

# Showing Compassion for Those Who Suffer

by Nichiko Niwano

Many bodhisattvas appear in the Lotus Sutra. Among them, one of the best known is the Bodhisattva Kannon (Guanyin, Regarder of the Cries of the World) who hears the voices of those suffering in the real world and transforms herself into many different forms and shapes in order to liberate them. The phrase “And beholds living beings with compassionate eyes” is found in chapter 25, “The Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Kannon.” The Kannon who looks upon people with compassionate eyes is one ideal image of humanity, which put into our everyday terms could be expressed as true friendship, sympathy, and empathy.

However, when we face a disaster such as the massive earthquake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011, we may have no clue about what we should do and remain frozen in place. What actually happened made us reconsider how we come to terms with a difficulty that we have not experienced first-hand, and how we can get close to the feelings of suffering people and stand by them as a companion as they move forward.

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

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

## Widening the Circle of Warmth

When people are experiencing some difficulty, we think about what we can do to help them and, within the realm of the possible, we want to lend them a hand. This arises from the spirit of consideration for others that everyone possesses, or the spirit of donation and benefiting others.

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

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

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

come naturally. In reality, the assistance that each of us can offer may be rather minor. However, when we look at things with an eye toward the source of all life, then even though what we can offer may seem negligible, our hearts and minds that pray and hope for the sake of the world and of humanity are thereby connected to a great system of support. Being considerate toward our own families leads to warming the hearts of many people, the emotion passing from one person to another. As can be seen in the ideal of “liberating people and improving society,” the spirit in which Rissho Kosei-kai was founded, and just as in the phrase “our families, our communities, and the world” in the Members’ Vow, the consideration we show others in our daily lives becomes the starting point for widening the circle of warmth in society.

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

# DHARMA WORLD

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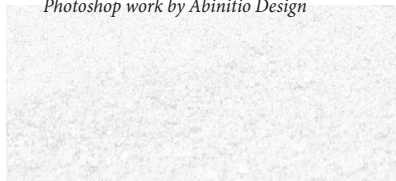
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# Listening to the Thin Voice of Silence

by Hans Ucko

**Deep listening to the other doesn't just provide space for the other to be who he or she really is. Listening to the other also provides space for the listener's own religious wanderings and pilgrimage.**

The duo Simon and Garfunkel is famous for many songs. One of them is entitled “The Sound of Silence.”

And in the naked light I saw  
Ten thousand people, maybe more.  
People talking without speaking,  
People hearing without listening.

Most of us have noted the same. People talk but don't communicate. People hear but are not listening. It's not unusual, and we come across it, even in that which we refer to as dialogue. The realm of dialogue, where two or more people exchange ideas or opinions on a particular issue, is not always true to the inner meaning of the word. The word *dialogue* itself is maybe to blame. The word is derived from the Greek words *διά* (*diá*), meaning “through,” and *λόγος* (*logos*), meaning “speech” or “discourse.” *Dialogue* thus means “through speech.” The word dialogue itself, from which of course the very concept of dialogue arises, may actually make us believe that listening is somehow subordinated to talking. It does not seem to offer space for listening, as if through speech alone we could dialogue.

Although there may be two or more in a room and one would imagine that dialogue would be the *modus operandi*,

dialogue easily turns into monologue. The French call such exchanges “*un dialogue des sourds*,” a dialogue of the deaf. One doesn't understand the other, and yet they both think they are on the same issue or topic. One knows what to say even before seeing or listening to the other. There is more talking than listening. We don't pay much attention to the implications of the saying that God created us with two ears but only one mouth. The mouth dominates and the ears shut themselves off as if they were not needed to understand the other, as if one already knew who the other is and what the other has to say. When hearing does not mean listening, perspectives become skewed. What you say matters less; it is how I can capitalize on it that matters. I hear what you say but only because I want to know when to jump in to say what I wanted to say already irrespective of what you would like to say. I want to project my own opinions. I wait for what I think is my cue line, the moment when I will mount and ride my hobbyhorse around the scene to present my case or arguments. In such conversations or dialogues, whether a dialogue among the highest religious leaders or ordinary people in everyday exchanges, the focus is locked on to the telling of *my* story, what I think, how

*Hans Ucko is a pastor of the Church of Sweden and did his doctoral studies in India. He has been extensively involved in interfaith dialogue, particularly between Christians and Jews, and has written a number of books on the subject. He has served as the Program Executive of the Office on Interreligious Relations and Dialogue of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and as President of Religions for Peace Europe. He is the President of the Nordic Gülen Institute and is since many years an interfaith adviser to Arigatou International.*

I feel, how it should've been, how it's always been. The other is instrumentalized, that is, turned into an instrument in order that my own goals are attained. One attends only to the surface of the words rather than listening to how they echo or how each word reflects. And people talk at each other but not with each other. Listening is absent. And one has forgotten “that every story needs a listener,” a key sentence in the work of the South African Institute for Healing of Memories.

Sometimes dialogue looks like dialogue but is not. It is, rather, a duet. There's a difference between dialogue and duet. The end result of a duet is known before it has even begun. It has been composed. The beginning, the flow, and the end—they have all been put on a sheet of music. There are two voices, and the singers each have their part to sing. Sometimes they sing together. During the song they may part

company, but at the end they join each other again. Two voices are heard in a way that reveals above all the inspiration, intention, and inventiveness of the composer. A dialogue is different. If it is a genuine encounter, it cannot be programmed, and there is always room for that which has not been said before. What is said is maybe not all that is said. If you listen carefully to the other, you will maybe hear more than what is said. Dialogue is not like a duet. There is something unpredictable about an encounter steeped in an attitude of dialogue.

To listen in dialogue is to admit the other and the universe of the other. You are willing to enter the world of the other, suspend judgment, and listen as you go along into that world. To listen means that you allow yourself to question your own presuppositions and assumptions. You may have to sacrifice assumptions. Are they biases and prejudices that you have just taken over without much reflection? How many calling for dialogue are not limiting themselves by their expectations of seeing the other accept their point of view? Dialogue is to open oneself up to walking next to the other in accompaniment. There is, therefore, something of a potential sacrifice involved in dialogue, a preparedness to be quiet and listen and to allow the other time and space, reading between the lines. Words are being said and declarations are being made, and through deep listening you may realize that this is not all that is being said.

Listening is not a passive or static activity but a way of being present without judgment. We let go of our inner clamoring and our usual assumptions and listen with respect for precisely what is being said. It is through listening that we will learn who the other is and, even more, who we are ourselves.

A teacher told a student from Paris who was about to leave for London for some time, "Living in London for one year does not automatically imply that

you will know all of London. But there will be parts of London that you had not seen before that will now add to your knowledge. In the light of the many surprises that you will have while discovering London, you will suddenly understand some of the deepest and most original features of Paris, those you did not know before and could not learn in any other way." You had to go to London to discover Paris in depth.

Deep listening to the other may cause you to discover some of your own inner understandings, those you may not even have articulated to yourself. Such moments are sacred. There is something sacred in listening. You don't see what it is, you have no idea beforehand; doors are opening to that which is beyond both you and the other. Listening may open doors into the sacredness of your own being, and you may suddenly sense something that is difficult to describe or define. Thoughts and perspectives overwhelm you, and you can't find words to describe your feelings: is it an awareness of something that is holy or sacred? There is a feeling of humility, gratitude, and thanksgiving; a sense of something ineffable, and you don't have any other word for it but calling it divine; there is a sense and awareness of limits and even powerlessness; there is a sense of the eternal and of fusion with the whole of the universe. Awe overwhelms you, this sentiment or feeling of reverence, wonder, and interconnectedness. It is this realization of the unfathomable, always beyond and yet inexplicably moving and overwhelmingly present. Words cannot express that which listening uncovers. We can only hint at what we think we fathom.

The words of Rumi, the thirteenth-century Persian poet, scholar, and theologian, leave us with reverberations of what silence brings: "A deep silence revives the listening and the speaking of those two who meet on the riverbank. Like the ground turning green

in a spring wind. Like birdsong beginning inside the egg. Like this universe coming into existence, the lover wakes and whirls in a dancing joy, then kneels down in praise."

And yet awe is not necessarily connected to faith or religion. It may precede faith or be the root of faith. The sense of awe leaves me in bewilderment and confusion, and there is a question in the depth of me: "What is required of me? Something is asked of me. What am I to do with this feeling and sense of the mystery of living, what to do with the awe, wonder, or fear?" There is a sense of transcendent waiting, which is not immediately or even ever answered or given an interpretation. There is silence, and in this silence there is a presence, and this presence is not announced or preached or revealed or demonstrated in ostensible ways, colors, and sounds.

Elijah was a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel, seeking God at Mount Horeb, another name for Mount Sinai, where the Ten Commandments had once been handed down to the people and the mountain was wrapped in smoke and shook violently. The Ten Commandments came with thunder and blasts of trumpets. Now it was Elijah who was at the same mountain, and he was told to go outside the cave and "stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." . . . There was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks, . . . but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence" (1 Kings 19:11–12). And at the sound of sheer silence, Elijah wrapped his face in his mantle. The human quest for the divine or the numinous is sounding in this thin voice of silence. The trumpets and the fire and the smoke were visible and audible for everyone, even for those gathering a long distance away, but they didn't count for

becoming smug and conceited in your religion. You have it all. You know it all. You don't need anyone. You can declare the truth, the true way, the only way. You can pontificate. It is a good thing when your faith enables you to stand up in confidence and hope, but there is a risk when it makes you insensitive to the presence of the other in his or her otherness, reducing the other to being only a recipient of what you confess or declare.

The Christian creed sounds magnificent and can be accompanied by beautifully sounding trumpets, horns, and kettledrums. It reflects conviction and commitment. Christians can stand up and solemnly declare the creed in unison: "Credo in unum Deum" (I believe in one God), but there is a risk of being heard only as a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. Leaving space and waiting for the sound of silence in your creed, making your creed also a moment of listening, may be more beneficial to the world of many voices and songs and hopes and dreams. Maybe there is wisdom in the Jewish prayer *Sh'ma Yisrael*, which functions as the equivalent to the Christian creed: "Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone." There is in this prayer or creed an invitation to listen while confessing, to leave a space for silence, for listening into the silence while praising God, which may make you more sensitive to the presence of the other in his or her otherness, who is walking with you along many of the roads you're walking.

We all come from somewhere and have attachments that can close us off to what is transpiring in the moment of here and now. Listening is conditioned by attachments. In listening we need to be able to hear afresh, even if we've heard it before. That which we've heard before easily fuses into that stream of earlier learning and prior experiences and easily disappears exactly because we've heard it before and we are convinced that we know all of its ins and outs. And

then, on the other hand, that which we haven't heard before may often appear so strange that we feel we don't have a place for it. We have no receptors to receive what we've heard.

The Buddhist tradition is rich in education about the importance of listening. It's not for nothing that the Buddha's first disciples were called *śrāvakas*, or "hearers," those who actually heard the Buddha speak. The Buddha knew that listening is an essential factor in education. He said: "There are five advantages of listening to the Dhamma. What five? One hears things not heard before, clarifies things heard before, dispels doubts, straightens one's ideas, and one's mind is delighted."

The Buddhist tradition is for me a catalyst in interfaith listening, and it is in its relations with other religions a genuine challenge to the Western Hemisphere, the Judeo-Christian traditions, and the heritage of the Abrahamic religions. As long as I find myself in the context of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, I know where to go and I know what to hear, and I may not hear what I hear. There is something of conditioned responses, which at times may be to the detriment of my listening. When I take for granted Abrahamic monotheism as the overall given and accepted perspective or worldview, the Buddhist nontheistic tradition takes me with great carefulness out of my theological comfort zone into the open field of amazement, obliging me to put aside for a moment my conditioned responses to listen afresh, asking myself if there's anything like unconditional responses, and if so, where they would take me. We need, as religious people—and this is what interfaith dialogue and interfaith listening are really all about—the overwhelming surprise of awe and wonder when hearing things not heard before, enabling us to revisit and rediscover things heard before and be for a moment stunned and ultimately able to reconsider and to straighten the way ahead. □

Elijah. Everyone saw the fire and felt the ground shaking or smelled the smoke, but Elijah still waited. In the thin voice of silence, in this absolute stillness, there was the divine presence, there was the numinous, and it was perceptible only to the one who was silent and listened.

Deep listening to the other doesn't just provide space for the other to be who he or she really is. Listening to the other also provides space for the listener's own religious wanderings and pilgrimage. One is made aware of dimensions of one's own faith seldom or never before visited. Through his or her religious tradition the other contributes to shedding light on dimensions in one's faith that could become visible only through listening. We need the other for the sake of our own faith—someone who through her or his otherness will tell me over and over again: You are not arrived. There is more. There is still more. You cannot exhaust the divine or the absolute.

There is a risk when never being exposed to the other in his or her otherness. While it is a good thing to be strongly grounded and deeply rooted in your religious tradition or faith, there is a risk in thinking you can be self-sufficient in religion. While it may be a good thing to be unmovable and unshakable in your faith, you are at risk if it means

# Deep Interreligious Listening in Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

by Elizabeth J. Harris

*Deep interreligious listening invites us to develop a frame of mind that is open and vulnerable. Such a frame of mind goes beyond dialogue into a zone where deep interreligious learning is possible.*

## The Importance of Listening in Buddhism and Christianity

Listening and hearing are centrally important in both Buddhism and Christianity. Every *sutta* in the Pāli Canon of Theravāda Buddhism begins, “Thus have I heard.” After the Buddha died, according to tradition, his teachings were recited by Ānanda, the Buddha’s closest disciple, to a gathering of five hundred monks. “Thus have I heard,” therefore, refers to Ānanda’s faithful listening. Theravāda Buddhists believe his recall was perfect and that it fulfilled the Buddha’s wish that the Dharma be the teacher after his death. The teachings were then transmitted orally for three to four hundred years before they were further systemized and written down. None of this could have happened without rigorous listening and remembering.

