workings of awakening and awakening beings and this potential all around us. But then we would do well to ask where we can discern these underground bodhisattvas arising in our world today. How is the Buddha alive today? Where can we find the Awakened One and the relief of suffering in our own world and in our own lives? With the Buddha somehow still

alive and underground bodhisattvas at work right now, we must take responsibility and join the buddha-work and the flowering of Dharma encouraged by the Dharma Flowering Sutra.

We should not assume that these underground bodhisattvas reside merely in formal Buddhist institutions. We must look beyond the formalities of “Buddhism,” as even the most noble of human institutions tend to become stiff and self-serving of institutional needs and forget their original inspirations. The true vitality of awakening and healing awareness, the true spirit and purpose of the buddha-work, may express itself in many unexpected places.

We may see bodhisattvas supporting innovative spiritual movements in formal Buddhism as it adapts to and transforms in the modern world in the West and in Asia but clearly also in some other religious traditions. However, we should not ignore the potential of the old Buddhist institutions to convey something important from the traditional teachings and the rich tapestry of practice forms and artistic expressions of Buddhist images and imagination. My own decades of committed Buddhist practice were significantly

stimulated when I was twenty and witnessed Japanese Buddhist statues, temple architecture, and Zen rock gardens. Thanks to this experience of Japanese Buddhist images, when I met a worthy Japanese Soto Zen priest in New York City several years later, I was prepared to dive into practice.

Dharma teachings of the nature of self and nonself, of emptiness and impermanence, of the deep interconnectedness of all beings, of mutual causality, of the ground of buddha-nature, and of the depths of complexity of consciousness and of reality remain beneficial as inspiring offerings in the modern world. The Lotus Sutra, and also a great many other Buddhist sutras, commentaries, and talks and stories from millennia of Buddhist adepts are all part of the skillful means of Buddhist liberation and healing. They provide a profound legacy whose meanings should be made available and retranslated for beings in fresh contexts and new cultures.

The Buddha and underground bodhisattvas are present and supportive in the world today in company with all sorts of contemplatives, with meditators working on developing inner awareness in various modes. Awareness itself is transformative. We do not always see how growth, development, or relief of suffering may emerge. And yet with awareness the possibilities for wholesome transformation are fostered, and one thing we all know is that change is always happening. This change can be a good thing as well as sometimes a source of loss and sadness.



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Those who nurture awareness engage in the work of poets and philosophers, inspiring creative thought in others. We see awareness in prisoners, and with those who witness and attend to the suffering of prisoners and the injustice in our society, in which many are incarcerated for nonviolent offenses or because of social systems where opportunities for wholesome livelihoods are infrequent. Others attend to the dying or to those in poverty, the hungry, or the homeless. Many American Buddhists are now involved in programs for ministering to prisoners or to the dying in hospices. The Buddha and underground bodhisattvas appear in the world today in a multitude of sites and situations, wherever people attend to those who are suffering or oppressed, facing material hardship or emotional pain.

We also find buddhas and bodhisattvas exactly among those who are searching for awakening and awakening lifestyles. Just by asking the question, wondering where to find healing and insight, awakening response from the underground bodhisattvas or from our abiding Buddha becomes available, and somehow responses emerge. This seeking, known traditionally as *bodhicitta*, or the mind of the way, is itself a valuable and mysterious gift. From whence such caring arises is as mysterious as the underground bodhisattvas and must be nourished when we recognize it in ourselves and in others around us.

In addition to witnessing and addressing suffering and the sadness of the world, buddhas and bodhisattvas

celebrate joy and inspiration. The Buddha abides and the bodhisattvas emerge in all creative activities that promote liveliness and vitality and that benefit all beings with the gift of encouraging creative play. Buddha-work is the most meaningful and dignified of all activities, but it is too important to make somber. It is simply the most beautiful, satisfying mode of being and comes most fully alive in its playfulness. This is the spirit of creativity, necessary to sustaining such awakening for novel contexts, in new cultures, and in times with innovative technologies and fresh dangers. The Zen tradition cherishes old sayings that celebrate the arising and revitalizing of life and energy. For example, we can hear the value of renewal when “the plum blossoms on the same withered branch as last year” or when “a dragon howls in a withered tree” or “when the wooden man starts to sing, the stone woman gets up dancing.” Such creative emergence and ongoing liveliness is an occasion for playfulness, for dancing, for festivities. Even silent, still, upright meditation can be performed with such a pleasing spirit.

Bodhisattvas serious about addressing the causes of suffering in the world today and the possibilities for liberation and healing attend to the personal and psychological aspects of individuals. Turning within to look at our personal self-clinging is certainly a central facet of liberative work. One of the places that the Buddha’s Way is adapting to the modern world is through Western insights into psychology, which are integrating

with traditional Buddhist study of consciousness. Buddhist practices of mindful awareness have been employed to help the process of seeing through habitual obsessive attachments and to develop a more flexible adaptive posture in relationships and work contexts.

We may look for awakening activity where creative inspiration appears in our modern culture and its varied art forms, music, and literature. Through such fresh forms, awareness flowers and finds new expression. The Buddha and bodhisattvas especially appear in whatever inspires and encourages young people to creative performance. As new media appear with technological innovations, opportunities for renewed expressions of awakening may manifest. The Buddha and the underground bodhisattvas emerging presently are always concerned with awakening beings of the future. Thus they are concerned with young people, their well-being, and their interests. I appreciate the Japanese priest who has recently adapted his liturgy to a hip-hop presentation. Young people are interested in making their marks, of finding their places in the unfolding of human history and creation. This is also the heart of awakening and the reason the Buddha needs an enduring lifespan. True awakening is ongoing, and even Shakyamuni must ongoingly awaken to the new possibilities of insight and compassion in each new situation and age.

Buddhas attentive to the future are concerned about conserving beneficial spiritual teachings and practices as well

as preserving enlivening traditional cultural artifacts for the nourishment of new generations. Our world would be diminished if we lost the beauty of Bach, Homer, Shakespeare, or Rembrandt. Bodhisattvas are also concerned about protecting and safeguarding a healthy natural environment and conserving the beauty of mountains and woodlands for the nurture of living beings. Along with such conservative activities, the abiding Buddha and the underground bodhisattvas in the world today support progressive movements that work for the progress of the health and safety of all beings. The ancient Metta Sutta proclaims, "May all beings be happy." The Buddha can be found in the world today wherever this concern is expressed and supported. The earth bodhisattvas thus help progressive social activists who care about the well-being and benefit of all beings and encourage these people toward calm, sustainable activity that helps assist the beleaguered.

For bodhisattvas truly bringing

awareness to the suffering of the world, attention must be given to the systemic sources of societal distress in our world. Perhaps this has been going on for centuries, but in recent decades, and increasingly in the past decade, we can see hurtful class warfare being waged against the majority of people, including the former so-called middle class. Most of the large banks, major weapons manufacturing corporations, and large energy corporations (initially American but now multinational) have been making enormous profits while entrenching their control of global wealth and domination over societal organizations. The result has been the destruction of Western and global economies, with massive inequities in resource distribution, leading to increased social injustice and oppression. We now face instability and unsustainability among many public institutions.

In this situation creative bodhisattva activity has arisen, as if from the earth itself, in various forms, including the nonviolent Occupy movement in the

United States and elsewhere in 2011. With public communal gatherings attempting to claim a space of commons, people spoke out for a more just societal arrangement. While not yet realizing the change it called for, this movement focused awareness on the damaged well-being of people and the contrary heightened corporate powers that control the organs of government and mass media. It remains to be seen how the awareness of this imbalance and the accelerating hardships of the 99 percent will help transform the possibilities for social change. But awareness has at least been catalyzed.

Among the most serious effects of the situation of unrestricted corporate power is the threat to the planetary environment that supports human life. A global climate emergency has been produced from addiction to fossil fuels in technologically advanced societies. We are all involved to varied extents in such addiction, but the situation has been willfully imposed by the fossil fuel corporations. Over

decades these corporations have used their vast resources to misinform the public, at least in the United States, and to obstruct serious efforts to divert resources to alternative and sustainable energy sources. The science is very clear about the effects of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere and the impact of climate damage on the ocean, on drought, on damage to agriculture and drinking water, on glacier and polar melting, and on the extinction of many species, as well as a host of other dangers. And the worst predictions of scientists continue to be proved too moderate in the face of current physical developments. At this point, the extended business plan of the fossil fuel industry will mandate a future that produces a biosphere uninhabitable to human beings.

The earth bodhisattvas emerging now must certainly attend to and respond to this crisis. And bodhisattvas are indeed emerging from the earth to respond. One example is the work of scholar and activist Bill McKibben and his many colleagues around the world (see <http://350.org>) who support sustainable alternative energy and the end as soon as manageable of fossil fuel as the main source for human energy needs. I was inspired to witness and join fifty thousand people gathered in Washington, D.C., this February to oppose a dangerous new dirty tar sands oil pipeline, the Keystone XL from Canada, and urge the development of alternative energy. Certainly there are sustainable energy technologies available, such as wind, solar, geothermal, biomass, and others in development. What is required is an appropriate investment in research to develop them and find ways of transporting the energy produced.

One technology that is certainly not a solution to the problems of climate damage is nuclear power. The meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in March 2011 not only have been a disaster for Japan

but are an ongoing global catastrophe whose full scope may remain unclear for decades. In the wake of this calamity, all too predictable, and the intractable and inconceivably long-term poisons from nuclear waste, the underground earth bodhisattvas can surely be found working on efforts to stop nuclear energy use in Japan, in America, and throughout the world. The Fukushima reactor that melted down was built by General Electric, and many nearly identical GE Mark I reactors continue operating in the United States despite fundamental design flaws. Like the fossil fuel industry, the nuclear industry remains entrenched, both in the United States and in Japan, through moneys given to control governments, media, and regulators, while resisting even modest safety regulations. Despite the will of the Japanese people to close down all Japanese nuclear power plants permanently, strong United States government pressure has caused their reopening because of the U.S. nuclear

industry's reliance on the Japanese fast-breeder Monju reactor, a naming that desecrates the bodhisattva of wisdom.

Many earth bodhisattvas have emerged to oppose this danger not only to human survival but to the survival of many other sentient beings and biosystems. They are evident in the Japanese movement against nuclear power and for sustainable energy. For example, Japanese Buddhist artist Mayumi Oda is evoking Japanese spiritual, pilgrimage, and agricultural traditions to promote solar energy. California author Cecile Pineda has provided a highly illuminating and transformative account of the psychic and global dimensions of the Fukushima disaster in her book *Devil's Tango: How I Learned the Fukushima Step by Step*.

The abiding Buddha and earth bodhisattvas surely must witness and respond to the gravest needs of our own version of the "evil age" predicted in the Lotus Sutra. But the modes of response may be as many as the different beings called to awakening faith and practice. There is no one right response. All the varied responses may contribute to the change that will make a positive difference. Such response may range from creative expressions to awaken people to the realities we face, to strong but peaceful pressure on institutions now acting ignorantly and destructively based on quarterly profit margins, to somehow activating the potentialities for personal awakening and conversion of the corporate CEOs who might be able to effect change.

Bodhisattvas perform such active responses in the spirit of flexibility, creativity, and playful celebration thanks to the long view informed by the inconceivable timespan indicated in chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra. While not diminishing the severe perils of climate damage and nuclear power, the earth bodhisattvas are endowed with their own sustainable energy systems that may guide fruitful responses. □

# Reconnecting with Everyday Life: Buddhism through Simple Gestures in the Café de Monk

by Levi McLaughlin

***Buddhism, in practice, need not be formal or dramatic, and perhaps Buddhist ideals are realized most clearly when they manifest in informal settings that encourage honest, extemporaneous expression.***

Images of tonsured Buddhist priests in Japan as rigidly disciplined keepers of arcane knowledge and mysterious rites prevail in popular media and in a remarkable amount of scholarship as well. Similarly, representations of Zen, Pure Land, Nichiren, and other Buddhist lineages often center on clearly defined institutions with discrete rules and practices. Here I provide a thumbnail sketch of a distinctive project called the Café de Monk that sees Buddhist priests and other religious professionals put aside formal doctrinal and institutional distinctions to develop innovative ways of helping survivors of the March 11, 2011, earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disasters. Following the guiding question “Where does the Buddha live now?” I suggest that events like this café show us that the Buddha may manifest within simple social interactions that encourage nonjudgmental compassion. Enjoyable Buddhism-inspired community events separate from institution-based rituals or doctrinal instruction help traumatized people regain equilibrium. Humble social interactions that are guided, but not dominated, by Buddhist practices introduce survivors to the possibility that ordinary life can be regained by engaging in simple pleasures.

*Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, June 13, 2012:* Rev. Yōzō Taniyama, a True Pure Land (Jōdo Shinshū) priest who also teaches at Tohoku University, drives his van past row after identical row of temporary housing units, looking for the location of this week’s Café de Monk. After driving nearly two hours from Sendai, our motley collective of Buddhist priest, foreign researcher, and students from the United States has reached the town of Ishinomaki on the coast of Miyagi Prefecture. At first it is difficult to tell that Ishinomaki was one of the communities that were close to the epicenter of the March 11, 2011, earthquake that devastated this region and that it has lost an estimated 70 percent of its population since that terrible day—thousands dead and missing immediately after the tsunami that wiped out more than twenty-nine thousand homes, and many more who have left the town since. As soon as we get close to the shore, however, the devastation becomes apparent. It does not seem as if more than a year has passed since the earthquake and tsunami. Mountains of debris still loom in places, and patchwork outlines of concrete foundations, some no more than a few inches high, trace all that remains of entire neighborhoods that were scoured away by the

relentless surge of water that dwarfed the buildings it destroyed.

Outside one of the numerous community halls built in the temporary housing complex, the eerie silence that ordinarily hangs over the disaster area is broken by cheerful conversation among a group of Sōtō Zen Buddhist priests who are busy unloading tables and other supplies from a small truck. Seven Zen priests from Iwate Prefecture have just come from a study tour of temples in Fukushima to help their fellow Sōtō priest Rev. Taiō Kaneta with his distinctive disaster relief project: the Café de Monk.\* Every ten days or so, Reverend Kaneta—sometimes joined by Zen priests or clergy from other Buddhist denominations and at other times by Christian ministers, Shinto priests, or lay volunteers—serves tea and cake to residents of the temporary housing units as he engages them in fun Buddhist-themed activities and free-flowing conversation. The café’s sign displays the word *monku* in *katakana* (Japanese phonetic script) to offer a playful double entendre—*monku* as “monk” and as a homophone for the Japanese word for “complaint”—implying that guests can take advantage of a chance to complain to a Buddhist cleric. However, the playfulness of the name and the entertaining events of the Café de Monk belie its serious intent: to offer disaster victims the crucial opportunity to open up to compassionate listeners in order to stave off real dangers that accompany their trauma, such as debilitating mental illness and suicide.

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As the volunteers set up low tables on the tatami mats and begin lining up cakes, coffee, and tea, Kaneta plugs in a portable CD player and the sounds of jazz piano fill the space: Thelonious Monk, naturally. Kaneta is an amateur jazz guitarist, and he is also enthusiastic about classical music. “I was on my way to Sendai to take a cello lesson with a musician in the Sendai Philharmonic on March 11 of last year,” he tells me, comically miming a passionate cello solo. “But I haven’t played since the tsunami.” Kaneta started the café after one of his former Zen students, a foreigner, gave him ten thousand Australian dollars to use for disaster relief. More money followed, but the donors imposed no conditions other than that he should use

the funds to help victims in the disaster area. In the absence of clear directives, Kaneta responded in the best way he knew how: namely, by making the most of his own interests to help others. His love of music and a knack for communicating Buddhist ideas in accessible ways inspired him to start the café. The Café de Monk is now one of several activities supported by the Kokoro no Sōdanshitsu, or “Consultation Room of the Heart,” an initiative administered by Tohoku University that brings together academics; clergy from Buddhist, Christian, Shinto, and other religious organizations; medical professionals who specialize in grief care and hospice work; and a number of others within and outside the religious world. “I think I will

keep the café going for one more year,” Kaneta tells me. He smiles as he talks to me and to everyone else here, but the cumulative experiences of caring for the dead and bereaved immediately after the tsunami, followed by months of operating the café, have clearly taken their toll; he looks completely exhausted.

Soon the first guests begin to arrive, and the jazz is quickly drowned out by cries of “Welcome!” from the priests. As the refugees file in, the priests invite them to take tea and cake and to avail themselves of items that have been set out along one low table. These include *tenohira jizō*, or palm-of-the-hand figurines of the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha (Jpn., Jizō), revered for centuries in Japan as a protector of children. Amanda and



Terrance, the two students I've brought from the University of Iowa, drink coffee with an elderly gentleman who grips a small clay *jizō* tightly. He tells us that he has accepted one of the figurines to serve as a memorial for his child, a son who died decades before the tsunami. It seems as if memorials for the 2011 calamity bring up lifetimes of accumulated grief. Earlier traumas are not replaced by this most recent calamity but are amplified in an atmosphere of constant mourning.

The priests also offer to inscribe *ihai*, or memorial tablets for deceased relatives that are enshrined at home altars. Along with family photos, these are among the most cherished possessions that survivors search for in the rubble of their lost homes. Bestowing *kaimyō*, or posthumous ordination names, on the deceased for the purpose of inscribing *ihai* is ordinarily an expensive service, but the priests here offer it for free, and they present it in a lighthearted way as an option that accompanies the refreshments, warm social interaction, and group activities they are otherwise providing.

I see no one receive an *ihai* today, and the atmosphere remains casual, but the event has a clear Buddhist thread

running through all of its planned activities. Once the small hall fills, Reverend Kaneta invites everyone to take part in the first of these: making *juzu*, or Buddhist rosaries. Everyone gets the chance to make two types of bracelets—larger ones for men and smaller ones for women. Each of the different colors of beads we begin stringing onto plastic wire has a meaning, he tells us: one for good health, another for making money, a third for the benefit of family, and a fourth for a desire of our choosing. If the desire is realized, then we must pass the lucky *juzu* on to another person. The twenty women present immediately begin making *juzu* of both types, and the four elderly men who have come along follow them, hesitantly at first. I sit next to an older resident whom I will call Mrs. Okabe, eventually asking for her help with stringing together a single rosary as she and the women around me effortlessly produce one after another. Mrs. Okabe wears three larger *juzu* that she has made for her sons. “My wish is for each of them to get married,” she says, laughing. She speaks with her friend, whom I will call Mrs. Ōta, who smiles and commiserates with her about the difficulty of finding brides. These two women have clearly formed a close friendship through their shared life experiences, something they explain with remarkable openness to me and one of the Zen priests from Iwate who sits down with us. To my surprise, they speak frankly about the fact that they are both *batsuichi*, or “once divorced,” a topic that is frequently taboo in Japan, particularly among women of their generation. They are both mothers of adult children, and they both lost their homes, most likely for good. The land where Mrs. Okabe's house once stood is soon to be paved over by a new highway.

It does not take long for their conversation to turn to their shared experience of the disaster. Tears streaming down her face, Mrs. Okabe tells us that

she crawled from the wreckage and found shelter for the first five days with other refugees who had managed to salvage only half an *onigiri* (rice ball)—no more than a mouthful—between them. “We barely made it,” she tells us, and then breaks down. Mrs. Ōta cries with her. As these two women continue sharing memories of their survival and the loved ones they lost, they confirm something one of the priests tells me after the café wraps up: more than a year later, survivors here have not yet begun to recover. For them, the disaster is not a memory per se. It is a living reality that remains almost unchanged more than a year after the tsunami.

However, as I look around, it appears as if some survivors are seeking ways to move beyond this state. One of the elderly men has moved to a smaller room off the main hall, accompanied by three priests. I can't hear what he is saying, but I see his anguished face as the door slides quietly shut. The café begins as a casual gathering, but it obviously transforms into counseling sessions for those who are willing, or able, to open up to the compassionate listeners who have come to help them. I learn later that once the itinerant café packs up, the priests sometimes take leftover cake to the homes of some residents who are too overcome by posttraumatic stress to attend social gatherings or, in some cases, to leave their homes at all. Kaneta and his companions are sometimes successful in getting a chance to visit with these survivors, to chant a sutra for them or just to chat. “These are the people we're most worried about,” one of the regular Sōtō Zen priest participants tells me. “The ones who *don't* come to the café.”

Having set aside *juzu* making, Mrs. Ōta produces one beautiful origami lotus after another, each with at least four intricate layers of petals, and the Zen priest seated beside her offers gentle compliments. Mrs. Okabe tells us that Mrs. Ōta has been giving origami

lessons to her and some other women in the housing complex. In exchange, Mrs. Okabe has been teaching women in the neighborhood how to sew *zōri*, a type of traditional Japanese sandal, and another refugee who ran a beauty salon before the tsunami has been gathering small groups at her tiny housing unit to pass on affordable beauty tips. The women here have clearly worked hard to stitch together a new social network that transforms their shared status as refugees into productive forms of mutual support, ones that integrate with events like the café.

As we continue speaking, a possible reason for Mrs. Ōta's particular attention to the lotus emerges. She is a Soka Gakkai member, and she speaks of chanting the *daimoku* mantra and sections of the Lotus Sutra as a means of persevering as a refugee. An entirely surreal scene unfolds as Mrs. Ōta launches into a full-bore attempt to convert Mrs. Okabe while we are surrounded by our Buddhist priest hosts—priests who belong to sects that have engaged in decades of intense conflict with Soka Gakkai. Mrs. Okabe smiles and nods, evidently accustomed to this line of conversation from her friend. It almost appears as if the bonds she has forged with Mrs. Ōta in these extreme circumstances, when so many social conventions have been upended, supersede conventional concerns about hard-sell conversion attempts. She listens patiently to her friend, but I do not get the sense that Mrs. Okabe will be converting to Soka Gakkai anytime soon. It is also apparent that Mrs. Ōta

has put aside concerns that, in ordinary circumstances, might have prevented her from attending an event run by priests her religion deems heterodox. She too does not appear all that concerned with whether or not her friend converts or by the fact that she is attending a Café de Monk. She seems mostly happy to be spending time with her close friend and meeting new and compassionate people. All manner of divisions, religious and social, seem petty in the face of the trauma that these survivors endure, and they seem willing, even eager, to look past these barriers to regain human connections that the tsunami washed away.

For his part, the priest seated at this table seems to understand this, and he continues to smile at Mrs. Ōta during her testimony. During the drive back to Sendai, when I tell Reverend Taniyama about the surprising Soka Gakkai appearance at the Café de Monk, he bursts out laughing. He laughs again when he tells me that he performed brief *hōyō* services (Buddhist services for the dead) for four of the women, clasping his hands around theirs that were wrapped in their newly made *juzu* and chanting a sutra incantation to infuse them with the power to invoke the Buddha Amitābha. In his capacity as a Jōdo Shinshū priest, he essentially made the Sōtō Zen rosaries into True Pure Land Buddhist implements. None of the other priests there noticed—and most likely would not have cared if they had. It is also likely that the women receiving the sutra incantation may

not have known the difference. All of the guests left expressing their gratitude for the event, having spent an enjoyable afternoon that allowed them to suspend temporarily the difficulties of their lives as refugees.

Buddhism, in practice, need not be formal or dramatic, and perhaps Buddhist ideals are realized most clearly when they manifest in informal settings that encourage honest, extemporaneous expression. They are perhaps best realized when delineations between doctrines and institutions remain fuzzy, allowing human feeling to transcend sectarian concerns. The Café de Monk shows us that people's lives can perhaps be improved most effectively through simple gestures of friendship and compassion. The event speaks to the most heartfelt desire of disaster survivors, and indeed of all people who suffer loss and trauma: to return to everyday life. Perhaps ironically, low-key Buddhist events aimed at a return to the everyday may involve radical challenges to temple-based ritual norms and a willingness to ignore long-standing institutional conflicts. The Café de Monk is, like the temporary housing communities it serves, most likely an ephemeral project that may be remembered as an outstanding religious representative of the immediate aftermath of the 2011 disasters. However, it represents a useful model for activists who seek to look past rivalries in order to cultivate much-needed human connections—ones that survivors of future calamities will certainly cherish. □

\* The Café de Monk has two primary manifestations: itinerant gatherings like the one described here and a Japanese radio broadcast that can be accessed at its dedicated YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/user/Cobrapool?feature=watch>. Some of these broadcasts have been transcribed and published in Chieko Itabashi's book *Rajio kafe de monku* (Kokoro no Sōdanshitsu, 2012). Information on Reverend Kaneta's Café de Monk activities and related initiatives overseen by Tohoku University's Kokoro no Sōdanshitsu can be found at <http://www.sal.tohoku.ac.jp/kokoro/diary.cgi>, and a more-detailed analysis of this activity and related ventures is available in Levi McLaughlin's, "What Have Religious Groups Done After 3.11? Part 2: From Religious Mobilization to 'Spiritual Care,'" *Religion Compass* 7 (2013), <http://religion-compass.com/sections/east-asian-traditions/>.

