

Daily Activities Are Practice of Our Faith

by Nichiko Niwano

For us lay Buddhists, our daily lives are the occasion to learn and practice the Buddha's teachings. We respond cheerfully when someone speaks to us, greet the people we meet, and show consideration toward others. In order to become able to do these things naturally, at any time, in any place, nothing is better than learning from the Buddha's teachings.

We see into ourselves by offering sutra recitation, participating in *hoza* counseling sessions, introducing others to the Dharma, and giving fellow members guidance. These practices enable us to become considerate of our family members and other people and offer warmhearted words to them. As a result, we can pass from one day to the next cheerfully and full of energy, and that is a great benefit of our faith.

When we hear the phrase "Learn and practice the Buddha's teachings," we are apt to think of learning and practice as separate things. The Japanese word for "learn," however, shares the same root as the words for "emulate" or "follow." Just as a site where people and cars come and go is a road, where learning and practice come together is the Buddha Way.

Shakyamuni preached, "No matter how many useful things someone says, if he does not put them into practice, he is negligent." Zen master Shido Bunan (1603–76) explained this succinctly: "Do not become confused about the word 'way,' just understand the actions you are undertaking from morning until night."

When I leave the house in the morning, my wife always sees me off with a cheerful, "Have a good day." Her voice

gives me encouragement, and I leave home feeling good. Such snapshots of daily life, like one's behavior and conversation from one moment to the next, can be the practice of the teachings, and the power they give us is the real value of the Buddha's teachings, which is finding joy in faith.

Awareness of Being Caused to Live

We cannot always pass from one day to the next with our hearts calm and still, however. Sometimes our feelings cause us to behave emotionally, which often leads to suffering.

I have said many times that it is important to know the Truth and the Dharma. This is because, although we are apt to be swayed by our emotions, awareness of the Truth allows us to see things as they really are and remain calm and collected.

The teachings of the impermanence of all things and of dependent origination demonstrate that no one lives by his or her power alone, and that we exist here and now because our lives are supported by all things.

Knowing this, in other words being aware that we are caused to live, we cannot help but feel grateful toward everything in this world. And that feeling of gratitude is expressed with regular words of thanks and a pleasant demeanor.

When our words and deeds bring harmony to our interactions with other people, they are certain to nurture friendly ties. The possibility of our getting along better with those with

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whom we have been in conflict also can increase. When complicated human relations become harmonious, we will feel at ease. Being aware of the Truth and the practice of being grateful for it bring with them the dissipation of suffering over and worrying about problems in daily life.

Incidentally, regarding our bodhi-sattva practice, as members know, the Six Paramitas are donation, keeping the precepts, perseverance, diligent effort, meditation, and wisdom. When we consider only these terms for the Six Paramitas, meditation and wisdom especially can seem to be hard to connect to practice. Simply put, however, wisdom means the awareness of being caused to live, and because this awareness produces the mental state of living tranquilly and gratefully, we could say that these two are the practices that form the very foundation of our lives.

In terms of daily life, let us imagine that there are some people who happen to feel happy and grateful for being alive when preparing breakfast in the kitchen in the morning. People who can pass each day in such a state of mind are none other than teachers of the Dharma who are bearing witness to being liberated. This perspective is the starting point for being able to introduce others to the Dharma. □

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FEATURES: Religious Rituals and Their Meaning for Today

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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Cover: Dippers on a purification trough at a Shinto shrine in Tokyo. At the entrances to Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples in Japan there are purification troughs where worshippers ritually cleanse their hands and mouths before entering.

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The Right Way to Hold Rituals

by Hideyuki Kobayashi

Rituals are an important element of religion, together with teaching and dissemination. In Rissho Kosei-kai we have various rituals throughout the year, starting with the three great observances of Buddhism—the celebration of Shakyamuni’s birthday, the anniversary of the day Shakyamuni attained enlightenment, and the anniversary of the Buddha’s entry into nirvana. We also commemorate the anniversaries of the deaths of our founder and cofounder.

In the rituals that we hold in the Great Sacred Hall at our headquarters or in Dharma centers, we do not let them become too extravagant, but strive to express the devotion we feel in our hearts and minds to the Buddha and our teachers.

As the saying goes, “Faith springs from majesty.” Solemn rituals performed with a pure heart inspire the viewer. Not just the grand events mentioned above, but our morning and evening offerings at home are also important, daily religious rituals.

Nowadays we tend to make everything efficient and rational, but religious rituals are by their very nature unusual and illogical. Rituals help participants deepen their understanding of doctrine. Sometimes, however, as rituals become more formalized, their meaning can be overlooked.

Throughout Rissho-Kosei-kai’s history, in keeping with the founder’s breadth of mind, its rituals have had few fixed arrangements and have been performed with utmost sincerity. That

does not mean, however, that anything one can come up with is fine.

There is a phrase used in Japanese martial arts and the tea ceremony as well as traditional performing arts: *shu-ha-ri* (preserve, detach, depart). “Preserve” is the fundamental principle, preserving the teaching, and involves thoroughly absorbing the fundamentals. “Detach” means applying the fundamentals to practical use. Absorbing the fundamentals allows the practitioner to make changes and innovations. “Depart” is the state in which one is no longer caught up in the form, yet does not stray from the path even while being freed.

For example, when joining Rissho Kosei-kai, members prepare a home altar and enshrine there an image of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni. Every morning before we worship, we place offerings on the altar of cooked rice, tea, and water, and offer thanks to the Buddha and our ancestors for our lives that day. We gain peace of mind by performing this sort of daily routine. We offer the same sort of food that our ancestors ate every day. That is why in Western countries if the offerings are bread or coffee, it’s not a problem. As long as the fundamental principle is understood, I think there is nothing wrong in adapting offerings to the local climate and culture.

On the other hand, at Dharma centers and other places where there are many participants, there can be unexpected mix-ups, disagreements, or other difficulties over rituals. Movement

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around the altar may be awkward, assignments might not be duly carried out. Neatly arranged offerings of fruit and vegetables might fall apart during the service. Since everyone can see what is happening, if something appears to have been done wrong, the officiant might be blamed, people will find fault, and disagreements can arise.

Correct performance of rituals depends on performing them in the way best suited to each occasion. It means following the Middle Path. So it is unfair simply to blame anyone for mistakes. Furthermore, although it is important to reflect positively on things, it is not necessary for those who make mistakes to rashly blame themselves. A mistake in a ritual is a chance for all concerned to display their cordiality. I urge people at these times to ask the participants to speak kindly and considerately to whoever made the mistake. This gives that person an opportunity to think and act positively and cheer up, and both sides learn from it.

Religious rituals are ways to direct and express our devotion to the gods and the buddhas. They are all performed for the spiritual liberation of believers. Even if they at first seem merely a copying of form, their repetition nurtures us and helps us order our lives. Through our rituals we walk the path to the joy of buddhahood. □

The Heritage of Ritual Activity for Contemporary Society

by John Nelson

It is part of our heritage as human beings to enact performances and promote beliefs that ensure order, stability, prosperity, and comfort while, at the same time, addressing the forces of chaos and disruption.

For most readers of *Dharma World*, living in a fast-paced, interconnected, and globalized world is a normal state of affairs. Even for individuals residing in the countryside or who hail originally from rural backgrounds, the so-called modern world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is an inescapable fact of existence. Contemporary institutions influence how we shop, travel, work, and are educated, as well as how we think about the meaning of our lives. Although a very recent historical trend, an emphasis on the individual in everything from governments to marketing and from science to religion

has both empowered and isolated people in numerous novel ways.

And yet, when we consider the evolutionary development of human beings—with the archaeological record pointing to around fifty thousand years of what has been called “behavioral modernity” (the ability to make tools, music, long-distance exchanges, figurative art, burials, and so forth)—we see that modernity is but a brief moment in time. Before all of our skyscrapers, cars, telecommunication wizardry, and scientific breakthroughs, small-scale communities nourished a more normative pattern of life. Families, clans, and communities were privileged,

usually because they ensured safety and survival. Even in urban settings, which began almost ten thousand years ago (see Çatalhöyük, a Neolithic community that existed from approximately 7500 to 5700 BCE), life was organized in ways similar to small-scale and tribal patterns. Thus, our development as human beings has a much longer heritage with ancient and premodern forms of social organization than it does with today’s urban and global cultures.

Owing to this long period of gestation in small-scale societies, we are behaviorally, cognitively, and even spiritually predisposed to religious belief and ritual. It is part of our heritage as human beings to gather in groups at certain times and in certain situations to enact performances and promote beliefs that ensure order, stability, prosperity, and comfort while, at the same time, addressing the forces of chaos and disruption. Communities both large and small, rural and urban, have long turned to religious rituals as a way to confer solidarity and purpose to the “socially constituted ‘me’” and not the “private, subjective ‘I.’”¹ Among the wide range of possible themes that rituals address, the sense of empowerment regarding personhood, cultural/ethnic/racial identity, and, more recently, loyalty to a political regime are persistent and prevalent.

For *Dharma World* magazine to devote an issue to the topic of ritual indicates editorial concerns about the inherent value of ritual as well as how society might be affected as secularization advances and ritualized behaviors

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and activities diminish. In this short essay, I will sketch an overview of contemporary ritual practice and performance in liberal democratic societies (such as the United States, Europe, and Japan), focusing on two main topics: ritual meanings and expressions, and the possible effects of rituals on social life and experience.

Approaches to Ritual Meanings

For much of the twentieth century, scholars researching religion and ritual advanced competing explanations and theories of what ritual is, what it does for the individual and society, and why it matters. Current thinking on the topic is by no means consensual or uniform. There are clear divisions among theologians and liturgists in Catholic and other Christian churches as well as among their counterparts in Islam, Hinduism, and various types of Buddhism. All of these individuals have an investment in maintaining religious institutions and doctrines, so their ideas on ritual tend to be normative and encompass a belief in supernatural powers. A theologian or religious leader might say a ritual has credibility because "it's always been done that way," or that history and tradition, not to mention divine forces, have proven its value.

On the other hand, scholars working in one or more of the diverse academic disciplines of religious studies emphasize the role of culture and society in shaping what kinds of rituals are

relevant and performed at any given time. At first glance, a ritual seems to be a fixed and predetermined series of gestures, words, and associations brought together in a performative way to reference a dominant cosmology. Upon closer investigation, however, a religious-studies approach sees ritual as a formalized (and highly negotiated) invocation of symbols, gestures, and language. No single ritual tradition or practice is used as a normative standard for analysis and classification.² Rituals are intended to shape both individual and communal understanding about a wide range of concerns: general well-being, social and cosmic orders, political stability, expressions of power (including those of the natural world), maintaining health, and so on. Rituals are also designed to manage anxieties about

and threats to these important social and religious themes.

As scholar Catherine Bell noted, "Ritual is not a universal phenomenon with a persistent, coherent structure that makes it work roughly the same way everywhere."³ Ritual practices and performances are constructed and then refined by specific cultures. What concerns urban and highly educated Japanese or Americans today would have little relevance for rural Africans affected by the HIV and Ebola epidemics. Differences can occur even within the same religion: for example, a Muslim farming community in Indonesia acknowledges Ramadan, Eid, and Mawlid rituals like their counterparts elsewhere in the world but would enact and celebrate them in culturally appropriate ways.

intervention, with a variety of actors creating roles for themselves to mediate between common people and the divine energies believed to impact their lives. Today, however, though these rituals are cultural and religious performances of great historical value, only a shrinking number of people would see them as having a direct impact that actually changes the world. In Japan, the Gion festival in Kyoto began originally as a complicated ritual to control and appease vengeful spirits (*goryō*) thought to have possessed rice-destroying insects. For spirits angry at the rulers who usurped their power and eliminated them, taking the form of a pest that could destroy the economic foundation of an entire society (rice agriculture) was a highly effective means to enact revenge.⁴

The Meaning of Rituals in Japan

Ritual in Japanese society, whether Shintō, Buddhist, Christian, or a synthesis of these traditions such as we might find in some of the New Religions, have helped to create and maintain a sanctified point of reference for social, political, and cultural activities. Ritual can legitimate common origins and interests, empower select individuals (including people historically without much

power, such as women), and negate or neutralize threats (including death) that challenge the legitimacy or survival of the individual or group. When successful, these rituals were thought to help maintain a reciprocal balance between human, phenomenal, and transhuman worlds, enabling human life and society to prosper.

We know from archaeological evidence that religious rituals occupied a central role in the lives of the Jōmon (10000 BCE to 300 BCE) and Yayoi (300 BCE to 300 CE) cultures, but the first written account—concerning the “black magic” used by a female ruler named Himiko to control her subjects—comes from Chinese envoys in the third century CE. Another account is found in the mythological and genealogical narratives of the eighth-century *Kojiki* and *Engishiki* texts. Here, the primordial *kami* Izanagi enacts a purification ritual after his visit to the land of Yomi (hell) and his close encounter with the destructive forces of death and decay. The power of this ritual renders him capable of giving birth to the three major divinities so central to Japan’s imperial household: Amaterasu (the sun deity), Tsukuyomi (the moon deity), and Susano-o (the land deity).

As Buddhism made inroads among the administrative elite in the sixth and

It is a curious aspect of ritualized behavior that while it might emphasize a major theme or concern, it does not have to explain its many moving parts. Readers who have experienced a Buddhist funeral service, a Shintō ritual within a shrine, or even a Catholic Mass know that most actions, words, and symbols are not explained; they exist as part of a holistic and situational performance focused on a particular goal (healing, purifying, energizing, protecting, blessing, and so on). Furthermore, whether all the people participating in or experiencing a ritual share an understanding about the overall goal of the event is not really important to the outcome. A wedding celebration has great significance to the happy couple and their families and friends, but to the spouse of a relative or to a friend of a friend, the occasion means primarily a lavish party with good food and plenty to drink.

Additionally, the meaning of a ritual sometimes depended on attributing a threatening situation (such as a prolonged drought, epidemic, or earthquake) to divine causes. In premodern societies, the relationship between cause and effect was usually open to ritual

seventh centuries, considerable syncretization occurred as the *kami* were appropriated and, after they became bodhisattvas, venerated in Buddhist rituals. Ritual practice in Japan continued a continental-style liturgical “magic” based on texts, chanting, divination, and prolonged prayer petitioning before statues representing various buddhas, bodhisattvas, and ancestral figures. Although historical records are limited for this period (roughly 530 to 900), archaeological evidence indicates that considerable interaction and exchange between *kami* and Buddhist ritual traditions was the norm rather than the exception. This long-lasting syncretism characterizes religious practice for most of Japan’s social history. Only in 1868, when the Tokugawa shogunate—representing the dying gasps of feudalism—finally ended in a revolution, did a heightened awareness of Shintō and Buddhism as distinct religious traditions begin to be institutionalized and enforced, with sometimes destructive results.

It was at this time that the new central government became quite active in promoting civic rituals as the ideological heart of their modernization program. Founding of the Nation Day; the emperor’s and empress’s birthdays; the enthronement of the legendary first emperor, Jimmu; military victories in several major Asian wars; the Great Harvest rite (*niinamesai*); and many other events

kept citizens, students in Japan’s schools, and the media attentive participants (and after 1932, what choice did they have?). For example, the government’s “shrine merger” program, lasting from 1906 to 1912, tried to single out one shrine per village so as to better maintain the correspondence between local and national ritual activities aimed at advancing and preserving the nation-state, headed by the emperor. Scholars are still trying to determine the dramatic shifts in ritual practices during this period, as local observances came under scrutiny and management by administrators from distant yet powerful centers of political influence associated with the Meiji (1868–1912) and later Shōwa (1926–89) governments. Rituals at shrines nationwide underwent a process of systematization

so as to conform to liturgical guidelines from Tokyo. Since there were often financial rewards and patronage attached to compliance with the national standards, local priests and their institutions often acquiesced to the new ritual forms as much for financial reasons as for civic or patriotic ones.

