

Shining Our Light on Others

by Nichiko Niwano

Making the self our light and walking the Way does not mean being independent and conceited. It means that we shine the lamp of the Dharma amid every karmic connection and shine its light on others.

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

The Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo, the principal training center for Rissho Kosei-kai members, was inaugurated fifty-one years ago, on May 15, 1964. Since then, an eternal light has shone from the rooftop tower. That light symbolizes the bright lamp of the Dharma, Shakyamuni's teachings shining on the hearts and minds of people who are suffering ("Make the Dharma your light") and also the lighting of one's own lamp, that is, everyone being able to walk the Way by their own light ("Make the self your light"). Most importantly, there are no exceptions among us, since all people can be their own shining light and walk the Way.

In this vast universe, each and every one of us is an irreplaceable, precious existence. People who see themselves this way also see that other people are the same and their lives are equally worthy.

Our human goodness compels us to tell others about the happiness we ourselves have found, and those who have discovered their own worth surely cannot help sharing the joy that comes from revering humanity as they see it reflected in their hearts and minds.

Making the self our light and walking the Way does not mean being independent and conceited. It means that we shine the lamp of the Dharma amid every karmic connection and shine its light on others. As living beings who

continue to illuminate all corners of the world, we lead lives full of purpose in accord with the Way.

Donation Is Central to Life

Shakyamuni set the example for shining our light on others. However, rather than shining as an individual, he shone in the universe as burning star, giving light like the sun, and since then has always shined the light of his teachings on countless people. Since we are unceasingly bathed in the light of the Dharma, we become aware of the sanctity of our own lives. How, then, can we shine the light of the Buddha's teachings on other people?

I think undertaking our every task seriously, whether at work or at our Dharma center, thereby making others happy, is the best way to shine our light on others.

We study and practice the Buddha's teachings as lay bodhisattvas. The Six Perfections of our bodhisattva practice begin with donation. Therefore, the practice of donation is central to our lives. Those who donate with their bodies make physical donations. Those who donate with their hearts and minds make spiritual donations. Those who donate assets make material donations. Since all of these kinds of donation help

other people and let them rejoice, our practice of donation is clearly one and the same as shining our light on others.

There is an old saying, "A candle uses itself up in giving light to people." One merit of donation is that by doing our best for other people, our ego melts away from us. With our deeds we make others happy, and at such times our bodies shine a light equal to the light shone by Shakyamuni. In other words, we are shining forth on others a precious light.

Of course, it is difficult to do this constantly. However, an example of doing it regularly is participating in the Donate-a-Meal Movement, one of Rissho Kosei-kai's peace activities, in which we forgo a meal several times a month and donate the money saved.

This gives us a taste of selflessness and is an important practice for us as we lead our lives with the heart and mind of donation. Or, like the Zen priest Ryokan (1758–1831), who aimed to use words of affection, our being mindful in looking for the good in people and praising them for it is no less than a form of donation that shines light on others.

When we have this perspective, the eternal light atop the Great Sacred Hall symbolizes what lies deep in our hearts. Even if we shine only a single ray of light, I hope it will always shine forth to brighten and warm our surroundings. □

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

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Active Faith and Contributing to Society

by Hiroyuki Nasu

Amid the chaos and suffering in Japan that followed World War II, even the sick were unable to obtain proper health care, prompting Rissho Kosei-kai to establish Kosei General Hospital in 1952. The organization has since continued to broaden its contributions to society to meet changing social needs. For example, it established schools and centers of research and launched the Brighter Society Movement. All these activities are based on the organization's founding spirit of liberating people from suffering and restoring the world in accordance with the true spirit of Buddhism as epitomized in the Lotus Sutra.

The organization's founder, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, would often quote Saicho, the founder of the Tendai denomination of Japanese Buddhism, who said that "just as a net of only one mesh is of no use in capturing a bird, so too is a single sect insufficient to save all people." Interreligious cooperation has thus been a basic tenet of Rissho Kosei-kai's approach to its campaigning for peace and contributions to society. Informed by this thinking, it has sought to contribute to society in partnership with people of all faiths in Japan and around the world in pursuit of human happiness and peace in society.

In Japan, however, public awareness of religion's contributions to society has been low, and many people have been indifferent to those contributions.

That appears to have changed since the massive earthquake and tsunami

that devastated parts of northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011, with the mass media frequently showing Buddhist priests performing funeral services for the dead and comforting the survivors.

The director-general for reconstruction policy at the Reconstruction Agency of the Japanese Government, Mr. Masakatsu Okamoto, told a religious gathering in 2014 that religion was necessary for the bereaved to recover from feelings of loss. He said this at the Roundtable Conference of Religionists on Reconstruction, held by Religions for Peace Japan in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture. Mr. Okamoto had been involved for three years in rebuilding quake-stricken areas. He argued that it was important to reflect on the failure of government to work effectively with people of faith owing to an overly literal concern with the constitutional separation of religion and the state. He said this issue should be discussed more fully in the mass media.

Japan is now at the stage of evolving from a growth society into a mature society. In a society of growing diversification and individualization, the individual's independence and spontaneity is to be valued above all else. Just before he died the Buddha said, "Make yourself your light, make the Dharma your light." For Japanese individuals to do this, they must learn to think more independently and live more autonomously.

Human independence depends on knowing current realities and their background. Following the 2011

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earthquake, Japanese media provided a constant window on the misery at the scene. No one who saw those images could not have been moved to want to do something, anything, to help. Many set about giving and volunteering as a result. Knowing about other people's suffering cultivates a spirit of compassion that leads to the first proactive, voluntary steps. This applies equally and exactly to our own daily lives as we live out our faith. There can be a tendency to consider the living out of faith and contributing to society to be two separate things, but they are in fact essentially the same.

An important challenge for Rissho Kosei-kai in its future contributions to society will be to enable members to begin acting more spontaneously than ever. The most important thing, in all of this, will be the organization's founding spirit. The founder devoted his life to trying to liberate all people—believers and nonbelievers—from suffering, and to restoring the world in the spirit of the Lotus Sutra. Following the founder's example, we should seek to deepen our faith and serve as a light to illuminate the world through our own voluntary actions. Although it will take time, little by little our efforts will gain proper public recognition. I believe this is how people of faith can make society truly happy. □

Faith-Based Organizations' Contributions to Society, Past and Present

by Kenji Ishii

Whether the activities of faith-based organizations acting as public-interest groups evolve to become more public serving in character, or else sink into the egoism of organizational activity, will serve as an important indicator for gauging the future of Japanese culture.

It is already four years since the massive earthquake and tsunami struck north-eastern Japan, on March 11, 2011, and the shock of that day's events to the people of Japan has, for good or ill, faded with the passage of time.

People of faith and faith-based organizations have provided much greater sustained and organized relief to the victims of the 2011 disaster than was given to the victims of the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995. However, the reports and other information published by these organizations on the status and development of their activities can only hint at the time, resources, and number of people involved in their planning and implementation.

Vastly more information is available now than in 1995 on these activities. Some faith-based organizations publish pamphlets, while many others provide news on their activities, past and current, on their Web sites. The Japanese Association of Religious Organizations (made up of the Federation of Sectarian Shinto, the Japan Buddhist Federation, the Japan Confederation of Christian Churches, the Association of Shinto Shrines, and the Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan) reported on the responses of its five

member organizations in the February 2012 issue of its bulletin, *Nisshūren tsūshin*. Among other such organizations, Religions for Peace Japan reports regularly in its own bulletin on the activities and relief being provided.

People of faith and faith-based organizations are not the only ones concerned about the issues surrounding the relationship between disaster victims and religion. Interest is also incomparably

greater now than in 1995 among scholars of religion, as illustrated by the fact that one-third of the papers presented at the seventy-first annual conference of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies in September 2012 concerned the relief of disaster victims. Evidently, despite differences in individual scholars' fields of expertise and standpoints, there is widespread, strong academic interest in the subject. A special issue of *Shūkyō kenkyū*, an academic journal of religious studies, published that September on the theme "Disasters and Religion," contained eleven papers. Although the contributors' academic interests in some cases were not directly related to the question of disaster relief, clearly they all considered the issue worth exploring from their own different perspectives.

Some academics are also beginning to emerge from the ivory tower to become more closely involved in relief activities. Examples include moves to actively treat faith-based organizations' relief activities as social capital (see, for example, Yoshihide Sakurai and Keishin Inaba, eds., *Shūkyō to sōsharu kyapitaru* [Religion and social capital], 4 vols. [Akashi Shoten, 2012–13]), initiatives to play a liaising and coordinating role among people of faith and faith-based organizations (such as the Japan Religion Coordinating Project for Disaster Relief, headed by the religious studies specialist Susumu Shimazono), and the development of training programs (such as the Interfaith Chaplains Training Program, being organized by scholars at Tohoku University).

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Faith-Based Social Work's Long History

The active engagement of people of faith and faith-based organizations in society has come to be known in Japan in recent years as “social contribution activity.” Generally speaking, the initiatives by people of faith to help the socially vulnerable within the context of the wide-ranging ties that exist between religions and society have been considered through the lens of social work. Such faith-based service is nothing new, and records are to be found of the pioneering work by four institutions (Kyōden'in, Seyakuin, Hiden'in, and Ryōbyōin) founded by Prince Shōtoku (574–622) to deliver various forms of relief, and the bridge-building and irrigation work initiated by the Buddhist priest Gyōki (668–749). Later examples include reconstruction of the Mannōike reservoir on Shikoku, undertaken by the monk and scholar Kūkai (774–835); well digging by another monk, Kūya (903–972), in the Heian period (794–1185); and philanthropic activity pursued by the founders of religious sects based on close ties with the common people in the Kamakura period (1185–1333). These activities continued into and throughout the early-modern and modern periods.

Christianity's major role in the realms of education and health care since the Meiji period (1868–1912) is well known, and many of today's universities and hospitals in Japan were founded on Christian principles. Christians played a particularly pioneering role in the course of

the modernization of Japanese society in areas such as women's education and the campaign to abolish the system of licensed prostitution.

As Shinto has endured as a manifestation of traditional Japanese culture primarily in the maintenance of local communities, it tends to be regarded as having had a weaker presence in organized social work. However, this evaluation has mainly been due to contemporary conventions and patterns of social work, and Shinto may be regarded as having made its own contribution through its diverse ties with the general population. After World War II the Association of Shinto Shrines was formed, and since then many Shinto priests have been closely involved in community welfare services in such capacities as volunteer chaplains in prisons and other facilities and district welfare commissioners.

The new religions that arose out of mass society during Japan's modernization are also actively engaged in areas such as campaigning for peace, overseas aid, and so on. The year 2014 was the thirtieth year of Rissho Kosei-kai's involvement in the Japan Blankets for Africa Campaign, through which it has sent almost four million blankets to Africa. This is a prime example of the kind of sustained, charitable activity that only organizations can perform.

For reasons of space, we can examine here only a fraction of the kinds of activities engaged in by people of faith and faith-based organizations in Japan. Suffice it to say, however, that we see,

use, and benefit from many more of their activities in our everyday lives, including their involvement in the cleanup of local streets and railway stations, their provision of educational services ranging all the way from preschool to university, their operation of hospitals, and their service as prison chaplains and in other roles for which only people of faith are equipped.

Public Awareness of and Attitudes toward Faith-Based Organizations' Activities

These contributions to social services and society by faith-based organizations undoubtedly lead many Japanese, including me, to recognize and appreciate their activities. The aftermath of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami no doubt reminded us of the many roles they play.

Considered objectively, however, less than 30 percent of the Japanese population professes to having a faith, and only around one in ten has any religious affiliation. With ties to traditional religion waning and attitudes toward new religious groups as critical as ever, it behooves us to assess what ordinary Japanese really know and think about faith-based organizations' contributions to society.

The Niwano Peace Foundation in April 2012 conducted its second survey on how the Japanese public views

religious organizations' contribution to society. The purpose of these surveys is to shed light on the public's awareness of and attitudes toward social contributions by faith-based organizations. The second survey included questions on relief activities in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 disaster. Below I use the findings of this survey to explore how ordinary Japanese regard the activities of faith-based organizations.*

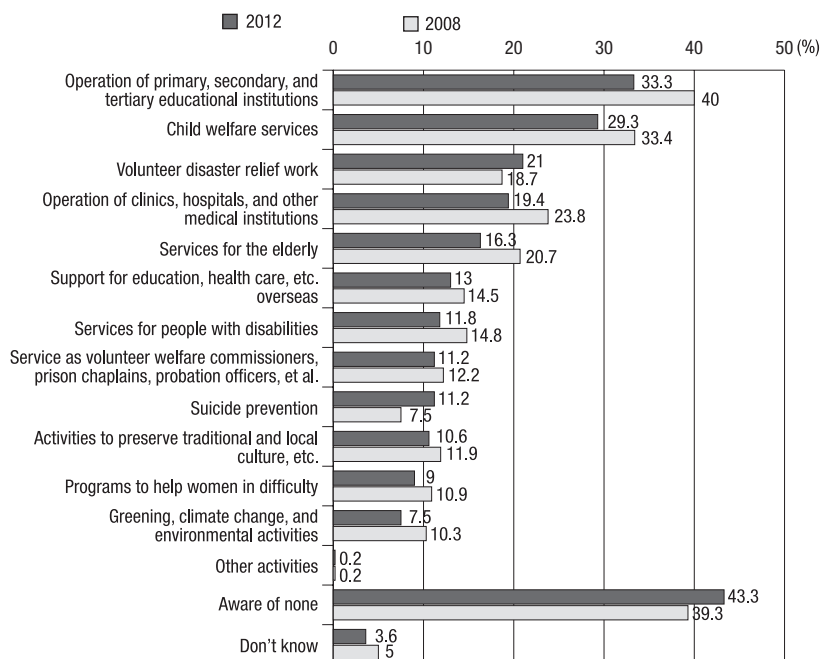
First, regarding awareness of faith-based organizations' social contributions, about one in three (34.8 percent) respondents was aware of the organizations' involvement in running schools, hospitals, and similar institutions. Figure 1 shows the percentage of responses regarding specific forms of such activity. Awareness was highest for "operation of primary, secondary, and tertiary educational institutions," at 33.3 percent. The most common response, by 43.3 percent of the respondents, was "aware of none."

The most common response concerning the social contributions of faith-based organizations, by 24.1 percent, was "did not know faith-based organizations engage in such social activities." Next came "as for what faith-based organizations do, I don't care either way" (23.1 percent). Overall, therefore, the attitude was one of indifference. While there were hardly any negative responses, only about 20 percent were "very praiseworthy activities, and I want faith-based organizations to be even more active."

Although the survey was carried out a year after the 2011 calamity, awareness of and attitudes toward faith-based organizations' social contributions were virtually unchanged from the previous survey in 2008. The same applies to the responses obtained in northeastern Japan, which bore the brunt of the disaster.

Regarding the questions about the 2011 catastrophe (figure 2), the forms of relief activity undertaken by faith-based organizations after the disaster that the

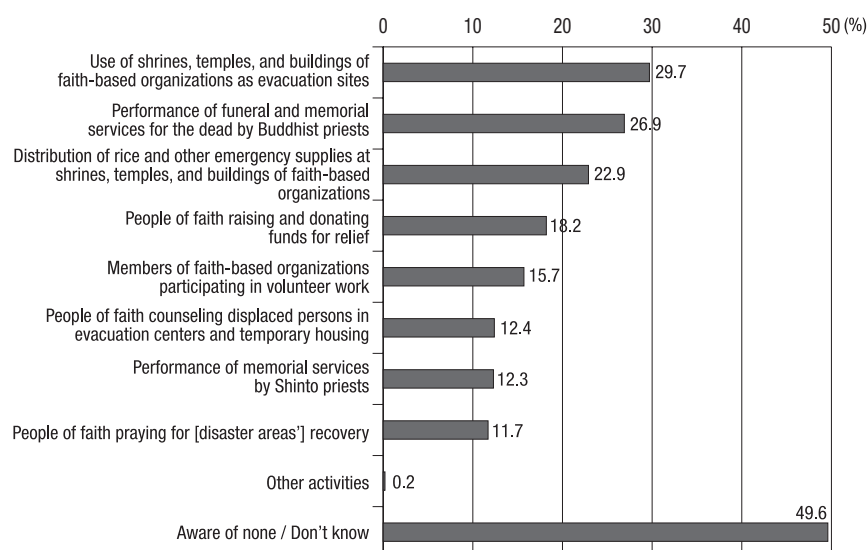
Figure 1: Awareness of social contributions by faith-based organizations



respondents were most aware of were "use of shrines, temples, and buildings of faith-based organizations as evacuation sites" (29.7 percent). Next came "performance of funeral and memorial services for the dead by Buddhist priests" (26.9 percent) and "performance of memorial

services by Shinto priests" (12.3 percent). Together, therefore, funeral and memorial services were cited by almost 40 percent of the respondents. "Distribution of rice and other emergency supplies" was cited by 22.9 percent. None of the other activities were known to more than

Figure 2: Awareness of the forms of relief activity undertaken by faith-based organizations after the March 11, 2011, disaster



20 percent of the respondents, and few knew about “people of faith counseling displaced persons in evacuation centers and temporary housing” (12.4 percent) or “people of faith praying for [disaster areas] recovery” (11.7 percent).

The fact that nearly one in two responded “aware of none” or “don’t know” indicates that faith-based organizations’ relief activities after the 2011 catastrophe are not necessarily well known.

When those who said that they were aware of faith-based organizations’ various relief activities were asked how they had learned of them, by far the largest proportion answered from “television” (81.8 percent). The next most common response was from “newspapers” (51.9 percent), illustrating that since the disaster we have obtained information on faith-based organizations’ relief activities primarily through these two media. In other words, these organizations’ activities would have been unknown without the media reports, so the reporting attitudes of the media have had a substantial impact on public awareness of the relief activities of faith-based organizations.

The form of activity considered best undertaken by faith-based organizations after a major disaster was providing “evacuation sites and collection points for relief supplies,” cited by 45.2 percent of the respondents, followed by “storage and distribution of relief supplies after a disaster” (31.3 percent) (figure 3). Neither of these forms of relief is directly related to religious activity.

Concerning the choices that did relate directly to religious activity, “performance of funeral and memorial services for the dead” was selected by almost three in ten of the respondents (28.4 percent). “Active visitation of victims by people of faith to provide counseling,” “establishment of counseling services,” and “praying for [disaster areas] recovery,” however, garnered only around 20 percent each.

Put simply, ordinary relief activities are considered acceptable, but anything that might be interpreted as proselytizing (except memorial and funeral services) tends to be rejected.

I was struck by a talk given by Rev. Naoya Kawakami, senior pastor of the Sendai Citizen Church of the United Church of Christ in Japan—which is

providing disaster relief in Sendai—at a February 11 symposium held by the International Institute for the Study of Religions. He said the public regarded religion as a private matter and that relief activities such as faith-based care were not welcomed in disaster areas.