As for Christianity, words denoting listening or hearing appear numerous times in the Bible. Jesus, for instance, is recorded as saying, “Let anyone with ears listen” or “Listen and understand,” after giving a teaching (e.g., Matt. 13:9, 13:43, 15:10).

Both traditions also warn against the consequences of not listening or, more exactly, of not understanding and

acting after listening. In the *Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta*, a discourse in the *Dīgha Nikāya* of the Pāli Canon, the Buddha tells the story of a kingdom in which a line of righteous monarchs are advised by holy sages about their duties. One monarch, however, puts power first and does not consult his spiritual advisors. When things go wrong in the kingdom, he belatedly consults them but fails to act in one important area, “he did not give property to the needy” (*Dīgha Nikāya* iii, 65, trans. Maurice Walsh). Consequently, the people of his land gradually slip into poverty, crime, anarchy, and violence, until there is a “sword interval,” where people see each other as wild beasts and are sucked into an orgy of slaughter. The beginning of this horrific narrative of societal collapse was the failure of an individual ruler to listen, understand, and act.

Similarly, Jesus is recorded as illustrating the importance of listening and acting through the simile of a person who builds his house on rock rather than sand:

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon

that house, but it did not fall, because it was founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall (Matt. 7:24–28).

Listening to and acting on the teaching of a buddha or, in the case of Christianity, of Jesus is linked in both religions to what happens after death. One story told by Jesus concerned a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus. The rich man, after death, finds himself in the fires of hell with an ability to see that Lazarus, whom he had ignored during his life, even though that man had lived at his gate, was in heaven next to Abraham, one of the most important patriarchs in the Jewish tradition. The rich man appeals to Abraham to send someone to earth to warn his rich brothers of the consequences of their lack of compassion, namely torment in hell. Abraham replies that they already have the teachings of the prophets, all of whom taught people to give to the needy. The rich man continues to plead, saying that they would repent if someone were sent from the dead. Abraham then replies, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:31).

Similarly, in Buddhism, the consequences of not acting after listening to the Buddha’s teaching are graphically

*Elizabeth J. Harris is Associate Professor in the Comparative Study of Religion at Liverpool Hope University, with a specialism in Theravāda Buddhism and Buddhist-Christian relationships. She is president of the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies and moderator of the Inter Faith Theology Advisory Group of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. Her recent books include Buddhism for a Violent World: A Christian Perspective (2010, 2012) and History as a Challenge to Buddhism and Christianity (coeditor, 2016).*

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described in the *Devadūta Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, which outlines the punishments in hell that will be suffered by those who do not see and, by implication, listen to messengers from the gods, who teach them the importance of right view and wholesome moral living (*Majjhima Nikāya* iii, 178–87). Hell is described as a fire-filled place, filled with excruciating tortures such as having a red-hot iron stake driven through each hand and each foot, and through the middle of one's breast (*Dīgha Nikāya* iii, 183).

The two religious traditions, therefore, seem remarkably close to each other when it comes to the importance of listening to religious teaching and acting

on it. How effective have they been, however, in listening to each other and learning from each other? "Interreligious learning" is a most important concept that became popular in the late twentieth century. For interreligious learning to happen, deep interreligious listening is essential. In addition, this listening must be accompanied by the conviction, or at least the hope, that the other can offer something that will both enrich and challenge the self. The German scholar Michael von Brück said something at a conference of the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies that I have never forgotten: "Dialogical communion with the other is possible only when I recognize the partner as a possible *source* for my truth and salvation, or at least my understanding of my truth and salvation" ("What Do I Expect Buddhists to Discover in Jesus?" in *Buddhist Perceptions of Jesus*, ed. Perry Schmidt-Leukel [EOS Verlag, 2001], 160). I would suggest that this is the kind of ethic that should inform deep interreligious listening. With one possible exception from China, only in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has this kind of interreligious listening entered Buddhist-Christian relations.

## **Buddhist-Christian Encounter: A Historical Perspective**

The encounter between Buddhism and Christianity goes back centuries. There could have been Buddhists in the Christianized countries of North

Africa in the early centuries CE, since Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–ca. 214 CE) mentioned Buddhists in his writings. That he had not listened deeply to Buddhists is apparent in his assumption that the Buddha was a god, worshipped for his holiness. The Church of the East, a form of Christianity that took root in what is now Syria and Iran, sent missionaries toward China after the rise of Islam, in the sixth century CE. They listened more closely to Chinese religion, which included Buddhism. According to Martin Palmer, in his book *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Religion of Taoist Christianity*, they adopted a nonaggressive stance to what they heard and sought to communicate Christian thought through Chinese categories. According to manuscripts found at Dunhuang, they created a synthesis of Dao, Christ, and the Buddha (Piatkus, 2001).

Later Christian missionary initiatives were not so accommodating. Both China and Japan experienced the Jesuits, a Roman Catholic missionary order. In 1549, Francis Xavier (1506–1552) arrived in Japan with some coworkers, and in 1582, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) reached China. At first both groups of missionaries dressed as the Japanese and Chinese did and sought to communicate Christianity through what they knew of Buddhist terminology. In both countries, however, the mission went wrong, at least from the missionary perspective. Risking simplification, the Japanese and the Chinese started to see Christianity as something they

could combine with Buddhism, a position the Jesuits could not endorse. The Jesuits, therefore, changed strategy and started to stress the differences between Christianity and Buddhism. The result was that Christianity was proscribed in Japan at the beginning of the seventeenth century and did not reenter the country until the nineteenth century, when the American Christian presence in the country increased. In China, Christian missionaries were ejected from some provinces (Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China 1578–1724* [Harvard University Press, 2007]).

For the Jesuits, reciprocity and coexistence between Buddhism and Christianity was not possible. They originally listened to Buddhist terminology and attempted to understand it. Their motive, however, was to establish a Christian church at the expense of Buddhism.

The nineteenth-century encounter between Buddhism and evangelical Protestant Christian missionaries in the context of European imperialism was even less accommodating. I will use Sri Lanka as my example. The British gained control over the maritime areas of Sri Lanka in 1796 and over the whole island in 1815. The British administrators were more concerned about consolidating power than learning about Buddhism, although there

were some creditable exceptions. Not so the evangelical Christian missionaries, who arrived from 1805 onward. At first they listened to Buddhist monks in an attempt to understand Buddhism. The Methodist missionaries Benjamin Clough and William Harvard reported, two years after their arrival in 1814, that they had spent much time “conversing in a quiet way, with the most learned priests we could meet” (Elizabeth Harris, *Theravāda Buddhism and the British Encounter: Religious, Missionary, and Colonial Experience in Nineteenth-Century Sri Lanka* [Routledge, 2006], 21). And Buddhist monks, at this point in the century, were willing to talk. They also offered the missionaries hospitality and gave them precious manuscripts.

The aim of the missionaries, however, was not simply to learn. They sought conversions to Christianity, as the Jesuits had done in Japan and China. To cut a long story short, the Buddhists who had offered hospitality to missionaries such as Clough and Harvard gradually realized that their hospitality had been betrayed. The missionaries had only listened to them in order to find arguments that might help them draw people away from Buddhism. Not unsurprisingly, some Buddhists, in defense, rejected

their former code of conduct and moved toward confrontation and competition. This process eventually led to mutual demonization. The missionaries accused Buddhism of being irrational, atheistic, nihilistic, morally impotent, and in league with devil worship. Buddhist revivalists, in turn, accused Christianity of being irrational and nihilistic, and Christians of worshipping a demon-like God (Ibid., 191–204).

Not all the British in Sri Lanka, however, shared the missionary worldview. Some, for example George Turnour (1799–1843), a colonial administrator and a historian, and Robert Childers (1838–76), an Orientalist scholar and compiler of the first Pāli-English dictionary, listened to Buddhists in order to understand, without the wish to convert them. People such as these paved the way for the more mutual Buddhist-Christian listening that happened in the twentieth century. I would like to mention briefly three twentieth-century Christian pioneers: Thomas Merton (1915–1968), Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle (1898–1990), and Aloysius Pieris (b. 1934).

Thomas Merton was an American Trappist monk who called for a dialogue of spirituality between Christian and Asian monastics. His diary of a

visit to Asia, which ended tragically in his death at an interreligious meeting in Bangkok, shows that he had what Christians might call an epiphany, a sudden realization of truth, in Sri Lanka, at the Gal Vihāra (the Rock Monastery) in Polonnaruwa, where three massive images are carved into rock, two of the Buddha and probably one of Ānanda. He described it in this way: “The rock, all matter, all life, is charged with *dharma*. . . . Everything is emptiness and everything is compassion” (*The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* [New Directions, 1973], 234). That he could write this showed how deeply he had listened and learned from Buddhist categories. His vision for a dialogue of spirituality inspired what has now become intermonastic dialogue.

Closer to home for many readers of *Dharma World* was Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle. He was also a Jesuit, this time from Germany, who was injured in Hiroshima at the time of the atomic bombing in 1945. He entered into deep dialogue with Zen Buddhism, practicing under a Zen master. Eventually he was recognized as a Zen master himself. He became utterly convinced that a person could remain a Christian and practice Zen and wrote widely on this theme. In 1968, *Zen: A Way to Enlightenment* was published (Taplinger Publications), followed by *Zen Meditation for Christians* in 1974 (Open Court Publishing). His example and teaching inspired a stream of other Christians to listen to Buddhism and practice Zen meditation. In effect, his life opened the door to Buddhist-Christian dual belonging.

Aloysius Pieris was born in Sri Lanka and entered the Jesuit order at quite a young age. He specialized in the study of Pāli and Sanskrit and was the first Roman Catholic priest to receive a doctorate in Buddhist studies from a Sri Lankan university. He eventually founded Tulana, a center for research and interreligious encounter near Colombo. His life and writings have been characterized by a

willingness to listen, learn, and act in his encounter with Buddhists. One of his most innovative acts of listening has been to encourage Buddhists to interpret Christianity through art for the benefit of Christians. The conviction behind this was that Buddhists who were involved in action for social justice in Sri Lanka alongside Christians could help Christians better understand how their faith could be expressed in an Asian context (*Fire and Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity* [Orbis, 1996], 127–37).

## Deep Interreligious Listening Now

In the twentieth century, the foundation was laid for interreligious listening between Buddhists and Christians that was reciprocal and positive. This is continuing in the twenty-first century. Deep interreligious listening invites us to develop a frame of mind that is open and vulnerable. Such a frame of mind goes beyond dialogue into a zone where deep interreligious learning is possible.

Developing the openness of mind that is needed for interreligious listening is not easy, for either groups or individuals. In Theravāda Buddhism, one of the obstacles to reaching enlightenment is clinging to views, *diṭṭhupādāna* in Pāli. One such view is the belief that one’s own group is right and all other groups are wrong. Such clinging, the texts say, is rooted in craving, not enlightenment.

Theravāda Buddhism also speaks about *papañca*, a word that can be translated as “proliferation” when it refers to the tendency of thoughts to grow and to proliferate in the mind under the influence of greed, hatred, and delusion. One key text, the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, implies that this proliferation can make the thinker the victim (Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda, *Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought* [Buddhist Publication Society, 1971]). In other words, there can come a point in our thought processes when we are no longer in control; we become the victim of our thoughts and therefore of our own delusions. This kind of proliferation, I would suggest, was present in the evangelical missionaries in nineteenth-century Sri Lanka in their conviction that only their view was right. It made interreligious learning through listening impossible.

Most of us probably have a tendency to allow some thoughts to proliferate in our minds, because all of us have preconceptions that cloud our perceptions and make us less able to be truly open to truth from sources outside our own religion. Yet the message of Buddhism is that we need not be imprisoned in this way. We can move toward greater openness. We can be involved in deep interreligious listening. My hope is that both Buddhists and Christians will embrace interreligious listening as an important part of our path toward salvation and enlightenment. □

# Teaching and Learning Attentive Listening

by Kenta Kasai

***Is it a good idea to listen to everything? Isn't it important to have the self-awareness that as human beings we are limited and can't comprehend or accept everything?***

I believe we can say that in Buddhism, the Buddha, practicing bodhisattvas, and other Buddhists are all expected to be deeply attentive listeners. Looking back, we can see that this began when Brahma, a Hindu deity, requested that Shakyamuni preach the Dharma, and he complied. Shakyamuni observed that some people's minds were hardly defiled and they had developed wisdom, enjoyed doing good, and excelled at listening and learning (Mahavagga I. 5. 10). The sutras say that Shakyamuni kept on traveling and teaching the Dharma until his death.

