

Regulating Our Breathing

by Nichiko Niwano

Although we tend to take breathing for granted, inhaling and exhaling are essential for human life. Most people are unable to remain alive if they stop breathing for even a few minutes. As a matter of fact, nearly all human beings take their first breath by letting out a loud squawk as soon as they are born, and take a last small breath just as they are dying and depart this world. In other words, breathing is the essence of being alive.

Among the teachings of Shakyamuni is a sutra called the Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing. This sutra teaches us how to cultivate a careful awareness of breathing by thinking, “I am now inhaling slowly, I am exhaling slowly,” with each breath in and out.

The sutra continues: The practice of cultivating mindfulness of breathing in and out is fruitful and of great benefit, and will quell greed and distress. This allows us to attain a tranquil, stable state of mind in which we are not disturbed by passions or distracting thoughts.

In concrete terms, as I suggested above, while realizing that one is breathing out, one should slowly exhale, and while realizing that one is breathing in, one should inhale the same way. Then one should breathe with one’s thoughts focused on feeling joy while breathing, quieting the mind while breathing, and contemplating impermanence while breathing.

By directing our consciousness toward our breathing, we will know that our breathing has become slower and deeper of its own accord. And while

repeating this process of breathing we can calm down our mind and improve mental function. Slow, deep exhaling stimulates the parasympathetic nerves that urge one to rest and by bringing balance to the sympathetic nerves causes the emotions to settle down. This is because by inhaling slowly, one is able to take in a sufficient amount of oxygen. The exhaled breath is particularly significant because it is not unrelated to the fact that life begins with the first cry one makes as a newborn baby.

Buddhism involves the teaching of realization. Every person should become aware of the working of the truth and the importance of self-control. In this sense, focusing one’s consciousness on breathing—with which human life starts—is a convenient method of controlling the body and the mind.

Becoming Aware of Gratitude

The Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi (d. ca. 286 BCE) left us the following thought about breathing:

“The true man’s breathing comes from his heels, while the ordinary man’s breathing comes from his throat.” This means that breathing deeply calms people, endowing them with supreme virtue. Certainly, when one’s emotions are rising and falling or when one is agitated because of anger or excitement, one’s breathing becomes shallow and fast.

In this sense, breathing deeply is important for regulating the mind. Indeed, we may sigh from too much stress, but we do not usually focus our

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

consciousness on breathing or make a habit of breathing deeply. In fact, however, it is important that in our daily lives we learn to breathe slowly and deeply.

To this end, why not take just three to five minutes to have such time, for example, in the morning and in the evening.

While we are sitting in *seiza*, the Japanese way of sitting formally, before the Buddhist altar, we keep our bent knees spread about the width of two fists and settle our posture by swaying the body to the left and to the right. In *zazen*, one sits cross-legged in the “full lotus” position and sways the body to the left and the right, but there is also a method of practicing it in the Japanese formal sitting position.

Then slowly exhale from the mouth, and when you have completely exhaled, let air flow in naturally through your nose. Then, as I mentioned at the beginning, by concentrating on each breath, both body and mind will relax.

At the same time, as we become aware of the mystery of life—that while we breathe our hearts continue to beat without stopping for even a moment—the development of feelings of gratitude for being caused to live arises. This realization protects us from desire and conceit, and brings us the great gift and benefit that is true self-control. □

DHARMA WORLD

FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

OCT.–DEC. 2015 VOL. 42

FEATURES: The Modern Significance of Meditative Practices in Religions

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: Hirofumi Mizuno

Director: Kazumasa Murase

Senior Editor: Kazumasa Osaka

Editor: Katsuyuki Kikuchi

Editorial Advisors:

Miriam Levering, Gene Reeves,
Yoshiaki Sanada,

Dominick Scarangelo,

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:

Photos: Shutterstock.com

Photoshop work by Abinitio Design

1 Regulating Our Breathing

by *Nichiko Niwano*

•••••

3 Meditation in the Contemporary World

by *Dominick Scarangelo*

4 Buddhist Meditation, Christian Contemplation, and Their Various Uses

by *Peter Feldmeier*

8 Meditation without Borders: Christians Who Engage in Meditation Practices from Other Religious Traditions

by *Leo D. Lefebure*

12 The Development and Significance of Meditation in Buddhism

by *Kenryo Minowa*

20 Buddhist Meditation and Christian Contemplation: Wisdom Bringing Forth Selfless Love

by *Ruben L. F. Habito*

•••••

24 Reforming World Order through Human Reformation: A Perspective through Religion

by *Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman*

28 The Practical Ethics of Won-Buddhism and Liberal Religious Culture as a Path to World Peace

by *Park Kwangsoo*

32 Buddhism and Social Engagement (2) Building Peace

by *Ranjana Mukhopadhyaya*

37 The Ome Retreat Center and the Youth Department

by *Nikkyo Niwano*

THE THREEFOLD LOTUS SUTRA: A MODERN COMMENTARY

43 The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law Chapter 25: The All-Sidedness of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World (1)

Meditation in the Contemporary World

by Dominick Scarangelo

Time magazine's February 3, 2014, cover story on the popularity of mindfulness meditation in the United States was taken by many as proof that meditative contemplation, once associated primarily with the counterculture, had become mainstream. It is no exaggeration to say that centers for the practice of various forms of meditation, including yoga, Zen, and calming and insight meditation (*samatha* and *vipassanā*), can be found in the downtowns of almost any city in Europe or the Americas. People of all stations and social classes throughout the world are embracing meditation practices of some sort. The medical community is increasingly prescribing meditative techniques for stress reduction and pain management. Cognitive scientists explore the physiology of concentration techniques and philosophers of mind and plumb ancient texts of Buddhist and Hindu epistemology. Suddenly it seems as if meditation and Dharma centers are everywhere.

This issue of *Dharma World* considers the religious significance of meditation in contemporary societies. Contributors trace the historical origins of these practices, focusing primarily on Buddhist traditions, and also explore how Asian meditation practices have crossed religious boundaries to be embraced by communities of faith in the West. They ask how these meditative practices contribute to deepening religious faith, but also consider the limits, if any, of incorporating meditative practices from other religions.

It is not possible to explore all the pertinent issues related to meditation in contemporary societies, nor can we fully appreciate the diversity of meditative traditions in just a single issue. However, a brief look at Rissho Kosei-kai may provide a unique perspective on meditation. In Rissho Kosei-kai, reciting the text of the Lotus Sutra is a primary method of meditative concentration. The practice of right mindfulness is also understood as *sange* (Ch., *chanhui*; Skt., *kṣama*), usually translated as “repentance.” In the context of everyday life, practicing *sange* is perhaps better conceived of as self-reflection—a constant mindfulness of one’s actions from the standpoint of Buddhist morality, and respect for others rooted in the principle of universal buddha-nature. Rissho Kosei-kai president Nichiko Niwano writes in *Cultivating the Buddhist Heart* (Kosei Publishing, 2008), “Self-reflection is the inward examination of one’s daily actions, one by one” and “Mindfulness is the scrutiny of not only one’s individual actions but one’s entire inner landscape, oneself as a whole.” The practices of Rissho Kosei-kai remind us that meditation or mindfulness is not necessarily separate from liturgy and ritual, nor distinct from ethical action.

Although practices and theories of meditation differ across Buddhist, Hindu, and other traditions, I suspect that most Buddhists and even followers of other faiths might be able to find common ground in the Shared Precept of the Seven Buddhas. One translation is as follows: “Refraining from performing

Dominick Scarangelo, PhD, specializes in early-modern and modern Japanese religions. He has taught at the University of Virginia and was the Postdoctoral Scholar in Japanese Buddhism at the Center for Japanese Studies, University of California, Berkeley (2013–14). Currently, he is an international advisor to Rissho Kosei-kai.

all that is bad / And practicing all that is good, / Naturally purifies one’s mind. / This is the teaching of all Buddhas.” The Chinese monk Zhiyi (538–97) opened the *Shorter Cessation and Contemplation*, one of his famous treatises on meditation, with this pithy verse, and the Japanese Zen monk Dōgen (1200–1253) also took up this precept in a chapter of his magnum opus, *The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*. Taking the interpretations of both of these eminent monks into consideration, the precept would seem to provide us with two ways of thinking about purifying the heart-mind. First, on the face of it the precept tells us that wholesomeness of mind is fundamentally a question of how we live, persevering in rejecting unproductive and harmful actions, and alternately engaging in the performance of all manner of beneficial, edifying, and ethical actions. The reverse would also seem to be true, however. When our mind is pure, our actions become the actualization of enlightenment: we naturally refrain from harmful actions and instead spontaneously cultivate all that is good. □

Buddhist Meditation, Christian Contemplation, and Their Various Uses

by Peter Feldmeier

In the modern world we find popular movements engaging either Buddhism or Christianity and sometimes uniting them in ways that are both questionable and inspiring.

Most religions have contemplative or meditative practices, and many have a variety of them that serve different but mutually reinforcing aims. As a general rule, these practices are widely thought to be among the most transformative activities within those religions.

Within Theravada Buddhism, there are two meditative strains, one that seeks mental absorption and the other seeking wisdom. This first strain is known by several terms, such as *samatha* (calm), *samādhi* (concentration), or *jhana* (meditation). Buddhaghosa, in his famous *Visuddhimagga*, lists forty traditional meditational subjects, each carrying possibilities of levels of *jhana*. Different subjects are intended to mold the mind variously. For example, one could meditate on various qualities of the Buddha, and these would infuse the

mind with skillful traits and create a deeper love and respect for the Buddha. Another involves meditating on a decomposing corpse, which infuses the mind with detachment from one's body. A particularly important group of meditations is collectively known as the *brahma-vihāras*, or divine abiding practices of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.

In the Theravada tradition, such meditations are intrinsically associated with the eighth part of the Eightfold Path, right concentration. These meditations are crucial, as they strengthen the mind and purify it to some extent. Concentration practices are not, however, curative. While utterly wholesome and important, they can only suppress mental hindrances and toxins and cannot eradicate them. The only curative

meditational practices are those directly associated with wisdom (*paññā*), also known as insight (*vipassanā*). Wisdom meditations direct the meditator to experience his or her conditioned existence directly so as to penetrate the insights of selflessness (*anattā*), impermanence (*anicca*), and universal suffering or dissatisfaction (*dukkha*). Watching, without identification, the arising and dissipation of physical, emotional, and mental formations, the meditator sees with direct experience that there is no self and nothing to cling to. Ultimately the goal of insight practice is to attain nirvana, or absolute awakening.

One of the most interesting related phenomena in the West has been applying Buddhist insight practice to pain management and physical healing. In the 1970s Jon Kabat-Zinn, a professor of medicine at the University of Massachusetts, became involved with several Buddhist teachers, through whom he learned the wisdom practice of moment-to-moment mindfulness. In 1979 he founded the Stress Management Clinic at the medical school, where he adapted this Buddhist practice toward teaching patients with chronic pain how to deal with their condition. His eight-week course, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), removed all associations with Buddhism and took on a purely scientific expression. Some of his patients who took this course healed remarkably quickly and others with chronic pain learned how to live more flourishing lives by significantly reducing their identification with

Peter Feldmeier, PhD, holds the Murray/Bacik Endowed Chair of Catholic Studies at the University of Toledo, Ohio. He has written extensively on Christian spirituality, mysticism, comparative theology, and Buddhist-Christian dialogue. The author of seven books, among his most recent are *Encounters in Faith: Christianity in Interreligious Dialogue* (Anselm Academic, 2011), *Dhammapada: The Way of Truth* (Buddhist Publication Society, 2013), and *Christian Spirituality* (Anselm Academic, 2015). His forthcoming book is *The Christian Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

their pain. Kabat-Zinn's first book, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* (Delta Trade Paperbacks, 1991), detailed the practice. In 1994 he published a follow-up book, *Wherever You Go, There You Are* (Hyperion Books), which became an international best-seller. By the late 1990s MBSR clinics had been opened nationwide.

Among Buddhists in the United States, there appears to be no challenge to his use of mindfulness meditation for medical purposes, and indeed many Buddhists have celebrated the association of Buddhist wisdom practices and physical and mental well-being. But it is somewhat paradoxical that the very practice intended to lead the aspirant from a conditioned existence into nirvana is now stripped of that end and is used here simply as a way for managing pain.

Christian Prayer and Contemplation

The psychological use of Buddhist wisdom practice for something other than what it was originally intended has an analogue in Christianity. Like Buddhism, Christianity can understand its meditative practices under two headings. One deals with mental prayer and the other with contemplation. Just as Buddhism has a variety of concentration practices, each for a different aim, Christianity has a number of expressions of mental prayer. For example, one form of prayer known as *lectio divina* (divine reading) is the practice of meditating on scripture. Here one

is not merely trying to learn something inspirational about God through the Bible, as valuable as that can be. Rather, in *lectio divina* one seeks to experience God speaking through the mediation of the text. This is but one form of mental prayer. Other expressions of meditation would include meditating on qualities of Christ and his grace, such as the Sacred Heart devotion. The Christian use of the sacraments can be understood as a highly symbolic expression of mental prayer as well.

According to the contemplative tradition, these forms of prayer are excellent but suffer one great limitation: they are experiences of God restricted to some extent by one's *natural* use of the mind. In Christianity, God is widely believed to transcend anything the mind can think. Thomas Aquinas regularly defined God as Absolute Mystery, and Augustine coined the pithy expression "Si comprehendis non est Deus," meaning "If you understand it, it is not God."

Contemplation, as the term is typically used, expresses a kind of prayer that negates all concepts and attends to God as God is. Gregory of Nyssa's classic spiritual masterpiece *The Life of Moses* describes various levels of spiritual attainment, using Moses as a model. Moses's most profound experience of God took place on the top of Mount Sinai, where the peak of the mountain was covered in a thick cloud. Gregory called this the "dark cloud where God was" (*Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson [Paulist Press, 1978], 95). It is in this darkness

where the soul unites with God. It is not that the soul doesn't know it is experiencing God. Quite the contrary, it recognizes the Divine in an absolute way but not conceptually. Teresa of Avila describes "the soul being suspended in such a way that it is completely outside itself" (*The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, vol. 1 [ICS Publications, 1987], 105). And John of the Cross characterizes it as the "secret knowledge of God" (*The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez [ICS Publications, 1991], 582).

Contemplation, as understood here, has a long pedigree in the Christian tradition and enjoys the support of most of the greatest Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic mystics. The contemplative tradition is also quite clear that this kind of prayer is not for beginners. In the East, the great monastic figure Evagrius Ponticus warned that texts describing such prayer should not even be shown to those who are not fully developed in prayer (Irénée Hausherr, *Penthos: The Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East*, trans. Anselm Hufstader [Cistercian Publications, 1982], 72). In Orthodoxy's classical collection of spiritual texts, the *Philokalia*, we find eight stages of prayer, only the last of which are that of contemplation (*The Philokalia*, trans. and ed. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, 4 vols. [Faber & Faber, 1979–95], 3:108–43). In this book we also read, "Divine contemplation, which only those established in a high degree

began in the mid-1970s, when the monastic priests Thomas Keating, M. Basil Pennington, and William Meninger began what is known as the centering prayer movement. Here one is taught how to lovingly and silently present oneself before God. One is also taught when to practice, for how long, and how to deal with such things as distracting thoughts. Contemplation is the direct experience of God, and thus the initiators of the movement argued that centering prayer was not necessarily contemplation per se. Rather, it is the spiritual posture that leads to mystical contemplation, and often relatively quickly (Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* [Element Books, 1986], 5).

of perfection can safely approach, is not good for those who are still immature” (ibid., 4:369). In the *Philokalia*, the great master Gregory Palamas writes, “Some people, unaware of the harm which will result, counsel anybody they happen to meet to practice this discipline alone, so that their intellect may grow accustomed to being mindful of God and may come to love it. But this is not possible. . . . [Those who do so] will never make any progress during their whole lives” (ibid., 4:268–69).

The Christian mystics of the West, from the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* to Teresa of Avila to John of the Cross, also share the same concern: one must be deeply invested in the spiritual life and necessarily invited by God to enter contemplative prayer. Saint John describes signs such as mental prayer drying up, a deep compulsion for silent communion with God, and profound solicitude toward God (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, *Collected Works of St. John*, 189–91; 395–96).

In spite of the Christian tradition’s care and even warnings about attempting a contemplative practice before its time, today contemplative practices are widely taught in many Catholic and some Protestant churches. The movement

Somewhat like Kabat-Zinn and others using Buddhist wisdom meditations to attain a goal different from the tradition’s original intent, the centering prayer movement often describes its goals as varied from the classical tradition. Thomas Keating regularly frames centering prayer in terms of its psychological effects, such as healing emotional wounds, uniting the unconscious mind with the conscious one, and transforming the narcissistic or false self (*Open Mind, Open Heart*, 93–108; *The Better Part* [Continuum, 2000], 107). It is also regularly depicted as reducing stress and facilitating a healthier mind and body.

While the classical Christian tradition is wary of initiating a contemplative posture before its time, those highly involved in the centering prayer movement are confident that such “jump-starting” of this spirituality has few liabilities and many assets. Personally, I have met Christians who have practiced this form of prayer for years and have, in doing so, become bona fide contemplatives. Yet the warnings of the tradition ought to be seriously attended to. I believe the greatest danger in beginning such a practice too early is that one might mistake the actual experience in the moment for something particularly spiritually

elevated when it is not. Taking a mental or emotional rest is not “contemplation” but may be imagined to be something like mystically resting in God’s grace. Or worse, one could imagine something more fantastical. The great modern spiritual writer Thomas Merton warned: “There is a danger of *illumination* and false mysticism when those who are easily swayed by fancy and emotion take too seriously the vivid impulses they experience in prayer, and imagine the voice of their own exalted feeling is really the voice of God” (*Spiritual Direction and Meditation* [Liturgical Press, 1960], 67).

The Christian Use of Vipassanā

In the late 1980s, Mary Jo Meadow and the Carmelite priests Kevin Culligan and Daniel Chowning, all of whom had been trained in *vipassanā* meditation, began to notice affinities between the spirituality of John of the Cross and the aims of Buddhist insight practices. They started offering retreats intended to introduce *vipassanā* meditation to Christians and show its alignment to the spiritual aims of Saint John. In 1992 Meadow started Resources in Ecumenical Spirituality (RES), a nonprofit organization designed to advance this program more robustly.

It certainly seems counterintuitive to align these two spiritualities. Buddhist insight practices are exactly aimed at deconstructing the self by direct experience so as to come to the realization that there is no perduring self, while Saint John of the Cross’s contemplative agenda is to encounter a loving God so intimately and directly that the soul becomes utterly united to God. But they are not as far apart as they may seem. John of the Cross writes, “To come to the knowledge you have not, you must go by a way in which you know not. To come to the possession you have not, you must go by a way in which you possess not. To come to be what you are not, you must go by a way in which you are not. . . . For to go from

the all to the all, you must deny yourself of all in all” (*Collected Works of St. John*, 150–51). In John’s famous sketch of reaching the summit of Mount Carmel, an image for union with God, he writes, “The path of Mount Carmel, the perfect spirit: nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, and even on the Mount: nothing” (*ibid.*, 111).