Future of Faith-based Organizations as Public Interest Groups

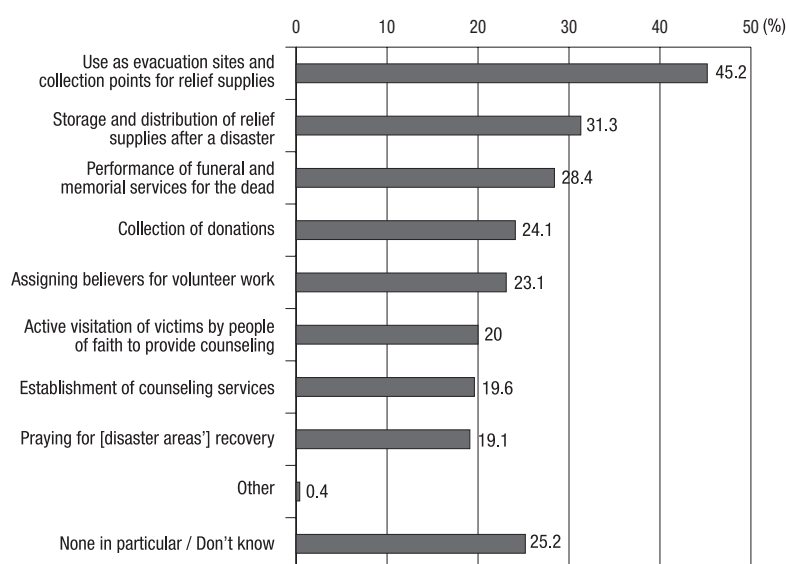
A report of Japan’s Central Research Services written by Yōji Inaba concludes the following from a comparison of three surveys conducted in 2003, 2010, and 2013: “In just ten years, peer ties that until now had been taken for granted have grown weak and peer trust is also disappearing. However, group engagement is being strengthened to compensate for this, and general trust, representing tolerance and altruism in society as a whole, is just about being maintained.” The social-related capital described by Inaba consists of the trust, mutual norms (or, more technically, reciprocity), and networks through which actions affect third parties other than the participants themselves (*Chūō Chōsa-hō* [Central Research Services report], no. 684 [November 3, 2014]).

As familiar ties break down, trust in tolerance and altruism in society as a whole is somehow maintained. Whether the activities of faith-based organizations acting as public-interest groups evolve to become more public serving in character, or else sink into the egoism of organizational activity, will serve as an important indicator for gauging the future of Japanese culture. □

*Details of 2012 survey

Respondents: Nationwide sample of 4,000 males and females aged 20 or over
Sampling method: Stratified three-stage random sampling
Survey method: Individual interviews by investigators
Survey period: May 10–19, 2012
Valid responses: 1,232 (30.8 percent)
Survey entity: Central Research Services, Inc.

Figure 3: The form of activity considered best undertaken by faith-based organizations after a major disaster



The Role of the American Muslim Community in a Pluralist Setting

by Sayyid M. Syeed

The first time that Muslim students abroad saw a new reality of a pluralist democracy was in America, where they were treated as equals and their practice of religion was encouraged.

During the middle of the last century, many Muslim countries were becoming independent of European colonial occupation. Their first priority was therefore to send their students to America for advanced studies in science, technology, and education. In the 1960s there were about a quarter million Muslim students at American universities. This was a new thing for America, to have that many Muslims at American universities and to have that many Muslims in America observing their religious practices, such as congregational Friday prayers and Ramadan fasting. There were hardly a few dozen Islamic centers at that time. Today there are more than two to three thousand of them, all built in the last fifty years. In the absence of their own Islamic centers, it was the Christian churches that opened their doors for Muslims to pray and hold other religious events.

Being in America was a new experience for Muslims also, because our earlier generations, under occupation, had been sent mainly to Europe. The Indo-Pakistanis and Malaysians used to go to London for higher studies, Algerians and Moroccans to France. But the relations between the host society and the incoming students was quite unequal. The first time that Muslim students abroad saw a new reality of a pluralist democracy

was in America, where they were treated as equals and their practice of religion was encouraged. So it was very much a new experience for Muslims as well as the host society.

This was the environment in which the Muslim Students Association of the United States and Canada was born, in 1963 (the organization celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2013). Later, I also came to America, as a student from Kashmir, to do my PhD. I became active with the Muslim Students Association, and after a few years I became its president, in the late 1970s. While I was president of the organization, which had already done so much good work in America, I thought it was a historic opportunity to have a modern-day Islamic community organization at par with Christian and Jewish communities. This would be our gift to America and a gift to the Muslim world. For the first time Muslims would be proud to observe a Muslim community flourishing in a pluralist democracy, and that would be a gift that the Muslim world would recognize with pride. So we transformed this students' organization into the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA).

It is important to note that this organization began in 1963—the year Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous “I Have

a Dream” speech, leading a march on Washington, DC. Usually, in America and around the world, when people think of Martin Luther King Jr. and his march and the whole civil rights movement in America, they think of 1963 as the watershed year for the beginning of a more racially inclusive society in America. But the fact is that it was also the year when America became more inclusive in terms of welcoming a new religion, which is Islam. So our growth, our development, started in 1963 in terms of having a well-coordinated community development, building communities of peace from state to state, from city to city in America. But the whole project was an interfaith effort, working together with our Christian and Jewish neighbors and their organizations in adding this new faith to American diversity.

Long before 9/11, Muslim-Christian dialogues and partnerships had flourished at the local as well as national level. ISNA had worked with the National Council of Churches (NCC) and developed a close relationship. The two organizations cooperated like twins, one the umbrella organization of thousands of mainline Protestant Christian churches, and the other the umbrella organization of hundreds of Muslim mosques. Similarly, ISNA and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops had vibrant cooperation at both the national and local grassroots levels. I had personally been invited to speak to the conference of Catholic bishops and the NCC executive board. We had invited Catholic leaders and the secretary-general of the

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NCC to address our national conventions and our regional conferences, drawing appreciation and applause from the audiences at the ISNA and Christian conferences. This relationship became much stronger and more visible after the 9/11 tragedy.

What was missing in this whole landscape of formal interfaith dialogues was the presence of Jewish organizations. Our members, American Muslims, were interacting with Jewish individuals as colleagues, teachers, neighbors, and religious leaders, but a formal interaction on an organizational level was conspicuous by its absence. We had a few awkward experiences in this relationship. Our local interfaith committee in Chicago had routinely invited an official from a national Jewish organization along with a long list of Christian leaders to address one of our national events in Chicago. The response was painfully upsetting for our local leaders. The Jewish official conveyed his deep resentment and suspicion of the host organization and declined to address the event.

I was invited to give a keynote address at the annual conference of Religions for Peace (www.religionsforpeace.org) in Chicago in December 2005. At the end of the presentation, members of the audience came and shook hands with me, hugged me, and expressed their heartfelt respect and appreciation. While some were hugging me cheerfully, others were taking pictures and trying to capture the joyful moments of interfaith celebration of love and happiness. But one audience member hugging me saw another person

taking our picture and jumped at the photographer and stopped him from taking our picture. He shouted at him that he would lose his job if his picture with me went out to his organization. Upon inquiry, I found he was from one of the national Jewish organizations, and there was real fear of being seen socializing with Muslim leaders.

This was a serious challenge to our ability to engage with the Jewish community as a formal partner for breaking down these barriers of mutual suspicion. I started to approach the largest single denomination, the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ). We had worked with their leaders in other settings. We had known one another in advancing the efforts for peace in the Middle East. It was very natural to see whether they

would be able to venture into a formal dialogue with ISNA. It took a few intensive meetings with their leaders in Washington, DC, and New York. It was very clear that we were as religiously committed to opening the dialogue with people of the Jewish faith as we were with people of the Christian faith. We had made statements formally saying that we were against terrorism in the name of Islam and deplored senseless acts of suicide bombers killing innocent civilians. Our passionate advocacy for peace in the Middle East and a respectable resolution of the Palestinian problem was equally matched by our counterparts from the URJ. They realized that we were genuinely seeking to build bridges of understanding with the Jewish community in America. This was critical in

view of the deteriorating conditions in the Middle East. We could build trust and goodwill and ultimately use these to address the injustices committed in the Middle East. Either we could do nothing and be confronted with the same tensions and mutual hatred being imported into the United States from overseas, or we could open up our communities to each other and promote mutual respect, understanding, and partnership.

We were pleased to see that our meetings and discussions on both sides were having the right effect. It was clear that they had been thinking along the same lines. Since this was the summer of 2007 and our annual convention was drawing close, we offered to invite the president of the URJ to address our convention. We were pleased to see that our leaders very much welcomed this idea. We were impressed to see that Rabbi Eric Yoffie, then president of the URJ, was ready to venture for this breakthrough.

It was in this context that Rabbi Yoffie was invited to address our convention in Chicago. His speech was delivered at the inaugural session of the ISNA convention. Despite the misgivings of many, the audience was very respectful, and he received a standing ovation. The coming together of thirty to forty thousand moderate American Muslims for the ISNA convention has always been news, but the address of Rabbi Yoffie made international news. It was a historic event.

We reciprocated this gesture of friendship when the URJ invited us to address their biennial convention in San Diego that same year in December. Dr. Ingrid Mattson, the ISNA president, delivered her speech to an audience of Jews listening respectfully to a Muslim woman addressing their convention for the first time. The extraordinary hospitality, love, and attention that our three-member delegation received at the conference was overwhelming.

These two historic speeches were followed later with many projects and programs of interfaith dialogue. We were

approached by various other Jewish organizations assuring us that they were equally interested in having formal organizational partnerships. We have since then collaborated with many of them in various partnerships and joint projects. We brought imams and rabbis together condemning Islamophobia and anti-Semitism and have established a twinning program between synagogues and mosques to promote a better understanding of each other's traditions and beliefs. We took delegations of imams to the Holocaust sites in Poland and Germany to see for themselves the Nazi crimes against a minority community as an example of what the Qur'an tells us regarding how humans who are created to be the best of creation can become demented if not guided by higher principles of faith (Qur'an 95:5).

These activities have opened doors for a better understanding and created an atmosphere of respect and trust. The hope is that this atmosphere will grow stronger and stronger as the challenges are growing more and more difficult.

It was in 2010 that we thought our honeymoon in America was going to end. There was a wave of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment. This was represented very loudly by a pastor in Florida threatening to burn a Qur'an, and unfortunately dozens of Muslims were killed in Pakistan and Afghanistan in protesting against this hateful act. That

was the same time that in New York City the Ground Zero mosque project was under attack. There were people who resented the building of the Ground Zero mosque in New York. That was also the time when Muslims had problems building an Islamic Community Center in the South, in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. There was a wave of anti-Muslim sentiment in America. That was also the time I was getting letters of support and sympathy from Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish leaders condemning the anti-Muslim rhetoric. They were assuring us that these hate-mongers did not represent Christianity or Judaism. Finally, these faith organizations, our partners, decided that they would come to Washington, DC, and hold a summit of religious leaders on August 7, 2010, where they would articulate their rejection of anti-Muslim sentiment that was growing quite loud and intense.

On September 7, 2010, a summit of Christian and Jewish religious leaders was held in Washington, DC, and at their major press conference at the National Press Building, these leaders denounced anti-Muslim bigotry. But they did something more than that. They created a campaign called Shoulder to Shoulder: Standing with American Muslims; Upholding American Values. And you know what American values they were talking about. They

said that they could not allow hatemongers to attack the Muslim community in America, because an attack on one religion was an attack on all religions. They said that those who indulge in bigotry against a religious community would be destroying the most cherished asset of American society, which is respect for diversity. They raised about a quarter million dollars to run this campaign. They advertised the position of a director for Shoulder to Shoulder (www.shouldertoshouldercampaign.org) and appointed a professionally trained and highly motivated Mennonite Christian woman as the coordinator of this movement. We in the Islamic Society of North America host Shoulder to Shoulder in our office on Capitol Hill, but it is steered and funded by Christian and Jewish organizations and leaders.

This campaign has shown impressive results. This organization has now devoted four years of work to opposing Islamophobia in America. One may have seen that in 2010 anti-Muslim rhetoric was about to become acceptable to the mainstream. But this alliance of faith leaders has made sure that anti-Muslim sentiment is no longer a respectable discourse.

One can imagine what it means to live in an environment where major representatives of Islamic, Christian, and Jewish religions, organizations, and institutions are participating together in creating an environment of mutual respect and religious freedom. It means that when we

turn on the television and hear that a church has been burned in Pakistan or that something of this nature has happened anywhere in the world, it becomes a part of our Islamic responsibility to come forward and see what we can do together to avert further such incidents. That is exactly what we have been doing.

America's Muslim community has become a strong voice against misuse of Islam as an ideology to justify extremism and violence. We are working with Religions for Peace, our partner from other faiths, to play a role in various regions to mobilize Muslim thinkers, scholars, and activists who share our vision of a pluralist society and the role of Islam in reinforcing it. We are strengthened in this resolve by our interfaith partners in the United States and around the world.

Our advocacy against racism, violence, poverty, and other moral issues has helped us to discover new allies from other faith groups as well. We have joined Hindus, Buddhists, Bahá'ís, and others in our campaigns for religious freedom and against forced conversions and discrimination. We have found valuable allies in the Buddhist community for human rights and religious freedom in Myanmar and Sri Lanka. We have a common cause with them against the weaponization of nuclear technology. We are particularly proud of putting together the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (www.nrcat.org), a multifaith advocacy group that

successfully impacted the policies of the US government against use of torture in interrogations. All of our faith groups shared the belief that torture is a moral issue and should be dealt with as such.

We believe the power of faith translated into action in partnership with others is the greatest gift to humankind and we should continue to engage with others in our journey to seek peace and justice for ourselves, for our human family, and for the beautiful planet that our Creator has entrusted us with. □

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How Altruism Can Solve Religious Conflict

by Rey-Sheng Her

The spirit of Tzu Chi is one example that supports the idea that altruistic voluntarism is stronger than religious belief. . . . Altruistic activities and experiences have resulted in mutual acceptance and understanding between different religions and lessened the conflict between them.

The tension between different religions is one of the major crises of modern society. During the last half century, the number of fundamentalist movements of all religions has tripled worldwide. Bruce Hoffman, the author of *Inside Terrorism*, observed that there has been a virtual explosion of identifiable religious terrorist groups—from none in 1968 to the level today, when nearly a quarter of all terrorist groups active across the world are predominantly motivated by religious beliefs. Hoffman says, “Religion may not trigger the conflict alone but serves as a legitimizing force conveyed by a sacred text or imparted via clerical authority claiming to speak for the divine” ([Columbia University Press, 1998], 89).

On the one hand, conflicts are increasingly pervasive, but on the other hand, scholars like Peter Clarke from Oxford argue that the boundary between different religions has diminished in all regions. In his speech “Why the World Needs Tzu Chi,” given in 2012 at the Tzu Chi Foundation’s Jingshe in Hualien, Taiwan, Clarke stated that in Brazil and Europe there are increasing numbers of people who identify themselves as Buddhist-Catholic or Catholic-Buddhist. Will this gradual mixing of different

religious philosophies and practices reshape the traditional face of monotheism and provide hope for reducing tensions among religions? Will it reveal the decline of friction between traditional religions or merely create new forms of tension among them?

The Altruism That Goes beyond Religious Beliefs

My investigation of altruism will focus on the operational model of the Tzu Chi Foundation (*Tzu Chi* means “compassion relief”), the largest Buddhist-based charity organization in the ethnic Chinese world. It runs charitable operations in eighty-eight countries, with ten million members and two million volunteers, including large numbers of Christians and Muslims. By providing emergency relief and long-term support to people in countries like Haiti, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Myanmar, and China, Tzu Chi has been able to enlist local volunteers who have committed themselves to the foundation but also hold religious beliefs other than Buddhism.

In South Africa, Tzu Chi has reached out beyond the ethnic Chinese community to introduce its philosophy to

thousands of local people and inspire them to go out into their communities to help the poor, the sick, and victims of HIV/AIDS. In Manila, the Philippines, more than ten thousand devout Catholics who were aid recipients during the flooding of September 2009 have joined Tzu Chi as volunteers. In Haiti, hundreds of Tzu Chi volunteers are Catholics who survived the 2010 earthquake (Yungli Tseng, Colin Legerton, and Peter Chu, “Hope, Commitment, and Love: Three Schools for the Sisters of Saint Anne,” *Tzu Chi Quarterly* 20 [Fall 2013]: 31). Tzu Chi’s mission is to inspire people to devote themselves to their community; it is not to convert them to Buddhism. Many volunteers today are devout Christians who see Tzu Chi’s message as being in harmony with their own faith. “We are doing God’s work,” said Zulu Tzu Chi volunteer Gladys Ngema, a devout Protestant: “Master Cheng Yen has great love. Jesus and Buddha are the same” (Rey-Sheng Her, “The Innumerable Meaning of Sutra and the Philosophy and Practices of Tzu Chi,” *Journal of Dharma Seals* [2012]: 1).

A Zulu Catholic priest from South Africa has just become a commissioner of Tzu Chi; he is still a priest but is also committed to the Buddhist principles of Tzu Chi. He now teaches Tzu Chi’s precepts and practices in his church.

In Indonesia, Imam Habib Saggaf, who established a Muslim school with more than ten thousand students who are orphans or come from poor families, has accepted support from Tzu Chi for many years. Now the school

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teaches the students not only the precepts of the Qur'an but also precepts from the book *Still Thought Aphorisms* by Dharma master Cheng Yen. Thousands of Habib's students join Tzu Chi as volunteers to support their community. Habib also hangs a picture of Ven. Cheng Yen along with one of Qur'anic scripture in his office and all the school's sixty classrooms. Nonetheless, Habib and his students maintain their belief in Islam (Musu Shu, *The Enlightenment of Great Love: A Case Study of Tzu Chi's Charity in Jakarta* [Tzu Chi University Press], 121).

These phenomena are evidence for the research of Peter Clarke, who suggests that "the New Religion Movements and a new kind of holistic, inner-directed spirituality have introduced a new cognitive religious style, which appears in a growing number of those who do not attend church. This is a style that places the emphasis on experience, not on faith. One can, thus, be spiritual or religious without faith" (*New Religions in Global Perspective: A Study of Religious Change in the Modern World* [Routledge, 2006], 308). The Tzu Chi case indicates that volunteers committed to their original beliefs can accept Tzu Chi's doctrines; actually, they say that Tzu Chi has strengthened their beliefs.

The spirit of Tzu Chi is one example that supports the idea that altruistic voluntarism is stronger than religious belief. Thus traditional beliefs, which people use to differentiate themselves from pagans, may no longer confine Tzu Chi members. These altruistic activities

and experiences have resulted in mutual acceptance and understanding between different religions and lessened the conflict between them.

My investigation aims to understand the key philosophies and practices that Tzu Chi has brought to its Christian and Muslim members and that also inspire them to perform altruistic activities in their own communities.

What are the concepts of voluntarism of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation that are compatible with the doctrines of Christianity and Islam held by Zulu members and Indonesian Muslims?

The Ideal of Altruism Provided by Tzu Chi

Altruism, defined as selfless love or giving with gratitude, has to provide freedom and individuality to recipients. One criterion that Tzu Chi practices is to support the recipients and inspire their love so that in due course they will be self-supporting like the Indonesia Muslim school or support others in need, as Tzu Chi has done in South Africa. However, this further development and devotion should be self-driven, self-motivated, and without pressure or external force.

Second, altruism does not intend to disadvantage the practitioner; on the contrary, it proves that givers benefit from their giving. The key factor is that the giver does not seek benefit in return. The motivation has to be purely altruistic so that the result can be positive for both the recipient and the giver. The root of life's suffering, according to the

Buddha's teaching, has been unlimited human desire and greed. Eliminating greed and desire will create the wisdom to reach eternal happiness. Giving with selfless love can be the pivotal practice for the volunteers for reaching a state of calmness and happiness.

Third, in Tzu Chi, the volunteers' safety is the first priority for emergency relief work. It is a prerequisite to ensure that when volunteers go to the scene of a natural disaster, their safety is guaranteed. For Master Cheng Yen, all lives are equal, as she said in establishing the first bone marrow bank for ethnic Chinese. She will not sacrifice a healthy person to save a patient. Only when we are assured that the donors themselves are safe is it reasonable to save someone who is endangered. If the givers themselves risk danger, people will be unwilling to participate in altruistic voluntary relief work—and more victims will be neglected.

Fourth, providers of altruistic activities have to know, objectively, the needs of recipients in order to provide the appropriate help. Otherwise, even if the giver has the motive to be altruistic, the result may be harmful or inappropriate for the recipient; this does not meet the definition of altruism.