There is every reason to believe that Buddhism values listening, taking into account the existence of the buddhas and deities whose names reveal that they specialize in attentive listening, such as Kannon (Skt., Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World), and Tamonten (Skt., Vaiśravaṇa), whose Japanese name can be translated as “the *deva* [heavenly] king who listens to many teachings.” Kannon is said to perceive the grief-stricken cries of all living things. The phrase *regarding the cries* implies that sensory organs other than ears are needed to listen carefully. This might seem hard to understand at first. But just as we might sense the color red when we eat something very spicy, or that the color blue suggests coolness, our

visual perception interacts with our other senses, even if this is not usually obvious. “Regarding the cries” is an extension of that and can be thought of as a Buddhist suggestion that we are required to use our senses of sight, smell, touch, taste, and intuition to open the possibility for even better listening. Furthermore, for us living in a modern civilization that overemphasizes the visual, it is all the more important to bear in mind those senses other than sight. To pay attention to senses other than sight is to listen to our own inner voice.

On the other hand, it seems to me that Buddhism admonishes us against wanting to listen to everything. Is it a good idea to listen to everything? Isn't it important to have the self-awareness that as human beings we are limited and can't comprehend or accept everything? Even while our ears seem to be open to everything, I consider that sometimes it is better for us to limit ourselves to be concerned observers instead of always trying to give a helping hand.

## Sophia University's Program for Developing Attentive Listeners

For the past several years I have been involved in training “attentive listeners” at Sophia University's Institute of

Grief Care. Sophia is a Catholic university, founded by the Society of Jesus. However, the institute was established with financing from the West Japan Railway Company as compensation for a commuter railway accident in 2005 that killed 107 people. The efforts to establish this institute were coordinated by a Catholic nun, Sister Yoshiko Takaki, who had engaged for decades in an attentive listening program for hearing families' grief, including families bereaved by the 1995 Kobe Earthquake and by that railway accident. Courses of study were established in Osaka and then Tokyo to develop attentive-listening specialists to work with the families of victims of crime, accidents, and natural disasters, and with patients in the late stages of a terminal illness, as well as providing support for medical staff.

This program was modeled on the American educational system called Clinical Pastoral Education, designed for chaplains attached to hospitals and hospices who practice attentive listening and offer medical consultation. The system was introduced in Japan particularly to broaden the practical theological skills of the clergy, but the program was discontinued. Since we realized that there is a limit to the kind of grief care offered only by *Christian* chaplains, the present training program that was started at some universities, including Tohoku University and Sophia, began with developing *interfaith* caregivers or chaplains, and it coordinates professionals from a variety of religions as well as those with no religious affiliation.

*Kenta Kasai is a Research Fellow at the Center for Information on Religion in Tokyo. He earned a PhD in Religious Studies at the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, the University of Tokyo, in 1999. He now teaches at the Institute of Grief Care, Sophia University, as a supervisor for the training of spiritual caregivers. His recent books include Bukkyō shinrigaku kīwādo jiten [Keywords for Buddhism and psychology] (Shunjusha, 2014) and Kea to shite no shūkyō [Religion as care] (Akashi Shoten, 2014).*

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Respect for the care recipient is a requirement for attentive listeners. One must listen while confirming the care recipient's experiences and what sort of values those experiences have formed, considering the setting of those experiences and the detailed facts of the case; for instance, imagining the care recipient's family backgrounds and even the layout of the family home.

In our training program, we caregivers must also be aware of our own values. We all have our own attitudes to life, family, marriage, education, work, and friendship. Because a care recipient's values do not always match our own, we may miss a person's hidden message. For example, I recently became aware that both a nonreligious Japanese caregiver trainee and a devoutly Christian

Japanese trainee are surprisingly bound to a common Confucian value of the parent-child relationship. We can experience some frustration when we listen to the narratives of single mothers or of children who do not take care of their parents. We might feel angry if someone can't forgive a parent for something. We ourselves might not have taken perfect care of our parents and did not know why we were obliged to do so. We had better observe the parent and child as they are.

When listening to care recipients, the caregiver should consider not only the verbal expression of their thoughts but also any meaningful inconsistencies in how they act. For the caregiver who practices attentive listening, not only the sense of hearing but all the other senses

become tools. For instance, a caregiver should notice if a seemingly relaxed and smiling care recipient is clenching a fist or if a seemingly relaxed and smiling woman recipient with a handkerchief is gripping it tightly. If a care recipient's word or act is inconsistent or unusual, questioning it can lead to an important identification of matters.

## When You Stop Listening

Our values are the framework by which we perceive reality. I will give you another example of failing to hear a crucial message.

I have a two-decade friendship as a researcher with Alcoholics Anonymous, a mutual-support group for people with alcohol dependency. It found that a group of *sober* alcoholics can be attentive listeners to other alcoholics. Alcoholics Anonymous has become the model for all kinds of mutual-support groups for persons with substance dependencies as well as for patient and family support groups.

How did alcoholics who have difficulty in managing not only their dependency but also their lives enable themselves to become caregivers capable of attentive listening? This is almost as important as the question of why their family members, friends, coworkers, and religious professionals were unable to listen. Some religious professionals thought they would like to help alcoholics, but few could listen attentively while alcoholics tried to tell first

have chances to hear many such personal narratives, their religious values would have hindered their understanding the nature of alcoholics' predicaments. Many religious professionals, even after hearing many alcoholics' narratives, failed to carefully listen to their narratives about their states of mind. Instead they suggested or persuaded alcoholics to stop bad habits, such as drinking, and the religious professionals failed to change their own ways of listening and response. Furthermore, unfortunately, religious professionals neither received nor sought

training in attentive listening, not only for a lack of personal effort but because no such training was yet available.

The publication of those alcoholics' narratives, with the excellent idea of keeping their identities anonymous, made it possible for the first time to effectively discuss why alcoholics justify (rationalize) their drinking habit despite the many reasons not to overindulge. The narratives' publication, in addition to depicting how low a human being can fall, with detailed description of the physical symptoms and mental and social suffering of alcoholics, also revealed how recovery could begin from that absolute bottom, a topic that could deeply interest religious professionals.

Again, alcoholics were isolated because no one heard their stories. The people close to them expected them to use their willpower and submit to self-examination, and to agree to a strongly moralistic promise of abstinence.

Attempts to keep alcoholics abstinent can fail repeatedly, ultimately hindering efforts to help them. Their identities are shaken between their appraisal as earnest abstinents and condemnation as morally defective when they relapsed.

During the past few years, several famous Japanese singers, actors, and sports figures have been castigated for drug dependency. They have been treated as depraved, and the authenticity of their expressions of repentance has been endlessly questioned. On the other hand, none of them were ever asked what sort of personal experiences they had been through. Our ears are not ready to listen to them yet.

## **Doubts about Debriefing after a Disaster**

Another thing I noticed about failure to listen attentively is the assumption that debriefing (letting out happenings and emotions) will make a disaster victim (and care recipient) feel better. The many disasters that have occurred throughout the world have been valuable opportunities for learning about what caregivers should be mindful of when they listen to disaster victims.

The term *post-traumatic stress disorder* (PTSD) has become familiar and is used in everyday conversation. It was widely thought that disaster victims could be comforted by having them talk in detail about their experiences and feelings immediately following a disaster (psychological debriefing). It was also believed that this can prevent the onset of PTSD as well as other post-traumatic psychological aftereffects. However, psychological debriefing is no longer considered effective, and it may even be harmful to question disaster victims about the hardships they suffered, though the debriefing for the caregiver is proved to be effective.

Then, is it better that religious professionals do nothing when caregivers are

in detail what they had suffered. Even though during Prohibition in the United States, from 1920 to 1933, when people tried a national Christian moral experiment of outlawing alcohol, there was little sympathetic inquiry into what kinds of personal experience led to alcoholism and made recovery difficult. That is why, until the publication of the personal narratives of recovered alcoholics in 1939, we rarely heard about their personal experiences. (The narratives were titled *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism*, often known as "the Big Book," and Big Book Study Groups were named after this title.) Even when alcoholics were heard, their narratives were not made public. It goes without saying that the sufferings of alcoholism are a serious matter of shame and guilt and difficult to talk about with others frankly. Although religious professionals would undoubtedly

not medical experts? Yes, they can provide detailed care in the matter of culture, religion, and values. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network and the National Center for PTSD have published *Psychological First Aid: Field Operations Guide*, which is based on results of clinical research on PTSD as well as of the 9/11 Commission Report on experiences following the 9/11 attacks in New York. On the basis of user experience after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, which left more than twenty-five hundred dead or missing, the second edition of *Psychological First Aid* was published in 2006 with additional details regarding relief programs oriented toward the diverse religious backgrounds of the bereaved families ([http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/pfa/english/1-psyfirstaid\\_final\\_complete\\_manual.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/pfa/english/1-psyfirstaid_final_complete_manual.pdf)). The authors maintain the significance of recognizing the disaster victims' religious needs (rituals and materials): supporting their religious needs enables caregivers to give better care. Unless those needs are met, victims are considered to be at risk.

In *Psychological First Aid*, you will see the emphasis on maintaining familiar environments for victims, including meeting their religious needs (rituals and materials) to remove the recipients from

risk rather than debriefing them about their experience. Caregivers must think carefully about victims' values, lifestyles, and medical care, and respect victims'

lives as a whole based on those values, whether they are elderly people or little children. Even for medical treatment, caregivers should refrain from forcing victims to undergo any unfamiliar and unnecessary therapies. Psychological first aid goes beyond ordinary counseling: it suggests that caregivers ask recipients about their need of religious materials such as candles, a chanting book, or beads, if these were lost in a disaster. The authors recommend asking victims about their religious affiliation and facilitating funerals according to the religion of the deceased. Religious matters should not be neglected even if the survivor is a small child.

There are people everywhere with the knowledge and skill for attentive listening, be they specialists or ordinary people—such a society of attentive listeners I wish to help in expanding. □

# Chaplains and Listening: A Buddhist Perspective

by Yozo Taniyama

***Listening by a caregiver allows care recipients to tell their stories and simultaneously discover their distress and its effects. This also makes it possible for the distress to be managed; the role of the caregiver is to assist this process of discovery.***

Listening forms the bedrock of interpersonal help. In spiritual-care practice, it is impossible (without supernatural powers) to wholly understand the care recipient. Being human beings with finite capabilities, we are incapable of fully grasping what care recipients really seek and what lies beneath what they say, which makes it necessary for caregivers to listen hard, using all of their mental and physical faculties, to what recipients have to say.

## Feeling-Focused Listening

More concretely, listening with all of our mental and physical faculties means using not just the sense of hearing but all five, or six, senses, which include such feelings as compassion, to “listen” to the care recipient. The eyes can register changes in the recipient’s expression and physical movements. The ears can pick up not only the recipient’s utterances but

also changes in tone of voice. The sense of smell may come into play less, but it can still be used to experience with the care recipient, for example, the fragrance of flowers arranged in a vase. Opportunities to use the sense of taste may also be limited, but it is still possible for caregiver and care recipient to chat over a nice cup of tea. The sense of touch can detect the care recipient’s body temperature when one shakes hands. And the heart can empathize with the feelings of the care recipient and also those of the caregiver, while at times also providing inspiration.

As students of Buddhist philosophy readily comprehend, appreciating another person’s feelings requires first and foremost a thorough understanding of the self. The sensory organs enumerated above, including one’s heart, are all one’s own. If one’s own senses are dulled or warped, it becomes impossible to understand accurately those of another. This accurate understanding does not require, however, a level as profound as that known in Buddhism as *nyojitsu chicken*, or the perception of reality as it truly is. The important thing is to recognize the filters through which we view the world, and this entails being aware of our own tendencies in personal relations.

There are those, for example, who feel uncomfortable when talking about certain subjects or with certain people. Provided that we are aware of this, we can ensure that our own feelings of discomfort do not in turn discomfort our interlocutor. For instance, some

*Yozo Taniyama is an Associate Professor at the Graduate School of Arts and Letters, Tohoku University in Sendai, specializing in clinical thanatology and Buddhist welfare studies, and teaches the courses for training interfaith chaplains. He is the author or coauthor of several books on Buddhism and spiritual care. He is a director of the Japan Association for Buddhist Nursing and Vihara Studies and a fellow of the Japan Spiritual Care Society.*

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people may feel comfortable talking to someone of the same age and opposite sex but become nervous when talking to someone of the same sex who is twenty or more years older. This may be because they have not gotten on well with a parent, relative, teacher, or some other individual of the same sex in the past. Writing out our own life history offers one means by which we can identify such tendencies and idiosyncrasies in ourselves. Hard though this may be, doing so can prevent us from causing discomfort in care recipients.

## Listening Is Not Everything

Courses in listening are of various kinds. One particular approach that has gained considerable ground in Japan in recent years is passive listening, where the listener avoids as far as possible entering into conversation and giving advice.

It is certainly safer to listen in complete silence, making the minimum of interjections and repeating only what the other person says, rather than to speak carelessly and make the other person feel uncomfortable or hurt. And if there is little time available, such an approach may be an effective means of building a trusting relationship. However, even robots equipped with artificial intelligence are now capable of passive listening, which is anyway a somewhat unnatural form of interaction.

A chaplain at a hospice in the United Kingdom that I visited last year preferred to use the term *conversation*.

By this he meant conversing with conscious attention to listening—conversation, in other words, where the chaplain serves in a listening capacity—and this approach to listening through conversation struck a chord with me. It is important to get people who are experiencing some form of psychological distress to talk. However, if the conversation is all one way, interaction on a person-to-person level is impeded.