To many foreign observers, there is a perplexing informality shown by many Japanese people about using Shintō and Buddhist rituals with little regard for the boundaries of these traditions. What continues to matter to individuals, today as in the past, are the spiritual and pragmatic benefits (*goriyaku*) to be gained via ritual practices. More-devout parishioners of shrines and temples have altars in their homes where they can carry out simple rituals on a periodic basis. As we learned earlier, a ritual can empower individuals and communities to feel continuity between the present and the past, a situation especially relevant to the Japanese custom of venerating the spirits of their ancestors.

If the nearly 78 percent of the Japanese population visiting shrines and temples on or soon after New Year’s is any indication, it is likely there is far more substance in these ritual activities than participants either know or would admit. For those who partake in periodic public rituals and festivals throughout

the year, a complex interplay of associations and meanings reinforces cultural and communal identity as well as historical traditions. They also empower the individual, group, and larger community and resonate with possibilities for spiritual renewal.

The Impact of Ritual on Social and Cultural Orders

One of the enduring aspects of ritual is its ability to enable participants to understand themselves as moving within a cosmos of complex powers that can be addressed, propitiated, and cultivated.⁵ From temple altars to the streets of a major city, ritualized drumming, chanting, symbolic gestures, or special clothing reference a structure of power and authority that the ritual intends to influence. Public demonstrations and parades against nuclear weapons or nuclear power, and those promoting gay rights, ethnic identity, or reenactments of historical events, are also ritualized ways of acting in the world that can affect political policy and cultural norms.

An opportunity to loosen the bonds of workplace or social and familial obligations and experience a brief, well-bounded but nevertheless liminal stage of social existence via ritual and festival is generally welcomed within modern urban environments. Festivals of all kinds regularly draw huge crowds of people.

Similarly, rural communities suffering demographic change have tried to revitalize old festivals or create new ones (such as Furano, Hokkaido's "belly button" festival), hoping to stimulate local economies with a boost from tourism. These events create instant communities that share a particular orientation to social issues often based on religious or humanistic values.

Conclusion

There is concern among religious leaders that as societies become more secular and as demographic and generational change accelerates, the importance of religion and ritual will diminish. If people and communities do not continue to engage in ritual activities, will they experience disorientation about their place in the cosmos and a crisis of moral, religious, and cultural values? Many scholars are researching how a decrease in formal religious affiliation does not necessarily mean that individuals are without spiritual direction. The boom in New Age practices of all kinds, plus the unprecedented availability of texts, teachings, and events online, indicate a continued interest in ritualizing certain parts of one's life as a means of self-cultivation.

Additionally, considerable growth in humanistic thinking and teachings (including a bestseller by the Dalai Lama called *Ethics for the New Millennium*) has emphasized rationalism, psychology, and

a do-it-yourself methodology (including secular rituals) meant to empower individuals and the society in which they live. Of course, religious rituals have always done this for the members of their particular tradition. Today, however, owing in part to an increased awareness of global connectivity, climate change, and human rights, there is a tendency to see beyond the truth claims of specific religions to a broader, more inclusive pluralism that values all humans regardless of their religious or political choices, or their racial or gendered conditions.

The future of ritual in society may not be predictable in the diverse forms it will take or the range of meanings it will promote (How about a ritual to protect digital archives and databases?) but we can have some certainty that people will continue to find both cognitive and emotional significance in performing scripted, symbolic actions that are set apart from everyday life. There is simply too much cultural heritage, as well as an easy access to personal and community empowerment, to abandon this poignant social and religious resource. □

Notes

1. Roy A. Rappaport, "Concluding Comments on Ritual and Reflexivity," *Semiotica* 30, nos. 1–2 (1980): 190.
2. Madeline Duntley, "Ritual Studies," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2005): 7857.
3. Catherine Bell, "Performance," in *Critical Terms in Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 218.
4. See Neil McMullen's, "On Placating the Gods and Pacifying the Populace: The Case of the Gion 'Goryō' Cult," *History of Religions* 27, no. 3 (1988): 270–93.
5. Catherine Bell, "What's So Powerful about Ritual?" (from the Gateways of Power symposium) in *Pacific Rim Report* 22 (2001); available online at https://www.usfca.edu/uploadedFiles/Destinations/Institutes_and_Centers/Pacific_Rim/pdf/Report-22-May-2001.pdf.

The Buddhist Critique of Ritualism

by David R. Loy

Ritualism is “the belief that it is necessary for rites to be carried out,” because the ritual accomplishes something in and of itself, apart from our attitude as we perform it. In contrast, rituals . . . can be extraordinarily valuable if and when we undertake them in the proper spirit, because they can help to nurture and embody the mental transformation that is the most important goal.

Buddhism originated, in part, as a reaction against ritualism.

The prevalent religion in northern India during the time of the Buddha was Brahmanism. In addition to the chanting of Vedic hymns, it emphasized the worship of gods such as Indra and Agni and natural phenomena such as fire and the Ganges River. The main religious practice was the performance of rites, especially sacrifices, by priests who were members of the Brahman caste. If a nobleman or a wealthy merchant wanted his wife to give birth to a son, for example, he could hire a Brahman to perform the appropriate sacrifice. If the ritual were conducted correctly, the wife would bear a son; if that didn't happen, there must have been some error in the ceremony, or perhaps the results were postponed to a future pregnancy—or a future lifetime.

This emphasis on ritualism (“the belief that it is necessary for rites or repeated sets of actions to be carried out,” according to Wiktionary) was challenged by Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, who offered a very different perspective that shifted the focus from ritual activity to the importance of one's

mental attitude. The beginning of the Dhammapada highlights this:

Experiences are preceded by mind,
led by mind, and produced by mind.
If one speaks or acts with an impure
mind, suffering follows even as the
cartwheel follows the hoof of the ox.
Experiences are preceded by mind,
led by mind, and produced by mind.
If one speaks or acts with a pure
mind, happiness follows like a
shadow that never departs.

This change from ritualism to mental attitude is crucial to the Middle Way that the Buddha taught. In the Pali Canon—the earliest Buddhist collection of texts—the Jatila Sutta (Udana VI.2) recounts an event that happened while the Buddha was staying near Gaya. On a cold winter night, when snow was falling, he observed ascetics jumping up and down in the water, in the belief that they were thereby purifying themselves. The Buddha commented: “Not by water is one cleansed, though many people are bathing here: whoever has truth and rectitude, *he* is the clean one.”

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This approach is also the key to understanding the Buddha's critique of mechanistic karma. The Sanskrit word *karma* (*kamma* in Pali) literally means “action,” but in popular usage it refers to the consequences of some previous action: if you intentionally hurt someone, it is “your karma” to be injured sometime in the future. That puts the cart before the horse because it misses the point of the Buddha's revolutionary new perspective, which emphasized transforming one's motivations and the intentions of one's actions right now.

According to this understanding of karma, if I am motivated by greed, ill will, and delusion—the three fires or three poisons—the consequences will be bad, involving some kind of suffering. If, however, I am motivated by generosity, loving-kindness, and wisdom, then the consequences are very likely to be positive. That makes sense psychologically, because my intentions strongly affect not only how I relate to other people but also how I experience the world generally, and how other people experience and respond to me.

A better-known Pali Canon text, the Sigalovada Sutta, also emphasizes the shift from a ritualistic approach to a more psychological and social understanding of the religious life. It is often considered the most important *sutta* for laypeople; Bhikkhu Bodhi, for example, considers it the “most comprehensive Nikāya text” that pertains “to the happiness directly visible in this present life.”

One day the Buddha was taking his morning walk when he met a youth named Sigala, who was prostrating himself and worshipping in the four compass directions (east, south, west, and north), plus the earth (down) and the sky (up). When the Buddha asked him why he did so, Sigala replied that his late father had told him to do so, and he wanted to uphold his father’s wishes.

In reply, the Buddha taught him how a noble one (*ariya*) should “worship” them. He described the four compass directions as parents (in the east), teachers (south), wife (west), and friends and colleagues (north), and the two vertical directions as religious ascetics and Brahmins (up) and one’s servants (down). The Buddha explained how to respect and support each of them and how the six will return that kindness and support.

Notice that the Buddha did not dismiss the importance of venerating the

six directions—which might have caused difficulties for Sigala, who wanted to respect his father’s request. Instead, the Buddha redefined the meaning of the six directions by interpreting them as symbols or metaphors.

Half the people in the world think that the metaphors of their religious traditions, for example, are facts. And the other half contends that they are not facts at all. As a result we have people who consider themselves believers because they accept metaphors as facts, and we have others who classify themselves as atheists because they think religious metaphors are lies. (Joseph Campbell, *Thou Art That: Transforming Religious Metaphor* [New World Library, 2001])

In the case of Sigala, understanding the six directions in a more metaphorical way changes the focus from ritualistic formalities to practices that directly affect how we actually interact with family members, friends, and others. Again, the emphasis is on transforming the mind, especially our intentions.

Finally, the Pali Buddhist perspective on ritualism is perhaps best exemplified by its classifying “clinging to rites

and rituals” as the third of the ten fetters (*samjoyana*) that shackle us to *samsara*, this world of suffering, craving, and delusion. It is necessary to cut through all the fetters to attain nirvana, complete awakening. Someone who attains stream-entry, the first stage of enlightenment, already destroys the first three, including ritualism (the other two are the false view of a real self, and doubts about the Buddhist path).

Given this early Buddhist critique of ritualism, it seems ironic that the Japanese Buddhist establishment came to emphasize ritual most of all: in particular, the chants and other rites associated with funerals and memorial services. Traditionally, the main role of Buddhism in Japan has been to “purify” death, but as far as I know Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, was not at all concerned about that.

Ritual and Ritualism

Does all of this mean that contemporary Buddhists should reject all rituals? Not at all: there remains an important difference between ritual and ritualism.

Ritualism is “the belief that it is necessary for rites to be carried out,” because the ritual accomplishes something in and of itself, apart from our attitude as we perform it. In contrast, rituals (sequences of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and performed according to set sequence) can be extraordinarily valuable if and when we undertake them in the proper spirit, because they can help to nurture and embody the mental transformation that is the most important goal, according to Buddhism.

Let me offer an example from my Zen practice. To do *zazen* together as a group in a meditation hall is a ritualized activity that works to encourage and cultivate certain mental processes. One enters the hall with a small bow (*gassho*) and walks mindfully to one’s seat without stepping on the cracks between the

tatami mats. One bows to the seat, turns around and bows to the hall, sits down, and begins *zazen* with a prescribed series of physical actions that help one settle onto the cushion. The period begins with clappers and three bells; it ends with one bell, or two bells if there is to be a period of walking meditation followed by another period of meditation. The walking meditation—*kinhin*—is also ritualized. All of this is done in silence, which minimizes distractions.

I cherish that ritual. Nevertheless, the distinction between rituals and ritualism is not always clear. The basic problem is that ritual, by its nature, tends to be a conservative force that preserves and maintains traditions, which is often a good thing but not always. According to one definition, rituals are characterized by formalism, invariance, rule-governance, and sacral symbolism. Sometimes, however, adaptability is more important, especially in new situations that call for flexibility.

Buddhism's emphasis on impermanence and insubstantiality applies even to itself, and this has been significant as Buddhism has spread to new societies and interacted with different religious cultures. The rituals found in Korean and Japanese Buddhism, for example, are quite different from those practiced in Thailand or Burma. Is it necessary that the traditional rituals used in premodern Asian Buddhist societies be preserved and continued in the modern world? If the most important consideration in Buddhism is whether something promotes genuine awakening—if all rituals, like all the teachings, are only rafts to help us get across to “the other side” of the river—then we need to distinguish or create rituals that are most relevant to us today, because they help to cultivate the personal and social transformations that are most needed.

One consideration that is especially relevant in Japan is the great generation gap—greater than anywhere else I have lived—between young people and their

elders. My sense is that young people may acquiesce in social ceremonies, such as funeral services and memorials, but these are often a source of estrangement and disaffiliation. Such rituals have less and less meaning for many people, especially youth.

That concern is actually part of a larger issue. In the Buddha's time, life was lived in groups; individualism as we know it today did not exist, because neither the economy nor social relationships enabled it. Today we experience the opposite, with the encouragement of consumerism and the support of new communication technologies. The prevalence of *hikikomori* (acute social withdrawal) is only an extreme example of a culture of alienation that is much more widespread. The challenge today, therefore, is different: can rituals help to bring us together, to cultivate the growth of community bonds that are unraveling?

Healing Rituals

One possible answer might be found in the recent development of new healing rituals.

For example, in her important book *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World*, and in her Work That Reconnects workshops, Joanna Macy offers practices that can “help us take part in the epochal shift from the industrial growth society to a life-sustaining civilization.” Many of the exercises and meditations she outlines have a ritual component. For example, the Council of All Beings, for reconnecting with the other species that share this planet with us, begins with participants sitting in a circle around a lit candle while listening attentively to parts of Chief Seattle's famous 1854 speech:

The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. Whatever befalls the earth befalls

the sons of the earth. Man does not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand of it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

After the reading is complete, participants are invited to speak to Chief Seattle, imagining his spirit to be in the middle of the circle. When everyone has had an opportunity to speak, and after silent reflection on their words, this first part of the exercise concludes by the participants saying together: “May our words to Chief Seattle, like his to us, remain with us for the healing of our world.”

There is much more to the Council of All Beings—too much to summarize here—but perhaps this excerpt is enough. The crucial point is that, in this time of great social and ecological challenges, our hearts, our societies, and the earth itself need to heal. That points to the direction that Buddhism and other religious traditions could develop if they are to contribute to that healing process. And rituals, understood and performed in the right spirit—with the right intention—can be an important part of that healing. □

Catholic Celebration of the Eucharist

by Leo D. Lefebure

For Catholics, the Eucharist interprets the meaning of life, shapes personal and communal identity, and calls for life-giving action in the world. In many contexts the Eucharist is intimately linked to work for social, political, and economic justice.

The Catholic Church is a strongly sacramental tradition of Christianity, celebrating the presence of God in and through concrete ritual actions, often involving materials such as water, oil, bread, and wine. The rituals known as sacraments lie at the heart of Catholic experience, communicating the grace of God, interpreting and shaping the events of everyday life in relation to the mystery of God, recalling past events in the Bible, and looking forward to eternal life and ultimate fulfillment in heaven. Catholic theology views grace as God's loving presence and our transformation in it. God's grace pervades all of life; the Catholic sacraments are rituals that offer special ways of acknowledging,

experiencing, and celebrating grace. In the Catholic tradition there are seven sacraments, including three sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation), two sacraments of vocation (Holy Orders and Matrimony) and two sacraments of healing (Penance and the Anointing of the Sick).

Among these, the Eucharist holds a place of special importance, for in this ritual Catholics commemorate the Last Supper of Jesus Christ with his disciples on the evening before his crucifixion. Catholics celebrate the Eucharist on almost every day of the year, the lone exception being Good Friday in Holy Week, when Catholics commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in

a special liturgy for Good Friday. All Catholics are expected to participate in the Eucharist each weekend, either on Sunday or on Saturday evening in anticipation of the Sunday celebration, and also on special Holy Days that celebrate a feast of major importance.