# Let a New Age of Tolerance Dawn

## Niwano Peace Prize Acceptance Address

by Dr. Gunnar Stålsett, Bishop Emeritus of Oslo, Church of Norway

*The Niwano Peace Foundation awarded the thirtieth Niwano Peace Prize on May 16, 2013, to Dr. Gunnar Stålsett, bishop emeritus of Oslo, the Church of Norway. Bishop Stålsett was chosen for his distinguished leadership in promoting interfaith dialogue and cooperation for world peace as well as for his unabated endeavors for peace by leading reconciliation efforts and performing confidence-building activities in conflict regions. The presentation ceremony took place in Tokyo. This is his acceptance speech.*

Let a new age of tolerance dawn!

It is a great honor for me to have been found worthy of the prestigious Niwano Peace Prize. I am deeply moved by the decision to make me the thirtieth recipient, joining a global company of laureates.

On this occasion I wish to pay tribute to the memory of Founder Nikkyo Niwano for his understanding and promotion of the interrelatedness of peace and religion. I also wish to express my admiration for the abiding commitment to this legacy by the president of Rissho Kosei-kai, Nichiko Niwano, and Chairman Kinjiro Niwano of the Niwano Peace Foundation and to the Niwano Peace Prize International Selection Committee under the able leadership of Dr. Katherine Marshall.

I express my appreciation to the World Conference of Religions for Peace, which I have had the privilege to serve for many years together with its affiliate the European Council of Religious Leaders.

I also offer my gratitude to the International Religious Liberty Association, which for more than a hundred years has been in the vanguard of the struggle for freedom of religion

and which has helped me to see how dialogue and freedom of religion are twin sisters.

On this auspicious day I share my joy with friends and coworkers on all continents in the global movement of Religions for Peace.

It is a special joy for me to have so many members of my family present here in Japan at this award ceremony. Without their strong support my mission would have been impossible.

This ceremony of the Niwano Peace Prize offers us a moment to reflect on the intimate connection—for better or worse—of religion and peace. The annual award is a constant reminder of the need critically to face the complexities of human conditions that lead to oppression and armed conflicts. But above all, the award ceremony offers a platform for the spiritual and political imperative of “war no more.”

Since the first Niwano Peace Prize was given to the Catholic Archbishop of Recife, Brazil, Don Helder Camara, thirty years ago, the list of laureates has reflected a broad and inclusive understanding of peace—peace not only as a negative concept, meaning absence of war, but as a positive concept, embracing

all that which serves to promote human well-being. Importantly, Niwano laureates have come from almost all major religious traditions, such as Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian. They have witnessed to a broad consensus among religions about what promotes the human well-being so well expressed in the Hebrew concept of “shalom.” Indeed among the many peace prizes on the world stage, the uniqueness of the Niwano legacy is its recognition of the essential linkage of body and soul, spirituality and politics, religion and peace.

No country or culture is exempt from the duty to scrutinize their own status when it comes to fundamental freedoms. In my country, Norway, we are in the process of revising our two-hundred-year-old constitution in order to give greater prominence to the international legal instruments on human rights. As the multicultural and multireligious reality of globalization also has impacted our small and hitherto homogenous country, the government has commissioned a report on new and inclusive politics of religion for the twenty-first century.

In my own ecumenical, interreligious, and political engagement for

*Bishop Gunnar Stålsett was born in Nordkapp, Norway, in 1935. In 1972–73 he was state secretary in Norway's Ministry of Church Affairs and Education, and he later represented Oslo in Parliament. He chaired Norway's Centre Party in 1977–79 and led the Church of Norway Council on Foreign Relations as its general secretary. He served as general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation in 1985–94. He has been an ardent activist in interreligious dialogue, taking the lead in peace-building endeavors in conflict regions and in offering international humanitarian aid for victims of HIV and AIDS.*

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peace, justice, and reconciliation, I have come to appreciate the centrality of tolerance in all peace-building efforts. I therefore wish to make *tolerance* the focus of my remarks today.

I am convinced that the practice of tolerance has become even more critical today in an age when religion and sectarian strife continues to cause war, when the holy is increasingly associated not with love, but with hatred. Ethnic and tribal feuds, racial and religiously motivated violence are causing deep distress in many parts of the world. Media remind us daily that sectarian strife *within* a religion is causing more death and destruction than conflicts between religions. In some regions, such as Pakistan, Iraq, and Afghanistan, sectarian tensions between Shia and Sunni Muslims are at a boiling point, causing death and destruction on a daily basis. The repercussions are felt in many countries around the world. Attempts to contain the spread of fanaticism often bring new fuel to the fire.

I see a negative trend around the world when it comes to tolerance and freedom of religion. This is well documented both on the level of legislation and administration and in increasing incidents of religiously motivated social hostilities.

In many countries processes towards democracy are coupled with attacks on minorities, as witnessed in the signs of ethnic cleansing of the Rohingyas in Myanmar. The uprising in North African and Middle East countries and the civil war in Syria have such dimensions. There

is indeed a strong tide against tolerance and respect of human dignity on all continents.

Counter-strategies against extremism, against jihadist and crusade mentality, under whatever name, are fraught with paradoxes. In the attempt of curbing terrorism worldwide, fundamental principles of human rights are often violated. Thus narrowly defined “national security” has caused greater insecurity. The faceless warfare of drones, about to proliferate to ever new regions, saves lives of soldiers at the cost of lives of innocent civilians. This new dimension of the technological arms race opens a new chapter in the important discourse on “just war.”

It is in this context that I see the need for our generation to revisit the meaning of tolerance in the twenty-first

century. To which extent is tolerance appreciated, affirmed, and practiced? Today's struggle for a culture of peace and a civilization of universal brotherhood is addressing the prevailing conflict between tolerance and intolerance, between knowledge and ignorance.

In our attempt to rekindle the spirit of tolerance and mutual respect we may learn from history and be enlightened by the wisdom of important consensus documents of international law.

Two world wars shaped the fate of humanity in the last century. After World War II there was a universal drive for peace resulting in an epic effort to establish a common structure to avert the tragedy repeating itself in the future. The birth of the United Nations is the most ambitious political achievement in human history. Its ambition is: *To save*



*future generations from war! To promote freedom and tolerance, built on a shared understanding of human dignity.* These ideals expressed the deep longings and aspirations of a war-ridden human race.

The true nature of tolerance, its full implication, is perhaps best understood by its opposites: the ugly faces of intolerance, prejudice, discrimination, marginalization, and deprivation which shape the daily life of hundreds of millions even today. The victims are the stigmatized others; discriminated against because of gender, poverty, race, faith, color, sexual orientation, physical or mental status, cast or culture.

It is sad to realize to which extent our generation has forgotten the lessons of the past when it comes to the fundamental link between human dignity, peace, justice, and tolerance.

We therefore need to return to the wisdom and the values that inspired the Magna Carta of the twentieth century, the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This is my deep conviction; at a time when tolerance and its corresponding concept, dialogue, are neglected or even scorned by many, we need to reaffirm the insights expressed in our human rights canons. These bear out that tolerance is at the heart and center of all other fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of conscience, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, and freedom of assembly: in short, essential and existential respect for the other.

When the UN Charter and its corollary the Universal Declaration of Human Rights both proclaim tolerance as a prerequisite for peace and as the essence of social harmony, they are not promoting “Western values.” These are universal values; they are shared human values, deeply rooted in the inherent and shared wisdom of faith and cultures.

But history shows that they are also, in all parts of the world, equally contested out of ignorance and political expediency. Repeated attempts at the

UN Human Rights Council to subordinate human rights to traditional values reflect a prevailing uneasiness both in politics and religion about the pre-eminence of tolerance.

Today we must learn from the bold affirmations of those who brought the world from war to peace in 1945. Addressing the needs of a tormented humanity, political leaders bonded together never to tolerate that humans should have to endure such suffering and oppression.

The message of the UN Charter expressed in simple words a profound commitment: “We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, . . . reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, . . . and for these ends to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors.”

It is worth observing today that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights lifts up the importance of education for “understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations, racial or religious groups.”

These two epic statements in the history of human endeavors for tolerance and peace are the basis for a wide range of rights based international treaties advocating nondiscrimination and mutual respect.

One such pillar is the UNESCO Declaration of Principles of Tolerance, proclaimed and signed on November 16, 1995.

Its message calls us “to take all positive measures necessary to promote tolerance in our societies, because tolerance is not only a cherished principle, but also a necessity for peace and for the economic and social advancement of all peoples.”

Interlinking tolerance with peace and development, this declaration speaks to our age when many see tolerance as an impotent concept, void of political relevance. Tolerance and respect are expressed as two sides of the same coin. It is inspiring to read the affirmation of

the richness of a multicultural world, and of the many ways for being human. It is challenging to sense the tone of moral duty and political imperative. I feel strongly that the clarity with which this declaration states what tolerance is and what is not, is critically needed today.

So what is tolerance in the words of these noble texts? “*Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. . . . Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty; it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace. . . . Tolerance is, above all, an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. . . . Tolerance is the responsibility that upholds human rights, pluralism (including cultural pluralism), democracy and the rule of law.*”

To those who tend to equate tolerance with lack of conviction, with indifference, and with negligence of values, there are insights about what tolerance is not: “*Tolerance is not concession, condescension or indulgence. . . . The practice of tolerance does not mean toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one’s own convictions.*”

Now, how do these affirmations challenge religious positions?

I believe that we honestly need to ask if in fact religion, as we claim, influences secular laws and regulations in the directions of greater fulfillment of human rights and defense of human dignity. Must we not with shame admit that often it is the other way round; that religion must learn from secular society and listen to humanistic worldviews in order to fully understand and practice tolerance? Must not religion be taught human rights and the value of humanism? Do we not religion need the challenge of secularism to shed bigotry?



These are not theoretical questions; they are life and death issues, frequently demonstrated in outrageous violence against women. Many are the martyrs of tolerance and many are the victims of intolerance at the hands of people who claim to honor God with their bombs. There is no greater blasphemy!

The fight of the brave Pakistani girl Malala Yousafzai for education for girls almost cost her her life at the hands of religious extremists. Long is the list of brave men and women who have been assassinated because they championed freedom of thought, freedom of religion, and freedom of assembly. Let there be no doubt, a terrorist “holy war” is a war *against* tolerance. The victims are children, women, the poor and the uneducated, ordinary people, over and over again marginalized and oppressed.

There is no greater challenge today for formal and nonformal education, especially for religious education, than to contribute to the formation of the mindset of children at the deepest level of consciousness and conscience in the spirit of tolerance. There should indeed in the words of the Holy Qur’an be “no compulsion in religion.” Religion should not be used for the crushing of a child’s dream for a better future.

Inspired by tolerance as a global value and as a prerequisite for world peace, the European Council of Religious Leaders [ECRL], which I have had the privilege to serve for many years, has in a number of statements addressed aspects of interaction between religion and society. We have seen the need to promote dialogue and common praxis as the exercise of tolerance. In doing so we have found that there indeed is a two-way street between dialogue and tolerance: Tolerance leads to dialogue. Dialogue is critical for promoting and upholding fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion and freedom of expression. Dialogue makes democracy flourish.