Central to Saint John’s message is that union with God demands complete self-emptying, and this for two reasons. The first is that any clinging to self-interest undermines the possibility for divine union. Second, as noted above, God is absolute mystery and absolutely transcendent, and thus union with God can be found only when all conceptualizations are let go of. In Christianity, of course, there is both a soul and an eternal God. But to find this eternal God of mystery, the soul has to renounce everything it consciously is. The paradox is that the soul knows itself only in that mystery while clinging to nothing.

What Meadow and these Carmelite priests found is that the very technology of Buddhist *vipassanā* practice facilitated the kind of nonattachment to any concept of self that Saint John was demanding. This initial insight led me to do more research on the subject and ultimately drove my doctoral dissertation and my first book, *Christianity Looks East: Comparing the Spiritualities of John of the Cross and Buddhaghosa* (Paulist Press, 2006). I had also briefly been on a retreat leadership team for RES. Saint John frames his spirituality in four related dynamics: the active night of the senses, the passive night of the senses, the active night of the spirit, and the passive night of the spirit. The nights of the senses refers to ascetical practices and the dynamic of dis-identifying with any gratifications or aversions one would experience in life. The active night is what one cultivates, while the passive night is what God’s grace does in this regard. The nights of the spirit deal with entering a nonattached contemplative posture

of self-emptiness before God. Again, the active night is what the soul does, while the passive night refers to God’s infused graces of contemplation.

My greatest concern with the RES agenda, and why I eventually abandoned my participation in it, is that some of the teachers blurred the distinctions between active and passive nights and tended to teach not only that Christian mysticism holds that there is no self but also that Buddhist aims and Christian aims were the same. My research confirmed extraordinary alignments among the active nights of Saint John and *vipassanā* meditation. But this is only as far as that could go. Most clearly in Saint John, not only is there a real soul, but the soul’s intent is for a loving union with a loving God. All of this is wrapped in mystery and beyond conceptualization for sure, but as noted above, the Christian mystical tradition witnesses to a kind of knowing that is outside of *natural* conceptualizations. Saint John’s most famous poem, “The Dark Night,” begins “One dark night, fired with love’s urgent longings—ah, the sheer grace!—I went out unseen, my house being all stilled.” The poem ends with “I abandoned and forgot myself, laying my face on my Beloved; all things ceased; I went out from myself, leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies” (*Collected Works of St. John*, 358–59).

Final Word

In the modern world we find popular movements engaging either Buddhism or Christianity and sometimes uniting them in ways that are both questionable and inspiring. The Buddha was little interested in pain management, and Christian contemplation was not to be exported wholesale and certainly not intended to heal neurotic psyches. Certainly, too, the Buddha could never have intended insight practices to facilitate mystical union with a loving God. Nonetheless, with the help of the Buddha,

non-Buddhists are coming to discover possibilities for his wisdom in their own lives. And I am convinced the popularization of Christian contemplative exercises has allowed some laypeople in very active lives to come to know God’s dwelling in the depths of their souls. ≥

Bibliography

- Buddhaghosa, Bhadantacariya. *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, 5th edition. Translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991.
- Culligan, Kevin, Mary Jo Meadow, and Daniel Chowning. *Purifying the Heart: Buddhist Insight Meditation for Christians*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1994.
- Driscoll, Jeremy. *Spiritual Progress: Studies in the Spirituality of Late Antiquity and Early Monasticism*. Rome: Studia Anselmiana, 1994.
- Meadow, Mary Jo, ed. *Christian Insight Meditation: Following in the Footsteps of John of the Cross*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2007.
- Merton, Thomas. *What Is Contemplation?* Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1950.
- Pennington, Basil. *Centering Prayer: Renewing an Ancient Christian Practice*. New York: Image Books, 1982.

Meditation without Borders: Christians Who Engage in Meditation Practices from Other Religious Traditions

by Leo D. Lefebure

For many Christians, the practice of meditation has led to a renewal of their faith and practice.

Meditation practices arise within particular religious traditions, but once their structures are established and presented publicly, they become part of the heritage of the human community and may be practiced by persons from very different religious backgrounds or from no religious background. From ancient times, meditation practices that arose in South Asia have traveled the world, shaping the lives of persons in distant lands and often receiving new interpretations as they moved from one context to another. In recent years, many Christians have explored meditation practices that come from other religious traditions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism. Some have gone quite deeply into these practices under the guidance of respected religious leaders and have received authorization to teach these forms of meditation to others. This essay will examine some of these explorations in relation to yoga, *vipassana* (insight) and *metta* (loving-kindness) practice, and Zen.

Christians Practicing Yoga

The tradition of yoga goes back to the very early period of South Asian culture. It has long shaped many different religious traditions in this vast subcontinent, finding classic expression in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and in the

Bhagavad Gita. The ancient Indian tradition distinguishes four major forms of yoga: *karma* yoga focuses on proper action in accordance with one's Dharma (duty); *bhakti* yoga cultivates devotion to God; *jnana* yoga seeks transformational insight into saving truth; and *raja* yoga develops concentration of the mind as a path to realizing oneness with the ultimate. *Raja* yoga draws upon the physical and mental practices of *hatha* yoga. When contemporary Christians practice yoga, it is often the discipline of *hatha* yoga that they engage most directly.

While the interpretation of yoga by Patanjali has been immensely influential, there is no one philosophy of yoga, and practitioners in India have

long approached the practice of yoga from diverse theoretical perspectives. Christians who practice yoga may or may not be aware of the sophisticated philosophical and religious reflections of Indian thinkers. Many Christians seek physical and emotional benefits without attending to the intellectual context of yoga in Indian thought.

One of the pioneers in the Christian exploration of yoga was Bede Griffiths, a Catholic Benedictine monk who moved from England to India in 1955, immersed himself in the way of life of a Hindu renunciant, or *sannyasi*, and drew aspects of Hindu practice into his life as a Catholic monk. Meditation in the yogic tradition played a crucial role in his development, as he explains:

How can I get to know myself? Not by thinking, for thinking only reflects my conscious being, but by meditating. Meditation goes beyond the conscious mind into the unconscious. In meditation I can become aware of the ground of my being in matter, in life, in human consciousness. (*Essential Writings*, ed. Thomas Matus [Orbis Books, 2004], 43)

For Griffiths as a Catholic monk, the practice of meditation was a way of entering more deeply into the mystery of the Holy Trinity, seeking the goal of union with the ultimate that is beyond all names: "Thus the *sannyasi* is called to go beyond all religion, beyond every human institution, beyond every scripture and creed, till coming to that which every

Leo D. Lefebure is the Matteo Ricci, SJ, Professor of Theology at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. He is the author of numerous works, including True and Holy: Christian Scripture and Other Religions. He is also the co-author with Peter Feldmeier of The Path of Wisdom: A Christian Commentary on the Dhammapada. He is an honorary research fellow of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and a Trustee Emeritus of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions.

religion and scripture and ritual signifies but can never name” (ibid., 98). For Griffiths, this did not mean abandonment or rejection of Christian faith; rather, it was the culmination of the spiritual journey into God: “Yet when we say that the sannyasi goes beyond religion, this does not mean that the sannyasi rejects any religion. I have not felt called to reject anything that I have learned of God or of Christ or of the Church” (ibid.). For Griffiths, as for many other Christians, the practice of a form of meditation coming from another religious tradition did not contradict Christian faith but led to a greater depth and intensity of the experience of God.

One leader in teaching the Christian practice of yoga in the United States and Canada is Thomas Ryan, an American Paulist priest who spent time with Griffiths in India. Inspired by Griffiths to probe deeply into the resources of yoga, Ryan received training at the Kripalu Yoga Center in Lenox, Massachusetts. Ryan notes a far-reaching irony: Hindus and Buddhists who believe in rebirth view our current body as simply one of many in our trajectory, but they have devoted tremendous attention to the posture and movement of the body in meditation. Christians who believe in the resurrection view the body as an everlasting element in our identity, but they have traditionally devoted far less attention to the posture and movement of the body in meditation. Many Christians have experienced an unhealthy split between their body and their spiritual life. In response, Ryan seeks to integrate

heart and body together as a way of opening to God. Ryan explains the relation in yoga practice between the quest for God and the physical practice of meditation:

Seekers of conscious union with the divine in various ancient civilizations subjected to careful study the repercussions of various bodily gestures and attitudes on the spiritual in our nature. They discovered, for example, that by keeping the body still you calm the mind; that by concentrating your attention, you settle the body; that by certain methods of breath-control, the mind becomes quiet and focused. This evolved a system of practices: physical postures (*asanas*), breath-control (*pranayama*), and mental focusing on what is happening in the body-mind when one enters into and holds the posture. Together, these things make up hatha yoga. (*Prayer*

of Heart and Body: Meditation and Yoga as Christian Spiritual Practice [Paulist Press, 1995], 137)

Ryan combines practice of the physical postures (*asanas*) of *hatha* yoga with traditional Christian prayers such as the Lord's Prayer and the Prayer of Saint Francis (available on DVD: Thomas Ryan, *Yoga Prayer: An Embodied Christian Spiritual Practice* [Sounds True, 2005]). Ryan relates the practice of yoga to Christian faith that God has become incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. The incarnation reveals to Christians: “All flesh is holy and the ground of all human endeavors is sacred. It is in these bodies that we work out our salvation” (*Prayer of Heart*, 145). Thus, Ryan explains, there is an inner harmony between Christian faith and yoga: “What we are doing is discovering in yoga a concrete application of our incarnational faith. The use of bodily postures to open us to God is already well-established in our own

practice. . . . Yoga is a way to help us fully inhabit our bodies and to begin using them to more fully actualize what God calls us to be” (ibid.).

Recently, some Hindus have criticized those who engage in the practice of yoga apart from the traditional context of Hinduism. It is important to respect the integrity of other religious traditions. Nonetheless, Christian practitioners of yoga can point to the wide variety of forms of yoga from different traditions in South Asia as offering a precedent for followers of other religious paths today to take up the ancient way.

Christians Practicing Insight (*Vipassana*) and Loving-Kindness (*Metta*) Meditation

Buddhist practice of meditation has a close relation to the ancient practice of yoga. The noted historian of religion Mircea Eliade recalled that Shakyamuni Buddha proclaimed that he had “seen the ancient way and followed it.” Eliade commented, “The ‘ancient,’ timeless way was that of liberation, of nondeath, and it was also the way of Yoga” (*Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, trans. Willard R. Trask [Princeton University Press, 1973], 162). Eliade cited the comment of Émile Senart: “It was on the terrain of Yoga that the Buddha arose; whatever innovations he was able to introduce into it, the mold of Yoga was that in which his thought was formed” (ibid.).

The Theravada Buddhist tradition has long taught the practice of insight (*vipassana*) meditation, together with the complementary practice of loving-kindness (*metta*) meditation. The *brahma-viharas*, or dwelling places, of the Buddha (loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity) resonate deeply with the Christian tradition. The seeking of insight into one’s present situation and the extending of loving-kindness and compassion to oneself

and to all creatures bear strong similarities to the values of the Christian tradition. In the early church, Evagrius Ponticus taught Christians to pray by emptying their minds of all thoughts and desires. He predicted that an emotional upheaval might well ensue, but he promised that meditators would come to a state of peace and tranquillity that cannot be obtained in any other way. The Hesychast tradition of Byzantine Orthodox Christianity sought *hesuchia* (“rest” or “quiet” in Greek) by following the breath and trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit. While this tradition is in many ways profoundly different from Theravada Buddhist meditation practice, there are clear similarities. These areas of shared or overlapping spiritual wisdom provide a space for Christians to encounter Buddhist meditation and appropriate it into their Christian faith and practice.

The Carmelite tradition of Catholic spirituality has long valued silent meditation and the letting go of all thoughts and ideas about God. A number of Catholics from the Carmelite tradition have probed these Theravada practices very deeply. Kevin G. Culligan, Mary Jo Meadow, and Daniel Chowning have integrated insight and loving-kindness meditation into a spiritual practice inspired by Saint John of the Cross, a sixteenth-century

Spanish Catholic mystical leader who called for the purification of disordered appetites, intellect, memory, and will. Culligan, Meadow, and Chowning compare the teachings and practices of John of the Cross to those of Shakyamuni Buddha for training the mind. They indicate that “by offering an ancient Buddhist meditation practice within a Christian prayer tradition, we hope to teach our readers a process of inner purification that we believe can lead to deeper Christian faith in this world and the direct vision of God in the next” (*Purifying the Heart: Buddhist Insight Meditation for Christians* [Crossroad, 1994], 13).

The Carmelites begin with Jesus’s beatitude: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). Culligan, Meadow, and Chowning comment, “Jesus teaches that we must purify our entire interior life if we want the happiness of seeing God” (*Purifying the Heart*, 23). They then cite the words of Shakyamuni Buddha: “When you are cleansed of all impurity and the stain of all sinful passions is gone, you can enter the blessed abode of the saints” (ibid., 29). They note that the Buddha taught meditation as “the practice that cleanses the heart. It purifies the heart of disordered desires, hateful thoughts, harmful memories, fear and other negative emotions, and, in their place, engenders sharp mental awareness, clear understanding, strength of will, and attentiveness to each passing moment” (ibid.). They observe that John of the Cross describes the painful but healing process of purification of desires, thoughts, emotions, and memories. Thus the Carmelites “bring these two venerable traditions—Buddhist meditation and the Christian spirituality of St. John of the Cross—together into an ascetical practice we call Christian insight meditation” (ibid., 30).

In a companion volume, Mary Jo Meadow describes the complementary practice of loving-kindness meditation,

which extends loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity to oneself, to one's neighbors and friends, to one's enemies, and to all sentient beings (*Gentling the Heart: Buddhist Loving-Kindness Practice for Christians* [Crossroad, 1994]). The ancient Buddhist practices find an important place in contemporary Christian spirituality.

Christians Practicing Zen

A number of Christians have entered deeply into the practice of Zen and have found their Christian life and practice enriched. In Japan a German Jesuit, Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle, was a significant pioneer in exploring Zen Buddhist meditation practice in the mid-twentieth century. He went to Japan in the 1930s as a missionary, remained in Japan during World War II, and survived the nuclear attack on Hiroshima. In order to understand Japanese culture better, Enomiya-Lassalle did intensive Zen practice in Japan after World War II and was eventually recognized by his Buddhist teachers, particularly Yamada Koun Roshi, as able to teach Zen. He received the Buddhist name "Enomiya." When Enomiya-Lassalle first began to write about Zen in the 1950s, Vatican officials were concerned

and ordered him not to publish anymore. His Jesuit superiors advised him to obey the Vatican directives, but they also encouraged him to be faithful to his own spiritual path: "Go on quietly sitting." Within a few years, the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) opened the Catholic Church to better interreligious relations. Enomiya-Lassalle then led Zen retreats for Christians around the world. In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, he published *Zen Meditation for Christians* (trans. John C. Maraldo [Open Court, 1974]). After explaining the historical background of Zen and the physical posture of *zazen*, he stressed the courage

needed to let go of one's usual position: "If you have enough courage to plunge into the adventure of nothingness in spite of your objections, you will soon realize that the other shore to which you are swimming, as it were, places you upon a ground more solid than that which you left behind" (*ibid.*, 13).

Enomiya-Lassalle notes that some Christians may practice *zazen* "as a means toward spiritual recollection, that is, as a preparation for Christian meditation, be it discursive or object-less" (*ibid.*, 150). But he also notes another approach, which is more radical: "Or else you can practice *zazen* itself as a type of Christian meditation" (*ibid.*). In this approach, Lassalle notes an important difference: "A tension between subject and object marks Christian meditation but is absent from *zazen*" (*ibid.*, 151).

Some Zen Buddhists have criticized the Christian practice of Zen, calling this *gedo zen* (heretical Zen). Enomiya-Lassalle's teacher, however, offered a different perspective. Yamada Koun Roshi explained that when Christians asked him if they had to give up Christianity to practice Zen, "I always answer them that they need not worry about forsaking or losing their Christianity. I tell them that Zen is not a religion and they do not have to think of it as such, in the sense of a system of beliefs and concepts and practices that demands exclusive allegiance" (quoted in Ruben L. F. Habito, *Total Liberation: Zen Spirituality and the Social Dimension* [Orbis Books, 1989], 85). Enomiya-Lassalle believed that for many Christians, Zen could help them find a deeper experience of God: "Zen, because it is not bound to any particular worldview, can also help Christians come to an experience of God without compromising their Christian faith" (*Living in the New Consciousness*, ed. Roland Ropers, trans. Paul Shepherd [Shambhala, 1988], 70). For many Christians, the practice of meditation has led to a renewal of their faith and practice. □

The Development and Significance of Meditation in Buddhism

by Kenryo Minowa

When, during meditation, we experience a state in which there is no judging, comprehending, or discriminating (the state of nondiscriminative wisdom), a feeling of great joy arises in our mind, and we could even say that the barriers between ourselves and others fall away.

There exists in Buddhism a tradition of scrutinizing the mind, a concern inherited from ancient India. Here, I would first like to describe meditation as it has been transmitted within Theravada Buddhism and then touch on how it entered Mahayana Buddhism. Finally, I will take the opportunity to offer my own views regarding the significance of meditation as it has been handed down in Buddhism.

Meditation in Theravada Buddhism can basically be classified into two major categories: *samatha* (calm), which quiets the workings of the mind, and *vipassanā* (insight), which observes things as they actually are. These methods are presumed to date back to the Indus Valley civilization (ca. 2600 BCE–ca. 1900 BCE), and at root both are related to fixing the mind on some single object. This must have been knowledge derived from personal experience. Fixing the mind on something is known as *yoga*, which the Yoga Sutra, the scripture of the Yoga school of Indian philosophy, defines as “control over the actions of the mind.” This means to calm the workings of the mind by fixing it on some object.

As Shakyamuni himself told us, during the period before he attained supreme enlightenment, he practiced this method to quieten the mind. One

of his teachers, Ārāḷa Kālāma, taught him how to achieve the sphere of nothingness, where what is sensed is only that nothing at all exists, while another, Uddaka Rāmaputta, taught him to reach the sphere of neither perception nor nonperception, where only the minutest workings of the mind remain. These two states were later combined as one of the “nine stages of mental abiding” to calm the mind, set out in a meditation text called *Yogācāra-bhūmi*.

The important point in observing the mind, then, is to fix it on a single thing. Buddhism calls this *samādhi* (concentration). The famed Chinese monk Xuanzang (602–64), translator of the *Yogācāra-bhūmi*, said that *samādhi* was, essentially, making the mind one-pointed (*ekāgratā*) by fixing it on a single object.