Distance, or detachment from distress, allows one to see the distress objectively within oneself and to stand outside oneself and relativize it. Separated from the self, distress can then be cast away or, alternatively, recombined with the self. Once we realize that “this distress may accompany me, but it is not part of me,” things become a little easier. Listening

by a caregiver allows care recipients to tell their stories and simultaneously discover their distress and its effects. This also makes it possible for the distress to be managed; the role of the caregiver is to assist this process of discovery.

This process can be assisted in various ways, and not simply by passive listening. For instance, if someone has tomato ketchup on his or her face, we might tell the person directly that they have ketchup on their face, but there are also politer ways of drawing attention to the fact in a roundabout fashion. However, it is hard to get the person to notice that they have something on their face if one simply listens to them in silence. Conversation, and in particular conversation with chaplains and other religious professionals, contains

within it the potential to change a person's perspective.

We all have different characters, and our education differs too. The differences are even starker when it comes to professional education. As religious professionals receive especially unique educations, they are well placed to change people's perspectives through conversation if they can apply their distinctive backgrounds. This demands an approach that more closely resembles *shōju* (leading others to the correct teaching gradually and persuasively) than to *shakubuku* (refuting the mistaken views of others in a more direct fashion). Particular acceptance should be shown toward those who do not wish to make any religious commitment. However, attention should be paid to the difference between chaplains and ordinary religious professionals. The goal of religious professionals is to missionize, which means that they intentionally seek to change people's perspectives. On the other hand, missionizing is not the goal of chaplains; instead, they work with care recipients while praying within themselves and

waiting for recipients' perspectives to change. Only when recipients tell them that they want their help because they want to change themselves and their perspective do chaplains intentionally set out to change other people's perspectives.

Another distinguishing feature of the care provided by religious professionals is prayer. Through prayer, people find solace and comfort and also gain a sense of their relationship with a greater existence, and this, too, can lead to a change in perspective.

## Pitfalls When Delivering Advice

Some interpersonal help begins with listening and then moves on to the provision of more concrete support, and this is commonly encountered in health-care work. In the case of counseling, support may consist solely of listening, but advice and guidance may also be provided as part of therapy. The support provided by religious professionals, too, may involve simply listening, but it may also evolve into concrete forms of

religious practice (such as prayer) and the provision of advice and guidance. Unless provided with care, however, advice and guidance can be ineffective and even harm trust, and so caution should be exercised.

Religious professionals must take even greater care than other caregivers when providing advice. This is because their words potentially have greater charismatic effect, and care recipients can exhibit higher than normal dependency tendencies. As anyone who has been in the position of providing advice in practice will know, being of service to a care recipient is a satisfying experience. A caregiver should be careful, though, to avoid wallowing in satisfaction, as the relationship between a caregiver who enjoys giving advice and a care recipient with dependency tendencies can easily evolve into a dominant-subordinate relationship in which the recipient grows ever more dependent and loses his or her sense of independence. This may be what the participants themselves want, but it may have the potential to do harm.

There are a number of ways in which such a dangerous relationship can be avoided, and as I have frequent opportunities to provide instruction to religious professionals, I approach the issue from a religious angle rather than a psychological one. What this means in practice is that I ask my students to be constantly aware of who is the beneficiary of their words and actions. Religious professionals and, more broadly, people of faith have a strong desire to be of service to others. This is a pure and laudable motivation, but it also contains pitfalls because it can lead caregivers to seek satisfaction from their actions, and so give rise to a dominant-subordinate relationship. Even if the advice provided benefits the care recipient, the motivation behind it is orientated toward personal satisfaction. It leads, in other words, to use of the care recipient for the caregiver's own personal benefit. Recognizing

this risk as early as possible makes the caregiver less prone to fall into this trap. Providing advice is, in the terminology of Buddhism, a form of donation of the Dharma, and this requires what is called the triple purity of giving: the giver, the recipient, and the gift must all be pure. If givers lapse into desire, they are no longer pure, and their actions cease to produce benefits for them in this and future existences. Givers must therefore always act with humility.

## Ethical Processes

Having explored how religious professionals should approach listening and the associated acts of prayer and advice from the point of view of their impact on care recipients, I will focus now, from an ethical angle, on the process by which listening evolves into prayer and the provision of advice.

Japanese society has a tendency to regard places of worship, such as Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines, and Christian churches, as private spaces. In contrast, institutions such as hospitals and schools are seen as public spaces, and recent years especially have seen an avoidance of the presence of religious professionals in the public sphere. However, the support work of religious professionals in the wake of the massive earthquake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan in 2011 drew wide acclaim, and following the establishment of a training program for interfaith chaplains at Tohoku University, healthcare professionals in particular have argued that chaplains have a necessary role to play. In public spaces such as hospitals, great importance is attached to ethical processes regardless of the type of service delivered. When religious professionals serve as hospital chaplains, there can arise the suspicion when they pray or offer advice that they are missionizing. I want, therefore, to clarify the process by which listening, prayer, and advising should

be practiced in the public sphere, to ensure ethical propriety.

The process is in fact an extremely simple one. When chaplains start listening or initiate a conversation, they should first obtain the care recipient's consent to spending time with the chaplain. Before praying or providing advice, they should confirm that this is what the recipient wants. And if the care recipient wishes to continue to pursue faith-based activity (an unlikely eventuality according to the case reports on hospice and palliative care in Japan), the chaplain takes the necessary procedures. In the case of conversions in particular, the consent of other key individuals, including family members, should also be obtained.

If prayer and the provision of advice are commenced without first obtaining a care recipient's consent in this way, that person may feel pressured and, depending on the nature of the prayer or advice, uncomfortable and psychologically hurt. The religious professional concerned would also be prohibited from visiting that hospital any longer. (In regions that

have long traditions of chaplaincy practice, such as Europe and North America, the above is a matter of the most basic common sense. In Japan, however, where chaplaincy practice is a much more recent development, we must start with the basics and progress from there.)

One final point that should be emphasized, and one that may be painful for religious professionals to hear, is that religion's relationship with society and government is often strained, making it essential that people of faith act appropriately to assuage society's concerns. Such an approach may be discerned in the Vinaya (a corpus of monastic rules considered to have been first instituted during the lifetime of Gautama Buddha). Flexibility of response may also be regarded as a distinguishing feature of Buddhism, as illustrated by use of the concept of *upāya* (skillful means). In this sense, then, chaplaincy practice in the public sphere should certainly be no more difficult for religious professionals from a Buddhist background than for those from Christian and Jewish backgrounds. □

# Listening: A Practice of Generosity and Healing

by Daijaku Kinst

***Listening requires courage and confidence. This courage is the courage of a bodhisattva who gives fearlessness. . . . To give fearlessness to oneself and others means not to turn away, to stay present for what is happening with all of its complexity, contradictions, and fullness.***

“We vow together with all beings, from this life on throughout numerous lives, not to fail to hear the true Dharma.”

—Eihei Dogen, *Eihei Koso Hotsuganmon* (Words for arousing the vow by Great Ancestor Eihei Dogen)

“Listen carefully, my child, to my instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart.”

—The Rule of Saint Benedict

To listen is an act of intention. It is an act of generosity, of giving. To listen is to attend, to give one's time, one's respect, and one's care to others, and to oneself, so that we might hear what is being expressed. We listen with our ears, our minds, our hearts, our entire body and being. We listen in order to return to harmony. This harmony is not the sound of one note, it is the sound of all being expressing itself—which may seem discordant at times. True listening requires that we drop preconceived ideas and allow “what is” to present itself. I will focus in this essay on our human relationships, but it is important to remember that this listening includes all others: human and nonhuman beings, sentient and insentient, all dimensions of reality. From the perspective of Soto

Zen—the Buddhist tradition of which I am a part—listening to all aspects of life is listening to who we are.

Listening requires courage and confidence. This courage is the courage of a bodhisattva who gives fearlessness (chapter 25, “The All-Sidedness of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World,” in *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, trans. Bunno Kato et al. [Kosei Publishing, 1975]). To give fearlessness to oneself and others means not to turn away, to stay present for what is happening with all of its complexity, contradictions, and fullness. This requires and expresses a courage built from intimacy with one's own being and with the human condition. Such intimacy teaches us that we are a part of an interdependent dynamic whole; we are not an isolated entity. As we come to know and trust—that is, have confidence in—the interdependent reality of our lives, the courage and desire to be present grows naturally, and with it the gift of fearlessness.

In her *Bringing Zen Home: The Healing Heart of Japanese Women's Rituals* ([University of Hawaii Press, 2011], 53), Paula Arai quotes the Soto Zen nun Kito Sensei, who describes the development of courage as the

development of “Fudo's heart.” The fierce and fiery figure of Fudo is emblematic of an unshakable capacity to pursue and express compassion, to be undaunted, to be able not to turn away from any aspect of life. As Kito Sensei notes, such “an accepting heart is fearless.” This acceptance is an important aspect of listening.

The question becomes, then, how do we support the development of Fudo's heart and the courage and confidence that will allow us to listen to ourselves and others? I would like to outline one possible developmental arc, knowing that there may be many others.

First we listen to the Dharma, the Buddhist teachings. We listen so that we might truly hear the Dharma and grow in our capacity to allow ourselves to be changed by it. We listen to our own hearts and minds, and we come to know the ebb and flow of them, the dynamic interdependent nature of subjective experience. As we listen in this way, we come to know what it is to be fully present, and confidence emerges.

This confidence allows us to release the need for an immutable position on which to hang our hopes or self-esteem, or the need to defend one definition of reality. With this confidence there is the flowering of a creative curiosity and a spirit of generosity as we relate to others. This allows a thorough, intelligent form of attending to another.

We give dignity to ourselves and others with our willingness to truly listen. We do not need to colonize or define. We do not need to claim sameness in

*Daijaku Kinst, PhD, is the Noboru and Yaeko Hanyu Professor of Buddhist Chaplaincy at the Institute of Buddhist Studies and is a member of the core doctoral faculty of the Graduate Theological Union, in Berkeley, California. She is ordained in the Soto Zen lineage and serves as guiding teacher of the Ocean Gate Zen Center, in Capitola, California.*

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order to appease the anxiety that arises from a desire to be right. We can allow the other to be other, and at the same time recognize our shared life together. We give to ourselves, and to the other, our and their unique particularity. We also do not rank others in categories of worth or validity.

This is the spirit of the bodhisattva way described by Eihei Dogen (1200–1253) in his fascicle *Bodaisatta Shisho-ho* (*Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi [North Point Press, 1984]). In it Dogen enjoins practitioners to practice generosity and kindness to all beings without regard to category or status. He states that we should act to “benefit all classes of sentient beings” without expectation of reward, knowing that such action “is an act of oneness, benefiting self and others together.” Listening with this spirit recalls the one who listens and the one who is heard to a realization of shared life.

In this way, the art of listening is the art of healing. When we hear another, we join him or her in intimate relationship. In *Bringing Zen Home* (58), Arai notes that her consociates, the Japanese Soto Zen laywomen with whom she did her ethnographic study of healing rituals, described the “deceptively simple act of listening [as] an embodiment of compassion.” This listening is closely related, by these women, to the actions of Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion, sometimes described as the “one who hears the cries of the world.” To be listened to, to be heard, brings with it

a felt sense that one is not alone but is a part of the interrelated web of existence. This changes our experience of self, our experience of others, and our experience of the world.

To hear is a physical act; sound waves impinge upon the small bones of the ear, which vibrate, and from this our brains interpret and build definitions and realities. But the entire process starts with the quivering of tiny bones. When we attend, when we truly hear another, we become intertwined with that other. When we listen and are heard with kindness, we are recalled into a depth of relationship that is healing.

We can think of listening in many ways; in this essay I focus on two of them. The first is listening to someone who is in need of solace, guidance, support. The second is listening as a part of interfaith dialogue. These are distinct, if overlapping, practices.

The American Episcopal priest Margaret Guenther, in her book *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Cowley Publications, 1992) describes the practice of listening to another as the practice of hospitality, of welcoming the stranger. She notes that particularly under trying circumstances, hospitality can mean everything from the ability simply to survive to the opportunity to learn, thrive, grow, and flourish as a person. She also reminds us that hospitality is hard work, and she describes the steps that make it possible. We make ready for guests by preparing the space—inwardly and, as much as possible, in our surroundings. We

reflect on our own need for hospitality and cultivate a posture of humility. This humility gives strength and supports empathy. We take stock of our inner state and our resources and take steps to address any needs we identify—guidance from someone with whom we can be completely honest, rest, good friends, time for our religious practices, appreciation of the many gifts we receive in each moment of our lives. We then set aside our own needs and worries and agendas and welcome a guest with the aim of tending to the person’s needs. We communicate respect and

attention, we welcome the words of our guest and the guest's silence, his or her spoken and unspoken communication. Simple questions asked with care can be helpful; however, the need to know should be set aside. Guenther recommends such questions as "What can I do for you?" This may seem a simple, even trivial, question, but it can open a door to great depths and an awareness of what is needed. Sometimes honestly naming what is unsaid is called for, and stories told and received have particular power. Using these steps, we create an atmosphere in which a person can be deeply heard. Guenther points out that to be heard is to be relieved of a burden, it is healing.

When we take up the practice of listening to another suffering being, we ask ourselves to live generously, to invoke the name of Kannon and to have Fudo's heart. We recall ourselves and those we hope to serve to the healing present in an experience of interrelationship. We allow something new, we listen, as Saint Benedict recommends, with the ear of the heart. When we do this, trust builds and what needs to be heard will be heard. With our presence, our calmness, and our fearlessness, we support the growth of what is needed, which may be unknown to either of us. We recall the speaker into relationship with him- or herself and with the community of beings. All of this we can do one-on-one, in groups, and in our community-wide relationships.