Our ECRL Istanbul Declaration of 2010 addresses issues which are daily debated in most European countries, including Norway, such as the role and place of religion in an open society. As religious leaders from all major faiths we promised to “*work for the rights of all religions to be visible in the public square. In a tolerant society people have the right to promote their faith and to manifest it in public. This includes displaying religious symbols, wearing religious dress, symbols or articles of faith, establishing schools for education of new generations, and building places of worship which conform to each religious tradition.*”

These are poignant affirmations on a continent where hate speech in social media is the most prevalent expression of intolerance, and the most difficult to restrain. Its target is individuals who defend multiculturalism and the fundamental rights of minorities. Anti-Semitism finds ever new expressions, and hatred of Islam is on the rise. Christian tenets and beliefs are used to attack others and are at the same time under pressure from increasingly strident atheism.

I see many of the conflicts that today shape history and impact the life of future generations as a struggle for tolerance. I suggest that the so-called Arab Spring started as a desire for tolerance, respect, and democracy. Its driving force is a protest against the authoritarian rule that for generations has stifled freedom and hindered prosperity and equality. The dream of those who ignited the fire of freedom was not for a new type of authoritarianism, now in a religious guise. They did not fight for a new pharaoh to replace the autocratic rulers of the past.

The question posed by many today is if the darkness of intolerance can be overcome by the light of knowledge and faith. Will the struggle and prayers for an open, pluralistic, democratic, and truly tolerant society, shape a better world in this century? Will the spring bring forth a summer of dialogue and respect of universal human rights?

A final thought: Tolerance does not thrive with triumphalism, nor does dialogue flourish with dogmatism. Tolerance is sympathy of the heart, born in the souls of humans. Therefore tolerance is the language not of power but of humility.

This I find genuinely reflected in a Messianic promise in the words of Jesus: “*Blessed are the meek. They will inherit the earth. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*” I believe this is the spirit also of the Niwano legacy.

It is in this spirit I pray: Let a new age of tolerance dawn. □

# Coventry's Peace Message: How Can Spiritual Ideals Help to Preserve Peace and Human Security?

by Alan Hunter

***Peace is a great blessing and a fundamental need for civilization; human security argues that people should also be blessed with at least minimum food, shelter, and safety.***

Millions of individuals throughout the world lead a spiritual life, as best they can, with the intention of benefiting their communities, their families, and themselves. Surely most of us also have an aspiration that people throughout the world might live free from the threat of war and free from extreme poverty, even if we cannot all be rich and successful in material goods. After devastating experiences of war and poverty, some nations and their governments have also become committed to developing a world that provides better welfare and protection to vulnerable populations. Many such efforts are channeled through the United Nations, the Red Cross, international aid agencies such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and religious organizations. Yet individuals who have

a sincere religious practice in their personal life may feel that issues like world peace and human security are rather remote and abstract, the business of governments and international organizations rather than grassroots citizens. How can ordinary people like us make any contribution to these global issues? This article discusses a few pertinent ideas, making reference to the small city of Coventry in the United Kingdom.

## Peace and Human Security

The concept of peace is relatively straightforward, if we take it as simply "absence of war." But in many countries, even where no major armed conflict is taking place, communities are often

vulnerable to natural disasters, health emergencies, violence inflicted by organized crime, or lack of nutritious food. Even Japan, one of the richest and best-prepared nations in the world, is deeply impacted by tsunamis and earthquakes. In the past decade the United Nations, the government of Japan, and various institutions throughout the world have developed the concept and practice of "human security." The intention is that a basic level of human security (freedom from extreme poverty, freedom from violence, and freedom to live in dignity) should be available to every person in the world. Peace is a great blessing and a fundamental need for civilization; human security argues that people should also be blessed with at least minimum food, shelter, and safety.

After the Second World War, almost all countries in the world made a commitment to provide better care for such people. Humanitarian concerns were deeply embedded in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has been ratified by all member states of the United Nations. Article 25 states: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

These aspirations were not well implemented for many reasons, including

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the military confrontations of the Cold War, but the agenda was revived in the late 1990s. Kofi Annan, then UN secretary-general, stated in 2001, “We must also broaden our view of what is meant by peace and security. Peace means much more than the absence of war. Human security can no longer be understood in purely military terms. Rather, it must encompass economic development, social justice, environmental protection, democratization, disarmament, and respect for human rights and the rule of law.”

The UN Development Report also stated: “Albert Einstein summed up the discovery of atomic energy with characteristic simplicity: ‘Everything changed.’ He went on to predict: ‘We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive.’ . . . Five decades later, we need another profound transition in thinking: from nuclear security to human security.”

All predictions indicate that the world’s population will increase rapidly over the next fifty years, reaching perhaps nine billion (from the current seven billion) by 2050. There will be huge concentrations of population in megacities in poor, and some middle-income, countries: for example, Karachi, New Delhi, Mumbai, São Paulo, Dhaka, Cairo, Manila, Lagos, Mexico City, and Jakarta may all have populations of fifteen to twenty million or more by 2050. The world may witness one of the most dramatic demographic changes in history. The population living in urban areas is projected to gain 2.6 billion,

passing from 3.6 billion in 2011 to 6.3 billion by 2050. Thus, the urban areas of the world are expected not only to absorb all urban population growth over the next four decades but also to draw from the rural population. As a result, the world rural population is projected to start decreasing in about a decade, and there will likely be fewer rural inhabitants in 2050 than today. Population growth is becoming largely an urban phenomenon concentrated in the developing world.

In short, there will be many more people in need of food and fewer people in agricultural production. Human security into the twenty-first century will be most severely challenged by intensive shortages of food, water, and energy supplies for these large populations in poor countries. The basics for human

life are likely to be available only to those who can pay for them on international markets, or possibly those who can gain supplies from richer countries for political or security reasons. Certain sectors of these populations will be especially vulnerable depending on local cultures and politics; among them are likely to be women, members of marginalized and minority ethnic groups, and those most susceptible to natural disasters, disease, and violence. People in such desperate situations may easily be manipulated by politicians or turn to violence in order to survive as criminals.

## **Coventry Cathedral and Peace Studies**

Coventry is an industrial city in the Midlands; the geographical center of England lies only a few miles to the west. The town boomed in the 1920s and 1930s, mostly because of the numerous factories producing vehicles, electrical goods, textiles, engines, and a wide range of components and other items. The factories became even busier at the start of World War II, as many were converted to the production of armaments. The city also has a long religious history, which until 1940 was embodied in many beautiful old buildings, especially clustered around the great Church of Saint Michael, which in 1918 was granted cathedral status.

By October 1940 the German air force dominated the night skies over England. In November the German air force stepped up its raids on Coventry

and neighboring Birmingham. On November 14 they launched what was probably the largest air attack of the early war years. Some four hundred bombers were active from 6:00 in the evening until about 5:00 in the morning, dropping five hundred tons of explosives. The city was virtually defenseless; it is thought that at most two German planes were lost. Many thousands of civilians had already vacated the city, some of them camping out in the surrounding countryside; most of the remainder spent the night in underground shelters. This evasive action accounts for the relatively low casualties: an estimated 550 dead and 1,000 injured, most of them emergency workers. The city, however, was effectively devastated. Almost all factories and a great proportion of the housing stock were damaged; much of it had to be demolished. Water, gas, electricity, telephones, railways, and many roads were unusable. The food supply was uncertain for a while. The city center was mostly rubble.

Symbolic of the destruction, even the cathedral had burned almost to the ground, attempts to save it having failed through lack of water: most of the pipes had been smashed by bombs. One tower still stood, and a few of the treasures had been safely stored underground. On the morning after the raid, a caretaker took two partly burned beams from the fallen roof, tied them in the shape of the cross, and set the result in a mound of rubble.

Repair work commenced, and some factories restarted production after a few weeks, but Coventry has not yet recovered from the raid. Most old English towns have some kind of historic center, but central Coventry dates only from the 1950s—a visible reminder of the destructiveness of war. Yet the provost of the cathedral, R. T. Howard, was a remarkable personality who managed to create something positive out of this gloomy story. In 1940 the BBC invited Provost Howard to lead one of its Christmas broadcasts from the ruins of the cathedral. During his speech he said:

Early this Christmas morning, here under these ruins, in the lovely little stone chapel built six hundred years ago, we began the day with our Christmas communion, worshipping the Christ, believe me, as joyfully as ever before. What we want to tell the world is this: that with Christ born again in our hearts today, we are trying, hard as it may be, to banish all thoughts of revenge. . . . We are going to try to make a kinder, simpler, a more Christ Child-like sort of world in the days beyond this strife.

Provost Howard was determined that forgiveness, reconciliation, and international friendship were to be the key elements of postwar Coventry. A litany was composed that is still recited every Friday at noon in the ruins of the old cathedral, where people pray that

we may leave behind hatred between nations, greed and envy, pride and indifference. Instead, we should be “kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another.”

There were some who interpreted the words “Father, forgive” as “Father, forgive those wicked Germans, because I will not”; the provost categorically rejected this view and stated that “there are no innocents; we all stand in need of forgiveness; this understanding is the beginning of reconciliation.”

In 1999 Coventry University decided to further the city’s international work by opening the Centre for Peace and Reconciliation Studies.

CPRS promotes research and learning that contribute to a deeper understanding of peace and reconciliation. It questions the inevitability of war as a method of conflict resolution and supports those who work for more peaceful solutions. It is a dynamic, cosmopolitan center reflecting contemporary international scholarship on the theories and practices of conflict transformation, peace building, nonviolent politics, human security, faith-based and humanitarian aid, postconflict reconstruction, and related areas. This history and focus differentiates the CPRS from some other centers of peace studies across the world.

As well as those of the cathedral, the city, and the university, there are a number of other important initiatives in Coventry, for example, the Coventry International Prize for Peace and Reconciliation (<http://coventrypeaceprize.org.uk/>), an arts link with Dresden, regular contacts with Hiroshima, a peace gallery at the local art museum, and the annual Peace Festival.

## So, What Can We Do as Citizens?

As mentioned at the start of the article, many of us are people of goodwill, engaged with a spiritual orientation,



and deeply wishing that all of our brothers and sisters might enjoy peace and some basic living standards. Many of the issues raised above—international bombings, earthquakes, and so on—seem far beyond our capacity to address. Should we just refer them “up” to governments and the biggest international agencies? Or should we do something ourselves?

One approach is that all of us can at least contribute to healing the human psyche by starting with ourselves. There is a growing recognition, even in mainstream politics, that much of the “new” ethnic violence is not easily subject to conventional monitoring like arms control. War and extreme poverty have their technical aspects. But even more fundamentally they have their roots deep in the divided and troubled human consciousness. To be meaningful, new peace agreements really have to indicate “we will no longer regard these persons as

our enemies but as friends.” For communities who have suffered unbearable heartache, these words are perhaps, understandably, almost impossible to utter. Likewise, communities may have to learn to share precious resources not only among themselves but perhaps with strangers, even with their former enemies. So perhaps a first step is to make sure we ourselves can practice forgiveness and generosity.

Then, there are many effective ways in which aid agencies and others provide help: they include emergency and humanitarian assistance, micro- and meso-level projects to enhance livelihoods, medical programs such as vaccinations, and improvements to infrastructure. It seems that all of these, assuming they are well designed and delivered, would make significant contributions to human security. So another positive step one can take is to personally or perhaps financially support reputable

charities working in these areas: some directly deliver services and aid in poor or violent regions of the world; others campaign for better national and international practices, for example, in clearing land mines and building flood defenses.

Finally, our experience in Coventry shows that even in a small town in the United Kingdom there are vulnerable people or people who have links to vulnerable communities. They may be students from developing countries who try to survive on very low incomes and send money back home, conflict victims who arrive as refugees and asylum seekers, people who have been displaced after earthquakes and other disasters. If we care enough to take an interest, we might well come across such people even in affluent cities like Tokyo. If we want our spiritual practice to manifest as charity and generosity, we will surely find opportunities. □

# The Prism of the Lotus Sutra

by Atsushi Kanazawa

Atsushi Kanazawa is a Professor in the Faculty of Buddhism at Komazawa University, Tokyo. He specializes in the Indian philosophy of language and the history of Indian philosophy and culture.

## The White Lotus

Among the many Buddhist scriptures, the Lotus Sutra is king. The original Sanskrit title is *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, translated by Kumārajīva into Chinese as *Miaofa lianhua jing* (Jpn., *Myōhō-rengē-kyō*). The Sanskrit title means “Scripture [sūtra] of the White Lotus [puṇḍarīka] of the Correct [sad] Teaching [dharma],” while the Chinese title means “Scripture of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Teaching.” The *puṇḍarīka* is a variety of lotus with white flowers. Buddhists would seem to see the figure of Shakyamuni, who strove to liberate people from suffering in a world filled with both good and evil, superimposed on these awesomely

imposing and refreshing white lotus flowers, growing as they do in muddy water without being sullied by it.

