

All Who Are Born Must Die

by Nichiko Niwano

February 15 is the date on which Rissho Kosei-kai holds the ceremony marking the day when, some twenty-five hundred years ago, Shakyamuni entered nirvana. This observance of Shakyamuni's entrance to nirvana is, along with the anniversaries of the day of Shakyamuni's birth and the day of his enlightenment, one of the three important annual events for Buddhists, and while we praise his virtues on this day, we also take the opportunity to again reflect upon what matters most in life.

In this regard, as Zen master Dogen (1200–1253) declared, “The most important matter for a Buddhist is to be completely clear about the meaning of birth and the meaning of death.” In other words, we should clearly understand the reality of life and death. The fact that all who are born must die, that death comes equally and indiscriminately to one and all, should be etched on our hearts.

We need to be clear in our minds about this fact because it lets us know the preciousness of the life we now have and makes us aware of the value of our being alive.

Incidentally, during morning recitation not long ago, I suddenly thought, “Shakyamuni used his physical existence to tell us these things.” As I have said before, Shakyamuni was no superhuman; he was born a flesh-and-blood human being, and he entered nirvana at the age of eighty. Shakyamuni, who expounded the truth of impermanence, himself lived out the very truth of what he taught: not only illness and death, but

before that, sorrow at being confronted with the ruin of his country—accepting such dire circumstances. Therefore, when I was reciting chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, “The Eternal Life of the Tathagata,” and read, “The words of the Buddha are true, not false,” I was struck by the thought that what the Buddha told us is the truth, not meaningless words. I then pondered anew the importance of accepting the truth of life and death as the highest priority in our existence.

Shining Light into Hearts and Minds

Everything that is born will someday die—that is the essential course of nature, which is preordained and necessary. Yet when we hear this, the thought of death often captures our attention and makes us feel gloomy. However, without life there is no death, and so by being clear in our minds about death, we cast light on life. Life and death are essentially part of the same thing: one cannot exist without the other.

In *Essays in Idleness*, one of the classics of Japanese literature, Yoshida Kenko (1283–1350) tells us, “If we had the ability to live forever, how colorless our lives would be. Because we are impermanent, our lives are rich with color.” Precisely because we know that our lives are limited, we lead purposeful lives and can concentrate on the matters before our very eyes. We may forget the truth of life and death, as Zen master Ikkyu (1394–1481) described in this humorous poem: “‘Tomorrow is another day,’ my mind

Nichiko Niwano is president of Rissho Kosei-kai and an honorary president of Religions for Peace. He also serves as special advisor to Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan).

was eased by this. I whiled away today doing nothing.” Conversely, when we lead our lives supposing that tomorrow may never come, we fully experience each and every moment of life.

When we can accept the fact of death in this way, we need not uselessly fear it or find the thought of it abhorrent. Furthermore, by doing so we can cherish the memory of those who have gone and our perspective becomes richer and deeper.

We feel sad when those close to us die, but when we have been overcome by this sadness in our whole being, the strength to once again face life positively wells up within us, meaning that such sadness is an essential part of life. At the same time, being able to accept that life and death are parts of one thing allows us to reflect more deeply on the legacy of those who have passed away, learn from and praise their positive traits, and vow to lead our lives as they led theirs. This is just like our learning from Shakyamuni and looking up to Founder Nikkyo Niwano as our guide, thereby gaining renewed power to conduct our lives.

By doing so I want each of us to lead a life that can shine light into the hearts and minds of other people. □

DHARMA WORLD

FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

JULY–SEPT. 2014 VOL. 41

FEATURES: Life After Death

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.

Publisher: Moriyasu Okabe

Executive Director:

Jun'ichi Nakazawa

Director: Kazumasa Murase

Senior Editor: Kazumasa Osaka

Editor: Katsuyuki Kikuchi

Editorial Advisors:

Miriam Levering, Gene Reeves,

Yoshiaki Sanada,

Michio T. Shinozaki

Copy Editors:

William Feuillan, Gary Hoiby,

DeAnna Satre, Catherine Szolga

Editorial Staff:

Ryuichi Kaneko, Satoe Izawa

Subscription Staff: Kazuyo Okazaki

Layout and Design: Abinitio Design

Cover photo: Shutterstock

Photoshop work by Abinitio Design

1 All Who Are Born Must Die

by Nichiko Niwano

.....

3 East Asian Buddhists and the Afterlife

by Miriam Levering

5 Modern Perspectives on Death and Afterlife

by Liz Wilson

9 The Practice of Faith in This World and Belief in the Hereafter: The Afterlife in Islam

by Jiro Arimi

12 "Life after Death" in Traditional Tibetan Buddhism

by Margaret Gouin

16 Exploring Traditional African Belief Systems and Their Relation to the Understanding of Death and Afterlife

by Nomfundo Walaza

20 Life in the Spirit: A Christian Outlook on Life beyond Death

by Juan Masiá

23 Japan's March 11, 2011, Disaster and the Strength of Buddhism: Living with an Awareness of Death and the Dead

by Susumu Shimazono

.....

26 The Call for a Deeper and More Inclusive Interreligious Engagement

by Dena Merriam

32 Side by Side: Notes on the Twin Buddhas of the Lotus Sutra in the Stone Carver's Art

by Hank Glassman

36 The Prism of the Lotus Sutra (5)

by Atsushi Kanazawa

38 Pivotal Encounters with American Religious Leaders

by Nikkyo Niwano

THE THREEFOLD LOTUS SUTRA: A MODERN COMMENTARY

44 The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 23: The Former Lives of the Bodhisattva Medicine King (1)

East Asian Buddhists and the Afterlife

by Miriam Levering

The implication of the notion of samsara is that this lifetime is the afterlife of a previous lifetime, indeed, of many previous lifetimes. Likewise, more lifetimes are to come, shaped by both the previous and the present lifetimes.

One of the things that characterize the premodern world is belief in an afterlife. Death was a hard fact of daily life: as some Westerners still say at funerals, “In the midst of life we are in death.” That is the case now, and it was even more the case in the premodern world, where the germ theory of disease and antibiotics had not yet been discovered, while plagues, wars, famines, and natural disasters constantly threatened. Yet in the prescientific era, most people had a conviction and hope that the present life was not the end.

In India, around the time of the Buddha, people’s ideas of the afterlife changed. Before there were Buddhists and Jains, people on the Indian subcontinent believed that one lived in this world once. The emphasis was on this one life—gods were petitioned for wealth, sons, victory, and cattle, while the notion of an afterlife was rather vague. By the time of the Buddha, a new notion had just begun to take hold: that death is followed by a new birth in an endless cycle of life and death called samsara. Buddhists, Jains, and proto-Hindus had different theories of what caused and shaped rebirths, but all agreed that cause and effect was the cosmic law governing life and death. Not only that, all groups agreed that

all lifetimes in this world were marked by dissatisfaction and suffering, that existence in samsara was more to be feared than loved. Some way of freeing oneself and others from samsara needed to be found.

While Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists all sought freedom from samsara, Buddhists taught that freedom was to be found by deeply grasping the reality of impermanence and change, while Hindus taught that freedom was to be found through a deep insight into the permanent core of the self, the essence of all things. Jains and Hindus both held that all actions were causes of the circumstances one faced in the next and future lives, while Buddhists held that actions could be good, bad, or neutral, with only the good and bad actions shaping one’s future births.

The implication of the notion of samsara is that this lifetime is the afterlife of a previous lifetime, indeed, of many previous lifetimes. Likewise, more lifetimes are to come, shaped by both the previous and the present lifetimes. In the *Mulāsarvāstivāda Vinaya*, it is taught that a large image of the samsaric Wheel of Birth and Rebirth should be painted on the wall at the entrance to the monasteries. The Wheel of Birth and Rebirth was thus to be a constant reminder that

Miriam Levering, Professor Emerita of Religious Studies and Asian Studies at the University of Tennessee, is an international advisor to Rissho Kosei-kai. She received her PhD from Harvard University in 1978. She has edited a book called Rethinking Scripture, a study of the concepts and uses of sacred texts in the major religious traditions, and has written many articles on women and gender in Chan and Zen Buddhism.

this life is passing and will be replaced by a future life.

The Wheel of Life is a common feature of Tibetan Buddhist temples but is rarely found in East Asia. In East Asia, to remind believers and nonbelievers alike of the possibility in the next life of losing our joys and pleasures in the human realm, Buddhists painted scenes of the process of judgment that held the answer to our postmortem fate. In Buddhist theory the process that governed rebirth required no judges. It was the natural law of cause and effect. But in China, Korea, and Japan, the servants of King Yama (a Buddhist figure) and the Ten Kings of Hell hauled the newly dead person before their courts in the dark realms to decide that person’s fate. In East Asia, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva (known in Japan as Jizo and in China as Dizang) assumed the chief role as the Savior of the Six Paths of Rebirth.

If one’s current circumstances, pleasures and pains, are caused by past good and bad actions—the word *karma* means “act”—then death is the moment at which

those circumstances can undergo a large change. In the circumstances of this life, you or I may be enjoying the fruits of past good actions, but in the next lifetime our circumstances may reflect our bad actions. Now we are well-born, relatively handsome, and intelligent; in the next life we may be born to a poor family in a war-torn country and be dull-witted and crippled from birth. Not only that, Buddhists everywhere teach that the human realm is only one of six realms of rebirth in which our past actions may cause us to find ourselves: the hell realms (also called purgatories, since they are impermanent), the realm of hungry ghosts, the realm of animals, the human realm, the realm of belligerent giants, and the realm of the gods. Though we are human now, our past bad deeds may propel us out of the human realm altogether, into a hell or an animal realm. The six rebirth destinations were powerfully illustrated in cave sculptures and paintings and in portable pictures used by preachers. In Japan, a book by the Tendai scholar Genshin (942–1017), *Ōjōyōshū* (Essentials of birth in the Pure Land), contains graphic depictions of the Buddhist hell realms and spurred many to seek rebirth in Amida Buddha's Pure Land.

One who took refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha and followed Buddhist practices could be relatively assured that he or she would not be reborn in the three unfavorable realms, that is, among the denizens of the hells, the hungry ghosts, and the animals. The lives of animals were seen as undesirable because they were short and filled with killing. Humans suffer but are intelligent enough to hear the Buddha's teaching and follow it. A human birth was described as being as rare as a deep-sea tortoise managing to find on the ocean surface a log with a hole in it large enough to permit its head and shoulders to fit through it, and then succeeding in pulling its head and shoulders through.

Devotion brought birth in the

heavens in which the gods dwelled or in one of the Buddha-purified lands. Particularly popular destinations were the Trimsaka Heaven, where the god Indra presided; the Tushita Heaven, where the next Buddha Maitreya awaited rebirth in our world; and the land purified by Amitabha Buddha, where that buddha currently taught. The merit from good actions could be transferred to the beloved dead or to all of one's ancestors, rescuing them from long, punishing stays in the purgatories/hells and assuring them a desirable birth.

Uncertainty about one's destiny after this life was a powerful motivating force in premodern East Asia, and to some extent remains so today. Even those monks and teachers who encouraged their monastic and lay followers to forget about the next life and concentrate in this life on awakening to the Buddha's supreme insight made good use of the zeal for practice of which someone fearful of the next birth was capable.

In East Asia, the obligation of the living to care for their ancestors in the afterlife predated Buddhism, and the melding of the two produced powerful yearly Buddhist rituals to benefit all of one's ancestors. Funeral rites in which monks performed rituals to transfer merit to the recent dead could assure an improved afterlife.

In East Asian Buddhism considerable emphasis was placed on the role

of one's last thought at the moment of death in determining one's afterlife destination. The best preparation for a good death was, of course, a good life. But just before death, memories and emotions from the life just ending would flood through the brain. If one's last breath occurred in the midst of a memory that made one angry, one could find oneself reborn as a ferocious beast. Even dying with emotional pain at leaving one's loved ones behind could prevent a good rebirth. The value of cultivating mindfulness and surrounding oneself with monks and buddha images rather than loved ones so that one could focus on a buddha at the moment of death was emphasized in some schools. If one died a good death, with one's full mind at peace and focused on devotion to a buddha, the living would see signs—sounds, lights, radiant clouds—that one's death had been a good one and that one had achieved rebirth in a pure land.

All of the powerful East Asian Buddhist understandings of the afterlife have had a great cultural impact. But they are merely the prelude to the deeper, universal East Asian understanding of *samsara*. The deeper understanding of our life and the Buddha's life is that each moment of one's life must be treasured. One must, to the extent possible, live selflessly and free from the distortions introduced by emotions, attachments, and desires, manifesting in each moment one's true self that is one with the Buddha.

One must live each moment for others as well as for oneself. Fear of death must be fully faced, as must all of one's attachments and problems, to enable one to be free in each moment to create good things and avoid creating bad ones. Practice of the Dharma-gates taught by the Buddha is essential; its goal is to free one from fear of life and fear of death, including fear of possible rebirths. A true follower of the Buddha vows to be reborn in any realm in order to help sentient beings attain the Buddha's Way. □

Modern Perspectives on Death and Afterlife

by Liz Wilson

These are exciting times for those with an interest in what might happen after death. One need not be a religious person to find some basis for believing that life can persist after the termination of our flesh-and-blood existence. Conversations about the possibilities of postmortem life are drawing atheists, agnostics, and scientists of all sorts to promising exchanges with religious people.

There are a number of ways to think about life after death and a variety of issues involved. One can reflect on beliefs about God, karma, or divine agents who help to shape the fate of those who die. One can think in purely philosophical terms about probability and causality in regard to the possibility of postmortem existence. One can investigate studies that explore the evidence for life after death. One can look at the impact of such beliefs on those who hold them, investigating their effect on the actions and mental health of those persons. In this essay, we will combine all of these approaches in order to give a brief overview of modern perspectives on death and afterlife.

Demographic Information

As one looks around the world with an eye to beliefs about life after death, one encounters considerable variation in the degree to which people hold such beliefs. In a study conducted from 1999 to 2002 that surveyed eighty-one countries, the results show a high incidence of belief in postmortem existence in North

Africa, in parts of the Middle East, in the United States, and in Iceland, as well as in strongly Catholic European countries such as Poland and Ireland (Ronald Inglehart, *Human Beliefs and Values: A Cross-Cultural Sourcebook* [Siglo XXI Editores, 2004]: 338).

Americans typically score high on religious belief in surveys. So it should come as no surprise that surveys of Americans conducted at the end of the twentieth century indicate that more than 75 percent of Americans believe in life after death (D. J. Klenow and R. C. Bolin, "Belief in an Afterlife: A National Survey," *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying* 20, no. 1 [1989–1990]: 63–74; A. M. Greeley and M. Hout, "Americans' Increasing Belief in Life after Death: Religious Competition and Acculturation," *American Sociological Review* 64, no. 6 [1999]: 813–35).

Studies of surveys over time suggest that these beliefs are growing more popular, not less popular (as many of the architects of modernity had predicted). For example, Greeley and Hout's study "Americans' Increasing Belief in Life after Death" compared the numbers of American adults who claimed

Liz Wilson is Professor of Comparative Religion at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. She is an affiliate in the Asian/Asian American Studies program and in the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program. Her training is in South Asian religious history, especially Buddhist and Hindu, with a focus on gender, sexuality, death and dying, and family structures. She is the editor of The Living and the Dead: Social Dimensions of Death in South Asian Religion (SUNY Press, 2003).

to believe in life after death in the 1970s with those who made such claims in the 1990s. They found that in the 1990s, the number of Jews and those with no religious affiliation reporting beliefs in life after death was almost as high as that of Christians, unlike two decades before.

Not only are contemporary people open to the possibility of life after death, but many also claim to have had experiences in which they interacted with loved ones who had died. About half of the widows and widowers in America and Britain believe that they have felt the presence of their deceased spouse (A. M. Greeley, "Hallucinations among the Widowed," *Sociology and Social Research* 71, no. 4 [1987]: 258–65; W. D. Rees, "The Hallucinations of Widowhood," *British Medical Journal* 4, no. 5782 [1971]: 37–41).

In addition to reporting a sense of familiarity with the departed, contemporary people contacted in surveys describe other very specific beliefs about

what happens after death. According to data released in 2009 by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, a quarter of Americans believe in reincarnation (<http://www.pewforum.org/2009/12/09/many-americans-mix-multiple-faiths>, accessed January 21, 2014). In Europe, the number of people who believe in reincarnation is almost as large—around 22 percent, or just over one out of five persons (E. Haraldsson, “Popular Psychology, Belief in Life after Death and Reincarnation in the Nordic Countries, Western and Eastern Europe,” *Nordic Psychology* 58, no. 2 [2006]: 171–80). Given the Christian heritage of Europeans and Americans, these are interesting statistics. We can speculate about whether this demographic situation is due to the persistence of pre-Christian beliefs or to the influence of Asian religions or is simply a matter of thoughtful persons coming up with a full range of possibilities.

It appears that belief in life after death has salubrious results for a person’s mental health. A study of 1,403 adult Americans asked to report on their beliefs and their mental health found that a person who anticipated living on after death is likely to experience less anxiety, depression, obsession-compulsion, paranoia, phobia, and somatization (Kevin Flannelly et al., “Belief in Life after Death and Mental Health: Findings from a National Survey,” *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 194, no. 7 [2006]: 524–29).

Afterlife Scenarios and the Basis for Belief

For some people, death is not as much of a preoccupation as it may have been for their ancestors. Contemporary medical practices and medications, combined with better nutritional practices and higher safety standards than in centuries past, have led to longer life spans for many people in the developed world, who now tend to spend

as much time wondering how to save for retirement as thinking about matters of death and postmortem existence. Modernity has also brought skepticism. Many people cannot accept the postmortem scenarios they were taught as children. However, atheists and religious humanists who stand outside conventional religious traditions suggest that one can believe in life after death without relying on traditional religious beliefs. In his recent book *The Atheist Afterlife*, David Staume calls for us to think about an afterlife based on reason, imagining a postmortem existence without the usual concepts of presiding deity, judgment, reward, and punishment (*The Atheist Afterlife: The Odds of an Afterlife: Reasonable; The Odds of Meeting God There: Nil*. [Agio Publishing House, 2009]). Staume compares the afterlife with dreaming: using simple analogies like that of the dream state, he seeks to remove the concept of the afterlife from its religious context.