Observing the Mind: the Basis

The simplest method of meditation is to focus the mind on breathing in and breathing out. This is called “mindfulness of inhalation and exhalation” and is the most basic method. The human mind views thinking about something as being its job, and so in reality it quickly starts thinking about a variety of things. Not to do so is the epitome of “easier said

than done.” Even if the mind wanders, it is still possible to bring it back and resume full observation of the object. (It does not even matter if it does not come back—there is a method for continually observing that as well.) With

Kenryo Minowa, PhD, is a Professor in the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, the University of Tokyo. Prior to 2010, he served as a Professor in the Faculty of Letters at Aichi Gakuin University. He received his PhD in literature from the University of Tokyo in 1999. His fields of specialization are Indian literature, Indian philosophy, and Buddhist studies. He was awarded the Hajime Nakamura Award in 2000. Dr. Minowa has authored and translated many books on Buddhism.

repeated practice the mind gradually calms until it eventually arrives at a mental state where there is a sense of seeking something as well as there being feelings of joy and comfort. These stages are called in Pali *jhānas* (states of concentration) that lead ultimately to the stage of a cessation of perception and feeling (*nirodha-samāpatti*) where nothing at all stirs in the mind. But if one asks if this then solves the problem of the cycle of rebirth, the answer is no.

Although it is good to dwell within these states of concentration, when one returns to normal circumstances, various mental actions start up, just as before. Therefore, Shakyamuni thought that there must be another way to overcome suffering and distress, and he moved further along the path with a method of observation of the mind slightly different in direction. Present-day Theravada Buddhism teaches that this became what is known as *vipassanā* (insight).

However, a comparison of the form of meditation practiced in Theravada Buddhism today with descriptions in the Pali Mahasatipatthana Sutra is actually a method of observation called the “foundation of mindfulness” (*satipaṭṭhāna*).

Fundamentally, I believe we can safely say that what is nowadays called *vipassanā* (insight meditation) is the same as this *satipaṭṭhāna*. However, the various methods for identifying in the mind concepts such as “all is emptiness,” “all is impermanent,” and “all is nonself” are also referred to as “insight.” I will discuss this in further detail below.

The objects on which the mind focuses when observing its workings were called *kammaṭṭhāna* (bases of action), that is, objects of meditation. In the early period, they were divided into four types—the workings of the physical body (*kāya*), feelings or sensations such as pleasure and pain (*vedanā*), the workings of the mind (*citta*), and mental phenomena common to all (*dhammā*, generally the five hindrances and the five aggregates). The workings of the body include all movements, including breathing. Movement may seem a strange object of observation, but in fact all actions, starting with that of walking, were treated as objects that could be used. Basically, anything could be used to fix the mind on some object; people even placed an earthen disk directly in front of their eyes and

fixed their mind on that. Eventually words also came to be used as objects, and reciting short words and attaching the mind to phrases were seen as being basically the same as this. The reciting of Amida’s name (*nembutsu*) or chanting the *o-daimoku*, so prevalent in East Asia, serves the same sort of function.

Two Types of Insight

Let us now look at insight in a bit more detail. *Insight* (Pali, *vipassanā*) means to observe closely and involves watching all the actions of the mind. This method is essentially no different from *samatha* meditation, but what we should realize is that here the objects of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*) are not restricted to just one thing.

It seems that the Indic word for *insight* was at first only a verb. In the Upanishads, a collection of spiritual and philosophical texts, there are examples of the construction “to regard A as B,” and it is thought that this way of observation was also introduced into Buddhism. A method called “mindfulness of emptiness,” to which Mahayana Buddhism was later to attach great importance, and which consisted of contemplating the phrase “all is emptiness” over and over again, can be considered an extension of this. Since this actually fixes the mind on the concept of the mind itself being the object, functionally it is none other than the working of *samatha*.

What then is *vipassanā* (insight) in relation to *samatha* (quietening)?

We can talk about the contemplation that leads to enlightenment, but when that contemplation progresses to distinguishing between mind (*nāma*) and material form (*rūpa*), it is called insight meditation. To distinguish between mind and form means making a distinction between the object that is grasped and the workings of the mind that are doing the grasping. This comes, for example, the moment—when you are observing your breathing and following the inhalation and exhalation—that you are visited by the thought, “This air flowing like the wind is the object I am aware of, and this awareness is a working of the mind that seems to have a name.” Here *nāma* is certainly a faculty of language and is a mental action that judges, understands, and discriminates, and *rūpa* is the object being captured, both appearance and form.

In fact, it now becomes possible to observe the divisions of the subtlest workings of the mind and perceive those known as the five aggregates. These are the functions or aspects that constitute sentient beings: material form (*rūpa*), sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental formations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāna*). We become aware of things as we receive stimulus from the

outside world. Images form as objects that can be grasped by the mind, and it becomes clear that we are determining that they are such and such.

What then becomes a problem is the workings of the mind that determine this as “such and such.” Immediately before this mental action (that is, thought) arises, we can perceive that thoughts from the past, of memories or studies, are exerting some sort of influence (if not, we would not be able to say what these images are). At any rate, the perceived object is pictured in the mind and the language faculty is activated, triggering the judgment that it is such and such.

In fact, these mental actions of determining, comprehending, and discriminating that something is such and such were understood to bring about the next reaction of the mind. Let us say, for example, that someone has said something bad about you. First you comprehend the details of what was said and determine it was an insult. Then you feel something unpleasant that you don’t like it, or perhaps you feel a spurt of anger and respond, “What did you just say?” These reactions triggered in us all are a daily occurrence. Thus our everyday troubles and suffering arise from the mental actions of determining, comprehending, and discriminating. The Sutta Nippata (verse 734) tells us “All suffering grows out of consciousness; with the cessation of consciousness, there is no more pain.” We know therefore that consciousness was understood to be the cause of our troubles and suffering.

Insight to Prevent Consciousness from Arising

How then do we ensure that such consciousness—in other words, the actions of determining, comprehending, and discriminating—does not arise? It is here we find the true value of *vipassanā*—to

make everything that’s registered through the five sense organs the object of mindfulness.

A small note of caution is necessary here. Two practices exist for when you become aware of an object. You do so by either using words or not using them. Not using words means not causing the faculty of language to be brought into play; so it is more accurate to describe becoming aware of something without using words as turning the mind to it, or directing the attention to it. This is exactly what is now called *vipassanā* and what was called *satipaṭṭhāna* in the early Buddhist writings.

In this connection, it was Buddhist scholars who asserted that one could perceive something without using words. There is a large discrepancy here with the Vaisheshika and Nyanya schools of Hinduism, which understood cognition to always be accompanied by the language faculty. At any rate, all objects are perceived by being registered through the five sense organs.

Whereas *samatha* was a practice to calm the mind through single-minded attention to one object, in *vipassanā* attention is focused on multiple objects, one after another. Ultimately all the sense functions registered by the physical body are the objects of meditation, and if we are able to direct the mind, a mysterious condition comes into being within it, where judgment, comprehension, and discrimination do not arise, yet an awareness of seeing and hearing exists. This is to enter the mental state known as “nondiscriminating.” At such a time we experience the feeling that there is no distinction between ourselves and the world, that we have become one with all others. Now we are rid of all self-centered thoughts, and an attitude of compassion and loving-kindness toward others arises naturally.

The most important point about *vipassanā* meditation is this directing of attention (“being mindful” may be a better way of putting it). The “mindfulness”

that so many people associate with Buddhist meditation these days is actually an expression of this.

Vipassanā Practice through an Awareness of Words

As it happens, words are usually at work in our daily lives, and even when we are being mindful, words intervene. In fact, at such times we become aware of how we are judging, comprehending, and discriminating things. For example, if we have pain we are aware of “pain,” and if we itch we are aware of “itch.” When we become mindful of things in this way, we can overcome the ensuing emotions and lessen the extent to which they can dominate us, just as we can when words do not intervene.

This is where the practical benefits of *vipassanā* meditation exist. That is to say, by making the feelings that arise in our daily lives the objects of our attention, we are enabled to remove ourselves, little by little, from the domination of the emotions.

This also means temporarily stopping the mind from judging, comprehending, and discerning. In the Arrow Sutra, Shakyamuni speaks of being struck painfully by two arrows. The first arrow refers to the painful experiences we encounter in the course of our lives, while the second represents our reaction to them. It is possible to avoid the second arrow. In other words, if we hear something unpleasant, we might limit ourselves to understanding it without allowing it to make us feel unpleasant. Or if we see something beautiful, we might merely accept its beauty without yearning to possess it. This is clearly a position from which we can rid ourselves of anxiety and suffering.

In the Indian world, the objects of observation were called the four foundations of mindfulness: mindfulness of the body (*kāya*), mindfulness of feelings such as pleasure and pain (*vedanā*),

mindfulness of the mind or consciousness (*citta*), and mindfulness of mental phenomena common to all (*dhammā*, generally the five hindrances and the five aggregates). In any case, the goal was to condition the mind by practicing *vipassanā* so as not to give rise to anxiety or suffering. Strictly speaking, the practice had the intention of overcoming both pain and pleasure. Actually, conditioning the mind that way is not easy. Even the Pali scriptures do not say that emotions, such as pain and pleasure, will disappear through *vipassanā* practice. They state only that this practice enables people to endure them. This is indicative of the profundity of Buddhism, based on reality and a deep insight into the human mind.

Mahayana Meditation

I would now like to turn from Theravada meditation to look at how meditation is practiced in Mahayana Buddhism. The optimum materials for understanding Mahayana meditation are early-period sutras known from ancient times, the so-called contemplation sutras and meditation sutras. The contemplation sutras include the Samadhi Sea Sutra (Ch., *Guan fo sanmei hai jing*), translated by Buddhahadra (359–429); the Sutra on the Contemplation of Maitreya Bodhisattva’s Ascent to Rebirth in the Tushita Heaven (Ch., *Guan Mile pusa shangsheng Doushuaitian jing*), translated by Juqu Jingsheng (fifth century); and the Samantabhadra Contemplation Sutra (Ch., *Guan Puxian pusa xingfa jing*) translated by Dharmamitra (356–442). The meditation sutras were those such as the Dharmatāla Meditation Sutra (Ch., *Damoduoluo chanjing*), translated by Buddhahadra, and the Sutra of Sitting Dhyana Samadhi (Ch., *Zuochan sanmei jing*), translated by Kumārajīva (344–413).

I do not believe that the fundamental principles of meditation in Mahayana Buddhism differ from those

in Theravada. To preempt my conclusion, the Theravada traditions of *vipassanā* (insight) and *samatha* (calming) remain fundamentally alive and intact. So does this mean there are absolutely no features unique to meditation in Mahayana?

Mahayana practices directing the mind toward a single object, the principle of *samādhi*, without change. In the case, too, of *samatha*, a meditation to calm the workings of the mind, the mind is joined to a single object, as it is also with *vipassanā*. As far as choosing an object for meditation and directing the attention toward it, there is absolutely no difference between Theravada and Mahayana.

However, from the standpoint of the objects of meditation, it is clear that new developments were introduced. Breathing techniques to exercise *qi* (life force, energy) existed in East Asia before the introduction of Buddhism and added new elements to Buddhist practices. I would therefore like to survey Mahayana meditation from two standpoints: the development of objects of meditation and the addition of new elements belonging to the East Asian world.

New Objects of Meditation

1. The Form of the Buddha as an Object of Meditation

I will first consider the evolution of objects of meditation following the advent of Mahayana Buddhism. Typical of those used in Theravada were the forty objects (*kammaṭṭhāna*) introduced in the Pali Visuddhimagga (Path of Purification) by Buddhaghosa (fifth century). The first of the “ten reflections” (*anussati*) listed there is that of the Buddha, the object being specifically mindfulness of his virtues through his ten epithets. The meditator recollected and affirmed these, but however deep his reflection, it never took form as the

figure of the Buddha. In Mahayana, however, the form of the Buddha itself became an object of meditation. There was a great leap here from recollecting the specific words that are the ten epithets of the Buddha to contemplating the form of the Buddha itself in the mind.

This means that the figure of the Buddha came to be used as an object to direct the mind. The object of meditation has thus changed from words to a specific representation. A description of what is thought to be its earliest occurrence appears in the Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sutra (Sutra of the Meditation to Behold the Buddhas), representative of the contemplation sutras. It probably originated around the first century BCE in Central Asia and was the first to teach that the Buddha manifests himself in the minds of practitioners using the distinguishing features of the Buddha's form as an object of meditation.

The sutra speaks of calling to mind the Buddha Amitābha in the Western Pure Land and states, "The Buddha's body is endowed with all the thirty-two marks, he radiates light, he is fine and upstanding beyond compare" (*Taishō Tripitaka* [hereafter *T*] 13, 905b). In other words, practitioners are to hold a concrete figure of the Buddha in mind.

Stimulated by this interest in a concrete form of the Buddha, it was only to be expected that this form would develop into a produced physical object. This is considered to be a factor in the origin of Buddha images, though asking which came first is rather like asking whether the chicken came before the egg.

Nevertheless, research into art history suggests that Buddha images were first produced around the first century CE, which means that the period when distinguishing features of the Buddha's physical body were used as objects of meditation predated it.

The practice of using the form of the Buddha as an object of meditation gradually spread eastward. New sutras appeared at this time that use

not just the form of the Buddha but also depictions of the Pure Land where the Buddha resides. Representative of them is the Sutra on the Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life, also known as the Meditation Sutra.

This sutra introduces sixteen visualizations as objects of meditation: the sun, water, the ground of the Pure Land, the jeweled trees of the Pure Land, and so on. Practitioners envision with all of their attention the setting sun; the entire western direction as water; Amitābha's Pure Land of Sukhavati; and the trees, branches, leaves, and fruits that grow there. It is a method to focus the mind by holding objects clearly in the mind.

The Visuddhimagga speaks of "concentration [*samādhi*] that may be extended" and mentions "concentration where the earth is seen to extend" and "concentration where the water is seen to extend." The sun and water visualizations are a direct extension of the Theravada extended concentration, and the visualizations of Amitābha's realm and the trees that grow there are merely limitations of the objects to which the mind is attached.

However, we should keep in mind that in the Chinese translation of the sutra—though the Chinese character used to express *visualization* is the same as that used to translate *vipassanā*—the

object to which the mind is attached, the object of meditation, is a single thing and is functionally the action of *samatha*, not *vipassanā*. We must be careful here. When we speak of *samatha* and *vipassanā*, we think of *vipassanā* as having as its basis a state of mind where judgment, comprehension, and discernment do not arise, the mental state known as “nondiscriminating,” and where the mind continues to observe the object of meditation, bypassing the language faculty. When limiting the object being observed to just one thing involves *samatha*, considered somewhat different from *vipassanā*, there is a clear contrast between the two. Therefore I will clearly distinguish between *vipassanā* in the strict sense and visualization.

2. The Practice of Chanting the Name of a Buddha

One of the changes that occurred in Buddhism when it was transmitted to China was the introduction of reciting the name of a buddha over and over again (Jpn., *shōmyō nembutsu*). While Huiyuan (334–416), of Donglin Temple on Mount Lu, is thought to have been the first exponent of Pure Land teachings in China, it was Shandao (613–81) who popularized them, and *nembutsu* practice is generally thought to have begun with him. Whatever the exact story, it was at this time that there appeared the practice of reciting the Buddha’s name and keeping the form of the Buddha in the mind.

This may be considered a new form of the mindfulness training that appears in the *Visuddhimagga*, and we can conjecture a continuity with the recollection of peace (*upasamānussati*), the last of the ten recollections, where the practitioner is inclined to recite good words such as *nirvana* and *enlightenment*.

I believe, therefore, that reciting the name of a buddha and affirming it in the mind may be called a form of this recollection of peace. Since this is, of

course, included in the category of *samatha*, reciting the *nembutsu* can also be regarded likewise.

However, we must not forget the manner in which those good words were recited. It is thought that in East Asia they were recited slowly in a relatively quiet voice. I believe there is a special characteristic at work here. The mind becomes excited if, when the same phrase is repeated over and over, the tempo rises and the chanting gets louder. The slow recitation was probably employed to prevent this.

3. Breathing as an Object of Meditation

Buddhism was transmitted to China around the first century BCE and the first century CE. There already existed in China an interest in the human body, linked with medical ideas and Daoism, and the body was believed to possess *qi* (life force).

The earliest text we have concerning *qi*, the Circulating Qi Inscription,

dates from the Warring States period (475–205 BCE). It reveals an awareness of breath moving up and down through the body. *Qi* is what moves up and down through the body, and breathing is the intermediary that consolidates it. To be more precise, when we draw a breath, there is a sensation of something coming up from below, and when we exhale there is a sensation of something going downward. *Qi*, then, was something that was recognized as being tied to breathing.

Thus training to recognize the *qi* circulating through the body was tied to breathing. When the Indian practice of observing the breaths was introduced with Buddhism, it was no doubt accepted as being akin to the Chinese understanding of *qi*. Observing *qi* rising and falling in the body in concert with breathing was probably understood to be the same as the Buddhist practice.

This may be how the practice of observing *qi* as an object of meditation first appeared. Conversely, it was

precisely because of a realization of a connection between *qi* and the Buddhist practice of observing the breath that the foreign creed of Buddhism came to be genuinely accepted in East Asia.

Sutras Related to Meditation Circulating During the Southern and Northern Dynasties

The Northern and Southern Dynasties period (220–589) was an epochal time for the translation of Buddhist texts. Kumārajīva, a monk, scholar, and translator, arrived in China from Kucha in Central Asia and set about creating a new Buddhist terminology. It did not depend on existing philosophical or religious terms and adopted and developed the translation theories of the Chinese monk Dao'an (312–85). Kumārajīva also translated sutras relating to *samatha* and *vipassanā*, using a compound term, *changuan* (Jpn., *zenkan*). This term remains commonly used in East Asia. *Chan* (Jpn., *zen*) is an element in terms that transliterate the Sanskrit word *dhyāna* (Pali, *jhāna*), which functions as the action of calming the workings of the mind and so comes under the category of *samatha*. Thus, *changuan* may mean either a meditation practice called Chan (Zen) or *samatha*, as opposed to *vipassanā*. Here I would like to understand *chan* and *guan* as two separate things, with the former meaning practically the same as *samatha* and the latter, *vipassanā*.

The Sutra of Sitting Dhyana Samadhi is a representative example of a meditation sutra from this period. Although its translation is attributed to Kumārajīva, it is thought that it was actually a compilation by his disciples of several works about meditation very popular at the time and translated as a single volume under their master's authority.

This sutra became widely accepted in China. It contains many references

to *samatha*, demonstrating Theravada-type meditation at the beginning, but later it has additions of a Mahayana type. Overall it is very interesting, and I would next like to look at some of its expressions.

1. Meditation as Depicted in the Sutra of Sitting Dhyana Samadhi

The Sutra of Sitting Dhyana Samadhi is a short sutra in two volumes. The first deals with the various kinds of people who may wish to practice meditation and assigns subjects of meditation to each accordingly. Those who tend to suffer from neuroses should observe their inhalations and exhalations, those who are prone to anger should be mindful of compassion, and so on. Since this approach existed in Theravada meditation as well, it was not a particularly new thing. Furthermore, it became associated with the stages of practice. Toward the end of the first volume we find the teaching that the three poisons (greed, anger, delusion) are equally distributed and that the subjects of meditation are the thirty-two distinguishing marks and the eighty minor marks of the buddhas. It says, "Focus your mind on the buddhas. . . . In this way, if [your mind] does not become scattered, you will see one buddha, two buddhas, and even all physical bodies of buddhas in endless worlds throughout the ten directions" (T15, 277a).