Fifth, it is very important not to force volunteers to support the needy, no matter how important the missions are. Tzu Chi highly respects the autonomy of volunteers and gives them the discretion to determine any mission in which they wish to be involved. Dharma master Cheng Yen has earned the greatest

respect from Tzu Chi volunteers. When she believes that a matter is very important, she explains it clearly and uses love and insight to inspire volunteers rather than giving them instructions to follow. Altruism has to be completely self-driven, and individuals always have the freedom to choose when to give, how to give, what to give, and whether to give at all.

Sixth, altruism always comes with discipline. Participants in these altruistic activities are subject to mandatory rules that aim to preserve the honor and credibility of the organization and its membership. These rules, such as no drugs, gambling, or consumption of alcohol, are considered critical for volunteers. The rules may also benefit recipients, but it can be difficult to encourage recipients to obey them. Thus communication and explanation of this altruistic behavior to the recipients is necessary. If the givers can provide better communication and explanation, their behavior is closer to altruistic. Conversely, the more compulsory the methods and attitudes of the givers toward the recipients, the more they depart from the ideal of altruism.

Seventh, the ultimate and most difficult altruism is to respond to hatred with love. There was violence throughout Indonesia in 1998. Many ethnic Chinese were killed by Indonesian mobs, and many local Chinese either fled or went into hiding. Master Cheng Yen asked Tzu Chi volunteers who were standing by to stay where they were and started to think about how to use this opportunity to give back to the local Indonesian community. Her compassion and wisdom influenced the volunteers. During the upheavals of the 1998 riots, volunteers donated materials and medicines to more than one hundred thousand people in Jakarta. In 2002, with the help of local entrepreneurs as volunteers who offered their own effort and resources, Tzu Chi started a charity and a free clinic near the filthy Angke River in Jakarta.

As I described in *The Philosophy and Practice of Tzu Chi*, the first step was to clean up garbage from about six miles of the river and move out all of those who lived on its banks. Then the volunteers built Da Ai (Great Love) houses as brand-new homes for the villagers ([Lee-Shu Publishing, 2008], 194–95). Tzu Chi volunteers also built schools in the community, offering the best opportunity for education to the next generation. In addition, there is a permanent free clinic and a factory in the community, providing the residents with medical care and stable jobs. Tzu Chi volunteers also built a multipurpose house of worship for all religions.

This is Master Cheng Yen's ultimate goal of altruism, to employ selfless love to the people who used to be hostile to us. Through this, we are able to achieve the resolution of conflicts and build harmony between religions, races, and nationalities.

A Buddhist Concept in a World of Conflict

Tzu Chi's philosophy of selfless love is based on the teachings of the Buddha, which advocate neither violence nor conflict in any human interaction. In fact, the Buddha was born in a time of war, when his own kingdom was being attacked by outside forces. The Buddha did not use force or arms to help save the Kapila kingdom, which he was supposed to inherit. Instead, he sat serenely on the spot where a large invading army of the king of Kosala, Virudhaka, was to pass on its way into his kingdom. The Buddha deliberately sat under a lone, dead tree. Virudhaka went to see him, wondering why he had chosen to sit under a bare tree. The Buddha explained, "The shade of one's kin is superior to that of outsiders." Virudhaka understood this to mean that the Buddha felt himself to be under the protection of the Sakya clan even in this exposed circumstance.

Virudhaka was touched and called off the confrontation. The Buddha saved the day.

However, the Kapila kingdom was not able to escape destruction as a nation in later years. The third time Virudhaka returned, the Buddha saw that karmic consequences must be accepted, and he did not resist. The Buddha did not detach himself from the sufferings of war, but he did not use resistance to confront threats.

In the process of losing his homeland, the Buddha said, "Detach a member for a family; detach a family for a village; detach a village for a nation; and detach oneself for a lifetime." According to Dharma master Yin-shun, this meant "To detach a lifetime 'for oneself' is to liberate oneself for the realization of truth. This kind of 'for oneself' is for the people, to free yourself from the bondage of self to be able to become involved with humanity" (*Buddha in the Earthly World* [Chen-Win Publishing, 1971], 313). Since the Buddha sought to free himself from violence, he could not take part in violence. Upon Virudhaka's third return, the Buddha thought that protecting his kingdom would simply prolong human savagery, . . . violence and that by acceding to his clan's karma he could avoid contributing to bad karma.

This is the ultimate peace and absolute nonviolence of the Buddha's teaching. Dharma master Cheng Yen shares the same philosophy as the Buddha. In her mind, there should be neither conflict nor violence at any time nor under any circumstance. Her three ultimate loves have been defined as love all, lead others to love, and, finally, respond to hatred with love. Through practical altruistic activities, religious groups work together to help others, reduce inequality in society, and avoid debating their essential faith in one God and the perplexity of reincarnation. This may contribute to ending the continuous conflicts between religions in our society. □

Religious Altruism and Its Contribution to Society

by Keishin Inaba

Only when activities are publicly performed will the practical effects of social contributions by people of faith elicit society's sympathy. And only when the logic of altruism is communicated to the world in a way that transcends the boundaries of each religion will it create bridging social capital that can link people.

Major disasters are occurring with great frequency all over the world. At the same time, people are coming together to solve common problems, giving rise to a new solidarity. Even as the individualization of society progresses, there are people who do not feel it is a matter of self-sacrifice to help others or act altruistically. On reflection, we realize that religions, throughout their long history, have always taken a strong interest in helping people when bad things happen. All religions teach altruism, consideration for others, and the value of acting according to these virtues.

In recent years, research on altruism has been flourishing in various academic fields. In 2009 the American Sociological Association set up a specialist study group, the Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity Section. In the field of religious altruism, the subjects of study now include a movement that puts into practice faith-based action to contribute to society.

Aspects of Religious Altruism

Altruism is taught by Buddhism and all other religions. Words related to altruism

include *charity*, which has its origins in Christianity. *Charity* comes from the Latin *caritas*, a translation of the Greek word *agape*, which in Christianity indicates the love of God and love for one's neighbor. Specifically, in the teachings of Jesus, charity to the poor is considered the most straightforward expression of love for one's neighbor. It is exemplified by the parable of the Good Samaritan, who reached out to help a traveler who had fallen by the wayside after being beaten and robbed (Luke 10:25–37). In religious terms, charity means good deeds and acts of goodwill inspired by compassion that help the poor and unfortunate.

Not only Christianity but Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and many other religions teach that charity is noble behavior or a duty of believers. Charity is related to the practice of giving some of one's assets as alms to the poor. This is where the concept of mutual aid or altruism comes in. The holy canon of Judaism teaches that charitable acts are performed in God's honor. Giving alms (*zakat* in Arabic) is also one of the Five Pillars of Islam, and Islamic countries have welfare systems (*waqf* in Arabic) for the public good.

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Since the principal teachings of Japan's Shrine Shinto do not include making charitable contributions to individuals, Shrine Shinto has seldom been the subject of research on religious altruism and its contribution to society. However, if we take a historical perspective, immediately after the Second World War the Shinto priesthood did become involved in society, setting up nursery schools and serving in positions of responsibility for social welfare: as chaplains, juvenile probation officers, district welfare commissioners, and so on. Also, more recently, more Japanese are voicing their appreciation of Shinto and Shinto cultural expressions, symbolized by the benefits accorded by village shrines as locations of groves of large trees.

Belief in a certain religion means that believers' value systems and worldviews are built up around that religion. The religion's teachings on altruism will also regulate how believers live, nurturing a

spirit of altruism. Scholars in the West have pointed out that religion makes people altruistic. In Japan it has also been found that religious belief encourages participation in volunteer work.

Religion as Social Capital

I have defined religions' contribution to society as "the contributions of religious believers and religious groups, as well as of religious cultural assets and concepts, to solving problems in society's various domains and to maintaining and enhancing the quality of people's lives" (*Ritashugi to shūkyō* [Altruism and religion], [Koubundou, 2011]). This also defines religion as social capital; that is, religious social capital is the peace of mind and community bonds linking people that arise from religious culture, spaces, and concepts. Appreciation of religion as social capital is high in the West. Religions and houses of worship can link people to form the foundation of a community.

A problem arises at this point. The faith and worldview that accompany religious belief form a backbone for the volunteer spirit found in all religions. In addition, this kind of shared faith and worldview also lend significant psychological support to volunteers working together. The behavior created by members' shared religious worldview, however, can in itself seem to close off people who do not share that particular religion's worldview. This is called bonding social capital.

At the same time, it cannot be denied that the social contributions of a religion and the volunteer activities of its believers can transcend religion, engender social sympathy, and communicate the logic of altruism to the world. This constitutes bridging social capital, which encompasses both the function of undertaking and performing the practical tasks of making a social contribution as a religious group or as a believer and the function

of providing a public forum for nurturing a spirit of thoughtfulness.

Cooperation of Local Governments and Religious Facilities during Disasters

A major change has recently arisen in Japanese society with respect to the relationship between religion and government, which involves a form of cooperation that transcends the concept of separation of religion and the state. After the massive earthquake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011, many people were evacuated to religious facilities—temples, shrines, and churches—that were not officially designated as evacuation shelters. The elementary school gymnasiums that were designated as shelters had hard wooden floors that took a physical toll on evacuees there. Many people were more comfortable on the tatami-mat floors of temples. Religious buildings in rural areas often function as social capital and in this case were appreciated as evacuation shelters during the disaster.

I was the principal investigator of a study funded by Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research, supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion

of Science, titled "Action Research on Regional Disaster Prevention Using Religious Facilities as Regional Resources." This study aimed to clarify the existence of disaster assistance agreements between municipal governments and religious facilities on a national basis. A survey of 1,916 municipal governments was carried out in July 2014. It included wards of cities designated under the Local Autonomy Law as having a population greater than five hundred thousand. Replies were received from 1,184 municipalities (a response rate of 62 percent).

Of these, 95 municipalities had disaster relief agreements with religious facilities (involving 399 religious facilities, of which 272 were designated as official evacuation shelters), while 208 municipalities did not have agreements but in fact were cooperating with religious facilities (involving 2,002 religious facilities of which 1,831 were designated as official evacuation shelters). Of the 399 religious facilities in municipalities with disaster relief agreements, 167 had entered into these agreements after the March 2011 disaster (mostly in 2013 and 2014).

There were 871 municipalities that answered that they were not considering disaster relief agreements with religious facilities. The reason given for this by the highest number of these municipalities (155) was "a lack of religious facilities

with a suitable structure to accommodate evacuees and an appropriate location for an evacuation facility.” The next most common reason was that “existing evacuation facilities can already accommodate the estimated number of evacuees” (139 municipalities). Some municipalities (19) were not considering it because “local neighborhood associations and voluntary organizations for disaster prevention are building cooperative relationships with religious facilities.” Only 5 municipalities were not planning such agreements “due to considerations of separation of religion and the state.”

The Japanese constitution’s Article 20 on the principle of separation of religion and the state reads, “Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all. No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State, nor exercise any political authority. No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite or practice. The State and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity.” Article 89 on prohibited use of public funds reads, “No public money or other property shall be expended or appropriated for the use, benefit or maintenance of any religious institution or association, or for any charitable, educational or benevolent enterprises not under the control of public authority.”

Some people pointed to possible contraventions of these laws, but in fact some municipalities did provide or decided to provide funds to religious facilities that they designated as evacuation shelters or temporary mortuaries. Takekoma Shrine in Iwanuma City, Miyagi Prefecture, was designated as an official evacuation shelter, and a memorandum of understanding was adopted to allow the city to bear the resulting costs to the shrine during a disaster aftermath. Tokyo’s Taitō Ward has designated Sensōji temple, a popular tourist attraction in the ward, as a shelter for people unable to travel home after a disaster, and the ward government

footed the bill for emergency electricity generators and a stock of emergency supplies for the temple.

Our survey showed that disaster-relief agreements are in fact being entered into by municipalities and religious facilities and that movement toward cooperation in disaster situations is under way. Amendments have been made to the Basic Act on Disaster Control Measures, and since April 2014 all municipalities have been required to renew existing or adopt new evacuation shelter designations. As municipalities also adopt local disaster prevention plans, and as local residents take up the task of disaster prevention in their own communities, many residents will take into consideration the existence of their local temples, shrines, and churches. I think we can expect cooperation among municipalities, local residents, and religious facilities to spread in the future.

Religious Facilities That Are Open to Local Communities

In case of a natural disaster or any of the other problems society faces, religions that teach altruism can offer help in the form of a concrete social contribution. However, religious altruism performed by a closed, tightly bonded group will have only a weak ripple effect on society. Only

when activities are publicly performed will the practical effects of social contributions by people of faith elicit society’s sympathy. And only when the logic of altruism is communicated to the world in a way that transcends the boundaries of each religion will it create bridging social capital that can link people.

Most of the religious facilities that functioned as emergency evacuation shelters and organizing hubs after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami had always been open to the local communities. They showed their ability to work with the community during a disaster in the same way they worked with it during festivals and other events throughout the year, cooperating with local neighborhood associations, NPOs, the Boy Scouts, and other socially active groups. Working together in ordinary times is important.

Japan is sometimes called a nonreligious country, but in fact there are over 180,000 official religious entities in Japan, and religious believers and groups are now making contributions to society. In contrast to the strong, independent, self-reliant individuality and doctrine of economic supremacy thrust upon us by modern society, religious altruism can offer alternative values and ways of life. As contributors to society and public spaces that benefit society, religions can still be important socially. □

North American Buddhist Support for Same-Sex Marriage: An Example of Compassion in Action

by Jeff Wilson

There is a venerable religious tradition that provided sanction for same-sex marriages long before they were legally recognized. That tradition is Buddhism.

In 2013 the United States government granted recognition to same-sex couples, not only providing benefits already available to opposite-sex couples but also affirming their relationships as loving and human. Thirty-five states have since extended such recognition to same-sex marriages, meaning that the majority of Americans now live in places where same-sex marriage is fully recognized. The struggle to achieve this legal recognition has been long and difficult, and is not yet complete. Many factors have contributed to the process, including religion. The North American media typically depict religion as a conservative, prejudiced force that has hampered the quest for equal rights. There is some truth to that perspective, but it is not the whole truth. In fact, there is a venerable religious tradition that provided sanction for same-sex marriages long before they were legally recognized. That tradition is Buddhism.

For some, this early Buddhist support for same-sex marriage might seem counterintuitive. After all, Buddhism has been relatively uninvolved in marriage practices in Asia—even today there are many Buddhist traditions that do not conduct or solemnize weddings, leaving such matters to other religious groups or the civil authorities. Furthermore, Buddhism has often regarded sexuality with some suspicion, since it is a common source

of attachment and suffering. Monks and nuns—the exemplars of Buddhism—are supposed to be celibate, and even householders are admonished to moderate their desires. Buddhism has never had a strong opinion on homosexuality, especially when compared with some other, less-tolerant major traditions. But it has generally been categorized as unskillful or even aberrant in Asian societies heavily steeped in Buddhism.

Given these facts, why were Buddhists in North America conducting same-sex marriages decades before the first legal rights were won? This is the question that I asked myself as I set out to research the previously undocumented history of Buddhist same-sex marriage in the United States and Canada. What I found was that there were multiple contributing factors, but there was one that stood out above the others. The answer would appear to lie primarily with another major aspect of Buddhism: compassion. Buddhists are exhorted not only to cultivate but also to *practice* compassion, and buddhas are said to combine perfect wisdom with perfect compassion. The

most popular figures in Asia are those who are specifically associated with compassionate care for humankind, such as Kannon Bodhisattva (Avalokiteśvara); Amida Buddha (Amitābha, whose infinite life span is said to symbolize universal compassion); and of course Shakyamuni Buddha, the central figure of Buddhism. As for the Buddhist clergy that I spoke with, they were moved to conduct marriage rites for same-sex couples because they could perceive the suffering that denying such affirmation would entail, especially in the face of the frequent intolerance and hatred that homosexual men and women live with on a regular basis.

The first such ceremonies I uncovered occurred in the 1970s, when gays had few protections and homosexuality was still defined as a pathology by the American Psychological Association. No religious organization had declared support for same-sex marriage, and

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same-sex couples seeking to have a minister conduct a wedding service had virtually no options. Many Buddhist clergy cited these conditions as the most important in their decision-making process. Regardless of whether they were fully comfortable with same-sex sexuality themselves, each recognized that many of those who came to them were suffering and that refusal to carry out wedding services would increase their suffering. In other words, the issue for them was not “Are the actions of these men and women moral or immoral?” but “What response would be the most compassionate toward these men and women in their situation?” Such a thought process was deeply rooted in the Buddhist attitudes and orientations toward how to treat others that such leaders had developed over their years of service in the Dharma.

The first such ceremonies that I uncovered were conducted by Koshin Ogui at the Buddhist Church of San Francisco in the early 1970s. This is the oldest Buddhist temple in North America, established in 1899, and it is located not far from the heart of San Francisco’s famous gay neighborhood. When couples from the temple who happened to be gay asked Ogui to conduct wedding ceremonies for them, he readily agreed. Meanwhile, Joren MacDonald of the Seabrook Buddhist Temple in New Jersey was approached by a lesbian couple from outside the community. They knew that Christian churches would refuse to marry them, and so they looked to the Buddhists for

a more compassionate and tolerant attitude. Their assumption was correct, as MacDonald conducted the ceremony for them in 1977.

Since those early ceremonies, Buddhist temples in North America have gone on to conduct many other same-sex marriages. Most of these have been performed by ministers in the Jodo Shinshu denomination of Pure Land Buddhism, such as Ogui and MacDonald. There are a number of reasons that this group has been at the forefront of the same-sex-marriage issue. First, Jodo Shinshu established most of the early Buddhist temples in North America and thus has the longest institutional Buddhist history in Canada and the United States. That translates into significant numbers of practitioners and a relatively established and respected place in the Canadian and American religious landscape. These temples have been conducting marriages for more than a century and their communities have few worries about sexuality in general. It helps that Jodo Shinshu was started as a married order of ministers—even the thirteenth-century Japanese founding monk, Shinran, was married. Furthermore, as an early example of Asian-American organizations, the Jodo Shinshu temples and their members faced religious and racial prejudice in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, even to the point of forced internment in Canadian and American concentration camps during the Pacific war. Thus while the situation for Buddhists and persons of Japanese descent in North America is

much better than it once was, these communities carry memories of the discrimination they faced in earlier generations and are often determined not to exhibit similar prejudices themselves.

There is a further reason for Jodo Shinshu to be so tolerant in its attitude toward homosexuality and same-sex marriage. This form of Buddhism focuses on liberation through the compassionate grace of Amida Buddha, who is said to embrace all beings regardless of their good or bad actions. For modern-day Buddhists, this tends to suggest that there is no possible basis for discrimination toward socially maligned groups. For instance, in his popular book *Ocean: An Introduction to Jodo-Shinshu Buddhism in America*, Dr. Kenneth Tanaka discusses homosexuality in the following terms: “No doctrinal grounds exist for a judgmental attitude by others. All beings are equally embraced by Amida Buddha, the symbol of understanding and caring.” Historically, Jodo Shinshu practitioners in Japan sometimes displayed the same cultural prejudices as other Japanese, but at the same time the tradition has been relatively open to marginalized classes, such as women and outcasts. And the example of Amida Buddha has always been available to inspire greater inclusivity, as happened when gay and lesbian issues began to enter the North American consciousness.