The English word *eucharist* comes from *eucharisteo* in Greek, which means "I am grateful," "I give thanks." *Eucharisteo* in turn is composed of two smaller Greek words: *eu*, which means "good," and *charis*, which means "grace." In the Eucharist, Catholics give thanks for God's grace transforming human lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. For Catholics, the Eucharist interprets the meaning of life, shapes personal and communal identity, and calls for life-giving action in the world. In many contexts the Eucharist is intimately linked to work for social, political, and economic justice. The Catholic Church embraces twenty-two different rites for celebrating the liturgy, including the Ukrainian, Melkite, Maronite, Chaldean, and Coptic, to name just a few. This discussion will focus on the Roman rite, which is celebrated by Roman Catholics, who are by far the largest part of the Catholic Church. The seven sacraments set the tone for all of Catholic life.

Form

The form of the Roman, or Latin, rite of the Eucharist has deep historical roots in the Jewish liturgy, developing from the Jewish forms of prayer that Jesus and his first disciples knew. From biblical times

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to the present, Jews commemorate the Passover by celebrating the Seder service. By recounting how Israelite slaves had passed from bondage in Egypt through the Sea of Reeds and the desert toward the Promised Land, Jews of each generation learn and appropriate their identity. To be a religiously observant Jew is to pass through the Passover experience, not only as a remembrance of a past historical event but also as a present reality and an invitation to hope for the future. During the course of the Passover meal, Jewish families recall the bitter trials their ancestors went through, point to distinctive items of food and drink that recall past suffering and deliverance, and interpret them in relation to the Passover narrative.

Among these elements are unleavened bread and wine.

The gospels in the New Testament describe Jesus's last meal with his disciples before his death in the time of the Passover celebration, but they do not agree on whether it was a Passover meal or not. In the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the meal is a Passover meal that Jesus celebrates and transforms into a memorial of his own death. In the gospel of John, Jesus celebrates the meal on the night before the feast of Passover, and Jesus dies at the same hour as the lambs in the Temple in Jerusalem were being sacrificed. Thus the context of the Passover meal surrounds the Last Supper in the gospel of John.

A bishop or priest presides at the Eucharist, and a deacon may assist in the ceremony. The Eucharist begins with the introductory rites, which gather the faithful into the worshipping community. After the opening greeting, there is usually either a penitential rite, in which the faithful express their sorrow for sin, or a rite of sprinkling of holy water, which recalls the sacrament of Baptism. In some celebrations of the Eucharist, the faithful proclaim the glory of God in the prayer known as the "Gloria," which begins with the words used by the angels to announce to shepherds the birth of Jesus Christ in the gospel of Luke 2:14: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to people of good will." Then the presider

prays the Collect, a prayer that collects the private prayers of the congregation into one public prayer, setting a tone for the rest of the service.

After the Introductory Rites comes the first principal part of the Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Word, in which the scriptures are proclaimed. The first reading comes from the Gospels or other books of the New Testament. On Sundays and major feasts, there is a second reading, usually from one of the Epistles of the New Testament. Then there is the proclamation of a gospel passage, often followed by a homily that reflects upon the significance of the scripture readings in relation to the life of the community. On Sundays and other major feasts, the community responds to the readings and homily by professing their faith in one of the ancient creeds of the Catholic Church. After the profession of faith, there is usually the Universal Prayer or Prayer of the Faithful, during which the assembly prays for various needs of people throughout the world, including the Catholic Church; public authorities; all people, especially all of those in need; and the local community. These prayers can include intentions for better inter-religious understanding and harmony.

The second principal part of the Eucharist is the Liturgy of the Eucharist, which begins with the presentation and preparation of the gifts of bread and wine. Often representatives of the assembly bring bread and wine to the presider to be offered to God. The bread and wine represent the lives of the assembly. Many Jewish prayers begin with the invocation "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation." The presider says prayers over the bread and wine that are based on this Jewish precedent. He then invites the assembly to pray that these gifts may be acceptable to God, and he offers the Prayer over the Offerings.

The Eucharistic Prayer begins with a dialogue in which the presider invites the assembly to lift their hearts to God and give thanks. In the Eucharistic Prayer, the presider asks the Holy Spirit to come upon the gifts of bread and wine to transform them into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. He then pronounces the words of institution spoken by Jesus Christ at the Last Supper: "Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my Body, which will be given up for you." "Take this, all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured

out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me." The assembly makes a brief acclamation of faith, and the Eucharistic Prayer continues by celebrating the memorial of the Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven. The Eucharistic Prayer concludes by interceding for the local assembly,

the pope and the local bishop, the church throughout the world, and all of those who have died.

The Communion Rite begins with the Lord's Prayer and continues with the Sign of Peace, during which the members of the assembly wish each other the peace of Christ. Then the faithful receive the Body and Blood of Christ in Communion. There is then a Prayer after Communion, asking that this ritual transform the lives of the participants. The Eucharist ends with the Concluding Rites, which consist of the Final Blessing and the Dismissal.

Meaning

The Eucharist is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving in which Catholics become united to God through the self-gift of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist is an exchange of gifts in which Catholics offer their lives to God and in return receive the gift of God's own life in Jesus Christ, becoming the Mystical Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit empowers Catholics to worship God properly and to be filled with God's gifts. The Eucharist remembers the past event of Jesus's Last Supper with his disciples; it celebrates this as a present reality; it looks forward to the eschatological consummation of the Eucharist in the heavenly banquet and eternal life with God.

In 1963 the bishops of the Catholic Church from throughout the world who were gathered at the Second Vatican Council expressed their desire to renew the celebration of the liturgy, explaining the meaning of the ritual: "This is because the liturgy, through which, especially in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, 'the act of our redemption is being carried out,' becomes thereby the chief means through which believers are expressing in their lives and demonstrating to others the mystery which is Christ, and the sort of entity the true church really is" (*Sacrosanctum concilium* # 2; p.

820). The full meaning of the Eucharist becomes clear in the way it transforms personal and social experience.

The Eucharist and Personal Experience and Identity

In the Eucharist, Catholics learn who they are, and they express their identity to the world. In the early church in North Africa, Saint Augustine exhorted his congregation, “Become what you eat.” Augustine explained: “If you are the body and members of Christ, then what is laid on the Lord’s table is the sacrament of what you yourselves are, and it is the sacrament of what you are that you receive. . . . Be a member of Christ’s body, so that your ‘Amen’ may be authentic” (Sermon 272). As Catholics consume the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, they re-member the Body of Christ; they recall that their fundamental identity is to be the Body of Christ, the presence of Jesus Christ in the world, reaching out to others with his charity and compassion. The words of institution, in which the celebrant says the words of Jesus consecrating the bread and wine so that according to Catholic belief they become the Body and Blood of Christ, are pronounced not only over the elements of bread and wine on the altar but also over the assembly. In receiving Communion, the assembly incorporates the Body and Blood of Christ, learning again their identity.

The Eucharist and Social Justice

The Eucharist concludes by sending the worshippers into the world to be the concrete expression of the love and compassion of Jesus Christ. Catholics often call the Eucharist “the Mass.” The word *mass* comes from the Latin words *missa est*, which mean “it is sent.” At the end of the Roman rite of the Eucharist instituted after the Council of Trent in the

late sixteenth century, the final words spoken to the congregation were “Ite, missa est” (Go, it is sent).

The social dimension of the Eucharist is deeply rooted in the Jewish heritage. As we have seen, the Jewish Passover is a celebration of the liberation of the enslaved Israelites from their bondage in Egypt and the beginning of their long journey toward the Promised Land. So the early roots of the Eucharist include a commemoration of concrete political, social, and economic liberation. Ancient Israel knew that to perform rituals properly demands an ethical lifestyle. The prophets of ancient Israel excoriated those who performed rituals for God but then went on to oppress the poor and engage in dishonest business practices. To God, such rituals were abhorrent because they amounted to a form of bribery, asking God to condone their wrongdoing. In writing to the early Christians in Corinth who celebrated the Eucharist as part of a full meal, Saint Paul sharply criticized those who refused to share their lavish meals with the poor: “When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes

drunk” (1 Cor. 11:20–21). Genuine celebration of the Eucharist involves social concern for those in need.

The prophetic heritage of ancient Israel and the warning of Paul shape the celebration of the Eucharist for Catholics today. In August 2014 Pope Francis told visitors that there is a close connection between receiving Communion and having compassion for the poor: “One who goes to the Eucharist without having compassion for the needy and without sharing is not right with Jesus.” Movements seeking social justice in the United States and around the world have drawn inspiration and sustenance from the Eucharist. In situations where the dominant structures of society are oppressive, the Eucharist calls Catholics to be a countercommunity founded upon the love of God expressed in Jesus Christ, challenging injustice, and offering an image of an alternative way of living.

In the United States today, Catholics attend the Eucharist less regularly than in earlier times, but for those who are active in practicing their faith, the Eucharist continues to be a decisive moment in forming and transforming their personal and social experience and in sending them forth for service to the world. □

Performance, Asceticism, and the Power of Ritual: The Repentance Liturgy of Tōdaiji

by Lucia Dolce

Repentance in Japanese Buddhism was not conceived as a mental process of individual awareness but was enacted in a set of ritual actions, including physical movements, melodic chanting, and recitations.

The importance of ritual in Japanese Buddhism can hardly be overstated. Historical and textual material as well as ethnographic evidence demonstrate that in its development in Japan, Buddhism has privileged a performative approach to the religious. The persistence of multiple ritual forms thus offers a fertile ground to explore how rituals have remained at the core of religious experience in today's Japan.

Yet Buddhist rituals have not been studied much. Some have been documented in order to illustrate doctrinal points or political interactions, or as a product of social structures, but the intrinsic dynamics and the relationships that the performance of a specific ritual creates have hardly been explored. The study of Japanese Buddhist rituals has also lacked the theoretical articulation that the analysis of ritual has enjoyed in

Western scholarship in the last decades, where Ritual Studies has emerged as a distinct field of enquiry. Particularly fruitful is the repositioning of ritual at the intersection of the discursive and the material. This has helped conceptualize ritual as language, not in the sense that rituals are texts whose symbolic meaning must be deciphered, but in the sense that ritual actions, like words, generate meaning. Such a framework requires us to understand what makes a ritual meaningful by taking into account the different elements that constitute its enactment, from the liturgical procedures to the objects that are used or produced for a specific practice, the spatial construction wherein the practice occurs, the narratives (mythological or theological) that sustain it, as well as the physical gestures that are acted out.

It is from this perspective that I would like to explore the significance of a Buddhist ritual performed annually at one of Japan's oldest temples, Tōdaiji, situated in Nara, the old capital of Japan. The temple is today associated with cultural heritage and domestic as well as international tourism more than with specific forms of devotion. Yet for two weeks at the end of February, one of the halls in the upper precinct of the temple complex, a usually peaceful and deserted place, bustles with activities and devotees of all sorts. The focus of so much interest is a ritual dedicated to Eleven-Headed Kannon, the bodhisattva worshipped at Tōdaiji's Nigatsudō (The Hall of the Second Month). Popularly known as *omizutori* (drawing sacred water),

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this liturgy is presented by the temple and the city of Nara as an ancient ritual of water and fire that has been performed for centuries, uninterrupted and unchanged. What draws people to this event? Is the current popularity that the ritual enjoys just one example of the revival of traditional performances, religious or not, that has occurred all over Japan, often triggered by the need to promote local areas? What defines the liturgy as a Buddhist ritual today?

Omizutori is a complex liturgy on a grand scale, composed of different segments and involving different agencies, human and divine. It belongs to a type of exoteric ritual known as “public dharma assemblies” (*hōe*).¹ It is properly named *shunie* (literally, “liturgical assemblies of the second month”), because it was historically performed in Buddhist temples in the second month of the lunar calendar. In its simplest meaning it may be described as an exorcistic ritual performed at the beginning of the year and centered on repentance (*keka*). Its origins can indeed be traced back to the early history of Japanese Buddhism, for repentance was probably the first form of Buddhist ritual transmitted to Japan from China.²

Repentance

The liturgy consists of two sets of daily observances, a day service and a longer night service, performed in the inner hall of Nigatsudō by a fixed number of ritualists, currently eleven priests selected from different Tōdaiji

subtemples and affiliated temples in the provinces. Repentance in Japanese Buddhism was not conceived as a mental process of individual awareness but was enacted in a set of ritual actions, including physical movements, melodic chanting, and recitations. We can speak of a ritualization of repentance.

The liturgy at Nigatsudō revolves around two types of physical actions. One is the recitation of the holy name of Kannon accompanied by prostrations and other acts of veneration. The second is the recitation of sutras and other “texts,” at times accompanied by walking and running inside the inner hall. These actions have been understood to benefit the practitioners as well as the community around them: the performance of

the liturgy is intended to bring wealth and well-being to the devotees and the populace at large, and world peace is today added to its purpose.

Water

The ritual segment that gives the liturgy its popular name, *omizutori*, takes place on only one night during the liturgical period and could thus be considered an ancillary practice. It consists of drawing scented water (*kōsui*) from a well at the bottom of Nigatsudō. Carried back to Nigatsudō, it is mixed with water drawn in past rituals and offered to Kannon as well as to the devotees who attend the liturgy. In these actions the ritual reiterates the karmic connection between Kannon, the place where the bodhisattva's power is bestowed, and the people who attend the ritual.

Interestingly, the performance of this liturgical segment is patterned after a Shinto ritual, with *gagaku*, or ancient court music, played along the steps of

Nigatsudō during the procession that goes to draw sacred water, and with *shimenawa* adorning the building that contains the well. The ritual thus evokes the combinatory nature of Japanese Buddhist practice. The close connection between *kami*, buddhas, and a cultic site is also underpinned by the foundation narratives of this practice, transmitted through medieval documents and reiterated in the architectural details of the hall that contains the well.³

Fire

The other element that defines the *shunie* is fire. At the beginning of the night service, huge burning torches (*taimatsu*) are carried up by temple assistants to the front gallery of Nigatsudō, illuminating the clear winter skies. In the perception of the wider public, the climax of the ritual is reached two nights before the conclusion of the liturgy, when eleven torches weighing more than sixty kilos (162 pounds) each are

simultaneously whirled around on the balcony of Nigatsudō, producing a rain of blessed fire over the audience.

This spectacle has been exploited in the media representations of the liturgy and attracts thousands of spectators from all over Japan, of which only a small number stay on to partake in the ritual performed inside the hall. This extravaganza may be misconstrued as the least “religious” aspect of the liturgy. The practitioners play hardly any role in this part of the liturgy. The size of the bamboo poles, the fire effects, and the ability of the attendants who carry the torches determine its results. Yet it is not an element newly introduced into the liturgy, nor is it unrelated to the meaning of the ritual. Historically, ludic interludes were a determining factor in the dynamics of Buddhist public assemblies, for they were conceived as didactic occasions to expose the lay audience who attended the performance to Buddhist teachings.