The sutra states that the buddhas themselves can be seen from their physical features—the thirty-two distinguishing marks and the eighty minor marks—and that the form of the buddhas will emerge in the mind from their physical characteristics.

In the second volume, we find contemplation on the four foundations of mindfulness, called here "stopping thoughts" (at a particular point): "The various aspects of the body are full of suffering. Born as a result of causes and conditions, it is impermanent,

and because of the afflictions associated with it, there is suffering. Containing thirty-six objects, it is therefore impure. Without true freedom, there is no true self. Practice this contemplation. . . . This is called "Stopping Thoughts about the Body" (T15, 278c).

This contemplation involves observing impermanence, suffering, impurity, and absence of self with regard to the body. It is next applied to the feelings, the workings of the mind, and mental phenomena (*dharma*). In the section "Stopping Thoughts about the Mind," we find the understanding that where there is no true freedom, there is no host, and because there is no host, there is emptiness. Now impermanence, suffering, impurity, and nonself are represented by the expressions impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and nonself.

In other words, contemplation of the four subjects—the body, the feelings, the mind, and the dharmas—is described as observing that they are all marked by impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and nonself. Describing the course of the contemplation in this way can be considered a characteristic of Mahayana Buddhism. Judging, too,

from the expression “stopping thoughts about the body,” this contemplation clearly falls within the category of *samatha*. Since it is seen in the same way as making verification with words, it has the effect of calming the workings of the mind.

Further, the sutra instructs those seeking the path to buddhahood to “focus your minds on the physical bodies of all the buddhas throughout the ten directions in the three periods of time” (T15, 281a). Here, observing the features of the bodies of the buddhas is essential. Cultivating a compassionate mind and contemplating the twelve links of causation are also mentioned, among others. The latter is also a training method in Theravada and can be regarded as a further characteristic in common.

Zhiyi (538–97), founder of the Tiantai school and an important figure in Chinese understanding of *samatha* and *vipassanā*, recognized that contemplation practices that confirmed the workings of the five aggregates and aimed at preventing the rise of the distinctions of determining, comprehending, and discriminating (in other words, nondiscriminative wisdom) were *vipassanā*.

The Benefits of *Samatha* and *Vipassanā*

This has been both a rapid and a broad investigation of the course of meditation from early Buddhism through to Mahayana, but it has shown the existence of a clear commonality. Looking at it in terms of its benefits, the following points can be made.

First, we can say that, as propounded by early Buddhism, our minds change so as not to give rise to distress and suffering. When, during meditation, we experience a state in which there is no judging, comprehending, or discriminating (the state of nondiscriminative wisdom), a feeling of great joy

arises in our mind, and we could even say that the barriers between ourselves and others fall away. This state also encourages compassionate thoughts toward others.

However, in actuality, such an experience is temporary, and most people quickly revert to their normal state. But even so, after we experience the state of nondiscriminative wisdom, many of our thoughts go away. The sutras say that even if feelings of distress and suffering arise, “one shall become able to endure them.”

I believe the benefit of the Buddhist meditation known as *samatha* and *vipassanā* has a major purpose here. What insight contemplation does is show us how we can free ourselves from the distress and suffering that we experience in our daily lives.

Furthermore, since in meditation we focus the mind on one thing, there is no doubt at all that we will enjoy an increased power of concentration. This is a very useful ability to have in daily life. Whether it is *samatha* or *vipassanā*, we become aware of the present moment just as it is, allowing the mind to focus on the now.

Again, in the practice of *samatha* and *vipassanā*, there is a big difference between using words or not. Yet even if words are used, it is still possible to be freed from distress and suffering. Even if we do not attain nondiscriminative wisdom, the workings of our mind stop at the point of recognition and go no further. For example, if we are out walking and someone bumps into us, by stopping at the sensation of “it hurts” and going no further, things change such that anger and hatred do not arise.

Moreover, if we are able to put the emotions that arise in the mind into words, we can escape from being controlled by them. Being controlled by emotions is itself a type of forgetting oneself. I believe that everyone has experienced this at one time or another. But

being able to arrest an emotion that has arisen in our mind is in some respect like observing our own mind from the perspective of a third party. Certainly at such a time we are no longer controlled by our emotions.

Furthermore, we will grow able to gaze dispassionately at the emotions that arise in our mind, feeling neither liking nor disliking. That makes it possible to be freed of emotions that have been seized by some trauma. This is described as having a neutral mind, a mind that can let go. It is by means of such a mind that separating from trauma becomes possible.

And with that I have, although simply, stated the benefits of observing the mind. □

Bibliography

- Bronkhorst, Johannes. *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*. 2nd ed. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993. (Reprint: 2000.)
- Gyana Ratna Thera. *The Way of Practicing Meditation in Theravada Buddhism*. Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 2001.
- Mahamuni, Ven. Phra Dhamma Theerarach. *The Path to Nibbana*. 8th ed. Bangkok: Mahadhatu Monastery, 1989.
- Minowa, Kenryo. *Buddhist Meditation*. Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 2008. In Japanese.
- Phrapongsak, K. “The Practice of Samatha and Vipassanā in Modern Thai Buddhism.” *Journal of Buddhist Studies* 24 (2010). In Japanese.
- . “Samatha and Vipassanā in Late Pali Literature.” *Journal of Buddhist Studies* 65 (2011). In Japanese.
- . “Samatha Practitioners and Vipassanā Practitioners and Samadhi.” *Journal of Pali Buddhist Studies* 23 (2009). In Japanese.
- . “A Study of Samatha and Vipassanā in the Nikayas.” *Journal of Ryukoku University Graduate School of Literary Studies* 29 (2007). In Japanese.
- Sekiguchi, Shindai, ed. *A Study of Samatha and Vipassanā*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1975. In Japanese.
- Yamabe, Nobuyoshi. *Dhyana Practice in Mahayana Buddhism*. Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 2011. In Japanese.

Buddhist Meditation and Christian Contemplation: Wisdom Bringing Forth Selfless Love

by Ruben L. F. Habito

An individual who . . . engages in a sustained way in a form of Buddhist meditation or Christian contemplation . . . is launched into a winding path of awakening and transformation, with surprises at every turn.

Meditation in varying forms is now being practiced by many people all over the world, with different kinds of motivation that lead them to this practice. Meditation has been highlighted for its beneficial effects on physical, mental, and emotional health, including reducing stress, lowering blood pressure, overcoming insomnia, and so on. It has also been recommended for dealing with conflict and difficult life situations, coping with heartbreak or failure, and attaining overall happiness and well-being. As an indication of how widespread this practice has become, an Internet search will now bring up at least 15 million sites that have something to do with “meditation.”

Long before it became such a widespread phenomenon, meditation had been—and still remains—a spiritual practice cultivated in different religious traditions, within specific contexts offering guidelines and leading to outcomes in an individual’s way of being religious. (I use the term *spiritual* following the common preface [written by Ewert Cousins] to the multi-volume series *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* [Crossroad, 1987–]: “The spiritual core is the deepest center of the person. It is here that the person is open to the transcendent dimension; it is here that

the person experiences ultimate reality.” I use the term *religious* following Frederick Streng, *Understanding Religious Life*, 3rd ed. [Wadsworth, 1984], as “ways of ultimate transformation” with a four-fold schema, including [1] a view of the human problematic, [2] an understanding of ultimate reality wherein the resolution of the human problematic can be found, [3] prescriptions on the personal appropriation of what is taught as ultimate reality, and [4] social and communal expressions related to this appropriation.) In this short essay, I present a sketch in very broad strokes of the religious contexts of meditation in two religious traditions, Buddhist and Christian, offering some reflections on where these two might share a common ground despite their evident differences. (For an account of meditation in the context of different religious traditions, including Hindu Bhakti, Jewish Kabbalah, Christian Hesychasm, Sufism, Transcendental Meditation, Tibetan Buddhism, Zen, and others, see Daniel Goleman, *The Meditative Mind: The Varieties of Meditative Experience* [G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1988]. See also Marcia Z. Nelson, *Come and Sit: A Week inside Meditation Centers* [Skylight Paths, 2001], which describes Christian Centering Prayer [“entrusting oneself to God”], Zen Buddhist meditation [“true

emptiness”], Insight Meditation [“being mindful”], Tibetan Buddhist meditation [“diamond clarity”], Hindu meditation [“that thou art”], Sufi meditation [“remembering the Beloved”], and Jewish meditation [“awakening to tradition”].)

Buddhist Meditation: Cultivating Wisdom and Compassion

When the followers of the Buddha asked him how they themselves could become awakened as he was, his response to them was in the form of short, pithy statements addressing the particular questioners’ situation. Culling from the many scriptural texts handed down in Buddhist tradition, the Buddha exhorted his followers who sought to live an awakened life to observe right conduct (*sīla*), that is, to live responsibly, doing no harm and doing all that is good. He taught them to engage in meditative practice, which entailed stopping the discursive activity of the mind, allowing it to come to a point of single-minded stillness (*samādhi*). This is a state of mind that enables a person to see things as they really are, freed from delusion, and thereby to attain the wisdom (*paññā*) that brings liberation (*nibbāna*).

Situating the above in the context of the basic teaching of the Buddha on the Eightfold Path that leads to liberation, *samādhi*, the state of single-minded stillness, is placed at the summit of the path of awakening, which in turn leads back to and reinforces the first stage on this Eightfold Path, right view, coming

Ruben L. F. Habito teaches world religions and spirituality at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, and serves as Guiding Teacher of the Maria Kannon Zen Center, both in Dallas, Texas.

back full circle. Right view is about seeing things as they are (*yathābhūtam*), that is, as impermanent, dissatisfactory, and self-less, a way of seeing based on the realization of the interconnectedness of all things in the universe. Meditative practice is the gateway that opens us to this way of seeing, ushering in a state of mind and being called “the place of peace” (*santam padam*). This way of being embodies the “four immeasurables” of loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karunā*), sympathetic joy (*mudithā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*), grounded in this vision of interconnectedness. (See Ruben L. F. Habito, *Experiencing Buddhism: Ways of Wisdom and Compassion* [Orbis, 2005], for a more detailed elaboration of these themes.)

Regarding the practice of meditation that brings one to the state of *samādhi*, two key Pāli terms emerge in describing its features: *samatha* (pacifying the mind) and *vipassanā* (seeing clearly). These two elements (bringing the mind to a point of stillness, and coming to see things as they are) consist in the common underlying core of the various forms and styles of meditation that came to be practiced and taught as Buddhism developed in different cultural settings throughout the centuries. Of these, the most commonly known in the West are Insight Meditation, deriving from Theravada Buddhism; the various forms of Tibetan Buddhist meditation that include visualization practice; and Zen (Chan in Chinese, Son in Korean) Buddhist meditation.

Zen is one form that developed in East Asia, centered on the practice

of sitting still and calming the mind. Those who take on this practice are given instructions in taking a seated posture conducive to stillness, paying attention to the process of breathing in and breathing out, and directing the mind to a point of stillness, in full attentiveness to what happens from moment to moment. A sustained way of continuing this practice regularly in one’s day-to-day life leads to a threefold fruit. First, one learns to live in a more focused and centered way, living more fully attentive to the present moment instead of whiling away one’s time with one’s mind wandering all over or being worried about future events or being obsessed about the past. This is a way of life characterized by mindfulness, or perhaps better, “heartfulness,” whereby one comes to cherish and hold in one’s own heart everything and everyone that comes one’s way each given moment. Second, one thus becomes more open to experiencing singular moments whereby one “sees into the nature of things,” that is, arrives at a direct experiential realization of the interconnectedness of everything in the entire universe. Third, based on this direct experiential realization of the interconnectedness with everything and everyone, one enters into the path of awakening, marked by the *wisdom* of seeing things as they are, which in turn ushers in a heart of *loving-kindness* and *compassion* toward all beings. (See Ruben L. F. Habito, *Healing Breath: Zen for Christians and Buddhists in a Wounded World* [Wisdom, 2006], chapters 1, 2, and 3, for a description of the

structure and elements of Zen practice.)

The Buddhist practice of meditation is not primarily about finding a haven of peace and quiet for oneself, where one can be less stressed, more relaxed, healthy, and able to enjoy life more. True, these things may ensue as an outcome of meditative practice, and they may be considered as auspicious side effects of the practice. Meditative practice as cultivated in the Buddhist traditions is in many cases launched by, or opens to, the “big questions” of life, the supreme matter of life and death: Who am I? What is the point of all of this? How can I live in a way that I can face my death with equanimity and without fear? How can I live in a way that is fully awakened? What *does* it mean to be fully awakened?

In sum, Buddhist meditative practice *does* calm one’s mind and lead to all the physical, psychological, and other benefits that ensue from this. But more important, it paves the way for an awakened way of life grounded in the *wisdom* of seeing things as they are, that is, as intimately interconnected with everything else, and consequently brings forth a heart of *compassion* for all beings that inherently flows out of that wisdom, enabling practitioners to align their life in loving service to others in the world.

Christian Contemplation: Basking in Divine Love

In the Western cultural matrix wherein Christianity took root, was nurtured,

and has blossomed for these past two millennia, the English word *meditation* is more associated with a mode of discursive thinking on various aspects of our human existence. (Two well-known examples that come to mind in this regard are the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, Roman emperor from 161 to 180, a tome that contains the author's musings and steeped in Stoic philosophy, written as a resource book for his own self-improvement and guidance in his affairs personal and public; and *Meditations on First Philosophy: In Which the Existence of God and the Immortality of the Soul Are Demonstrated*, by René Descartes [1596–1650], the French philosopher considered to be the “father of modern philosophy.”) The term that most closely corresponds with what Buddhists refer to by *meditation* (as briefly described above) is in the Christian tradition *contemplation*, from the Latin *contemplatio*, which in turn derives from the Greek *theoria*, or “way of seeing” (verb, *theorein*, “to see, to gaze at, to behold”).

In the New Testament, Jesus himself is described in various places in the Gospels as entering into periods of solitude and silence, as he “often withdrew into the wilderness to pray” (Luke 5:16; see also Mark 1:13, 1:35; Matthew 4:1–11, 14:23; Luke 4:1–2, 6:12). Mary, the mother of Jesus, is held up as the model of a contemplative life, as she “treasures in her heart” (Luke 2:19, 2:51) the wondrous events surrounding her son, Jesus, from the moment of his birth on through his entire earthly life. Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha, is also seen as an exemplar of the contemplative life, commended by Jesus for having chosen “the one thing necessary” (Luke 10:40–42), simply sitting down and paying attention to the Word rather than being preoccupied with many mundane matters like her sister Martha. (With Mary of Bethany seen as representing the contemplative life, the comparison to, as well as the interactive

and indispensable connection with, her sister Martha, said to represent “action in the world in service of others,” has been a repeated theme in Christian life. For an insightful and fresh view of the interplay between Mary and Martha, see Sermon 86 of Meister Eckhart [1260–1328], accessible at <http://www.knocklyonparish.ie/reflection/martha-and-mary-the-better-part/>.) Christians take the cue from John's Gospel, where Jesus says, “Whoever sees me sees the One who sent me” (John 12:45). In other words, Christian contemplation involves beholding, and treasuring in one's heart, all the things that Jesus said and did as they are witnessed to in Scriptures, a practice that becomes the gateway to the vision and direct experience of the Divine in our midst.

Withdrawing from one's normal activities to spend periods of time in solitude and prayer, basking in divine presence, is a practice at the heart of Christian tradition. The Desert Fathers and Mothers were people who, from early centuries on, in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and other places, withdrew to the desert to seek “the one thing necessary” and spend their time in contemplative prayer, basking in divine

presence for the entirety of their earthly lives (see John Chryssavgis, *In the Heart of the Desert: Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers* [World Wisdom, 2003]). Many saints and mystics since the early centuries, through the Middle Ages, after the Reformation, and up to more recent times are cited as examples of those who lived such a life, whom Christians are called to set as a model for their own (for a volume that offers a wide-ranging survey on this theme, see Robin Maas and Gabriel O'Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church* [Abingdon, 1990]).

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the sixteenth-century mystic and founder of the Jesuits (Society of Jesus), offered a way of guiding others into the contemplative life, summarized in a small booklet entitled *Spiritual Exercises*. One of the important works of service of the Jesuits since their founding in the sixteenth century has been to accompany people of all walks of life through this methodical form of spiritual practice based on Ignatius's own life experience, beginning with his conversion experience, unfolding into a life of total dedication in the service of the church and the world motivated solely by divine Love. The number of those who have undertaken, and are now also qualified to guide others in, the *Spiritual Exercises* has now greatly expanded beyond the Jesuits to include lay Catholics as well as Christians of other denominations.

The *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius follow four phases (“weeks”) of the interior journey, corresponding to the stages of spiritual life noted by many other writers across religious traditions. Without going into detail, what is notable here is that the term *meditation* is used in the first stage, where exercitants are enjoined to look at their current state of life and examine from various angles the need for purification of their sinful condition. This entails a wholehearted engagement of their

discursive mental faculties, including memory, understanding, and will.

After an individual has undergone the first stage, with its very detailed instructions for meditating (read: examining and reflecting) on various aspects related to the human condition of sinfulness, Ignatius guides the practitioner into properly *contemplative* practices in the second, third, and fourth phases of the Spiritual Exercises. From this point on the practice is about contemplating words or actions of Jesus as presented in the Gospels and in other scriptural passages, “beholding” these as entry points wherein divine presence is revealed to the practitioner in concrete and palpable ways.

The culminating point of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises is a contemplative exercise that opens to an experiential realization of the unconditional Love that permeates and fills everything in the universe. This experience of basking in divine Love not only enables the individual to find the bedrock of true inner peace and unspeakable joy but also moves a person to offer his or her entire life, with deep gratitude, in service to the world, impelled and empowered by the same unconditional Love one experiences as coming from a divine source. The overall outcome of engaging in contemplative practice following the structure of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises is a transformative experience that overturns a person’s life, from one preoccupied with one’s own self-interest and well-being to one dedicated in service to the well-being of others, sustained and empowered by divine Love. (See Ruben L. F. Habito, *Zen and the Spiritual Exercises: Paths of Awakening and Transformation* [Orbis, 2013].)

Another form of meditative/contemplative practice that is now being taken up by increasing numbers of Christians of different denominations is Centering Prayer, given articulate expression in the writings of Fr. Thomas Keating, a

Trappist monk who has led contemplative retreats in many different locations, and several others (including Dom Basil Pennington, O.C.S.O.; John Main, OSB; and the former Trappist monk James Finley, among others). In a gathering of twelve “elders” of Christian contemplative practice held at Saint Benedict’s Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado, convened by Fr. Keating, the participants drafted a common statement conveying the key points of their practice based on their collective experience, which included the following: “Through a pattern of abiding in God that we call contemplative prayer, a change of consciousness takes place. This dynamic sharing of God’s nature forms each person, and opens them to the very mind and very life of Christ, challenging them to become instruments of God’s love and energy in the world” (Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* [Cowley Publications, 2004], 156).