The question of what happens after death has traditionally been regarded as a philosophical or religious one. In recent years, however, scientists have shown interest in this avenue of inquiry. Religious scenarios about life after death have received scrutiny from scientific quarters in recent years, with scientists bringing their methods to bear on questions about what happens to the brain during clinical death and whether consciousness persists after death. In cases of clinical death, reports by people who

have been resuscitated occasionally claim that when their hearts stopped beating, they experienced the world from outside their bodies and were able to observe medical personnel trying to revive them, along with having other experiences such as seeing light, feeling themselves move through space, and interacting with deceased loved ones. Between 4 percent and 18 percent of those resuscitated after a cardiac arrest report having near-death experiences (Daniel Williams, “At the Hour of Our Death,” *Time International*, September 10, 2007).

Culture appears to make a difference in the type of near-death experiences that are common in different locales. Researchers have found, for example, that it is more common for Japanese people to see rivers and ponds than tunnels during near-death experiences (Ornella Corazza and K. Kuruppuarachichi, “Dealing with Diversity: Cross-Cultural Aspects of Near-Death Experiences,” in *Making Sense of Near-Death Experiences*, ed. Mahendra Perera, Karuppiiah Jagadheesan, and Anthony Peake [Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2012]: 52–54).

Sam Parnia and colleagues have conducted promising studies of patients undergoing cardiac arrest in hospitals. While Parnia’s team has not yet published the results, Parnia indicates that the first phase of the project has been completed and results are undergoing peer review for publication (AWARE Study Update 2014, published online at Horizon Research Foundation: http://www.horizonresearch.org/main_page.php?cat_id=293, accessed April 25, 2014). Seeking evidence that the visions of those with near-death experiences can be confirmed with empirically verifiable data, investigators in Parnia’s team placed signs in hospital emergency rooms and cardiac units, signs that faced the ceiling,

where only patients who are having an out-of-body experience would be able to see them. Patients who reported having had out-of-body experiences during cardiac arrest were asked to identify whether they saw the signs and what information the signs contained.

Studies like this are designed to counter the widespread belief in the medical field that what we experience at moments of cardiac arrest are just subjective experiences or hallucinations that do not correspond to any entities in the objective world. According to the prevailing model of consciousness, these hallucinations are the result of a flood of chemicals in the brain and do not correspond to any transcendent reality. But those who believe in life after death suggest that this is not the only way to understand these phenomena. Philosophers like Richard Swinburne argue that while one’s experiences and mental life may be caused by chemical reactions in the brain, these thoughts, ideas, and experiences are not just epiphenomenal. They in turn cause other experiences and ideas, and they help to shape a person’s ideals and behavior (Richard Swinburne, *Is There a God?* [Oxford University Press, 1996], 77). Dualistic philosophers such as

Swinburne and others suggest that we can speak of the mind (or the soul) and the brain as two separate things. The brain may be responsible for the generation of mental life, but mental life has some independence from the brain. As Keith Ward puts it, “The soul need not always depend on the brain, any more than a man need always depend on the womb which supported his life before birth” (*The Battle for the Soul* [Hodder and Stoughton, 1985], 149–50).

Perspectives of Major Religions

The concept of reincarnation is central to how Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains conceive of life after death. It is also a theme that appears in the work of some early Greek philosophers as well as in strands of Celtic, Norse, and Kabbalistic Jewish thought. To those with little exposure to what is meant by reincarnation, the idea may sound quite pleasant. Since it entails the experience of life in some other form after death, reincarnation seems to promise novelty and excitement as well as the prospect of extended life. But none of the various forms of rebirth that believers of reincarnation envisage, including extremely pleasant forms of life as a deity, offers the possibility of endless life. Those who take birth in various hells (or who are reborn as insects or other sentient beings with limited faculties) owing to a lack of virtue in their present lives will experience tremendous discomfort. Even those who, because of meritorious deeds in their present lives, enjoy tremendous ease and ready satisfaction of physical needs by taking rebirth as gods and goddesses will eventually die. Rebirth is inherently dissatisfying because life must end, and at the end of each life one not only endures the breakdown of one’s body and the pain of saying good-bye to life but must also separate from loved ones. This dissatisfying

cycle of rebirth is driven by karma, a term that refers to the effects of our actions, which bear fruit that we will experience either later in this life or in future lives.

One exception to this generally bleak picture of reincarnation is the concept of pure lands developed by Mahayana Buddhists. Assuming a cosmology of multiple worlds presided over by buddhas, teachings in this tradition describe ideal worlds generated by the vows of bodhisattvas, worlds that are designed to make religious awakening easy. For example, the sounds of nature in the Sukhāvātī Pure Land are forms of teaching that convey the nature of reality to those who have taken birth there. In the Abhirati Pure Land, one eats Buddhist teachings in the form of ambrosia. In such environments, it is easier to comprehend and behave in accordance with the truth than in environments where the truth is hard to perceive and follow.

Developments in physics that have led to theorizing about multiple worlds have made it possible to consider Buddhist visions of pure lands

in a new light. Beginning with a provocative dissertation published in the 1950s, physicists and mathematicians have explored the idea that there are many worlds parallel to our own. Various terms are used to describe such a reality: parallel worlds, parallel universes, the megaverse, the multiverse, and so on. And indeed there are many different theories of multiple worlds. Some envisage other worlds separated from ours by huge stretches of space or time. Some suggest that other worlds are less than inches away from us. In a recent monograph, the physicist Brian Greene discusses nine possible types of multiple worlds, each one based on different sets of theoretical assumptions (*The Hidden Reality: Parallel Universes and the Deep Laws of the Cosmos* [Knopf, 2011]).

Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions about life after death revolve around ideas of the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body. The doctrine of bodily resurrection suggests that the dead will be revived and judged at a future time. While in modern times this doctrine has often been

marginalized, there are new ways of interpreting traditional doctrines about the resurrection of the body that suggest that while we may not have our former bodies returned to us, we will experience new forms of embodiment. Multiple-worlds theories make such forms of existence plausible in that they allow for other dimensions of existence in which a person might enjoy forms of embodiment very different from that experienced in this life.

These are exciting times for those with an interest in what might happen after death. One need not be a religious person to find some basis for believing that life can persist after the termination of our flesh-and-blood existence. Conversations about the possibilities of postmortem life are drawing atheists, agnostics, and scientists of all sorts to promising exchanges with religious people. Medical researchers are developing methods for verifying near-death experiences. Mental health researchers are studying how belief in life after death affects the experiences and actions of the individuals who hold those beliefs. New theories in physics have inspired innovative ways of thinking about traditional afterlife doctrines. While the results of some newly initiated research programs are not yet known, it is clear that this is an area of inquiry with much promise. □

The Practice of Faith in This World and Belief in the Hereafter: The Afterlife in Islam

by Jiro Arimi

There are said to be eight gates to paradise and seven gates to hell in the hereafter, and the Qur'an contains numerous passages that joyously proclaim and warn that people will dwell in one or the other according to the results of their actions in this life.

Life after death is certain in Islam. “Everyone shall taste death” (3:185) says the Qur'an. (All excerpts from the Qur'an are from Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, trans., *The Noble Qur'an: The English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* [King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, 1998].) Death in what we call this world does not mean death forever. Entry into the hereafter comes through the resurrection of all flesh after death. Rank in the hereafter is determined following God's judgment. In all sects of Islam, it is believed that this judgment is based on the consequences of the individual's deeds in this world. Whether one is destined for heaven or for hell depends entirely on how one has lived one's life in this world.

God's message as proclaimed by his prophets contains law (*hukum*) ordained by God that believers are required to practice unwaveringly in their daily lives: “Who has created death and life that He may test you which of you is best in deed. And He is the All-Mighty, the Oft-Forgiving” (67:2).

This life is a time of preparation for the hereafter through the practice of faith in submission to God the Creator.

This life does not solely entail asceticism. As well as God's rewards in the hereafter, there are various rewards and pleasures that may be received, albeit fleetingly, in this world too. Compared with those of the hereafter, however, these are finite and temporary: “And the life of this world is nothing but play and amusement. But far better is the house in the Hereafter for those who are *Al-Muttaqun* (the pious)” (6:32). “And put forward to them the example of the life of this world: it is like the water (rain) which We send down from the sky, and the vegetation of the earth mingles with it, and becomes fresh and green. But (later) it becomes dry and broken pieces, which the winds scatter. . . . Wealth and children are the adornment of the life of this world. But the good righteous deeds, that last, are better with your Lord for rewards and better in respect of hope” (18:45–46).

Whether one is destined for heaven or for hell, the hereafter is a world where one will dwell in eternity forevermore. Practicing faith in this life in preparation for the hereafter means acting in compliance with the revealed Islamic code of law called shariah. Believers form an Islamic community called the Ummah Islamiyyah, which consists of

Jiro Arimi is vice president of the Japan Muslim Association and a visiting professor at Takushoku University Shariah Research Institute in Tokyo. After graduating from the Toyo University Faculty of Sociology, he studied Islam as an invited student at King Abdul Aziz University, Makkah (Mecca), and at Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, from 1975 to 1980.

people who revere and believe in God and follow this code of law. These followers aim to build a community that makes possible the coexistence yearned for by humankind while being rooted in monotheism. “Then when you have taken a decision, put your trust in Allah, certainly, Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him)” (3:159). “It is not for any Prophet to take illegally a part of the booty (*Ghulul*), and whosoever deceives his companions as regards the booty, he shall bring forth on the Day of Resurrection that which he took (illegally). Then every person shall be paid in full what he has earned, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly” (3:161).

One must entrust everything to God and heed the words of the prophets. If the practice of faith in this life is the determinant of rank in the next, then believers will strive to outdo one another in their devotion to good deeds.

There are said to be eight gates to paradise and seven gates to hell in the hereafter, and the Qur'an contains numerous passages that joyously proclaim and

warn that people will dwell in one or the other according to the results of their actions in this life.

There are some who deny God even when informed of such a world, and the Qur'an describes their fate in even greater detail than the fate of those who go to heaven.

For the believer, the Qur'an brings the following glad tidings about heaven. (Heaven is called Jannah, the Garden of Paradise, though this garden is known by other names, such as Adn and Firdaus.)

"Those who are faithfully true to their *Amanat* (all the duties which Allah has ordained, honesty, moral responsibility and trusts, etc.) and to their covenants; And those who strictly guard their (five compulsory congregational) *Salawat* (prayers) (at their fixed stated hours). These are indeed the inheritors Who shall inherit the *Firdaus* (Paradise). They shall dwell therein forever" (23:8–11).

Those who submit to God and are patient and careful of their duty will enter a paradise where they will be clad

in silken garments and brocade. There they will recline on beds and know neither severe heat nor bitter cold.

The shade of the tree of Sidrah that grows in heaven is described as extending so far that it cannot be traversed by camel in a hundred years. Those who enter this paradise will be given as much wine mixed with ginger and other drinks as they wish, served in pitchers and cups of silver by boys of everlasting youth whose beauty is like that of scattered pearls.

As for the food in heaven, the pious will be free to eat from the gardens of dates, grapes, and all other fruits that grow there.

The Qur'an describes in detail other rewards to be found in heaven, including fine palaces inhabited by pure maidens with wide, shining eyes who will be spouses of the pious.

"And whosoever believes in Allah and performs righteous good deeds, He will admit him into Gardens under which rivers flow (Paradise) to dwell therein forever" (65:11). Here is how the Qur'an describes the rivers flowing at the feet of the pious in paradise: "The description of Paradise which the *Muttaqun* (the pious . . .) have been promised (is that) in it are rivers of water the taste and smell of which are not changed; rivers of milk of which the taste never changes, rivers of wine delicious to those who drink, and rivers of clarified honey (clear and pure)" (47:15).

These rewards are for those whose efforts in this life have been accepted. The disbelievers, on the other hand, are described as being those who love the transient life of this world and put behind them a "heavy day" of judgment. Out of God's mercy, however, the Qur'an repeatedly exhorts those who do not recognize him or who deny him to relinquish their attachment to the life of this world.

Believers are required to devote themselves to propagating Islam in their daily lives, to be patient in this

life, and to recite the Lord's names day and night, and they must never obey the sinful or disbelievers.

Those who trust too much in their own abilities, on the other hand, see only what is in front of them and show no interest in what they cannot confirm with their own eyes. Although they too are similarly destined for a world without death in the hereafter, the world that awaits them is one of merciless, eternal agony where they will never die, no matter how great the pain.

This hell that disbelievers, apostates, and those who reject faith or deny the message of Allah and his apostles and prophets are destined for is commonly known as *Nar*, though it is also known by other names such as *Jahannam* and *Jahim* because of its association with fire and flames. These sinners will become fuel for the raging fires of hell, and instead of being clothed in silk and fine clothes as in heaven, they will be enveloped in flames and placed in chains and iron

collars. "Garments of fire will be cut out for them, boiling water will be poured down over their heads. With it will melt (or vanish away) what is within their bellies, as well as (their) skins" (22:19–20).

The descriptions of the painful torments inflicted in the fiery prison of hell are enough to make people understand just what hellfire is. There they will have no cool respite from the searing wind that blows, and will have nothing to eat in their starving state but the bitter fruit of the tree of *Zaqqum*, which grows at the bottom of hell. "You verily will eat of the trees of *Zaqqum*. Then you will fill your bellies therewith" (56:52–53).

For drink, the Qur'an says that those who dwell in hell will drink boiling water like thirsty camels. Unlike the descriptions of the food and drink served in heaven, the picture is one of relentless, painful torment.

For the believer in Islam, this life is a transient one that precedes the hereafter. Confident of the existence of a world

to come that is free of pain and filled with hope, the believer is to spend his or her days enduring trials and living faithfully in abidance with the statutes of the Lord and in accordance with fair and just principles in order to be able to eagerly anticipate a fair judgment when the hereafter comes. In addition to living their faith as individuals, believers are also required to practice the virtue of moderation and display brotherly love toward their families and other believers in order to coexist with all people.

God's message to humankind does not vary over the course of history or according to region, and it is this universality that makes Islam a world religion. The message at the beginning of this article that "everyone shall taste death" is not the product of a single human's wisdom but instead comes from the Lord of the worlds. Should this view of the hereafter seem to change at all, this is due not to the wisdom of God (*hikmah*) but solely to humans. □

“Life after Death” in Traditional Tibetan Buddhism

by Margaret Gouin

For a Tibetan Buddhist, death changes—or at least can change—everything, and it is because of this huge potential that death is by far the most significant life-cycle event. The importance of rebirth is a major influence on how Tibetan Buddhists approach dying and death and how they conduct the funerary rituals for a deceased loved one.

In Tibetan Buddhist belief, rebirth is central to the entire structure of existence. Death is the bridge between lives. It's the end of one life, but at the same time it's also the necessary prelude to rebirth in a new life, which will also eventually end in death—and so on, across a vast expanse of time, the cycle ending only when enlightenment is attained. Nor is it inevitable that a person will be reborn

in human form: there are six realms of existence, and one's next life may be as a god or titan, an animal, a hungry ghost, or an inhabitant of the terrible hell realms. For a Tibetan Buddhist, death changes—or at least can change—everything, and it is because of this huge potential that death is by far the most significant life-cycle event. The importance of rebirth is a major influence on

how Tibetan Buddhists approach dying and death and how they conduct the funerary rituals for a deceased loved one. There are many regional variations in the performance of these rites: this article will focus on certain common themes running through them.

The moment of death itself is an opportunity to attain enlightenment. It is believed that as the dying person finally relinquishes this life, he will for a moment see a clear white light. If the person is able to recognize this light—that it reveals the true nature of reality—he will immediately become enlightened and escape from the round of samsaric rebirths. The hope that this will occur for the dying loved one influences the activities of the living from the moment it's understood that death is inevitable. Every effort is made to ensure that the dying person is peaceful and undisturbed. The person is surrounded with reminders of any religious teachings he may have received and is gently urged to settle his earthly affairs so he won't be distracted from focusing on the Buddha's teachings as they move into the *bardo* (intermediate, or transition) state between death and their next life.

In case the dying person didn't recognize the clear white light, other steps must be taken to assist him in the transition to the next life. As soon as possible after death, a religious professional—a monk, a lama, or a *yogin* (female yoga practitioner)—will perform *powa*, a ritual that seeks to expel the deceased's consciousness from the body through the top of the head, sending it directly

Margaret Gouin received her doctorate in Buddhist Studies from the University of Bristol. She is an Honorary Research Fellow at the School of Theology, Religious Studies, and Islamic Studies at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (Lampeter, UK) and the author of *Tibetan Rituals of Death: Buddhist Funerary Practices* (Routledge, 2010).

to a buddha's pure land, where it will reach enlightenment without any further samsaric rebirths.

After this, though, the rituals proceed as if *powa* had not succeeded. It is as if the survivors, while hoping for the best, also make provision for the worst-case scenario. From this point onward, their activities will primarily be directed toward promoting the spiritual well-being of the deceased in the new life. They will also seek to protect themselves from any supernatural harm arising from the death, in particular some hostile manifestation of the deceased. These activities will continue up to and beyond the disposal of the body, and the spiritual concerns of the survivors influence practical activities such as arranging the disposal of the body.

If the deceased didn't attain either enlightenment at the moment of death or rebirth in a pure land through the *powa* ritual, the next-best result would be for the person to obtain a fortunate rebirth as a human being who has the opportunity to practice the Buddha's teachings. For this to happen, first of all the deceased must die focused on the Dharma, and this is another reason that so much emphasis is placed on ensuring that the dying person is kept undisturbed, reminding him of any teachings he may have received, and surrounding him with holy articles and prayers. Second, the deceased must be helped to navigate the *bardo* period in such a way that the conditions for his next birth will be optimal.

The role of guide through the *bardo* is performed by a religious professional. A wide variety of texts is used (the so-called Tibetan Book of the Dead, familiar to Western Buddhists, is only one of very many), but they all contain the basic elements of informing the deceased that she is dead and instructing her on the phenomena she can expect to encounter in the *bardo*, and advising her on how to react. At every step along the way, she is urged to recognize the true nature of reality, which will take her to enlightenment (or at least to birth in a pure land), and enable her to escape the round of rebirths. Although it's recognized that the longer the deceased remains in the *bardo* state, the more likely she is to be reborn in one of the samsaric realms, it's still hoped that she will be able—even by such a small thing as recalling a fragment of the Dharma she heard in her last life—to improve her chance of finding a new life in which she'll be able to make more spiritual progress.

Another important mechanism for ensuring that the deceased will obtain a fortunate rebirth is for the survivors to perform meritorious acts and dedicate the merit arising from them to the benefit of the dead person. This is a major activity of the survivors, since it's accessible to all without the assistance of a religious professional. The practice of merit transfer—performing acts that Buddhism teaches are good (meritorious) and attributing the positive karma gained benefit not to the actor but to someone else—has a long history in Buddhism. Making merit (performing

good actions) is central to the everyday practice of lay Tibetan Buddhists. The additional step of dedicating the merit of an action to another's benefit is itself meritorious, so the actor always adds to his or her stock of merit whether or not it is dedicated to someone else, such as a deceased loved one.