The other realm of listening I would like to address is listening, and being heard, in interfaith settings. The world we live in increasingly requires that we engage fruitfully with difference. This in turn requires skill, particularly skill in listening and communicating. The first principle that is essential in any interfaith setting is respect for the other, for difference, and an awareness of any need to reach a false harmony by eliminating that difference and the sense of dissonance it can evoke.

From this it becomes apparent that we need to develop the ability to rest in ambiguity and the unease that can arise when things are unsettled, when our worlds don't match with others', when the fundamental principles that guide our lives are at odds with others'. The desire to erase these differences, either by attempting to eliminate them or by pretending they do not exist, can be strong.

To listen across differences, we call again on Fudo's heart, the ability to stay settled and undeterred by apparent obstacles to compassion. We return to the practice of hospitality and the core virtues of honesty, generosity, fearlessness, and kindness. We return to our understanding of the interrelated nature of existence, the equality as well as the particularity of all beings. We cultivate the posture of granting dignity to the other and to ourselves. We trust that these encounters will challenge us and can open us more deeply to our own traditions.

This is where confidence is key. With a genuine and deep confidence, we do not need to convince another of the "rightness" of our way, nor do we have to dismiss the beauty that another tradition can present to us. An ethic of diversity thrives in what can seem like paradox—we fully and completely commit ourselves to our tradition and appreciate that others will do the same

to theirs. In fact, the commitment of each member in a dialogue to his or her own tradition can be a primary point of communality and communication. We can listen deeply to another's life of dedication and appreciate the shared experience.

This points to a way of being with others in which a focus on beliefs or ideas of truth is not central. It does not erase difference, but it also does not allow differing truths to foment discord. Instead, what we can honestly point to as shared values becomes central.

Practically speaking, in order to build trust, shared aims and goals are often essential. If we work side by side to rebuild a water reservoir together, serve meals to those who are hungry, or plan for a community celebration, we will build bridges of shared experience that lead to greater intimacy. We will see each other's humanity and the beauty of our lives together.

In this way we will create venues and circumstances in which a habit of respectful listening can take root. As we learn to trust, we can recognize difference without the need for fear. We cultivate the generosity, courage, fearlessness, and confidence that support the growth of genuine listening. We call ourselves to hear the true Dharma as it is expressed in each moment by all beings. This, in turn, can help to heal our world. □

# Remembering Hakuin's Voice of Dissent in Today's Japan

by Masaki Matsubara

***"Yet from what one hears from all the provinces everywhere, the sadness of life lodges itself among the common people. . . . What state of mind is it that allows for the concentration of luxury in one person, while causing many to suffer?"***

Japan's parliament finally enacted security laws in September 2015 that allow the Self-Defense Forces to fight overseas for the first time since the end of World War II, in 1945. This contentious enactment was a centerpiece of the goals of the cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to strengthen Japan's military alliance with the United States. Against unprecedented and historic levels of opposition and protest, the government consistently explained that this particular change in Japan's defense

policy was critical, and pointed to the urgency to address new military challenges in East Asia, particularly from China and North Korea. Creating the groundwork for Japanese involvement in US-led conflicts abroad, the laws created a real danger, marking a significant abandonment of Japan's postwar pacifism. In other words, the laws betray the pacifist provisions in the constitution banning combat overseas, of which many Japanese have been proud. Though the constitution was drafted during the US

*After Zen monastic training with the Rinzai sect in Japan, Masaki Matsubara earned a PhD in Asian Religions from Cornell University. He taught Buddhist Studies and East Asian Languages and Cultures as well as Religious Studies at UC Berkeley (2009–13) and was the BDK Fellow at the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies at Stanford University (2013–14). He is now a Visiting Scholar in the East Asia Program at Cornell University and is a Research Associate for the Contemplative Studies Initiative at Brown University. He is the head priest of the Butsumoji Zen temple in Chiba Prefecture, Japan; supervises the nearby affiliated International Zen Center; and travels between the United States and Japan to lead retreats and seminars.*

occupation, many Japanese have come to regard pacifism as a new, twentieth-century Japanese heritage.

As a historian of religion, I view this particular historical moment with curiosity. Now seems a good time for me as a Zen scholar and practitioner to weigh in on this change by reclaiming the stance of one of the Zen tradition's greatest critics of abusive state power. In doing so, I am reconsidering two things: Japan's formative period of fascism and nationalistic militarism at the beginning of the twentieth century and, probably most important for the purpose of this article, the political criticism by Japanese Rinzai Zen master Hakuin Ekaku (1686–1769) in his

letter “Hebiichigo” (lit., “Snake strawberries”), written in 1754 at the age of seventy, as well as in his painting *Fuji daimyo gyōretsu zu* (A procession of a great lord past Mount Fuji). In particular, what I pay special attention to in both of his works is their shared theme of criticism of the “processions of a great lord” (*sankin kōtai*), which was part of the economic policy of the Tokugawa shogunate (the military regime from 1603 to 1868) in governing the country. I argue that reclaiming this significant aspect of Hakuin is a matter of moral conscience today. What is at stake in our uncritical acceptance of the recent governmental enactment of the security laws and its abuse of power and authority? We must remember that we have a fine heritage from Hakuin in our Japanese Rinzai Zen tradition. Voices from within the Zen tradition give us a moral ground opposing this return to militarism.

To note briefly, “Hebiichigo” is originally a letter Hakuin wrote to Ikeda Tsugumasa (1702–76), the fifth lord of Okayama. There are many versions of it, and soon after it was first published,

the government banned further publication. Based on Hakuin’s keen observations of the social as well as political conditions of those days, the letter urges Lord Ikeda to implement just policies for farmers and the common people. Hakuin criticizes the luxurious lifestyles led by provincial lords and urges them to reduce such unwarranted expenditures.

However, Hakuin’s most striking critique of the Tokugawa shogunate’s political authority refers to processions of a great lord. The shogunate required feudal lords to travel to the national capital, Edo, and spend half of the year there, leaving their families behind as hostages until they returned to their domains. This policy was designed to control the lords by forcing them to expend large sums on costly annual processions to and from their domains. Hakuin fearlessly condemns the processions as a wasteful, as well as extravagant, political system. He states in the letter:

When one watches the *sankin kōtai* processions of the lords of the various provinces, a huge number of

persons surround them to front and rear, bearing countless spears, pikes, weapons of war, horse trappings, flags, and curtain poles. Recently, even for trivial river crossings, depending on the status of the family, a thousand to two thousand *ryō* [gold currency] are used without even thinking about it. In the Tenshō [1573–92] and Bunroku [1592–96] eras when the country was not yet at peace this was an established precautionary procedure. But the Divine Ruler [Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa shogunate] brought order to the world, and now as the various lords go back and forth, there is no one even to shoot a rusted arrow at them. If under the motto “a humane man has no enemies” you take the true precautions of being extremely benevolent, worrying about the people, and governing your domains well, then ten good hereditary retainers to front and rear will do. It will be far more profitable than employing a horde of several thousand insincere flatterers. But if you are wealthy and

powerful and do not bring pain and suffering on the people, how many thousands of people you employ should be at your own discretion. Yet from what one hears from all the provinces everywhere, the sadness of life lodges itself among the common people.<sup>1</sup>

The last line is worth repeating: “Yet from what one hears from all the provinces everywhere, the sadness of life lodges itself among the common people.” Moreover, he states:

I hear from time to time of various easygoing lords who pay out sums of from three hundred to five hundred pieces of gold to buy singing and dancing girls or other so-called women of pleasure from the Kyoto area. They amuse themselves with them for two or three years and then exchange them for other girls, much as they would fans or pipes. There are reports that in some households one-third of the total expenses go for the needs of the women’s quarters. This does not matter so much for a house blessed with a splendid fortune, and possessing an overflow of wealth, but very frequently people not so well provided for will pile up two thousand *ryō* of debts on an income of a thousand *koku*, twenty thousand *ryō* of debts on an income of ten thousand *koku*. Then they will ignore, impoverish, and bring suffering to their hereditary retainers, whose duty it is, when an emergency arises, to ward off the flying arrows and sacrifice their very bones and flesh for their lord. In a time of need these lords will expend their money on people who are unfit even to carry a raincoat box. In the end isn’t it the people as a whole within the domains who suffer? What state of mind is it that allows for the concentration of luxury in one person, while causing

many to suffer? What will happen in the next world? A frightening prospect indeed!<sup>2</sup>

We cannot ask this enough: “What state of mind is it that allows for the concentration of luxury in one person, while causing many to suffer?” This is a very powerful sentence, criticizing lords’ luxurious lifestyles. The lords have many women, and after they enjoy them for a few years, they exchange them for other women, as if they were exchanging fans or pipes. It is also worth pointing out Hakuin’s condemnation of the lords’ extravagant lifestyles as the main reason that farmers starve and riot. After all, he stresses that the most wretched and pitiable people are farmers, describing their uprisings in many parts of the country in those days. He develops his critique of political authority. Again, “What state of mind is it that allows for the concentration of luxury in one person, while causing many to suffer?” This was very brave, revolutionary, and radical in 1754 in Japan. Further, Hakuin states:

The common people day by day grow feebler, month by month become more stunted. It becomes impossible to support a wife and family. Each house moans under the suffering, each family falls into decline, until misery and starvation are everywhere. There is grain in the fields in abundance; thus hatred wells up within. At last there comes a time when life is no longer of any consequence. When things reach this point twenty or thirty thousand men gather together like swarms of ants and bees. Screaming their hatred, they first surround the village head’s house, smash open the doors, and scatter his possessions. If they catch him they will be sure to tear him to pieces. Thoroughly aroused, they end up by storming

the city, entering its gates, and creating a riot. Then the temples within the domains are called upon, and with deception and persuasion they bring things under control. Once peace is restored a spy is sent around in secret to search out and seize the conspirators. Then twenty or thirty men are crucified or executed, and their rotting bones litter the fields. But it must be known that the conspirators are not among the people. They are the official and the village head. . . . If the official imitates an earlier benevolent official and takes into account the quality of the crops each year, investigates what is good and what is bad for the people, sees to it that the high and the low gain profit equally, and shares in the misfortunes and joys of the noble and the base, who will take an evil attitude toward the ruler of the province? Don’t they say that a desperate rat will bite a cat? No, the conspirator is not among the people. How can you say that he is not the official and the village head?<sup>3</sup>

This is his very powerful criticism of the social as well as political conditions of his time. In pointing out that lords’ luxurious and lavish lifestyles were supported through the labors of commoners, he shows his awareness of social inequality. Expressing his sympathy for the farmers’ plight and thus their riots, he even goes so far as to say that “a desperate rat will bite a cat.” With this intense tone, he condemns the lords’ immoral behavior as inexcusable. Lords’ ideal behavior, he emphasizes, would be to eliminate their extravagant lifestyles, trim their frivolous expenses, and turn their primary attention to the common people and to the creation of policies that will benefit them. Hakuin is concerned first and foremost with protecting the common people from political and social oppression.

In all of the powerful quotations above, Hakuin criticizes in an intense, clear tone the ostentatious processions whose enormous cost was ultimately paid by the taxes squeezed from the farmers and common people. His concern about the processions-of-lords system reflects a solid critique of misused resources and of people who ignore human suffering to advance their own power agendas. I have been disturbed in observing the extent to which this very important side of Hakuin has been “missing in action” from contemporary Japan. I am deadly serious in asserting that we have a true, important heritage of criticism of the abuse of power and authority.

Hakuin’s painting of a procession of a great lord past Mount Fuji is not at all merely a religious painting, of the kind usually held up as examples of a highly developed capacity for religious experience or of koan practices. I mean that, in general, Hakuin’s art has been regarded as the visual embodiment of his religious experience (*kenshō* or *satori*), thus often excluding interpretation, explanation, or any verbal expression in favor of immediacy, spontaneity, and freedom. Indeed, the uniquely Hakuin paintings and calligraphy have often been described as “powerful,” “solid,” “profound,” “penetrating,” “settled,” “severe,” and as reflecting his spirituality. For example, *Bodhidharma* [a portrait of the Indian monk who brought Ch’an (Jpn., Zen) to China] is always used as an example of Hakuin’s art. It is always emphasized that the simplicity, power, and depth of its lines, colors, and figure represent the climate of his Zen.

Of course, there are various interpretations of the painting of a procession of a great lord past Mount Fuji as teaching the importance of koan practice, and of the portrait of Bodhidharma. However, I strongly regard these paintings as visual expressions of Hakuin’s political and social critiques. In the procession painting he depicts a lofty, snow-covered Mount Fuji at the center,

and in front of the beautiful Mount Fuji, he depicts the procession of a great lord in extraordinary detail that shows his unusual enthusiasm for the procession. He depicts mounted samurai, riflemen, bowmen, pike bearers, porters, foot soldiers, palanquin bearers, and so on. I argue that this unique painting reinforces Hakuin’s extended political critique of processions in “Hebiichigo.” The painting denounces the government policy and processions of lords, and protests against the ostentatious dignity and wasteful extravagance of this system, all of which placed an enormous burden of suffering on the peasantry. He was a fearless fighter for social justice whose campaign on behalf of farmers resulted in his condemnation of political abuse of power and authority.