Concluding Reflections: Wisdom Bringing Forth Selfless Love

The Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh, widely known for having inspired countless numbers of people all over the world to engage in Buddhist meditation and a life of mindfulness, writes: “Meditation is to live each moment of life deeply” (*Thich Nhat Hanh: Essential Writings*, ed. Robert Ellsberg [Orbis, 2001], 91). To live deeply is to realize oneself in interbeing (this term was coined by Thich Nhat Hanh himself, appearing in his many writings) with all and thereby to open one’s heart in loving-kindness and compassion, dedicating oneself in service for the well-being of all. Thich Nhat Hanh’s own life is a powerful testimony and clear embodiment of this message.

Thomas Merton describes contemplation in the following way: “It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the

sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life, for awareness, and for being” (*New Seeds of Contemplation* [New Directions, 2007], 1). Having behind him seventeen years of contemplative life as a Trappist monk, Thomas Merton goes out on an errand to the city of Louisville, Kentucky, and there, at a street corner in the middle of a shopping district observing people pass by, he experiences a very powerful interior event that becomes another turning point in his life. He wrote, “I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers” (from his famous epiphany at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, recorded in his journal entry for March 18, 1958, as well as in his *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* [Image Classics], 1968).

Thomas Merton’s many works, especially those written after this event in 1958, convey clearly and repeatedly that contemplative practice, as it opens an individual to a life steeped in unconditional Love, also unfolds in dedicated service for the well-being of all.

In sum, an individual who so engages in a sustained way in a form of Buddhist meditation or Christian contemplation, nurtured within the context of the religious tradition wherein it is historically situated, is launched into a winding path of awakening and transformation, with surprises at every turn. It matures in a life of selfless love and service to all beyond the boundaries of self and other, bearing fruits of unspeakable joy and deep inner peace, and profound gratitude. (For an excellent and very readable volume that takes the reader by the hand through the contours of meditative or contemplative practice, navigating seamlessly through Buddhist and Christian territory, see Ellen Birx, *Selfless Love: Beyond the Boundaries of Self and Other* [Wisdom, 2013].) □

Reforming World Order through Human Reformation: A Perspective through Religion

by Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman

When the modern generation marginalized religion, and in some cases even threw out religion from their lives completely, they therewith also threw out the comprehensive definition of the human being, and with that they lost the comprehensive knowledge of how to live appropriately.

As the contemporary world prides itself for achieving the highest rate ever of development in human history, it also grapples with unprecedented problems that besiege human life and planetary existence. After developments and achievements that should make life so sweet and comfortable for one and all, the human world as well as the nonhuman world now seem to have soured, causing not only discomfort but also downright misery in some cases. There is disorder everywhere—locally, nationally, and globally—in individual and family life, in politics and economics, in social and religious life, and in nature and the environment. Aggression, violence, and conflict seem to be the rule, not the exception. Why have we come to this state? How have we come to be what we are now? Where has the world gone so wrong?

To begin with, and as acknowledged by many analysts, all of these problems are human created, meaning human beings are not behaving properly and not acting as we should. But for human beings to know how to behave and to act as human beings, we first need to understand what a human being is and what being a human being is all about. In general, modern education does not

explain adequately what human beings are. At best it explains only that we are the product of evolution, thus identifying and relating human beings only to the physical realm. But we are not just physical existence—there are also the matters of the human mind and psyche, of human emotions and sentiments, of behavior and conduct. How are these to be understood in the comprehensive context of a wholesome person?

Religions—all religions without exception—do explain in depth what human beings are and how we should live and behave, how we should regard

and relate to one another, and also how to relate to nonhuman beings. When the modern generation marginalized religion, and in some cases even threw out religion from their lives completely, they therewith also threw out the comprehensive definition of the human being, and with that they lost the comprehensive knowledge of how to live appropriately, how to behave and act properly, and how to become a wholesome person.

Human Reformation

In the wake of these human-created problems, it is necessary to reflect and thereby understand once again what human beings are, how to become proper human beings, how to relate to one and all—the human and the nonhuman. In brief, it is to relearn yet again the ABCs of being human. These are the basic essentials needed for human

Dr. Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman is an Associate Professor in Comparative Religion at the International Islamic University of Malaysia. She is also a social activist and resource person, particularly in Islamic and interfaith work, and heads a number of NGOs. She participates in numerous forums locally and internationally, including those conducted by the United Nations and UNESCO. She has also published numerous books and academic papers, some of which are now reference texts.

reformation, and indeed the world today truly needs human reformation, since all the problems that abound are human created. We have to once again become the responsible and conscious custodians of the existences that we are meant to be; to embrace all existences, human and nonhuman, as a part of ourselves; to appreciate that everyone and everything is interdependent and that everybody and everything can live side by side healthily, harmoniously, and happily.

If we human beings fail to reform and get back on track, then the future will be even bleaker than it is now and catastrophe and destruction will await everyone. In brief, in order to bring back order to the disorder, we must reform, must transform ourselves into the type of human beings we are meant to be and ought to be. Only when we can become what we are meant to be and can function as we ought to function can we then embark upon repairing the damaged order of existences, of both human existences and other existences.

The Superstructure of Relationships and Interdependency

Today human rights are much talked about and demanded, yet not as much attention is paid to human roles and human responsibilities. Human beings not only have rights but also have roles and responsibilities. Moreover, nonhuman existences, too, have their rights, roles, and responsibilities. In fact, we

should understand and appreciate not only that all existences have rights, roles, and responsibilities but that all existences, including human beings, are interrelated and are also interdependent. Every existence falls into and fits into a superscheme and a superstructure of existences, a cosmic order of existence and a cosmic interrelatedness and interdependency.

Although many may not agree with such terminology, for these are religious terms, the understanding among religious and nonreligious thinkers is quite similar, namely that we humans have responsibilities toward the world of nature. The tsunamis, earthquakes, hurricanes, typhoons, and floods across the globe not only shock and terrify people but should also cause people to ponder the power and possibilities of natural catastrophes, of global disasters and planetary disorder.

Yes, these are natural disasters in the sense that they are acts of nature, yet acts of nature are also responses to how people have treated the world of nature—the raping of forests and disruption of wildlife, the destruction of natural habitats and the upsetting of the ecological balance, the eroding of mountains and the damming of rivers, the interference with the atmospheric equilibrium—to list a few. These, in essence, are actually injustices done to nature and are exploitations of nature's rights. In the human world, when injustice is committed upon a person, the person will seek reparation through the legal and judicial systems, and if it is denied

or is nonexistent, then the person will seek revenge. As regards nature, there is no court of justice for nature to bring its cases against those who exploit it. Thus nature, like human beings who are denied rights and justice, now reacts to human mistreatment with seemingly retaliatory excesses.

Indeed, injustice, in whatever form and to whomever done, will lead to retaliation. Sadly, retaliations are also unjust because they are often random acts of revenge, hurting those who are uninjured and innocent. Revenge often leads to more revenge and more retaliation, and so a vicious cycle of revenge and retaliation develops; and this is what the world is witnessing today—in the human world as seen in social upheavals and political discontents; in the natural world in the form of natural disasters and catastrophes that are escalating in momentum, intensity, and volume. It is as if the world today had reached a point of no return and were heading toward self-destruction.

Human Beings—Constituents and Nature

Because injustices in the human world and in the world of nature lead to horrifying consequences, religions, all religions, lay out how people ought to behave appropriately with each other and with the world of nature, teaching each person to regard others as a part of themselves. Along this line, religion starts by explaining what a human

being is, how to become a proper human being, and how to behave accordingly. Religion also explains human nature, both the positive and negative traits, and gives guidance on how to transform the negative into the positive so that the end product will benefit the individual and all others, too. Religion therefore starts with nurturing individuals and teaching them what to be and how to be, then explains roles and responsibilities, rights and duties. As the individual has rights and roles and responsibilities toward others, others likewise have rights and also roles and responsibilities toward the individual. Thus, religion starts with focusing on the individual, albeit the nurturing of the individual, to help the person become good, wholesome, comfortable, confident, contributory, and productive. Since individuals are units of society, or the fabric of society, if individuals behave appropriately and function properly, then the whole society will be in good order. Thus Confucius beautifully and rightly said, "Good individuals make a good society." (In fact, this saying of Confucius represents the social maxims of all religions.)

Most religions, though not all, define a human being as having a body, mind, and soul. (Buddhism does not uphold the concept of body, mind, and soul classifications but believes that a human

being is made up of the Five Aggregates [*skandhas*]. Also, Buddhism does not believe in existence of the soul [*anatta*]). By this definition, a person therefore possesses physical, intellectual, and spiritual constituents. (Some religions regard the intellectual as part of the spiritual constituent, thus, according to these religions, a human being is made up of the spiritual and the physical only.) Moreover, most religions insist that all of these constituents need to be duly attended to and developed accordingly and that no constituent should be overlooked or disregarded totally. This is true even if some religions do give more attention to one or two of the constituents, such as focusing more on the spiritual than the intellectual and the physical, or more on the spiritual and intellectual constituents but less on the physical. This uneven focus may occur because religions that strongly emphasize spirituality regard the intellectual and the physical constituents as instruments to serve and perfect spirituality, and as such, the latter two constituents are disciplined and groomed to help in the perfection of spirituality. If any one of these constituents is not given the proper attention, the person will not become a wholesome person. Such a person will not be at peace with him- or herself and will not feel comfortable with other people or with all else either.

Religions that believe a person has a body, mind, and soul also believe that a person has physical, intellectual, and spiritual needs. In this modern time, the physical needs are generally given a lot of attention to enable a person to live a comfortable life. Likewise, the intellectual needs are well taken care of, with various means of acquiring knowledge available to those who want to acquire expertise and skills. Indeed, contemporary society has achieved the highest level of intellectual development and knowledge acquisition in human history. Logically speaking, such a society with such a high standard of physical

and intellectual achievements should be living in bliss and happiness, peaceful and contented. However, the realities on the ground show otherwise, for one sees in advanced countries violence and aggression, abuses and exploitation, poverty and deprivation, injustice and disorder, even suicides and mass killing. Even economic well-being is not secured, despite all the sophisticated philosophies and theories of the social sciences and economics.

In the perspective of religion, these unhappy situations are seen as the effects of an unbalanced development of individuals, and since individuals are the fabric of society, society, too, is affected by this unbalanced growth. In particular, the spiritual needs of individuals are not given as much attention as the physical and intellectual needs of the person, and consequently of the society as a whole. It is not surprising, therefore, that some people today are suffering a restlessness of sorts, a general discomfort, and even discontentment with life. These are actually symptoms of a spiritual void, that is, a feeling of emptiness or hollowness in the inner being of the person. To fill this void, such persons may resort to external stimuli such as drugs and alcohol—even living a hedonistic lifestyle with wild entertainments—all to pacify their feeling of emptiness and restlessness. However, all of these stimuli are external and artificial, and they wear off fast and easily, leaving behind an even deeper void, a more intense feeling of emptiness, loneliness, and even despair. In modern understanding, these symptoms are regarded as psychological, often termed *depression*, and are often given psychiatric treatment.

In religion they are considered psycho-spiritual symptoms and are addressed through psycho-spiritual treatments, spiritual procedures and techniques, and the rituals and rites of religions. Hence, for people of religion and spirituality, the spiritual need is

attended to by spiritual performances and by linking with Divinity through the rituals and rites. Communicating with Divinity and performing the rituals and spiritual services pacify the spirit, and the person feels spiritually uplifted and thus is emotionally and psychologically appeased and fulfilled. As such, people of religion do not need external stimuli to quench their spiritual thirst. Rituals and spiritual procedures of religions are therefore not mere mechanical performances or technical movements but are actually means through which psycho-spiritual wholeness and well-being are developed and strengthened.

With spiritual strength and stability, people of religion are able to take whatever comes in life and address it accordingly. They do not despair when situations become challenging, and they do not become euphoric when good things come their way. They sympathize and empathize with those who are suffering, knowing that perhaps one day suffering may visit them, too. When a person is spiritually fulfilled and psychologically appeased, he or she becomes a comfortable, wholesome person. A wholesome person is comfortable with him- or herself and with all others, too—with the human as well as the nonhuman—and others are also comfortable with that person.

potentially destructive—to the individual and to others. As such, all religions have guidance on how to control and pacify negative traits and transform them into positive energy.

Conclusion: Being Good and Doing Good

Thus, religion ultimately works not only to nurture a person toward being a good person but also to assist a bad person, or a potentially bad person, to transform into a good person. This person will thus be at peace with him- or herself and will not be a menace to others. On the contrary, the person will be contributory and productive both for him- or herself and for others, performing duties and responsibilities accordingly. In so doing, the person will be respected by others and will gain a place of dignity in society. Therefore, religion is not just about being good but is also about doing good, and indeed, to be religious is to be good and to do good. Hence, religion not only relates and connects the individual with Divinity but also connects the person with all others, with human as well as nonhuman existences. □

The Practical Ethics of Won-Buddhism and Liberal Religious Culture as a Path to World Peace

by Park Kwangsoo

Truth is one; the world is one; humankind is one family; the world is one workplace. Let us pioneer one world.

—Taesan Kim Taego

Engulfed by a surging wave of globalization, contemporary society faces conflicts between civilizations and clashes between ethnic groups and nations that threaten lives and security around the world. At root, all of these frictions share a common cause: exclusionary attitudes that make people refuse to accept mutual differences between one person and another and between one religion and another. Can these exclusionary attitudes that hold that only one's own religion and culture have any absolute value be overcome, and if so, how?

To help answer this question, I explore below what Won-Buddhist thought can offer. Won-Buddhism began as a Thought of Great Opening during the Korean Peninsula's historic transformation at the beginning of the twentieth century, and almost from the outset it placed an enormous emphasis on harmonious synthesis (*hwetong*) and dialogue. Won-Buddhism's founding master, Sotaesan, and his successor, Master Chöngsan, put forward the concepts of Irwonism and the Ethics of Triple Identity, respectively, to provide the philosophical groundwork for a harmonious synthesis of religions. Chöngsan's own successor, Master Taesan, then advocated the creation of a "united religion movement" to provide a concrete, practical means of resolving the difficulties facing humankind, to which end

he engaged in practical interfaith dialogue and cooperation with other religions. By examining the thought and activities of these three individuals, my intention here is to suggest what shape a "liberal religious culture" ought to take in order to pave the way for peace in the world today.

The Philosophy of Peace and Practical Ethics of Won-Buddhism

Sotaesan's Irwonism

Sotaesan (1891–1943) believed in the truth of *Irwon* (the one circle) and stressed making this a standard of spiritual practice that would allow one to become a believer in one vast, harmonious religion that integrates different religious faiths. Arguing that all religions stem from the same root and that discord and conflict arising from religious belief derive from ignorance of the true intentions of great religious figures, he said:

The fundamental principles of all the world's religions are also essentially one, but as different religions have long been established with different systems and expedients, there have been not a few incidents of failure to

reach harmony and dialogue between these religious groups. All this is due to ignorance of the fundamental principles underlying all religions and their sects. How could this be the original intent of all the buddhas and sages? (The Web site for Won-Buddhism, "The Principal Book of Won-Buddhism," p. 2, <http://www.wonbuddhism.org/docs/1.principal.of.wonbuddhism/The.Principal.Book.of.Won-Buddhism.in.English.3rd.Edition.by.budswell.pdf>)

Sotaesan himself entered dialogue with the believers of various religions from such a standpoint, learning about Cheondoism when he encountered believers in this traditional Korean religion, for example, and about Christ

Park Kwangsoo is a Professor in the Department of Won-Buddhism at Wonkwang University, Iksan, South Korea. He serves as the director of the Research Center of Religions at Wonkwang University and as vice president of the Korean Association for the History of Religions and has also worked for religious dialogue and peace movements. He received his PhD in Buddhist Studies from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He is the author of several books and articles on interfaith dialogue and religions in Korea.

from Christians when he met Christians. His open-minded attitude to the religions of his neighbors is evident from his conversation with a Protestant elder and longtime Christian who had sought to become a disciple of his: “If a Christian becomes a disciple who truly knows Jesus, he will come also to understand what I am doing, and, if one becomes a disciple who truly understands me, he will come to understand what Jesus accomplished” (the Web site for Won-Buddhism, “The Scripture of the Founding Master,” 14:14, <http://www.wonbuddhism.org/docs/2.the.scripture.of.the.founding.master/The.Scripture.of.the.Founding.Master.in.English.3rd.Edition.by.Buswell.pdf>). This Irwonism is the idea at the heart of the Later Day’s Great Opening that will come, and it demands that people of faith who, through openness of thought and harmoniousness of attitude, profoundly understand the religions of their neighbors and can open the way to a new civilization.

Chōngsan Song Kyu’s Ethics of Triple Identity

Chōngsan Song Kyu (1900–1962) inherited Sotaesan’s mantle as master of Won-Buddhism when the latter passed away in 1943, and he guided the organization as first “Highest Dharma Master” (*jongbeopsa*) until 1962. In April 1961 he proposed the concept of an “Ethics of Triple Identity” that embodied the Irwonism of Sotaesan. In explaining this concept, he emphasized that “the concept of ethics of triple identity is the

threefold principle of grand harmony for all human beings of the world. This is the fundamental principle for the whole human race to follow in order that they may work and rejoice together in a peaceful and comfortable world; namely, as one household, as one grand family, keeping the one grand house by transcending all boundaries” (the Web site for Won-Buddhism, “The Dharma Words of Master Chōngsan,” pp. 151–52, <http://www.wonbuddhism.org/docs/3.the.dharma.words.of.master.chongsan/THE.DHARMA.WORDS.OF.MASTER.CHONGSAN.by.Bongkil.Chung.pdf>).

Chōngsan’s Ethics of Triple Identity comprises three principles: knowledge of one fundamental origin, bonding by one vital force, and renewal with one aim. The first requires that “all people of religion must harmonize with one another, with the knowledge that the fundamental origin of all religions and religious sects is one” (*ibid.*, p. 152). The second states that “all races and all sentient beings should be united in grand harmony by awakening to the truth that they are all fellow beings bonded together by the one vital force” (*ibid.*). And the third principle says, “Being awakened to the truth that all enterprises and proposals help toward the renewal of the world, all should unite in grand harmony” (*ibid.*, p. 153). Chōngsan’s Ethics of Triple Identity not only constitutes a set of principles that make possible encounters between religions but also serve as virtues that can be practiced together by human communities.

Taesan Kim Taego’s United Religion Movement

Taesan Kim Taego (1914–98) proposed creating a “united religion movement” in 1965, when he acceded to the position of Highest Dharma Master, and he strove to put into practice the idea of harmonious synthesis with other religions. He argued that “the role of bringing about peace, stability, and economic equality in the world’s regions of conflict should be played by the United Nations, while the role of relieving humanity from ignorance, poverty, and sickness of mind and body should be played by ‘United Religions’ organizations” (“Jōngkyop’yon” [Politics and religion], *Taesan Chongsa Pōbō* [Dharma words of Master Taesan] [Won-Buddhism Publishing, 2014], pp. 251–52). He stressed that a United Nations of governments (UN) and a United Religions of religious organizations (UR) should work together and that “if everyone joins forces and acts with one accord, not only will nations and the world develop, but people’s lives will also improve” (*ibid.*). He sent a delegation to the First World Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, held in Kyoto, Japan, in 1970, and put forward “Three Great Proposals for World Peace,” namely the establishment of a United Religions, cultivation of a common world market, and training in “cultivation of the mind-field” (“Kyongsep’yon” [Conduct of state affairs], *Taesan Chongsa Pōbō* [Dharma words of Master Taesan], p. 338).