It is vitally important to perform all the funeral rituals properly, because otherwise the deceased may be unhappy. This will hinder his passage through the *bardo*, since he will be drawn by his distress to stay attached to the people who have upset him. It will also mean that the survivors will have a restless ghost on their hands who may cause all kinds of havoc. The fear of ghosts is very real, and every effort is made to ensure that the deceased has no reason to be discontented with how his passing was handled by the survivors. In addition to carefully following the directives of the death horoscope, the relatives of the deceased will “feed” him until the funeral rituals are completed. This feeding consists of offering various foodstuffs, usually vegetarian, and liquids (anything from water to alcoholic beverages), often by burning them. The smoke arising from the burned food is believed to nourish the being the deceased has become in the intermediate (*bardo*) state. This, of course, is also a meritorious act, and the merit can be dedicated to the deceased's benefit, thus accomplishing two ends in one action. In addition, a portion of the food may be offered to the hungry ghosts who are believed to be everywhere: often they are dead people who

have been forgotten, or left unprovided for, by their survivors. Feeding the hungry ghosts generates even more merit, which can also be dedicated to the benefit of the deceased.

Among the actions undertaken to ensure the spiritual well-being of the deceased, one of the most important is to ensure that the mortuary rituals are properly performed—and in particular that the body is disposed of in an appropriate manner. This requires the casting of a death horoscope, based on the time and date of death and also

on the deceased's birth horoscope. The death horoscope will indicate the best form of disposal, as well as the proper day and time, and may also provide information on who should carry the body, where it should be disposed of, and what the deceased's prospects for rebirth are. If the forecast for the person's rebirth is not auspicious, this will call for remedial steps, which may also be indicated by the death horoscope and may include such meritorious actions as commissioning the painting of a holy picture (*thangka*), copying a religious

text, or paying religious professionals to recite particular prayers or perform special rituals.

The disposal of the body also has connotations of merit making, since the gift of one's body to feed other beings is regarded as highly virtuous. In exposure, the body is consumed by scavengers, including birds, wolves, foxes, dogs, and even pigs. By feeding these animals with her body, the deceased is saving them from the bad karma of having to kill other animals in order to eat. In water, the body nourishes fish, and in earth disposal (either in a grave or under a cairn), it provides food for worms. In cremation, as in feeding the dead, the smoke from the burning body is believed to provide nourishment to hungry ghosts and thereby to ease their suffering.

Following the disposal of the body, the deceased will continue to receive "feeding" and guidance through the *bardo* until the completion of the funeral period. Another important activity at this time is purifying the karma of the dead person. The person's name is written on a card, and her consciousness is summoned into it by a religious professional, who then conducts various purification rituals to free her from negative karma accumulated in her recent life or more-distant past lives. At the conclusion of the rite, the deceased's consciousness is dismissed and the name card is burned. The ashes may be made into a small clay figure called a *tsatsa*, which will be placed in some location of special holiness or purity (for example, on a mountain or at a shrine).

The practice of generosity is considered to be one of the most basic Buddhist virtues, accessible to anyone. A common merit-making activity following a death is to distribute food to everyone in the village. This may be a very elaborate feast if the family is sufficiently wealthy. But whatever the extent of the meal, the most important element is its impartiality. Every single person in the

village, irrespective of age, gender, or social standing, must be invited, and each must receive the same quantity of food. Some survivors go so far as to weigh out the individual portions to eliminate any possibility of inequality. If the family is poor, they may simply brew up a batch of *chang* (beer), go to the edge of the village, and give some to anyone who passes until it's all gone.

Although the formal teaching is that the deceased may remain in the *bardo* for up to forty-nine days, in practice the rituals are rarely continued for so long. They are expensive both monetarily and in lost work time, and only very wealthy families can afford seven weeks of expenditure. High religious teachers may also receive the full length of ceremonies from their followers. But often a layperson's mortuary rites will conclude just a few days after disposal, with a final round of merit making and purification rituals.

The influence of Tibetan Buddhist belief in the cycle of life, death, and rebirth is pervasive. Tibetans are taught early on to meditate on the brevity of life and the certainty of death and are warned to live in such a way as to be ready to die at any time. The most feared death is the unexpected death—by accident or violence—since a person who is not prepared to enter the *bardo* is unlikely to succeed in finding a fortunate rebirth. It is somewhat fashionable at the moment, particularly in the West,

to psychologize afterlife beliefs as simply coping mechanisms meant to help people deal with the death of those they love, with no basis in reality (however that may be construed). But the effect of Tibetan Buddhist belief in the cycle of rebirth also extends beyond any psychological effect of helping the survivors cope with the fact of loss to having an impact on some very practical aspects of Tibetan life. Merit-making activities such as food distributions are expensive, at a time when the family is barred from doing income-earning work by mourning rules and the requirements of the mortuary rituals.

The number of monks (or other religious professionals) who perform the funeral rites also reflects the amount of benefit gained for the deceased: having more religious professionals generates more merit. But they come at a high cost: they must be housed and fed for the duration of the ceremonies and provided with all the necessary materials for preparing ritual items—and everything must be of the best quality the family can afford. Commissioning the painting of *thangkas* and the copying of religious texts is also expensive. In fact, such activities, which must be carried out by religious professionals, can form a significant element of monastic income, as do the fees paid for the performance of religious rituals both within the flow of the mortuary rites and as supplementary merit making

to improve the deceased's chances of a fortunate rebirth.

It is generally accepted that the more money that is spent, the more meritorious the death rituals are, and therefore the more beneficial for the future state of the deceased. In order to promote this future well-being—and also to avoid the possibility of the deceased's returning as an unhappy ghost to protest any perceived inadequacy in the activities of the survivors—it is quite usual for families to go deeply into debt in order to defray the costs of a suitably meritorious funeral.

Moreover, friends and fellow villagers are expected to contribute to the well-being of the deceased's family at this time by providing gifts of money and food, thereby setting up a system of reciprocal indebtedness within the village. In some cases this may be formalized in the shape of a ledger of entries indicating exactly what has been donated by whom in the case of each death, so that when a villager dies, the person's family will be sure to receive the equivalent to whatever they had donated to other local families for earlier deaths. The economics of death are complex and deeply woven into Tibetan society, reinforcing the social cohesion engendered by the shared belief in rebirth that is foundational to the practice of Tibetan Buddhism. □

Exploring Traditional African Belief Systems and Their Relation to the Understanding of Death and Afterlife

by Nomfundo Walaza

I would like to suggest that perhaps what we can do to make our brief existence worthy is to ensure that we keenly observe our interactions with others and constantly take the time to ask ourselves if we have lived in a manner that displays compassion and honors interdependence and interconnectedness with fellow human beings.

Since the law of transience makes it clear that death cannot be avoided, the issue is what we can do to make our brief existence as pleasant as possible for others as well as ourselves.

—Nichiko Niwano, *Cultivating the Buddhist Heart*

Within the multiple religious and cultural African societies, human existence is construed as a dynamic process that entails life's not ending with death but continuing in another realm. In other words, death does not end the life or personality of an individual but only denotes a shift or change in its condition. Ancestral spirits, as an expression of people who have died and who continue to "live" in the community and communicate with their families, are therefore seen as vital forces that maintain the connection between the living and the dead (*Encyclopedia of Death and Dying*, <http://www.deathreference.com/A-Bi/African-Religions.html>). For most African people, ancestors are regarded as critical connectors and mediators between life as we (the living) know it and the afterlife. Individuals who describe themselves as atheists, and who do not believe in the concept

of "God," are often comfortable in their beliefs in ancestors as a source of all that God and the divine power of religion can provide. Indeed, for some, "God" and "ancestors" are interchangeable.

Because cultural and religious notions can never be seen as static, many concepts that are ascribed to cultural and religious imperatives (including the concept of ancestral spirits) observed by many ethnic groups in Africa have been altered or adapted as a consequence of globalization and migration of people across continental boundaries. I therefore want to declare up front that the rituals referred to in this essay have been transformed and adapted over centuries to match current influences. It is also true that in South African traditional societies (as in many other societies that order their lives according to traditional rhythms), many of these rituals, while stemming from the same belief systems, are practiced differently by different clans and ethnic groups.

I was asked to reflect in this essay on how traditional African beliefs in an afterlife continue to influence people's lives in South Africa. In attempting to answer this question, I will first examine how traditional rites of passage practiced at birth, such as *imbeleko*, speak to and underscore the critical connection between the living and the dead. I will then use examples of narratives drawn from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) process of South Africa to show how burial rites of passage are essential for healing and for laying a proper foundation for reconciliation, as well as ensuring that the deceased are able to make a transition to the realm of afterlife unhindered. It is my belief that acknowledging and allowing for the expression of these rites of passage not

Nomfundo Walaza is the Chief Executive Officer of the Desmond Tutu Peace Centre in Cape Town, South Africa. She is also a clinical psychologist and has worked in the human rights field for the past two decades. For eleven years she was Executive Director of the Trauma Centre for Survivors of Violence and Torture in South Africa. Since 2012 she has been a member of the independent International Niwano Peace Prize Committee, which selects the prize recipient each year.

only secures the place of the deceased in the afterlife but also could provide a fertile ground for victims and perpetrators to begin a dialogue that may lead to true reconciliation and forgiveness. Lastly, I will explore how the concept of *inimba* (as it relates to compassion or “to feel for”) complements *ubuntu* and how living a life that embraces both is essential in ensuring our worthiness for ancestral guidance and protection.

Imbeleko

Imbeleko refers to three distinct but inseparable aspects of being: the act of giving birth, the act of the mother carrying a baby on her back, and the rites of passage associated with the ritual itself.

In this section I aim to explore the concept of *imbeleko* and its significance to life and living. In traditional African societies, *imbeleko* is a rite-of-passage ceremony performed by family members of a clan for a newborn baby. Symbolically it is construed as an act of detaching the infant from the umbilical cord and introducing it to its ancestors. The sole intention of the ceremony is to introduce the infant to the elders or, more important, to ancestors of that family. It is mandatory that all children of the family go through this ceremony. *Imbeleko* is also seen as a precursor to all the other rites of passage that an individual will go through later in life. For example, a young woman may not be eligible to get married if the ritual was never performed. Similarly, a young man may

not be able to go through a circumcision ceremony if this rite of passage was not performed. During *imbeleko* a goat is slaughtered as a sign of sacrifice, and the elders of the family normally speak and ask the ancestors to accept, guide, and protect the child (<http://www.kotifamily.com/amasiko.html>). The poignant question often asked to ascertain whether all is in order before another ceremony is performed for an individual is “Do the ancestors know this child, or has the family done right by the child?”

The *imbeleko* ceremony is normally preceded by the burial-of-*inkaba* ritual, which usually takes place a few weeks after the birth of an infant. During this ritual the umbilical cord, placenta, and some of the hair that the child was born with are buried in order to seal the

attachment of the baby to its ancestral home. *Inkaba* denotes one’s ancestral home and symbolizes the relationship between the individual and his or her clan, the land, and the spiritual world. It is believed that the burial place of *inkaba* is where one must go to dream and communicate with ancestors (<http://www.spiritualbirth.net/sacred-xhosa-birth-rituals-south-africa>). Hence, the highest honor usually bestowed on an African who has accomplished much and who has acted in a manner that is befitting a born leader is to call the person “a daughter of the soil” or “a son of the soil.” It is therefore perhaps no surprise that former president Nelson Mandela’s last wish was to be buried in the soil near where his *inkaba* is buried. During his burial ceremony the world witnessed a seminal moment when a

son of the soil literally returned to the soil in order to join a lineage of ancestors that came before him.

I recall when I was a newly qualified clinical psychologist and a young boy was referred to me because he was behaving aggressively following the brutal killing of his parents. I was requested by a Department of Education official in the Western Cape Province to provide trauma counseling for the boy and his grandmother, who had, subsequent to the death of the parents, assumed the responsibility for his parenting. The grandmother refused to engage with me because in her view the problems of the child could be addressed by simply performing *imbeleko*, which she believed would introduce the boy to his ancestors and secure their guidance and protection for him. She also believed that the mere performance of the ritual would not only correct the behavior of the child but address the trauma endured by the family as well.

Prior to this, through my career as a psychologist I had come across many African parents who firmly believed that problems of a psychological nature such as bed-wetting and sleepwalking could be addressed by simply ensuring that proper rites of passage were performed. This made me realize as a practitioner that Western notions of healing could not alone provide solutions to such problems.

At this point I would like to reiterate that the importance of *inkaba* reminds us that in African cultures, rituals around birth speak profoundly to the significance of body parts (such as the umbilical cord, which is cut off after birth, and the hair the child is born with) and the location of these within the life cycle of an individual. It is important to note that these body parts are not thrown away but, rather, are buried as a symbolic gesture of connecting the infant to its forebears, or ancestors. These are rites of passage that connect a newborn to its protectors and, more

important, help consolidate the child's identity. It is believed that when these critical connectors are not secured or honored, an individual may be prone to wander aimlessly without direction. Hence the importance placed on occasionally looking back to track, evaluate, understand, and where possible, put right what was not done when problems arise in later life.

Burial Rites

The significance of burial rites to the living was highlighted during the TRC hearings in South Africa. Faced with the enormity of confronting crimes confessed by their respective perpetrators and with questions about the fate of their loved ones, victims again and again asked for the bones of their loved ones so that they could perform the last rites of passage for the deceased. What was significant was that they were not asking for money or symbolic reparations but simply requested the remains of the deceased in order to secure rites of passage that would help with their healing process and enable a transition that

would ensure that the dead would not continue to wander as a ghost.

After failing to secure the remains of their beloved son Siphiwo Mthimkhulu (who was tortured and poisoned while incarcerated, then later released, only to be abducted and killed by the security police), the Mthimkhulu family eventually decided to bury a clump of hair that was his only remaining body part, to secure his rite of passage. They had kept the hair for evidence following his poisoning with thallium during his incarceration.

The importance of this rite of passage for restoring equilibrium between the living and the dead was further affirmed for me at a conference I attended while the TRC of South Africa was in progress. On that occasion, a TRC commissioner presented a paper in which he revealed that a group of victims might have been thrown into a river infested with crocodiles. I was seated next to a mother who, on hearing those words, became ashen and looked as if the blood had literally drained out of her system. At that moment it became clear to me that any hope she had harbored of ever receiving remains of her loved one to bury was taken away from her. As the commissioner proceeded, I realized that he had no idea of the devastation he had visited on her. He was unaware of the pain and suffering he had inflicted and the wound he had unconsciously opened.

The Dynamic Connection between the Concepts of *Inimba* and *Ubuntu*

To offer an explanation of the concept of *ubuntu* and its significance to life, the novelist Zakes Mda writes: "We are not people, my grandmother used to instill in us, until somebody makes us into people by being generous toward us, by showering us with acts of kindness.

The more acts of generosity and compassion we receive from others, the more human we become. In return, we become generous and kind to others, making them human as well. When we do that our humanity is enhanced. When you make others human you enrich your own humanity. Thus goes the cycle of humanity and humanness” (*Sometimes There Is a Void: Memoirs of an Outsider* [Penguin Books, 2011]). It is for that reason that our forebears composed the saying “Umntu ngumntu ngabantu” (A person is a person through other people).

Ubuntu speaks of the interconnectedness and interdependence that are essential for human beings to thrive. These elevate the notion that we need each other to survive no matter the consequences. This profound saying helps us relate the subject of interconnectedness to our daily reality.

In trying to understand the source of our compassion, I went back to explore a common utterance among Xhosa women that goes as follows: “Inimba mayibenyé, bafazi” (Birth pangs should resonate among women). *Inimba*, as I explained in Malika Ndlovu’s book *The*

Invisible Earthquake: A Woman’s Journal through Still Birth, represents the seat of our soul that connects us to our ancestors and at the same time provides a link to future generations. In essence this means you should feel for my child as you feel for yours. This denotes empathic resonance and a call for compassion. It is a plea to “feel for” one another’s pain and suffering and to respond appropriately—to allow oneself to be touched by another and to suspend anger and resentment in the service of avoiding further pain and suffering.

Karen Armstrong, in a TED talk titled “My Wish: The Charter for Compassion,” reminds us that “it is compassion, says the Buddha, which brings you to the nirvana. Why? Because in compassion, when we feel with the other, we dethrone ourselves from the center of our world and we put another person there. And once we get rid of the ego, then we are ready to see the Divine.” She further cautions that “you could not and must not confine compassion to your group, your own nation, your own fellow countrymen—honor the stranger. We formed you, says the

Quran, into tribes and nations so that we may know one another” (http://www.ted.com/speakers/karen_armstrong).

I have often wondered if we would not adequately address the many problems that cause suffering and grief in the world if we were to ensure that the principles embodied in the concepts *inimba* and *ubuntu* were part of the curriculum taught in early childhood education. This would ensure that the foundation for norms and values would form the basis for all subsequent lessons.

What sums up the dynamic connection between *inimba* and *ubuntu* are two sentences contained in the last paragraph of the Charter for Compassion, which read as follows: “Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is a path to enlightenment and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community” (<http://www.charterforcompassion.org>).

In conclusion, I would like to refer to the epigraph for this essay: “Since the law of transience makes it clear that death cannot be avoided, the issue is what we can do to make our brief existence as pleasant as possible for others as well as ourselves.” I would like to suggest that perhaps what we can do to make our brief existence worthy is to ensure that we keenly observe our interactions with others and constantly take the time to ask ourselves if we have lived in a manner that displays compassion and honors interdependence and interconnectedness with fellow human beings.

Following the recent passing of Nelson Mandela, we were comforted in our grief by what an elder from his clan said: “Inkosi ayingcwatywa, iyatyalwa.” This means that a king is not *buried* but *planted*. This reminds us of Mandela’s continued presence among us and supports the belief that his legacy, like a seed, will grow and provide sustenance for us and for future generations. □

Life in the Spirit: A Christian Outlook on Life beyond Death

by Juan Masiá

We should not think about eternal life as a continuation of life in this world. It is a new life beyond the limitations of space and time. It is a life within the hands of God. It is definitive life and a new creation. It is not an end but a new beginning, and a new way of relating to God and to the world.