Multivocal Signification

Thus more than one “mode” defines and gives meaning to the *omizutori* of Tōdaiji. For the ritualists who carry out the repentance, *omizutori* is an ascetic practice. Formally called *rengyōshū*, literally, “those who cultivate asceticism,” they undergo a long preparatory period in which they live in isolation, following strict regulations. During the liturgy they are housed in a secluded lodging at the foot of Nigatsudō and observe purity rules. They take only one ritual meal, at noon, and are forbidden to eat and drink until the end of the daily observances in the middle of the night, when they have some rice gruel. Maintaining an ascetic regime empowers them and legitimizes the soteriological value of their practice. This practice may be seen as the innermost and experiential dimension of the ritual. Nevertheless, it is expressed through the body and the

performance of bodily acts, underpinned by notions of physical purity. Like other ascetic practitioners, the *rengyōshū* are accomplished executors, whose acts are denoted by a degree of virtuosity. Such is, for instance, a distinctive type of prostration, whereby the practitioner throws himself down with all the weight of his body onto a long plank, touching the floor with hands, knees, and forehead simultaneously (*gotai tōchi*)—a difficult exercise that has to be executed to perfection to avoid a broken knee.

For those who attend the liturgy to “see” what is enacted, the meaning of the ritual is in its efficacy. Many of those interested in the fire extravaganza may visit the hall briefly to pay homage to the deity and are mostly not concerned with what the practitioners do inside. They seek the benefits of the ritual by standing below Nigatsudō to receive the sparks of fire produced by the whirling torches, which by their very proximity

to the place of practice, are invested with blessed power, and by collecting burned wood from the torches to take home as charms. Other devotees perceive the ritual as an intense and dramatic liturgy. They are very knowledgeable about each ritual step and spend the nights sitting in silence outside the inner hall, listening and watching. Fieldwork shows that they attend the liturgy for different reasons than one may find for other religious practices in Japan: as devotion to Kannon, to acquire merits for oneself or for family members, to pray for specific aims, to acquire peace of mind, or because of interest in the vocal performance. Yet all the devotees seem to share a sense that the experience is uplifting and has a positive impact on their lives. In this sense they are not simple “witnesses” to the clerical practice. By being there, enduring the uncomfortable sitting and the cold nights, and following the sounds and movements generated in the ritual space with awe and appreciation, they partake in the performance and are empowered by it. In this sense, the ritual plays a transformative role.

Space

This relation between the practitioners and the audience is also shaped by the construction of the liturgical space. The monks perform most of the repentance liturgy in a hall almost completely inaccessible to the public. The inner sanctuary of Nigatsudō, the space around the altar to Kannon, is separated from the outer hall by doors and by a white curtain that at night reveals only the shadows of the clerics circumambulating the altar and the light of the eternal lamp burning for Kannon. Further, lattice doors separate the outer hall from the space where people can sit. Yet the liturgy is not meant exclusively for the clerics. There is a curious relation between inside and outside, seeing and non-seeing, which allows the devotees to apprehend the ritual with their senses.

As the liturgy progresses, the side and back doors of the inner hall are gradually opened and the devotees are given more view of the inside, as if they too had progressed in the practice.

Sound

Sound is another basic element of the ritual that connects the practitioners and the audience. Since the most significant liturgical sequences take place in the dark, sound (or absence of sound) plays a role in the understanding of the ritual. Different sounds emerge from inside the inner hall. The master exorcist moves around uttering incomprehensible words with a strained voice, ringing bells, stamping on the floor with his wooden clogs, and running. The liturgist who leads the sutra recitations chants with a melodic voice. The litanies of the name of Kannon are pronounced with an accelerating rhythm, progressively abbreviating the formula *namu Kanjizai bosatsu* (Praise to the Bodhisattva Kannon) and repeating it at an almost delirious speed. The declamation of long rosters of names of gods and patrons is done slowly at first, then very quickly, then quietly again, introducing a rhythm that depends on the class of the beings whose names are pronounced.⁴ The different pattern in which each liturgical element is articulated allows the audience outside the hall to discern the phases of the ritual, the deities venerated, and the type of “text” recited. It is by listening, and at times by reciting along, that the audience forms a community with the practitioners and builds a karmic connection with the object of worship (*kechien*).

The few elements discussed above afford us only a partial window on the dynamics of the *omizutori*. However, they suffice to suggest the extraordinary significance that this ancient ritual maintains today. Its meaning thus

resides not in the unchanged form that it claims to preserve, nor in the reenactment of established movements rooted in a mythological narrative. It is the interaction between diverse ritual actions and discrete agencies that engenders a process of production of meaning—meaning thus contingent on the specific time and space wherein each action is performed. Ascetic, ludic, and devotional actions, albeit distinct in terms of settings and performers, are equally necessary to the definition of the *omizutori*. The performativity of the ritual, that is, its power and efficaciousness, resides in their relational dynamics. □

Notes

1. Buddhist scholars have used the two emic categories of exoteric and esoteric to indicate rituals belonging to different systems of Buddhism.
2. For a more comprehensive analysis of repentance rituals, see Lucia Dolce, “The Contested Space of Buddhist Public Rituals: The *Shunie* of Tōdaiji,” in *Grammars and Morphologies of Ritual Practices in Asia*, ed. Axel Michaels, Anand Mishra, Lucia Dolce, Gil Raz, and Katja Triplett (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2010), pp. 433–58.
3. The origin story tells that all gods of Japan were invited to attend the ceremony. The god of Wakasa Province, Onyū Myōjin, was delayed in arriving, and to compensate for this he expressed the wish to offer scented water to Kannon. At that point a black and a white cormorant took off from a rock near the hall, and water began to spring from that very spot. That is the well from which the water is drawn today. Two decorative metal cormorants grace the roof of the hall built on the well. If we consider only this narrative, the ritual may be seen as a reenactment of the myth.
4. Two rosters are read during the nightly rites: a Register of Gods (*jinmyōchō*), which lists thousands of guardian gods of Japan; and a Register of Patrons, called *kakochō*, a list of monastics, rulers, and laypeople, famous and unknown, who through the centuries have contributed to the performance of the liturgies.

The Voices of the Ancestors and Ritual Change in Mount Ontake Pilgrimage Confraternities

by Dominick Scarangelo

Ontake confraternity rituals draw on both Shintō and Buddhism, epitomize many of the common characteristics of Japanese religiosity, and also include shamanic rites. These confraternities have always been highly independent, with each group possessing its own unique elements, but the veneration of confraternity ancestors is a widely shared practice.

By many measures the Japanese would seem to be among the most secularized people in the world today. Polling shows that large majorities describe themselves as “nonreligious” (*mushūkyō*), and few individuals attend religious services on a regular basis. Even so, Japanese often enshrine their ancestors at Buddhist

altars within the home, and millions make New Year’s pilgrimages to famous Shintō shrines or Buddhist temples. These kinds of puzzling discrepancies between attitudes and action tell us that religiosity and secularization are complex issues in Japan.

Scholars have described Japanese religions as practical and highly ritualized, often concerned with worldly problems, community solidarity, or veneration of the ancestors. Some argue that a belief-centered and privatized notion of “religion” was absent or at best weak at the time Japan opened to the outside world in the late nineteenth century. Consequently, data on religious affiliation or polling religious attitudes may not necessarily reflect the state of Japanese practices that we may broadly identify as religious. Understanding the state of religion in contemporary Japanese society requires that we look at what people actually do by considering changes in popular ritual practices.

In this piece, I will discuss two religious confraternities for pilgrimage to Mount Ontake, one of Japan’s most prominent sacred peaks. Ontake confraternity rituals draw on both Shintō

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and Buddhism, epitomize many of the common characteristics of Japanese religiosity, and also include shamanic rites. These confraternities have always been highly independent, with each group possessing its own unique elements, but the veneration of confraternity ancestors is widely shared. Shamanic practices may be impacted by what seminal sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) called the modernity’s “disenchantment” of the world. Cultural historian and social critic Morris Berman elaborated the concept of disenchantment by describing it as the development of a modern “nonparticipating” consciousness that no longer sees nature as animated and possessed by mind or spirit and consequently responds to the natural world as an object instead of subject. Exploring contemporary practices of these two confraternities allows us to

compare one case in which shamanic elements have survived relatively intact and another in which the institution and its ritual complexes continue in spite of the disappearance of fundamental shamanic practices.

Popular Pilgrimage: Ontake Confraternities

Mount Ontake captured the attention of the world in September 2014 when it suddenly erupted without warning, killing fifty-seven people. What most news accounts failed to report was that Ontake is the focus of an active ascetic pilgrimage tradition dating to the late eighteenth century, when two monks, Kakumei (1718–86) and Fukan (1731–1801), initiated their lay followers into the esoteric rites and austere practices of mountain ascetics. During the course of the nineteenth century, Ontake pilgrimage rose in popularity among peasants and townspeople as confraternities spread throughout Honshū, the main Japanese island, including the city of Edo (modern Tokyo).

The fall of the shogunate and establishment of the modern Japanese state significantly impacted Ontake confraternity practice, but modern transportation also facilitated a renaissance of Ontake pilgrimage in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The vitality and charisma of Ontake fire offerings and spirit possession in that period was captured in surprising detail by Percival Lowell in *Occult Japan*, published in 1895. Changes wrought by the economic bubble of the 1990s have probably posed the greatest threat to the Ontake tradition, particularly in Aichi and western Shizuoka prefectures, where the rise of the automotive industry has spurred rapid urbanization and transformed lifestyles in many rural agricultural areas. The two sites where I undertook fieldwork, the Shusshō Motogumi confraternity of Nagoya

City, Aichi Prefecture, and the Daizen confraternity of Iwata City, Shizuoka Prefecture, are both located in this area, which composed the historic geographic base of the Ontake cult.

The Shusshō Motogumi Confraternity

The Shusshō Motogumi confraternity is located in the heart of the city of Nagoya, and like many urban Ontake religious associations, it proselytizes, seeking and accepting new participants. However, the confraternity's core membership belongs to a single extended family. Confraternity sacred garments show the influence of *shugendō*—mountain asceticism—of the type affiliated with Tendai Buddhism, but the group's ritual technology and rites resemble Lowell's descriptions, especially *oza*, the Ontake practice of spirit possession. *Oza* is performed as the conclusion of the Ontake liturgy, after a fire offering, or at important places on the route up Mount Ontake, which the confraternity visits twice a year, in summer and winter. In its simplest form, *oza* requires two people of either gender: a *nakaza*, the person to be possessed by the divinities, and a *maeza*, who oversees the process and interacts with the sacred

beings that descend. Chanting Buddhist sutras, Shintō incantations, and mantras causes the *nakaza* to enter a trance-like, vulnerable state, and by raising the sacred wand (*gohei*) that he or she holds, the *nakaza* signals that a divinity has entered their body. The *maeza* responds by facilitating the possession with various mantras and mudras, greets the sacred being, and inquires of its name. Sacred beings that often descend for the Shusshō Motogumi confraternity include the Buddhist saint Kūkai, the tantric deity Fudō Myōō (Skt., Ācala-vidyā-rāja), and deceased confraternity members. While the sacred being is present, the confraternity treats the *nakaza* as the divinity incarnate, giving it the appropriate respect and deference, including prostrations. The sacred beings address the confraternity, bless it, and often perform individual empowerments (*kojin kaji*), requiring each confraternity member to sit in front of the *nakaza* in order to receive advice and interact somatically with the divinity by receiving a massage-like healing touch.

The Daizen Confraternity

The Daizen confraternity is representative of rural Ontake groups. Its shrine is located in farm fields on the edge of

the suburbs of the industrial center of Hamamatsu, and its membership derives from families in the village, particularly the hamlet of Matsu-no-kijima. The Daizen confraternity is known for its performance of fire walking at area Buddhist temples that enshrine the Akiha Daigongen, a Buddhist avatar propitiated as a fire-controlling deity. When offered at their own shrine, fire offerings are made in twin fire pots in front of the Ontake and Akiha deities, who are enshrined together. Evidence suggests that in addition to Mount Ontake, the Daizen confraternity also made pilgrimages to nearby Mount Akiha, the home of the fire-controlling deity. In 1873 the icon of the Akiha deity was transferred to Kasuisai, a high-ranking and historic Sōtō Zen monastery located nearby, and shortly thereafter, in 1881, the Daizen confraternity began performing fire walking at Kasuisai's Akiha Fire Festival, a tradition that continues today.

Every year on the evening of December 15, confraternity members ritually purify themselves by performing cold-water ablutions at a lake within the temple precincts and then receive a purified flame from the monastery's Buddhist monks. This flame is transferred to wooden pyres, where confraternity members prepare the

flames for fire walking by reciting the Great Purification of the Six Sense Spheres, which is a Buddhist-Shintō syncretic incantation for ritual purification; the Heart Sutra; the mantra of the fire-enveloped Fudō Myōō; and the incantation of the Nine Letters, an ancient exorcistic practice with origins in Taoism. Confraternity members are the first to cross over the burning embers, followed by hundreds of boisterous festivalgoers. Zen monks actually conduct the principal prayers and offerings to the deity in the middle of the night, but the Daizen confraternity's fire walking is the highlight of the festival for most visitors.

Tradition and the Ancestors

Ontake confraternities maintain small cemetery-like plots on the slopes of Mount Ontake (and often at their local sanctuary), where the souls of confraternity ancestors, called *reijin*, are enshrined in large stone *reijin* monuments. Propitiating *reijin* is part of many confraternity activities, but is one of main objectives of any pilgrimage to Mount Ontake. For confraternities that continue the practice of *oza*, visits to their *reijin* monuments are opportunities for ancestors and members to interact.

The Shusshō Motogumi confraternity is most moved by the descent of the *sendai* (literally, “previous-generation leader”), the founder of this branch

of the confraternity. The arrival of the *sendai* elicits sobs and cries of emotion from confraternity members, and individual empowerments are common. Confraternity members who joined during his tenure or knew him personally will actively engage the *sendai* (that is, the possessed *nakaza*) in conversation, receiving advice or encouragement and sometimes stern words of caution. Several members of the confraternity are the children, grandchildren, or direct disciples of the *sendai*, and a *sendai*'s daughter, the principal *nakaza* of the confraternity, has led the group since his death. In this way *oza* offers Ontake confraternity members the chance to meet confraternity ancestors, to hear them, and to be touched by their healing hands.

The Daizen confraternity, in contrast, has not preserved the practice of spirit possession. According to what I was told by the present confraternity elder, when he was young there was a member who could channel the spirits, but no one in confraternity elder's generation was able to perform possession. Thus, the voices of the gods and ancestors probably went silent sometime in the early decades of the twentieth century. Even so, in my view the Daizen confraternity continues performing ritual work that embodies and objectifies the ancestors—not in a shamanic mode, but through the creation of religious material artifacts, and by conducting liturgy, which enacts and communicates community identity.

“Disenchantment” and the Continuation of Religious Ritual Work

The Daizen confraternity's *reijin* monuments, which embody the confraternity lineage, stand next to the group's shrine. The tantric deity Fudō Myōō stands guard over the plot, and the first rows of monuments enshrine Kakumei, Fukan, and the early popularizers of the Ontake movement. Next are Daizen, the Ontake evangelizer who spread the Ontake cult in this region; and Ryūdō, the first local elder; followed by all of the successive historical elders. When an elder passes away, the confraternity erects a monument enshrining him on behalf of the new, succeeding elder. More recent *reijin* monuments carry the mark of Kasuisai Temple, which attests to the resonance of *reijin* monument practices of the Daizen confraternity and the general culture of ancestor veneration in Japanese religions. The confraternity's annual pilgrimage to Mount Ontake also prioritizes visiting the *reijin* monument plot on the mountain's slopes in order to propitiate the confraternity ancestors. This is done even in years when the journey to the summit is not made. The names of this sequence of ancestors are also inscribed in texts used within the shrine so that they can be invoked in liturgy.