Continuing in the same vein, he sent representatives of Won-Buddhism to conventions of diverse international organizations for interreligious cooperation, including the World Fellowship of Buddhists, the World Conference of Religions for Peace, the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace, and the Parliament of the World's Religions, in order to broaden the horizons of the united religion movement.

The philosophical underpinnings of Taesan's united religion movement are evident in the declaration made at the Half Centennial Commemoration Conference of Won-Buddhism in 1971: "Truth is one; the world is one; humankind is one family; the world is one workplace. Let us pioneer one world" (ibid., pp. 342–43).

Liberal Religious Culture as a Path to World Peace

The new challenges facing not only Northeast Asia but also the entire world owing to highly developed modern social networks are already proliferating beyond the personal and local dimensions. Exclusionary extremism in religions and ethnic groups is manifesting itself in confrontations and

clashes of civilizations. In one attempt to overcome such discord, delegates at the centenary conference of the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1993 adopted the Declaration toward a Global Ethic, which set a course toward upholding the dignity of life and creating a religiously pluralistic society that values practical action to enhance mutual understanding and respect between people.

Hans Küng wrote in *Projekt Weltethos* [Project world ethos] (Piper, 1990), that despite the existence of minimum necessary common values, norms, and attitudes, actual manifestations of tensions and discord between particular ethics

and universal ethics in individual religions make it exceedingly hard to transcend the ethical originality of each and identify a common platform that can be shared by all.

Diverse "united religion" organizations are presently searching for a greatest common denominator that allows them to recognize one another's unique cultures and doctrines of salvation on a basis of religious pluralism. As Stanley J. Samartha has observed, unilateral proselytizing and doctrines of salvation necessarily cause clashes between religions, ideas, and civilizations.

At the same time, however, Asian religious culture serves as a melting

pot that creates a civilized society of harmony and coexistence suited to a multiethnic, multicultural, and multi-faith age. Religious leaders in Asia established the World Conference of Religions for Peace in 1970 with leaders of religions from all over the rest of the world, a development in which Nikkyo Niwano (1906–99), founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, played an extremely important role. This was followed by the formation of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace, which established a forum for exchange and cooperation between people of faith in Asia.

Creating a liberal religious culture requires having an educational forum through which people can develop religious empathy and a shared appreciation of peace. It also requires both experience born of a firm faith identity and thorough spiritual practice informed by one's own religion, and an openness toward other faith traditions. By encountering and engaging in dialogue with people of diverse faith traditions, people of faith will be able to further deepen their own faith and spiritual practice.

Openness in matters of faith means recognizing the potential of new spiritual experiences. And cultivating people with a religious spirituality necessitates access to concrete practices. For example, in order to cultivate religious leaders with specialist skills and abilities

concerning the protection of life and peace, it is necessary to equip such individuals with humanistic knowledge of international cooperation, sustainable development and the environment, human rights, life, NGOs, and similar topics, and to support the development of human networks that protect life and peace in local communities in practice.

Developing liberal religious values and peaceful civilizations in Northeast Asia requires vigorous popular action, such as grassroots movements in local communities in the countries of the region. If the scope of understanding and acceptance of diverse religions, cultures, and ethnic groups is broadened and interfaith dialogue and cooperation take place in a mature fashion in local communities, perceptions will change—people will come to see the “religions of others” as the “religions of neighbors”; “other ethnic groups” as “neighboring ethnic groups”; and “other countries” as “neighboring countries,” thereby ushering in a world of harmony in which rejection of and hostility toward others have been wiped out.

Buddhism and Social Engagement (2)

Building Peace

by Ranjana Mukhopadhyaya

Engaged Buddhism arose . . . out of the anti-war movement led by monks during the Vietnam War. Witnessing the destruction and suffering the war had brought his country, Thich Nhat Hanh called for positive social engagement based on adapting Zen meditation to modern needs.

Peace movements are the best-known type of social engagement by Buddhists. They vary in size from a local to a global scale and take forms such as nonviolent countermovements, antiwar demonstrations, appeals for arms reduction and a ban on nuclear weapons, helping refugees, and supporting relief efforts in war-torn areas.

The very term *Engaged Buddhism* arose, as we have seen, out of the anti-war movement led by monks during the Vietnam War. Witnessing the destruction and suffering the war had brought his country, Thich Nhat Hanh called for positive social engagement based on adapting Zen meditation to modern needs. This he called “mindfulness” and “mindful practice.” He has written about these in *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (Rider Books, 1991) and *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* (Bantam reissue, 1992). Mindfulness (Pali, *sati*; Sanskrit, *smṛti*; Chinese, *nian*), in the sense of awareness and attention, is the condition in which we are conscious of our own motivations and actions and are able to judge correctly what we have done. It is also the state of realizing these things. *Sati*, as one of the components of the Eightfold Path (*sammā-sati*), was translated as

“mindfulness” by the Pali scholar T. W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922) and, as the four bases of mindfulness, is also part of the thirty-seven practices conducive to enlightenment.

Mindfulness, or *mindful practice*, as it is understood by Nhat Hanh and other Buddhist activists, means being aware of the suffering of those about you, having a correct understanding of the social conditions that give rise to that suffering, and responding through practical

action based on wisdom and wakefulness. Between 1964 and 1966, Nhat Hanh founded the Order of Interbeing (Tiep Hien) to carry out social activity based on mindfulness (Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism* [Full Circle, 2000]). *Tiep hien* is a Sino-Vietnamese term meaning “mutual identity.” *Tiep* literally means “being in touch with” or “continuing” and *hien* means “realizing” or “making it here and now.” In Huayan philosophy, “mutual identity” is the interconnectedness of all things, the oneness of all that exists. Nhat Hanh used *tiiep hien* (which he called “interbeing”) to explain the interrelationship of everything, in particular the connection between those who inflict suffering and their victims, and between the

Ranjana Mukhopadhyaya specializes in sociology of religion and Japanese religion. She is an Associate Professor at the Department of East Asian Studies, University of Delhi, teaching Japanese society, culture, and language. She received her doctorate in Religious Studies from the University of Tokyo in 2003 and has taught as an Associate Professor at Nagoya City University. She is the author of Nihon no shakai sankai bukkyō [Engaged Buddhism in Japan] (Tōshindō, 2005).

spiritual peace of the individual and world peace. The order is guided by a set of guidelines that govern its social participation; these are called the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings, of which the fourth, Awareness of Suffering, reads:

Aware that looking deeply at the nature of suffering can help us develop compassion and find ways out of suffering, we are determined not to avoid or close our eyes before suffering. We are committed to finding ways, including personal contact, images, and sounds, to be with those who suffer, so we can understand their situation deeply and help them transform their suffering into compassion, peace, and joy. (Ibid., 17–18)

Nhat Hanh was forced out of Vietnam as a result of his antiwar activities and went into exile in France, where in 1969 he established the Unified Buddhist Church (Église Bouddhique Unifiée), thereby expanding the antiwar movement into a peace movement on an international scale. It demanded an end to the Vietnam War and also concerned itself with relief activities designed to aid people whom the war had made refugees.

Perhaps the figure most representative of Engaged Buddhism is the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, the supreme spiritual and political leader of Tibet. The Dalai Lama is venerated as the reincarnation of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara and, like Nhat Hanh, has been in exile for most of his life. He has, as a Buddhist

leader, undertaken activities based on nonviolence and peace that are aimed at liberating Tibet, giving aid to refugees, and preserving Tibetan culture. At the core of his ideas about peace are the ideals of love, nonviolence, universal responsibility—concepts guided by the Mahayana teachings of interconnectedness and taught through the doctrines of emptiness, dependent origination, and causation—and the equality of all living beings, based on the idea of the buddha-nature inherent in all things (*tathāgata-garbha*).

Despite being forced to leave his homeland as a result of the Chinese invasion of Tibet, the Dalai Lama bears no rancor toward the Chinese government

or people but seeks, with compassion, to negotiate with the Chinese and to improve relations between the two ethnic communities. In the Five Point Peace Plan submitted to the Chinese government in 1987, he proposed transforming the whole of Tibet into a zone of *ahimsa* (a Sanskrit term meaning noninjury and nonviolence). This zone would be completely demilitarized, with all armaments prohibited and with a withdrawal of Chinese troops and military installations, in order to preserve Tibet as a “Buddhist country of peace” (Tenzin Gyatso, *Freedom in Exile: The Autobiography of His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet* [Hodder and Stoughton, 1990], 273–74).

The Dalai Lama has been deeply influenced by the *Bodhisattvacaryā-vatāra*, a work about bodhisattva practice by the eighth-century Indian monk and poet Śāntideva, and speaks of cultivating *bodhicitta*, which he calls “a good heart.” In *Freedom in Exile* he writes: “To engender altruism, or compassion, in myself, I practice a certain mental exercise which promotes love towards all sentient beings, including especially my so-called enemies. For example, I remind myself that it is the actions of human beings rather than human beings themselves that make them my enemy. Given a change of behavior, that same person could easily become a good friend. The remainder of my meditation is connected with *Sunya* or emptiness, during which I concentrate on the most subtle meaning of Interdependence” (ibid., 227).

He also sets out the ideal of “Universal Responsibility” based on dependent origination and the law of cause and effect. “As a human being, I talk about what I have termed Universal Responsibility. By this I mean the responsibility that we all have for each other and for all sentient beings and also for all of Nature” (ibid., 219).

Questions of human rights, freedom of belief, the preservation of minority cultures, and environmental destruction, all symbolized by the Tibetan liberation movement, are also common human issues. The Dalai Lama’s philosophy of nonviolence and peace, while based on Buddhism, offers a universal ethic for world peace. Today there are supporters of the Dalai Lama all over the world, and the Tibetan liberation movement has developed into a peace movement on a global scale, concerned with issues wider than those of a single region and a single people.

Maha Ghosananda, who died in 2007, was a Cambodian monk who developed a peace movement in his country based on the same philosophy of nonviolence as that of Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama. He has been called “the

Gandhi of Cambodia.” He worked to bring about the end of the civil war and return his country to peace, and led the revival of Cambodian Buddhism, then close to extinction as a result of the actions of Pol Pot’s regime. From 1978 he was involved in relief and ministry work in the refugee camps that had grown up along the Thai border. He also made a positive contribution to peace building, describing Cambodia’s situation in the many countries he visited around the world, and he took part in UN-sponsored peace negotiations. He also aided international delegations looking into human rights issues.

The most widely known of Ghosananda’s peace activities is the nationwide peace march called Dhammayietra (often translated “pilgrimage of truth”; a *yietra* is a spiritual walk) that he instituted, in which Cambodian monks and laypeople walked together through parts of the country that were still dangerous and disturbed. The pilgrimage had its origins in traditions that the Buddha led his followers to many different places, including battlefields, to preach the Dharma. Ghosananda had learned about this kind of activity from Nichidatsu Fujii (also known as Nittatsu Fujii), the founder of Nipponzan Myōhōji, whom he had

met in India. In 1992, the year after the UN-sponsored peace settlement, Ghosananda led a group including monks, laypeople, and foreign supporters on the first walk for peace, from the refugee camps on the Thai border to the capital, Phnom Penh. The walk was held again in the following year, and every year thereafter, through areas marked by continuing skirmishes and covered with land mines. The participants cleared the land mines as they continued on their way. The Dhammayietra contributed greatly to bringing peace to the hearts of people who had been wounded spiritually by the war and to building peace in Cambodia. This peace movement has continued after Ghosananda’s death, concerning itself first of all with conflict resolution but also with deforestation, the clearing of land mines, and human trafficking. Drawn by the philosophy of nonviolence and peace that the Dhammayietra embodies, people of faith from many parts of the world take part in it.

The stance that Ghosananda took at the various peace conferences he attended and the idea of activism that the Dhammayietra imbues are conflict resolution through nonviolence from a position of neutrality. Since a major factor contributing to the civil war in

Cambodia was the collision of different ideologies, political groups, and political parties, Ghosananda's neutral stance can be seen as expedient. Its ideological foundation is, however, the Buddhist teaching of the Middle Way. Ghosananda writes of the Middle Way (or Middle Path) in his *Step by Step*: "The road to peace is called the middle path. It is beyond all duality and all opposites. Sometimes it is called equanimity." He also says in the book that the Middle Path is in one's actions of the here and now. In other words, Ghosananda taught that we walk the Middle Path when we are mindful of each and every step: "The middle path is not only the road to peace, it is also the road of peace" (Parallax Press, 1991, 51–53).

Peace movements have occupied an important position in social engagement within Japanese Buddhism as well. Ghosananda's peace march, as we have seen, was something learned from the Buddhist organization Nipponzan Myōhōji and its founder, Nichidatsu Fujii. Ghosananda met Fujii in 1953 while Ghosananda was studying at Nalanda University in India. Fujii had been close to Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Indian independence movement, and he imparted to the Cambodian monk the Gandhian ideal of nonviolent resistance and the peace march. Nipponzan Myōhōji monks assisted in the first Dhammayietra, and later marches received support from other Japanese Buddhist organizations as well.

Nipponzan Myōhōji, a religious movement advocating peace and complete nonviolence, emerged from the Nichiren sect. It is a representative example of active involvement by Japanese Buddhists in building world peace after the Second World War. Its philosophy of peace took form against a background of Japanese colonization in Asia, fascism, wars of aggression, and ultimate defeat. Nichidatsu Fujii was a Nichiren Buddhist monk who established the first Nipponzan Myōhōji temple at

Liaoyang in northern China (the former Manchukuo) in 1918. Then in 1930 he went to India, with the idea of taking Buddhism back to the land of its origin, and while there met Gandhi and was deeply influenced by his espousal of nonviolence. This meeting, and the later defeat of Japan in the Second World War, caused Fujii to devote his life to the global peace movement based on the Buddhist teachings of complete nonviolence. Nipponzan Myōhōji is known for building peace pagodas in Japan and other countries (for example, China, India, the United States, the United Kingdom, Austria, and Italy) as symbols of peace and nonviolence and for its peace activities centered on peace walks held around the world.

Japanese Buddhist organizations, particularly the Buddhist-affiliated new religious groups, have actively engaged in working for world peace under the influence of pacifism in the country since the Second World War. New religious organizations such as Rishso Kosei-kai and Myochikai that aim at promoting world peace through interreligious dialogue have been closely associated with the establishment of both Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan) and the World Conference of Religions for Peace and the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP) internationally. These organizations have actively promoted various kinds of activities concerned with international cooperation, foreign aid projects, and peace movements.

Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rishso Kosei-kai, which has taken a leading role in activities associated with interreligious dialogue in Japan, emphasized that the essence of all religions is one. For this reason, he sought the cooperation of people from all religions in order to achieve world peace. "If all people of religion go deeply into the most profound truths of their own faith, they will discover there, having penetrated all the various surface differences, the

truth that 'human beings are one'; what they all teach is that to live peacefully together is to live in accordance with that truth" (*Niwano Nikkyō hōwa sen-shū* [Selected Dharma talks by Nikkyo Niwano], vol. 6, *Sekai heiwa: rinen to kōdō* [World peace: Ideas and actions] [Kosei Publishing, 1979], 294). The root of this idea about activism can be found in the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, the basis of Rishso Kosei-kai doctrine, which speaks of the One Vehicle as a metaphor indicating that all the various teachings of Buddhism express a single truth. In addition to his promotion of interreligious cooperation on a global scale, Niwano also encouraged interreligious dialogue within Japan itself through the Brighter Society Movement, a citizen-based campaign centered on local communities that he first advocated in 1969. To further interreligious cooperation, the Brighter Society Movement takes part in local temple and shrine festivals; works with groups from other Buddhist sects to hold spirit-consoling services for the war dead and other victims of war, as well as for victims of traffic accidents; and interacts with the leaders of other religious groups (Ranjana Mukhopadhyaya, *Nihon no shakai sanku bukkyō: Hōonji to Rishshō Kōsei-kai no shakai katsudō to shakai rinri* [Engaged Buddhism in Japan: Social activities and social ethics of Hōonji and Rishso Kosei-kai] [Tōshindō, 2005], 202–22).

Japanese Buddhist global peace movements take various forms. Together with interreligious dialogue, international cooperation, that is, aid projects overseas, is part of the activities for building peace. For example, Myochikai, a Buddhist new religious organization, undertakes international aid activities in cooperation with other religious organizations and in particular focuses on helping children. It set up the Arigatou Foundation (now Arigatou International) in 1990 (<http://www.arigatouinternational.org/en/>), which is concerned with the rights

of the child throughout the world, education for subsistence and development, aid in fields such as medicine, and emergency relief to refugees and disaster victims. In 2000 it set up the Global Network of Religions for Children, an interfaith organization working to help children around the world.

Soka Gakkai also engages in international activities such as educational projects, particularly those promoting peace education; cultural undertakings; and emergency disaster relief through its international arm, Soka Gakkai International (SGI). Under the slogan of “promoting peace, culture, and education,” it looks to bring about world peace through dialogue. To this end, its president, Daisaku Ikeda, engages in dialogue with heads of state as well as with leading intellectuals and cultural figures from around the world. Ikeda states that it is dialogue that connects minds, links people, and eventually joins civilizations, and he believes dialogue to be the great road to peace. Since 1983 he has issued peace proposals in commemoration of SGI

Day (marking SGI’s inauguration in 1975), suggesting solutions, in the light of Buddhist teachings, to the various problems that challenge humankind. During the Cold War he called for a summit of American and Soviet leaders, and he has also advocated the establishment of human rights based on universal values, the setting up by the United Nations of an Environmental Security Council, and the signing of a treaty to abolish nuclear weapons.

Temples and priests belonging to traditional Japanese Buddhism have also worked in peace movements and promoted international cooperation projects. The Japan Buddhist Federation (Zen Nihon Bukkyōkai; <http://www.jbf.ne.jp/english/federation.html>) and the All Japan Young Buddhist Association (Zen Nihon Bukkyō Seinenkai), centering on young priests and laypeople, were set up through the collaboration of the various established Buddhist sects. The Japan Buddhist Federation aims to embrace all Buddhist organizations and movements in Japan and give them a sense of unity, and to promote

international exchanges and peace activities by Japanese Buddhism. It is concerned with information exchange, study, and friendship among member organizations and with assisting disaster victims, as well as with enhancing Buddhist culture and spreading world peace. In addition, as the Japanese representative of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, it promotes exchanges with Buddhists in other countries.