There is a wide variety of viewpoints about so-called life after death according to the Bible in the tradition of Catholic theology. I cannot summarize in a short article the origins and evolution of the Christian faith, which is expressed in the “belief in the resurrection of the body and in life everlasting” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, nn. 988, 1020). Neither can I present in a condensed form the long history of the influence on Christian thought of several cultural traditions of mythical narratives about paradise, heaven and hell, angels and demons, and so on, or philosophical opinions about the immortality of the soul. What I intend to do in this short essay is to focus on just one important point of the Christian outlook on life beyond death—not merely life after death—which is expressed in the New Testament with the formulas “life in the Spirit” and “eternal or true life” (Rom. 8:9–27; Gal. 5:18–25; John 17:3; 1 John 1:2).

Let me start with a reminiscence from my childhood.

When I was a twelve-year-old middle school boy, I asked the teacher in religion class: “What will happen when I die? Shall I go to heaven or shall I just disappear into nothingness?” My teacher,

who was a good catechist and educator, answered: “Well, Juan, your question is a good one, but you should not put it as a question *about where you will go*. The place you shall go is heaven. But you do not need to go anywhere to be in heaven; you *are already* there. And when you die, you will realize that you were *already* in heaven.”

Then my teacher went on explaining it to me with the following image. “Let us pretend that you have spent the night in a hut for mountaineers in the Alps at one thousand meters of altitude. You get up early in the morning and go outside, eager to see the wonderful landscape. But there is a deep fog. You cannot see anything at all. You go back to bed and get up two hours later. You again go outside. Oh, what a surprising, wonderful sight! The fog has dissipated. The sight is great. You enjoy it. Tell me: has this wonderful landscape been brought from somewhere outside all of a sudden? Or have you been suddenly taken to a different place from the one where you were two hours ago? No, the landscape was there before, and you are in the same place you were before, in front of the hut. The difference is that the fog has dissipated. Well, when you die you will realize that life beyond death is a reality

you are already living in. The eternal and true life should be called not ‘life after death’ but ‘life beyond death.’”

What my teacher taught me through this image was the teaching of the Gospel about life beyond death. Years later, as I grew into an adult understanding of my faith and a deeper study of the teaching of Jesus, I learned to grasp the main aspects of this Christian outlook on death and life. They can be summarized in the following points:

- To believe is to awake.
- Death is birth.
- Resurrection is life in the Spirit.
- Eternity is to be lived and experienced in the present.

That is a way of thinking about death and life, inspired by the teaching of Jesus, which we can find in the Gospel according to John and in the letters of Paul (John 5:24; Rom. 8:11). The key and foundation for this view is the resurrection of Christ, understood as an entrance into the definitive, eternal, and true life of God.

Awakening

To believe is to awake, namely, to become aware of the dimension of the depth of life. To believe is to die to the surface of life in order to live in its depth. An old Christian hymn says, “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” (Eph. 5:14. Quotations are taken from the New Jerusalem Bible, 1985). To believe is to go out of our superficial

Juan Masiá, SJ, was previously a Professor of Christian Ethics and the History of Philosophical Anthropology in the Faculty of Theology at Sophia University, Tokyo, where he is now a Professor Emeritus. He also serves as a special fellow of the Peace Research Institute affiliated with the World Conference of Religions for Peace Japan.

ego, to die to our self-centered ego, and to awaken to our deep self. That is what Paul calls living in the Spirit, living in Christ, living as a person who has been resurrected already before dying: “Since we are living by the Spirit, let our behaviour be guided by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25). “Since you have been raised up to be resurrected with Christ, you must look for the things that are above” (Col. 3:1). For Paul, to believe, to be united with Christ, and to overcome death were one and the same reality: “It is no longer I, but Christ living in me” (Gal. 2:20). “Life to me, of course, is Christ” (Phil. 1:21).

Transformation

To die is to be born into true life. Dying to the life in this world means being born unto eternal life. When we die, we will die unto eternal life, toward true life. When we die, the whole person, and not just the body, dies, and the whole person is transformed and created anew. There are many different ways in the Holy Scriptures to express the meaning of death and the meaning of a life beyond death. For instance, Paul understands the dying of Christians to be a dying with Christ (Rom. 6:8), a falling “asleep in Christ” (1 Cor. 15:18). “Someone may ask: how are dead people raised, and what sort of body do they have when they come? How foolish. What you sow must die before it is given new life. . . . It is the same with the resurrection of the dead: what is sown is perishable, but what is raised is imperishable” (1 Cor. 15:35–36, 42).

Resurrection

In his discussion with the Pharisees, Jesus corrects their doctrine that the resurrection meant a return to the conditions of earthly life: “When they rise from the dead, men and women do not marry; no, they are like the angels in heaven” (Mark 12:25). Faith in the resurrection of Jesus is the heart of the message of the Gospel. This is the foundation of Christian hope: life is stronger than death.

Answering the Sadducees, who denied resurrection, Jesus said, “He is God, not of the dead, but of the living” (Matt. 22:32). To those who did not believe that God calls each person to eternal life, Jesus said, “You are wrong, because you understand neither the scriptures nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:29).

Jesus, when giving us hope of eternal life, instead of saying, “I will resurrect you,” said, “I am the resurrection” (John 11:25). The Gospel does not intend to give information about the “how” of an afterlife but to proclaim the good news that God calls us to himself in and through death.

“On the third day he rose again” is a symbolic expression. “Third” is not a date in the calendar. Resurrection is not a miracle to prove the faith but an object of faith. The Creator, who calls things from nothingness into being, also calls persons from death into life. This cannot be proved historically, empirically, or rationally but has to be grasped with the eye of faith through contemplative illumination.

Resurrection is usually translated into Japanese as *fukkatsu* (with the characters for *fuku*, “again,” and *katsu*, “living”). I have proposed that we translate it as *shin-shin-katsu* or “new and true life” (with two different characters for *shin-shin*, meaning “new” and “true,” and the character for *katsu*, “living”). Life after death, as life beyond death, is like the transformation of a new person into a true life. Paul expressed it like this: “What is sown is perishable, but what is raised is imperishable, . . . what is sown is weak, but what is raised is powerful; what is sown is a natural body, and what is raised is a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:42–44).

Jesus overcame death by his own death (1 Cor. 15:51–57), which was an entrance into the life of God. He deprived death of its power (2 Tim. 1:10–11). The Christian experiences the victory of Jesus over death by sharing in his death (Rom. 6:2–11). To die with Christ is to live with him (Rom. 6:8). Christian believers overcome death by being baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:4) and by partaking of the Eucharist (John 6:50–51).

In the Gospels the stories about the empty tomb or about the resurrected Christ appearing to the disciples should be read as symbolic expressions of the life of Jesus in God after his death. Those stories express the Christian experience of faith of his followers, who believe that Jesus is not a figure of the past but is present to us here and now; we live in him and he lives in us.

We should not think about eternal life as a continuation of life in this world.

It is a new life beyond the limitations of space and time. It is a life within the hands of God. It is definitive life and a new creation. It is not an end but a new beginning, and a new way of relating to God and to the world. After death we will not be “here” or “there” but in and with God, paradoxically, “everywhere and nowhere.” Not “up there,” not merely “on the other side of the river.” What awaits us is not disappearance into nothingness but immersion into the life of God.

Death and resurrection are the two sides of the same coin. Catechism of the Catholic Church expresses this meaningful and positive approach to death in the language of the theological tradition with the following words: “Christ will raise us up ‘on the last day’; but it is also true that, in a certain way, we have already risen with Christ. For, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, Christian life is already now on earth a participation in the death and Resurrection of Christ: And you were buried with Him in Baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1002–3).

Eternal Life in the Present

Eternal life is not to be thought of as a prolongation of this life in the future. Eternal life is to be lived and experienced in the present. Eternal life is life in the Spirit. “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead has made his home in you, then he who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies through his Spirit living in you” (Rom. 8:11).

Let me gather the main words of the Gospel of John about eternal life in the present: “Whoever listens to my words, and believes in the one who sent me, has eternal life” (John 5:24). “I am the resurrection. Anyone who believes in me, even though that person dies, will

live and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25). “No one who drinks the water that I shall give him will ever be thirsty again: the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water, welling up for eternal life” (John 4:14). Anyone who becomes united with Christ has eternal life” (cf. John 6:54). He who becomes united with Christ lives in Christ and Christ lives in him. “As the living Father sent me and I draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will also draw life from me. . . . Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever” (John 6:57–58).

“On the last day, the great day of the festival, Jesus stood and cried out: ‘Let anyone who is thirsty, come to me! Let anyone who believes in me come and drink!’” As Scripture says: “From his heart shall flow streams of living water” (John 7:37–38). “In a short time the world will no longer see me; but you will see that I live and you will also live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you” (John 14:19–20).

To Die Is to Be Born

In the liturgical celebrations of the Catholic Church, when praying at memorial services for those who have died, the day of their death is called their birthday. One prayer says, “May we who recall their birth [*natalitia colimus*] imitate their courage.” Another prayer for the dead says, “Lord, give them the new life given to them in baptism to the fullness of eternal joy.” “Lord, those who die still live in your presence and they rejoice in complete happiness.” In the hymn “Preface for the Dead,” we read: “Lord, for your faithful people, life is changed, not ended.” That is the main point of the evangelical teaching about death. Dying is a transformation of the whole person. The Latin text says, “Vita mutatur, non tollitur,” that is to say, “Life is transformed, not taken away.” It can be said, of course,

speaking in conventional and colloquial terms, that death is the beginning of life hereafter. But, instead of “life after death,” it would be better to name it “life beyond death.”

Let me finish with a symbolic narrative that can enlighten us about life beyond death—the parable about the cells of the womb. The cells were—anthropomorphically personified—watching the growth of the fetus inside the womb of the mother. Nine months passed. Suddenly, a kind of earthquake, a storm, running waters—that little creature, the fetus, starts going out. Where? It goes through a tunnel. The little cells inside the womb had, for the past nine months, come to like that little creature very much; they did not want its “death” or disappearance. They tried to stop its going out. But they did not succeed. She went out, and the “door of the tunnel” was closed. The little cells cried. They thought the little creature had died. But outside there was joy. A girl had been born.

If we were able to look at the giving of birth from inside the womb, it would look like a death. But from outside, it is seen as a birth. Could we say that to die is to be born into the life beyond death? But looking at it from this side, from the side of our earthly life, it just looks like death.

That is what Jesus tried to teach Nicodemus: that to die is to be born anew, but the wise Jewish doctor of law did not get the point because he took the words of Jesus literally. “Jesus told Nicodemus: ‘Unless a person is born from above he cannot see the Kingdom of Life.’ Nicodemus said: ‘How can a grown person be born? Can we go back into the womb of our mother and be born again?’ Jesus replied: ‘Unless you are born through the Spirit of Life, you cannot enter the kingdom of Life. . . . This man who is talking to you must be lifted up so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him’” (cf. John 3:1–21). □

Japan's March 11, 2011, Disaster and the Strength of Buddhism: Living with an Awareness of Death and the Dead

by Susumu Shimazono

The boundaries between religions really need to be transcended in order to widen the scope for cooperation. Doing so would make it more apparent to people that religions occupy an important position in Japanese society and engage in correspondingly important relief and social action programs. It would also demonstrate that the religious spirit of Buddhism and other religions plays a serious role in Japanese society.

The massive earthquake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011, and the following nuclear accident in Fukushima, have served as a reminder of the role that religion, and Buddhism in particular, plays in Japanese society. This applies equally to Buddhism as traditional culture and to Buddhist organizations as social groups and institutions.

Temples as Places of Refuge

Traditional Buddhist temples were the first places to play a major role as refuges for people fleeing the earthquake, the tsunami, and then the radiation. For example, Dōgen-in, a temple of the Sōtō sect of Zen Buddhism, located on a small hill in Ishinomaki in Miyagi Prefecture, long sheltered hundreds of people owing to its proximity to the devastation caused by the tsunami. As it had already regularly hosted parishioners' activities, such as homemakers' and children's groups, it was well equipped to fulfill such a role. While the rhythm of communal life lived in accordance with the daily routine of the

temple inevitably entered into refugees' own lives, many, in fact, reported feeling more settled at the temple than did those at other shelters (according to the chief priest, Shūtsū Onosaki).

In Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture, where the disaster left some two thousand people dead or missing, the principal and staff of Shishiori Elementary School led the eighty pupils from the school when the tsunami struck, and

Susumu Shimazono is a Professor in the Faculty of Theology and director of the Institute of Grief Care at Sophia University, Tokyo, and is a Professor Emeritus in the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology at the University of Tokyo. His multiple research fields include religions in modern Japan, comparative study of contemporary religious movements, new religions, and death and life studies. He is the author of numerous books on religion, spirituality, and bioethics.

they fled to the nearby Sōtō temple of Kōfukuji. The children remained there, joined by their families, following the loss of their homes. As of the end of April 2011, fifty people in nine households were living communally there. The Jōdo

temple of Jōnenji, in the same region, similarly opened its main hall to well over a hundred residents who streamed to the temple. It was still sheltering eighty people at the end of that April (*Bukkyō Times*, April 28, 2011). The Jōdo Shin temple of Shōtokuji in Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, also sheltered about a hundred refugees. It organized a range of activities to help them (including tutoring children until they could go back to school). According to Nozomi Chiba, who was born at Shōtokuji, it was not until the end of July 2011 that the last of the refugees left the temple to move into temporary housing.

Opportunities for Buddhist temples to shelter people in need have existed since ancient times. As temples are inherently places where all kinds of people spend time together, it has been natural for temples to function as shelters in the event of disasters and other emergencies. However, we seem to have long failed to notice that Buddhist temples, as religious institutions, can perform such a function.

Buddhism as Agent of Remembrance and Mourning

The period since the March 2011 earthquake has also been distinguished by a renewed recognition that individual Buddhists, Buddhist groups, and Buddhist organizations play an indispensable role as agents for remembering and mourning the dead. Ordinarily, the Japanese media offer little coverage of the religious groups' activities. When they do, they usually report only their scandals or their value as tourist attractions. But reporting after the earthquake frequently featured such scenes as priests reciting sutras for the dead and presiding over joint memorial services at temples. Viewers often put their own palms together in prayer when they saw on TV the traditional Buddhist services of remembrance on

the eleventh of each month and the forty-ninth and hundredth days after the disaster. Remembering and mourning the loss of many lives are acts of public significance. That is why the media have reported them, and in so doing, they could hardly have left out of the picture the Buddhist temples and priests that led these acts.

History suggests that Japanese Buddhism's spread among the common people was encouraged by its intense awareness of death. It consequently grew and developed in association with a culture of remembrance for the dead, and Buddhist temples became an integral part of people's lives through their role in funerals. In the year or so before the March 2011 earthquake, however, there had been much discussion of the merits of simplifying and even doing entirely away with funeral ceremonies. Certainly, in the big cities, there had emerged a marked tendency for Buddhist services to be cold and formulaic, lending weight to the argument that it is now difficult to "properly grieve" and so "nurture the strength to live" through ritual.

After the March 2011 earthquake, on the other hand, the public mood seemed to swing toward seeing Buddhist funerals and ceremonies of remembrance and mourning as indispensable. This is possibly a reflection of the deep community roots that Buddhist temples in the Tohoku region have. Temples there still have strong ties with their local communities, and in many areas they now even function as places that transform grief into strength. Throughout the rest of the country too, however, the belief that remembrance and mourning are inseparable from the

traditions of Buddhism has indubitably gained ground.

Diverse Relief Provided by Diverse People of Faith

What, then, of the support activities undertaken by faith groups in the affected regions? Leading the way have been those groups that have long been involved in providing disaster relief. These include the Sōtō-based Shanti Volunteer Association, the Tenrikyo Disaster Relief Hinokishin Corps, and relief teams associated with Risshō Kōseikai and Shinnyō-en. In many cases, though, these activities have depended more on the efforts of small numbers of experienced individuals than on the wider involvement of ordinary believers and citizens.

Alongside such relief, the community-based activities of priests (especially the younger ones) belonging to traditional Buddhist organizations have also drawn considerable attention as priests have continued to administer to the physical and spiritual needs of the victims of the disaster. The fact that traditional Buddhism has always been deeply respected in the Tohoku region has helped. The everyday mechanisms of relief for the vulnerable that had grown

up in each region evolved into new forms of activity, including means of delivering support to the areas most affected by the disaster. Diverse small Buddhist groups engaged in various forms of relief, the results of which attracted attention.

But while it is all well and good for individual religious groups to contribute through their own various relief activities, the boundaries between religions really need to be transcended in order to widen the scope for cooperation. Doing so would make it more apparent to people that religions occupy an important position in Japanese society and engage in correspondingly important relief and social action programs. It would also demonstrate that the religious spirit of Buddhism and other religions plays a serious role in Japanese society.

Interfaith Action

It is for this reason that a number of Buddhist, Shinto, Christian, and new religious groups have come together to launch a new federated organization, exemplified by the Counseling Room for the Heart in Sendai. Transcending religious and denominational differences, this organization has engaged in activities to provide consolation for the souls of the dead and spiritual support for the living that were welcomed by the survivors of the March 2011 disaster. One of the alliance's most prominent initiatives was Café de Monk, a program led by Buddhist priests and the leaders of other religious groups who visited victims to lend them a sympathetic ear. A program to train "interfaith chaplains," based at Tohoku University, has also been set up to provide interfaith spiritual care.

In a similar vein, volunteers from religious circles and religious academia came together on April 1, 2011, to form the Japan Religion Coordinating Project for Disaster Relief (<http://www.indranet.jp/syuenren/>). Its purpose is to

encourage federations of Japan's main religions, including Buddhism, Shrine Shinto, Sect Shinto, Christianity, and the new religions, to coordinate their efforts and to enhance and publicize their relief work. The World Conference of Religions for Peace Japan, a coalition of representatives of various religions, continues to pursue vigorous action in cooperation with both the Counseling Room for the Heart and the Japan Religion Coordinating Project for Disaster Relief. Buddhist religious organizations are playing a major role in such interfaith collaboration.

It is as yet impossible to say what fruit these initiatives will bear. Nevertheless, there is a widely shared impression that the events on and after March 11, 2011, demonstrated the fragility and transiency of today's material civilization. Many Japanese no longer feel that economic development can make them happier. Now is perhaps the time to take a fresh look, through the lens of religious tradition, at our lives' foundations. Both as a cultural tradition and through its religious organizations, Buddhism will have much to contribute to this endeavor.

The future may show that the religious traditions of Buddhism and other faiths can provide the foundations for tackling the various challenges to Japanese society. Government agencies, too, now believe that religious organizations can play a role in supporting local residents in the wake of disasters, providing evidence of a renewed recognition of the strength of religions, and Buddhism especially, in Japanese society.