In the case of Shusshō Motogumi, it is difficult to imagine the confraternity's surviving if the spirits no longer

descended. Indeed, I suspect that a decline in spirit possession may have been a factor in the dissolution of many Ontake confraternities during the twentieth century. However, the Daizen confraternity continues to externalize and objectify the ancestors. Additionally, the fundamental work that ritual performs, particularly the liturgical mode of ritual, may actually become more important after the disappearance of shamanic action. Ritual scholars Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw propose that authenticity of performance, the crux of the effectiveness of shamanic action, is actually peripheral to the unique factors that make ritual what it is. In their view, “ritual commitment” is central to the ritualization of action. That is to say, unlike everyday life, in which we are the authors of our own actions, doing ritual requires that we suspend normal intentionality and act according to scripts encoded by others, essentially embodying another’s intentionality. Furthermore, this commitment to surrender one’s intentionality is a public stance, done before others in a way that makes it binding.

What does a ritual at the Daizen confraternity entail? Participating in a group’s ritual life is enacting solidarity with that community, in this case an institution symbolizing lineage and shared local identity. The importance of the confraternity as a transhistorical community is demonstrated by several factors, including the family-like collage of photos that decorates the interior of their shrine, and it is also evident in the actions of the son of the current elder, who photocopies and distributes newspaper articles on the Daizen confraternity, so that people in the region appreciate this long-standing tradition of their village. We can understand performing ritual at the Daizen confraternity as enacting and objectifying this sense of local community membership, giving it form by concretizing it in space and time. If we follow ritual scholar

Roy Rappaport’s semiotic approach, we might also think of confraternity ritual as including a constituent of “indexical communication.” Simply put, from this standpoint Daizen confraternity ritual could be understood, at least in part, as a way of “communicating to oneself” community solidarity.

Conclusion

This brief look at the Shushō Motogumi and Daizen confraternities does not permit wide-ranging conclusions about religious ritual in contemporary Japan but does provide some indications that religious rituals can survive the “disenchantment” of modernity in an ostensibly secular society. Shushō Motogumi’s size appears to fluctuate, and its numbers are down from several decades ago, but its membership is relatively young and predominately female, suggesting that it may have found a new organizational paradigm. We cannot say what the future holds, but for now, Shushō Motogumi shows that shamanic practices do persist in contemporary urban Japan, providing aural and somatic contact with sacred beings, including ancestors.

The example of the Daizen confraternity suggests that religious institutions and rituals can also survive the disappearance of important shamanic practices through changes in modal emphasis and by providing continuity in a rapidly changing society. One of several caveats is that the confraternity’s proximity to urban centers may have mediated the crippling depopulation plaguing many Japanese rural areas, including the mountainous region to the northwest of Matsu-no-kijima, where there is significant evidence of defunct Ontake confraternities. The Daizen confraternity’s highly visible role at Kasuisai’s fire festival is almost certainly a critical motivating factor in the persistence of other confraternity practices, including pilgrimage to Mount Ontake and the *reijin* monument

plot. However, this is also closely associated with the importance given to the continuity of the local community and its traditions.

Finally, considering these two groups in light of the rhetoric of religious decline in Japan, I will conclude with the following observations. The sacred beings who communicate with Shushō Motogumi do not dispense words of transcendent religious truth but minister directly to the realities of the human condition in everyday life, much like the spirits in religious traditions such as Santaria or Vodou. The religious truth of practice in the Daizen confraternity is the human query of who we are and where we belong. The silence of the divinities and ancestors caused by the decline of spirit possession no doubt reflects the demise of an animated world that speaks directly to human beings. Yet liturgical ritual continues to do covertly what spiritual mediumship does so overtly—channel the ancestors. The ritual stance requires that confraternity members embody another’s intentionality, in this case the confraternity ancestors who compiled the texts of the liturgy and established its rules of ritual performance. The Daizen confraternity has preserved its own distinctive liturgical praxis, and today, when this liturgy is performed, the ancestors continue to speak and act through their descendants. □

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Make This an Era of Respect for Other Faiths

by Noriyuki Ueda

Respect for another's faith is part and parcel of one's own faith. I believe that this is what our twenty-first-century civilization should be aiming for.

What sort of century will the twenty-first be? And what will our issues be? This juncture, the year 2015, is a good opportunity for reflection and review.

Let us go over what has happened in the past fifteen years. In 2001 there were simultaneous terrorist attacks in the United States, which launched the War on Terror in Afghanistan and Iraq. That turned into a quagmire, however, leading to increasing chaos in the Middle East and the rise of the so-called Islamic State, known as ISIS.

Seen from another angle, an economic viewpoint, these same years have also been buffeted by the wind of global neoliberalism. Capital has transcended national borders, and people's livelihoods, exposed to the vagaries of a global economy, have become destabilized, widening the gap between rich and poor.

The two currents of increasing chaos in the Middle East, with the rise of ISIS and global neoliberalism, are actually two sides of the same coin.

Global capitalism is a campaign for centralization that entails enveloping the world with one value, known as "money." But the more this has spread, the more there has been a sudden rise in nationalism and fundamentalism, with people loudly proclaiming their own culture and religious identity. In the fifteen years since we entered the twenty-first century, these two movements have become extremist. In other words, it has been a period of global polarization whereby, on the one hand, the ferocity of global capitalism has enveloped the world, and on the other hand, fundamentalism and terrorism have become emboldened.

Furthermore, a characteristic of this same fifteen-year period is that the polarization has taken the guise of religious wars. Global capitalism, which allows people to make money anywhere in the world, was superimposed on the world by a Bush administration with Christian values. Further, the United States has made War on Terror by spreading false suspicion that all Muslims could be terrorists.

As if in revenge for that, ISIS slaughters and executes non-Muslims one after another. I must say that this is a pointless religious war.

One's Own Faith and Someone Else's Faith

That has caused another major problem, namely, the negation of faith, expressed in such ways as "conflicts start with religious belief," "religion is the source of

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many evils,” and “conflict starts with a search for the absolute. If we believed in nothing, there would likely be no conflict.”

On the other hand, most Japanese feel troubled by the lack of a foundation, by a feeling of groundlessness. “What should my foundation be?” “Where is my support?” This has become a big issue in Japan.

So the issue we should be thinking about now is not the repudiation of our beliefs but how our beliefs and tolerance can coexist. How to keep one’s own faith and still accept another’s faith—that is where the problem of this era lies.

Values Our Era Must Aim For

While we are thinking about these things, what we must first overcome is our own tendency to jump to conclusions and our own preconceived notions. For example, most Japanese may think of Islam as a frightening religion. Yet this is a total misunderstanding.

I am acquainted with many Muslims who love peace and who are extremely kind. Just the other day I asked my class, “Do any of you live in the belief that there is a world after death?” Of the 150 students in the lecture hall, only two Malaysians raised their hands.

For Muslims, the Five Pillars of Islam are faith, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and charitable giving. My Japanese students were astonished to hear that it is extremely important for Muslims to

help others in order to enter paradise, and that they must do something helpful every day. A Turkish friend told me that there are so few suicides in Turkey because Muslims don’t doubt that someone will cheerfully help them in times of trouble.

Going a step further, I believe that the Buddhist teaching of dependent origination is itself a core ideology that makes faith and tolerance compatible.

Buddhism teaches that everything is impermanent and nothing exists in and of itself, which can be viewed as a decidedly relativistic ideology. But it is not nihilism. If, for example, you were

to come across the Lotus Sutra at a distressing time in your life, your encounter with it would certainly fill you with emotion, and you might think, “Eureka!” However, this does not mean denying the validity of someone else’s encounter with, for instance, Amida Buddha or the teachings of Jesus Christ. On the contrary, the more grateful you are for your own faith encounters, the more you realize how faith encounters fill everyone else with gratitude.

Respect for another’s faith is part and parcel of one’s own faith. I believe that this is what our twenty-first-century civilization should be aiming for. □

Bringing Down the Walls

Niwano Peace Prize Acceptance Address by Esther Abimiku Ibanga,
Founder of the Women Without Walls Initiative

The Niwano Peace Foundation awarded the thirty-second Niwano Peace Prize on May 14 of this year to Esther Abimiku Ibanga, a Pentecostal pastor in Jos, Nigeria, and founder of the Women Without Walls Initiative (WOWWI). Pastor Ibanga was honored for working extensively to foster and facilitate dialogue and mediation between warring religious and tribal communities in her country, advocating for the rights of the socially vulnerable, and promoting women's empowerment through skills acquisition. By uniting the voices of women arising from their individual religious faiths, she has encouraged and guided women's actions to build peace not only in Nigeria but all over the world. The presentation ceremony took place in Tokyo. In addition to an award certificate, Pastor Ibanga received a medal and twenty million Japanese yen. The following is her acceptance speech.

I greet you all in the precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I remember the day I got an e-mail from the Niwano Peace Foundation nominating me for the thirty-second Niwano Peace Prize; I thought it was a scam. I wondered why an organization founded by a Buddhist would want to recognize an African Christian woman, a pastor for that matter. I had never been to Japan, I had no affiliations with Tokyo, and there was no relationship whatsoever. But as time went on, it became clear that it wasn't a fraud. Here I am standing before you today, living that truth that first came in an e-mail.

This whole experience taught me to know that there are still people who have chosen to subdue the self within them, extinguish the seed of segregation, and eliminate the mental limitations brought about by religious diversities. These unusual people have chosen to step out of the ordinary and walk a superhuman path to ensure that peace reigns on earth. These people have established a movement with a philosophy

that says humanity is one equal family irrespective of race, religion, ethnicity, or nationality. They have shown the world how to have high values for human life. They have demonstrated an unrelenting commitment to serve humanity and make it better. They have over the years inspired the cooperation of world changers to work together in making better the world we are living in. They have brought down the walls of interreligious differences and have focused the energies of the many world religions on fostering peace. These people express divinity; for God so loved the world that he sent his only beloved son to die for the sins of all, whether or not we accept him.

The founder of this unusual foundation, Nikkyo Niwano, and the generations after him who believed in his values and are living by them today have challenged us all. Nikkyo Niwano saw walls that had the capacity to hinder world peace and he sought to bring them down. Today the same vision embraced by men and women of faith is still being

lived. Nikkyo Niwano's vision to recognize, encourage, and amplify the efforts of people who have dedicated their lives to bringing down the walls of interreligious disunity and fostering cooperation among these different religions in order to produce a breeding ground for world peace is something only a visionary person could do. He has made it possible for me to stand here before you today. This has a lot to say about vision having no limitations. It has the capacity to do anything and attract anyone from anywhere in the world in order to realize its purpose.

Therefore, on this note I find it both a privilege and an honor to be the recipient of the thirty-second Niwano Peace Prize presented to me by the Niwano Peace Foundation. I cannot but say thank you to everyone who found my efforts in peace building and conflict resolution worth recognizing. You made this possible by nominating and choosing me as the recipient of this year's award. To me this is a huge encouragement. It is a confirmation of my mantra, which

Pastor Esther Abimiku Ibanga was born in 1961 in the Nassarama State of Nigeria. She graduated from Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria, and received her master's degree in business administration at the University of Jos, Nigeria. She worked for sixteen years in the Central Bank of Nigeria. She voluntarily retired in 2001. In 1995, while serving as the Jos city manager, she founded Jos Christian Missions International, pioneering Nigeria's first church with a woman pastor. As its senior pastor she worked to take care of the poor and underprivileged, reaching out to young people, widows, and orphans.

says that nothing invested in the lives of people is ever lost. It always comes back to you, because God is not so unrighteous as to forget any labor of love. My fellow soldiers in the fight for world peace, I want to encourage you—no matter what challenges you face, no matter what oppositions and frustrations you experience, and even though no one claps for you—to keep doing what you believe in. In the fullness of time the voice of your deeds will be heard.

Africa, and in particular Nigeria, is a place that has been plagued with numerous wars, crises, killings, fighting, kidnappings, and violence, most of which have been caused by ethnoreligious differences. The results of these have caused so much pain, hurt, and sorrow. Hearts have been broken, homes destroyed, families displaced, lives shattered. Unfortunately, women and children have been the major victims of these predicaments. All of them have bred hatred, segregation, and disunity among people. These have stifled the development of my dear country and continent. Yet there are a few of us who have made up our minds to bring healing and hope to the Nigerian woman and her child. Our desire is to bring down the walls set up by politics using ethnicity and religion.

The Women Without Walls Initiative was formed as a result of the numerous ethnoreligious crises that had ravaged the state where I live, Plateau State, Nigeria. The killings, kidnappings, and massacres were just too much. The indigenes of Plateau State (mostly Christians)

were in a war with migrants (Hausa Muslims) that have lived in the state for a long time. Serial attacks were carried out back and forth as both communities suffered huge losses of life and property. Mass burials were the order of the day; many people lost their lives. As always, women and children were the most battered. Many women lost both their husband and their children. And in the case of the village of Dogon Nahawa, they were victims themselves, as 530 Christian women and children were killed by Islamic fundamentalists. I saw the need for these killings to stop and felt a strong desire to put an end to this evil.

This led me, along with other Christian women, to lead a peaceful protest march in March 2010. About one hundred thousand Christian women

within the state came out to lend their voices to putting a stop to the killings. We marched the streets of Jos to the State House of the Assembly and Government House dressed in black, expressing our grief over the wanton loss of human lives, especially those of women and children, and demanding that the government fish out the perpetrators of this evil and bring them to justice. The protest brought women to the forefront of the call for peace and for putting an end to violence in Plateau State. In response to the protest march by Christian women, Muslim women held their own peaceful protest demanding that the killings of Muslims in Jos also be stopped, as these women, too, had lost loved ones in the violent killings. In spite of the two protest marches, the killings continued. On the premise that we would

be more effective if we joined forces, I decided to reach out to the Muslim women, enjoining everyone, irrespective of religion and tribe, to come together as one body in the fight against ethnoreligious violence. For the sake of peace, it was important to build a community of women with one purpose, which is to advocate for and influence the peaceful coexistence of people among the Christian and Muslim communities. We refused to be involved in politics and would rather be solution minded.

We found out that the roots of the walls of division existed in people's minds. They were a mind-set. People have come to believe so many wrong things. They have believed that as long as you are not from the same tribe or religion as someone else, you are not their brother or sister and should not be trusted but should be regarded as an enemy. Some had built hatred and resentment in their hearts as a result of losses they had suffered during war and were waiting for an opportunity for revenge. They had shifted the blame for those losses onto the other community. It was clear that the Christian and Muslim communities would never live together if something was not done. So we undertook strong advocacies to religious and tribal leaders from both divides, security agencies, women leaders, and youths. Tribal and religious women leaders organized press conferences together to speak to the populace

in their different languages but all saying the same thing, advocating peace. Peace rallies and storytelling in schools were some of the activities we undertook as the Women Without Walls Initiative.

The wall of ethnicity and religion was pulled down to a large extent. The hatred, hurt, pain, and distrust built by the crises between the Christian and Muslim communities were addressed. Then we started building within us mutual trust, love, care, and commitment and initiated developmental projects in volatile communities to address grievances and to act as entry points to these communities. This created an atmosphere for peace to be planted and nurtured into what we are experiencing today. We discovered that peace would not exist if these walls were still standing upright. Then, together as Christian and Muslim women, we led a protest march in a Bring Back Our Girls campaign. The girls were kidnapped by Boko Haram. We had since then worked tirelessly in four volatile communities of both Christians and Muslims to counter violent extremism and terrorism.