Another national organization is the Japan Buddhist Nursery and Kindergarten Association (Nihon Bukkyō Hoiku Kyōkai), made up of child-care facilities run by temples of the various sects. To encourage child-rearing based on Buddhist principles, it is involved with teacher training and with the support of kindergartens and nursery schools run by temples, and also with child-care facilities abroad (establishing the Bodhi Tree Kindergarten, the Bodaiju Gakuen, in Bodhgaya, India) and other international activities (contributions to UNICEF projects and fundraising).

To be continued

The Ome Retreat Center and the Youth Department

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.

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.

What gratified and impressed the overseas religious leaders who had taken part in the first assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace in Kyoto was the way young volunteers worked. For the seven days of the conference, young people from the member organizations of the Japan Religions League [now the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations] acted as interpreters, took delegates from the hotel to the conference center, expedited the operations and communications of subcommittees, translated and edited the daily reports, and provided refreshments. They paid close attention to every detail, wanting to make the conference an unforgettable experience for the foreign delegates. Two thousand young people worked behind the scenes giving their all to their task.

Young Rissho Kosei-kai members also mixed with the other volunteers from each of the organizations involved, performing their allotted duties in a whirlwind of activity. They stayed up into the small hours every night of the

conference, busy with their tasks, and my heart went out to them. It filled me with joy to see how far they had come.

The Youth Department of Rissho Kosei-kai began in 1949, the year after the first training hall opened, at the site of the former headquarters. At that time we had no full-time workers at the headquarters, so everything was done by volunteers. The young people who came every day to the training hall did all kinds

of chores, including cleaning the hall.

I constantly felt that Rissho Kosei-kai would never flourish unless we had sincere young people who, while affirming their own faith, would actively reach out to other people.

With the training hall completed in 1948 and the Kosei Nursery School set up the following year, more and more young people began to participate. I always held that unless I gave them religious guidance in a way that enabled them to undertake their religious training with joy, they would not have true

faith. Young people could play no roles in taking initiatives in various fields of society if we were not able to speak to them in a way that brought them joy in belonging to Rissho Kosei-kai.

I encouraged our young people to share their constructive opinions and received a variety of suggestions about how things should be done in different situations. When those suggestions were praised and taken up for consideration by the relevant department, the confidence of those who had made them increased a hundredfold.

In August 1949, when the Youth Department formally began, it had no more than twenty-one members. Their first activities included facilitating the services of members at the headquarters, such as cleaning and maintaining the nursery school, keeping members' lost articles, doing the washing, repairing paths, and similar tasks both inside and outside the training hall. While they undertook this work under their own steam, I always spoke to them together on Sunday mornings about the Lotus Sutra.

Eventually a group of mainly young people formed to play traditional Japanese court music, or *gagaku*, and a baseball team was organized. A class teaching Japanese sewing techniques was set up for girls, as well as a knitting club and a flower-arranging club. Myoko Sensei (Myoko Naganuma, cofounder of Rissho Kosei-kai) would arrange snacks of rice balls and sweet potato cakes for them.

Youth groups began springing up at Dharma centers all over the country from 1951. The Yomiuri Incident of 1956 provided a powerful spur. I have written already about how in January of that year, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* newspaper started publishing a series of articles criticizing Rissho Kosei-kai, starting with one accusing it of illegally cornering real estate, and going on to report incidents and trouble around the country as being the result of Rissho Kosei-kai's erroneous teaching and guidance. The young people set up investigating teams that went out to check the accuracy of the newspaper articles and compiled their results in a special report. These investigations and preparing the ensuing report for members took a great deal of time, effort, and mobility. But such things suited the young people admirably. These tasks toughened them beyond all expectation.

Rissho Kosei-kai sent its official report, titled "Report of Investigations into News Published by the *Yomiuri Shimbun*," to relevant government offices and to newspapers and other publications. This experience made us keenly aware that we needed our own newspaper, and that June *Kosei Shimbun* was published for the first time, with a run of two hundred thousand copies.

Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan) also carried out its own investigation of the Yomiuri allegations and published the facts in its newspaper, *Shinshukyo*

Shimbun, for all to see. This stimulated ideas to set up a coalition in eastern Japan of youth members of Shinshuren member organizations. Representatives of the various youth organizations paved the way for the setting up of the Kanto Federation comprising young people from six organizations—Rissho Kosei-kai, PL Kyodan (Church of Perfect Liberty), Sekai Kyusei Kyo, Myochikai, Shinnyo-en, and Shishinkai. The Rissho Kosei-kai Youth Department, which had started with barely twenty-one members, had bloomed into a group that was able to call upon the youth of other religious organizations and become the kernel of the ensuing federation.

As Rissho Kosei-kai faced a period of great change with the Manifestation of the Truth in 1958 and the move to a reorganization on the basis of a national system of regions, the Youth Department had a further surge in growth. Youth groups at Dharma centers had been springing up one after another all over the country, and the number of local youth members increased accordingly. In March 1958 they were organized under one umbrella that newly united all of our youth groups across the country. With this new start, attention soon focused on the training of young people.

The first step in this direction was a training session at the headquarters for youth leaders centering on lectures on the core teachings of Buddhism. When three hundred young members selected from all over the country took part in that session, I spoke to them of my hopes for them. "Only when you can build a correct understanding of the Lotus Sutra by acquiring a knowledge of doctrine, in addition to your experience of the faith so far, will you find true solutions to the various problems you encounter. I hope that you will become models as responsible members of society and undertake your duties at your workplaces with the awareness that you are lay practitioners of Buddhism."

My aspiration was that our younger members would aim to make the Youth Department an organization in which they could take part from their various positions in society while working on society's front line. This also meant basing the Youth Department on true lay Buddhist practice.

Young people will not develop their full potential if left alone. They grow through action. Their awareness and sense of solidarity, as well as the way they view society, are nurtured through how they act. Genuine faith that can influence society is built by praying in the midst of action and acting in conjunction with prayer.

In March 1961 the total membership of the Youth Department had passed three hundred thousand.

The Effects of Youthful Enthusiasm

Around the autumn of 1964 some leaders of the Youth Department proposed that youth members build a training and retreat hall themselves. The idea was to build with their own hands a hall large enough for around three hundred members to stay and train in. This proposal soon resonated in Dharma

centers throughout the country. Fundraising was the first item on the agenda, and members of the Youth Department began collecting money directly, holding bazaars, collecting used goods for resale, and hiring themselves out as farmhands.

Young people will not make progress if we adults just go around finding fault with them. If we believe in their inner strength and give them something that excites them, it will certainly motivate them. I told them, "If a senior member complains that you're going too far, I will personally apologize, so go ahead, just that little bit too far!"

Thus roused to action, they soon raised 200 million Japanese yen [about \$550,000 at that time]. This sort of thing happens when young people determine their own goals and band together to achieve them. How should we respond to their fervor? I promised, "Rissho Koseikai will match the amount you've already raised for the project."

The initial plan had been only to build a hall where young people could stay and train, a shelter from the wind and rain. It turned out to be a two-story ferroconcrete building of 1,800 square meters [19,354 sq. ft.] of floor space, with separate wings for men and women, on a hill in Ome City, western Tokyo. Young people from all over the country took turns working hard on preparing a site of around a square kilometer [about 247 acres]. The Ome Retreat Center was the fruit of their labor. It was finished in November 1966, just a little

less than two years after the idea had first been raised, for a cost of 470 million Japanese yen [about \$1.3 million].

Starting in 1967, therefore, young people could train in their own training hall. Their enthusiasm was tremendous, knowing they were training in a hall they themselves had built.

The four-day training sessions gave them new life. They studied Buddhist doctrine; took part in *hoza* [group counseling] sessions; and in the evening, practiced the chanting of *o-daimoku* and reciting the Lotus Sutra. The participants then reflected upon their own actions and repented anything they had done wrong. The hall would be filled with tears and an eddy of emotion. The training staff from the headquarters would have no more than two or three hours' sleep on the nights of these sessions, so immersed were they in the young people's needs.

Leaders of Dharma centers all over the country reported to us the changes they had witnessed in the young people after they returned from the Ome Retreat Center. They would go down on their knees before their parents and in tears repent the many times they had not honored them as they should and thank them for all that they owed them. The parents themselves were surprised to see such a change in their son or daughter and they realized anew the greatness of the teachings based on the Lotus Sutra.

In the eyes of parents, their child is still a child at any age. Imagine their delight, therefore, when they saw their

children realizing what it means to live a truly worthwhile life and to be able to speak seriously of their faith. When their children listened honestly, the change must have seemed almost miraculous to parents whose children had always resisted them. The training of young people at the Ome Retreat Center caused many such “miracles.”

I like young people very much. They have ideals. They have dreams. We must encourage them to tell them to us, and listen carefully when they do. Unless we can provide leadership in harnessing their aspirations to action, those ideals will remain no more than a dream. It is important that leaders understand this.

Another important thing is that people who call themselves leaders should not aspire to be “flowers” but act as fertilizer helping flowers to grow. People will spontaneously gather around a person who is able to do that.

Happily, such leaders emerged one by one from their experiences at the Ome Retreat Center. Young people, confident in their own faith in terms of both doctrine and practice, have been in the forefront of activities, such as the Brighter Society Movement, interreligious cooperation, and international relief activities. The Youth Department has nurtured among young people a wider mental horizon socially, a serious concern about faith and peace as real personal issues, and a self-motivated willingness to engage in activities.

My Hopes for Young People

Speaking of young people, I am reminded of the time when I, too, was overflowing with health and vigor. At the same time, though, I cannot forget that I am now past ninety. When I think back about my own life, it is very clear to me that no one can live without the care and help of others. At birth we are cradled in our mother’s arms. We are raised and educated with others’ help

and encouragement. In old age, too, we rely on others to perform such tasks as, if necessary, pushing our wheelchair.

But it is not only on others’ support that we depend. We must realize from the depths of our being the reality that we are all sustained, and allowed to live, by everything around us in heaven and on earth. What I especially want to say to all young people is that not only are they sustained in this life by others but they should also ask about their purpose.

In the past Nichiko and my other children used to say to me that they would not be able to perform anything the way I did. They seemed to mean that they were wavering in their determination to follow the path of faith. At such times I would tell them, “I’ve been able to run the organization up to now, but there will certainly come a time when you will do what you must do.” I would like to say the same to all young people.

After the Second World War, the Japanese people raised themselves from the very depths by their own strenuous efforts so that Japan eventually became one of the advanced nations. During that time, we people of religion devoted ourselves to encouraging the poor and the sick. In other words, our great task was finding solutions to the problems most Japanese people at that time faced,

which were described in such terms as “poverty,” “sickness,” and “conflict.” In time those problems seemed almost to disappear, and some people suggested that consequently Rissho Kosei-kai’s mission was also over.

In my opinion, poverty, sickness, and conflict are not the only reasons people come to a faith. In fact, when we look at the world today, far from disappearing, the nature of those problems has changed and they have actually become more severe. Now other issues have been added to those three: housing, education, and the aging population. Indeed, the main issues might be these latter three, though these, too, can in the final analysis be considered aspects of poverty, sickness, and conflict.

For example, conflict now mainly takes the form of family discord, which in the worst case finds parents killing children and children killing parents, and vicious crimes are being committed by ever-younger people. The same can be said about poverty. In the past, poverty meant not having enough to eat, but now I think that it is people’s hearts that are gradually becoming impoverished. There are some who go so far as to call this a form of mental illness, and in fact there are many cases where wealth has strangely given rise to mental disorders.

I heard about one woman who said that her family had built a new house where every room had heating and cooling, and each of the three children had his or her own room with a television. This stopped their quarrelling over which channel to watch, but after dinner each would hurry off to his or her own room and not emerge again. The woman’s husband always came home from work late. This left the woman all alone in the dining room absorbed in thought. She said to herself, “I have always done what I think best for my husband and children, but no one pays any attention to me. What has my life been?” This woman fell into a serious

depression, having lost all sense of purpose in a type of empty-nest syndrome.

That is a sickness rooted not in poverty but in wealth. It is a phenomenon previously unthought of. There can be no doubt that the approaching twenty-first century will be a time when mental disorders will be a central issue. At the same time, problems relating to emotional and mental health, such as refusal to go to school, and eating disorders, are also increasing. There are even reports of growing numbers of teachers refusing to go to school.

At the end of the Second World War there were around two thousand illnesses in the world, but now there are more than seven thousand. Physical abnormalities deriving from volatile chemical substances in paint and new building materials are also increasing. There are dozens of substances around us with adverse effects on the human body, such as dioxins, which have become a particular problem. Poverty, sickness, and conflict have now taken on new forms and are becoming ever more complex and urgent. In many parts of society, the fires of greed blaze up. In Buddhism, the starting point is the realization of impermanence, but people pay no attention to this and do not even realize they are drowning in a sea of suffering.

Drowning in a Sea of Suffering

The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings says, in the chapter “Preaching”: “All living beings, however, discriminate falsely: ‘It is this’ or ‘It is that’ and ‘It is advantageous’ or ‘It is disadvantageous’; they entertain evil thoughts, make various evil karmas, and [thus] transmigrate within the six realms of existence; and they suffer all manner of miseries and cannot escape from there during infinite kotis of kalpas.”

People are swayed only by what is advantageous or disadvantageous to them. Having evil feelings, they fall

drowning into the sea of the six realms of existence and do not have the strength to pull themselves free. Thinking only of their own self-centered desires, they are obsessed with their reputation, place, and position in society. Because they are convinced that only they are right, they have no sense that they are drowning. There is no way they can escape from this by themselves.

If people do not realize that they are drowning, they will not seek religious faith. As the Buddha said, “Bodhisattva-mahasattvas, observing rightly like this, should raise the mind of compassion, display the great mercy desiring to relieve others of suffering.” People who seek to walk the bodhisattva path and see others suffering must feel sorry for them and extend to them the hand of liberation.

These days, it is especially young people who should reach out to those who suffer. I have dwelled on this because it is something that must be engraved on the hearts of all young people.

It is said that the devil comes riding the vehicle called progress. Dynamite and nuclear weapons are cases in point. Similarly, some of the hundred thousand or so chemical substances made by man cause harm to human beings.

A while ago I had a dialogue with the Christian writer Shusaku Endo (1923–96). I remember that at that time Mr. Endo said, “People can suddenly encounter things about which they have thought nothing at all. Or they might find themselves visited by very bad luck. Or they may find themselves with no way out

of their predicament. Eventually, wondering why they alone have met such a fate, they begin to doubt the existence of God and the Buddha, who seem to have let this happen. But isn’t this the very place that faith starts?”

Buddhism says that without great doubt there cannot be great enlightenment. Therefore I would be very worried if young people did not harbor doubts about their lives and ask whether what they were doing was enough. Just as Shakyamuni appeared in this world for an important reason, I hope that each young person who will be living in the future age will continue to ask, “What is the purpose of my life?” I hope, too, that they will never forget that there will surely be a time when prayer becomes a necessity.

Scientific progress has been astounding, and it is difficult to predict what will happen in the coming twenty-first century. However, what is certain is that there will be great and difficult problems affecting the future of the human race that we people of religion will have to tackle seriously, such as environmental destruction and endocrine-disrupting chemicals. Reckless deforestation and overfishing and hunting will also become nooses around our necks.

My hope is that young people will take the lead in bringing others to the realization that everything in the world is closely interdependent. Science is indispensable for an understanding of how the world works; but for acting within it, religion is equally essential.

Toward a Realization of Our Buddha-Nature

I have a request of all young people. I do not want you to become the sort of people who complain about being unhappy because you are not as successful as other people. Don't compare yourself to others—if you want to make a comparison, compare how you are this year with how you were last year, asking yourself whether or not you have been of service to others. That's the sort of person I want you to be.

Some people develop ahead of their peers, others are late bloomers. At the end of winter the plum trees blossom first, when it is still cold; next bloom the peach trees and then the cherry trees. Cherry trees can bloom months apart, depending on how far south or north they are. Even a single watermelon can be sweeter on the side facing the sun than the part that is in the shade. Since some people blossom like plum trees and others like cherry trees, there is absolutely no point in comparing them, because the time they blossom is different.

People often declare that they have reached the age of personal responsibility. Personal responsibility is nothing other than taking responsibility for what you have chosen to do. I hope you do not become someone who just complains that society is bad or the government is bad without trying to take some responsibility for them.

When it is reported that a teenager has murdered someone, it is all too easy to blame an education system that does not teach the value of human life but is, rather, geared toward university entrance examinations and ranks universities according to the level of difficulty in passing these examinations. Buddhism, however, teaches that brutality lies hidden like a demon in the hearts of all people. We have to be aware of this. We should therefore scrutinize ourselves and recognize that hidden

within us is the kind of brutality that makes some of us, from the time we are young, do such things as tear the wings off dragonflies, tread on frogs, bully those weaker than ourselves, or rob homeless old people in the park. We have to teach people properly that when we can control these urges, we are able to show compassion and empathy, with the wish to help other people. This compassion wells from the hidden depths of our heart.

Buddhism calls this compassion in our heart the potential for buddhahood, that is, buddha-nature. Goodness means causing the light of this buddha-nature to shine forth, and it was for this purpose that the Buddha appeared in this world.

Because of this, it is important for those who lead young people to recognize anew the basis of Buddhist guidance, that anything intending to extinguish that light is bad. If young people are just told “what you have done is wrong” without our teaching them that basis, they will have no idea why and how they make mistakes.

A Chance Meeting with Great Consequences

I would like to tell you a tale of a chance meeting.

I have had many opportunities to go to Kyoto, visiting the temple Enryakuji on Mount Hiei and attending conferences of people of faith at our Kyoto Dharma center. When I went, I usually stayed at the Miyako Hotel. Right next to this hotel is a noodle restaurant where I often ate.

Since I usually took officers and staff members there along with me, the old woman who ran the restaurant seemed to think I was the head of some company or other and would always greet me with the words “Mr. President.” She was a good and openhearted person.

I would always order *nishin soba*, or buckwheat noodles with herring,

which is a Kyoto specialty, together with a flask of sake. After taking my order the woman would often bring out a plate of homemade pickled vegetables as a free treat. The noodle dish tasted great, but it was the old woman's character that inevitably drew me back to her restaurant whenever I visited Kyoto. Her son and daughter-in-law continue to run that restaurant. The new Rishso Koseikai Dharma center in Kyoto happens to have been built diagonally opposite.

Before construction began, there was a public meeting for local residents to voice their opinions. Perhaps because it is important to preserve the streetscape of the old city of Kyoto, the building code there is very strict.

The majority of those at the meeting knew nothing about Rishso Koseikai. Some had already expressed disquiet about the disruption Rishso Koseikai's building would cause. One of the residents' representatives was the son of the family who owned the noodle restaurant. I am told he approved of the plan, saying, “The president of Rishso Koseikai has been a customer at my restaurant for many years. He is a gentle and trustworthy man. There will be no problem about an organization with such a man as president building their center here.”

With the expression of such approval, the meeting came to a satisfactory end and construction began. Later, hearing from my secretary what had happened at the public meeting, I keenly realized that we never know where or when we will be helped, or by whom, and that we have to set a high value on our relations with others. If I had created a bad impression on that old woman when I first visited her restaurant, she might have taken a dislike to me, such was her forthright character. If that had happened, her son certainly would not have been kindly disposed to me. That experience reinforced in me how important it is to work to make such chance meetings as positive as can be.