His paintings as well as his writings of political and social criticism show that his concern for social justice was not simply an isolated example of who he was. His concern was a dominant theme of his life. His art shows that his moral voice, with political and social critiques of power and authority, must be reevaluated as one of the important parts of who he was. This new reading of Hakuin can be used to examine some of the moral crises of our own times involving abuses of power, injustice, and the many instances of physical and mental abuse we see around us every day. Where is Hakuin’s voice of dissent today?

What about the security laws enacted in September 2015? This enactment will in essence provoke continuing struggles for political, social, and moral justice. Again, reclaiming this aspect of Hakuin rehabilitates our moral conscience. This moral conscience is not based on religious dogma and rituals but on the fundamental moral principles embedded in what we call “religion.” I can only hope that somewhere the lords and shoguns of our day are listening. What is at stake in our uncritical acceptance

of the recent enactment of the security laws and the government’s abuse of power and authority? Hakuin was a voice of dissent. His voice still resonates today as dissent. Everything is at stake in finding voices of dissent in our traditions. Everything. □

## Notes

1. Philip B. Yampolsky, trans., *The Zen Master Hakuin: Selected Writings* (Columbia University Press, 1971), 218–19.
2. *Ibid.*, 217–18.
3. *Ibid.*, 196–97

# Rebuilding a Society That Honors Diversity

Interview with Dishani Jayaweera and Jayantha Seneviratne  
of the Centre for Peace Building and Reconciliation

***The Niwano Peace Foundation awarded the thirty-third Niwano Peace Prize on May 12 to the Centre for Peace Building and Reconciliation (CPBR) in Sri Lanka for its distinguished contributions to peace building and reconciliation there during and after the country's twenty-six-year civil war and for its help in rebuilding society. Dr. Hiroshi M. Niwano, chair of the Niwano Peace Foundation, interviewed CPBR's cofounders, Ms. Dishani Jayaweera and Dr. Jayantha Seneviratne, as follows, on May 15 at the International House of Japan in Tokyo.***

**Hiroshi M. Niwano:** We are honored to present the thirty-third Niwano Peace Prize to the Centre for Peace Building and Reconciliation. You established CPBR in 2002. Could you tell us about the social conditions and issues or challenges you were facing at that time.

**Jayantha Seneviratne:** Before we started CPBR, Dishani and I had worked in an organization called the National Integration Program Unit. It was established in 1997 under the then president of Sri Lanka, Madame Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga. She invited us to give support to preparing a national

*The Centre for Peace Building and Reconciliation (CPBR) of Sri Lanka was founded in 2002 by Ms. Dishani Jayaweera, a former attorney, and Dr. Jayantha Seneviratne, an expert in conflict transformation, who are Sinhala Buddhists by birth. CPBR is a nonprofit organization promoting peace building and nonviolent conflict transformation. It supports personal and societal transformation within and between ethnic, religious, linguistic, and regional communities in Sri Lanka, working at the grassroots, local, and national levels.*

integration policy for Sri Lanka. At that time, an ethnic war was going on in Sri Lanka on a very intense level. We were thinking of a solution. I thought that a good solution would be a federal system for Sri Lanka. We have been campaigning for a federal political solution for the past thirty years. I conducted several workshops, meetings, gatherings, and dialogues, and I am a regular writer for a newspaper. That's why she invited us—me and other seven academics—to come and plan a national policy to end the ethnic conflict by adopting a national integration policy. She asked us to give our support, and we got involved with the National Integration Program Unit. However, in 2001, the government changed and I resigned from that program. The new government appointed its own political people. As we had built deep trust with local communities, people in those communities urged us to continue our work, which is why Dishani

*The award ceremony for the thirty-third Niwano Peace Prize, held at the International House of Japan in Tokyo on May 12.*

opportunity for us to do so. In 2007 we did our first long-term strategic planning.

The first reason for choosing to work with village religious leaders was that we wanted to really work with the grass-roots communities to change their attitude. In Sri Lanka, 73 to 75 percent of the population is villagers. In villages, schoolteachers, parents, and religious leaders play the main roles in bringing about change and influencing people. So we decided to work with the religious leaders because of their influence on parents, teachers, and the larger community.

The second reason for focusing on religious leaders was that our goal was conflict transformation. When we started conflict transformation, we realized that all the knowledge for conflict transformation came from religion. The conflict-transformation gurus put different religious perspectives into a sociological aspect, so peace building and conflict transformation needed all the knowledge and wisdom of religion. This was our second strategic reason for focusing on religious leaders.

The third strategic reason is that the media and teachers have hierarchies, and if we selected them, even if they were transformed, they couldn't do anything without getting permission from within their hierarchies. But village religious leaders have freedom and authority. So we introduced them to conflict transformation, and they then started small initiatives in their own communities to transform conflicts.

They then held intrafaith dialogues on how to apply their religions' teachings to conflict transformation and engaged in dialogues for reflection. They decided that their teachings but not their practice included conflict transformation. Then they tried to lessen the gap between preaching and practicing. That's when we introduced self-transformation as a technique, and that's the moment village religious leaders became responsible for lessening the gap between preaching and

practicing. "If I am wearing the robe of a Buddhist monk; if I am a representative of the Buddha; if the Buddha preached this and if our community is not practicing it, who is responsible?" That is a big question we've brought into intrafaith dialogues to really reflect on. So to lessen the gap between preaching and practicing, religious leaders developed action plans and started to preach conflict transformation in their temples, including Hindu temples, mosques, and churches.

**Niwano:** In a way, is that one of CPBR's main activities, which you have already established as programs?

**Jayaweera:** Yes. There are four main programs. One is an interfaith program, in which we are working closely with

and I started CPBR in 2002. Dishani worked at NIPU as a program officer, and that is where she started her peace building journey.

**Dishani Jayaweera:** As two Buddhist Sinhalese, we really want to engage with the majority Buddhist community to promote power sharing. In a way, the minority is barred from sharing power, and the majority is the challenge. So in our first or initial stage, we worked with Buddhist clerics to really understand why they had become pro-war campaigners.

After working with them, we realized there was a huge opportunity for the religious leaders to initiate this dialogue. The problem was that nobody was engaging with them. So here was an

200 leaders of four religions and close to 350 community leaders of all faiths. So these groups set up interfaith dialogue centers to institutionalize interfaith culture on the community level. It's not just to do dialogue, it's how we develop a system to take action.

With the second program, through interfaith dialogue centers, the leaders are conducting many activities connected to the interfaith program, creating a national reconciliation program, which we call NRI. Under the NRI program, communities present recommendations for reconciliation to the state government through our interfaith dialogue centers. There's a national reconciliation program. We are promoting those recommendations to take into the policy discussions.

The third program is our government's recent establishment of the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation, with which we are conducting a program to train government officials as reconciliation promoters on the regional level. In the regions, we have divisional secretariat officers. In every divisional secretariat, there are national integration officers and development officers, but they never get any training for peace building or reconciliation. So we are conducting a pilot project with three divisional secretaries, training them, and with them we are developing a program for the state to implement on the regional level.

The fourth program is with youth, whom we call young visionaries. They include two youth groups: the Voice of Youth (VOY) and the Voice of Image (VOI). We are using photography to initiate a dialogue process among youth. They will be taking photos of their villages. Their first theme is "Our Village: Our People." They come from different villages that are predominantly Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, or Christian.

We now have fourteen groups with a total of 175 young photographers. They are victims of war or tsunamis or

are economically in very difficult situations. They never ever imagined being able to use professional cameras. So in one way it is empowerment, using technology and art and dialogue together. The second thing is that young people have taken up arms many times because they had no way to express themselves. So we are giving them cameras to take pictures of what they can see and contribute to social justice in a more productive manner.

VOI have taken the "Our Village: Our People" photographs. VOI and VOY are setting up exhibitions in their communities and inviting fellow villagers to come and see them. Then they are initiating a dialogue to discuss the issues they are facing in day-to-day life. Following the dialogues, they are picking one or two issues on which to take actions. Religious leaders in those communities will support the youth groups in setting up exhibitions and invite people, including the important people, and then it's like harmonizing different energies.

Normally the young are reluctant, but here they are understanding how religious leaders can be supportive in their mission, and on the other hand religious leaders are getting an opportunity to understand what youth can do to contribute. They are talking about our world issues. Then they realize that if we come together, we can do things together. That's the psychology we want to create in villages.

**Niwano:** I see. As a former attorney and as a professor, what do you both think is necessary or essential for reconciliation in Sri Lanka?

**Seneviratne:** The long-term problem with the Sinhala people or Tamil people or Muslim people since 1948, which is when we gained our independence from Britain, was created by policies introduced into our nation by local politicians then. Those policies are causes

of political conflict. Our state-building process is largely focusing on three main concepts.

One such concept is held by national politicians who think Sri Lanka should be for Sinhala Buddhists only. We call that a homogenization policy. For example, in 1956 the government made Sinhala the country's only official language, to the exclusion of English and Tamil. In my country, Tamil, Hindu, and Muslim people all speak Tamil, and they were frustrated. Sinhala people were happy because their language received precedence. Tamils were not happy. There are so many bills passed by the parliament against minorities.

A homogenization system is not relevant to us at CPBR and not suitable for our country. We are promoting the

concept of heterogenization. Minorities also have very long histories. They also have very old and strong cultures. Some minority people are also very distinguished citizens. In 1972 Sri Lanka had a chance to create our own constitution, our first republican constitution, but with that constitution the politicians made Buddhism the state religion. Tamils and Muslims asked for devolution of the power system but were totally ignored.

With the 1972 constitution the politicians established a very strong central governmental system, which is the second concept that the government introduced. We are totally against a centralized system and are promoting power sharing. The government completely excluded the Tamil minority from the system, and that's the main reason for the conflict. That's why Tamils are asking for separatism, to make their regions autonomous. In 1975 they formed separatist political parties. When the government tried to totally suppress them, they took up arms. They started fighting the government in 1983.

The third concept the government is trying to introduce is standardization programs. In Sri Lanka, when the government gives jobs, promotions, land, or whatever, they prioritize the hierarchical system. Sinhalese always get the jobs and others are excluded. We are promoting not standardization but diversity and multiculturalism, creating opportunities for all.

**Jayaweera:** When it comes to the social and cultural situation, there are no common safe spaces for diverse people to come together to connect with each other. We have Sinhala Buddhist schools, Muslim schools, Christian schools, and Sinhala Buddhist villages, Hindu villages, and Muslim villages.

On the other hand, the core of our issues is very political. It is connecting to state power. Our system is very centralized. Since centralization is the

root cause of these divisions, the effect is polarization. These are the two main issues we are trying to address.

For hundreds and hundreds of years we have lived together, but people of different faiths rarely stop to sit and talk, and when they do talk, they don't really communicate. This allows politicians to manipulate us. So we are creating safe spaces for people to come together and to communicate and speak to understand each other's cultures, beliefs, values, needs, fears, aspirations, and hopes. Then to discuss the issues they are facing in day-to-day life. Then bring their ideas to a national level as a collective voice. We can advocate with them and lobby to introduce their recommendations into discussions of national policies.

For the very first time in Sri Lankan history, from the north, east, south, and west, communities and people of four religions came to the capital together to present their recommendations to the government on July 10, 2015. They named it the "People's Forum." More than two thousand people came together. This was one of the greatest achievements of our interfaith dialogue centers.

**Niwano:** One of CPBR's policies is to effectively utilize women's capabilities. What in your views are the roles women can play, or you expect them to play, based on women's characteristics, and what are their roles in contributing to the settlement of issues and to peace building and reconciliation?

**Jayaweera:** I think women can play a very significant role if we can create that safer space. I am a strong believer in womanhood; I think the first step in creating a safer space for women is not to promote things against womanhood. The first step is letting women celebrate and appreciate their own womanhood.

Women themselves are strengthening the attitudes and prejudices and

stereotypes that society is giving to them, but if they can do the opposite, they can feel very proud of who they are, and then there will be a very safe space inside themselves to build up inner power as women to stand up as women.

Initiated discourse about the system lets women understand it's not about their husbands' problem or their male colleagues' problem; it's a systemic issue. Men are also victims, so there's a need for compassion. That realization can guide us to start teamwork. Women and men together.

Because of social stereotypes, women tend to think men must be right. Or they are the problem. Many women office workers are very talented and committed and can work just as well as men. But unfortunately, they have had to quit because of their children or for other reasons, because the organization is designed by men. So that's why last year we created a sister organization of CPBR called "WOMAN," as a separate place and space for women. And we started a women religious leaders' interfaith program. And we are planning to start many initiatives with young women and community leaders connecting sustainable living and peace building along with visual literacy, art, and creativity.

I could see the difference when I started working with women's groups, a totally different way of looking at things and doing things. Things are not complicated, are simple, so you can do things, and that's why I can see that women's groups can play a significant role. But you need to create a safe place inside and outside and let women be compassionate and not competitors with men. That's the psychology we want to create. I am dreaming of a day—women designing cities or villages. How it would be? Women leading spirituality. How it would be? Women designing economic systems? How it would be. Yes, we are dreamers. □

# Welcoming the Chinese to Religions for Peace

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.*

## Seeking Chinese Participation

As we were preparing for the First World Assembly of Religions for Peace, in Kyoto in 1970, we greatly hoped that delegates from China would also take part. At the time, however, China was still in the throes of the Cultural Revolution, and we had no idea what the situation was like for religious people there. It goes without saying that we had no way to contact them. After the Kyoto assembly, the board members of Religions for Peace asked me whenever we met at its meetings if I could manage to go to China and talk to religious leaders there, since we could hardly speak of ourselves being a world assembly if there were no representatives from a country with more than a billion people.