The declining influence of religion was long lamented in Japanese society following World War II. Amid the suffering caused by the March 2011 earthquake, the spiritual stirrings among those struggling to come to terms with the events of that day, and the activities of the religious groups working to mitigate this suffering, however, there are signs that the trend may be changing. In both academia and the media, opportunities to convey such observations are growing. It is not known whether this marks a recovery of the concept of life after death, but what is clear is that there is a rising recognition of the importance of being keenly aware of death and the dead in one's life. □

The Call for a Deeper and More Inclusive Interreligious Engagement

Niwano Peace Prize Acceptance Address by Dena Merriam,
Founder and Convener of the Global Peace Initiative of Women

The Niwano Peace Foundation awarded the thirty-first Niwano Peace Prize on May 16 to Ms. Dena Merriam of the United States, for her leadership of the Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW). Ms. Merriam founded GPIW in 2002 to strengthen women religious leaders' roles in reconciliation and problem solving. GPIW has conducted a leadership program for youth in collaboration with the United Nations. It also has tried to organize dialogues in areas of conflict and has recently promoted environmental protection as well. The following is her acceptance speech at the award ceremony in Tokyo.

I want to thank the Niwano Peace Foundation for this tremendous honor and for recognizing the global peace work of women spiritual leaders, who are the core of our organization. Interfaith engagement is one of the most critical human activities at this period in history, and yet its importance is not adequately recognized by most of the global community. The Niwano Peace Foundation has long stood out as one of the few organizations to recognize the role interfaith engagement plays in creating a better world.

I want to share with you some of my experiences and observations during the last nearly seventeen years that I have been involved in interfaith work, and I want to express some thoughts on what I see to be the most pressing call for the interfaith community today.

I have been involved in interreligious activities for most of my adult life, but for many years it was more from the academic side. As a graduate student at Columbia University in New York City, I undertook an enthusiastic

study of the great masters and mystics of the major world religions and found an unexpected unity of experience and vision, although these have often been cloaked in different metaphors and narratives to suit various cultures and times. I came to my spiritual path when I was about twenty years old, and one of the things that drew me to the Hindu path was that my teacher Paramahansa Yogananda spoke of the underlying unity of the world's faith traditions. My studies confirmed what I learned from my teacher and what I intuitively felt to be true.

I didn't engage in interfaith work professionally until some twenty years later, when the secretary-general of the United Nations, His Excellency Kofi Annan, consented to the organization of the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders in the year 2000, to be held in the General Assembly Hall of the United Nations' New York headquarters. The idea was to explore how the religions could work in partnership with the United Nations

in resolving some of the key global conflicts, and it was the first time the major religions were being invited to convene in the General Assembly Hall. I was asked to serve as the vice chair and to aid in the organization of the event. My experiences during this process helped to set the course of my work.

Since the summit was to be held at the United Nations, we were to work at the highest level within the religious institutions. This was a real departure for me. Being a longtime meditation practitioner, I had far greater interest in the experiential and esoteric side of religion. However, I was soon to find that even at the institutional level there were people of wisdom and great commitment to the common good—and this attracted me.

A few incidents occurred during the process of organizing the summit that drew my attention. The secretary-general's office had put together an advisory council from the United Nations, and we kept them informed and updated on how things were progressing. One woman on the council was particularly concerned about having women religious leaders participate in the summit. I was unaware of any problems in this regard and so began to seek out women religious leaders.

I was seated at a dinner at Oxford, England, with a group of religious leaders when I happened to mention to the man seated next to me that we were having trouble finding women religious leaders for the summit at the UN. I was only trying to make dinner conversation,

Dena Merriam graduated from Barnard College, affiliated with Columbia University, and received an MA from Columbia University. As the founder and convener of GPIW, she has been engaged in reducing international tensions and fostering reconciliation by taking advantage of women's qualities. She has also served on the boards of the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions and the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy.

but he reacted strongly to my remark and asked in a rather stern voice, "Why do you need women religious leaders?" When he saw the surprise on my face, he added, "Take my advice and stay away from that issue or you might find that nobody will come to your summit." That was in 1999. The world has changed a lot since then—but in some quarters of the world, I would get the same response today.

We had difficulty finding women religious leaders, and so we compensated by finding women public figures—like Jane Goodall. I was not happy with this solution, but I was still in a learning phase. Much of our time during the organization of the summit was involved in dealing with political issues—like the fact that the Dalai Lama could not be invited to the United Nations and the response from some prominent religious figures who said they would not come if the Dalai Lama was not invited. So the gender issue got lost amid the political negotiations.

On the opening day of the summit, as we were waiting for the religious leaders to enter the General Assembly Hall to begin the prayers, we encountered another gender crisis. A prominent monk was to open the prayers, but he wasn't permitted by his particular order to come in close contact with any woman, and there was a Buddhist nun, the only woman in a delegation that included about a dozen Thai Buddhist monks, who was seated near the entrance where he was to enter. I was told she had to be moved, and when I asked why,

the response came, "Because she is a woman." A number of people on our staff had tried to get her to move, but she didn't understand English and refused to be separated from the monks of her delegation. The clock was ticking and we had to begin, and so I was asked to move her. It was a difficult moment for me. But when I went up to her and took her hand, she smiled and followed me. The crisis was solved, but it left a deep imprint in my mind. Later, when the Thai delegation came to greet me, I apologized to her, and we became fast friends. She was one of the founding cochairs of the Global Peace Initiative of Women.

The women religious leaders at the summit were not happy and asked for a follow-up summit specifically for women religious leaders. We went back to the secretary-general's office, and he agreed, suggesting that we could hold this second summit at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. So I began working with

the religious communities in Geneva, and the first response that I received was, "We don't want your American feminism here. We don't have women religious leaders." I was taken aback, because I never thought of this work as a feminist matter, and I began to wonder why this issue was so threatening to so many. In order to get around the subject of women religious leaders, the Geneva community suggested we change the title of our event from "The Global Peace Initiative of Women Religious and Spiritual Leaders" to "The Role of Women in the Faith Communities." I refused, and so began the difficult process of bringing this vision to fruition.

In 2002 we managed to bring 750 women leaders, mostly from the religious communities but also some from business and government, from over seventy-five countries to the Palais des Nations. Whereas there were many political issues and much competitiveness at the 2000 summit, there were no politics at the

Geneva summit. We had no thought of forming an organization out of this gathering, but we immediately received requests to come to conflict areas and help organize peace dialogues, and so the Global Peace Initiative of Women Religious and Spiritual Leaders was born. We later shortened the name to the Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW).

We spent our first five years organizing dialogues in conflict and postconflict areas—including Israel and Palestine, Iraq, Sudan, Afghanistan, Cambodia, and between India and Pakistan. The dialogues were initially with women, and then young leaders, and then eventually a mix of everyone. What was distinctive about these dialogues is that they were shaped and led by a diverse group of women religious leaders, always balanced between East and West. So we brought Buddhist nuns and women swamis to meet with the groups from Sudan, Iraq, and other conflict areas. This had a tremendously positive impact, as it opened the participants to the wider world and they saw the role women can play in other cultures.

There is a second theme, aside from the gender issue, that has motivated the work of GPIW, and that is the need not only for gender balance but for East-West balance. Interfaith work has mostly been shaped by the Abrahamic traditions

and has been for most of its short history an Abrahamic dialogue. There has been a need and rationale for this, as there has been and still is much tension in the Abrahamic world. However, half the world has been left out.

During the Millennium World Peace Summit, I saw the resistance of many Western institutions to deeper engagement with the Eastern traditions. And then after the 9/11 tragedy in 2001, when the pope organized a World Day of Prayer in Assisi, I saw again the disregard, perhaps unintentional, for the Dharmic traditions. I remember that each faith was asked to pray in a separate room. The Catholics had their room, as did the Jews and the Muslims, but most of the Eastern or Dharmic faiths were lumped together—the Shintoists, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and others all sent together to one room to pray. Not only was it considered unacceptable for the world's religions to pray together, but the Eastern or Dharmic traditions were not given the same courtesy of separate rooms. This was an indication to me of a great imbalance in the interfaith world, but this lack of awareness, which still prevails in many interfaith gatherings, was not even noticed. How can there be meaningful interfaith dialogue when we still abide by a hierarchy of religions, when some are considered more valid than others? This is against the whole

premise of interfaith engagement, and this has been and still is the very cause of so much religious tension. Until Hindus and Buddhists, among people of other Eastern faiths, are at the table equally, not only participating in equal numbers but equally shaping and forming the discourse, we will not achieve religious harmony.

It is no longer enough to have token representation. True balance is what we must strive for. This is an important point. Gender balance and East-West balance are critical not for the sake of being polite or politically correct, not for the sake of being inclusive or of being considerate to these groups. It is critical because the world is very much in need of what the Dharmic traditions and women have to offer. With regard to the Dharmic traditions, a whole body of wisdom has been ignored, wisdom that has great relevance to the multiple crises we face as a world community. This is changing, but it is changing most rapidly outside the traditional interfaith networks.

GPIW decided to make the achievement of East-West balance one of its major goals, and so in 2009 we organized a summit in Cambodia on the theme "Giving Greater Global Voice to Eastern Wisdom." Hindu and Buddhist leaders came from all over the world to talk about the common ground between

these two great Dharmic traditions. The rediscovery of the shared wisdom, vision, and practices of Buddhism and Hinduism gives the spiritual heritage of Asia a new strength globally.

Around this time GPIW also turned its attention to the United States. Thus far, most of our work had been global, in conflict and postconflict areas, but American society was and still is undergoing many tensions and transitions. We decided to explore the changing religious landscape in America and to focus on the growing meditation movement and so brought contemplative leaders from the Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Native American traditions to the Aspen Institute in Aspen, Colorado. The purpose was to explore how the spread of meditation practice is influencing American society and changing the religious dynamic of the country. Today, Buddhism is the fastest-growing religion in America. Many Buddhist principles, such as interdependence and mindfulness, have become mainstream concepts and are finding their way into the education and health care systems, among other mainstream institutions. At the same time, twenty million Americans are now practicing some form of yoga, and concepts such as karma and reincarnation are now widely embraced. Many, many Christian clergy are not only practitioners of Buddhist

meditation but also teachers. It is not uncommon to find a Catholic priest who is also a Zen *roshi*. In the state of Colorado we have the first Christian-Buddhist Church, where the community practices both religions. At one of the largest Episcopal churches in New York, there is a Living Christ Sangha, where mindfulness meditation is practiced after the Sunday Christian service. What does this say about the changing religious landscape in America, and ultimately what does it say about the future of interfaith, as more and more people cultivate dual affiliations? The same is happening in Europe, only not yet to the same extent, because Europe is a more secular society. To help give voice to this new dynamic movement, GPIW formed the Contemplative Alliance in the United States and in Europe, to explore how contemplative practice can help foster the individual and societal transformations needed to address the interconnected crises of climate change, environmental degradation, economic inequity, and so forth.

The spread of meditation practices has helped to bring the religions much closer together. There is a growing community of people who no longer see a hierarchy of religions, who view all religions as having their own distinctive perspective on truth, each being valid. It is no longer a matter of which one is

right but, rather, which one speaks best to the individual.

A few months ago GPIW helped to organize an interfaith retreat here in Japan on the theme “Awakening Buddha-Nature.” Increasingly, we have been choosing themes with language from the East and asking other religions to reflect on how this theme speaks to them. We invited a group from the United States called the Interfaith Amigos, composed of a Christian leader, a Muslim leader, and a Jewish religious leader. *Amigos* is a commonly used Spanish word for friends. The group formed after 9/11 when a Protestant minister from Seattle in Washington State reached out to a local imam and said they should start working together to ease the tensions caused by 9/11. They began speaking at churches and mosques and then decided to invite a rabbi to join them. The Interfaith Amigos have become quite popular in the United States and travel around the country speaking on interfaith. I wasn’t sure how they would respond to the theme of “Awakening Buddha-Nature,” but to my relief they loved it. They usually speak about religious friendship, and they said it was a novelty to delve so deeply into a spiritual topic. When they got up to speak together, this is how they began:

The minister spoke first. He said, “I have some good news.” We all waited

to hear what the good news was, and then he said, “Jesus Christ is not the only savior.” Then the imam spoke and he said, “I also have some good news. Muhammad is not the last prophet.” Then the rabbi chimed in, “And I have good news as well. The Jews are not the chosen people.” Everyone laughed. For those of you who may not understand this, these three beliefs—that Jesus is the only savior, Muhammad is the last prophet, and the Jews are the chosen people—are what keep these three Abrahamic religions at odds with each other and the rest of the world. The Interfaith Amigos now go around the country disclaiming these beliefs in a humorous and loving way, and this is helping to build religious unity. Their goal is not to discredit any one religion but to erase barriers. After this introduction, the minister, the imam, and the rabbi then went on to reflect on what buddha-nature meant to them in the language of their tradition.

The Contemplative Alliance organizes dialogues around the United States on critical issues, and wherever we go, no matter how small the city or town, there are Buddhist centers, Hindu groups, Sufis, and others. A new religious mix is emerging in America, and this bodes well for the future, because it is helping people to overcome barriers and find those practices that enable their own spiritual

growth. Spiritual growth is becoming more important than any specific doctrine, and this will help in the evolution of society. Our work as interfaith leaders is to see and understand what is emerging as the next stage of interfaith and to tap this new dynamic energy so that it can be used to address the critical challenges we face. The spiritual shift now taking place in America and other parts of the world has the potential to change the way people regard a host of issues—from economic disparity to our relationship with the natural world—because these changes depend on a transformation in the consciousness of people.

A few years ago we brought a group of Afghans to India for a dialogue. I happen to find Dharamsala, India, to be a very inspiring environment, and so we brought them there. As always we had a mix of spiritual teachers, men and women, from the Eastern and Western traditions to guide the dialogue. We covered a number of themes relating to the conflict and to methods of peace building, and then after a few days, one of the participants asked, “When are we going to learn to meditate?” I was surprised because we don’t proselytize and so never introduce spiritual practices. We may pray together and sit in silence, but we don’t teach specific techniques. I asked the group if this is what

they wanted, and they responded. “This is why we have come to India. We live in a state of fear, not knowing when or where the next explosion will be. We need to learn to deal with our fears.” I turned to the Afghan imams who were there, and they nodded their consent, and so one of the teachers in our group offered some basic stress-reduction meditation. This was the only time that we did this—because the need was so great. During that session, I realized that in many conflict areas people are seeking spiritual methods that ease their fears and anger, regardless of religious tradition. More important than doctrine today are practices that help people cope with life’s challenges.

There is much uncertainty and fear in the world—economic uncertainty, concerns about damage to the natural world, and fear due to social strife and polarization. How do we help people deal with their fears? One way is by coming together around shared practices that can connect people to their innate spiritual resources.

There is a growing community of people who either have been in the interfaith movement for a long time or have had much exposure to other traditions who truly see and function from the place of deep unity—knowing there is one truth that speaks through many tongues. Like biodiversity, religious

diversity is a gift to be treasured, but we are not to be deluded into thinking that a single path is the only true one. This evolution in understanding has profound implications for our ability to live together peacefully. So much of human history has been the imposition of one religion or culture on another. We must as a human community outgrow this instinct if we are to create a more peaceful world.

Now I want to return briefly to the issue of gender, because we are also being called to evolve beyond gender bias now. Initially the work of GPIW was to provide a platform for women religious leaders, but over time that changed. In 2008 we organized a big summit in India on the theme of the feminine aspect of the Divine in order to create balance in our understanding of that Ultimate Reality. One way of approaching this subject is to say the Divine or Ultimate Reality is beyond gender, but another way is to view it as containing both the masculine and feminine qualities. The Abrahamic traditions have lost sight of the feminine aspects of the Divine, although this understanding is there, hidden in those traditions. In the East it has not been lost, and there are practices for the realization of Tara, Durga, and other female manifestations of the Divine. In certain Eastern traditions it is this feminine aspect of the Divine that enables transformation—both individual and collective—and transformation is what we are all yearning for. After 2008 our work began to focus more on evoking images of the Divine Feminine than on giving visibility to women religious leaders. In part this was due to the fact that society was becoming more accepting of women religious leaders, and so this work was moving forward. Now the task was to bring gender balance to our understanding of the Primordial Creative Force, the ultimate source of all. As long as this force is conceived solely in masculine terms, as the Father, there is the ability to use this as a rationale

for gender bias. Our religious iconography has profound implications for how we function as a society.

As we have traveled the world talking about the transformative powers held within the feminine expression of the Divine, we have found many within the Abrahamic traditions who have resonated with this message and who are now delving more deeply into this aspect of their own tradition. So the issue of gender balance has both an external and an internal dimension—a societal and spiritual dimension. I have found in our work that men often understand the concept of the Divine Feminine energy and its transformative power as much as or sometimes more than women.

Today so many aspects of our planetary life are under threat—the oceans, forests, and rivers. We are losing plant and animal diversity. The climate has become unstable, and droughts and floods more common. Resources are rapidly being depleted. We are told water will become scarce in the future, and we are losing the natural seeds that are our heritage from our ancestors. What are we to learn from all of this but to find a way of living more in harmony with the earth and the forces of nature—to live with greater respect, appreciation, and love for the forces on which we depend for life. A transformation in understanding is very much needed.

Another crisis is forming at the same time. Economic inequity is reaching such an extreme degree that some change will have to come. More charity is not the answer but rather a fundamental shift in the way we live and work together—a shift toward a more sharing and compassionate society, where the goal is well-being rather than the amassment of money.

The answers are not clear. The problems are very complex and intertwined. But one thing we know—there are spiritual principles at stake, and solutions will be found in proportion to our ability to grow and develop spiritually. We will

need all of our human ingenuity and creative powers to envision and realize a new way of living on earth, and the talent and efforts of men and women are equally needed, as well as the knowledge and wisdom of East and West.

There is now a growing spectrum of interfaith work. There are still people in many parts of the world with little exposure to religions other than their own. For them it is enough just to learn and have some experience of “the other,” to gain respect and the ability to coexist without violence. These elementary steps can guide them to the next level, where religions begin to truly engage with one another and learn to see the beauty and truth in all traditions. When I first began my interfaith work in the 1990s, the key word was *tolerance*. From tolerance we moved to respect and then mutual respect and understanding. For those of us who wanted to go deeper, the next words that came into use were *oneness* and *unity*—one truth with many expressions. For those who have been on this interfaith journey for many years, we cannot operate but from a place of unity. Our focus must now be on how we can gather our collective spiritual wisdom and practices so that we can transform our societies and address the challenges facing the global community.