Since the 1970s, more than a dozen additional Jodo Shinshu ministers have performed same-sex marriages in North America, and other forms of Japanese Buddhism have also begun to offer such

approval, and even active campaigning for gay rights. Buddhist organizations in the United States have gone on the record a number of times with their support for equal marriage rights for same-sex couples. For example, the matter has been debated publicly in Hawaii a number of times. In 1995, Diana Paw U of the Hawaii Association of International Buddhists told a government commission:

The Buddhist teachings [emphasize] compassion, lovingkindness known as *metta*, and tolerance. Rev. Yoshiaki Fujitani, an ex-bishop of Jodo Shinshu Honpa Hongwanji, the largest Buddhist congregation in Hawaii, said to me vis-a-vis this subject at hand, "Amida Buddha in his infinite compassion accepts all of us as we are." I would like to call upon this commission, and the State Legislature, to show the same compassion, empathy, and aloha to those of a different sexual orientation, just as we do to those different from ourselves because of color, ethnic race, gender, or religion. I respectfully urge you to confer on them the full rights and privileges of humanhood, on par with those accorded heterosexual marriages.

In 2004 the Ministers' Association of the Buddhist Churches of America issued a proclamation that they opposed any governmental ban on same-sex marriage. When the issue was once again in the public eye in 2009, the Buddhist Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii issued a widely publicized statement that affirmed the support of the dozens of member temples in the organization. The statement opened with no fewer than three assertions stressing the role of compassion in the group's decision to support LGBT rights:

WHEREAS, the Dharma (universal teachings) provides guidance on

how to live mindfully with an awareness of universal compassion which embraces and uplifts each and every person; and WHEREAS, in order to truly realize universal compassion, we need to cultivate a profound sense of responsibility for the welfare of all beings; and WHEREAS, the Buddhist ideal of universal compassion does not discriminate between good and evil, young and old, rich and poor, gay and straight. . . . NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, a Shin Buddhist organization, affirms that same-gender couples should have access to equal rights and quality of life as conferred by legally recognized marriage.

What is the outcome of all of this activity? In looking at the example of same-sex marriage in North America, we can discern some of the ways that Buddhism impacts the societies in which it is practiced. First there are the practical benefits conferred upon the participants of these ceremonies. Men and women who have their weddings performed by a Buddhist minister, despite the ongoing prejudice of society, are told that they are valued, that their relationships are legitimate, and that religion has a place for them that recognizes their commitments to one another. Ministers who perform such ceremonies can find their own unexamined biases challenged and reformed and gain a deeper sense for the role of compassion in serving the buddhadharma. When ministers perform publicly noticed ceremonies, they help to affirm the right of all people to participate in our societies. And when Buddhist organizations petition the government, march in Pride parades, and talk to the media about Buddhist inclusivity based on the value of compassion, they help to transform society into a place where everyone can be valued and cared for. □

ceremonies in Canada and the United States. For example, priests at the San Francisco Zen Center, the Zen Center of Los Angeles, and Zen Mountain Monastery (in New York State) have conducted same-sex weddings. Since 1995 members of Soka Gakkai International-USA have been allowed to bless same-sex marriages. And in a few instances, non-Japanese types of Buddhism, such as Tibetan and Theravada, have also performed or blessed such marriages.

Much of the ministerial support for same-sex marriage has been on a case-by-case, monk-by-monk basis. An individual minister or monk would be approached by someone who wanted the ceremony, and then the monk or minister would decide whether he or she felt all right about conducting it. Because they were private ceremonies, Buddhist support for LGBT rights was not necessarily known by the wider community. There have, however, been some very public occasions. In 2008 Rev. William Briones of the Nishi Hongwanji Los Angeles Betsuin officiated at the wedding of *Star Trek* star George Takei to his longtime partner, Brad Altman. The gala wedding was a major media event, with US senators and Hollywood celebrities in attendance. This past summer, Rev. Christina Yanko of the Toronto Buddhist Temple helped co-officiate a mass same-sex wedding of 115 couples as part of World Pride 2014.

In recent decades, North American Buddhist support for same-sex marriage has advanced to the level of institutional

A Faith That Does Not Work for Justice Is Dead

by Vicente Bonet

I am convinced . . . that we, the members of different faiths, can collaborate in our actions for a better, more human world and learn, at the same time, from each other's beliefs.

Luis Espinal taught me Latin and Greek literature in my first two years of university studies in Spain. This was in the 1950s. After he studied theology and became a Jesuit priest, Espinal did journalism and audiovisual studies in Italy. In 1968 he decided to go to Bolivia, where he experienced terrible dictatorships with absolute military power, extreme repression, mass media control, and so on. Many people were sent to jail and killed. Others disappeared or were exiled. In a word, there were constant violations of human rights.

Since he had acquired Bolivian nationality in 1970, and because of his previous studies, he regularly wrote in several journals, spoke on the radio and on television, taught about social communications at the university, and so on. In all of his activities he constantly attacked the root of all the problems: a corrupt system that had no respect for life, human dignity, political freedom, or freedom of opinion. He was in prison and lost some of his jobs, but in spite of all the dangers, he continued to cry out: "No more deaths, no more destruction."

On the night of March 21, 1980, after being tortured for several hours, Espinal was killed. It was reported that his assassination was masterminded by Luis Arce Gómez, a man linked to the narcotics traffic, who took power with

a coup d'état a few months later, and for whom Espinal was an obstacle that had to be removed.

It was not only Espinal that was killed nor only in Bolivia that some people were eliminated by dictators. Two days after Espinal's assassination, it was in El Salvador that Oscar Arnulfo Romero, archbishop of San Salvador, was assassinated while celebrating Mass in the small chapel of the cancer hospital where he was living. He had been speaking out

Rev. Vicente Bonet, SJ, came to Japan from his native Spain in 1960. He was a Professor of Philosophical Anthropology, Human Rights, and Social Doctrine at Sophia University, Tokyo until 2007, where he is now a Professor Emeritus. In 2007–12 he taught social problems and Christian humanism at Caritas Junior College, Yokohama. He is the representative of the Association for Solidarity with People of Cambodia (<http://www.camboren.org/>) and is a staff member of the Tokyo Jesuit Social Center (<http://www.jesuitsocialcenter-tokyo.com/>).

very forcefully against the continuous gross violations of human rights and on behalf of the poor and the victims of repression.

That was not the end, because the thirst for power chooses any means to keep and strengthen that power. Also in El Salvador, a few years later, in November 1989, six Jesuit priests were murdered. Five of them were university teachers and the other was active in vocational schools for the poor. "Something terrible has happened" is the expression some people used to describe what took place that night of November 28. Why were they murdered and by whom? They had been accused of being communists and Marxists; they had been called anti-patriotic and even atheists.

But the only thing they had done, as university professors, was to analyze the social situation of their country, to criticize what they thought politically

mistaken and morally reprehensible. They brought out the causes behind the poverty and the murders of many innocent civilians. Since they were telling the truth, they were killed by the military, who did not want the truth to be known. And as these assassins did not want to leave any witnesses, they also killed the Jesuits' housekeeper and her fifteen-year-old daughter.

These are only a few examples. Many other Catholic priests, nuns, and laypersons have been killed both during the same period of time and after that. There are also members of other Christian churches, Buddhists, and followers of other religions that have been persecuted, sent to prison, and even killed, not only in Central and South America, but also in many other countries. What all of them have in common is their fight for the poor and the victims of injustice and their love for the people suffering, for the truth, and for justice.

All Had Started Many Years Before

The 2014 "Global Slavery Index" is the latest report released by the Walk Free Foundation, an antislavery NGO based in Australia. It tells us that an estimated 35.8 million people are now trapped in forced servitude or by ownership of some kind. Even in Japan there are more than 237,000 people in such a situation, according to the data the foundation has collected.

The news about the accidents in several garment factories in Bangladesh must still be fresh in the memories of many people. The fire that killed 112 workers in 2012 or the eight-story building that collapsed in 2013, taking the lives of 1,138 workers and leaving more than 1,000 with long-lasting injuries, brought to light the harsh, slave-like conditions of Bangladesh garment workers, mainly young women.

We have heard also of prawn harvests in Thailand, where people are sold

from boat to boat, made to work twenty-hour shifts, beaten, tortured, and even made to suffer execution-style killings.

Coltan (short for columbite-tantalite) is a mineral used in our cell phones, laptops, and other electronic devices. It is found in major quantities in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Children there are made to work for the extraction of the mineral. Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa, a writer and journalist who has been inquiring about the situation of the workers there, clearly states that for every kilogram of coltan obtained, at least two children die because of their harsh working conditions.

Bartolomé de las Casas was one of the first European settlers in Central and South America in the sixteenth century. He was given a large tract of land and became a slave owner. But a few years later, having witnessed the many atrocities committed by the Spaniards against the natives, he experienced a change of heart and started fighting for the rights of the natives.

The popes of the Catholic Church, starting with Paul III in 1537, condemned slavery and even threatened with excommunication—the strongest punishment given by the church—anybody who treated people as slaves. Urban VIII in 1639, Benedict XIV in 1741, and Gregory XVI in 1833, all continued writing against slavery. Nevertheless,

slavery was not abolished by law until the nineteenth century. But now we have it again—and slaves in great numbers. On December 2, 2014, the UN-designated International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, the present pope, together with eleven delegates of other religions—Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, the Orthodox Church, Islam, and the Anglican Church—signed a joint declaration against modern slavery.

But slavery is just one of the many social evils denounced and fought against by the successive popes of the Catholic Church. In 1891, Leo XIII wrote what is called the first "social encyclical." An encyclical is a letter that the pope sends to the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church about matters related to faith and/or ethics. Though encyclicals were traditionally written for the faithful of the Catholic Church, since the second half of the last century most of the social encyclicals have also been addressed to all persons of goodwill. That first social encyclical dealt with and denounced the hard situation of workers at the time.

Since Leo XIII, almost every pope has written about what he considered the most pressing social problems of his time. We now have documents against war; the proliferation of and trade in weapons, especially nuclear weapons; hunger and poverty in the world, although enough food is being produced for all to have what they need; and the

relatively few people who are becoming richer and richer. There are other documents defending human rights for everybody—men and women, old people and children; proclaiming the sacredness of life and the dignity of every human person; and opposing the death penalty, torture, and whatever degrades any human being. An economy not based on and for the needs of the people but centered on greed, exploitation of others, and consumerism has been denounced repeatedly (see Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* [Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004]).

But unfortunately, we have to admit that even many of us, members of the Catholic Church, have not read these documents, though they have been translated into most of the languages of the world, and we are not living and acting according to what they tell us to do if we really want to be Christians. These documents are so little known that this social philosophy has been called, ironically, the church's "best-kept secret."

Faith without Actions Is Dead

James, one of the disciples of Jesus, who calls himself a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, wrote:

My friends, what good is it for one of you to say that you have faith if your actions do not prove it? Can that faith save you? Suppose there are brothers or sisters who need clothes and don't have enough to eat. What good is there in your saying to them, "God bless you. Keep warm and eat well"—if you don't give them the necessities of life? So it is with faith; if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead.

But someone will say, "One person has faith, another has actions." My answer is, "Show me how anyone can have faith without actions. I will

show you my faith by my actions."

... So then, as the body without the spirit is dead, also faith without actions is dead. (James 2:14–26)

I am convinced that this is equally true for a Buddhist, a Christian, a Muslim, a Jew, a Hindu, or a member of any other religious faith—because faith is not just a set of beliefs, individual prayer, meditation, good feelings, peace of mind, and so on. All of these are necessary in order to act for and with the persons that suffer because their rights are violated, they are exploited and/or ignored, and they are excluded from a really human society. And I am convinced also that we, the members of different faiths, can collaborate in our actions for a better, more human world, and learn, at the same time, from each other's beliefs.

An Example of Actions Inspired by Faith and Interreligious Cooperation

Every year I go to Cambodia with a group of about ten different persons from Japan. Eleven years ago we started Camboren (short for the Japanese name meaning Association for Solidarity with the People of Cambodia), a small NGO, to collaborate with Jesuit Service Cambodia

(JSC), another NGO, working there for and with the poorest people and the victims of land mines and explosive remnants of war. They collaborate also with the Jesuit Refugee Service Cambodia (JRSC), actively promoting peace and the legal banning of land mines, cluster bombs, and nuclear weapons.

It all began in 1980. During the Pol Pot regime (1975–79), many thousands of Cambodians fled across the border into Thailand. A few were granted refugee status and went to other countries. But the majority had to remain in Thailand, as displaced persons with no refugee rights, in overcrowded camps where life was precarious and desperate.

A few Jesuit fathers, two or three sisters, and many volunteers began their activities there, listening to the stories of people; connecting them to loved ones; and providing care, social work, health services, and support for their education.

In November 1980, Fr. Pedro Arrupe, the superior general of the Society of Jesus at the time, founded the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in Rome, trying to respond to the plight of the people escaping from war in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. This was intended to be a temporary response to an emergency. But the fact is that its activities not only continue today but have had to be increased more and more and expanded to many other countries.

After the civil war, people began to return to Cambodia. But they had nothing. No place to live, no housing, no work. There were no schools for their children. And there were many persons with disabilities, victims of war and land mines (it is reported that the percentage of the Cambodian population with disabilities is the highest in the world).

In 1989, after a process of discernment, the JRS team decided to split in two. One team was to serve the people in need inside Cambodia, while the other would continue serving refugees in camps in other countries. Later on, the JRS set up the Jesuit Service Cambodia (JSC) to serve the poor, and the Jesuit Refugee Service Cambodia to work especially for refugees returning to Cambodia.

The JSC is a team of women and men, including Cambodians and people of other nationalities; Catholic priests, sisters, and laypeople; and Buddhists and Christians, all working together with the same aims and vision. They want to be of help in building up a society in which the four Buddhist ideals of *metta* (loving-kindness), *karuna* (compassion), *mudita* (altruistic or sympathetic joy), and *upekkha* (equanimity) will bring peace, justice, equality, and the fullness of life for all the people. By being with the people and working with

the most disadvantaged, they help them regain their human rights and dignity, improve their welfare, and establish just human relations within society.

For that purpose they have a variety of programs to respond to people's different needs. These programs can be put together under the following four headings:

- *Rural development support.* This includes aid for the construction of very simple houses for extremely poor families and for families with one or more members with disabilities; loans for farming, the so-called cow bank; and so on.
- *Assistance for education.* This includes assistance in building small primary schools for villages that have none, small scholarships for children of very poor families, secondhand bicycles for students who live very far away from the nearest school, and so on.
- *Support for people with disabilities.* Banteay Prieb (Center of the Dove) is a vocational school for people with disabilities. Wheelchairs are also produced there, to be given to the poor that need them.
- *Health-related assistance.* The poorest people need assistance to go to the hospital and during their stay there when they are sick.

The Wheel of Peace

The Metta Karuna Reflection Centre is an interfaith center in Siem Reap (Cambodia) run by the JSC and the JRSC. There you can find a mural depicting the Dharma wheel pushed by Buddhist monks, peace-loving men and women, people in wheelchairs, farmers, Catholic priests and nuns, and also soldiers.

They push it to promote nonviolence, peace, and reconciliation. It is the adapted logo of the Dhammayietra Center for Peace and Nonviolence, in Phnom Penh, and a symbol of interfaith collaboration. You can find there the face of Ven. Maha Ghosananda together with the faces of some members of the JSC and the JRSC.

I want to finish this article with Ven. Ghosananda's prayer for peace:

The suffering of Cambodia
has been deep.
From this suffering comes
Great Compassion.
Great Compassion makes
a Peaceful Heart.
A Peaceful Heart makes
a Peaceful Person.
A Peaceful Person makes
a Peaceful Family.
A Peaceful Family makes
a Peaceful Community.
A Peaceful Community makes
a Peaceful Nation.
A Peaceful Nation makes
a Peaceful World.
May all beings live
in Happiness and Peace.

And with the following words from the Gospel according to Matthew:

Happy are those who are humble
Happy are those who are merciful
to others
Happy are the pure in heart
Happy are those who work
for peace. □

The Lotus Sutra from Below

by Gene Reeves

To see the Lotus Sutra from below is to see it not so much as a protection for the nation and those who most benefit from social stability as it is to see it as at least partially subversive, from a perspective that would advocate dramatic change in society and inevitable overturn of powerful elites, both secular and monastic.

I do not know what Emperor Shomu had in mind by the “country” when in the eighth century he ordered that in every division of his realm temples—a *kokubunji* for monks and a *kokubun-niji* for nuns—should be constructed and there the Lotus Sutra recited every day for the protection of the country. The fact that he wanted these temples spread throughout his realm may indicate that he had all the people in mind. This is possible but unlikely. What is more likely is that he had in mind the aristocrats and nobility and was at most dimly aware of the existence of the farmers, fishermen, and hunters who made up the vast majority of the people of Japan. Emperor Shomu lived a very privileged life at considerable social if not physical distance from the poor of that time. Probably he saw the Lotus Sutra as a tool for protecting the privileged elite, for maintaining their status. Thus he would have seen the Lotus Sutra from a perspective above—both from above the masses of common people and from above the sutra itself.

The thesis of this article in brief is that one important perspective on the Lotus Sutra is to see it from below. Typically, Buddhism and its texts,

including the Lotus Sutra, are seen from the perspective of the elite of society, typically from the perspectives of highly placed scholar monks, who were usually supported by political and social elites. That is to see the Lotus Sutra from above. To see the Lotus Sutra from below is to see it not so much as a protection for the nation and those who most benefit from social stability as it is to see it as at least partially subversive, from a perspective that would advocate dramatic change in society and inevitable overturn of powerful elites, both secular and monastic.

While the distinction I am trying to make here between the above and the below is largely social and economic, a physiological distinction is also at play, one between mind and body. This is not the place to develop such a thesis, but I want to point here to the fact that elite Buddhism is typically concerned with what happens in and to the mind, while Buddhism from below is more concerned about what we do with our bodies, with acts more than with thoughts or ideas. Of course mind and body are not as easily separated as this seems to suggest. In my view, every thought is tinged with emotion, every

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action significantly related to mental processes. But still, there is, I think, a difference between compassion as a meditative practice and compassion embodied in doing good.

The Lotus Sutra has been called both the “king of sutras” and “nothing but snake oil.” No other Buddhist text, I think, has been evaluated in such extremely divergent ways. Though these views may be extreme, many different perspectives on the Lotus Sutra are possible. The fact that different, in some cases radically different, perspectives exist—and have for centuries—is evidence enough for this. I believe, though, that many perspectives on and interpretations of this sutra are not only possible but also useful and to some degree correct.

So I am not claiming that seeing the Lotus Sutra from below is the only correct, or only legitimate, way of viewing this sutra. Let us remember that the Lotus Sutra has been closely associated, as a kind of prelude to it, with the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings. It

invites, in other words, a variety of interpretations. And that, from my point of view, only confirms the wonderful richness of this text.

This does not, I think, mean that all perspectives and interpretations are equally valid or useful. I think, for example, that attempts to see the sutra as nothing more than empty praise of itself or as nothing more than a rhetorical gambit in a debate between two different Buddhist camps are badly misplaced. To understand the sutra in these ways, I believe, is to miss what is valuable in this text. Thus there are, I think, bad interpretations. But countering or trying to refute such interpretations is not my purpose here.

Here I merely want to claim that one important way of seeing or understanding the Lotus Sutra is to see it from below.

There are only three main sections. First I want to claim that this perspective is not a new one, that as a historical matter the Lotus Sutra has probably long been seen from below. Here I want to briefly discuss events in three different cultures and times: pre-Republican China, nineteenth-century Japan, and contemporary America. Second, I will ask you to think about some of the stories in the Lotus Sutra, stories that tend to support a subversive understanding of the sutra. Third, I will return to history with a brief discussion of the Japanese poet, storyteller, and devotee of the Lotus Sutra Kenji Miyazawa.

On the Ground

On the Ground in China

As my ability to read the Chinese language is very poor, I am very indebted to Barend ter Haar's book *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1999). According to ter Haar, an enormous variety of teachings and ideas over several centuries of Chinese history are associated with the rubrics of "white lotus society" or "white lotus teachings,"

often, but not always, with reference to the Lotus Sutra. The use of these terms, especially for lay Buddhists who recited the name of Amida Buddha (Jpn., *nembutsu*) in groups, can be traced back to the early Tang dynasty, that is, to the late sixth century or so. But there is also evidence of a similar group, though it did not rely on the *nembutsu*, on Mount Lu as early as 402. Later, groups using these rubrics were often associated with more rebellious Maitreya movements that would be banned, but not eliminated, during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).