It was at that very time, in the spring of 1974, that a letter addressed to me arrived from China, inviting me to visit that country and see for myself what was happening there. It bore the names

of Mr. Liao Chengzhi, president of the China-Japan Friendship Association, and Mr. Zhao Puchu, president of the Buddhist Association of China. Mr. Zhao was a renowned calligrapher, and he had visited Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters twice in the past. This coincidence seemed to me like the unparalleled providence of the gods and the buddhas. At that time, however, China was in the midst of a political campaign criticizing both Confucius and Lin Biao, Mao Zedong's designated successor, who had staged a failed coup three years earlier.

Normal diplomatic relations between Japan and China had been restored in 1972, but Japanese private citizens still could not visit China freely. To avoid making any careless mistakes, I made a point before I left of attending a lecture by an expert in Chinese studies. All I heard was, "You mustn't say that over there" and "You shouldn't touch on that kind of subject." All the same, I told myself, "However glibly I talk, it will soon be very obvious that what I am saying is not my true thoughts. What is the point of going to China if I can't speak frankly? My mission will fail if I'm not open about my real feelings."

Chinese people of faith talk about their experiences. They spoke rather reservedly, but the wounds inflicted by the Cultural Revolution, and the depth of those wounds, were very apparent.

I was treated with the greatest hospitality, almost too great. However, when the interpreter assigned to me repeatedly said, "The teachings of Confucius are bad, they are just for the bourgeoisie," I replied, "Can something that has been taught and followed throughout Chinese history suddenly be declared bad and discarded? I am sure the teachings of Confucius are engrained in your own mind. I don't think something that lies so deep in the hearts of people can be changed, even through revolution." He made no attempt to answer. However, several years later the teachings of Confucius were declared to be worthwhile to China, and the sage was rehabilitated.

The Second World Assembly of Religions for Peace was to open in Leuven, Belgium, in four months' time. In China, I spoke as persuasively as I could about it to the Chinese religious leaders. "Today, unless people of religion around the world put aside their differences of nationality and denomination, no nation can be assured of peace. You are not alone. You, too, can protect the peace of China by speaking to the world through the World Conference of Religions for Peace."

The Chinese religionists listened, nodding many times. But judging from their comments, which included the mention of Catholic missionaries who came to China from abroad in the past and were revealed as spies, I felt that more time would be needed before Chinese delegates would take part in the world assembly.

However, we did not give up. Dr. Homer Jack, secretary-general of Religions for Peace, kept up his contacts with the Chinese embassies in the United States and Canada and with the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations,

urging that a Chinese delegation attend the next world assembly. The Japanese committee of Religions for Peace did likewise, contacting the Buddhist Association of China and the Chinese Embassy in Japan. This long effort eventually bore fruit.

In July 1979, just before the Third World Assembly of Religions for Peace was convened in Princeton, we received a request from China for more information about Religions for Peace. I immediately set out for Beijing. Mr. Zhao came to meet me and told me, "We would very much like to take part in the Third World Assembly as delegates. It will be the first time for us to attend this kind of world assembly and we look to you for guidance." Thus Chinese participation was finally secured.

Princeton is in New Jersey, almost midway between New York and Philadelphia. It takes just over an hour

Since there was as yet no agreement about direct flights between Japan and China, I could not fly between Tokyo and Beijing. I flew first to Hong Kong, then took a train to Guangzhou (Canton), and from there flew to Beijing. I was met at the airport by Mr. Zhao and Mr. Sun Pinghua, chief secretary of the China-Japan Friendship Association.

Though this was a time when Buddhist priests and other people connected with religion were all being forced to work in the countryside, I made a strong request when I arrived in Beijing to meet religious leaders. Though the common perception outside China was that religious buildings had all been torn down and there were no religious believers at all left in China, thanks to the efforts of Mr. Zhao a meeting was arranged with representatives of Buddhism, Islam, Daoism, and Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant. Seeing us, Japanese reporters based in China expressed their surprise, saying, "So there are still religious believers in China." Mr. Zhao also remarked that this was the first time he had heard

to drive the fifty miles from New York to Princeton. In contrast to the forest of high-rise buildings in New York, Princeton is a quiet town, with trees and lawns covering much of it. Princeton University, established nearly 250 years ago, occupies more than half of it.

The Third World Assembly opened on August 29, 1979, in Miller Chapel at Princeton Theological Seminary, next to the university's campus, with 350 delegates from forty-seven countries. Its main theme was "Religions in Struggle for a World Community," so Chinese participation for the first time was particularly symbolic. No one would dispute that the people of the world are part of a community that shares the same destiny. To achieve such a community we must break down the walls that separate our own hearts and minds from those of others and spread the struggle to overcome egoism, from individual to society and from nation to nation.

Religions for Peace seeks to have people of religion work together for peace, overcoming not only religious differences—so that they can respect religions other than their own—but also

differences in ideology and political systems. During the nine years since the Kyoto assembly, when we were trying to achieve Chinese participation, many people said it was impossible and would all come to nothing. But we never gave up, and this softened Chinese hearts.

The Chinese delegation was led by Mr. Zhao, and its ten members included Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim representatives. They were all warmly welcomed by religious leaders from around the world.

Passionate discussions continued from early morning till after eleven at night. During this time, the Chinese delegation put forward a proposal to their Japanese counterparts. "As a first step to abolishing all nuclear weapons, why don't we ask, in the name of Religions for Peace, the leaders of those countries that have nuclear weapons to promise that their country won't be the first to use them." After the Japanese delegates met and discussed this serious proposal, it was decided to submit a joint proposal with China at the plenary meeting. However, the Soviet representatives firmly opposed the suggestion, saying

that it would be a better idea to call for the cessation of nuclear tests in the atmosphere. After a great deal of discussion, however, the Sino-Japanese proposal was accepted unanimously.

## The White House

The ninth day of the assembly was designated "Washington Day." Very early that morning, all the delegates boarded several buses and set out for Washington, DC, in heavy rain from a hurricane that had raged overnight, and arrived after a five-hour drive.

We conferred with a number of powerful senators inside one of the Senate office buildings, explaining the activities of Religions for Peace. After this we set out for the White House. On arrival we were welcomed by President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn. The president was a fervent Christian, having been baptized when he was eleven. Whenever he had to make an important decision that would determine the course of the nation, he would always seek God's guidance. Smiling, he extended his arms to each of us as he spoke.

He said, "It has been reassuring for me to hear how you, representing religions from forty-seven countries, have been conferring seriously together to ensure the existence and continuation of humankind, and how you have been working on a daily basis to achieve your great purpose. Perhaps your greatest task is to educate leaders, religious leaders of course, but also political and business leaders and those from other fields, to work for world peace. I pray for your success."

Some said that President Carter was not a particularly successful president in terms of his economic policy and American-Soviet relations. There was also criticism that détente allowed the Soviet Union to gain nuclear superiority. However, he stuck to his belief in peace, facilitating the Camp David Accords that brought peace between Egypt and Israel and also arms export controls. Since leaving the White House, he has continued to work actively for conflict resolution.

The Third World Assembly ended on September 7, having achieved a good

number of results. For me, though, the most memorable meeting was with Mr. Zhao when we both found a moment to unwind and talk in the midst of the busy assembly schedule. Mr. Zhao was very soft-spoken. He told me, "This is the first time for me to visit America, and what has especially impressed me has been the single-minded purpose of the religious leaders gathered here. They are of different nationalities, different races, different languages, and different beliefs, yet they all work together, deeply in earnest, from various directions to achieve world peace. Seeing this with my own eyes has left a deep impression on me."

I had something, too, that I wanted to convey to Mr. Zhao. "When I was invited to your country five years ago, I heard your thoughts about the aftermath of World War II. I was deeply touched by what you said. When I apologized for the great damage my country did to yours during the war, you and your colleagues said to me: 'China and Japan have had friendly relations for two thousand years. In view of that expanse of

time, the recent discord is just a temporary occurrence, like a marital quarrel. And it's thanks to what happened then that the Chinese were able to lead the revolution to success.' I was struck then by how big-hearted the Chinese are. You have made me very aware that it is this way of thinking that is essential in a conference of religious people from around the world, and it is what gives rise to true peace.

"No, Rev. Niwano, it is you who have taught us something by your own example, and that is that if people have a great purpose and devote all of their energy to it, it will be achieved."

I said, "I can do nothing alone. When people of religion from around the world are of one mind, the gods and the buddhas have shown us what great power people of religion have."

Mr. Zhao said, "In China, too, we have the teaching that if large numbers of people act following a single principle, they will be successful. However right the principle, nothing will happen if people remain silent. We must all set to work together."

## The Templeton Prize

Something else occurred at the Princeton assembly that gave me a great sense of unity and solidarity, and that was when Dr. Jack announced that I had been selected as the recipient of the Templeton Prize for that year and that the award of £80,000 would be donated to Religions for Peace. Seeing everyone as delighted for me as if they were themselves receiving the prize made me feel that the award had actually been made to all people of religion around the world.

The Templeton Prize for "affirming life's spiritual dimension" is presented to people of religion who have worked energetically in innovative ways to breathe fresh life into the religious world. Though not widely known in Japan, it was established by Dr. John M. Templeton, an American-born British

financier and economist, with the idea of honoring those who have devoted themselves to spiritual progress. “It is strange,” he noted, “that there is no Nobel Prize for religion, the most important of all human endeavors.” In fact, the Templeton Prize has been called “the Nobel Prize for religion” in both the United States and Europe. A committee of nine judges selects one person each year from those nominated from various countries. Past judges have included former US president Gerald Ford, Queen Fabiola of Belgium, Demetrios I of the Greek Orthodox Church, the banker Mr. Edmund de Rothschild, and from Japan, Mr. Masakazu Echigo of ITOCHU Corporation and Rev. Kosho Ohtani of Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha of Japanese Buddhism. Among previous prize winners are Mother Teresa and Chiara Lubich, who founded the Focolare Movement to bring Christ’s love to all the people of the world.

Realizing just how renowned the Templeton Prize was, I understood just how unworthy I was to receive it.

In fact a similar thing had happened to me four years previously. I had received a letter from Meadville Lombard Theological School, affiliated with the University of Chicago, saying that they wanted to confer an honorary doctor of laws degree on me. I declined, saying that I was not a suitable candidate for such an honor. After all, I had no more than an elementary-school education and no academic knowledge whatsoever. What I had done in my life was not more than what is expected of a person of religion. However, the people around me urged me to accept, in recognition of the spiritual progress of Rissho Kosei-kai’s membership as a whole. This gave me pause. I came to the conclusion that I would be happy to accept the degree if it was to be awarded to me on behalf of all those individual members of Rissho Kosei-kai who had put the Buddhist teachings into practice since its founding and who had

attested the truth of those teachings through their own experience.

The degree was awarded on March 5, 1975, in the Great Sacred Hall during a ceremony marking Rissho Kosei-kai’s thirty-seventh anniversary, by Dr. Malcolm Sutherland, president of Meadville Lombard Theological School and my colleague from Religions for Peace, before an audience of thirty-five thousand members and invited guests from various fields of endeavor. Dr. Sutherland said, “Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, global citizen and emissary of religious cooperation and mutual understanding, you are held in great affection, not only by members of Rissho Kosei-kai but also by Mormons in Utah, members of the Church of England in Canterbury, Roman Catholics in the Vatican, Vietnamese Buddhists, and Protestants in Heidelberg. You possess a humility, indicating that what you have managed to achieve is nothing compared with the great problems facing the world. You are enthusiastic for your own religion but at the same time tolerant of others. And there is no one

who has worked more untiringly than you to create a basis for world peace through religious cooperation.”

The “you” being referred to here was not me as an individual. All I had done was to work in the knowledge that nothing can be accomplished by one person alone but that one person was needed to take the first step. What I was today was due only to the enthusiastic support of large numbers of people. The one being addressed as “you” was none other than all of them. It was in this frame of mind that I shared the joy of the award with all the members.

## Following the Path without Hesitation

The following May of 1976, there was another delight for members. I was chosen as the recipient of the first Uniquist Schweitzer Award, presented by the editorial board of *Uniquist*, a journal associated with the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), with the agreement of Albert Schweitzer’s family, to commemorate the centenary of

the birth of the “jungle saint.” This, too, was nothing other than a recognition of Rissho Kosei-kai members’ commitment to peace.

Dr. Schweitzer was a saint who dedicated his life to medicine, building hospitals and treating the sick in the interior of Africa. The award that bore his name was for people of religion who had devoted themselves to peace. Members of Rissho Kosei-kai were continuing to serve quietly in their local communities and were selflessly working on projects like the donation of relief supplies to those suffering from poverty in Southeast Asia. I could only bow my head to them in admiration.

Members’ activities further developed and extended more broadly throughout the world, with contributions from ordinary people: digging wells in Bangladesh, constructing hospitals in India, erecting vocational training schools in the Philippines and Indonesia, sending medical teams to the Thai-Cambodian border region, and providing food aid to the Turkana region of Kenya. There were many people who

watched over and appreciated the work of the volunteers.

When I received the Templeton Prize I accepted it not for myself but on behalf of both the members of Rissho Kosei-kai, who work so passionately to bring Buddhism as a practiced living religion to as many people as possible, and my colleagues in Religions for Peace, who devote themselves to interreligious cooperation for the sake of peace. This prize meant that the dedication of people from around the world was being recognized. It was for them, and I attended the awards ceremony as their representative.