In order to achieve our goals, we developed an organizational focus on seven thematic areas:

1. Advocacy to all stakeholders
2. Provision of relief to internally displaced persons and the needy
3. Training of women in peace-building initiatives and activities

4. Developmental projects in underprivileged communities with grievances
5. Trauma healing and reconciliation for teenage war victims
6. Community dialogues with local police
7. Schools for mothers as well as other collaborative efforts with sister organizations both locally and internationally

Through these means, we have made tremendous progress in restoring peace between the Christian and Muslim communities within Plateau State, Nigeria.

We have crossed the barrier of segregation and have made WOWWI a community of women who think that peace is possible and that it starts from them. They now know that they have the power to influence the decisions of their children and husband. Men and youths are no longer carrying machetes and guns to fight and kill their fellow men at every slight provocation. They have come to know that there are better ways of resolving conflicts. And it is not by killing someone else. Peace has become the priority.

Although we have made great progress, there is still much ground to be covered. We have yet to reach the Fulani herdsmen and the communities they have problems with. This is a national issue in my country, as it is not only Plateau State that experiences it. I must thank the nongovernmental organizations and governments of these affected states that have taken it upon themselves to restore peace between these fighting communities. This is therefore a call to all stakeholders concerned, both in Nigeria and around the world, to join hands so that together we can design an all-inclusive approach to bring down these walls that religion and ethnicity have built in the psyche of some of the people in the Nigerian populace. These walls are not physical. They are in our minds. We have to uproot them and set up new ways of thinking that

encourage peace and the protection of lives around us. I am committed to this course, and I believe I'm also speaking the mind of everyone who is working hard in this line as well.

This award wouldn't have been possible without my fellow laborers and beloved sisters in the Women Without Walls Initiative. Their dedication, commitment, and resoluteness for achieving our vision—which is to “develop a nonviolent and all-inclusive approach to conflict resolution and peace building in Nigeria, through women who are natural agents of change”—has been amazing. They have fought hard with me, entered the most dangerous and volatile communities to make sure that we reach women and youths from different tribes and religions. I celebrate every one of you. This award is an encouragement to say that your dedicated service is not in vain.

I should not fail to talk about the insurgency that has plagued Nigeria for a while now. You all know that as soon as the name Nigeria is mentioned internationally, the next name that comes up is Boko Haram. It is clear that Boko Haram does not practice a religion that believes in the same thing we all sitting here believe in. And it is a fact that human life is sacred and no one has the right to take the life of another, no matter what. The bombings, killings, massacres, and kidnappings perpetrated by Boko Haram have prompted major headlines on CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera, NHK World (English) TV, Asahi-ANN Tokyo, and other media when Nigeria is talked about. It is clear that the fight for peace is a journey that we all must keep walking. When it will be fully achieved, that I don't know. But one thing is certain: peace will always win over violence.

The kidnap of 276 Chibok girls made major headlines last year. The Boko Haram sect in Borno State kidnapped schoolgirls and took them to a place we know nothing of. As the leader of the group threatened that he would

sell them as slaves to other countries, I kept wondering what trauma these girls would be going through. They no longer experience the love, protection, and comforting arms of their parents but are now living with a national and horrific terror. How traumatic and heart wrenching can that be, both for the girls and for their parents?

Lending our voice to the voices of many others worldwide, in 2014 WOWWI mobilized women and held a protest rally, calling on the Nigerian government to expedite the search for and secure the release of the abducted Chibok girls. I have not stopped campaigning for the release of the Chibok girls, as I use every platform both locally and internationally, including the UN, to advocate for the release of these girls, and we will not give up hope that one day they will be released, healed, and restored, for with God nothing is impossible.

To every hero we have lost as a result of this battle for peace, I want to say that you will never be forgotten. We will tell our children about how you fought gallantly for Nigeria. Laying down your lives for a worthy cause has left a legacy that we will never forget. Your immortality in the history books of Nigeria will never be erased. And like the Nigerian National Anthem would say, “The labor of our heroes past shall never be in vain.” This is to say that we who are alive will keep fighting for peace and continue

the legacy that you have left for us. Our children and our children's children will also live with this legacy. Time is too weak to erase you from our memories and uproot you from our hearts. You will never be forgotten, because people who follow the path of peace live forever. You will all live on.

To every family that has lost their son, daughter, brother, sister, father, mother, or relative as a result of this insurgency, I want to let you know that this battle will definitely be won in the end. Peace will always win. For the people now in the internally displaced persons' camps all around Nigeria, I want to let you know that your stay in those camps is temporary. The battle will soon be over, and then you will go back to your homes. I know that there is no place like home. It is our earnest prayer that you will get back to your homes. Never be discouraged; do not allow the seeds of resentment, hatred, anger, or revenge to grow in your hearts. It is okay to feel angry and vengeful, but let it out. Do not allow those seeds to live in you. Let the peace of God that transcends all understanding guard your hearts and minds. For by forgiveness we set ourselves and others free. And by love we express divinity and live like gods on the earth. Stay strong, my brothers and sisters.

Eradicating Boko Haram is one thing, but then much more work needs to be

done in the healing process of these victims. WOWWI is committed to that. These internally displaced persons living in camps like refugees in their own country need to be reabsorbed into their communities. They need to have their communities given back to them. They need to get their lives back. Young people need to go back to their schools; women need to go back to their marketplaces; some need to go back to their churches and mosques, while others need to go back to their places of work and farms. There is a need for the development of a proper program to integrate these displaced people back into their communities. They need to recover their lives again.

More important, many have been traumatized and pained. Many are heartbroken. The seeds of revenge, anger, and resentment must not be allowed to grow in their hearts. This is because if these victims nurture these seeds, especially the young ones, we might stand in danger of raising another generation of people that will cause greater havoc because they have come to believe that revenge over their loss and the pain they've been through is the only way to feel better. These people need healing. Some of them need to be counseled psychologically and spiritually. Their mental health and recovery are very important. We would love to see a nation that is whole again, completely free from the terror and fear of possible attacks and bombings.

This is therefore a call to everyone—organizations, governments, and the international community. I have never seen a place where darkness overcame light. It won't start in Nigeria. Let us all keep praying for my country and continue to lend helping hands to put a stop to this calamity. International collaborations will go a long way in restoring peace to my dear country. As you can see, the need to make world peace happen is enormous. WOWWI is willing to partner

with anyone, organizations or governments, to ensure that peace is completely restored to the affected states.

I want to thank you again for this rare award bestowed on me. This award is dedicated to every woman in Plateau State who saw her husband and children macheted in cold blood, to those who have fought for peace and conflict resolution among the Christian and Muslim communities. This award is for the mothers of the Chibok girls and also for many other mothers whose children have been kidnapped by the insurgents. It is for my fellow soldiers clamoring for the rescue of these girls. This award is for the Nigerian woman, the African woman who is in the interior villages of Zambia, Liberia, Sudan, South Africa, Kenya, Algeria, Malawi, and all the different countries in Africa, working tirelessly for the peace of her community, her nation, the African continent, and the world. Your efforts in bringing down the walls that would hinder world peace are of inestimable value. You are all my inspiration.

Today is a memorable day for me, not only because I'm a winner of an award, but also because this same day marks exactly twenty-one years since I walked the aisle with an amazing man, Dr. Iko Ibanga, who has taught me that life is all about humanity and service. His support and his encouragement to

pursue my passion for the peace of my warring community have provided me with an inner strength to forge ahead despite overwhelming challenges. I want to say thank you for being there for me even when the work seemed very hard and impossible to achieve.

Thank you to my children who tolerated Mummy's absence from home with great understanding and support. Thank you Anungwu (Mother) for teaching me discipline and hard work. Thank you, Dad; even though gone, your prophecy still rings out! Baban mace!


To my church, JCMS the Remnant Church—mighty warriors in Christ, great overcomers! It's our season of reward!

To my family, siblings, and friends for your spiritual support and faith in me, thank you!

To my pastor and mentor, Pastor Tunde Bakare, who saw the walls pushed back, thank you for not letting me quit when the heat was hottest.

Finally, to my God and Savior Jesus Christ, the one who called me and ordained me a prophet to the nations, I salute your majesty. For without you I can do nothing. Thank you for your surpassing greatness and grace that surpasses knowledge. All the glory belongs to you, Lord!

And, heiwa wa anata to issho ni (Peace be with you).

God bless you all! Amen. 

Buddhism and Social Engagement (1)

A History of Engagement

by Ranjana Mukhopadhyaya

A further important theme for Engaged Buddhism is the links made with the society as a whole by Buddhists and Buddhist organizations as they pursue their social activities.

In recent years, activities by Buddhists and Buddhist organizations are no longer limited to religious activities like proselytization and propagation, but have extended over a wide area, including social activities; political movements; environmental protection; and issues of human rights, education, and social welfare. Buddhist social participation may be defined as activities undertaken by both Buddhist clergy and Buddhist laypeople to benefit society. Guided by the teachings of Buddhism, they bring relief to people and help them to flourish and also contribute to the development of society. Social participation by Buddhists means practicing the Buddha's teachings in a social setting, motivated by the ideals of charity and compassion; following the teachings of dependent origination, *jiri-rita* (benefiting oneself by benefiting others); and pursuing the bodhisattva practice.

The history of Buddhism in Asia—in India, where it began, and in China and Japan, among other countries—shows us that there were social activities based on Buddhist teachings from an early period. They include charitable work by Buddhist followers and institutions, and certain states adopted a social policy based on the Buddhist teachings. King Ashoka of India, who built the first Buddhist kingdom in the world, was led by the Buddhist spirit

of compassion and charity to establish treatment centers for human beings and animals alike and to devise various state policies for the relief of the poor. In China, too, during the Western Jin period (265–316), people like Fotudeng (Buddhacinga, 232–348) were active in education, medical care, and the relief of the poor. During the Tang period (618–907), temples played a pivotal

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role in providing medical treatment and relief of the poor, and hostels for the poor and dispensaries were established within the temple precincts. In late sixth- and early seventh-century Japan, too, Prince Shōtoku's social contributions were based on the Buddhist teachings. Shitennōji, the temple he founded in 593, incorporated four institutions: the Kyōden'in, which was concerned with teaching and propagation; the Hiden'in, a facility for the relief of the poor and the care of orphans; the Seyakuin, a dispensary; and the Ryōbyōin, a medical treatment center. Eminent Buddhist priests like Gyōki (668–749) and Kūkai (774–835) contributed to local development by engaging in construction work, while Eizon (1201–1290) and Ninshō (1217–1303) were well known for their efforts to improve the lives of the poor and provide medical facilities and dispensaries, over and above their proselytization activities.

Engaged Buddhism: Terminology

Various terms have emerged to describe social participation by Buddhists and social activism based on Buddhist ideas and doctrine. The most popular of these is Engaged Buddhism (Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King, eds., *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia* [State University of New York Press, 1996]; Christopher S. Queen, ed., *Engaged Buddhism in the West* [Wisdom Publications, 2000]). It has its origins in the antiwar movement by Buddhist monks during the Vietnam War, when some chose to immolate themselves to highlight the tragedy brought by the war to their country. Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese monk and member of this movement, coined the term *Engaged Buddhism* to explain the extreme antiwar movement that his teachers and colleagues were a part of, and it first appeared as the title of a book by him published in 1963 (Kenneth Kraft, ed., *Inner Peace, World Peace: Essays on Buddhism and Nonviolence* [State University of New York Press, 1992], p. 18). Gradually it came to be used by both Buddhists and Buddhist scholars to refer to the participation by Buddhists in social activities, that is, Buddhism's stance toward society.

The use of the term *Engaged Buddhism* stems from the general perception of Buddhism in society as a whole. Because Buddhism (particularly Theravada Buddhism) put emphasis on world renunciation and the afterlife, it was perceived as a religion not actively involved in this world. Compared with other religions, especially Christianity, with its engagement in education and its welfare activities, which are seen as being consistent with its missionary activities, Buddhism was seen as a “socially disengaged” religion. However, active social and political participation by Buddhists in Asia and in other parts of the world has drawn people's attention, and this

new trend has come to be called Engaged Buddhism. The social participation of Buddhists includes the antiwar movement by Vietnamese monks, the Tibetan Buddhist liberation movement centering on the Dalai Lama, the Sri Lankan Sarvodaya Shramadana movement, the social-development projects undertaken by monks in Thailand and other countries of Southeast Asia, and the movement for world peace promoted by Japanese Buddhists' organizations. Engaged Buddhism is also becoming a subject for study within Buddhist studies in Europe and North America.

In Japan, Engaged Buddhism has been translated as *shakai sanka bukkyō*, literally “socially participating Buddhism.” In my *Nihon no shakai sanka bukkyō: Hōonji to Risshō Kōseikai no shakai katsudō to shakai rinri* [Engaged Buddhism in Japan: Social activities and social ethics of Hōonji and Risshō Kōsei-kai], I defined the term as follows: “Engaged Buddhism is a

term denoting the attitude of Buddhism towards society where Buddhists do not limit themselves to religious activities like dissemination and instruction but undertake a variety of social activities, regarding them as the practical applications of Buddhist doctrine. The influence of these activities is not limited to Buddhist circles but extends to society as a whole” ([Tōshindō, 2005], p. 28). Social engagement by Buddhism includes not just the activities by Buddhists that contribute to society, but also the possibilities inherent in Buddhist social action and the power of influence it exerts socially, politically, and culturally by means of its social participation. To understand how Buddhism has come to participate in social activities, we must consider the social and historical background to that participation. A further important theme for Engaged Buddhism is the links made with the society as a whole by Buddhists and Buddhist organizations as they pursue their social activities.

When can we begin to describe the activities of Buddhists, within the long history of Buddhism, as “Engaged Buddhism”? Is positive social action within Buddhism a phenomenon of the modern period? Can we apply the term *Engaged Buddhism* to activities in pre-modern times? Thich Nhat Hanh, who coined the term, wrote that Buddhism was already engaged; if it had not been

so, it would not have been Buddhism (*Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change* [Parallax Press, 1993]). (Incidentally, Patricia Hunt-Perry and Lyn Fine have an article about Thich Nhat Hanh entitled “All Buddhism Is Engaged: Thich Nhat Hanh and the Order of Interbeing” in Queen, *Engaged Buddhism*.) But as we shall see below, many Buddhist scholars look to the influence of modernization, contact with Western civilization, and opposition to colonial rule as the background to Buddhism’s social outlook and the beginnings of Engaged Buddhism.