As is often the case with the history of uneducated, illiterate groups, almost all of what we know of these groups is learned from what was written about them by educated elites who despised them. It is reasonably clear that Chinese elites often both despised and feared white lotus teachings groups. Thus they were referred to as "people who eat vegetables and serve devils," a stereotypical phrase perhaps first used in 1121 as a direct result of unrest and a local uprising in Taizhou. Of course, various religious groups were vegetarian, but such a reference is most often used for lay Buddhists. And while "devils" can refer to any number of "false" gods, it was often used by Confucian elites to mean Buddhist bodhisattvas and buddhas, especially when perceived to be at the center of popular devotional groups.

Against the assumption of many scholars that such groups were generally violent and rebellious, ter Haar argues that they were often entirely peaceful. But this should not detract from the fact that serious rebellions did arise under the banner of lotus teachings and that even when they were peaceful, such groups were perceived from on high as dangerous and potentially rebellious. Thus they were called people who "gather at night and disperse at dawn." This widely used epithet points to the fact that subversive activities often were, and still are, conducted semisecretly, under cover of darkness.

It is noteworthy, I think, that such groups were sometimes associated with devotion to the Eternal Venerable Mother (Ch., Wushenglaomu), as in China, and not only in China, strong women, including Guanyin and the Queen Mother of the West, were often perceived by elites as threatening to the existing order, in which women were generally regarded as inferior to men and incapable of effective, heaven-pleasing leadership. That such groups may sometimes even have been nongendered might be indicated by the fact that they were referred to as "men and women who mix indiscriminately."

We do not, and probably cannot, know to what extent such groups were influenced by the Lotus Sutra. It's quite possible that the "lotus" in "lotus teachings" is not at all a reference to the Lotus Sutra but only to the lotus plant and flower. Still, it is not difficult to imagine that people were influenced directly or indirectly by the Lotus Sutra and its teachings, seeing it from below.

Another, probably socially more important, area of largely undiscussed Lotus Sutra influence in China is to be found in Guanyin devotion. Elsewhere I have tried to show how devotion to Guanyin in post-tenth-century China gave rise to three transformations of Guanyin Bodhisattva: a transformation from being entirely male to being both male and female; a transformation from being a bodhisattva among many bodhisattvas to being a buddha as well as a bodhisattva; and a transformation from being "on high" to being the epitome of embodied compassion, especially in places where compassion is most needed, that is, in the lowly, dirty places of this world. All of these important transformations, found in popular devotion to Guanyin and as well in countless, largely ignored, Chinese Buddhist texts devoted to Guanyin, and given graphic description in East Asian Buddhist art, can be supported by what is written in chapter 25, the "Universal Gateway" chapter, of the Lotus Sutra, a

text that often circulated separately as the Guanyin Sutra.

While it would be very difficult to prove this as historical fact, I believe that Guanyin devotion transformed or moved Buddhism as a whole from obsession with texts and mental wisdom to being a religion and practice of compassion. I am not at all suggesting that pursuit of Buddhist wisdom has been or should be abandoned. Compassion that is not wise may not be truly compassionate. But I do want to suggest that the Buddhisms most Buddhists follow today are considerably more compassion oriented than the earliest forms of Buddhism—largely as a consequence of the growth of Guanyin devotion in East Asia.

While devotion and compassion can be practiced by anyone, at any level of society, I think they are not readily realized through study of texts or development of complex theories of mind. They may not have been primary for most elite monks and highly literate laypeople in East Asia. But devotion and compassion are at the heart of the Buddhism from below of nuns and of laypeople. Too often, I think, such popular forms of Buddhism are ignored or dismissed by elite Buddhists, including Buddhist scholars, who regard them as no more than embarrassing popular religion, as expressions of ignorant and superstitious people.

On the Ground in Japan

In his *Introduction to the Lotus Sutra* (Wisdom Publications, 2014), Yoshiro Tamura discusses Lotus Sutra-inspired pilgrimages of thanksgiving to Ise Shrine in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that made it possible for people to express their frustrations with life at that time and provide some relief from the hardships of peasant life in pre-Meiji Japan (before 1868).

Sometimes these pilgrimages transformed themselves into explicit resistance movements and gave rise

to peasant uprisings and riots. In at least one case, in nineteenth-century Nagoya, these pilgrimages became a kind of social reform movement, with the popular dance and slogan of “Why not?” This was started by a rumor that talismans from Ise Shrine had fallen from heaven. Men and women, young and old, went kind of crazy with joy, dancing wildly in the streets of the city. This movement spread rapidly over much of Japan, down to Osaka and Kyoto and up to Edo (Tokyo) and even Fukushima.

This was a time of enormous social-political change, when the Tokugawa shogunate was being replaced by the restoration of the emperor. It is said that the faction that overthrew the shogunate supported the “Why not?” frenzy. Political changes gave rise among common people to expectations of social reform as well. In joy, people danced in the streets, sometimes day and night, wore clothing of the opposite sex, and generally went wild with excitement. Stirred up by chants of “Why not, why not?” they would sometimes force their way into the homes of wealthy landlords or merchants, taking money and other things while yelling “Why not, why not, why not take this?”

It’s not possible to say that such uprisings were inspired only by the Lotus Sutra, as there were multiple causes at play. But inspiration by the Lotus Sutra, especially as it was interpreted by Nichiren-related groups, played a big part in some of them.

Were I equipped to do so, here there should be some discussion of devotion

to the Lotus Sutra itself. I do not know how common it was in China or India, but in Japan the Lotus Sutra has inspired devotion and reverence to itself. Today chanting the *odaimoku*, or praise of the title of the Lotus Sutra, can be an act of mere ritual practice; it can be a magical way to exorcise demons or gain rewards; it can be an important intellectual exercise; it can be a musical performance; it can be a kind of meditative reminder of the teachings of the entire sutra; it can be many things. But most often it is an act of devotion, an expression of some deep feeling, even of love, for the Lotus Sutra. In Japanese history such devotion has found expression in countless ways, in humble acts of piety, in magical uses of the sutra to cure the sick or bring material benefits to the poor, and in exquisite art forms.

Such expressions of devotion to the Lotus Sutra have not always come from below in a socioeconomic sense. Magnificent art, after all, often depended for its production and preservation on wealthy patrons, including wealthy temples and monks. But very ordinary, typically illiterate people, often regarded

as ignorant, have found comfort and even the Buddha's awakening in such devotion.

In recent years, I have had the pleasure of participating in various Oeshiki celebrations in Tokyo. Oeshiki parades are usually associated with temples of the Nichiren sect or newer Nichiren-related groups, such as Rissho Kosei-kai, though often with participation by secular groups as well. Though celebrated on or around the anniversary of the death of Nichiren, these parades are joyous occasions, with dancing to special music, much use of drums and other musical instruments, highly decorated floats, and highly symbolic twirling of *matoi* (Japanese firefighters' standards) and bobbing *mando* (portable lighted pagodas). Though highly emotional in some ways, at places such as the Nichiren sect's Ikegami Honmonji or Rissho Kosei-kai these festive parades are relatively well controlled and quite sober. But at the Oeshiki festival culminating at the Kishimojin temple in Zoshigaya, an older tradition persists. There we find the same basic symbolic elements but in more primitive or simple forms. Beer drinking and drunken revelry are also part of the sometimes chaotic festivity reminiscent of the wild frenzy of the nineteenth-century pilgrimages of thanksgiving. To my knowledge, there have been no surveys of the social class level of participants in Oeshiki festivals. But I can tell you that the one in Zoshigaya has a definite feeling of being from below. Even the Kishimojin temple itself is quite modest, both in size and in decor.

And this is the only place in Tokyo where I have seen cross-dressing. I have

no idea, of course, what these men in women's clothes, and perhaps a little drunk, thought they were doing, but aware of it or not, they were clearly giving expression to the idea that gender is largely a social construction and, by implication, to the idea that what is socially constructed can change or be changed. Though this is highly speculative, it may be no accident that this festival with important social implications is held at a Kishimojin temple. Kishimojin, who appears in the Lotus Sutra and therefore has a number of temples in Japan, is, after all, a very powerful woman.

Here there is not space enough to go into anything like a history of the formation of the Japanese Buddhist so-called new religions that grew up in the twentieth century. Almost all of the Buddhist "new religions" are significantly related to the Lotus Sutra. There are exceptions, but very few—actually only one that I know of. And most have been heavily involved in social reform, such as the Brighter Society Movement, and the current movement to bring an end to the use of nuclear energy worldwide. By now, I suppose the vast majority of Rissho Kosei-kai members are solid middle-class folks. But that was not always the case. In its early days, in its days of rapid growth, it was a working-class movement, but one that took seriously the commission to be concerned about the welfare of all people and the peace of the entire world. It was a movement that saw the Lotus Sutra from below.

Finally, I want to mention Soka Gakkai International (SGI) in North

America. Far from my being an expert on Soka Gakkai, most of what I know about it is from what I have read or from rumors spread in Japan. But I have observed in a few gatherings in the United States that SGI is extremely diverse in race and socioeconomic class—in sharp contrast with every other religious group I have experienced except for a few Roman Catholic churches. At a Soka Gakkai funeral service I recently attended, there was a rainbow of people of African, Indian, East Asian, Latino, and European origins or ancestry. And while there surely were doctors and lawyers and teachers among them, the majority of those present were lower-class people, people we used to call "working class" but who now are more often unemployed or at best marginally employed. They were, in other words, people who would see the Lotus Sutra from a perspective below.

In the Text of the Lotus Sutra

I suppose that most people reading this magazine are already familiar with the text of the Lotus Sutra. So I will not retell here the stories to which I would like to refer, but merely remind you of them and try to show their significance for the thesis I am presenting here.

Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva

Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva, probably found only in chapter 21 of the Lotus Sutra, is a much earlier embodiment of Shakyamuni Buddha who goes around bowing to everyone he meets, telling them that he would never disrespect them or put them down, because they have the potential of becoming a buddha. This bodhisattva is a monk but one who does not devote himself to reading or reciting sutras but simply to going around bowing to people, be they monk or nun, layman or laywoman, praising them for practicing the bodhisattva way and telling them that they will become buddhas.

The point of this story is surely that we should always respect others and see in them the potential to become buddhas. But there is also a strong suggestion here that what is most important is not so much how one treats sutras but how one treats other people. This, mind you, is in a text that elsewhere strongly advocates embracing, copying, studying, reciting, teaching, and so forth, the Lotus Sutra. Even in this very chapter, Shakyamuni Buddha says that he was able to become awakened quickly only because he received and embraced, read and recited the Lotus Sutra. But what is more important, this text suggests, is being respectful toward others, even all others. This point of view, I suggest, is a perspective from below, one that emphasizes simple practice rather than complex doctrine, ritual, or practice. Perhaps that is why even now this bodhisattva is especially popular with laypeople.

Fame Seeker

Already in chapter 1 of the Lotus Sutra we find an earlier embodiment of Maitreya who, while he read and even memorized many sutras, gained little from them and forgot almost all of what he had read. Called “Fame Seeker,” he was always seeking fame and material gain. Yet this man, we are told, by doing good works, by helping others, was able to see countless buddhas and himself become the Buddha Maitreya.

Here, too, different lessons might be taken from this story. But surely it is in part a lesson about what is most important—helping others. We are not told whether this man is a monk or a layman, but it is clear that he is a bodhisattva, one who follows the way of helping others, doing good, as the text says.

King Wonderfully Adorned

Near the end of the Lotus Sutra, in the next-to-last chapter, we can find the story of King Wonderfully Adorned, a story about a non-Buddhist king who,

having been persuaded by his sons to do so, relinquishes his throne and takes his whole extended family to follow the Buddha.

There are, I think, at least two important, at least slightly subversive elements in this story. First is the queen, the wife and mother. In the Lotus Sutra there are several stories involving fathers and sons or, as in the parable of the burning house, fathers and children. But nowhere in any of these stories is there a mother. Yet here, toward the end of the Lotus Sutra, is a story in which the mother is at the center of the story, as the glue that holds the family together. It is to her that the sons go to complain about their father and express their desire to follow the Buddha, and it is she who insists that they must gain their father's assent to go anywhere. In this story the mother is a queen, so hardly a model of low status, but she is a woman in a story in which the king has an entire harem to serve him. This story invites us to see things, at least in part, from a woman's perspective.

The second element in this story to which I wish to point is much more explicitly central to the story. It is the fact that the father is taught by his sons and in the end calls them his good friends. Such good friends, the Buddha says, whether they be sons or daughters, are a great blessing. By planting roots of goodness, that is, by doing good, they will enjoy good friends in life after life and be able to do the Buddha's work, teaching the dharma and enriching others, bringing them joy and enabling them to attain supreme awakening. Again, what is stressed here is not studying or reciting sutras, not analyzing doctrines, not meditation or ritual practice, not following precepts, but simply doing good.

This emphasis on doing good, sometimes termed doing the good of all, is one of the things in the Lotus Sutra that may have helped give rise to the Buddhism of compassion that arose in China, a form of Buddhism that to this

day is especially important to women, including ordained women, who tend to see things from below.

Dharma Teachers

More or less in the middle of the Lotus Sutra and not well integrated with the rest of it is a chapter proclaiming the importance of teachers of dharma.

This chapter, the tenth, “Teachers of the Dharma,” perhaps more clearly than any other, insists on the equality of women and men, which itself requires a kind of view from below. But what is more interesting about this chapter for the purposes of this article is that it authorizes a new category of Buddhist leader, that of dharma teacher, a category that has very little if any regard for the hierarchies prominent elsewhere in the sutra of *shravaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, *bodhisattva*, and *buddha*, and of monk, nun, layman, and laywoman.

What's especially important here, I think, is that anyone can be a dharma teacher, even without credentials. Religious organizations, including Buddhist organizations, seem to love hierarchies and the gates and hurdles that signify—or more often permit or prevent—advancement from one level to the next. The “Teachers of the Dharma” chapter has none of that, whether intentionally or not I do not know.

The chapter begins with the Buddha looking out over a vast variety of living beings, including not only people who aspire to become *shravakas* or *bodhisattvas* but also gods, dragon kings, satyrs, centaurs, asuras, griffins, chimeras, and pythons. In other words, a great variety of both human and non-human beings. And the Buddha says to Medicine King Bodhisattva that he assures all such living beings that if they hear even a single verse of the Lotus Sutra and respond with joy even for a single moment, they will become supremely awakened. If anyone asks you, Medicine King, the Buddha continues, who will become buddhas in the

future, you should show them these people. They certainly will become buddhas in ages to come.

Moreover such people should be honored as if they were *tathagatas*, for in reality they are all already bodhisattvas who have given up living in a pure land and chosen to be born in this world out of sympathy for other living beings!

This “Teachers of the Dharma” chapter is sometimes embodied in Rissho Kosei-kai’s practice of *hoza*, dharma sitting, in which people help each other apply the Buddhist teachings to problems of everyday life without regard to rank or gender or social standing. In *hoza*, all are learners and all are teachers.

Guanyin/Kannon

I know that Guanyin belongs to Pure Land traditions at least as much as she belongs to Lotus Sutra traditions. I also know that Tiantai Buddhist teachers in China and, at least until the time of Nichiren, Tendai teachers in Japan practiced and advocated Pure Land teachings and practices. So I do not want to claim that the rise of Guanyin devotion, which is so central to a perspective from below, is simply due to influence of the Lotus Sutra. But I also think it is far from trivial that all of the elements of the rise of Guanyin devotion can be based on the twenty-fifth chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

In fact, that chapter, which was and is circulated and recited separately from the Lotus Sutra, sometimes even today is taken to be the Lotus Sutra. Its title is “The Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World.” Other translations are possible, of course, but what is being highlighted in the title is the sense that Guanyin makes Buddhadharma available to anyone.

The text itself has two main parts. In the first, a variety of calamities are named, from which one can be rescued by calling on the name of Guanyin. The text does not say so explicitly, but I think a case can be made for thinking that

here calling on the name means, or at least can mean, taking the name seriously by embodying it in one’s own life, that is by regarding, taking seriously, the cries and suffering of others. Rather than being a mere magical act, it can be an act of deepest religious devotion, a devotion that is especially attentive to those in trouble.

In this way, devotion to Guanyin, expressed in calling the name, is devotion to others, especially compassion for others who are especially in need. I learned this, by the way, from a clerk in a gift shop in a very important nuns’ temple in Hong Kong.

The second feature of chapter 25, often portrayed on temple walls in China, is the many forms that Guanyin can take on, from that of a buddha to that of an ordinary woman to that of a god, in order to save those who are in need of someone in such a form. The point, of course, though again not explicit in the text, is that anyone at all can appear to us as Guanyin. This is related to the prevalent idea that Guanyin is compassion embodied, and anyone can embody compassion, thus embodying Guanyin.

This can have very important implications for what it means to be a buddha, but it has long been taken to be a teaching about what it means to be a Buddhist. And here, at least, to be a Buddhist is to be compassionate toward those who are poor or oppressed or ill or otherwise pushed to the bottom, to a place below.

The Dragon Princess

I suppose we might make something of the fact that the central figure in the story of the Dragon Princess in chapter 12, “Devadatta,” is obviously non-human. Not only that, this girl lives at the bottom of the sea. What could be lower than that? But that is not what this story is about, nor is it the way in which this character has been received and treated in history, where this dragon girl is almost always portrayed as human.

This story is nearly as much about two men, a leading *shravaka* and a bodhisattva, as it is about the dragon girl. Manjushri Bodhisattva has been asked whether in all of his extensive travels he has found anyone capable of quickly becoming an awakened buddha. His response is that he has, the young but already highly accomplished daughter of a dragon king, where Manjushri has just been visiting. This girl, he tells the two men to their astonishment, is capable of becoming a buddha quickly. Neither of these men expresses any qualms at all about the girl’s being an animal or a dragon. What Shariputra, the *shravaka*, is concerned about is the fact that this person is female, since a woman’s body, he says, is too filthy even to receive the dharma, never mind be awakened by it. Accumulated Wisdom Bodhisattva, on the other hand, is concerned only about the claim that she is capable of becoming awakened quickly, especially since it took Shakyamuni a long time to become an awakened one.

We need not be concerned here about the issue of speed, but the gender of the girl is relevant. Some complain, as well they should, about the fact that in this story, as in many others, in the process of becoming a buddha the girl’s body is transformed into that of a man. But this is to miss the way in which this story is obviously intended and has been received in East Asian Buddhist history—as assurance from the Buddha that women are capable of becoming fully awakened buddhas.

But there is another interesting feature of this story. After the Buddha has accepted a gift from the girl, she turns to the two men in the story and asks if the Buddha has accepted the gift quickly or not. And when they respond that he has accepted it quickly, she tells them to watch with their spiritual eyes and they will see her become a buddha even more quickly. Then the two men, along with others present, do indeed see the girl become a buddha sitting on a lotus

flower, teaching the dharma to living beings everywhere. The two men saw and believed.

In other words, these two men of highest rank, the leading *shravaka* and a leading bodhisattva, were instructed by this girl and learned from her, advancing their own way along the path. What she showed them was a kind of seeing from below, bringing them down, so to speak, from their elevated positions to see the potential to become a buddha in a little girl.

The Poor Son

The poor son found in chapter 4 is not prodigal at all, but he is poor. We are told that he goes around from place to place trying to eke out a living in any way he can. In contrast with his rich father, he is extremely poor. But his material poverty is not the point of the parable; it's his mental poverty, his extreme lack of self-confidence; in other words, his complete lack of awareness of his own potential to become a buddha.