In the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings we read that after the Buddha’s sermon had ended, “various kinds of celestial flowers, such as *utpala*, *padma*, *kumuda*, and *puṇḍarīka*, rained down from the sky.” It is worth noting that the *utpala*, *padma*, *kumuda*, and *puṇḍarīka* that rained from the sky to bear witness to this auspicious occasion are all varieties of lotus (or water lily), respectively blue, red, yellow, and white in color.

In Japan Prince Shōtoku (574–622) wrote a commentary on the Lotus Sutra not long after Buddhism had been introduced there. Identifying the “lotus” in the title of the Lotus Sutra with the

*puṇḍarīka*, he detected in a characteristic of this plant—the fact that it blooms and bears fruit at the same time—a characteristic of the Lotus Sutra, which explains both cause and effect together.

The Lotus Sutra is incomparably engrossing as a narrative, but in addition there are abundant references to many familiar things such as animals, plants, accessories, and so on. Since we are seeking sustenance for our daily lives in Buddhism, it is my hope that we will take the Lotus Sutra in our hands and read through it little by little. □



## The Bodhi Tree

Buddhism is usually described as a teaching for becoming a buddha that was taught by the Buddha. The Buddha in this case is Gotama Siddhārtha, who was born in India about twenty-five hundred years ago. As a prince of the Śākya tribe, he began to question the meaning of life, left home, and after many years of hardship reached a state of supreme bliss and became the Buddha. The word *buddha* means literally “awakened one” and signifies someone who has experienced awakening or enlightenment (*bodhi*). Becoming a buddha is also referred to as attaining buddhahood. In other words, Buddhism is a

teaching in which the Buddha explains on the basis of his own experiences how we too might become buddhas.

It is recorded that the Buddha Shakyamuni gained enlightenment beneath an *aśvattha*, or pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*) at Bodh Gayā in India. Ever since then this tree has also been known as the bodhi (or bo) tree. Known too as the sacred fig, it is a member of the Moraceae, or mulberry, family and is famous for its profusion of distinctive cordate (heart-shaped) leaves. In the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings we read, “After six years’ right sitting under the Bodhi tree of the wisdom throne, I could accomplish Perfect Enlightenment.” The bodhi tree is similarly referred to

in chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra (“Springing Up out of the Earth”): “I, [near] the city of Gayā, / Sitting beneath the Bodhi tree, / Accomplished Perfect Enlightenment.”

In Japan the linden, or lime, tree of the Tiliaceae, or linden, family is usually referred to as the bodhi tree, but it should be noted that although it resembles the sacred fig in the shape of its leaves and in other respects, it is a different tree. Which tree will become the bodhi tree for each of us, under which we might someday attain awakening? □



# Building the Great Sacred Hall

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.***

I began making a handwritten copy of the Lotus Sutra on July 16, 1960, at the former residence of Myoko Sensei [Myoko Naganuma, cofounder of Rissho Kosei-kai, who died in 1957] adjacent to the organization's former headquarters. The day had been very hot since morning. The thermometer had steadily risen, and by midday it was thirty-two degrees Celsius. I started writing from the first chapter, "Introductory," and worked intently until five in the afternoon and managed to finish copying out about a thousand characters.

When Rissho Kosei-kai proclaimed its intention to manifest the truth, we determined that our focus of devotion would be the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, the Great Benevolent Teacher and Lord, the World-honored One. We commissioned the artist Ryusen Miyahara to paint a picture of Shakyamuni on silk. It was a major undertaking that took a year to complete. However, we were told a painting on silk does not last long, so we decided

to have a wooden statue of Shakyamuni made as well. It would be installed on the main altar in the Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo when the hall was completed. We commissioned the sculptor Shinkan Nishikido, and I then vowed to make a handwritten copy of the Lotus Sutra to insert within the finished statue.

Nichiren had written in a text called "Opening the Eyes of Wooden and Painted Images" [in Japanese] that if copies of the sutras are placed before a wooden or painted image of Shakyamuni, the image takes on all the Buddha's thirty-two marks of physical excellence. I decided to deposit within the statue the sutra that I had devoted myself to and that I was copying with all of my heart and soul as my prayer to the Original Buddha Shakyamuni for the liberation of all humankind from suffering.

Work on the statue continued according to schedule, and the construction of the Great Sacred Hall, whose groundwork had begun in 1956, was proceeding steadily.

*Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, was an honorary president of the World Conference of Religions for Peace and 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.*

Copying the ten volumes of the Threefold Lotus Sutra was no ordinary undertaking. First I had to decide on the model from which to work. I studied the copy known as the *Chomyoji-bon*, another called the *Heirakuji-bon*, and a version owned by Rissho Kosei-kai copied by the twelfth-century lord of Hiraizumi, Fujiwara no Motohira. None of them, however, was exactly what I had in mind. But then I recalled a copy that had been made by my teacher Sukenobu Arai, who had guided me to the Lotus Sutra. On my way home from my first day's copying, I called at Arai Sensei's house and borrowed from his widow the eight-volume copy of the Lotus Sutra that he had made.

The calligraphy was very skillful. Arai Sensei had copied the eight-volume Lotus Sutra three times. The first was destroyed during the bombing in World War II, and the one I had borrowed was the third, which he copied when he was sixty. Arai Sensei not only had a deep knowledge of Chinese classics but was also an accomplished calligrapher, known as such under the art name Genshu. Calligraphy reflects the personality of the calligrapher. A mature

perfection imbued each of the characters of the Lotus Sutra that Arai Sensei copied after he reached sixty.

I used white *torinoko*, a finely textured handmade paper with a glossy surface. Since the sutra was to be arranged in scroll form, I selected a format of fifty-one vertical lines of seventeen characters per line for a single sheet. Before beginning to write, I calmed my mind and then put my heart and soul into writing each character.

That summer was sultry, and day after day the thermometer went above thirty degrees Celsius. I went to the headquarters at 8:30 every morning, and after the morning meetings there I began my copying at Myoko Sensei's former residence. Though by midday it was so hot that the leaves on the trees in the garden were wilting, I decided not to use an electric fan, as the air current from the fan would have disturbed the papers I was working on. As I sat at my desk, the sweat ran down the back of my neck until my whole body was soaking wet.

Mrs. Kayo Iwafune, the former head of the Fifth Chapter, was helping me by grinding the ink on the inkstone, and

her forehead too was beaded with perspiration. The secret to preparing the ink is to rub the ink stick gently against the inkstone so the ink does not become grainy. But the intense summer heat made the liquid evaporate quickly, so Mrs. Iwafune could not rest for a second. Also, the paper I was writing on tended to warp in the heat. Furthermore, when I put my brush down to take a rest, people would invariably arrive to ask my guidance. There were also many

things to decide: the construction of the Great Sacred Hall, purchasing land for regional branch training halls, important matters concerning the appointment of new branch heads and senior leaders, and administrative work related to personnel at Kosei Gakuen schools and Kosei General Hospital.

While both dealing with Rissho Kosei-kai business and copying the sutra, I sat formally on my knees in front of my desk. But maintaining this posture the whole day was not easy, and my back and legs got very sore. By evening I was very tired. Motoyuki Naganuma [chair of Rissho Kosei-kai's Board of Trustees] and others counseled me not to risk my health. They said that if I overexerted myself and fell ill, it would be a grave matter for the whole organization. They recommended that I go somewhere cool to continue my copying without distractions. At first I refused. When leaders were putting up with the heat to conduct *hoza* sessions, how could I escape to somewhere cool? I could not leave the headquarters when everyone was working hard to put the new organizational changes into effect. They insisted that if I collapsed, all the efforts of the leaders would come to nothing.

In fact I was not concerned so much for my own health as for the fact that I



was very much behind in my copying. So I heeded my counselors' advice and decided to go to a cooler place.

Early on the morning of July 26, I set out with Mrs. Iwafune for the villa Sanmaiso in Hakone, a mountain resort sixty miles southwest of Tokyo. I carried with me all the implements I needed for copying. We arrived at Sengokuhara, where the villa was located, at nine in the morning. It was incomparably cooler than Tokyo. I immediately began to work and continued until evening, absorbed in my copying. The air was clean and fresh, and the wind blowing in through the open window bore the scent of greenery. When I finished my day's copying, I made my devotionals, reciting the Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, and went to bed at ten o'clock. The deep night of Hakone settled over the villa.

I arose the following morning at five. After listening to the radio program *Jinsei dokuhon* (Human-Life Reader), I washed my face and put my bedding away. I then opened the shutters to let in the bracing morning air. The night had been cool, so I had slept very well and awoke refreshed. After a bath and some exercises, I performed my morning devotionals. As soon as I had eaten, I immediately began work. Having finished copying the 1,750 characters of the

"Skillful Means" chapter, I felt keenly the protection of the buddhas and all the good deities. The anxiety I had felt in Tokyo about working as much and as quickly as possible gradually subsided. I took morning and afternoon breaks, including an easy walk in the afternoon. With no feeling of strain at all, my brush flowed. I estimated it would take three days to write each volume.

Once when I was out for a walk, I met an elderly woman with a cotton towel wrapped around her head coming from the opposite direction. She removed the towel and uttered a polite greeting. She said, "I am a member of Rissho Kosei-kai. I am very happy to have had the chance to meet you, President Niwano." She brought her hands together in the *gassho* greeting, and I responded in the same way. I said to her in farewell, "May you have a long and healthy life."

Mrs. Iwafune looked after my needs by doing the cooking and cleaning. Members of the Odawara Chapter who lived in Sengokuhara came every day, bringing groceries and other necessities. A young member brought the newspaper to me every morning in a wrapper protecting it from the morning dew. I could not help feeling that my work was being supported by all the members of Rissho Kosei-kai.

## Dedicatory Text

I finished copying the ten volumes of the Threefold Lotus Sutra on October 9. Eighty-six days had passed since I first picked up my brush. Since I had returned to Tokyo several times for ceremonies or administrative affairs, the actual copying took fifty-five days. I was delighted beyond words. It had been a gift from the gods and buddhas. I then wrote the following dedicatory text to be appended as a colophon in the copied sutra:

"The Lotus Sutra and its opening and closing sutras, all three parts, embodying the spirit of our Original Teacher Shakyamuni, are now deposited within this statue of Shakyamuni. Before, the statue had thirty-one marks of excellence, and now it is complete with thirty-two. With the inclusion of the four bodhisattvas in the nimbus, the statue symbolizes the Original Buddha Shakyamuni, who attained eternal buddhahood. This object of veneration, the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Great Benevolent Teacher, the World-honored One, is one we should all revere, esteem, extol, and take refuge in, Buddhists as well as all humankind, though we may be of different religions. Performing the three kinds of acts of the Three Vehicles is the supreme,

direct path into the wondrous realm of nirvana.”

I would like to speak a little more here about the phrase “performing the three kinds of acts of the Three Vehicles.” The Three Vehicles are *shravakas* (disciples who hear and follow the Buddha’s teaching), *pratyekabuddhas* (those engaged in religious training without a teacher), and bodhisattvas, while the three kinds of acts are physical, verbal, and mental. When we speak of the actions of a bodhisattva, we tend to think this means religious practice that only a bodhisattva can undertake. In Mahayana Buddhism, aspirants to enlightenment are often called bodhisattvas, and some people minutely divide bodhisattva practice into forty or fifty stages. However, if we interpret “bodhisattva practice” narrowly in this way as something distinctive, it becomes something that not everyone can undertake. If bodhisattva practice is so difficult as to be almost impossible, neither individuals nor society will show any improvement.

The Bodhisattva Practice Jeweled Necklace Sutra says, “Receiving one part of the precepts is called one part of being a bodhisattva.” If we can practice even one of the Six Perfections, can we not then be called bodhisattvas? Originally the Three Vehicles of *shravakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and bodhisattvas meant the various capacities of different people, but they can also mean the different ways of living and thinking and various kinds of people. There are many differences among all who strive to improve themselves by controlling their desires, ridding themselves of prejudice, seeking to do good.