The interfaith work of so many committed men and women has led to a new closeness and fraternity among the religions—a real ability to sit together in our meditation and be in unity. But we must go further. Much is at stake for our planet and its communities of life. Can we enable this unity to foster now a real transformation in understanding so that we can reset our values, so that our spiritual growth and development will have a place at least equal to that of humanity’s material development? It is this spiritual growth that will provide the wisdom to guide us forward. The challenges we face are vast, but there are no problems that cannot be addressed through our united spiritual efforts. □

Side by Side: Notes on the Twin Buddhas of the Lotus Sutra in the Stone Carver's Art

by Hank Glassman

Here I explore some meanings behind . . . a small stone that depicts two buddhas sitting side by side in the lotus posture, sheltered beneath a heavy lintel. . . . These are old gravestones, their connections to families lost two or three centuries ago.

In the world of Japanese stonework of the late medieval and early modern periods, pairs or doubles are common. The iconography of twin figures standing shoulder to shoulder is found in examples of the stone carver's art throughout the archipelago. Here I explore some meanings behind a subtype of this dyadic—a small stone that depicts two buddhas sitting side by side in the lotus posture, sheltered beneath a heavy lintel. (I refer to this stonework iconography as *nibutsu dōza*, or “two buddhas on the same seat.” The iconography is also known more generally in various artistic media as *nibutsu byōza*, “two buddhas sitting side by side.”) These are old gravestones, their connections to families lost two or three centuries

ago. We no longer find this theme in contemporary Japanese cemetery monuments—what is the meaning of this lost iconography, what are its roots?

The Story of the Two Buddhas

Students of the Lotus Sutra will immediately recognize the resonance with chapter 11, “The Apparition of the Jeweled Stupa”: in one of the most unexpected and miraculous scenes in the whole of Buddhist scriptural literature, two buddhas occupy the same time and space, an important impossibility.

That is, according to orthodox or mainstream Buddhist cosmology, there can be only one buddha at a time. In the Lotus Sutra, this expectation is turned upside down. There is another buddha, and he has come for a visit. At the opening of the chapter, an enormous and lavishly adorned “jeweled stupa” appears before the multitude gathered at Vulture Peak. (The terms *jeweled stupa* [*hōtō*] and *Prabhūtaratna/Many Jewels Stupa* [*tahōtō*] require some explaining. While the terms are used by Japanese art and architectural historians to differentiate between two specific types of temple building, in fact they are often used

as synonyms in various textual sources. The sutra speaks of a “jeweled stupa” or “seven-jeweled stupa” [*shippōtō*], but the expansion to “many-jeweled stupa” is a natural one because of the name of the buddha. The sutra also refers to the stupa as “Prabhūtaratna *tathāgata's* stupa” [*tahō nyoraitō*]. Note that throughout this essay, in order to avoid undue confusion, I do not capitalize the word *buddha*.) Śākyamuni explains that Prabhūtaratna (“Many Jewels,” Tahō Nyorai), a buddha from the far distant past, enlightened since unimaginably long ago, made a vow that always and in any future world system, when the Lotus is being preached, he would appear there to declare the scripture's excellence and praise the qualities of the buddha who preaches it. Prabhūtaratna speaks, roaring the lion's roar from inside the stupa, saying that it is wonderful, “Excellent, Śākyamuni. Splendid!”

Before the ancient buddha within the stupa can reveal himself, Śākyamuni must call back all of his myriads of avatars to our *saha* world, bidding them to return from their merciful missions in distant worlds throughout the greater trichiliocosm. (That, is the sum total of the universe as described in Buddhist cosmology, consisting of one thousand systems comprising one thousand worlds each.) Presumably, this stipulation is meant to make perfectly clear that Prabhūtaratna is not a mere emanation or manifestation of Śākyamuni but is a *samyak sambuddha* (completely and perfectly awakened buddha) in his

Hank Glassman is Associate Professor of East Asian Studies at Haverford College in Pennsylvania. His scholarly work focuses on the religious cultures of medieval Japan. His book *The Face of Jizō: Image and Cult in Medieval Japan* was published by the University of Hawaii Press in 2012. Currently he is researching the history of grave monuments in Japan, especially the “five-elements pagoda” or gorintō.

own right. Whatever the reason for the request, Śākyamuni complies joyfully and summons together all of his magically created avatar buddhas (*funjin shobutsu*). Each of the buddhas thus summoned is urged to greet Prabhūtaratna.

After these few preconditions are met, the doors to the stupa open and the audience can see the glorious *tathāgata* Prabhūtaratna within. Prabhūtaratna repositions himself to offer half of his seat to Śākyamuni, who then mounts the lion throne. And so they sit, one next to the other, two *tathāgatas* together.

Thereupon Śākyamuni Buddha opened the entrance to the seven-jeweled stupa with his right finger. There was a tremendous sound as if the bar and lock to the gateway of a large city were being pushed aside. Then immediately the entire gathering saw the Tathāgata Prabhūtaratna in the jeweled stupa sitting on a lion-seat as if he were in meditation, his body whole and undecomposed.

They heard him say:

“Splendid, splendid! The Buddha Śākyamuni is teaching the *Lotus Sutra* and I have come in order to hear it.”

At that time the fourfold assembly saw the Buddha who had entered *parinirvāṇa* immeasurable thousands of myriads of *koṭis* of kalpas ago speaking those words. They praised this unprecedented experience and scattered heavenly jeweled flowers upon the Buddhas, Prabhūtaratna and Śākyamuni.

Then from within the stupa the Buddha Prabhūtaratna offered half of his seat to the Buddha Śākyamuni, saying:

“O Śākyamuni Buddha, please take a seat here!”

The Buddha Śākyamuni immediately entered the stupa and sat cross-legged on half of the seat. Thereupon the great assembly saw the two Tathāgatas sitting cross-legged on the lion-seat in the seven-jeweled stupa and they each thought thus:

“The Buddhas are seated far away. O Tathāgata, we entreat you to use your transcendent powers so that we may be in the air together with you.” (Tsugunari Kubo and Akira Yuyama, trans., *The Lotus Sutra* [Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1993], pp. 184–85; *Miaofa lianhua jing*, *Teihon* 0262)

He would seem to be in many respects identical to Śākyamuni. The radiance of the two flanking figures sitting in *padmāsana* (the lotus position) in all of their hieratic glory, shining through the open door of the jewel-adorned stupa, belies the intimacy and friendliness of the invitation “Come join me. Come on up and sit here next to me.”

Telling the Story with Voice and Image

But what does the jeweled stupa, or the Prabhūtaratna stupa, really look like? As described in the sutra, it is, of

course, unimaginably large, unimaginably splendid. At the temple Honkōji in Shizuoka Prefecture and at the temple Honpōji in Toyama Prefecture, we find two remarkable Kamakura-period (1185–1333) sets of hanging paintings on silk depicting scenes from the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra. Both sets clearly depict in this chapter a “jeweled stupa,” meaning a

dome or bell-shaped one-story building with a sweeping square roof, as in the example from Honpōji. It is clear that these paintings were created for the purpose of illustrated preaching, or *etoki*. (See Masahiko Hayashi, “Honpōji zō Hokekyō mandara zu—etoki to sono shūhen,” *Kokubunkagu: kaishaku to kanshō* 62/3 [1997]: 141–47. Also see Hirofumi Horie, “Hokekyō mandara zu ni okeru buttō no ichi kōsatsu,” *Indōgaku, bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 50/1 [2001]: 200–202 and “Hokekyō mandara zu ni arawareru buttō ni tsuite,” *Hokke bunka* 28 [2002]: 15–25. The twin buddhas appear across illustrations of various chapters in the painted scrolls, although the sutra does not continue to focus on the theme. See Bunsaku Kurata and Yoshirō Tamura, *Art of the Lotus Sutra: Japanese Masterpieces* [Tokyo: Kosei Publishing, 1987], plates 7, 8, 9, 16, and 17.)

That is, these paintings and later ones based on them were the vehicle by which Japanese Buddhists could begin to imagine the jeweled stupa and the vision of the twin buddhas. Drawing on iconographic traditions reaching back centuries to the Dunhuang caves in China, the artists created a setting for the priests giving sermons, and for male and female

etoki preachers, to bring the sutra to life through the coloration of voice, a pregnant pause, the cadence and pitch of the practiced orator. It is in these paintings, displayed and preached upon on important temple occasions, that generation after generation of the faithful of the Lotus Sutra beheld a vision of the eleventh chapter of the Lotus Sutra come to life, knew themselves to be indeed among the assembly there at Vulture Peak, and connected the message of the twin buddhas to their own experience and religious path. Yet there are indications that the inspiration for the gravestone carvings of two buddhas might be more complex than a simple evocation of this scene.

Keepers of the Gate: Reflections on the Double

At the entrance to Buddhist temples in Japan stand the fierce *varjapāni* figures, the great *niō* (benevolent kings). They are, famously, “a” and “un”—the alpha and omega—of the totalizing and magical syllable “om.” One has his mouth wide open in a strong, earth-shaking vocalization of the letter “a,” while the other has his mouth shut, producing a

thundering hum, the nasalized final “un.” These two are, of course, the gatekeepers, or *dvarapalas*, known throughout continental and insular Asia and common to both Buddhist and Hindu traditions. In many cases, the gatekeeper pairs represent an important locus for the interaction of global traditions with local cults and local ritual practices.

That is, as Rolf Stein suggested in his seminal article on the topic, this set of twin guardians, the *dvarapalas*, is a motif that artists, iconographers, and clerics have employed at every turn when seeking to integrate local and translocal traditions in India and across Asia.* Often these pairs are oppositional or contrary male figures: the handsome youth who stands for purity and ascetic or martial self-control and the ugly, pot-bellied dwarf who embodies wealth, pleasure, appetite—Skanda and Gaṇeśa, Weituo-tian (Jpn., Idaten) and Mile-fuo (Jpn., Miroku) in Budai (Jpn., Hotei) form. Sometimes they are nearly identical—the embracing twin elephants who are together Vināyaka, or Kangiten in Japan, or the cheery and auspicious pair Ebisu/Daikoku. (It is worth noting here that Ebisu is strongly associated with the stone gods. The stone gods are understood to be the “body” of Ebisu

or the rejected “leech-child” Hiruko. See Cornelius Ouwehand, *Namazue and Their Themes: An Interpretative Approach to Some Aspects of Japanese Folk Religion* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964], pp. 137–40. Another work that takes up the sacred stones of Japan is Peter Metevelis, *Japanese Mythology and the Primeval World: A Comparative Symbolic Approach* [New York: iUniverse, 2009].)

The stone deities of Japan, *sekibutsu*, are of many types, but functionally they tend to be quite closely related one to the other. The stones known as *sae no kami* or *dōsojin* are of the general type pointed to by Stein. They are gods of the boundaries, often doubled. These are the “stone gods” (*shaguiji*, *shakujin*, *ishigami*). They protect villages and city wards from disease and calamity and are also tied to the generative power of sexuality. (For a fuller description of the stone god or gods, see Hank Glassman, *The Face of Jizō* [Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2012], pp. 162ff. The classic work on the stone gods is by Kunio Yanagita, “Shakujin mondō,” in *Yanagita Kunio zenshū* [Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1998], vol. 12, pp. 487–627. Also, see Shinobu Orikuchi, “Ishi ni ide hairu mono,” in *Orikuchi Shinobu zenshū* [Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1965], vol. 19, pp. 212–55. More recently, see Shin’ichi Nakazawa, *Seirei no ō* [Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2003].) These deities are necessarily sexual in character, but not only sexual. They regularly take the form of a phallus (or of stone pillars inscribed with the name of the bodhisattva Jizō or the “Shinto” deity Sarutahiko), but the stones are most often carved or incised with a male and female couple. Some older images have explicit and detailed erotic content, but most are only tamely and humorously suggestive: some business with hands or sleeves or teapot spouts. The Shinto deities Izanami and Izanagi are a common identification. In a further sublimation, the couple become two Jizōs, or a monk and a nun.

Coming Full Circle

Of course, these pairs seen at the gateways and at the liminal spots are most certainly not the same as the twin buddhas of the Lotus Sutra, and yet the similarities in form in *dvarapala* and *nibutsu dōza* iconography draw our curiosity. In Stein’s study he points to the crazy Zen pair Hanshan (Jpn., Kanzan) and Shide (Jpn., Jittoku) as manifestations of the august bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra (Stein, “Guardian of the Gate,” p. 133). Here we might note that direct visual readings—that is, an understanding shaped by formal qualities and family resemblances—often supersede or circumvent more-abstract symbolic or doctrinal formulations. It is exactly these sorts of linkages that are of interest. I have said above that the *dōsojin* are not necessarily the twin buddhas, and yet Tomoichirō Kusakabe, in discussing the *nibutsu dōza* iconography, points to an image of this type from Kyoto, noting that it is not at all uncommon in the area. He points out, however, that this one has an inscription of the two characters that read *sae* or *dōso* on the base (Tomoichirō Kusakabe, *Sekibutsu nyūmon* [Tokyo: Rinjinsha, 1967], pp. 129–30, ill. 156). This is a clear indication of the relationship between the cult of the stone gods and the *nibutsu dōza* images. We can also find an example in Kyoto where a double grave was set up by a wife after her husband’s death for

their future burial together (Masatarō Kawakatsu, *Nihon sekizō bijutsu jiten* [Tokyo: Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 1978], p. 264), again strengthening the idea of a connection to male-female pairs.

And so at least two streams of Japanese visual and material culture flow into the creation and proliferation of the *nibutsu dōza* grave: paintings of the Lotus Sutra and stone carvings of the *dōsojin*. These small, charming, and silent memorials, like Stein’s gatekeepers, thus stand between the great pan-Asian Buddhist tradition as represented by the Lotus Sutra, and local fertility cults as represented by male and female pairs carved in stone. □

* Rolf Stein, “The Guardian of the Gate: An Example of Buddhist Mythology, from India to Japan,” in *Asian Mythologies*, ed. Yves Bonnefoy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 122–36. This article in particular and Stein’s bold hermeneutic approach in general have had enormous influence in the field of Buddhist studies and religious studies. For example, the recent work by Bernard Faure on the Indianization of medieval Japan, “The Impact of Tantrism on Japanese Religious Traditions: The Cult of Three Devas,” in *Transformations and Transfer of Tantra in Asia and Beyond*, ed. István Keul (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), pp. 399–412; or Faure’s earlier writing on Vināyaka, “The Elephant in the Room: The Cult of Secrecy in Japanese Tantrism,” in *The Culture of Secrecy in Japanese Religion*, ed. Bernhard Scheid and Mark Teeuwen (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 255–68, reveal Stein’s impact. This influence is also evident in the inventive and erudite work of Nobumi Iyanaga, especially in his massive twin monographs dedicated almost exclusively to the elaboration and expansion of Stein’s ideas—one volume on Daikoku: *Daikokuten hensō* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2002); and one on Kannon: *Kannon hen’yōtan* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2002). Readers wanting to think in greater detail about the issues raised in my superficial discussion of the gatekeepers are urged to consult the bibliographies of these two worthy heirs to R. A. Stein. For twin gods, see especially Iyanaga, *Daikokuten hensō*, pp. 113ff and 537ff.

The Prism of the Lotus Sutra (5)

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 Vulture

You may have noticed that the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings and the Lotus Sutra both have the same opening words: “Thus have I heard. Once the Buddha was staying at the City of Royal Palaces on Mount *Gr̥dhrakūṭa* with a great assemblage of great bhikshus, in all twelve thousand.” In addition, the final chapter of the Lotus Sutra (“Encouragement of the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue”) ends with these words: “When the Buddha preached this sutra, Universal Virtue and the other bodhisattvas, Śāriputra and the other śrāvakas, and the gods, dragons, human and nonhuman beings, and all others in the great assembly greatly rejoiced together and, taking possession of the Buddha’s words, made salutation to him and withdrew [from Mount *Gr̥dhrakūṭa*].” It should be evident from these passages just how important a role Mount *Gr̥dhrakūṭa* plays in the Lotus Sutra.

The “City of Royal Palaces” is *Rājagṛha*, the capital of the former kingdom of Magadha (present-day Rajgir in Bihar), while Mount *Gr̥dhrakūṭa* is a hill lying to the northeast of the town, known in English as Vulture Peak (which is also known as Divine Eagle Peak or Sacred Eagle Peak). *Gr̥dhra* means “vulture” and *kūṭa* “peak” or “summit,” and so its name literally means a (sacred) mountain “having a vulture for its summit.” Both names are significant for devotees of the Lotus Sutra: the hill’s original Sanskrit name *Gr̥dhrakūṭa* is important for seeking out the location of the place where the Lotus Sutra was preached, while the designation Vulture Peak, which evokes the image of a mountain with a summit resembling a vulture with its wings spread out, is important for being able to recall it at all times. This is why Kumārajīva sometimes transliterated its name and sometimes translated it.

It is true that *gr̥dhra* refers not to a golden eagle, the “king of birds,” but to

the vulture, which scavenges on carrion. But this is probably no cause for concern, nor is the fact that the vulture figures too, for example, in the parable of the three carts and the burning house, in which it is included among the wild animals and birds of prey listed when describing the “burning house”—or the terrifying and dangerous world of delusion—from which salvation and escape are deemed to be a matter of utmost urgency. □

The *Campaka*

In the Lotus Sutra there are mentioned various plants apart from sandalwood and aloes that are known for their fragrance. In fact, it could perhaps be said that mention is made only of fragrant plants. They appear, for example, in passages dealing with the capacity to discern the odors of buddhas and other outstanding beings, and this is perhaps owing to a basic notion in Buddhism

that anything emitting a sweet fragrance is to be admired. It is possibly for this reason that the “Merits of the Preacher” chapter, describing the merits of those who receive and keep the Lotus Sutra and make offerings associated with the Lotus Sutra, includes what could be called a catalog of fragrances, which is endlessly fascinating. The fragrance of the *campaka* (champak) flower, with which we are here concerned, also appears in this list. The *campaka* is perhaps not so

familiar to us, but both its flowers and its leaves are scented, and an aromatic oil made from it is also well known on account of the fragrance that it gives off as it burns, while in Buddhist scriptures it is frequently mentioned in contrast to foul-smelling things. It corresponds to the *Magnolia champaca*, a tree with thick glossy leaves and orange or cream-colored flowers that belongs to the magnolia family and grows to a height of more than ten meters (thirty-three feet).