We might be tempted to think that the father is at the opposite extreme of self-confidence. And we are told that he is a very successful businessman who has accumulated great wealth. But the only thing we learn of his psychological condition is that for a long time he has been suffering from longing for his lost son. And in this story he longs for his son not so much because he wants to be with him as because he needs someone to receive his inheritance and take over his business.

Understanding well the son's impoverished psychological condition, the father very gradually encourages him to take greater and greater responsibility, both for the father's business and for himself. This very rich father, in other words, is somehow able to see things from below, from the perspective of the poor son. This is put more dramatically in a part where the father dresses as a poor man and joins the son shoveling dung. It's a great metaphor for the

importance of social location for gaining understanding of the suffering of others.

It can be said that many of these stories are intended to show or illustrate the central theme of the Lotus Sutra, that anyone can become a buddha. That would, I think, be correct. But it does not negate the fact that these stories, and indeed the idea that anyone can become a buddha itself, also give support to the idea that the potential to become a buddha is to be found at every level of society, including the bottom level. This, so to speak, egalitarian stance of the Lotus Sutra is, in effect, a perspective from below, a perspective found especially, but not only, in people who suffer indignities of racial or class or gender discrimination.

Kenji Miyazawa, Failed Peasant

We turn now to Kenji Miyazawa, who perhaps more than any other modern figure sought to embody in his own life the ideal of the bodhisattva that he found in the Lotus Sutra. His kindness led people to call him "Kenji Bosatsu," or Kenji Bodhisattva.

Miyazawa was born and lived most of his life in the rural area of what is now Iwate Prefecture of Japan, an area not only extremely poor but also extremely prone to natural disaster, including frequent floods and occasional earthquakes and tsunamis, but especially drought, crop failure, and famine. Miyazawa witnessed poverty and great suffering every day, but he was born into a family in which both his father and his grandfather were wealthy. Even his mother was from a wealthy family. As a child Kenji was greatly embarrassed by witnessing extremely poor peasants come into his father's pawnshop to try to sell the last of their meager belongings in order to buy food for their starving children.

Probably in part to separate himself and his life from his father and his father's way of life, Miyazawa went through a phase in which he left a teaching job that he enjoyed enormously in order to try to be a "real peasant." He left the family's big house and moved into their second, much smaller home, in which he had tried unsuccessfully to nurture his younger sister back to health. There he set up a society to educate farmers called the Rasu Earthmen Society, but what he meant by "Rasu" was never explained. "We are all farmers," he declared.

But Kenji was identified from the outset as the first son of a wealthy family, and the thought police of the day made overt moves to look into Kenji's activities as potentially socialist and dangerous. The Rasu Earthmen Society stopped functioning and soon ceased to exist.

Kenji cultivated land. He had to clear a plot of sandy land atop a cliff. Even though he was a walker and a good mountain climber, he wasn't fit for that kind of labor and tired easily. He tried to live like a regular peasant, insisting on subsistence food, rejecting, for example, the box lunches his mother made and brought to him. He mainly ate vegetables he had grown himself. In his kitchen, for tableware there were only two rice bowls and a set of chopsticks.

Kenji's life as a peasant was full of incongruities. The flowers in his garden were grown from seeds he ordered from the Yokohama branch of Sutton &

Sons of England, an extravagance. With friends, he held concerts of Western classical music, himself playing the organ or the cello, both expensive instruments. He loved rubber boots, when no peasant then wore such expensive things. According to students, Kenji always wore socks. When the heels became holes, he wore them upside down with the holes up, but not a single peasant in the Tohoku region in those days wore socks at all. Even in the middle of winter they usually went barefoot.

Sometimes Kenji went into town to sell vegetables grown in his garden, loading them on the kind of cart you pull behind you. Of course, as the son of a distinguished family, he could not go about loudly calling out his wares in order to sell them. He simply pulled his cart, smiling. So most of his produce would end up unsold. Then this would-be peasant would give away his vegetables to anyone.

Kenji's family were devoted followers of Jodo Shinshu, or Pure Land Buddhism. His conversion to the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Buddhism started when, still in his teens, he became "extraordinarily moved" by the just-published Chinese-Japanese edition of the Lotus Sutra found in his father's library. He soon became interested in the Kokuchukai, founded by the charismatic follower of the Lotus Sutra Chigaku Tanaka. This Kokuchukai in the 1920s and 1930s was an ultra-nationalist religious body. Tanaka proclaimed its duty to achieve "a spiritual unity" throughout the world, with "Japan as the Imperial Headquarters." In 1920 Miyazawa joined the Kokuchukai, and in January of 1921, seized by a revelation, he left his home, went to Tokyo, and tried to work at the Kokuchukai as a resident member. When he joined the Kokuchukai, a copy of Nichiren's mandala was sent to him, which he mounted and installed in his home in a special ceremony.

Kenji was grasped by the central idea of the Lotus Sutra that every sentient

being is endowed with buddha-nature and is capable of becoming a buddha. This led to a decision not to eat "bodies of living things." His feeling about eating "bodies of living things" was so strong he felt guilty eating vegetables.

When he was about to graduate from agricultural college, he wrote in a letter: "Namu Myoho Renge-kyo, Namu Myoho Renge-kyo! I sincerely offer myself in service to the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, the foundation of the greatest happiness for all. When I chant 'Namu Myoho Renge-kyo' just once, the world and I are enveloped in a wondrous light." Chanting this *odaimoku*, he imagined his spirit soaring in boundless space, as on a railroad through the Milky Way, where he was filled with joy in the great cosmos, and from which, having a round-trip ticket, he returned to Earth, having acquired strength and courage to endure a life of suffering.

For Nichiren Buddhists the *odaimoku* is a kind of sacred mantra, one that works on the human spirit, elevating the human spirit by enabling one to identify with the affirmations of the whole Lotus Sutra. Since it represents and embodies the sutra, it provides a connection, a passage as it were, between earth and heaven, between earthly and cosmic perspectives, between fact and fantasy, between science and imagination.

In the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni's world and paradise is this world. For Miyazawa, this intimate association of Shakyamuni Buddha with this world in which suffering has to be endured, and can be, means that to whatever extent we honor or respect the Buddha, we must also honor and respect his home, which is also our world.

Miyazawa would have understood this intuitively and immediately, as he was devoted to working to improve the world, not only but especially for the poor. I suspect that his devotion to the poor did not come entirely from the Lotus Sutra. But in the sutra he found

a powerful and powerfully poetic affirmation of what he felt deeply from a young age. Like Buddhism generally, the Lotus Sutra does not advocate pure self-sacrifice for the sake of others but does teach that the way to supreme awakening, to embodying the Buddha in one's own life, to gradually becoming a buddha, lies in helping others, especially through teaching Buddhadharma. That Miyazawa largely abandoned family wealth and privilege—as the Buddha is said to have left the comforts of his father's castle—in order to try to find ways to effectively help the rural poor of Iwate not only is completely consistent with being a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra but is to embody it.

To embody the Lotus Sutra, I believe, is to try to see the world from below. It is, like Kenji Miyazawa, to try, however ineptly, to be a peasant even while not a peasant, thus, at least in part, to see the Lotus Sutra itself from a lowly perspective. But, perhaps ironically, to see the Lotus Sutra from below is to see the enormous potential in the weak and the poor of this world to be teachers and bodhisattvas for ourselves, thus giving us the wonderful opportunity to see countless buddhas everywhere. □

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The First World Conference of Religions for Peace in Kyoto

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.

For a long time I thought about how men and women of religion from around the world would sit around one table to discuss seriously, and with confidence in one another, what we must do to achieve peace. A lot has happened from the time when what had been no more than a vague idea first arose and now, when it has blossomed into the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

I received a lot of welcome advice but also a certain amount of criticism as well. For example, some said, “Niwano’s plans for the world conference show how ignorant he is of world religions as they actually are and of the cultures underlying them. Those plans are no more than a pipe dream.” Others commented, “It’s political power that makes things move in the world, not religion. Just getting people of religion together isn’t going to make a difference.” Some scholars cautioned me to my face, saying, “However much you talk with the Christian representatives, all they will do is tell you that you’re a pagan and try to convert you. And it’s even more

pointless to think you can discuss things with some of the other religions.” I listened quietly to all these warnings.

Why is it that human beings have fought over and over again throughout history? Thomas Hobbes, the English philosopher and political theorist, wrote, “The state of men without civil society (which state may be called the state of nature) is the state of war of all against all,” and he went so far as to say that “force and fraud are in war the two cardinal virtues.” Hegel too, in his *Elements*

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.

of the Philosophy of Right, noted that “if states disagree and their particular wills cannot be harmonized, the matter can only be settled by war.”

This perhaps reflects the general idea at the time that war is a normal event within human societies, that hostilities will occur whenever people take up arms. The words of Carl von Clausewitz, the Prussian general and military theorist, are well known: “War is merely the continuation of politics by other means.”

As these quotations suggest, war used to be thought of as a completely natural human activity. Victory in war increased national wealth and amply covered its own costs. Times are different now, with the advent of nuclear weapons, and when even conventional weapons have ever-greater killing power. War, for whatever reason, is a crime that is utterly unforgivable.

Already twenty-five hundred years ago, Shakyamuni said in the Stories from the Words of Truth Sutra, “Discard the swords, the bows and the arrows from your mind.” Even so, people are still obsessed with making weapons, though today they are nuclear missiles rather than bows and arrows. In view of this

situation, people of religion can no longer wonder if a peace conference among themselves is a possibility—it is now a necessity.

My determination to hold such a conference gradually turned into a mission.

I also felt uneasy that religions themselves would be rejected not only by society but by the gods and buddhas, as long as they built walls between themselves and acted like enemies, although they are supposed to give people peace of mind and a feeling of security.

A proverb says good can come out of evil. If the birth of nuclear weapons helps people realize the stupidity of war and understand the misery it causes so that they think seriously about ways to create peace, then it has yielded something great indeed. Otherwise, the spirits of the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, whose burned bodies drew the world's attention to the horrors of the atomic bomb, will indeed never rest in peace.

Still, conflicts rage unceasingly around the world. Surely now the human race, already on this earth for a million years, has to be painfully aware of the real importance, and the necessity, of peace. Although we have only ever known war as a means of existence, now, with the twenty-first century imminent, we have begun to realize that we must cooperate to live, and study ways of doing so.

A world conference of religionists was one such way.

A Miracle

It was October 16, 1970. More than three hundred men and women of religion from thirty-nine nations were meeting together at the Kyoto International Conference Center near the Takaragaike Pond. They included 219 delegates from the world's religions, as well as guests, consultants, observers, and staff members. It was the opening day of the first World Assembly of Religions for Peace, the culmination of a great deal of effort. One by one the leaders of the major

religions—Buddhism, Christianity, Shinto, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Jainism, Confucianism, and Zoroastrianism—arrived at the hall. They came from countries of the free world, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and West Germany; from countries in the communist bloc, such as the Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and Mongolia; and from developing nations such as India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Uruguay, and Brazil. And they came too from war-torn South Vietnam, the focus of the world's attention, and from Israel.

Representatives from all the world's religions were meeting together in one place, cutting across national borders and sectarian differences, united in their hope to bring about world peace. The first World Assembly of Religions for Peace turned out to have far wider geographical scope and a far more substantial content than we had first conceived. In scale, it certainly went beyond the wildest dreams, not only of the Japanese participants, but also of the delegates from abroad.

We received messages from Pope Paul VI; U Thant, secretary-general of the United Nations; and Lester Pearson, the former prime minister of Canada and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957; as well as from many other world leaders. The eyes of the world, not only of people of religion, were on the conference.

To have the Kyoto conference live up to its designation "World Conference of Religions for Peace," its executive committee had chosen delegates according to the following criteria: The number of delegates from each religion—Christianity, Buddhism, Shinto, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, and so on—should be in proportion to the number of its adherents. They should be leaders with significant influence within their own sect or organization. Religionists from as many countries as possible and from

every continent should be included. In addition to religionists, experts on the issues we were to discuss were invited as consultants or observers.

The delegates thus chosen numbered 132 from fifteen countries in Asia; 37 from Canada and the United States; 5 from Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil; 35 from thirteen European countries; 8 from Kenya, South Africa, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Senegal; and 2 from Australia. Invitations were sent to religious leaders in China and North Vietnam, right down to just before the conference opened, but in the end none came. The delegates represented 70 percent of the world's population, in terms of the populations of the participating countries. The conference was the first in history attended by people of religion from around the whole world. Archbishop Hélder Pessoa Câmara from Brazil even went so far as to say that such a gathering was "truly a modern miracle."

As the loud, clear sound of a bell reverberated through the conference center, packed with representatives of all the different religions wearing their formal dress, the curtain rose on the first World Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace. Rev. Shinko Kishi, the head of the Pure Land sect of Japanese Buddhism, opened the proceedings with a Buddhist prayer.

Committing to Peace

Rev. Kosho Otani, head of the Hongwanji school of Shin Buddhism, then mounted the podium and gave the opening address as the honorary president of the conference and as a representative of the host nation. He said:

Japan was the first country in the world to suffer from atomic bombing. It is also a country with a pacifist constitution that rejects the use of aggressive military force. These two facts persuade me that this is a

very appropriate place to hold such a significant conference as this.

Science contributes to both peace and destruction. It does not, though, determine peace, however much progress it makes, for this is something that only we human beings can do. Finding the road to world peace will be brought about through our determination and commitment. The real results of this conference will be seen in the way people of religion around the world set to work to achieve world peace.

The first World Assembly of Religions for Peace was sponsored jointly by an executive committee of interested leaders of the world's major religions and by the Japan Religions League. Organization of the conference was entrusted to the league's International Affairs Committee. As the latter committee's chairman, I addressed the conference as follows:

Our religions have the shared purpose of bringing people salvation and happiness. Rather than antagonizing one another because our beliefs are different, we must work together to contribute to the cause of world peace. I hope this conference will offer us the opportunity to discuss seriously, as people of religion, what it is we can and must do.

As we discussed our plans for this conference, we built trust and friendship among ourselves and increased our cooperation. In so doing, we have gone beyond the barriers of religion that separate us. This proves that it is possible for us to join forces as people of religion to work out, by focusing on what we must do, ways to contribute to the happiness of all people. I believe that the efforts that have gone into making this conference a reality are identical to those that will bring about world peace.

The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki have taught us all that we will not survive if we keep on looking on things in the old way. Japan is the first country in history to have experienced the unimaginable destructive power of nuclear weapons. But now nuclear weapons are a million times more destructive. If total war should break out, the earth itself would be destroyed, and no one at all would remain alive. Friend and foe alike would share the same fate as the whole world.

The Vietnam War has clearly revealed a confrontation between East and West and created a situation like a tinderbox waiting to explode. As President Kennedy said, "Every man, woman and child lives under a nuclear sword of Damocles, hanging by the slenderest of threads, capable of being cut at any moment by accident or miscalculation or by madness. The weapons of war must be abolished before they abolish us."

Following the plenary session, attended by all, the delegates joined one of three study groups to discuss disarmament, development, or human rights. These were the major issues being tackled by UN experts and members of global peace movements. We chose them not only because they are important problems that must be solved at an international level but also because we believed that they could not be resolved without the kind of discernment that comes from a love of humankind that goes beyond national interests and belongs to a deeper spiritual dimension.

Though there had already been a large number of conferences where people of religion spoke about peace, most speakers tended to begin and end simply by talking about peace from a spiritual point of view and offered no useful opinions about the actual obstacles to peace.

Of course, peace for all the world's people will not be possible unless each and every person has inner peace. But that alone is not enough to achieve peace. The question that the world conference thrust before us was this: How much strength do people of religion have to alter the realities that stand in the way of peace?

It was American religious leaders who had encouraged Japanese religious circles to get involved in a conference, such as the first World Assembly of Religions for Peace, that was seeking practical steps to peace. True liberation from suffering requires both inner and outer peace, but there was division among religious people, particularly Christians, in Europe and America over which should take precedence. Some belonged to a gospel movement that advocated spiritual peace and others to a social movement that wanted to bring about actual social reform.

At that time there was a growing confrontation between the communist bloc and the free world, between the principles of socialism, advocated by the Soviet Union, and democracy, advocated by the United States. On the pretext of providing aid to developing countries where internal conflicts were

preventing economic independence, both countries had actually prolonged conflicts until they had turned into civil wars. This had happened in Asia and Africa, the Middle East, and Central and South America. The Vietnam War was a typical example.

The central issue for the American participants in the conference, beginning with the president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, Dr. Dana Greeley, and the Unitarian social activist Dr. Homer Jack, was that despite the heavy cost and bitter experience of the Second World War, the world seemed once again to be heading toward another world war. People of religion from all over the world must take joint responsibility for the trend. Dr. Greeley said, "However much we speak of love, true peace will remain no more than a pipe dream unless we have a concrete program to support disarmament, development, aid, and liberation from discrimination and oppression, which are the very foundations of peace. But however much we build systems and structures for this purpose, they will not have any true vitality without the love that binds the minds of people together in trust. We believe it is the role of people of religion to bring love and action together."

With already two years' hard work behind us to make this conference a reality, we were more than ever determined to get to grips with this difficult problem.

A Strong Opinion

The Catholic archbishop of New Delhi, Angelo Fernandes, who presided over the conference, said in his opening address: "War doesn't begin with a declaration of hostilities but with the building up of arms. The voice of religion authoritatively denies the assertion that military buildup discourages people from war and brings about peace. Love alone makes peace possible."

I chaired the plenary session on the second day, during which world religious leaders mounted the rostrum to give keynote speeches before the whole assembly. I was then telling myself, "Disarmament, development, and human rights—the subjects of the three study groups to be held following this session—are none other than peace, growth, and justice; inverted, they become war, poverty, and oppression. In this sense, the themes we chose were very timely, considering the state of the world."

One by one, some of the wisest people of the time spoke to us, including Dr. Muhammad Zafarullah Khan, president of the International Court of Justice in The Hague and sixteenth president of the UN General Assembly; Dr. Hideki Yukawa, a scientist of world renown and recipient of the 1949 Nobel Prize in Physics; Dr. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, professor of comparative religion at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem; and Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, secretary-general of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Dr. Yukawa's keynote address was titled "The Creation of a World without Arms." He spoke quietly but with conviction:

Before the advent of nuclear weapons, ideas like pacifism, nonviolence, and nonresistance, which rejected war in general, were regarded as unrealistic. The majority view, ranging from a passive affirmation that war was not desirable but sometimes unavoidable, to active agreement that of course we should take part in just wars, was that war had to be sanctioned according to circumstances. However, now that the Soviet Union and the United States possess enough nuclear weapons to destroy humankind many times over, and with the great amount of harm that growing numbers of chemical and biological weapons can cause, and in a situation that could easily turn into nuclear war, we cannot condone even a just war.

According to the UN "White Paper on Nuclear Weapons" of the time, there were stockpiles of about 3,200 megatons of nuclear weapons around the world. This was the equivalent of 3.2 billion tons of TNT, the strongest of the conventional explosives. This means that there was one ton of explosive for every person then alive.

Dr. Yukawa added:

Even so, ideas from the past that there is such a thing as a just war still persist. Wars are taking place at the moment, and protagonists on both sides try to justify their actions, saying what they do is right. Their first reason is based on their belief that their own value system is superior to any others. Their second reason is that they have a legitimate right to defend themselves against aggression by another country in order to preserve their own country and people. The third is liberation from colonial exploitation. While we have to recognize these reasons and the situations surrounding them, we will in the future have to submit wars of all kinds to peace negotiations.

Professor Werblowsky spoke courageously, not averting his gaze from the mistakes made by people of religion in the past. Even now, he said, religions may stand in the way of social progress in various ways. He spoke of the problems that had arisen in Vietnam and the Middle East and about the future role of people of religion.

Dr. Blake's address about development was equally impressive. His ideas, backed by his experience as WCC secretary-general, were powerful and persuasive.