Though we talk of the Three Vehicles, in terms of everyday living there is not much difference between them. I think we are justified in regarding all people as practicing the bodhisattva way, since everyone is endowed with the same buddha-nature. If we speak of the ideal human being as someone only in some far-off heaven, then we cannot

guide people to the teachings. Can we not call all of those who want to grow spiritually and serve others bodhisattvas in essence? Even if there are differences between *shravakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and bodhisattvas, are they not all to become bodhisattvas, just as the various rivers and streams eventually flow into the great ocean of the One Vehicle?

Imagine that someone near you is ill. A bodhisattva naturally acts to massage the place that hurts and offer words of comfort. What is vital is that we do not lose sight of the bodhisattva spirit. Even people taking the first steps of a *shravaka* can practice as a fine bodhisattva simply by giving of their time or resources or by inviting people to attend a service at a Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma facility. Good *pratyekabuddha* practice is looking into one’s own life in the light of the twelve links in the chain of causation and reflecting on one’s ignorance, admitting “My karma is indeed deep.” Excellent bodhisattva practice is to act altruistically, always putting others first.

In Rissho Kosei-kai, people resembling *shravakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and

bodhisattvas are all equal within the Sangha, and all practice their faith according to their capacities. While the existence of each of the Three Vehicles is recognized, it is above all the spirit of the One Vehicle that integrates and liberates people. This is why I wrote in the dedication that was placed inside the statue of the Eternal Buddha, along with the volumes of the Threefold Lotus Sutra I copied, that “the supreme and direct path into the wondrous realm of nirvana” is “performing the three kinds of acts of the Three Vehicles.”

Through this, though a modest effort it might be, I have been enabled to undertake the five practices of a teacher of the Dharma: receiving and keeping the sutra, reading it, reciting it, expounding it, and copying it.

## The Need for the Great Sacred Hall

Plans to build the Great Sacred Hall date from around 1955, when we began to be painfully aware that the existing main hall was far too cramped for the increasing membership.

We had built the Second Training Hall, a three-story building, to provide space for all members to train together, but this soon proved inadequate. We then built the Third Training Hall. However, when grand ceremonies were held, it could not accommodate even all the members of the Tokyo chapters. This was a great problem for members from other parts of Japan who had come to Tokyo especially to attend ceremonies at the headquarters.

We desperately needed a building capable of accommodating ten thousand to twenty thousand people in one place. The idea grew in my mind that such a building should be the main place for manifesting the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and a sanctuary for dissemination of the true Dharma. It would be not just a training facility for members but a place open to nonmembers and people from all over the world.

The changes in the buildings we used as our headquarters tell much about the growth of Rissho Kosei-kai. The first dedicated headquarters, completed in May 1942, was a small building with 890 square feet of floor space standing alone in the middle of a field. It met our needs well enough during the war, but afterward it could not accommodate the growing number of members. We thought about constructing a new headquarters, but we could not get a building permit in the conditions prevailing at the time. We were allowed, however, to move an existing building to our site, so we decided to buy and move a building in the Tokyo suburb of Hoya that had belonged to a munitions factory during the war. In January 1949 the new headquarters, with an area of 6,049 square feet, was ready for use (this is preserved as a training hall on the original site). Despite its extensive floor space, this building too was all too soon full to bursting with members attending services. With four times as many people arriving as could enter the hall, many groups were forced to spread

mats on the ground outside and conduct *hoza* meetings there.

We made plans to build the Second Training Hall near the new headquarters building to cope with the rapidly increasing membership. It was to have two stories, with a wedding hall and a job-counseling office downstairs and a library upstairs. However, it was soon apparent that the continuing growth in member numbers made it impossible to include features such as a library, and we changed our plans to a three-story ferroconcrete building exclusively for *hoza* meetings. It was completed just two and a half years after the new headquarters building. But even as these plans were being carried out, the number of members kept growing. Even with the new building, it was not long before the streets between the two were packed with people whenever there were meetings or services.

"We need to build a larger headquarters," I said to Myoko Sensei, who was then still in good health. She replied, "I've been thinking the same thing." I said, "I wonder where a good place would be. I have a place in mind; I'll take you there." It was in what is now called Wada, then very much a rural village, with groves of trees and open fields. The place where the Great Sacred Hall now stands was a small hill. A pine tree that looked about forty years old stood in the middle of the southern slope, and a small stream flowed below it. Thus it was excellent too in geomantic terms.

"What do you think?" I asked Myoko Sensei. "It's perfect for the headquarters, isn't it?" She replied, "If you like it, I have no objection."

So the site of the Great Sacred Hall was selected.

I still had doubts, however. The amount of money necessary to construct a very large building would be an enormous burden on members. I was unable to make up my mind about what to do. Just at that time, Mrs. Iwafune

said to me enthusiastically, "President Niwano, let's just go ahead and build it!" Hers was the voice of only one person, but it seemed to me to echo the consensus of the membership, and it determined my resolve to go ahead with the construction of the Great Sacred Hall.

The groundbreaking ceremony was held on February 24, 1956. There was a strong wind blowing that day as we recited the sutra, purified the four directions, and broke the ground with a special hoe.

Myoko Sensei stood beside me. On that cold winter's day, the biting wind made my ears ache, but Myoko Sensei seemed unaffected. At one point she turned to me and said, "President Niwano, let's finish this building as fast as possible, by next year if we can." I wondered why she was in such a hurry and replied that we were going to build a fine hall.

## Finalizing Plans for the Hall

My first idea about the construction of the Great Sacred Hall was simply that it could accommodate a large number of people, up to about fifty thousand. It would be seven stories high, and people could fill it yet still hear the Dharma talks amplified. These were my rough ideas for the architectural plan.

Grading by the Zenitaka Corporation got under way two days after the groundbreaking. Just as this work was coming to an end, I traveled, as [was] described [in the previous issue of *Dharma World*], to Brazil with Motoyuki Naganuma to celebrate fifty years of Japanese immigration. I had the chance to see religious buildings in both South and North America, beginning with the Roman Catholic churches of Brazil. I took special note of their architectural styles and the way their interiors were organized. I learned a great deal about the history of church architecture there.

Saint Peter's Basilica at the Vatican is one of the largest and most magnificent

religious buildings in the world. It took 120 years to complete. Most churches in the West are built of stone, and many are elaborately decorated with carvings. Their tall domes and towers dominate the landscape, symbolizing Christian beliefs. I realized then that religious buildings were not designed just to accommodate large numbers of people but for magnificence.

I thus changed my ideas for the Great Sacred Hall. As Rissho Kosei-kai's main sanctuary, it had to be able to express the roots of Rissho Kosei-kai faith. I thus came to the conviction that it had to be a building that manifested the teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

The Lotus Sutra, on which Rissho Kosei-kai is based, is called the "rounded teaching," meaning that it is a perfect, harmonious whole, since the circle is regarded as the perfect form. Therefore I decided that the hall too must be round to symbolize this. After I returned from Brazil, I halted construction for a time for alterations in the light of what I had seen and learned. Building the type of structure we needed was more important than hurrying to finish it.

The Great Sacred Hall was finally completed eight years and three months after the groundbreaking ceremony, thanks to the combined efforts of members from all over the country who had done volunteer work or donated money

in an outpouring of religious enthusiasm. [Unfortunately, Myoko Naganuma did not live to see the finished building.]

There was a young junior high school girl who sent 275 yen and wrote, "I pledged to donate 300 yen from my spending money for my school trip to the building fund of the Great Sacred Hall, but I'm sorry that it is a little short."

A sixty-five-year-old blind woman sent a thousand yen. In the accompanying letter, she wrote, "Thanks to the power of the Dharma, I am no longer stubborn and have learned to be grateful for my husband's kindness. To repay just a little of the debt I owe both to the President and Myoko Sensei, I have been making and selling straw sandals. I enclose the money I have earned." There was also a campaign of collecting donations in handmade boxes for the building of the hall. People put in the ten-yen coins they had saved each day, and young people put in the money they earned by delivering newspapers or collecting trash.

## Completion of the Great Sacred Hall

Ceremonies were held on May 15, 1964, to commemorate the completion of the Great Sacred Hall of Rissho Kosei-kai that members had combined their efforts to build. It was a fresh and

clear May morning. At 8:45 I checked my watch against the time of an official in charge of the ceremony and then switched on the votive lamp, symbolizing the eternal flame of the Dharma, in the Precious Stupa atop the hall. Then I went up to the rooftop with a number of senior leaders. The purple flag of Rissho Kosei-kai was fluttering in the wind. Looking down, I saw waves of people on the Haramitsu (*paramita*, in Sanskrit, for "perfection") Bridge. Members had come from Hokkaido in the north and from Okinawa in the south to celebrate the inauguration of the Great Sacred Hall. My heart swelled to see them.

The inauguration was held in the main auditorium on the fourth floor. People carried the banners of the 173 chapters of Rissho Kosei-kai in procession from the former headquarters. They placed the banners around the inside of the auditorium. A pair of phoenixes with wings spread were depicted on the curtain in front of the central altar, giving forth a seven-colored radiance. As the curtain slowly rose, thunderous applause broke out. The statue of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, the Great Benevolent Teacher, the World-honored One, was revealed.

I went onto the platform and addressed the members. "Now the Great Sacred Hall, long awaited by all the



members, has been completed, and the statue of the Eternal Original Buddha—the ideal image of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, the Tathagata Abundant Treasures, and the four bodhisattvas—has been enshrined in it. As we enjoy the happiness and excitement this brings, there is something that we must all engrave on our hearts. Today Rissho Kosei-kai has taken a new step in disseminating its true Dharma. To make this Great Sacred Hall, whose construction has come about through the faith of many millions of people, a sanctuary for the liberation of humankind in both theory and reality, we must refine our hearts in accordance with the scriptures and act according to their teachings so that each and every one of us becomes a bodhisattva springing up out of the earth, as spoken of in the Lotus Sutra. Unless we do so, our long-awaited focus of devotion will be nothing more than an object of idolatry.”

“A bodhisattva springing up out of the earth” refers to the bodhisattva who has a thorough knowledge of the depths of human suffering and who can liberate all people from suffering. Such a bodhisattva has vowed to teach the Dharma and strive to bring liberation in the place of Shakyamuni following his passing from this world. This bodhisattva is considered a model

whose religious practice we should emulate.

The Haramitsu Bridge that leads to the stairway up to the main auditorium signifies the path leading from this shore of illusion and suffering to the Other Shore of nirvana.

Some people have said that when a new religion grows to a certain extent, it builds itself a grand complex, like those of established religions, to dazzle the eyes of beholders. Those people say that if a new religion has so much money, it should donate it instead for good causes. I would answer this criticism as follows: “I understand the public criticism very well. However, we do not have the slightest idea of showing off our religious power just for its own sake or satisfying our pride by erecting big buildings. From the time of Myoko Sensei it had been the fervent wish of members to be able to practice their faith together under one roof and in the presence of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni. Over the last eight and more years, all members have done away with what is inessential in their lives and put their every effort into fulfilling their wish to practice their faith.

“Even if we build a religious facility that compares with any in Asia or indeed the world, it means nothing if all we teach is a faith for our own benefit,

and then our attitudes or behavior are not worthy of that facility. If we cling to the Buddha image we have enshrined only for our own liberation and come to the Great Sacred Hall just to worship there, then the building we have worked so hard to build is no more than an empty shell. It would be shameful if the Great Sacred Hall—which should be a fountainhead for spreading the Dharma amid the defilement and corruption of the period of the Decay of the Law—were used only by people of small capacity who are not aware they are children of the Buddha. At the National Conference of Chapter Heads, I said, ‘By the time the Great Sacred Hall is finished, I ask you all, as Rissho Kosei-kai leaders and Buddhists, to be worthy of the hall, in your character, in the judgments you make, and in your actions. I want you to become capable of teaching the Dharma with confidence according to the principles of Buddhism to whomever comes, whatever their station in life.’ It will only be when everyone becomes such a person that we will be able to declare the Great Sacred Hall complete.”

My most fervent prayer was that all members of Rissho Kosei-kai would grow in faith to be worthy of the Great Sacred Hall. I still feel the same.