The “Story of the Bodhisattva Medicine King” chapter describes the fervent offerings made to the Buddha

Sun Moon Brilliance by the Bodhisattva Whom All Creatures Delight to See, which culminate in his burning of his own body with perfumed oils of *campaka* and other flowers. This offering through the act of self-immolation has been highly extolled as the supreme example of the perfection of giving, and it is described as follows: “Though I by my supernatural power have paid homage to the Buddha, it is not as good as offering my body.’ Thereupon he partook of many kinds of incense—sandalwood, kunduruka, turushka, prkkā, aloes, and resin incense—and drank the essential

oil of *campaka* and other flowers. After fully twelve hundred years, he anointed his body with perfumed unguents, and in the presence of the Buddha Sun Moon Brilliance wrapped himself in a celestial precious garment, bathed in perfumed oil, and by his transcendent vow burned his own body. Its brightness universally illuminated worlds fully numerous as the sands of eighty koṭis of Ganges rivers.” This episode cannot be casually skimmed through. It should also be borne in mind that offerings are to be performed “with respect and sincerity.” □

Light

“Skillful Means,” the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra, is an extremely important chapter in which the Buddha’s sermon commences. Therefore, the first chapter, “Introductory,” could be said to set the scene for the Buddha’s sermon, and what is about to be experienced by all of those waiting expectantly to hear the Buddha’s sermon is clearly set out in a dialogue between the bodhisattvas Maitreya and Mañjuśrī, both seasoned veterans.

The Buddha first preaches the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings to the assembled multitude, and as soon as he has finished doing so, he sits cross-legged and enters a state of meditation called the station of innumerable meanings, his body and mind motionless. Thereupon heavenly flowers rain down and the world shakes in six ways. On witnessing this, the assembly, “with joy and folded hands and with one mind looked up to the Buddha. Then the Buddha sent forth from the circle of white hair between his eyebrows a ray of light, which illuminated eighteen thousand worlds in the eastern quarter, so that there was nowhere it did not reach.” In other words, before commencing his sermon, the Buddha emitted a ray of light from the middle of his forehead that

illuminated all the worlds in the eastern quarter. On account of this light, the assembled beings gained a glimpse of all the worlds and states of existence through which they themselves would pass for as long as they did not become buddhas.

Why should this have occurred? According to Mañjuśrī, “The Buddha, the World-honored One, is now intending . . . to expound the meaning of the great Law. . . . Because of this, know ye that now the Buddha . . . intends to cause all creatures to hear and know the Law which all the worlds will find hard to believe. That is why he displays this auspice.” The Buddha preaches the Dharma and we listen to it, but it is not enough merely to listen to it. We need to know it and understand it, which is no simple matter. For us to see and know the Dharma presented by the Buddha, light that illuminates it is indispensable. To know is to illuminate and behold, but regrettably we lack the power to illuminate. Wisdom is this power to illuminate. This makes sense when we read, “Rare are the divine powers and wisdom of the buddhas; sending forth a single pure ray, they illuminate innumerable domains.”

The mysterious light of the Buddha described in the “Introductory” chapter

was no doubt intended by the Buddha, acutely aware of our never-ending lot in the cycle of rebirth, to strengthen our desire as Buddhists to listen to the Dharma. But I cannot help thinking that it is intimating to us that it is, in fact, the light of the Buddha’s wisdom that is indispensable for gaining true happiness. □

Pivotal Encounters with American Religious Leaders

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.

Rissho Kosei-kai celebrated its thirtieth anniversary in 1968. This was to become the most important year in its history after the declaration of the Manifestation of the Truth in 1958, which transformed Rissho Kosei-kai and led it into a new age. Overcoming troubles from both within and without, such as the Yomiuri Incident [the public criticism Rissho Kosei-kai had received for its practices and methods of dissemination] and the written compact that leaders required me to sign, Rissho Kosei-kai made a great change of direction from the Period of Skillful Means to the Period of the Manifestation of the Truth. In contrast to this, the important changes that occurred in 1968 were the result not of trials such as those in 1958 but of Rissho Kosei-kai's moving onto a wider stage.

Later, Dr. Kazuo Kasahara, professor emeritus of the University of Tokyo, analyzed this change as follows:

This important change in direction for Rissho Kosei-kai represented the beginning of a new kind of religious activity. Whereas Rissho Kosei-kai

had previously been a religion whose concern was for its own believers, in the sense that those who believed would be saved and those who did not would not be, now it was looking to guide even nonbelievers to happiness through the Buddha's compassion.

He further described the significance of the change:

Joining hands and transcending both sect and differences in thought and ideology was something that even the great leaders of Kamakura Buddhism were not able to do. Even the Pure Land and Zen sects were not able to overcome the idea that only they were right and all others were wrong. Pure Land followers held that salvation was impossible unless a person recited the *nenbutsu*, or the name of Amida Buddha, and Zen followers said that no sect other than their own was any good. Rissho Kosei-kai, however, joins hands with all, in the spirit of the Buddha and humanity, launching activities that have no parallel in religious history.

Looking back, I think we can divide these thirty years after Rissho Kosei-kai's founding into three distinct decades.

The first decade spanned the period from the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Second World War to the period of confusion immediately following Japan's defeat. This was when we were extending the hand of liberation from suffering to people desperate just to survive. They were hard-pressed even to make a living, and if they fell ill, little medical attention was available. The breadwinners had been sent to war and those left behind had nowhere to turn, their possessions burned in the bombing. They were seeking spiritual liberation as a last resort.

The second decade lasted from the time when Japan was beginning to emerge from its postwar chaos down to 1957. Now people were seeking a life that was a little more comfortable and were united in wanting freedom from poverty, illness, and conflict. Rissho Kosei-kai grew rapidly at this time and consolidated its organizational base. Members rigorously cultivated their religious training together, and the Dharma

Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, was an honorary president 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.

evidence of their practice appeared time and time again. The whole of Rissho Kosei-kai brimmed with great enthusiasm. It was a period when we walked the Way not knowing what that way was.

The third decade saw the end of the Period of Skillful Means and the beginning of the Period of the Manifestation of the Truth. Members throughout the country keenly studied doctrine, the Great Sacred Hall was completed as the main center for Rissho Kosei-kai's religious activities, and an image of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni was enshrined there as our focus of devotion. It was a decade when everything was fulfilled.

Of course, this kind of periodization of Rissho Kosei-kai's development may not seem quite so sharply obvious from an individual's point of view. For example, it is natural that for a person who became a member yesterday, the Period of Skillful Means is just beginning. Be that as it may, Rissho Kosei-kai, having developed over thirty years, was about to take its first steps into its fourth decade. It was the period of walking the known path.

It was around 1965 that the expression "the three Cs" became popular in Japan. During the late 1950s, people had wanted to acquire "the three sacred treasures," that is, a black-and-white television, an electric washer, and an electric refrigerator. Now the new "sacred treasures" became the three Cs of a car, an air conditioner, and a color television. As the production of domestic automobiles moved into full gear, the curtain rose on the age of the family car.

Ordinary people became car owners, and cars were Japan's star export. In an instant, all of Japan had become prosperous. The country was riding the wave of high economic growth, and this growth was continuing ever more rapidly. The postwar generation, which had never known war, was growing into young adulthood and enjoying an affluent lifestyle. On the one hand, some young people joined groups of hippies, and on the other, student protest movements expanded at all the universities. And at the end of 1968 there occurred the largest heist in Japan's history, dubbed the 300 million yen robbery.

Drunk on economic prosperity, people were carried away by the idea that happiness could be found if only they had enough money and possessions. Gradually they lost sight of morality and ethics and appeared to have forgotten

about revering the gods and buddhas. Even though desolation of the spirit, which was the other side of prosperity, gnawed away at them, very few were even aware of its existence.

Also, it was at this time, when Japan was rejoicing in peace, that great problems were arising in the world at large. The Vietnam War had intensified into a kind of proxy war between the United States and the Soviet Union. North Vietnam, which was receiving aid from the Soviet Union, and South Vietnam, backed by the United States, bore the brunt of the global conflict that had divided the world into camps in the Cold War. The National Liberation Front (NLF) had grown up in South Vietnam, and conflict erupted when it confronted government troops in a guerilla war. North Vietnam supported the NLF and was in turn backed up by the Soviet Union and China.

The United States, on the other hand, feared that if the NLF gained ascendancy in South Vietnam, the bordering countries—Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand—would fall like dominos and the whole of Indochina would become communist. Thus it sent military advisers to South Vietnam and continued to provide the government forces with weapons and supplies. With the American and North Vietnamese armies becoming fully engaged in the conflict between government troops and the NLF, the Americans began bombing military facilities in North Vietnam. The tragedy of this war was widely publicized throughout the world.

As the NLF continued its firm resistance, there seemed no end to war's destruction, and its victims only kept increasing. Voices rose from around the world urging an immediate end to the Vietnam War, and even within the United States, antiwar demonstrations were held over and over again.

The Spirit of Mahatma Gandhi

It was toward the end of 1967 that word came to me that religious figures in the United States had made an initial approach about forming a conference to bring about world peace by gathering together religious leaders from all around the globe. I heard about it from Rev. Riri Nakayama, director of the Nihon Bukkyo Sangokai (Buddhism Adoration Society of Japan) and the Ganji Heiwa Renmei (Gandhi Peace Federation). He was a leading Japanese

Buddhist who had long been passionately concerned with the question of world peace. He told me that he had met Dr. Homer Jack of the Unitarian Universalist Association when he visited the Church Center for the United Nations, and Dr. Jack had made this request [to form a coalition of religionists for peace] to him.

Rev. Nakayama was a pioneer in the peace movement, moving around the world speaking with the religious leaders of various countries seeking out ways to contribute to world peace. All the same, certain people in Japanese religious circles had the view that he always burdened himself with work that took a lot of money to carry out. He had realized that Dr. Jack's idea was not something he could move forward with on his own, so he consulted Dr. Shinichiro Imaoka, president of the Japan Free Religious Association, which had close ties with Unitarianism, and asked for my cooperation as well.

Rev. Nakayama said, "The year 1969 is the centenary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi. In commemoration, Dr. Jack said that he would like it to be this year that we hold a conference where religious leaders from around the world can gather under one roof and discuss matters relating to peace, and in this way continue Gandhi's nonviolent peace movement. A peace symposium of international religious leaders will be held in New Delhi from January 15 for five days to commemorate the centenary of Gandhi's birth. American religious leaders called on us to discuss during the symposium specific matters about the holding of a conference."

I fully agreed with the purport of this proposal.

Gandhi had been the leader of a movement to bring about the independence of India from British rule. His title, mahatma, means "great spirit." For more than a hundred years, from the middle of the nineteenth century, India had been governed as a colony within the British Empire. Gandhi was determined that his great task be accomplished through nonviolence. Einstein wrote of him, "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth." Gandhi said that although others declared that nonviolent resistance was impossible, that it had never before happened in history, it was his aspiration to provide a precedent. He showed us how to make the impossible possible.

In 1919, troops led by General Reginald Dyer opened fire on a gathering of civilians in Amritsar, killing or wounding more than sixteen hundred people. Indians were outraged, and riots threatened to break out in various places. It was then that Gandhi stood before the people and pleaded with them that violence was not the answer, that the people of India had to unite their hearts and jolt the consciences of the English.

In other contexts Gandhi said,

"When I despair, I remember that all through history the ways of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants, and murderers, and for a time they can seem invincible, but in the end they always fall."

He stated that even a coward can retaliate when beaten by an enemy. But he advised that if one makes no resistance against the violence of an enemy, one does not submit to evil. Rather, one should forgive the enemy with a magnanimous heart, and the enemy would then realize what he had done. This, he said, is true courage.

Gandhi also said, "Not to believe in this possibility of permanent peace is to disbelieve in the goodness of human nature."

I think we can interpret these words to mean that unless we can reveal the buddha-nature hidden deep within the human heart, true peace cannot be achieved. How can we prevent people from killing one another? The possibility of doing so lies in achieving world peace. This will not remain a dream if people of religion around the world join together in the spirit of nonviolence that Gandhi exhibited through his own actions.

I replied to Rev. Nakayama, "I agree wholeheartedly with this conference of people of religion. However, my schedule is jam-packed with events over the New Year period, so I am afraid it would be very difficult for me to go to India."

Rev. Nakayama suggested, "How about if after the New Delhi symposium the American delegates stop over in Japan? If we hold a meeting in Japan, I hope you'd be able to attend."

"If we can meet in Japan, I will certainly make sure I can take part."

The meeting with the American religious leaders was arranged through the joint auspices of the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations and the Shukyo [Religion] Center. It was the first step on the road toward the establishment of Religions for Peace.

A Watershed in Japanese Religious Circles

In January 1968, the American religious leaders broke their journey in Japan on their way home from the International Inter-Religious Symposium on Peace in New Delhi and attended the Japanese-American Inter-Religious Consultation on Peace, held in the Kyoto International Conference Center. Fifteen American delegates attended, including Dr. Dana McLean Greeley, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association; Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations; Rev. Herschel Halbert, executive council secretary for international affairs, Episcopal Church of the United States; Herman Will Jr. and Bishop John Wesley Lord, both of the United Methodists; and Ralph David Abernathy of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

The thirty-five participants from Japan included, of course, Rev. Riri Nakayama and Dr. Shinichiro Imaoka, as well as Rev. Kosho Otani, head of the Otani stream of the Jodo Shin sect; Rev. Taiko Furukawa, head of

the Myoshinji subsect of Rinzai Zen; Rev. Yoshitada Takahara, chief priest of Yasaka Shrine; Rev. Toshio Miyake, founder of the Konkokyo Church of Izuo; Rev. Isao Deguchi, leader of Oomoto; Dr. Tetsutaro Ariga, president of the Kyoto International Religious Fellowship; Rev. Koun Shigaraki, director of the Kyoto Association of Religious Organizations; Dr. Joseph Spae, director of the Oriens Institute for Religious Research, Tokyo; Dr. Shokin Furuta, a professor at Nihon University; and Dr. Masatoshi Doi, a professor at Doshisha University. It felt as if all of the people within Japanese religious circles who had a deep interest in international contacts had gathered in force.

The fifty religious figures from Japan and the United States sat side by side at a round table in the Kyoto International Conference Center. I was asked, as one of the leaders, to greet the delegates. I spoke about my own conviction of the need for interreligious cooperation: "Even though there has never been a greater need than now to seek peace among humankind, unless people of religion have the courage to join hands together, religion will lose its opportunity to make a contribution to human

progress. There is a pressing need for people of religion from all over the world to be of one mind about this.”

An American representative replied: “All the various religions surely have many points in common. We have come to Kyoto so that religions may cooperate together, and strengthen one another, for the sake of peace.”

Eager questions were raised and opinions exchanged concerning the establishment of a peace conference of people of religion from around the world. It appears that American religionists had determined two years before to set up a conference with peace as its purpose, one that represented religious leaders from around the world, and they were already making moves in that direction.

The Vietnam War had bogged down, but despite demands from all parts of the globe for America to get out, however much it wanted to withdraw it could not, and the cruelty continued as before. On both sides, much precious blood was spilled. Vowing to bring the war to an end through the power of people of religion throughout the world, the American religionists keenly desired to hold a conference of such people in the year marking the centenary of Gandhi's birth.

However, nothing specific had emerged from the International Inter-Religious Symposium on Peace in New Delhi, and although a proposal was raised at the Kyoto meeting to issue a joint statement by the Japanese and American delegates calling for an immediate ceasefire in Vietnam, no agreement was reached, unfortunately.

I asked to make a statement, and I said: “Gandhi's principle of nonviolence is the starting point for a peace movement among people of religion. Only one year remains before the centenary of his birth. A period of preparation is needed to allow religious leaders from around the world to meet. Even if it takes two or three years, why don't we

divide into groups and call upon people from around the world to bring about world peace in the spirit of Gandhi?”

Dr. Jack immediately agreed: “Next year is the Gandhi centenary, and the following year will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the end of World War II and the founding of the United Nations. If we can set up a conference in either of those years, it will be of great significance.”

My proposal was supported unanimously and included in the joint statement, which said, “A world conference on religion and peace would be useful in 1969 or early in 1970.”

The Japanese-American Inter-Religious Consultation on Peace had lasted only a single day, but it marked a watershed in that Japanese religious circles had determined, on an official occasion, to hold a peace conference of world religionists. And for me too, it was a matchless opportunity to meet like-minded people.

Making Good Friends

Three days after the Kyoto conference, Dr. Greeley and Dr. Jack visited Rissho Kosei-kai, guided by Dr. Imaoka. We were able to speak together from the depths of our hearts about our faiths, interreligious cooperation, and the peace movement by people of religion.

I think that at that time Dr. Jack was the director of the Social Responsibility Department of the Unitarian Universalist Association. He had a doctorate from Cornell University and had also studied at the Meadville Lombard Theological School, affiliated with the University of Chicago. He had many friends at the United Nations and a thorough knowledge of international issues. Dr. Greeley was a graduate of the Harvard Divinity School, and as the founding president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, he had many occasions to speak in public in his beautiful and persuasive voice. Typically American, both men were

very approachable, and when we spoke, it was as if we had known one another for many years.

Dr. Greeley made an ardent appeal on behalf of American people of religion:

We have to look at the Pacific Ocean that lies between our two countries, not as a sea dividing us, but as a small pond. People of religion stand at the forefront in joining together the hearts and minds of America and Japan. They above all must lead the peace. There is great sadness now among both the people of Vietnam and American soldiers and their families. I want people of religion throughout the world to join their voices in demanding that America cease waging war in Vietnam. If they do so, America will certainly withdraw. It is for this reason I want to hold a conference of religious people. My country's government is now committing a grave error. We have spoken with the secretary of state three times. Both the secretary of state and the president consider that unless we confront communism in Vietnam, the war will spread further, that in so doing we are preventing a world war. However, we think that such ideas make the danger of world war even more critical.

I was moved by the courage of the American people of religion and felt compelled to make a response on behalf of other religious people in Japan. I voiced my thoughts candidly:

At the time of the Pacific war, religious figures in Japan did not have the courage to urge the government to cease the ill-advised war it was waging. As a result, cities throughout the country were reduced to ashes and in Okinawa even teenage boys and girls fought to the death. And finally there was the tragedy of the

atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. How many people became sacrifices to war, in Japan, in other countries in Asia, and in your country as well? It has taught us anew that unless people of religion have courage, not even one person can be saved.

The third chapter of the Lotus Sutra, "A Parable," says: "Now this triple world / All is my domain; / The living beings in it / All are my sons. / But now this place / Abounds with distresses; / And I alone / Am able to save and protect them."