These keynote speeches provided material for delegates' debate in the study groups that followed. There they spoke frankly of the problems besetting their own countries and societies and enthusiastically discussed as specifically as

possible how they work and what they can do as people of religion to combat them.

Impassioned Discussion and Warm Handshakes

Vehement arguments flew back and forth in the study group on disarmament.

“Surely religion very often constrains people into obedience and so the result is that it supports injustice.”

“To me, as a person of religion, non-violence is a fundamental principle, but if we turn a blind eye to human suffering from violence, where does that leave the teaching ‘Love thy neighbor?’”

“In our country, nonviolence is tantamount to death. Isn’t it unfair to fight to survive as a human being?”

A Buddhist representative from South Vietnam replied to these views:

In Vietnam, people have already been resorting to violence for twenty-five years, but it hasn’t brought about any resolution. Buddhists in Vietnam are continuing their fight through fasting, prayers, and protests against violence. The continuing nonviolence movement is centered on religious organizations banding together and encouraging people’s education. There are people who say that nonviolence doesn’t produce results. But this is not because nonviolence is impotent but because the Vietnam War is no longer a problem for Vietnam alone. I would ask people around the world to lend their strength to our movement of nonviolence.

Never before had there been a conference where people of religion from the free world and the socialist countries had sat around the same table and discussed specific ways to solve problems. This made it all the more important for the first World Assembly of Religions for Peace to be a success.

It was only natural that where religious customs are different, so are ways of thinking and feeling. And over and above this were different national situations.

More than a few people had misgivings that such a meeting of people of religion could possibly discuss concrete issues like disarmament, development, and human rights, and they thought the whole concept ill-advised. “Communication will be completely impossible,” they said.

Every evening after the day’s discussions we held a working committee meeting. Members reported slipups in the running of the conference, and we discussed any immediate measures we should take. They also mentioned instances of strong differences of opinion in the study groups, arising from national and religious differences. All the same, amid the frank exchanges of opinion that continued during the coffee breaks and around the dining table, there were also smiles and warm handshakes.

Everyone agreed: the conference was a success.

I was deeply impressed by the way the American religionists organized themselves. There were a number of people from Japanese religious circles too who demonstrated a strength in no way inferior.

When I had a chance to talk with religionists from communist countries after we joyously shook hands, they agreed with me on a personal level, but they wanted me to understand how things were in their own

countries. This taught me how important it is to seek and have such meetings in advance behind the scenes at an international conference, over and above what happens on center stage. We call such an approach *nemawashi* (a necessary prearrangement) in reference to prior consensus building, and some of the overseas delegates also came to use that Japanese word at our next meetings.

The Historic Kyoto Declaration

Passionate discussions also continued in the study groups on development and human rights. Few of the Japanese religionists had had any practical experience dealing directly with actual issues like politics, economics, and the social system. However, taking advantage of the many opportunities for preparatory study and hearing the reports of the representatives from various countries, they came to a new awareness of the multiplicity and seriousness of the issues that obstructed world peace.

Alongside the three study groups, a special committee dealing with Vietnam was set up as a matter of urgency within the group studying disarmament. In war-torn South Vietnam, the antiwar movement was continuing. Religious leaders from around the world were moved by the appeals of the Vietnamese representatives Ven. Thich Thien Minh, assistant chief priest of An Quang Pagoda in Saigon, and Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh.

There was a fear that the committee might become uncontrollable because of the different political stances taken by the countries of the delegates, but we had to overcome this and worked hard to find common ground as people of religion. We determined on a specific course of action, making three resolutions that called for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the US forces from South Vietnam, for China and the Soviet Union to stop supplying weapons to North Vietnam, and for a ceasefire-monitoring group to be set up.

We made no distinction between day and night for the six days of the conference and on the final day adopted the Kyoto Declaration, which says:

It is not religion that has failed the cause of peace, but religious people. This betrayal of religion can and must be corrected. We live or die together. If we can drift toward destruction together, surely we can work together in our struggle for peace. We have seen the fundamental unity of the human family. We are convinced that religions, in spite of historical differences, must now seek to unite all men in those endeavors which make for true peace.

The declaration was a truly historic document, in its vow by men and women of religion from around the world to accept joint responsibility for the achievement of world peace.

Further, this was not to be a one-off event. Strong voices had been raised among delegates for more such conferences, and so new officers were elected to prepare for the next one. I was asked to be a vice president.

Human relations begin with an encounter. Only with encounters can discussions begin. Only from discussions can mutual understanding, trust, and friendship emerge. Only through bonds of trust and friendship can we hope to cooperate fully. The road may

be long and winding, but I believe that this road, and this road alone, is the true road to peace.

Even if for the moment we can't see any visible results, we must still take that first step, or even half step. However barren the land, unless we sow seeds, no shoots will rise. Deep in the earth, the seed will eventually sprout, flower, and give forth its fruit. We must never lose the conviction that each step we take toward building a peaceful world brings our goal one step nearer and that a hundred paces forward mean a hundred paces toward peace.

Rejoicing in Success

On October 23, 1970, two days after the close of the conference, ninety-four of the foreign delegates as well as thirty-three Japanese delegates were invited to a gathering in Fumon Hall in Tokyo to pray for world peace, in conjunction with a meeting to report on the conference. The hall had been completed that April and could seat five thousand people. Rissho Kosei-kai members filled Fumon Hall and the Great Sacred Hall to pray for world peace, and altogether twenty-five thousand people took part.

The form of Fumon Hall, with its two circles joined in one, symbolizes the Three Seals of the Dharma, the fundamental teaching of Buddhism. They are the truths that all things are impermanent, all things are devoid of a separate self (all things are interrelated), and nirvana is quiescence (perfect harmony between the first two truths).

On that day Fumon Hall welcomed men and women of religion from around the world who had vowed to rededicate themselves to the cause of peace for all humankind. Each Rissho Kosei-kai member in both halls also deeply resolved

to become a moving force guiding the world to peace.

Archbishop Fernandes of India gave the first report. He was followed by Dr. Greeley and Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev. Their powerful reports made a deep impression on members.

Metropolitan Philaret stated that poverty around the world is caused by the unequal distribution of wealth. He said that since planet Earth's wealth belongs to all people, we should use our wisdom to develop and distribute it more equally. To do so, all countries must cease military preparations: this is the gateway to global peace and prosperity.

Many of the foreign guests spoke to me of their impressions.

One said, "It was wonderful to see young people, children, and old people from Rissho Kosei-kai all coming together to pray for world peace. And seeing so many women actively working for peace filled me with a sense of the power of religion."

Another said, "The enormous energy of Rissho Kosei-kai made me feel I was able to see a modern living religion. We will never forget how deeply moved we have been."

To be continued

The Prism of the Lotus Sutra (8)

by Atsushi Kanazawa

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The Red Lotus

The “lotus” of the title of the Lotus Sutra is the *puṇḍarīka*, or white lotus, but in the Lotus Sutra not all lotuses are white. In fact, in the Lotus Sutra the word *puṇḍarīka* appears almost only in connection with the sutra’s title. Apart from a reference in the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings to the *puṇḍarīka* among various flowers that rain down from heaven, the only literal use of *puṇḍarīka* as the name of a flower occurs in chapter 19, “The Merits of the Preacher,” in the section dealing with the ability of the preacher to discern all kinds of smells, including the fragrances of red, blue, and white lotus flowers. Since these references are to Indian lotuses, non-Indian readers might not have known whether they were actually lotuses or similar-looking water lilies, and they may not have cared. This seems plausible when considering that the original Sanskrit text of the above passage about the fragrances of lotus flowers mentions the name of another kind of lotus, omitted, however, from Kumārajīva’s Chinese translation.

Aside from the blue lotus, the *padma*, or red lotus, distinguished from the white lotus, is what we are concerned with here. This is the lotus mentioned most frequently in the Lotus Sutra. An important quality of lotuses in general is that though they grow in muddy water, their flowers bloom untainted by it, inspiring a famous analogy likening the Buddha to a lotus flower. This analogy is found in chapter 15,



“Springing Up out of the Earth,” where it says, “These sons of the Buddha . . . are as untainted with worldly things as the lotus flower in the water.” Here the Sanskrit equivalent of “lotus flower” is not *puṇḍarīka*, or white lotus, but *padma*, or red lotus. In references in chapter 12, “Devadatta,” to “Mañjuśrī, sitting on a thousand-petal lotus flower as large as a carriage wheel, with the bodhisattvas who accompanied him also sitting on jeweled lotus flowers,” the lotus flowers are again red. Likewise, in chapter 3, “A Parable,” Shakyamuni predicts that Śāriputra, foremost in wisdom among

his disciples, will in a future age become the Tathāgata Flower Light, corresponding to the Sanskrit *padmaprabha*, or “he who has the radiance of a red lotus flower.” In the Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, it is stated more directly in connection with the elephant on which the bodhisattva Universal Virtue (Samantabhadra) is mounted that “on the elephant’s trunk, having the color of a red lotus flower, there is a transformed buddha who emits a ray from his eyebrows.”

In view of the examples above, some scholars surmise that the word

pundarika, or white lotus, was used only in connection with Shakyamuni and was differentiated from the *padma*, or red lotus, which was associated with all manner of other buddhas and bodhisattvas. □

Mount Sumeru

Mount Sumeru, also known as Mount Meru, is, among Japanese Buddhists, an all-too-famous mountain. Its name was rendered in Chinese as “Wondrous High Mountain,” and in Buddhist cosmology in ancient India it was the high mountain at the center of the world. A world with Mount Sumeru at its center is called a Sumeru world. Buddhist cosmology describes Mount Sumeru as eighty thousand *yojanas* high, but just how high might this be? It rises out of the sea and is said to be surrounded by eight concentric mountain ranges alternating with seven concentric other seas. Between the seventh and the outermost range of mountains is a vast ocean with four continents in the cardinal directions. The southern continent of Jambudvīpa is believed to be inhabited by Indians and other ordinary human beings. The sun, moon, and stars all orbit Mount Sumeru, and on its summit is the realm of Indra. The four heavenly kings live on a terrace halfway down the mountain. For human beings it is thus a legendary mountain that they will never be able to see with their own eyes and that they can only imagine. For this reason it is sometimes regarded as a fictitious, imaginary mountain, and various scriptures containing the teachings of the all-knowing Buddha frequently mention it in a variety of analogies.

It naturally figures quite often in the Lotus Sutra too. Chapter 7, “The Parable of the Magic City,” repeatedly describes how “all the Brahma heavenly kings bowed to the ground before the Buddha, made procession around him hundreds and thousands of times, and then strewed the celestial flowers

upon him. The flowers they strewed [rose] like Mount Sumeru.” This is no doubt an exaggeration, but to glorify the Buddha, the gods are said to have scattered celestial flowers equal in mass to Mount Sumeru.

Also, chapter 14, “A Happy Life,” says, “Let [the bodhisattva] abide in seclusion, cultivate and control his mind, and be as firmly fixed and immovable as Mount Sumeru.” Here a buddha’s unmoving, steadfast mind is likened to Mount Sumeru.

Chapter 11, “Beholding the Precious Stupa,” states that in the buddha-land there are no mountains like Mount Sumeru, the king of mountains, and that the ground is “even and smooth.” In the same chapter we also read: “If one took up Sumeru and hurled it to

another region of numberless buddha-lands, neither would that be hard.” This is, it has to be said, an astonishing statement, for it is saying that it would not be difficult to pick up Mount Sumeru and hurl it to another realm. “But if one, after the Buddha’s extinction, in the midst of an evil world is able to preach this sutra, this indeed is hard.” In other words, it is more difficult to preach the Lotus Sutra skillfully in an evil world after the Buddha’s death. The intended meaning should be clear. □

Note: All excerpts from the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, the Lotus Sutra, and the Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue are from *The Threefold Lotus Sutra* [Kosei Publishing Company, 1975], with slight revisions.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 24

The Bodhisattva Wonder Sound (1)

This is the 120th installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.

INTRODUCTION This chapter relates the story of the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound, who came from an ideal world to the actual world, the *saha* world. Important points in the story will be explained as needed, so let us immediately proceed with the story.

TEXT Then Shakyamuni Buddha emitted a ray of light from the protuberance [on his cranium], the sign of a great man, and emitted a ray of light from the white hair-circle sign between his eyebrows, everywhere illuminating eastward a hundred and eight myriad kotis of nayutas of buddha worlds, equal to the sands of the Ganges.

COMMENTARY *Protuberance.* The Buddha's head has what looks like a bump on top, on which there is a tuft of hair.

- *Sign of a great man.* This refers to a feature peculiar to a great person (a buddha). (See the September/October 1992 issue of *Dharma World*.)

- *White hair-circle sign.* Images of the Tathagata have a white spot on the forehead, which is a swirl of hair. It is called the "circle of white hair" and is the first of the thirty-two primary marks of a buddha. We read in various sutras that this mark on a buddha emits a great ray of light.

The ray of light from Shakyamuni Buddha shone throughout the innumerable eastern domains of heaven, meaning that the Eternal Buddha is everywhere and that all living beings can come to know of his existence only through his teachings. The ray of light from the circle of white hair symbolizes his Buddha wisdom, by which he has revealed the universal truth.

The same scene is also described in chapter 1 of the Lotus Sutra, “Introductory,” but it is especially important for us to be reminded of its significance by this chapter. That is why the chapter begins with the mention of the ray of light that shines throughout the worlds of the buddhas.

TEXT Beyond those numbers [of worlds] is a world named Adorned with Pure Radiance. In that domain there is a buddha styled King Wisdom of the Pure Flower Constellation Tathagata, Worthy of Worship, All Wise, Perfectly Enlightened in Conduct, Well Departed, Understander of the World, Peerless Leader, Controller, Teacher of Gods and Men, Buddha, World-honored One. Revered and surrounded by a great host of incalculable and countless bodhisattvas, he preached the Dharma to them. The ray of light from the white hair-circle of Shakyamuni Buddha shone throughout their domain.

At that time in the domain Adorned With All Pure Radiance there was a bodhisattva whose name was Wonder Sound, who for long had cultivated many roots of virtue, paid homage to and courted innumerable hundred thousand myriad kotis of buddhas, and perfectly acquired profound wisdom. He had attained the contemplation of the wonderful banner sign, the contemplation of the Dharma Flower, the contemplation of pure virtue, the contemplation of the Constellation King’s freedom, the contemplation of causelessness, the contemplation of the knowledge seal, the contemplation of interpreting the utterances of all beings, the contemplation of collection of all merits, the contemplation of purity, the contemplation of supernatural freedom, the contemplation of the torch of wisdom, the contemplation of the king of adornment, the contemplation of pure luster, the contemplation of the pure treasury, the contemplation of the unique, and the contemplation of the sun’s revolutions: such hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of great contemplations as these had he acquired, equal to the sands of the Ganges.

COMMENTARY *Cultivated many roots of virtue.* This means that he did many good deeds. Doing good deeds cultivates one’s virtues.

- *Contemplation.* There are many types of contemplation mentioned here, so please reread the section where we discussed the meaning of contemplation (See the July–September 2014 issue of *Dharma World*).

- *Contemplation of the wonderful banner sign.* The wonderful banner is an extremely beautiful banner that serves as the ensign of a general’s headquarters. Hence, the contemplation of the wonderful banner sign means firm, unshakable belief that the Lotus Sutra is the core, the central force, of all the Buddhist teachings.

- *Contemplation of the Dharma Flower.* This state signifies deep belief in the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, practicing them oneself, without any distraction. This contemplation can represent all of the sixteen contemplations enumerated here. A close analysis and explanation of the remaining fifteen will show that they are based on contemplation of the Dharma Flower.

- *Contemplation of pure virtue.* This is the state of mind in which one possesses pure virtue without being conscious of it. People who enter this contemplation are not arrogant or selfish, and their speech and conduct naturally influence those around them for the better.

- *Contemplation of the Constellation King’s freedom.* “Constellation” means that which has existed from the infinite past. “King” here means flourishing. This contemplation means voluntary, constant concentration on one’s aspiration to becoming a buddha or great bodhisattva who possesses excellent virtues from former lives and the power to lead others freely by means of these virtues. It also means an unshakable determination to achieve that purpose.

- *Contemplation of causelessness.* This is complete devotion to liberating everyone, both the people we know and do not know.

- *Contemplation of the knowledge seal.* This is constant awareness in which we wish for the deep wisdom to benefit the people around us.

- *Contemplation of interpreting the utterances of all beings.* This means concentrating on everything people say to understand it fully and adapting one’s way of teaching to each individual.

- *Contemplation of collection of all merits.* This means concentration on the idea that the merits of all the teachings result in one aim: buddhahood for oneself and everyone else.

- *Contemplation of purity.* This means the state of concentration on retaining a pure heart by ridding one’s mind of all defilements.

- *Contemplation of supernatural freedom.* This means the state of being consistent in keeping one’s mind free from all of one’s circumstances.

- *Contemplation of the torch of wisdom.* This is a state of spiritual concentration in which one shines the light of one’s wisdom on everyone around one like a torch.

- *Contemplation of the king of adornment.* “Adornment” in this case means majestic ornamentation, and here it specifically means to adorn oneself with virtues. “King” here means “in great measure.” Hence this means concentrating on the aspiration to become one who cultivates virtues that naturally influence other people.

- *Contemplation of pure luster.* This means concentration on single-minded devotion to purifying society through illumination with light from the body.

- *Contemplation of the pure treasury.* “Treasury” ordinarily means a collection of valuable things. In this passage of the sutra, it means a state of concentration for purifying the “treasury” of one’s heart.

- *Contemplation of the unique.* “Unique” here means the unique, or unequalled, Buddha. So this means being fully committed to the attainment of buddhahood.

- *Contemplation of the sun’s revolutions.* This means concentration in order to understand the higher teachings, with which to bless the lives of all things, just as the life-giving sun shines on all things on earth.

- *Great contemplations.* All things considered, contemplation means concentrating the mind on a single object and entering directly into a state of awakening to the reality of that ideal. There are lower and higher states of contemplation than those just mentioned. The higher states are called “the great contemplations.”

Whether we are involved in work, study, sports, or even recreation, it is important to immerse ourselves in it and enter a state of contemplation, even if it is a lesser degree of contemplation, because that is precisely what allows us to live fulfilling lives. Needless to say, this is even more true of the great contemplations of religion.

On the contrary, if one works half-heartedly, allows oneself to become distracted from one’s studies or is unable to become absorbed in recreation, one’s life will be unfulfilled.

Contemplation is very important for us in our daily lives, too.

TEXT No sooner had the ray from Shakyamuni Buddha shone upon him than he said to the Buddha King Wisdom of the Pure Flower Constellation: “World-honored One! I should go to visit the *saha* world to salute, approach, and pay homage to Shakyamuni Buddha, as well as to see the Bodhisattva Manjushri, son of the Dharma king; the Bodhisattva Medicine King; the Bodhisattva Courageous Giver; the Bodhisattva Star Constellation King Flower; the Bodhisattva Mind for Higher Deeds; the Bodhisattva King of Adornment; and the Bodhisattva Medicine Lord.”

COMMENTARY The Bodhisattva Wonder Sound was an extremely outstanding bodhisattva who had achieved the various contemplations listed above, so when his body was illuminated by Shakyamuni Buddha’s radiance, Wonder Sound recognized immediately that Shakyamuni possessed great virtue, and Wonder Sound must have felt strongly drawn to him. Furthermore, Wonder Sound must have been eager also to meet the many bodhisattvas who were Shakyamuni’s distinguished disciples.