To be continued

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 25

The All-Sidedness of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World (1)

*This is the 122nd installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra
by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.*

INTRODUCTION Of the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra, none has been more often misinterpreted since ancient times than this one. As mentioned briefly earlier, it has been interpreted very superficially, and the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World (Skt., Avalokiteshvara, Ch., Kuan-yin, Jpn., Kanzeon), whose name is often shortened to Cry Regarder (Jpn., Kannon), has been the object of an easygoing faith, as if those who call upon him were to be delivered instantly from all their sufferings.

To be sure, the first half of this chapter deals mainly with the supernatural powers of this bodhisattva, declaring that if people keep him in mind and pray to him, they will be freed from the seven misfortunes: fire, water, wind,

swords, demons, imprisonment, and robbery. They will also be delivered from the four sufferings: birth, old age, sickness, and death, and emancipated from the three poisons: greed, anger, and folly (or foolishness). In addition, they will have the kind of children they desire.

In ancient times when there were few educated people, these simple beliefs in regarding the bodhisattva as the sole source of spiritual support had some significance. In fact, innumerable stories have been handed down of actual instances of miracles credited to faith in him. I do not think that these stories are fabrications, because they are possible.

In short, such miracles occurred because of wholehearted devotion to the faith. Because the pure minds of

believers responded to the Truth (the Wonderful Dharma as *tathata*, or absolute Truth), their acts and surroundings were on the straight road of truth. Because they remained unaware of the real, or true, state of things, they assumed that they had been saved by the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, a godlike being with supernatural powers, entirely outside themselves.

If people have read the Lotus Sutra from the beginning and have understood its teachings, there is hardly any chance of their having such a misunderstanding. However, chapter 25, “The All-Sidedness of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World,” has long been circulated as an independent scripture known as the Kannon Sutra and has been widely believed in by Buddhists. Therefore it is only to be expected that ordinary people with no knowledge of the core teachings of Mahayana Buddhism would fall into such a misunderstanding.

When we consider the separate use of the Kannon Sutra and its general acceptance among Buddhists, its strong persuasiveness is evident. Wherever one travels, be it in India, China, or Japan, one can find statues of Avalokiteshvara, Kuan-yin, or Kannon. This is a fact that should not be simply overlooked.

The reason for this is that religion is not logic, but rather the fundamental means for liberating people from suffering. Devotion to this bodhisattva has for a long time sustained the minds of the peoples of Asia and liberated them from suffering. Hence it must be an invaluable blessing.

The principle of liberation. Although at first glance this chapter would seem to teach seeking liberation from something outside oneself—a teaching entirely different from those in the other chapters of the Lotus Sutra up to this point—we must earnestly pursue the truth set out in this chapter, since it is this very truth that can liberate humanity. As a matter of fact, it has already liberated countless people.

Let us take this occasion to refresh our understanding of spiritual liberation.

As already explained in detail in chapter 16, “Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata,” liberation happens when we firmly become aware of the existence of the Eternal Original Buddha, who is always with us, at all times and everywhere, and true liberation comes from the earnest, heartfelt realization that he sustains us.

That is because we find deep and true peace of mind for the first time with such a firm awareness. At the same time, our words and deeds naturally accord with the mind of the Buddha, that is, the Truth. When that happens, we will find ourselves naturally in harmony with the people around us. This harmony gradually fills our surroundings, which become the Land of Tranquil Light, an ideal society.

That is how it is with true liberation. Most people, however, misunderstand liberation as coming through the help of some outside entity. It is perfectly reasonable for some individuals to think so and it can bring them great happiness. Sustained by the faith that they are sure to be liberated or already are, they can live their whole lives with great peace of mind.

That would not be true happiness, however. The world is filled with multitudes of people, and if most of them are suffering, the happiness of the liberated few will not be complete. In short, however carefully you obey traffic laws or stay on safe sidewalks, you never know when you might be hit by a reckless driver.

Society cannot be perfected unless all people cooperate to perfect it. Until all social ills are overcome, no individual can find true happiness, because the roots of social ills will remain.

Similarly, someone who suffers headaches caused by constipation might take aspirin to relieve the pain. But aspirin would give only temporary relief, since it does not cure constipation, the root cause of the headaches. Society is the same: Although some people are aware of being liberated by a power outside themselves, they will not be fully liberated as long as others still suffer. Other people still have the root causes of suffering within them.

Some people would say, therefore, that it would be good if all people became aware that their liberation relied on external powers. But this does not work, for the following reasons.

The great power that exists outside oneself can, because of one’s karma, assume any number of forms and appearances. Anyone who is shown Avalokiteshvara’s powers of liberation will naturally worship him. Anyone with faith in Amitabha Buddha will surely call on Amitabha for aid. Because of differences of ethnicity, nationality, and culture, people in some countries turn to Christ, Mary, Allah, or Vishnu. Just as saviors take different forms, so do paths of liberation. Some people may feel liberated because their lives have improved, while others do because they have found peace of mind. This much is understandable, but others may believe they have won at gambling thanks to their guardian deity or even pray to that deity that they will not be caught in a burglary.

On a larger scale, some ethnic groups may come to believe that their deity wills them to commit genocide or to devote themselves more and more to war. There have been many such cases.

Just as one person will feel a need to turn to Amitabha Buddha and another will be equally convinced of a need to turn to Christ, the difference in their choice of savior makes it difficult for them to become of one mind, and there is no

end to discord. As long as there is human discord, individuals may feel liberated but will not have found true happiness.

For people throughout the world to find true well-being, they must be liberated not by faith in a particular power outside themselves but by the universal Truth (the Wonderful Dharma). People must be saved not by something outside themselves but by the universal Truth that is omnipresent, within and outside themselves, throughout the universe.

Religion has one true meaning. In the final analysis, those who inquire deeply into the true meaning of faith in particular gods, buddhas, or bodhisattvas will ultimately conclude that all religions share a common basic Truth. Religions or beliefs not based on this common Truth are false. Religions that are indeed true are based on this universal Truth, and at the very least they must share the common ground that people are liberated by taking refuge in the eternal life of the universe.

People of every religion must discover that. It is important to not cling to a shallow belief in powers outside oneself, but to believe in ultimate liberation by the highest universal Truth and abide by that Truth. If all the people in the world do this, they will share a common awakening to the meaning of liberation. They will be of one mind and therefore come together as one. There will be born a deep sense of awareness that all humanity lives by the universal Truth.

Anyone in the world—regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or cultural background—can believe this, but not right

away. It is a very difficult thing to realize, but over the long term it is certainly not impossible. That is why I believe that we must hold this up as the ultimate ideal for humankind. For this reason, I have advocated interreligious dialogue and cooperation for many years.

If we can discern the true meaning of all religious beliefs and grasp their universal Truth, we will thoroughly understand individual faiths and their significance, and those beliefs will truly come alive. This is also true of belief in the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, because he is no more than a manifestation of the universal Truth, that is, the Eternal Original Buddha. But some may wonder why his appearance is mentioned, so I shall explain.

Bodhisattvas are models of virtues. Fundamentally, bodhisattvas are messengers and embodiments of distinct aspects of the Buddha. The boundlessness of the Buddha's virtues and powers is hard for ordinary people to grasp. People find them simply unimaginable. So the Buddha sent forth bodhisattvas to symbolize each virtue so that even ordinary people could discern, recognize, and grasp these virtues more readily.

The bodhisattvas have perfected their virtues, and each bodhisattva is unique in character. For example, the Bodhisattva Never Despise honors others and brings out their buddha-nature. The Bodhisattva Medicine King repays the Buddha's grace by practicing his teachings. The Bodhisattva Wonder Sound devotes himself to the realization of an ideal.

Because each bodhisattva has a distinctive virtue, we can take them as models for our own lives.

The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World. What kind of virtues does the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World have? It is evident in his very name. His Sanskrit name, Avalokiteshvara, derives from the word *avalokita*, which is translated into Chinese with six meanings: to see, to be seen, to manifest oneself and let someone see the self, to see all things from all perspectives, to be worshipped, and to be seen clearly and fully.

In other words, Avalokiteshvara has these six powers. He sees and is seen by everyone in the world. He sees the real aspect of all things from all perspectives. He is not merely an abstract entity, but shows people his actual form. Many people in the world worship him. And finally he can be seen clearly and fully.

In Japan, Avalokiteshvara is well known as Kanzeon, or Kannon, which means “to behold clearly the sounds of the world.” It is of great significance that the name does not mean “hear” the sounds, but “see” the sounds of the world. Hearing is a receptive, passive, quite restricted sensory function. However carefully we try to hear, we hear a sound from only one direction, and usually only from a short distance.

In contrast, beholding (seeing) is active (in the sense of approaching others) and a very broad sensory function. For example, on the surface of the sun there constantly occur tremendous explosions of gas that emit terrific sounds, but we do not hear them at all. Yet, with the eye we can observe the sun’s dazzling flames. There is that great a difference between seeing and hearing.

The Bodhisattva Kanzeon does not merely listen to the sounds of the world but consciously notices them. He hears not only a narrow range of sounds, but sounds from far and wide throughout the world, loud or faint, missing none at all, and beholds the movements of the world from one end to the other.

Sound is made when things move, and for that reason the Chinese characters for *zeon* in Kanzeon refer to the living, moving world. Furthermore, the most significant sounds made by humans are vocal, and the characters for *zeon* also have the important meaning of the human voice and words. The Bodhisattva Kanzeon listens carefully, even to people’s silent, inner voice, which expresses the longings and prayers in their hearts.

The Bodhisattva Kanzeon has these virtues and powers. He sees into each and every thing in the world, regards them thoroughly, and appears everywhere in the world. He is seen and revered because he embodies true wisdom, which is the truth of the Middle.

The Threefold Truth. According to the doctrine of Tendai (Ch., T’ien-t’ai) Buddhism, the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World embodies the “truth of the Middle.” The truth here means the truth to which people are awakened. The doctrine advocates the teaching of the “Threefold Truth” by seeing the real aspect of all things from three perspectives: the truth of emptiness, the truth of provisional existence, and the truth of the Middle. This is a very important doctrine in the Lotus Sutra, so let us examine it in detail.

The truth of emptiness (*shunyata*) is seeing clearly that all things are essentially empty and that nothing is absolute or created by the absolute. The meaning of this emptiness has been repeatedly explained, so it should be very clear.

The truth of provisional existence addresses the concept that phenomena have unique individual forms and nature, or character. According to the truth of emptiness, all things lack substance, and while we see them as provisional phenomena arising from the combination of causes and conditions, we must observe clearly the true underlying reality.

The truth of the Middle is the way of understanding all things as they really are, neither adhering to the view of “emptiness” nor clinging to that of “provisional existence.” That is, this truth teaches that the existence of all things is both empty and provisional, and nothing is only one or the other. Thus it is beyond our linguistic expression and conventional understanding. The real aspect of all things can be perceived when we see emptiness and provisional existence as one in complete harmony.

Long ago, people found the truth of the Middle so difficult to speak or write about that the Japanese called it *myo*, or “wondrous.” It is even said that an eminent priest of the Tendai sect explained that he was so convinced of the utter inexplicability of the truth of the Middle that it was as if a stick had been placed vertically at the front of his open mouth to block all speech (suggesting the form of the Chinese character for “middle”).

I believe the easiest way for people today to understand it is the example of electricity.

It seems that scientists have not yet fully grasped the true character of electricity. Of course, explanations abound, yet there is still no clear understanding of its true nature. But from the point of view of “emptiness,” one can surely say that electricity has no eternal, immutable entity that is independent of everything else.

In any case, this fundamental view of the true character of electricity is what we call “the truth of emptiness.”

Merely taking that view of electricity, however, does not enable us to grasp clearly what it is. Only when we make electricity appear as phenomena—light from lamps, heat from electric stoves, the turning of motors, sounds from radios, and sounds and pictures from TV, can we understand

electricity for the first time. This is the truth of electricity's provisional existence.

But the truth of its provisional existence still does not give us a full understanding of electricity. Though we may point to the light of a lamp or hold a hand over the heat of an electric stove, it is both insufficient and inexact to say "this is electricity." Neither the light nor the heat is electricity itself. They are merely phenomena brought about by electricity.

Therefore, we try to grasp the process as a whole, regarding electricity (which is originally empty) as a phenomenon like light, heat, and other kinds of power, or sound, and say "this is electricity." We can say that this way of looking at things is the truth of the Middle.

The Threefold Truth (the truth of emptiness, the truth of provisional existence, and the truth of the Middle) applies to all things and all phenomena in the universe. According to Tendai doctrine, it also applies fully to the realm of the mind, and in Japanese the Threefold Truth in one thought is called *isshin sangan* ("threefold contemplation in a single thought").

It should be added that the truth of the Middle is also called the Middle Way. Since the focus of this series is not on Buddhist studies, let us not pursue the matter beyond noting this. Rather, let us give thought to how we should apply this teaching in our everyday lives. I believe we should accept and understand this in the following way.

To seek neither the similarities nor the differences between things, but to see all things as a harmonious whole, enables us to grasp the real aspect of things. Since things change constantly, we cannot perceive them correctly from a fixed viewpoint. Only when we see each thing as it is, constantly changing, can we clearly understand how it results from causes and conditions.

The wisdom of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World is compassion. He is the embodiment of this "truth of the Middle," and is basically true wisdom itself. Because this bodhisattva is true wisdom itself, he can clearly see the real aspect of all things in this world, and then he can be seen by all people as well.

Because this wisdom does not suggest a stern awakening that sees everything as empty, nor does it end merely in a provisional view that sees reality only as actuality, but is rather a wisdom that can capture the essential nature and reality of all things exactly as they are, we can say it is wisdom filled with great benevolence and compassion that desires to sustain all things as they are.

Because this wisdom is filled with great benevolence and compassion, it appears and manifests itself everywhere and is revered by all people.

By now the reader will surely have gained a clear understanding of the virtue of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, or the Cry Regarder. Since he is the personification of such great virtue, all people pray to him for liberation. In this chapter, however, the Buddha teaches us to take this bodhisattva as a model for living.

Keeping our minds on the Cry Regarder. Prayers to the Cry Regarder are based on wholehearted devotion to him, which has two meanings.

The first meaning is that sincere devotion to him opens the path of response to the Eternal Original Buddha. That is, if we pray wholeheartedly to the Cry Regarder, we will naturally respond to the Eternal Original Buddha, who sustains everything, and this brings us liberation.

The second meaning is that we long for that bodhisattva and want to become like him. If we pray to him with deep longing for him, we will one day come to embody true wisdom like he does. Let me introduce a deeply moving true story concerning this.

In the Iizumi area of Odawara City, Kanagawa Prefecture, southwest of Tokyo, there is a Buddhist temple called Shofukuji where a statue of an eleven-faced Kannon, known as Iizumi Kannon, is enshrined. When Ninomiya Kinjiro (later known as Ninomiya Sontoku, 1787–1856) was fourteen he visited the temple to pray to Kannon. He noticed a man there who appeared to be a wandering priest, chanting a sutra. Kinjiro stood behind him with his palms together in prayer, and listened to the chanting. Despite the difficulty of the words, he was able to make out their basic meaning. He felt their wonderful teaching permeate his mind.

Kinjiro waited until the end of the recitation and asked the priest the name of the sutra he had just recited.

"It is called the Kannon Sutra."

"Really? Is that the Kannon Sutra? I often pray at our family temple and hear the priest reciting that sutra, but I have never understood it. But just now I have understood practically the whole scripture. How could there be such a difference?"

"Well! That's quite commendable for someone of your young years. The reason is this. The sutra is written in Chinese characters and is usually recited in Chinese. To make matters more difficult, it is recited in the Chinese spoken in the kingdom of Wu [tenth century]. But I have recited the Japanese version of the sutra, so that's why you understood it."

"I see. Thank you very much. I, uh, have only a little money with me, and I would like to offer it as alms to you. And I have a request. Would you be kind enough to recite that sutra one more time?"

"I would be happy to do so. But I do not need alms. I will be satisfied with the intention of your kind offer."

“No, please accept it. It is an offering of alms.”

“Well, in that case, I gratefully accept it.”

The wandering priest received the alms reverently, then assumed the posture of prayer once more and recited the Japanese version of the Kannon Sutra. The young Kinjiro listened intently, and when the recitation was finished, he said, “Thank you very much. Reverend, is the teaching of this sutra suggesting that I too should emulate Kannon?”

The wandering priest was astonished and for a moment he stared dumbfounded at the young man. After a pause he answered, “Remarkable! It took me many years of practice to finally realize that we should all become like Kannon, but you have awakened to that after merely hearing the sutra only twice. That’s amazing. You are absolutely correct. The Kannon Sutra teaches that all people should become like Kannon and treat everyone in the world as Kannon would.”

It is said that this moment determined the rest of Kinjiro’s life.

Kinjiro went from there to his family temple to visit the graves of his ancestors, and said something as he crouched before their graves. Exactly what he said is not recorded, but there can be little doubt that it had to do with what he had just heard from the wandering priest about Kannon.

By chance, the priest at Kinjiro’s family temple who saw what Kinjiro was doing wondered about it and asked him what had happened. The young Kinjiro explained his wonderful belief in the Kannon Sutra. The priest was deeply impressed.

“I have never met a person as young as you who is so well versed in the Kannon Sutra. It’s quite amazing. How about it? How about becoming my disciple and succeeding to the priesthood of this temple?”

But Kinjiro promptly declined, “I am a farmer, and will stay a farmer until the end of my days.”

At the time, Kinjiro had already lost his father and was taking care of his invalid mother and many younger brothers and sisters. He was unfortunately destined to endure also the loss of his mother and the complete destruction of his farmlands by flooding. However, never losing courage, he worked and studied hard. He gradually won recognition, and by devoting his life to the rebuilding of impoverished villages, the restoration and development of land, and instruction in agriculture, he saved the lives of many people in the area of present-day Tokyo and the surrounding prefectures.

His compassionate, virtuous influence became so famous that before the Second World War, virtually every elementary school playground had a statue of the boy Kinjiro with a load of firewood on his back, reading a book.

It is unfortunate that so few of those statues still exist. Japan fully regained its footing after its wretched defeat in the Second World War through the spread of education, the development of superior technology, and praiseworthy devotion to hard work. In the years to come, too, for the resource-poor island nation of Japan to continue fulfilling its role as a member of the international community, it will depend completely on these three fields: education, technology, and labor. I believe that the Japanese should always emulate the spirit of Kinjiro, who devoted himself to these fields for the sake of others, and that these fields should be emphasized in the national scholastic curriculum.

Moreover, his wisdom extends to every facet of human life. All of his achievements were productive and cultural, and his character was sincere and deeply compassionate. He was exactly the kind of person that the Japanese should venerate and emulate.

In a word, the teacher Ninomiya Sontoku, as Kinjiro later became known, personified Kannon. Or perhaps we could say that Kannon appeared as Ninomiya Sontoku.

With this, the reader should have achieved an understanding of what Kannon is like, so let us now turn to the text itself.

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.