It is true that there were Buddhist figures in premodern times, like King Ashoka, Prince Shōtoku, and Gyōki, who engaged in social activities. Such social participation, however, was limited to a particular time and place. By comparison, modern Buddhist social participation is much more active and its sphere of influence broader and it is an expanding global phenomenon. The post-nineteenth-century Buddhist revival, modern Buddhist revolutionary movements, social-reformation activities by Buddhists, and the appearance of Buddhist nationalism and Buddhist fundamentalism in Asia, as well as the

spread of Buddhism in the West and the establishment of social movements based on Buddhist teachings, all point to the expansion of Buddhist social participation in the modern period. The Sri Lankan-born sociologist Gananath Obeyesekere called the modern revolutionary movement within Theravada Buddhism “Protestant Buddhism.” In his usage, this had two meanings: the Buddhism of “protest against Christianity and its associated Western [particularly British] dominance” and a Buddhism where “many of its norms and organizational forms are historical derivatives from Protestant Christianity,” which was marked by “inner-worldly asceticism” and a lay orientation (Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* [Princeton University Press, 1988]). The key figure in this Buddhist revival was Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933) of Sri Lanka. He turned a critical eye on the laxity of the Buddhist sangha and, emphasizing lay religious practice, denied that it was only through the sangha that people could find salvation. Salvation, he said, was attained through (a Protestant type of) “inner-worldly asceticism.” As he sought a

modern and reformed Buddhism that was able to compete with Christianity, he rejected popular devotional practices and magic as un-Buddhist, looked to the Pali canon as the origin of Buddhism, and advocated a rational and humanistic interpretation of the teachings. He also looked to Buddhism to forge the national identity of the Sinhalese people in opposition to colonial rule (Buddhist nationalism). Further, he aimed at returning Buddhism in India to its former prosperity and at surveying and restoring Buddhist monuments there. In 1892, he established the Maha Bodhi Society in Calcutta, and in 1893 he attended the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago as the representative of Southern Buddhism in order to deepen the knowledge of Buddhism among Westerners.

One of the countries of Asia where Buddhist monks and nuns are the most socially engaged is Taiwan. Here, Engaged Buddhism is translated as “Humanistic Buddhism.” The idea that has had the greatest influence on Taiwanese Buddhist activists has been the Buddhism for the human world, i.e., Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao*) of Yin Shun (1906–2005), who mapped

out a form of Buddhism that centered on practice in the real world. It has its origins in the teachings of Taixu (1890–1947), Yin Shun’s teacher, who advocated a reform movement to modernize Buddhism in China. Taixu was critical of the pessimism of Buddhism and sought the true meaning of its teachings in its actual practice in this world in which we live. Yin Shun, who had trained at the Minnan Buddhist Institute headed by Taixu at the Nanputuo Temple in Xiamen, China, introduced Taixu’s ideas to Buddhist circles in Taiwan and expanded them, asserting the maxim “for Buddhism and for all living beings” (*wei fojiao, wei zhongsheng*) and teaching that all people will become bodhisattvas by making the Dharma live in their lives. Today, the idea of Humanistic Buddhism continues to underpin the activities and thoughts of leading Buddhist teachers in Taiwan, such as Dharma Master Cheng Yen, a student of Yin Shun’s and founder of the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation; Venerable Master Hsing Yun, founder of the Fo Guang Shan Monastery; and Master Sheng Yen, founder of the Dharma Drum Mountain foundation.

In recent years an intellectual movement has grown up within Buddhist studies in Japan called Critical Buddhism (*hihan bukkō*). The origins of this concept can be found in the work of the Buddhist scholars Noriaki Hakamaya and Shirō Matsumoto (Noriaki Hakamaya, *Hihan bukkō* [Critical Buddhism] [Daizō Shuppan, 1990]; Noriaki Hakamaya, *Hongaku shisō hihan* [Critique of the thought of original enlightenment] [Daizō Shuppan, 1989]; Shirō Matsumoto, *Engi to kū: Nyoraizō shisō hihan* [Dependent origination and emptiness: Critique of the doctrine of *tathāgata-garbha*] [Daizō Shuppan, 1989]; Shirō Matsumoto, *Zen shisō no hihan-teki kenkyū* [Critical studies on Zen thought] [Daizō Shuppan, 1993]). They were both concerned with what “true Buddhism”

is and with methodological issues in their research, and they called into question the thoughts and social involvement of established Buddhism in Japan. Their pursuit of true Buddhism led them to criticize Mahayana—that is, Japanese—Buddhism. In *Hihan bukkō*, Hakamaya wrote, “[The teachings of] buddha-nature are not Buddhist, and nor are original enlightenment, the Kyoto School [of philosophy], the idea of non-duality in the Vimalakīrti Sutra, suchness (*tathatā*), and most of Zen [Buddhism] Buddhist [teachings]” (p. 3). According to Hakamaya and Matsumoto, the influential doctrines of original enlightenment (*hongaku*) and *tathāgata-garbha* (*nyoraizō*) of Japanese Buddhism contradict original Buddhist teachings like dependent origination (*engi*; Skt., *pratītya-samutpāda*), non-self (*muga*; Skt., *anātman*), and wisdom (*chie*; Skt., *prajñā*), while indigenous religious ideas have become conflated with Buddhism. They severely criticize both Japanese Buddhism and Buddhology as contributing ideologically to social injustice, institutional discrimination, imperialism, and political repression. “Criticism alone is Buddhism,” stated Hakamaya. Japanese Buddhism, which they see as

socially indifferent, willing to compromise with political authority, and dominated by an aesthetic mysticism, must have the strength to differentiate critically between truth and falsity, and this they see as being connected with social and political criticism by Buddhist priests and scholars of Buddhism, that is, with social awakening and engagement. Critical Buddhism is not a concept based on a historical or demonstrative examination of Buddhism and goes no further than an academic and philosophical criticism of the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism. However, like the concept of Engaged Buddhism, Critical Buddhism, too, has an awareness of the connection of Buddhism to society and the social influence of Buddhist thought (for details, see Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson, eds., *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* [University of Hawaii Press, 1997]).

In the next issue of this magazine I will discuss Buddhist social engagement and the social application of the Buddhist teachings by looking at examples of social movements led by Buddhist figures and social activities based on Buddhist principles.

To be continued

The Sorrow of Vietnam in 1970

by Nikkyo Niwano

In March 1999 an autobiography by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (1906–99), the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, was published in Japanese under the title Kono michi: Ichibutsujo no sekai o mezashite (The path that we have walked: Aspiring to the world of the One Buddha Vehicle). The book is a lively account of the life of Founder Niwano as a leader of an international lay Buddhist association and a pioneer of interreligious cooperation who dedicated himself to liberating all people from suffering with firm faith in the Lotus Sutra. Dharma World will continue to publish excerpts from the book in installments.

Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, was an honorary president of Religions for Peace and honorary chairman of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan) at the time of his death in October 1999. He was awarded the 1979 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.

Two months after the final affairs of the first assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, in Kyoto, had been dealt with, I set off on December 18, 1970, for South Vietnam, still in the throes of war, with five colleagues from the conference, including Rev. Toshio Miyake of the Konkokyo Izuo Church and Professor Yoshiaki Iisaka of Gakushuin University in Tokyo.

We had resolved at the Kyoto conference to call for immediate and unconditional withdrawal of 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. As a step in that direction, the Japan Religions League was sending us as a delegation to observe the situation.

Our plane landed at Tan Son Nhat International Airport on the outskirts of Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) after nine in the evening, three hours late. More than a hundred young people in the company of one of the Vietnamese representatives to the Kyoto conference,

Ven. Thich Thien Minh, were waiting to greet us on our arrival. Ven. Thien Minh grasped my hand warmly and said, "You are very welcome, Rev. Niwano. There were a lot more Buddhists waiting here to greet you, but since your

plane was delayed I suggested they go home. But the young people from the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam have remained here to wait for you."

Our schedule revolved around meeting political leaders; religious leaders, especially Buddhists; and university professors to exchange ideas, and making direct contact with ordinary people. It

was a demanding schedule that continued unrelentingly day after day.

The people who were in contact with us and guided us to villages near the border with North Vietnam were Buddhist priests working for peace, who, from the point of view of the South Vietnamese government, were undesirable. Inevitably the government continued to issue strict warnings, telling us over and over that what we were doing was forbidden.

An entry in my diary from that time reads, "December 20. Sunday. Weather fine. Again today the government has brought pressure to bear on us." The fact that I had written down things I wouldn't normally mention is an indication of the anger I felt at the government's harassment.

Ven. Thien Minh had taken our delegation to villages near the seventeenth parallel, which divided Vietnam into north and south. Avoiding minefields, we went to a village whose neighboring village was now under the control of the Viet Cong. We distributed relief packages we had brought from Japan directly into the hands of each of the exhausted villagers.

In this land that had experienced the ravages of battles over and over again, we often heard the distant gunfire and saw the devastation caused by shelling. With this evidence of war-torn

Vietnam in front of me, I felt personally the ongoing tragedy of Southeast Asia, caught between two superpowers, where parents and children, and brothers and sisters, were divided into enemies and allies who had to kill one another.

What encouraged me most during our visit was the living faith of the people of Vietnam. Everywhere we went, crowds of Buddhists waving Buddhist flags came out to greet us. In addition, we had friendly discussions with leaders of the Buddhist, Catholic, Cao Dai, and Hoa Hao faiths.

A large number of Buddhists had gathered to greet us at a temple that belonged to the An Quang Pagoda in Saigon [then the headquarters of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam], and I made a call to them. "Religious people from around the world are now trying to work as one to build peace in Vietnam. We Japanese, too, suffered because of war in the past, our homes burned and our families lost. Your happiness depends on the war's coming to a complete stop and your land returning to peace. I hope that the hearts of people of religion everywhere will rise as one to bring this about." The people gathered in the courtyard of the temple listened to my every word, their gaze fixed on me, not stirring despite the falling rain.

All the children living in the orphanage in Hue set up by the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam were war orphans. There are said to be around 500,000 war orphans in Vietnam. We were told that of those, 15,000 are living in institutions of some kind, but the rest, more than 480,000, have to either beg or die of starvation. When we gave children the relief packages we had brought with us from Japan, they gazed up at us with wide eyes and smiled broadly.

We visited a refugee camp on our way back from the north. Families squatted on the earthen floors of huts roofed with sheets of galvanized iron laid over a framework of four posts, and their washbasins, cooking pots, and a bundle of clothing were placed beside them. They had probably fled in the clothes they were wearing, having time only to snatch up a few things close at hand. There were mothers nursing babies, wrinkled old women, and nearly naked children. But there were no fathers. I was told that there were cases where some fathers had been taken away by the government army and the sons by the Viet Cong, and many fathers and sons must have faced each other as enemies. War had been continuing for twenty-five years, from the time of the First Indochina War (1946–50) against France. It is reported that one in thirty-five people in Indochina had been killed and one in fifteen had

been injured. How many of them had found themselves fighting against their fathers, sons, or brothers?

Burning Bodies

When we returned to Saigon, we were severely reprimanded by the South Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs for traveling into a dangerous area without notice. The Japanese ambassador, Fumihiko Togo, also reprimanded us.

I replied to this criticism that we had gone there because we had to. At that time, most of the foreign aid to South

Vietnam was being misappropriated or had been left out in the rain, and so nothing was being handed over to those who were in desperate need. We became all the more earnest in pursuing our work because we had been well aware of the dangers of stepping on a land mine.

After we first arrived in South Vietnam, we paid a courtesy call on the vice-minister of foreign affairs and the head of the foreign ministry's Asian Section. They urged us to travel by helicopter to the villages near the seventeenth parallel and return to Saigon

the same day, but we politely refused. We wanted to walk through war-torn Vietnam on foot, so we traveled through the jungle. At Hue, where a fierce battle was fought during the Tet Offensive of 1968, we slept in a private house, listening to the distant sound of gunfire. I wished to experience the true horror of war firsthand, seeing things as they actually were with my own eyes and hearing the sufferings of the people with my own ears.

Our delegation spoke with a large number of people in South Vietnam, including religious and political leaders and university professors. In particular, the men and women of faith spoke earnestly to us about the difficulties inherent in achieving a breakthrough in Vietnam, caught between the superpowers and amid ongoing slaughter.

The words of Ven. Thien Minh reverberated within me. He said, "We well understand the pitiful condition Japan was in after losing the Second World War. That it has been able to regenerate in twenty-five years is because it has had fine people to lead it. In Vietnam, though, there is a big problem with the leadership. Unless we can create good leaders, Vietnam will never be truly happy."

I believe his words pointed out what was most important for us and what we needed to preserve. They brought home

to me that what is crucial, besides a nation and wealth, is democracy in its truest sense: trust and respect among people. This kind of democracy has to be nurtured over time in the hearts of every individual.

I told myself, “Men and women of religion must combine their strength and contribute a great deal of patient effort in order to bring about a revolution in people’s consciousness.”

Two years later, in January 1973, a peace accord was signed and the fires of war were finally extinguished. The United States tasted its first defeat.

I would like to include here a poem by Phan Thi Mai, a devout Buddhist who took care of children in orphanages with affection and kindness. One morning in May 1967 she set fire to herself, leaving behind this poem calling for peace. What she did could be

called self-immolation as an offering to the Buddha.

May my body
Be a torch
To dissipate darkness,
To awaken love among all people,
And to bring peace to Vietnam.
Take my hand, all of you!
Already twenty-odd years have
gone by.
Much blood has flowed.
Please, don’t kill all my people!
Please, don’t kill all my people!
I kneel in prayer, my hands clasped
together.

Peace is an important goal that needs perseverance over a very long time. It also exacts great sacrifice. Perhaps it has been the following words of Kanzo Uchimura (1861–1930), a Japanese author and Christian evangelist, that have guided me as I continue my efforts in this direction: “A person of religion always holds the highest ideals but has never achieved even minimum goals.”

I too may never realize even my slightest goal, but whatever happens, I have to hold my ideals aloft and continue walking forward with them before me, since if I cease my efforts, they will become nothing more than flights of fancy.

Great Deeds and Small Deeds

When I try to speak of the course of my own life, I find myself describing the history of Rissho Kosei-kai. But when I describe the organization’s history, it inevitably sounds as if I were bragging about my own activities even though its history belongs to all the members who made it. And now, precisely because my later years have been spent trying to bring about interreligious cooperation for world peace, I have somehow become caught up with the history of the establishment of the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

Already the sixth assembly [at Rome and Riva del Garda, in 1994] has been held, but I still cannot forget the difficulties we had getting the first one on track. In fact, I think it was precisely because of those difficulties that the later conferences ran comparatively smoothly. This is all the more reason I would like to leave without fail a record of all the things we experienced before the first conference.

The directors of Rissho Kosei-kai spoke of the world conference as “the president’s pastime,” since I was spending so much time on it. Perhaps their choice of words was right. When you force yourself to do something you don’t like, you can use the word effort, but perhaps we can say “pastime” when we talk about being able to do something we really like and want to do to our heart’s content. As far as I was concerned, though, being active in an international conference of people of religion was one and the same thing as extending a hand to those who were suffering before my eyes.

I can’t remember exactly when it happened, but it was when I was going to give a talk about peace to members of a Rissho Kosei-kai Men’s Group at the Osaka City Central Public Hall on Nakanoshima [an island on a river] in Osaka. It was a hot summer’s day. At that time, when I visited Kansai, the region where Osaka is, I would often stay in a Japanese-style inn. After the talk I returned to the inn. Just as I was changing out of my sweaty clothing, my secretary told me that he had heard that the innkeeper had cancer. When I asked what hospital he was in, I was told he was in a room downstairs. So I immediately went to visit him and performed for him the *kuji*, a purificatory set of nine mudras and mantras. Afterward my secretary, who had joined me in performing the *kuji*, dripping with sweat like me, commented, “This morning you were giving a lecture on world peace and this afternoon

you are performing the *kuji*. It’s been a sweaty day!”

Some people might be puzzled by my performing a purification rite for an individual, while I was speaking to a large assembly on world peace. However, for me, whether a speech on world peace should take precedence over giving at least a little comfort to someone near me who was suffering was not an issue. The single moment of thought of how I can be

useful to others can sometimes take the form either of activity for world peace or of performing the *kuji* for someone who is suffering. I see no contradiction. Great deeds and small deeds are equally important. The great and small are one. Being mindful at every moment of the buddha-nature in every single one of my thoughts and its penetration of the whole world—this is of great importance.