TEXT Then the Buddha King Wisdom of the Pure Flower

Constellation addressed the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound: “Do not look lightly on that domain or conceive a low opinion of it. Good son! That *saha* world with its high and low [places] is uneven and full of earth, stones, hills, and filth; the body of the Buddha is short and small, and all the bodhisattvas are small of stature, whereas your body is forty-two thousand yojanas [high] and my body six million, eight hundred thousand yojanas. Your body is of the finest order, [blessed with] hundreds of thousands of myriads of felicities, and of a wonderful brightness. Therefore on going there do not look lightly on that domain, nor conceive a low opinion of the Buddha, nor of the bodhisattva, nor of [their] country.”

COMMENTARY The differences in size described above point out the gap that exists between the ideal and actuality.

The domain where the Buddha King Wisdom of the Pure Flower Constellation dwells is an ideal world in the far eastern heavens. For this reason the land is flat, made of something like lapis lazuli, and of a beautiful brightness.

The bodies of the buddha and bodhisattvas in that domain are extraordinarily large and shine with the color of gold. If we say for the moment that one *yojana* is equivalent to one kilometer, then the Buddha King Wisdom of the Pure Flower Constellation is 6.8 million kilometers tall and even the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound is 42,000 kilometers tall.

That is a metaphorical way of saying that the ideal world transcends the limits of the real world (actuality). People who perfect themselves in the real world are holier than any heavenly being, even though they may be physically small and not stand out. Nothing is more sacred than the supreme enlightenment attained by the Buddha in the real world, where evils prevail and obstructions are incessantly thrown up by Mara and the Mara people. The Buddha King Wisdom of the Pure Flower Constellation preached this earnestly to the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound.

TEXT The Bodhisattva Wonder Sound replied to that buddha: “World-honored One! That I now go to visit the *saha* world is all due to the Tathagata’s power, the Tathagata’s magic play, and the Tathagata’s adornment of merit and wisdom.”

COMMENTARY *Magic play.* This term means the divine power of being able to travel anywhere freely.

- *The Tathagata’s adornment of merit and wisdom.* This phrase is somewhat obscure, but it means the Tathagata’s great merits, supreme wisdom, and great dignity.

TEXT Thereupon the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound, without rising from his seat and without stirring his body, entered into contemplation. By the power of his contemplation,

on Mount Gridhrakuta, not far distant from the Dharma seat, there appeared in transformation eighty-four thousand precious lotus flowers with stalks of jambunada gold, leaves of white silver, stamens of diamonds, and cups of kimshuka gems.

COMMENTARY *Kimshuka gems.* These are probably rubies, red like the flowers of the kimshuka tree of India.

TEXT Thereupon Manjushri, son of the Dharma king, seeing those lotus flowers, said to the Buddha: “World-honored One! For what reason does this auspicious sign first appear? There are some thousands and myriads of lotus flowers with stalks of jambunada gold, leaves of white silver, stamens of diamonds, and with cups of kimshuka gems.” Then Shakyamuni Buddha informed Manjushri: “It is the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva Wonder Sound who desires to come from the domain of the Buddha King Wisdom of the Pure Flower Constellation, with his company of eighty-four thousand bodhisattvas, to this *saha* world in order to pay homage to, draw nigh to, and salute me, and who also desires to pay homage to and hear the Dharma Flower Sutra.” Manjushri said to the Buddha: “World-honored One! What roots of goodness has that bodhisattva planted, what merits has he cultivated, that he should be able to have such great transcendent power? What contemplation does he practice? Be pleased to tell us the name of this contemplation; we also desire diligently to practice it, [for] by practicing this contemplation, we may be able to see that bodhisattva—his color, form, and size, his dignity and behavior. Be pleased, World-honored One, by [thy] transcendent power, to let us see the coming of that bodhisattva.”

COMMENTARY *To see that bodhisattva—his color, form, and size, his dignity and behavior.* Color and form refer to his physical body. Seeing people’s “size” includes noticing whether they are large or small, and ancient Indians, as explained earlier, thought eminent people must be physically large. So they thought large people must be noble. But actually they wanted to meet people of noble character, whether they were physically big or small.

“Dignity” refers to signs of virtue in a person’s face and bearing. “Behavior” refers to deportment. In other words, character is manifested in people’s appearance and deportment, in every movement of their body. For that reason Manjushri Bodhisattva wants personal contact with the dignified figure of the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound.

TEXT Thereupon Shakyamuni Buddha told Manjushri: “The Tathagata Abundant Treasures, so long extinct, shall display to you the sign.”

COMMENTARY *Shall display to you the sign.* To be precise, this means that by the transcendent power of the Tathagata Abundant Treasures, the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound, who until now has been an ideal, will be revealed in a visible, concrete form.

The Tathagata Abundant Treasures does not proclaim the teachings himself, but Shakyamuni Buddha says this because this buddha performs the priceless role of always testifying to the truth of the Lotus Sutra, which other tathagatas preach.

TEXT Instantly the Buddha Abundant Treasures addressed that bodhisattva: “Come, good son! Manjushri, son of the Dharma king, wishes to see you.”

Thereupon the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound disappeared from that domain and started out along with his eighty-four thousand bodhisattvas. The countries through which they passed were shaken in the six [different] ways, lotus flowers of the precious seven rained everywhere, and hundreds of thousands of heavenly instruments resounded of themselves.

COMMENTARY *Hundreds of thousands of heavenly instruments resounded of themselves.* The instruments played themselves.

The glorious manifestations that appear as the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound travels from that domain Adorned with Pure Radiance to this *saha* world suggest a beautiful painting, which symbolizes very well the grandeur and majesty of an ideal.

TEXT That bodhisattva’s eyes were like broad big leaves of the blue lotus. His august countenance surpassed the combined [glory] of hundreds of thousands of myriads of moons.

COMMENTARY The portrayal has a certain Indian flavor to it, but it is possible to imagine the decency of that bodhisattva’s handsome countenance.

TEXT His body was of pure gold color, adorned with infinite hundreds of thousands of meritorious [signs]; he was of glowing majesty, radiant and shining, marked with the perfect signs, and of a body strong as Narayana’s.

COMMENTARY *Adorned with infinite hundreds of thousands of meritorious [signs].* The inestimable merits which the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound has accumulated until this time adorn his body beautifully.

We can easily understand this, because when we see a person of great virtue, one who has accumulated good deeds, that goodness comes through and appears on his

inexpressibly wonderful face. On the contrary, however handsome a man may be or however beautiful a woman may appear, if their intentions and deeds are evil or impure, it will show in their facial features.

Fine clothes and makeup cannot conceal one's true character, so we should bear this in mind and cultivate virtue and do good deeds.

- *He was of glowing majesty, radiant and shining.* "Majesty" means that he has the kind of character that wins the respect of those who meet him. "Glowing" means a fiery radiance. His body seems to radiate virtue, and its appearance is "radiant and shining."

- *Marked with the perfect signs.* The Bodhisattva Wonder Sound is well endowed with good features on his face and body. We have noted on many occasions that the Buddha possesses all of the thirty-two primary marks.

- *Narayana.* He is, so to speak, a strong man of the heavenly realm. In sculptures and such he is depicted as extremely robust and well built.

TEXT Entering a seven-jeweled tower, he mounted the sky seven tala trees above the earth and, worshipped and surrounded by a host of bodhisattvas, came to Mount Gridhrakuta in this *saha* world.

Arrived, he alighted from his seven-jeweled tower and, taking a necklace worth hundreds of thousands, went to Shakyamuni Buddha, at whose feet he made obeisance and to whom he presented the necklace, saying to the Buddha: "World-honored One! The Buddha King Wisdom of the Pure Flower Constellation inquires after the World-honored One:

COMMENTARY *Inquires after.* This means paying respects.

The bodhisattva who descends from an ideal world to this world worships and greets reverently the Buddha of this world. This act strongly suggests how precious it is to manifest the ideal in reality, as explained before.

TEXT 'Hast thou few ailments and few worries? Art thou getting on at ease and in comfort? Are thy four [component] parts in harmony? Are thy worldly affairs tolerable?

COMMENTARY This inquiry is extremely polite and infinitely considerate.

- *Few ailments and few worries.* The word "few" may be understood as "no" or "none." Asking whether he has few ailments or worries means rather that he undoubtedly has none.

- *Getting on at ease and in comfort.* This means that the Buddha is graceful in the way he stands and sits. In other words, the body is healthy and feels light.

- *Four [component] parts in harmony.* It was believed in

ancient Greece and India that all things were composed of the four elements: earth, air, water, and fire. Their right balance signified health.

In extension, the human body came to be called "the four parts." In this instance he inquires into the Buddha's health by asking whether these four elements are in balance.

TEXT Are thy living beings easy to save? Are they not overcovetous, angry, foolish, envious, arrogant;

COMMENTARY *Are thy living beings easy to save?* In direct translation, are they easy or difficult to instruct? In other words, he is inquiring whether the living beings of the *saha* world have superior capacity and obey the teachings.

- *Arrogant.* The original words in the Chinese text are written with two characters. The first means stinginess not only

with possessions, but also in sharing knowledge, such as in job training, and guiding others to happiness. The second means arrogance. Arrogant people think they are better than other people. Some people who are stingy and arrogant want to hinder others' success. When the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound mentions jealousy and stinginess (and arrogance), in addition to the three poisons of overcovetousness, anger, and foolishness, he clearly shows his understanding of ordinary people. Is it not true that people today are cursed by the five poisons of overcovetousness (greed), anger, foolishness, jealousy, and stinginess (and arrogance).

TEXT not unfilial to parents or irreverent to shramanas; not having perverted views or being of evil mind, unrestrained in their five passions?

COMMENTARY Now he turns to a subject that must surely make us recognize something of modern people.

- *Unfilial to parents.* It is a natural human feeling to think of one's parents and to treat them considerately. However, until the 1950s in Japan there was strong social pressure on young people to obey their parents, and today's youth seem to have rebelled against that, no longer feeling the need to honor their parents. I believe this a temporary symptom of a transitional period.

A mind which has swung to the right will always react by swinging to the left, and this pendulum motion will continue back and forth until it stops to the center. Since it is natural to honor one's parents, I believe Japanese young people will do that again.

- *Irreverent to shramanas.* On the surface this means not respecting people of faith who have renounced the world, but in the end it means indifference to all religion. This really strikes home as speaking of modern humanity.

- *Having perverted views or being of evil mind.* Perverted views means wicked opinions and mistaken thinking. Being of evil mind means not recognizing evil as evil and accepting it as entirely natural. Does this not fit the present world perfectly?

- *Unrestrained in their five passions.* The five passions are the desires to please the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Because these five desires are instinctual, they in themselves are not good or bad. However, a sign of good character is keeping those desires from becoming immoderate. This is the meaning of restraining the five passions.

Some people consider it only human to give in to desires. This is outrageous. People should consider how they relate to one another. We are unworthy human beings unless we are reasonable enough to control our own desires, considering the balance between ourselves and others, and society as a whole. Let us quickly dispel the misconception that there is no need for restraint.

TEXT World-honored One! Are thy living beings able to overcome the Mara enemies? Does the Tathagata Abundant Treasures, so long extinct, [still] abide in the Stupa of the Precious Seven and come to listen to the Dharma?

COMMENTARY *Mara enemies.* This means those who intend to harm others.

- *Does the Tathagata Abundant Treasures . . . come to listen to the Dharma?* Although this takes the form of a question, it is a declaration of confidence that when Shakyamuni Buddha preaches the Lotus Sutra, the Tathagata Abundant Treasures also comes to listen. It is an indirect expression of consolation for the toil of preaching the Dharma in the *saha* world.

TEXT [King Wisdom] also inquires of the Tathagata Abundant Treasures: 'Art thou at ease and of few worries? Wilt thou be content to remain long?' World-honored One! We now would see the body of the Buddha Abundant Treasures. Be pleased, World-honored One, to show and let us see him."

COMMENTARY *Wilt thou be content to remain long?* The Tathagata Abundant Treasures is a buddha who entered extinction an infinitely long time ago. He vows to appear together with the jeweled stupa to bear witness to its truth whenever the Wonderful Dharma (the Lotus Sutra) is preached and always holds himself in readiness within the stupa. Therefore he expresses the feeling that "indeed it must be a hardship" in these words.

The expression "World-honored One" is addressed to Shakyamuni Buddha, not the Tathagata Abundant Treasures. Ancient scriptures were not so neatly logically ordered as lines of thought are now, so we may not be able to make out what is going on if we are not careful.

TEXT Then said Shakyamuni Buddha to the Buddha Abundant Treasures: "This Bodhisattva Wonder Sound desires to see you." Instantly the Buddha Abundant Treasures addressed Wonder Sound: "Excellent, excellent, that you have been able to come here to pay homage to Shakyamuni Buddha, to hear the Dharma Flower Sutra, and to see Manjushri and the others."

COMMENTARY *To pay homage to Shakyamuni Buddha, to hear the Dharma Flower Sutra, and to see Manjushri and the others.* The Tathagata Abundant Treasures, who bore witness to the Wonderful Dharma, praises the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound for coming to this *saha* world to carry out three things: to pay homage to Shakyamuni Buddha in various ways because of his benevolence in preaching the Lotus Sutra (the Wonderful Dharma); to hear the teachings of the

Lotus Sutra; and to meet and emulate the virtuous bodhisattvas who practice the teachings. These words of praise show how significant each of these three is. It need hardly be mentioned that since a great bodhisattva from an ideal world does this, we ourselves should be all the more constant in paying homage to the Buddha, hearing the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, and following good examples of practicing the teachings.

The appearance of the Tathagata Abundant Treasures is not in the original text, but it is naturally implied.

TEXT Thereupon the Bodhisattva Flower Virtue said to the Buddha: “World-honored One! This Bodhisattva Wonder Sound—what roots of goodness has he planted, what merits has he cultivated, that he possesses such transcendent powers?” The Buddha answered the Bodhisattva Flower Virtue: “In the past there was a buddha named King of Cloud Thundering Tathagata, Arhat, Samyaksambuddha, whose domain was named Display of All Worlds and whose kalpa named Joyful Sight. The Bodhisattva Wonder Sound, for twelve thousand years, with a hundred thousand kinds of music, paid homage to the Buddha King of Cloud Thundering and offered up eighty-four thousand vessels of the precious seven. Being rewarded for this reason, he has now been born in the domain of the Buddha King Wisdom of the Pure Flower Constellation and possesses such transcendent powers.

COMMENTARY Making music is a way to honor the Buddha’s virtues. However, in this case, the reference to music should not be taken literally, but understood to mean words of praise.

Buddhism places great importance on words. Smiles and kind words are also regarded as important in leading people to the Buddha Way. In fact, in esoteric Buddhism there is the Shingon (True Word), or Chen-yen, sect which holds that secret and mystical words can counteract any evil or misfortunes. In chapter 26 of the Lotus Sutra, “Dharanis,” formulas of mystic syllables are believed to have this same mystic power.

The same can be found in Christianity. The Gospel of John opens with the words “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Modern science also points out that once human beings began to use words, their brains came to full-scale development. That is, when humans learned to use words, which are the vocalization of meanings, a distinction was made between thoughts, emotions, and actions, and the pure function of thinking with the brain was born. In the vocabulary of today’s brain physiology, there was new development of the cerebral cortex.

Such being the case, it becomes possible when one is about to commence an action to decide first in the mind “oh, this won’t do” and give up or decide “this is the best way” and launch forth into action.

It is precisely because people became able to make decisions about what is right and wrong and to form decisions based on values that they became truly human. We can therefore say that words made human beings what they are.

I am sure we have discussed this before, but when we think of something, we formulate it in words in our minds. Without words, we can think of nothing. It is not too much to say that words are so important that they can encourage people or ruin them.

When we consider deeply why the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound was called by that name, we realize that the name of this bodhisattva, Wonder Sound, must mean “words of truth.” In Dharmaraksha’s Chinese translation of the Lotus Sutra, *Cheng-fa-hua-ching*, we find the bodhisattva’s name means “the Bodhisattva Wondrous Roar.” We surmise that Dharmaraksha expressed in his translation the “bodhisattva who makes the wondrous roar of a lion.”

However beautiful music is, the Buddha is not delighted by people’s merely paying homage to him with it. Preaching the Dharma (a lion’s roar) in words of truth suits the mind of the Buddha.

Considering this, we can understand the phrase “offered up eighty-four thousand vessels of the precious seven.” However many beautiful vessels one offered to the Buddha, he would not be pleased. In Buddhism, as you know, the number “eighty-four thousand” refers to the teachings expounded by the Buddha. The phrase “offered up eighty-four thousand vessels of the precious seven” therefore means that the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound expounded the Buddha’s teachings to many people in return for the Buddha’s blessing.

• *King of Cloud Thundering Tathagata, Arhat, Samyaksambuddha.* An easier-to-understand form of the epithet is “King of Cloud Thundering Tathagata, Worthy of Worship, All Wise.”

TEXT Flower Virtue! What is your opinion? The Bodhisattva Wonder Sound who at that time paid homage to the Buddha King of Cloud Thundering with music and offerings of precious vessels—was it some other person? It was indeed the present Bodhisattva-Mahasattva Wonder Sound. Flower Virtue! This Bodhisattva Wonder Sound had before paid homage to and been close to innumerable buddhas, for long had cultivated roots of virtues, and had met hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of nayutas of buddhas, [numerous] as the sands of the Ganges. Flower Virtue! You merely see here [one] body of the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound. But this bodhisattva appears in many kinds of bodies

everywhere preaching this sutra to the living. Sometimes he appears as Brahma, or appears as Shakra, or appears as Ishvara, or appears as Maheshvara, or appears as a divine general, or appears as the divine king Vaishravana, or appears as a holy wheel-rolling king, or appears as one of the ordinary kings, or appears as an elder, or appears as a citizen, or appears as a minister, or appears as a Brahman, or appears as a bhikshu, bhikshuni, upasaka, or upasika, or appears as the wife of an elder or a citizen, or appears as the wife of a minister, or appears as the wife of a Brahman, or appears as a youth or maiden, or appears as a god, dragon, yaksha, gandharva, asura, garuda, kimnara, mahoraga, man, or nonhuman being, and so on, and preaches this sutra.

COMMENTARY *Maheshvara*. This was originally a Brahman deity, the supreme god of creation.

- *Divine general*. This is a great general who protects the Buddha Dharma in the heavenly domain.
- *Vaishravana*. This was originally a Brahman deity and is one of the so-called four heavenly kings who guard and protect the teachings of the Buddha.
- *Citizen*. This refers to the head of a household at the middle level of society. In contrast with all those practitioners who have renounced the world, this indicates a layperson.
- *Minister*. This refers to a government minister.
- *Brahman*. Brahmans are the highest caste. They take their names from the deity from whose mouth they believe they sprang forth. They engage in religious affairs, scholarship, and education, and have nothing to do with the secular affairs of industry or politics.
- *A god, dragon, yaksha, gandharva, asura, garuda, kimnara, mahoraga*. These have appeared frequently (Refer to the November/December 1991 issue of *Dharma World*).

The Buddha mentions thirty-four kinds of bodies in which the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound freely appears and preaches the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. This is quite important.

The Bodhisattva Wonder Sound lives in an ideal world and incarnates the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in an ideal form. Yet he is not merely someone who exists only in the faraway eastern domain Adorned with All Pure Radiance, but he appears in the *saha* world as every human being who endeavors to exemplify the ideals of the Lotus Sutra.

All around us there are innumerable Bodhisattvas Wonder Sound. Although they may not have esteemed positions and may be quite poor, whoever preaches the ideals of the Lotus Sutra in words of truth and liberates people may be called a “transformed-body” of the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound. Those of us who exemplify the ideals of the Lotus Sutra are transformed-bodies of the bodhisattva.

One must not think of the transformed-body as something mystical and far from reality. If we seek our origin, we are all children of the Eternal Original Buddha. If we consider the unlimited freedom of the bodhisattva’s manifestations, we realize that every one of us may become a transformed-body of some significance. If we preach the ideals of the Lotus Sutra in words of truth, surely we too are transformed-bodies of the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound.

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.