*To be continued*

# The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

## Chapter 21

### The Divine Power of the Tathagata (1)

*This is the 113th installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra by the founder of Rishso Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.*

**INTRODUCTION** This chapter is one of the most important of the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra because in it culminate the two doctrines of the realm of trace and the realm of origin. It also clearly teaches that these two doctrines are not separate, even though they seem different. This chapter particularly emphasizes that they are essentially one in every respect.

In the realm of trace, Shakyamuni revealed the aim and content of the teachings that he had preached during the forty-odd years following his attainment of supreme enlightenment. They are primarily philosophical and ethical teachings, emphasizing the formation of all things in the world, the laws by which they move, and teaches that human beings are never exempt from those fundamental laws, what human beings ought to be, and ideal human relationships.

In the realm of origin, Shakyamuni revealed that the Buddha is not only Shakyamuni the World-honored One

himself, who appeared in this world as a human being, but is also the Eternal Original Buddha, who gives life to all things.

In referring to the realm of origin, the Buddha teaches that to be finally liberated we must realize that we are one with the Eternal Original Buddha, and all human beings must reach this stage of liberation for the sake of true world peace.

We can clearly distinguish between the realms of trace and origin in the following way. The realm of trace includes the teachings of Shakyamuni, who appears on earth. The realm of origin manifests the Eternal Original Buddha, that is, “nonarising” and “nonperishing.” The doctrine of the realm of trace is about how people should live and what human relationships should be like. Because human relationships should be based on true wisdom more than anything else, the realm of trace can be said to be the teaching of wisdom.

In the realm of origin, the manifestation of the Eternal Original Buddha, who gives life to all things in the universe, is preached. Because the manifestation of the Eternal

Original Buddha represents the great benevolence and compassion of the Original Buddha, we may call the realm of origin a teaching of benevolence and compassion.

It is necessary for us thus to distinguish between these two realms when we study in depth the teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

Analysis is necessary when we study anything in detail. To analyze means to divide a thing into its components and examine its structure, its elements, its meaning, its functions, and so on. However, if we go deeper into mere analysis and conclude our study only with analysis, we have only studied something halfway, and our study will not come alive. Western scholarship, in its methodology and way of thinking, has a regrettable tendency of being satisfied with analysis, and because of this, subtle philosophy is unable to save human beings, and advanced medicine is able to cure only individual illnesses without being able to improve human health as a whole.

In contrast, the Eastern way of thinking seeks to broadly grasp the true nature of things. This way of thinking is founded on the belief that one is identical with all and conversely that all is identical with one.

In this day and age when Western civilization is reaching a stalemate, this Eastern way of thinking is attracting attention and esteem from people around the world. We ought to appreciate anew the fact that the most profound locus of Eastern thought is in the Buddha Dharma.

At any rate, once we have carefully analyzed a thing in order to study it in depth, it is absolutely necessary to unite all its aspects. It is only when we have done this that we have finally grasped the whole and been able to ascertain the truth that pervades the whole. This function is called synthesis, and we complete the study of a subject only if we follow analysis with this synthesis.

The same also applies to the study of the Lotus Sutra. Up to this point we have studied the Buddha's teachings by analyzing them in order to understand them correctly. If we stop with analysis, unless we are geniuses, the teachings will remain scattered in bits and pieces and jumbled in our heads, and it cannot be said that we have achieved true understanding.

We should not study the Lotus Sutra for the sake of learning alone. We should learn for the sake of true liberation, to attain buddhahood. Therefore, it is not enough to understand the sutra intellectually. We cannot be truly liberated, or liberate humanity, unless we proceed from understanding to faith and reach that mental state in which there is a complete union of understanding and faith.

In that sense, in this chapter, the Buddha reviews all his teachings in the preceding twenty chapters and declares that a single truth permeates them. In this chapter, it becomes apparent that the doctrine of the realm of trace is at one with

the doctrine of the realm of origin. When we embrace the two realms as a harmonious whole, our devotion becomes stronger and more secure.

Reading through this chapter, however, it may seem that it states no such important teaching, but only the mysterious and incomprehensible divine power of the Tathagata. That is what makes the chapter hard to understand. As I explained many times before, the great compassionate mind of the Tathagata is symbolized by these mysterious phenomena, and each of these phenomena implies the complete union of the realms of trace and origin.

Though I must resort once again to analysis, I will explain the meaning of the ten divine powers of the Tathagata according to the interpretations accepted by Buddhist scholars since ancient times.

For this reason, the discussion will become rather specialized, and I will use difficult terminology. But the reader should not be put off by this. Such terms are merely skillful means to help us in understanding these teachings, and needless to say, our ultimate goal is to clearly understand the spirit of this chapter.

In the final section of chapter 20, the World-honored One spoke as follows:

“Therefore let his practitioners, / After the Buddha's extinction, / On hearing such a sutra as this, / Not conceive doubt or perplexity. / But let them wholeheartedly / Publish abroad this sutra, / And age by age meeting buddhas, / They will speedily accomplish the Buddha Way.”

This chapter begins with the words of the innumerable bodhisattvas who reply out of their great emotion, after hearing the Buddha's preaching as above.

**TEXT** At that time the bodhisattva-mahasattvas, equal to the atoms of a [great-]thousandfold world, who had sprung up from the earth, all before the Buddha with one mind folded their hands, looked up into his noble countenance, and spoke to the Buddha, saying: “World-honored One! After the extinction of the Buddha, in whatever lands the separate embodiment of the World-honored One exists, wherever he is extinct, we will widely preach this sutra. Wherefore? [Because] we also ourselves have obtained this truly pure Great Dharma, we wish to receive and keep, read, recite, explain, copy, and make offerings to it.”

**COMMENTARY** *Equal to the atoms of a [great-]thousandfold world.* This means that the gathering of bodhisattvas was as great as the number of atoms that would be produced if a thousand worlds were ground into powder. That is, countless bodhisattvas assembled.



- *Who had sprung up from the earth.* This is explained in detail in chapter 15, “Springing Up out of the Earth” (see the July–September 2009 issue of *Dharma World*).

- *In whatever lands the separate embodiment of the World-honored One exists, wherever he is extinct.* Because the Original Buddha, as the Dharma-body neither arising nor perishing, takes no definite form, the separate embodiments appear incarnated in physical forms, each possessing both individual characteristics and affinities with a particular country. In other words, each of the separate embodiments is born in a certain country and becomes extinct there as a result of appropriate causes and conditions. Accordingly he embodies the distinctive qualities and typical sentiments of that country’s people.

That is why the expressly stated phrase “in whatever lands the separate embodiment of the World-honored One exists, wherever he is extinct” seems to imply the notion that all the separate embodiments of the Buddha have both individual characteristics and distinguishing features of a particular locale.

- *Truly pure Great Dharma.* This refers to the true and absolutely pure teaching of the Great Vehicle, needless to say, the Lotus Sutra.

These bodhisattvas who had sprung up from the earth were regarded as having greater virtues than the Bodhisattva Manjushri and the Bodhisattva Maitreya, who were originally of this *saha* world, and here they vow before the Buddha to impart the Buddha’s teachings widely. They accompany their pledge with an explanation of why they would impart his teachings widely, a reason with profound meaning.

They explain that because they have obtained this Great Dharma, they wish to make it truly their own, continually learn from it, preach it on behalf of others, copy it, and make offerings to it.

Offerings to the Buddha or the Dharma are expressions of devotion to and gratitude for them, and are a way of repaying one’s debt of gratitude for them. By widely imparting the Buddha’s teachings, the bodhisattvas pay this debt of gratitude for the teachings they have received from the Buddha.

This is why the bodhisattvas who have sprung up from the earth are great bodhisattvas. People at a lower spiritual stage would consider themselves to at least some degree, thinking, “I myself can be liberated by this practice.” These bodhisattvas, however, rise entirely above “self” or “I.”

We naturally receive merit by bestowing merit on others, and to deny that we receive such merit would be wrong and narrow-minded. Such narrow-mindedness is found nowhere in the teachings of the Buddha. Therefore, in the previous chapters, the Buddha has taught repeatedly the merits we should give to others by preaching the Lotus Sutra and the merits we simultaneously receive from such practices.

However, with this chapter, we see that the great bodhisattvas, whose virtue is far greater than that of other bodhisattvas, especially those great bodhisattvas taught by the Original Buddha, who have achieved a sense of oneness with the Eternal Original Buddha, have entirely risen above receiving merit. They have concentrated merit within themselves and hence think only of bestowing merit.

Another important teaching here is that even these great bodhisattvas do not neglect such practices as receiving and keeping, reading, reciting, explaining, and copying the Buddha’s teachings as practices for their own benefit or improvement. Because they are great bodhisattvas, their understanding of the Dharma must be perfect. But still they endeavor firmly to keep the Buddha’s teachings, deepen their understanding by studying them constantly, and devote themselves to the practice of memorizing the teachings by copying them.

This is a valuable admonition, for we are apt to become arrogant when our understanding of the Dharma improves even a little.

Upon hearing the vow made by the bodhisattvas who had sprung up from the earth, the World-honored One nodded contentedly. He said nothing in reply. Then he began his great wordless preaching.

**TEXT** Thereupon the World-honored One, before Manjushri and the other countless hundred thousand myriad kotis of bodhisattva-mahasattvas who had originally lived in the *saha* world, as well as of bhikshus, bhikshunis, upasakas, upasikas, gods, dragons, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings, and so on, [before] all these beings, revealed his great divine power,

**COMMENTARY** *Bodhisattva-mahasattvas who had originally lived in the saha world.* Bodhisattvas who were originally of this *saha* world, unlike those who sprang up from the earth.

- *His great divine power.* This refers to a mysterious power not possessed by ordinary human beings. Here it means a supernatural power that comes with enlightenment as a buddha.

**TEXT** putting forth his broad and far-stretched tongue till it reached upward to the Brahma world, every pore radiating the light of infinite and numberless colors, all shining everywhere throughout all directions of the universe.

**COMMENTARY** *Putting forth his broad and far-stretched tongue till it reached upward to the Brahma world.* The Buddha sticks out his long, broad tongue as far as the Brahma heaven.



This expression may strike the reader as peculiar, but it comes from an Indian custom. In ancient India, to put one's tongue out was a symbolic way of insisting on the truth of what one said. Come to think of it, this is quite a logical custom. By showing one's clean, graceful tongue, one insists that one speaks without guile, and not with a double tongue.

Needless to say, the Buddha's tongue is immaculate, and it is so long and broad that it extends to the Brahma heaven. This symbolizes that all the teachings he had imparted were true and that there are not two separate truths but only one. The teachings expounded so far may seem to be divided into two kinds: the teachings of the historical Buddha, called "trace," and those of the Original Buddha. But ultimately these two kinds of teachings are united into one great truth.

People in later ages interpreted the Buddha's mysterious gesture of putting forth his broad and far-stretching tongue as manifesting the doctrine of the "oneness of the two realms in faith" (*nimon-shin'itsu*). The two realms are the realms of trace and of origin.

At first, in the realm of trace, the Buddha as a dweller in the *saha* world taught its inhabitants how to live a virtuous life.

Later, however, in the realm of origin, he declared that he is the Eternal Original Buddha, the being originally non-arising and nonperishing. He led people to realize that true liberation comes from awakening to the well-established fact that we receive life from the Original Buddha.

Since there seems to be a great difference between the two realms, some people may have doubts about them, wondering how they should understand them.

Shakyamuni appeared in this world as a manifestation of the Eternal Original Buddha to liberate all living beings. Therefore there is no distinction between the historical Shakyamuni Buddha and the Eternal Original Buddha.

If Shakyamuni had not appeared in this world, we would not have known of the Original Buddha, so we cannot judge which is more welcome and more to be revered—the Buddha of the realm of trace or the Original Buddha.

The conclusion is that the Original Buddha and the Buddha of the realm of trace are ultimately one and that according to the Lotus Sutra our faith should have a single focus. This is the doctrine of the "oneness of the two realms in faith."

The mysterious gesture of the Buddha putting forth his broad and far-stretched tongue until it reached the Brahma heaven thus has this profound meaning.

• *Every pore radiating the light of infinite and numberless colors, all shining everywhere throughout all directions of the universe.* Shakyamuni Buddha revealed his divine power by radiating a beautiful, multicolored light from his whole body, shining in all directions of the universe, brightening all places simultaneously.