To be continued

The Prism of the Lotus Sutra (9)

by Atsushi Kanazawa

The Lion

The “Introductory” chapter of the Lotus Sutra says, “I see also the buddhas, the holy masters, the lions, expounding the sutra, mystic and supreme.” Here the buddhas are referred to as lions. On hearing the word *lion*, we tend to visualize the king of beasts bounding across a vast savannah in hot pursuit of prey, its long, thick, golden mane blowing in the wind. But we are probably thinking of the African lion. The Indian lion, on the other hand, considered to be endangered, is still the king of beasts, but is a little smaller, with quite thick legs and only a modest mane.

Why should the Buddha have been likened to a lion? One reason, which can be inferred from the phrase “lion’s roar” used in connection with the Buddha, is the persuasiveness of the Buddha’s voice and words. Just as one roar by a lion can make all nearby animals tremble, so too do living beings listen intently to what the Buddha says and prostrate themselves before him. The lion could be said to give apt expression to that most important aspect of the Buddha, namely, someone who preaches the Dharma to living beings. It could perhaps be said that the following statement near the start of the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings refers to this same aspect of the Buddha: “They are like a trainer of elephants and horses who never fails to train well, or like a majestic and brave lion that inevitably subdues and overpowers all beasts.”

Likewise, in the chapter “A Happy Life” in the Lotus Sutra, it seems quite appropriate that the fearlessness of a buddha as he boldly goes anywhere to preach the Dharma should be likened to that of a lion king: “Fearlessly he will roam like a lion king. The radiance of his wisdom will shine like the sun. If he should dream, he will see only the wonderful, seeing the *tathāgatas* seated on lion thrones, preaching the Law to hosts of surrounding *bhikshus*.” It is also known from this passage that the seat of a buddha, who is worthy of being

called a lion, is sometimes called a “lion throne.” We should not forget the figure of the Buddha seated on a lion throne beneath trees adorned with precious gems as he preaches the Dharma.

Further, in the chapter “Springing Up out of the Earth,” we read: “Thereupon Śākyamuni Buddha addressed Maitreya Bodhisattva: ‘Do you all, with one mind, don the armor of zeal and exhibit a firm will, [for] the Tathāgata now intends to reveal and proclaim the wisdom of buddhas, the sovereign and supernatural power of buddhas, the *lion eagerness* of buddhas, and the awe-inspiring forceful power of buddhas.’” This tells us that the term lion eagerness, reflected in Japanese expressions such as one meaning something like “furious lion-like activity,” can be traced back to the Lotus Sutra and makes it all the more meaningful. □

The Sea

The Chinese character for *sea* includes the element for *mother*, and the French word for mother, *mère*, is similar to *mer*, the French word for sea. In Chinese (and also Japanese) and in French the sea is thus associated with motherliness or womanliness. What about India? Was it perhaps associated with a more masculine image of a boundless expanse of nothing but water?

In chapter 3 of the Lotus Sutra, “A Parable,” we read: “[But when] the Buddha, with various reasonings and parables, speaks so skillfully, one’s heart is peaceful as the sea. On hearing, my

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nets of doubts were broken.” Again, in chapter 5, “The Parable of the Herbs,” we read: “The Buddha by this parable tactfully reveals and with various expressions proclaims the One Law; [but of] the Buddha-wisdom it is as a drop in the ocean.” One might conclude that for the people of India, too, the sea was associated with the image of a graceful “mother” or the image of a vast all-encompassing expanse filled to the brim with water. But in the extant Sanskrit text there is no word corresponding to *sea* or *ocean* in these passages. These analogies may have been devised by the translator Kumārajīva, taking into account Chinese perceptions of the sea.

Chapter 19, “The Merits of the Preacher,” includes the following passage: “With the eyes received from his

parents he will see all the three-thousand-fold world, within and without, Mount Meru, Sumeru and its Iron Circle, and the other mountains and forests, great oceans, rivers, and waters, down to the Avīci hell, up to the Summit of Existence.” This would suggest that for the people of India, the ocean, like mountains such as Mount Sumeru, may have been no more than an enormous representational figure forming part of our three-thousand great-thousand-fold world.

That may be the case, but I would also like to draw attention to the following passage in the chapter “The All-Sidedness of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World,” a chapter known also as the Kuan-yin Sutra and widely recited: “His is the wondrous voice, voice of the world-regarder,

Brahma-voice, voice of the rolling tide, voice all world-surpassing, therefore ever to be kept in mind, with never a doubting thought. Regarder of the Cries of the World, pure and holy, in pain, distress, death, calamity, able to be a sure reliance, perfect in all merit, with compassionate eyes beholding all, boundless ocean of blessing! Prostrate, let us revere him.”

It is here stated that Avalokiteśvara, or Regarder of the Cries of the World, a “sure reliance,” possesses a voice like the sound of the tide. It was in fact this phrase in the Lotus Sutra that became the source of the title *Kaichōon* (Sound of the tide) for a fine collection of poems translated into Japanese from other languages by the noted author and translator Bin Ueda (1874–1916) and published in 1905. □

Sutras

Two years have already passed since we began turning our attention to various terms mentioned in the Lotus Sutra and inquiring into how they relate to its teachings. This installment is the final one in this series, which started with “The White Lotus,” and we will end with “Sutras.” Buddhism has its origins in sermons about the “knowledge of enlightenment” gained by Shakyamuni beneath the bodhi tree when he became the Buddha, sermons that he gave to as-yet-unenlightened beings. These teachings are usually referred to as sutras,

of which there are an enormous number. The Lotus Sutra is just one of them, but both in quality and in quantity it is the “king” of sutras. For those of us who aspire to the bliss of buddhahood, sutras may be described as the greatest of treasures, to be constantly listened to, understood, and kept in mind, even though it is difficult for those of us lacking in wisdom to comprehend and realize their true meaning.

The chapter “The Merits of the Preacher” says: “If [anyone] keeps the Law-Flower Sutra, his body will be utterly pure, as that pure lapis lazuli;

all the living will delight to see it. And as in a pure, bright mirror every image is seen, the bodhisattva, in his pure body, sees everything in the world. He himself alone sees clearly what others do not see.”

What does it mean to keep the Law-Flower Sutra (the Lotus Sutra)? So long as one is able to do this, one’s body will, it is said, become as pure as lapis lazuli and one will know everything that is not known to others. When we today hear the words *Lotus Sutra*, a sutra in the form of a book immediately springs to mind, and thinking that we can easily pick it up whenever we feel like it, we are apt to handle it casually. But we should not forget what it says in the chapter “Discrimination of Merits”: “If anyone after the extinction of the Tathāgata receives and keeps, reads and recites it, preaches it to others, either himself copies it or causes others to copy it, and pays homage to the sutra, he need no longer erect stupas and temples or build monasteries and make offerings to the monks.” “Pays homage to” means to handle with care and the utmost sincerity. □

Note: All excerpts from the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings and the Lotus Sutra 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 (2)

This is the 121st installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.

TEXT He is able to rescue whatever beings are in the hells, or hungry spirits, or animals, and all in distress.

COMMENTARY *Hells, or hungry spirits, or animals.* These are generally the places or forms into which ordinary people are born, depending on the accumulation of their past deeds (karma). They also refer to the spiritual, or mental, states. (See the January/February 1993 issue of *Dharma World*.) Human beings who are in the hells or in the realms of hungry spirits and animals are the lowest of depraved human beings. However, the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound does not despise or detest them, but liberates all of them. This is an extremely important admonition for us who live in this world.

TEXT Even in the inner courts of a king, transforming himself into a woman he preaches this sutra.

COMMENTARY These are recesses of the palace for women only, where men are banned. They are where the wife of the nobleman, ladies in waiting, and concubines reside. If it is necessary to preach the Dharma there, the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound will transform himself into a woman and go there. This of course means that he will preach the Dharma everywhere.

TEXT Flower Virtue! This Bodhisattva Wonder Sound is one who is able to save and protect all the living in the saha world. This Bodhisattva Wonder Sound, thus transforming

living has obtained knowledge [of him]. In [other] worlds in every direction, [numerous] as the sands of the Ganges, he also does the same.

COMMENTARY *Every one of the living has obtained knowledge [of him].* The Sanskrit text says simply that he was known in this *saha* world, but in this translation by Kumarajiva the meaning is deeper. In other words, the bodhisattva led all living beings to learn on their own how to live by themselves.

TEXT To those whom he must save in the form of shravaka, he appears in the form of a shravaka and preaches the Dharma. To those whom he must save in the form of a pratyekabuddha, he appears in the form of a pratyekabuddha and preaches the Dharma. To those whom he must save in the form of a bodhisattva, he appears in the form of a bodhisattva and preaches the Dharma. To those whom he must save in the form of a buddha, he then appears in the form of a buddha and preaches the Dharma.

COMMENTARY Here the original Chinese text uses the term *tei-tu*, translated above as “save,” but *tei-tu* also has the various meanings of “guide,” “instruct,” or “enter the Buddhist priesthood.”

TEXT In such various ways as these, according to the way in which he should save [men] he appears to them. Even to those whom he must save by extinction, he reveals himself as extinct. Flower Virtue! Such is the great supernatural power and wisdom attained by the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva Wonder Sound.”

COMMENTARY *Even to those whom he must save by extinction, he reveals himself as extinct.* There are many situations, including his death, to awaken them to the teaching of impermanence, or hiding himself from this world to make them long for him.

TEXT Thereupon the Bodhisattva Flower Virtue said to the Buddha: “World-honored One! This Bodhisattva Wonder Sound has [indeed] deeply planted [his] roots of goodness. World-honored One! In what contemplation does this bodhisattva abide, that he is able thus to transform and manifest himself according to circumstances, to save the living?” The Buddha answered Flower Virtue Bodhisattva: “Good son! That contemplation is named revelation of all forms. The Bodhisattva Wonder Sound, abiding in this contemplation, is able thus to benefit countless beings.”

himself and appearing in these various ways, in this *saha* land preaches this sutra to all the living. In his [powers of] supernatural transformation and wisdom there is never any diminution.

COMMENTARY *In his [powers of] supernatural transformation and wisdom there is never any diminution.* When an ideal is given form, the resulting form is virtually always inferior to the ideal. This is because reality is not ideal. Nonetheless, the ideal’s value is undiminished. Nor is the strength of the wisdom to seek the ideal in any way lost or impaired.

Therefore, it is meaningless to overprotect the ideal in order not to compromise it, by depicting it as a dream, making no effort to realize it. This is shown by the fact that although the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound preaches the ideal in the *saha* world, a whirlpool of delusions, his powers of supernatural transformation and wisdom are never impaired.

TEXT This bodhisattva in so many [ways of] wisdom has enlightened the *saha* world, so that every one of the

to them. I have also seen the Bodhisattva Manjushri, son of the Dharma king, as well as the Bodhisattva Medicine King, the Bodhisattva Attainer of Earnestness and Zeal, the Bodhisattva Courageous Giver, and others, and caused those eighty-four thousand bodhisattvas to attain the contemplation of the revelation of all forms.”

COMMENTARY In chapter 21, “The Divine Power of the Tathagata,” we read that all worlds in the universe are united without barrier as one buddha land. In this chapter, the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound comes to this *saha* world from the domain Adorned with Pure Radiance, instructs and leads many people, returns to the land of his origin, and there reports to the Buddha. This narrative gives realistic expression to the ideal that “all worlds in the universe are united without barrier as one buddha land.”

There is one truth, and the Original Buddha is eternal and omnipresent. If everyone awakens to this truth, practices it, and strongly believes that we are all one with the Eternal Original Buddha, then the whole universe will become one buddha land. It is toward this ideal state that we want to steadily progress one step at a time.

TEXT While this chapter on the going and coming of the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound was preached, the forty-two thousand heavenly sons attained the assurance of no [re]birth, and the Bodhisattva Flower Virtue attained the contemplation termed Dharma Flower.

COMMENTARY Here ends chapter 24, “The Bodhisattva Wonder Sound.” When we read the closing portion of this chapter, we may wonder if the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound is identical with the Eternal Original Buddha. It is mentioned that the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound can transform himself and appear in various forms anywhere. It is even written, “To those whom he must save in the form of a buddha, he then appears in the form of a buddha and preaches the Dharma.” We can trace our origin to oneness with the Eternal Original Buddha. In this sense, of course, the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound is identical with the Eternal Original Buddha, but he can manifest himself as a messenger of the Original Buddha. Furthermore, it is clear that this bodhisattva is inferior to the Tathagata Shakyamuni as the trace Buddha in his power of enlightening.

That is because, as mentioned earlier, the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound is the symbol of an ideal.

The teaching of the ideal state of mind is precious indeed, but it does not show its true worth since it exists only in the mind. The true worth of the ideal teaching is appreciated only when and where people realize it little by little in their daily lives.

COMMENTARY *Contemplation of the revelation of all forms.* (See the July–September 2014 issue of *Dharma World*)

TEXT While this chapter of the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound was preached, the eighty-four thousand who had come with him all attained the contemplation of the revelation of all forms, and countless bodhisattvas in this *saha* world also attained this contemplation and dharani.

Then the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva Wonder Sound, having paid homage to Shakyamuni Buddha and to the stupa of the Buddha Abundant Treasures, returned to his own land. The countries through which he passed were agitated in the six [different] ways, with the raining of precious lotus flowers and the performing of hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of music. Having arrived in his own domain, he, with the eighty-four thousand bodhisattvas around him, went to the Buddha King Wisdom of the Pure Flower Constellation and said to him: “World-honored One! I have been to the *saha* world, done good to its living beings, seen Shakyamuni Buddha, also seen the stupa of the Buddha Abundant Treasures, and worshipped and paid homage

Consequently it becomes essential that there be a practical teaching so that the ideal may be realized in life on earth. It is Shakyamuni Buddha who imparted the practical teaching. With profound wisdom in penetrating this real aspect of all things, he showed the ideal human form, which is that of a buddha, and taught the concrete path to buddhahood through the so-called eighty-four thousand doctrines. Through his own being, he set an example of realizing the ideal. The holiness of the trace Buddha, Shakyamuni the World-honored One, is beyond estimate.

This is clearly displayed through the actions of the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound. This bodhisattva (himself an ideal), with a bright golden body of infinite size, went to Shakyamuni Buddha (a realizer of the ideal), who had perfected the thirty-two primary marks and the eighty kinds of excellence of the Buddha but had assumed the form of an ordinary man. The bodhisattva made obeisance at the Buddha's feet and presented a priceless necklace to him. When the Bodhisattva Wonder Sound says to the Buddha, "You are the one indeed who has realized our ideal," he is lauding that ideal.

The Bodhisattva Wonder Sound came to this world from an ideal realm for the purpose of praising and proving how great and holy a thing it is for people to endeavor to establish the Righteous Dharma and to build an ideal society in this *saha* world, filled as it is with defilements and evils.

The true spirit of this chapter is that an ideal is only truly holy when it is actually realized one step at a time. Although the buddhas dwelling in ideal worlds, such as the Tathagata Mahavairocana and the Tathagata Amita, are surely very holy, it is confirmed here again that the Eternal Original Buddha, whom we can revere through the Tathagata Shakyamuni as the personified ideal thereof, should be the focus of devotion for those living in this world.

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.