People living in this world are all the sons and daughters of the Buddha. We have been entrusted by the Buddha to do all we can to protect his children struggling among the trouble and sufferings of the world. We have not been able to protect his children from the scourge of war, however. We cannot allow mistakes to be repeated.

I spoke about my beliefs with all my heart:

To achieve our mission as people of religion in the world today, we should unite the strength of religious figures from around the globe. Our most pressing need is that we all become one. Interreligious cooperation means first of all to know one another. Apart, misunderstanding arises and hostility can result. If we can meet together and talk, we will achieve understanding. If we understand one another, cooperation will grow. And peace is sure to spread from where there is mutual understanding and cooperation.

Dr. Greeley's words that day became engraved on my heart: "Some people say that Unitarians are Christians, while others say they are not. We look up to Jesus Christ as a great teacher, and we do not worry too much about traditional rituals or miracles. From one point of view, you can probably say that Unitarians are not Christians. However, we believe in the teachings of Jesus Christ and we

abide by his teachings and put them into practice. In this respect, Unitarians are true Christians."

The Unitarian movement is a Protestant denomination whose first church was established in London in 1774. It spread to the United States, where it expanded from Boston. It is possible to say that this group blew a breath of fresh air into Christianity. In 1961, the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America consolidated to form the Unitarian Universalist Association. Unitarianism warns strongly against doctrinairism, and its activities are directly involved with modern life.

I found Dr. Greeley's views to be very close to my outlook on the Lotus Sutra. The teachings of the Lotus Sutra boil down to the idea that all religions are, at base, one. It is my conviction that the way these teachings are put into practice is through the mutual respect and mutual inspiration of religions one for the other, and through their joining together to create a peaceful realm (the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light) where all people can live in happiness.

Seeing the Rissho Kosei-kai members gathered in the Great Sacred Hall, Dr. Greeley spoke in admiration: "Rissho Kosei-kai is a Buddhism that acts! Its growth has been remarkable, with a membership of three million in thirty years. I think the secret of this has been that it is a religion that strives to put the teachings of the Buddha into practice in daily life. In addition, it is promoting interreligious cooperation in a spirit of tolerance and altruism. Unitarians too are focusing their efforts on interfaith dialogue and service. I am very happy I have met a spiritual friend whose ideals are the same as mine."

I also felt the same happiness, no less than Dr. Greeley's.

My meeting with Dr. Greeley and Dr. Jack was to have a profound influence on determining my future religious activity.

To be continued

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 23

The Former Lives of the Bodhisattva Medicine King (1)

*This is the 117th installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra
by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.*

INTRODUCTION As noted at the conclusion of chapter 22, “The Final Commission,” at that point in the Lotus Sutra the exposition of the Buddha’s teachings is almost complete. It may be more appropriate to say that with chapter 22 we have come to the completion of the Buddha’s teaching mission.

That being the case, people may wonder why the Buddha went on to preach in chapters 23 to 28 and about these chapters’ significance.

It is true that by reading chapters 1 to 22 we can understand the core teachings of the Buddha, confirm our belief in them, and gain the resolve to practice them.

However, for most people the teachings are easier to discuss than practice. So far the teachings have taught us

a basic attitude to practice, but we need to affirm our attitude once more to be doubly sure of it.

How should we do this? We must seek strength from outside ourselves that encourages and inspires us never to lose heart or forget our basic attitude to practice. In short, we need something to stimulate our practice.

We can find the best stimulus in examples. Nothing is more inspiring than the examples of those who followed the path of the Buddha’s teachings in particular ways and thereby obtained specific merits.

We can say the same thing of moral deeds in our daily lives. For example, even if parents teach their children to be kind to the elderly, it is doubtful that the children will understand and practice this. It would be helpful if the

parents give a concrete example. For instance: “Today I saw an elderly man at a loss how to cross a street where there was no pedestrian crossing. A boy of twelve or thirteen ran up, raised his hand to signal the traffic to stop, and took the man’s hand and led him across. It certainly was a refreshing sight.” Children will take an interest in a story like this and want to follow the boy’s example. They too will feel the urge to do good deeds.

Ordinary people need concrete models to help them do good. Who should be their model for practice of the Dharma? Needless to say, Shakyamuni Buddha himself. The first thing that they must do is follow the path that the Buddha has shown them.

But they have no idea how to begin to emulate the Buddha and cannot help feeling at a loss, because he is perfect and possesses all the virtues. Ordinary people can much more easily emulate one particular virtue or practice of a bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas provide suitable goals and models. As an example, we have already considered the single practice of emulating the Bodhisattva Never Despise’s revering the buddha-nature in everyone he met.

The chapters from chapter 23 to the end of the Lotus Sutra provide us with a series of such bodhisattva models. In these chapters, the virtue of each of the bodhisattvas is described as belonging to the highest, ideal state of mind, and it is difficult for us to achieve such a state immediately. Yet, because the aim is placed within sight and seems within reach, it gives us the very encouragement we need.

At the same time, these chapters tell us that the true believer must achieve such ideal states. Since the standards are so clearly indicated, we can take them as aids to self-discipline and self-admonishment, because we are apt to become self-satisfied.

Therefore, ordinary people who continue to lead a religious life of taking one step forward and a half step back, then another step forward and a half step back, will rouse themselves from neglect and be inspired anew to humility whenever they read about the examples of each of those bodhisattvas in the sutra. This is the significance of these final chapters. For this reason, we must not neglect to study these six chapters simply because we have already completed reading the core of the Lotus Sutra with chapter 22.

There is one point about which we must be very careful: in comparison with the preceding chapters, the following chapters mention many extraordinary acts. To avoid misunderstanding them, we should pay close attention to the following points.

The first is that we must grasp their spirit and realize what they really mean.

For example, the Bodhisattva Loveliness set fire to his arms. Many ascetics did this in ancient India. In China and

Japan, too, Buddhist monks have immolated themselves and died sitting calmly amid the raging flames. Perhaps you will also recall the instances of monks and nuns in Vietnam who immolated themselves in protest against the government’s suppression of Buddhism.

How we are to take these actions is a delicate, difficult issue.

In principle, such acts violate the spirit of the Middle Way preached by the Buddha. Also, in light of the teaching of reverence for life, such acts can hardly be condoned.

However, as I have said many times thus far, the Middle Way of the Buddha Dharma differs from the golden mean. Since the Middle Way is the path of truth and high purpose, for some people in certain situations the Middle Way may include extraordinary acts.

As for reverence for life, the Buddha Dharma teaches that life is not only physical but spiritual, precious, and worth living. One way of giving our spiritual life greater value is by sacrificing the life of the body. Likewise, people sometimes give their lives to save the lives of others. There are instances of this in many *jatakas* of the Buddha’s acts of great self-sacrifice as a bodhisattva in earlier incarnations. (For example, “The Story of How the Bodhisattva Gave His

Life for a Verse” and “The Story of the Bodhisattva Giving His Flesh to the Tiger,” in the November/December 1992 issue of *Dharma World*.)

Willingness to sacrifice oneself is the most noble expression of the human spirit. Of course, people should make the ultimate act of self-sacrifice only in emergencies such as those in which the fate of the Dharma hangs in the balance or humanity faces a great crisis. Yet, self-sacrifice on a much smaller scale is called for constantly in our daily lives.

Many people have this spirit of self-sacrifice, and by showing it in minor matters, one at a time, they contribute to human harmony and help things go smoothly.

A truly democratic society is just this sort of society. Individuals sacrifice their own desires to some extent to benefit many other people. To gain the consent of the multitude, one must to some extent limit one's own desires. That is the way democracy works. This is the true meaning of selfless service to humanity.

The form of democracy that we find in Japan today, however, erroneously insists on individual rights and privileges, neglecting the spirit of compromise for the common good. People have lost sight of the vital point that unless everyone makes some self-sacrifice, there can be no consensus, and the government cannot function efficiently.

This mistaken trend has spread widely, even into small matters of daily life. People fiercely guard all their rights, insist on their own opinions, and refuse to sacrifice anything for the good of others.

As a consequence of this clashing of avarice with avarice, this wrangling between asuras (demigods), there is no way for people to improve. The world will not work well. This is why I mentioned earlier that nothing is more noble in the human spirit than the spirit of self-sacrifice.

There is great hidden danger, however, in demanding self-sacrifice by others. The result of powerful people demanding self-sacrifice from people within their power almost always results in tyranny and the loss of human freedom. An example of this is the fanatical patriotism forced on the Japanese people by the upper echelons in feudal times and more recently during the Second World War.

Therefore, self-sacrifice should always be voluntary. Whenever it is forced, there will be immediate harm.

Yet, without a spirit of self-sacrifice, society will inevitably become a realm of *asuras*, that is, a world of conflict.

So what should we do?

There is only one path we can take. Religion is the only way to solve this issue. First, we must recognize our own freedom and that of others. Then we should powerfully preach the spirit of self-sacrifice, appealing to the minds of others and helping them awaken to that spirit. Only people of religion can teach self-sacrifice.

This is why religion is necessary even today, or why, precisely because of the current social conditions, religion is all the more essential.

The second point to be noted is that we should not interpret the form of liberation superficially.

For example, in chapter 25 it is stated that anyone who keeps in mind the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World will be delivered from suffering. If we interpret this statement literally, it would seem to mean that we do not have to practice the Buddha's teachings earnestly. If that were the case, none of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra preached so far would bear any fruit. Anyone can easily understand that in the last six chapters the Buddha cannot have been so illogical and contradictory as to deny fundamentally all of the teachings preached so far. It is surprising to find that for centuries many people have put a shallow interpretation on something that should be so readily understood and have turned to an easy, lazy faith that they thought would free them from suffering if they merely kept in mind the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World.

When we read chapter 25 carefully and in depth, however, we understand that the supernatural powers of this bodhisattva are essentially identical with the power of the Dharma preached by the Tathagata Shakyamuni. We also realize that ultimately we must depend spiritually upon the Dharma, but that in putting it into practice, we should take the model of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World as our immediate goal.

This point also appears in the words of the sutra, and when it does I will explain in greater detail. But it is most regrettable that misunderstandings and simplistic interpretations of the sutra have sunk deeply into the minds of the general public over a period of centuries, vitiating the true spirit of Buddhism. It is earnestly hoped that the readers of this commentary will not repeat the same mistake.

Before we proceed to the text of this chapter, let us look at its title.

The Sutra of Meditation on the Two Bodhisattvas Medicine King and Medicine Lord tells us that Medicine King was a bodhisattva who offered important medical treatment at many gatherings of bhikshus and other people. So we may say that he is a bodhisattva devoted to treating illness.

When one mentions faith healing some people are skeptical. Those with this attitude tend to be fundamentalists or scholars whose time is spent primarily in research. If the mind is cured by religion, then it is entirely natural that the illnesses of the body will also be cured. Surely one of people's greatest desires is to stay healthy, so we ought to consider this issue with flexibility of mind. We will return to this subject later on.

Whereas the term *jataka* is used strictly to describe the

stories of the Buddha's practices as a bodhisattva in earlier incarnations, the term *itivriddaka* refers to narratives of deeds of the Buddha and his disciples in earlier lives.

All rejoiced greatly after hearing the Buddha preaching in chapter 22, "The Final Commission," and at the beginning of this chapter the Bodhisattva Star Constellation King Flower puts a question to the World-honored One.

TEXT At that time the Bodhisattva Star Constellation King Flower addressed the Buddha, saying: "World-honored One! Why does the Medicine King Bodhisattva wander in the *saha* world? World-honored One! What hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of nayutas of distresses the Bodhisattva Medicine King has to suffer! Excellent [will it be], World-honored One, if you will be pleased to explain a little, so that the gods, dragon spirits, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings, and the bodhisattvas who have come from other lands, as well as these shravakas, hearing it will all rejoice."

COMMENTARY *Wander.* The original term in the Chinese text here refers to touring, as in making a speaking tour, and traveling about, as a priest travels about the world preaching and disseminating the Dharma. As a whole, the word means to sojourn in other lands and act in an entirely spontaneous manner. In this passage, the Bodhisattva Medicine King is described as freely appearing everywhere in the *saha* world to enlighten and liberate sentient beings. The Bodhisattva Star Constellation King Flower asks what severe practices the Bodhisattva Medicine King had to undertake to have attained such divine powers.

TEXT Thereupon the Buddha addressed the Bodhisattva Star Constellation King Flower: "Of yore, in the past, kalpas ago incalculable as the sands of the Ganges River, there was a buddha entitled Sun Moon Brilliance Tathagata, Worshipful, All Wise, Perfectly Enlightened in Conduct, Well Departed, Understander of the World, Peerless Leader, Controller, Teacher of Gods and Men, Buddha, World-honored One. That buddha had eighty kotis of great bodhisattva-mahasattvas and a great assembly of shravakas [numerous] as the sands of seventy-two Ganges rivers. The lifetime of that buddha was forty-two thousand kalpas, and the lifetime of his bodhisattvas was the same.

COMMENTARY *Of yore, in the past.* In past worlds.

• *Worshipful, All Wise, Perfectly Enlightened in Conduct, Well Departed, Understander of the World, Peerless Leader, Controller, Teacher of Gods and Men, Buddha, World-honored One.* These are the ten epithets for the Buddha. Since they have been used many times so far, readers have grown

accustomed to them and are likely to understand them simply as epithets for the Buddha. However, they all express the Buddha's virtues, and we must understand them as such. Their meanings already have been explained in detail (in the January/February 1997 issue of *Dharma World*), so please refer to the earlier commentary.

• *[Numerous] as the sands of seventy-two Ganges rivers.* Seventy-two times as many as the number of grains of sand in the entire basin of the Ganges River; that is, an infinite number. This is a particular Indian expression, and if one travels by plane over the innumerable tributaries which fan out in a meshlike pattern along the Ganges, one gains a clear picture of the meaning of this expression.

TEXT His domain had no women, no hells, no hungry spirits, no animals, no asuras, and no disasters;

COMMENTARY The overall meaning of this passage is that the Tatagata's teaching has brought peace to the country.

As already explained in the commentary on chapter 12, women are mentioned here along with hells and other bad things because ancient Indians believed that women were incarnations of sin and impeded men's religious discipline. Therefore, we should not take the mention of women literally in this context. We must also not forget the fact that the Buddha's teachings broke down this generally accepted idea of the India of his day.

TEXT its land was level as one's palm and made of lapis lazuli; it was adorned with jewel trees, covered with jewel curtains, hung with banners of jewel flowers, and jeweled vases and censers were [seen] everywhere in the country.

COMMENTARY This is a description of the beauty of that country.

• *Jewel curtains.* This appeared earlier in chapter 21, “The Divine Power of the Tathagata.” The “banners of jewel flowers” are exquisite banners which are tied with rope to one end of a pole.

TEXT Terraces were there of the precious seven, with trees for each terrace, the trees distant from it an arrow’s full flight. Under all these jewel trees, bodhisattvas and shravakas were seated. Above each of these platforms were a hundred kotis of gods performing celestial music and singing praises to the buddha in homage to him.

COMMENTARY *An arrow’s full flight.* Although the distance an arrow can travel varies, presumably the trees were about fifty to sixty meters from the terraces.

TEXT Then that buddha preached the Dharma Flower Sutra to the Bodhisattva Loveliness and all the bodhisattvas and host of shravakas. This Bodhisattva Loveliness had rejoiced to follow the practice of asceticism and in the Dharma of the Buddha Sun Moon Brilliance had made zealous progress, wandering about single-mindedly seeking [the enlightenment of] the Buddha for fully twelve thousand years, after which he attained the contemplation of revelation of all forms.

COMMENTARY The Buddha is not advocating religious austerities here, but followers of the Way wish to perform them only voluntarily, with the aspiration to fully engrave the teachings in their own minds. However, austerities will come natural to devout followers.

Shakyamuni gave up asceticism because he realized that it did not lead to the supreme enlightenment of a buddha, not because he thought it entirely useless.

Shakyamuni’s admonition also emphasized that, contrary to the view of most Brahmans that religious austerities were all-important, the primary goal was awakening to the truth. The Buddha was certainly not advocating an easy form of practice.

It is never easy to attain a high spiritual state, or reach the heights of anything. People who seek to master something or achieve great things without effort take too much for granted. This applies to everything in the secular world, such as scholarship, technology, the arts, and sports.

Therefore, those who want to be outstanding in something are unfazed by difficulty. They have the necessary spirit to overcome them. The Bodhisattva Loveliness, out of a desire fully to realize the teachings of the Buddha Sun Moon Brilliance, “had rejoiced to follow the practice of asceticism” and “had made zealous progress, wandering about . . . for fully twelve thousand years.”

This practice of “wandering about” refers to walking

from place to place pondering the Dharma and reading and reciting the sutras. Modern medical research has demonstrated that walking makes the brain function more vigorously and that standing is the best position for thinking. People of long ago deserve our admiration because they realized this even though they did not theorize about it.

• *The contemplation of revelation of all forms.* Contemplation, or *samadhi* (from Sanskrit), is a deep trance in which the mind concentrates on one thing in order to discern true ideals and put them into practice at will. It means virtually the same as meditation (*dhyana*), but if we are compelled to draw a distinction, then *samadhi* is a state achieved by meditation.

There are various kinds of *samadhi* depending on the object on which one focuses (that is, the ideal state that one attempts to attain), and “the contemplation of revelation of all forms” is the state in which one has acquired a full command of the art of manifesting oneself and communicating the teachings in a way suited to the person whom one is guiding to the Buddha Way. Amenable people can be led gently, and with them one should be kind and use kind words like those the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World (Avalokiteshvara) might use. If people need strict instruction, the instructor adopts a stern approach and uses hard words in the fierce spirit of Acalanatha. One can change one’s approach easily and appropriately.

Spontaneity and freedom from error are characteristics of this *samadhi*. People who have not yet attained the state of *samadhi* are likely to misjudge the other people’s conditions and capacities if they try to judge them with ordinary knowledge or common sense. But that never means that they do not need any knowledge or common sense when they teach and lead people to the Buddha Way. Those who have not attained the state of this contemplation of the revelation of all forms must strive hard to put ordinary knowledge or common sense into full play when they make judgments so that they can figure out the most appropriate way to teach and guide other people. In doing so, if they try to be as selfless as possible, they are at least unlikely to make serious mistakes.

Moreover, those who strive for complete selflessness through *samadhi* will learn instinctively the right gradual approach to the contemplation of revelation of all forms. Thus, this *samadhi* has practical value, and is not just an ideal state of mind.

To be continued

In this series, passages in the **TEXT** sections are quoted from *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Company, 1975, with slight revisions. The diacritical marks originally used for several Sanskrit terms in the **TEXT** sections are omitted here for easier reading.