This mysterious phenomenon means that truth is the light that dispels the darkness of delusion.

As I have mentioned before, darkness does not really exist. It is merely an unlighted state. It instantly disappears when light shines. It is just that evanescent.

The same can be said of delusion. Delusion is unreal; only truth is real. Delusion is simply failure to realize truth. Therefore, when we awaken to truth, our delusions immediately disappear.

However, for most people, delusion seems real. Just as they believe in the reality of darkness and fear it, they think delusions and defilements really exist. As they struggle to rid themselves of these, their minds on the contrary become fettered by these imaginary things, and this increases their suffering.

Addressing their misunderstanding, the Buddha taught that people must not be troubled by such a trivial thing as delusion. They have only to realize the truth, and delusions will disappear. The basis of this is the doctrine of the ultimate reality of all things, which includes the doctrine of the Ten Suchnesses.

The realm of trace includes various teachings, and the central one is the doctrine of the Ten Suchnesses, which reveals in detail the real state of all things. Here again is thoroughly explained the teaching of dependent origination, which holds that phenomena occur through the interaction of causes and conditions.

From the realization of this came the awareness that if the human mind is provided with conditions for improvement, it has the potential for buddhahood. On the other hand, if it is provided with conditions for depravity, it can fall into the realm of hells.

The doctrine of the realm of trace explains truth in a philosophical, ethical way. The doctrine of the realm of origin, however, expresses it as the Eternal Original Buddha, who is all-embracing in his warmth and compassion.

This Original Buddha exists from the infinite past and into the eternal future giving life to all beings, hence we are children of the Original Buddha. It is clear that because of this, in our true nature we are one with the Original Buddha.

With the help of the philosophical doctrine of the Ten Suchnesses, only some of the intelligentsia could attain enlightenment. But when ordinary people today hear the teaching that the Original Buddha sustains them, they can understand it, and they respond to it with inexpressible joy.

The realm of trace and the realm of origin are ultimately based on the same truth. In the realm of trace, truth is taught in a more philosophical way; in the realm of origin, in a more religious way.

This doctrine is called "the oneness of the two realms in

truth” (*nimon-ri’itsu*). This profound teaching is shown by the fact that the multicolored light that emanated from the Buddha’s whole body dispelled all darkness from the universe.

It is hardly necessary to mention that this light with its innumerable colors symbolizes the infinite teachings of the Buddha. That this light shone forth throughout the universe symbolizes that all teachings emerge from a single truth and that all delusions are extinguished.

**TEXT** Under all the jewel trees the buddhas, each seated on a lion throne, also in like manner put forth their broad and far-stretched tongues radiating infinite light.

**COMMENTARY** *The buddhas.* This indicates the buddhas as separate embodiments who were called to gather from throughout the universe as explained in chapter 11, “Beholding the Precious Stupa.”

The fact that the other buddhas put forth their broad and far-stretched tongues and emanated light after Shakyamuni Buddha did, symbolizes that the truth is one. It indicates that all the buddhas have awakened to the same truth, however countless in number they may be.

Truth attracts truth. Each truth resonates with the others. All truths combine as one. The moment Shakyamuni Buddha radiated the sacred light from his whole body, the other buddhas likewise radiated infinite light, which combined into one great light that shone throughout the universe. This is the ideal state sought by practitioners of the Lotus Sutra. It is the state in which all people become buddhas and the *saha* world becomes identical in essence with the Land of Tranquil Light.

When we read this short passage over and over again with this understanding, we can keenly feel the sacredness of its content.

**TEXT** While Shakyamuni Buddha and all the [other] buddhas under the jewel trees were revealing their divine powers, hundreds of thousands of years had fully passed.

**COMMENTARY** This mysterious phenomenon lasting hundreds of thousands of years symbolizes the eternal truth of the buddhas’ divine powers.

**TEXT** After that they drew back their tongues, coughed simultaneously, and snapped their fingers in unison.

**COMMENTARY** *Coughed simultaneously.* All together they cleared their throats in the same instant. The original Chinese characters for “cough” have two meanings. The first is to clear the throat. The second is to chat, to talk together as friends. “Coughed simultaneously” means

expounding the teachings and that all the teachings constitute a single truth.

That means that the teachings of the three vehicles are identical with the One Buddha Vehicle, if we refer to it according to the sequence of the teachings expounded by the Buddha throughout his lifetime.

Shakyamuni Buddha imparted first the teaching of skillful means. The teaching of skillful means is definitely the true Dharma, and is in no way a lesser teaching. It was merely a process for expounding the ultimate Dharma, and each teaching of skillful means in its own way is an important Dharma and a valuable teaching.

Applying this process to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra is called *nimon-kyo’itsu*, or teaching the “oneness of the two realms in doctrine.”

To truly comprehend the realm of origin, it is absolutely essential to study the doctrine of the realm of trace. Just as in the study of mathematics, addition must be learned before multiplication, the realm of trace should be mastered before the realm of origin.

A child learning mathematics would not really understand if you start by teaching that two times three is six. First you have to teach addition. You would begin by teaching, for instance, that two plus two plus two equals six. Then the child is ready to understand that multiplying two times three is the same as adding two three times. Even if a child has memorized the multiplication table and can readily say that two times three is six, the child won’t understand multiplication unless it knows how to add.

The same is true of religion. Just as children learn mathematics by studying one thing at a time, people learning about a religion should learn religious practices and eliminate their delusions one at a time. This is what I believe.

Just as multiplication, which produces immediate answers, is a true teaching, Buddhism is also a true teaching, which liberates people immediately when they realize that they receive eternal life (the buddha-nature) from the Eternal Original Buddha.

Yet it is difficult to truly appreciate and embrace the wonder of liberation without understanding that spiritual progress requires a gradual accumulation of practices.

In the explanation of chapter 18, “The Merits of Joyful Acceptance,” faith was shown as multiplication: the object of faith multiplied by the mind of faith equals the result of faith. Even if we immediately teach people from the first that the object of faith must be the Eternal Original Buddha, they will be confused and at a loss. They would be unlikely to develop true faith.

The mental stage of faith by “addition” commences with religious practice, such as learning the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths, through which one awakens to the fact

that this world is characterized by suffering and one learns how to overcome suffering. As one learns religious practice through the doctrine of the Eightfold Path, one accumulates practices according to the teachings. Moreover one realizes through the doctrine of the Twelve Causes and Conditions that the most fundamental cause of all human sufferings is ignorance of the Buddha's teachings. One therefore practices contemplation (*samadhi*) to study and ponder the Buddha Dharma in order to eliminate this ignorance. Then, on the basis of the doctrine of the Six Perfections, one progresses through independent practice and by instructing others. If one accumulates practices by such "addition," then one's mind will become purified and serene, and one will gradually approach buddhahood and the compassionate mind of the Original Buddha.

For those who have understood these doctrines, the Buddha finally reveals the ultimate truth that the Eternal Original Buddha, who is nonarising and nonperishing, sustains all beings. Without understanding these doctrines, a person would find it difficult to believe in this teaching about the Eternal Original Buddha. One who does understand these doctrines will embrace and be grateful for the teaching about the Eternal Original Buddha.

Then in our hearts we realize that if we feel at one with the Buddha, we will naturally come to live according to the Dharma. We fully comprehend that as true liberation.

Therefore, it would be wrong to say that the doctrine of the realm of trace, preached in the first half of the Lotus Sutra, and that of the realm of origin, preached in the second half, are separate teachings. They are the same teaching viewed from two sides, and because they are ultimately two ways of arriving at one and the same liberation, Buddhist scholars since ancient times have interpreted the phrase "coughed simultaneously" as the teaching of the "oneness of the two realms in doctrine."

• *Snapped their fingers in unison.* This action refers to an ancient Indian custom of making a sound by putting the tips of the thumb and the index or middle finger together and snapping hard.

Shakyamuni Buddha and the other buddhas snapped their fingers to signify their solemn vow to spread the teachings together. They made this vow out of the compassion that moved them to seek the liberation of all living beings. In modern terms we might describe that compassion as a feeling of complete unity with others.

A baby cries for its mother's breast. The mother takes the baby in her arms and gives her breast to it. At this moment the mother transcends any feeling of pity for her baby. She feels the baby's hunger as keenly as if she herself were hungry. Therefore she lifts the crying baby in her arms, with no idea of self, and puts it to her breast. The baby innocently

takes the mother's breast as the mother contentedly looks on.

There is a perfect union between mother and baby; nothing separates them. There is no feeling of reserve, and the mother has no feeling of doing her baby a favor. This is pure compassion, in the spirit of the Buddha.

This is the ideal relationship between a preacher and his or her listeners. We can imagine that there must have been such a harmonious relationship between Shakyamuni Buddha and his disciples. As written in the Vimalakirti Sutra, "The diseases of all the living are those of the bodhisattvas," a sense of unity with others is something that the Buddha, teacher of all the bodhisattvas, perfectly made a part of himself. From this we can sense just how devoted the Buddha is to the ideal of human unity.

Having studied the teachings of the Lotus Sutra thus far, we know that all of them amount to the concept of our oneness with others.

It might seem that only we ourselves benefit by ridding our minds of delusion, finding spiritual happiness, and improving ourselves according to the doctrine of the realm of trace. The fact is, however, that our own self-improvement benefits those around us. This is an example of individual practice that results in teaching others. It is often sounder and more effective than preaching with words. As we make spiritual progress and come to practice the Six Perfections, we actively practice to benefit others, and we approach more closely a perfect oneness with others.

When we enter the realm of origin, we are about to experience poignantly the meaning of oneness with others. In other words, we will come to believe that all people are the true children of the Eternal Original Buddha. It means that although people seem to be individuals, we are all basically one.

Human conflicts arise from a lack of that sense of oneness. If everyone felt completely at one with others, then hatred, resentment, scorn, envy, and jealousy would vanish, and this world would inevitably be transformed into the exquisitely beautiful, peaceful Land of Tranquil Light.

Thus the Lotus Sutra ultimately teaches oneness with others, and the spirit of oneness permeates the realms of trace and origin. This is called the concept of *nimon-nin'itsu*, or the "oneness of the two realms in humanity." All the buddhas snapping their fingers in unison signifies their vow to spread widely this spirit of oneness with others throughout this *saha* world.

**TEXT** These two sounds reached through every direction of buddha worlds, all their lands being shaken in six ways.

**COMMENTARY** *These two sounds.* This refers to the sounds of the buddhas coughing simultaneously and snapping their fingers in unison.

made all living beings in the universe shake with emotion.

No one shaken with emotion by the teachings can resist practicing them. There are some who only understand the teachings intellectually, storing them in their minds but not practicing them. But whoever shakes with emotion on hearing the teachings will naturally begin practicing them.

What is it that they should practice? Bodhisattva practice, which manifests all the teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

With the doctrine of the realm of trace, the Buddha ultimately urges people to do bodhisattva practice through the Six Perfections. The doctrine of the realm of origin teaches them they are one with the Buddha and all other people. This realization in turn is naturally manifested in the bodhisattva practice of liberating others. This realization develops further into the great bodhisattva practice of seeking the liberation of humanity and the transformation of the *saha* world into the Land of Tranquil Light.

This is the concept of *nimon-gyoitsu*, or the “oneness of the two realms in practice.” It has a profound meaning expressed in the words “all their lands being shaken in six ways.”

• *All their lands being shaken in six ways.* It is held that on six occasions—when the Buddha was conceived, when he was born, when he renounced the world, when he attained enlightenment, when he preached the important Dharma, and when he passed away—the earth shook in six ways (three kinds of form and three kinds of sound).

This means that all beings in heaven and earth were deeply moved. The buddhas coughed simultaneously to declare loudly that all the teachings are based on one great teaching, because the truth preached in the Lotus Sutra is one. They also loudly snapped their fingers in unison to indicate their solemn vow to establish in the world a spirit of human unity, which is the culmination of the Buddha Way. These two sounds reverberated in the ten directions and

The five divine powers of the Tathagata already mentioned are the manifestation of Shakyamuni’s and other buddhas’ enlightenment, teachings, and vow. The next five divine powers show what result will take place when the manifestation of their enlightenment, teachings, and vow are extended to all living beings in heaven and earth.

*To be continued*

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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.