The ceremony was held at Windsor Castle, near London, in April 1979. The castle has a commanding view over the River Thames and has been the seat of English monarchs for nine centuries. In one of its beautiful rooms, and in the presence of Dr. and Mrs. Templeton and the American-born violinist Yehudi Menuhin, among others, the Duke of Edinburgh, husband of Queen Elizabeth II, handed me the certificate describing the award, a commemorative medal, and a check for £80,000. “I hope the check

is inside,” joked the duke, holding up the envelope to the light. He seemed very approachable and friendly. He held out his hand to me, saying, “I am very happy to be able to present the seventh Templeton Prize for the first time to a Buddhist,” and he went on to ask me many questions about Rissho Kosei-kai. He seemed particularly interested in the fact that a new religious group like Rissho Kosei-kai was promoting interreligious cooperation with established religious organizations. He commented with a smile, “Christianity, too, must learn the spirit of interreligious cooperation from Buddhism.” I was surprised by how much he knew about Rissho Kosei-kai, which he must have been told about by those around him.

Two days after the ceremony at Windsor Castle, I gave an address at a public ceremony in the Guildhall, London. Standing before an audience of more than a thousand people, including famous religious scholars from Europe and America, I spoke about the Three Seals of the Dharma, the essence of Buddhist teaching. I said, “The Buddha explained the transience inherent in existence, the inevitability of aging and death; but he did not stop there. Instead, he taught that, since all things are constantly altering, people must exert their best efforts at every instant of life. . . . I interpret the awarding of the Templeton Prize to me as encouragement from God and the Buddha to continue on the path I have followed thus far.”

At the end of my speech, the audience rose to their feet and applauded warmly. Then Mr. Leo Tindemans, a former prime minister of Belgium, ascended the dais and greeted the audience. He spoke to the effect that just as great oaks can grow from tiny acorns, a great doctrine gradually evolves from a basic idea that is amplified and tested in the crucible of life. I remember the embarrassment I felt hearing his words.

*To be continued*

# The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

## Chapter 25

### The All-Sidedness of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World (5)

*This is the 126th installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.*

**TEXT** But the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World would not accept it.

Again the Bodhisattva Infinite Thought addressed the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World: "Good sir! Out of compassion for us, accept this necklace."

**COMMENTARY** *Out of compassion for us.* The bodhisattva Cry Regarder clearly does not accept the necklace because he feels no need for a token of gratitude for what he has done in an overwhelming spirit of pure compassion.

However, there is a problem with this. Just as Cry Regarder's compassion is pure, so too is the feeling of the Bodhisattva Infinite Thought in wanting to repay the blessing.

If Cry Regarder ultimately does not accept the necklace, that pure feeling of gratitude will go unanswered. His not accepting the wholehearted expression of goodwill would be too regrettable to bear. Therefore, the phrase "out of compassion for us" expresses in large measure the feeling of "please do not disappoint us, don't leave us dispirited." Today we can also easily understand this feeling.

However, without understanding this particular Indian way of thinking, it may be difficult to grasp the true meaning of these words. In India there is a fixed way of thinking that one does not just make, but rather is *allowed to make*, offerings to religious groups or persons. It was that way long ago, and this thinking remains strong even now. According

to this view, making offerings allows us to accumulate merit for ourselves. As a result, when bhikshus and others from Tibet, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar (formerly Burma) make pilgrimages to Buddhist holy places in India, they need to pay for little other than transportation.

Given this Indian sentiment about offerings, the phrase “out of compassion for us” includes in large measure the sense of “please do not turn away from our desire to accumulate virtuous deeds” or “please take pity upon us and give us the opportunity to acquire merit.”

Be that as it may, the feeling of the Bodhisattva Infinite Thought in repaying an obligation and offering sincere gratitude, even asking the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World to accept it, saying “out of compassion for us,” is something that we today ought to try to appreciate fully.

When we observe recent social conditions, we note that the idea of a debt of gratitude seems to weaken day by day. Why is it that of the wonderful ideas passed down to us from long ago, this particular idea of being indebted to someone has fallen away conspicuously?

Unless we ascertain the reasons for this, rectify that which should be rectified, and adapt ideas of obligation or gratitude to our age, we might have reason to worry that something elegant and graceful in our human existence will be increasingly lost. So, since we are reading the story of the Bodhisattva Infinite Thought offering a necklace in repayment of an obligation, let us inquire into the matter.

I assume the concept of obligation originated from a serious consideration of the relationship between heaven and earth and human existence. If we awaken to the truth that all things are interrelated and interdependent, which arises from what is described in the Buddha Dharma as the truth that “all things are devoid of self,” then, whether or not we make an effort to think about it or feel it, there will naturally spring forth a feeling of gratitude and the idea of debts of gratitude.

First, let us consider the connection between ourselves as human beings and everything else in the universe. Human beings, like all other living beings on Earth, cannot live without the light and heat of the sun. It has even been proved that the moon not only affects natural phenomena, such as the ebb and flow of the tides, but also has a direct relationship with human physiology. At first sight, the other heavenly bodies seem unrelated to us, but this is not true at all. We are related even to heavenly bodies too distant to be seen with the naked eye. For example, the cosmic rays emitted by explosions of novas and supernovas far beyond the Galaxy, as they “wander” incessantly throughout the universe over millions and tens of millions of years, fall unnoticed upon Earth day and night, greatly affecting humans and animals, and causing mutations.

Human beings are deeply connected with all things and phenomena on Earth. This is directly indicated by the fact that much of the human body is composed of water, an inorganic substance, and that without water the human body cannot survive. Moreover, the other thirty elements that compose the human body—carbon, nitrogen, calcium, and phosphorus, to name a few—are all furnished in one form or another by the organisms and inanimate objects of Earth.

Plants provide the oxygen that is absolutely essential for human survival, and 90 percent of that element is furnished by vegetable microorganisms in the oceans. This means that in the ocean, small plankton and algae, which we have never seen, sustain our lives.

If we probe more deeply, it should become clear that even the human body itself is not a permanent entity, but an assemblage of various forces or energies. We might think we are living under our own power, but our lives are sustained by many invisible things.

We can understand the intimacy of these relationships still more clearly when we look at human relationships. Just by considering the origins of the food we eat and the clothes we wear, we can recognize the breadth, closeness, and complexity of human relationships.

As the world progresses, and as the structure of society and human livelihood grows more complex, these links grow wider and become more complicated. This expanded sphere and growing complexity of human relationships actually seems to be a major reason why people today tend more and more to forget the idea of indebtedness for favors they receive.

Long ago in Japan when the social structure was less complex, clothing was made of yarn spun and woven by the people who wore it. Even in nonfarming households, other than rice, each family produced its own food. Every person had a role in taking care of others. People felt grateful to their parents for bringing them into the world and for providing the essentials of life; to their lord for security; to farmers for rice; and to teachers for instruction in reading,

writing, and ethical principles. That is why people were able to feel gratitude for such obligations strongly and deeply.

But as I mentioned earlier, because of society's complexity and breadth, people today do not know precisely to whom they should feel obligated, so their awareness of obligations and their desire to express gratitude for favors received have weakened.

However, whatever remarkable progress humankind makes in social structure and lifestyle, if gratitude lessens within the human spirit, people will hardly seem to progress spiritually. An imbalance arises if spiritual progress does not accompany social progress, and this imbalance brings misfortune.

Now is the time when we ought to take a second look, with clear wisdom and perceptive eyes, at how great the forces are that sustain our existence. If we do this, we will develop a fresh sense of obligation, and gratitude will surely well up within our hearts.

Perhaps a sense of obligation has also been neglected because traditional morality tended to force people to feel obligated, possibly provoking a backlash. This is understandable, and besides, a sense of obligation must be spontaneous. If parents say to their child, "We are the ones who gave birth to you and raised you," the child might resent this and think, "Who asked you to do that?" Similarly, if a large company is arrogant with subcontractors, as if to say, "You have work because we pass it along to you," the subcontractors will surely feel like saying, "But you also profit from the work we do."

If one fully awakens to the truth that "all things are devoid of self," then the desire to make other people feel grateful will surely never arise. On the contrary, one will feel within oneself insurmountable debts of gratitude to other living beings. Therefore, those who boast about favors granted to others have still not truly awakened to the truth that "all things are devoid of self," and have forgotten their debts of gratitude to other living beings. These people are egotists and must recognize that such egoism will always provoke a reaction.

A debt of gratitude is something we feel spontaneously and cannot be made to feel. What should we do when we feel obligated?

First of all, we should feel deeply thankful. Expressing deep gratitude means discarding the "lesser" self and achieving selflessness. Accordingly, it means that our human nature has been elevated all the more.

If by doing this, all people recognized their obligations to one another and were thankful to one another, this alone would make the world a brighter, more harmonious place. Surely people can imagine how different a world would emerge compared with our present society, where everyone

insists on their own interests and flaunts their own rights.

Second, in order to show gratitude to others, we must live an honorable life. Living an honorable life is a way to repay the debts of gratitude for all the forces that give us life, and it also gives joy to those who have done us favors, so it is an honorable way of repaying debts of gratitude.

Third, we can repay debts of gratitude by serving others. Life is reciprocation. We can repay the benefits we have received from many unknown people by serving many other unknown people. Actually, this is the only way to repay debts of gratitude. Herein lies the significance of contributing to many other people and rendering service to society.

In addition to these three ways of repaying debts of gratitude, there may be no better way than expressing gratitude directly to our benefactors, closing the circle of debts of gratitude.

In this part of chapter 25, the Bodhisattva Infinite Thought offers a necklace to the Cry Regarder, who declines it, but, later on, when Shakyamuni Buddha encourages him to accept it, he gladly does so and breaks it in half and offers one half to Shakyamuni and the other half to the stupa of the Buddha Abundant Treasures. This is an extremely significant passage about repaying a debt of gratitude.

**TEXT** Then the Buddha said to the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World: "Out of compassion for this Bodhisattva Infinite Thought and the four groups [of the Buddha's disciples], and for the gods, dragons, *yakshas*, *gandharvas*, *asuras*, *garudas*, *kimnaras*, *mahoragas*, human and nonhuman beings, and others, accept this necklace." Then the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, having compassion for all, the four groups and the gods, dragons, human and nonhuman beings, and others, accepted the necklace, and dividing it into two parts, offered one part to Shakyamuni Buddha and offered the other to the stupa of the Buddha Abundant Treasures.

**COMMENTARY** Why does he offer one half of the necklace to Shakyamuni Buddha and the other half to the stupa of the Buddha Abundant Treasures? This passage contains a key point.

The Bodhisattva Infinite Thought, on behalf of all living beings, offered the necklace to the Cry Regarder as an expression of gratitude and admiration for his great benevolence and great compassion, and for his activities to liberate all living beings. By offering half of the necklace to the Tathagata Shakyamuni and the other half to the stupa of the Buddha Abundant Treasures, the Cry Regarder immediately showed, with deep gratitude, that all of his activities had been made possible by the grace of both these tathagatas.

The Tathagata Abundant Treasures is a buddha who is symbolic of buddha-nature itself, that is, an incorporeal ideal buddha, so no one could visualize him until the Tathagata Shakyamuni preached the Lotus Sutra. Only then could people see and worship his ethereal presence. In other words, buddha-nature itself was revealed to the people, who could for the first time grasp the value of buddha-nature as reality. That is the essential point of chapter 11, “Beholding the Precious Stupa.”

Universal truth is imperishable, existing from the eternal past to the infinite future, and is symbolized by the Tathagata Abundant Treasures. However, unless someone had discovered it and expounded it widely, so that many people could learn about it, it would not have come alive as a source of human happiness and spiritual progress. It goes without saying that the person who first accomplished this, the greatest accomplishment for the benefit of humanity, is the Tathagata Shakyamuni, who was born human in India.

Thus, there were three reasons why the Cry Regarder divided the necklace into two and offered half to each tathagata.

First, he aimed to teach all people that all actions for human well-being become complete when the wisdom to understand the universal truth is followed by the compassion to illustrate and impart that truth in the phenomenal world.

Second, he expressed devotion and gratitude as if to say: “I wholeheartedly take refuge in the Tathagata Abundant Treasures, who embodies buddha-nature itself, and at the same time I offer unlimited gratitude to the Tathagata Shakyamuni for his preaching the Dharma to us on the value of buddha-nature.”

Third, it is his feeling of repaying a debt of gratitude, as if to say: “I owe free and unimpeded activities wholly to the Tathagata Abundant Treasures and the Tathagata Shakyamuni. For the benefits I have received I must make recompense, no matter what.”

When we read this carefully, it becomes evident that a simplistic belief in praying only for worldly benefits—that worship of the Cry Regarder, for instance, is enough for liberation from suffering—is a superstition that departs from the Great Way of the Buddha Dharma. This is because the Cry Regarder himself expresses reverence with his behavior, as if to say: “My powers of liberation come from the Buddha’s wisdom and compassion.”

**TEXT** “Infinite Thought! With such sovereign supernatural powers does the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World wander through the *saha* world.”

**COMMENTARY** The Buddha does not merely and loosely

state that the Cry Regarder wanders through the *saha* world instructing others by virtue of his supernatural powers. When the Cry Regarder offered half of the necklace to the Tathagata Shakyamuni and the other half to the stupa of the Buddha Abundant Treasures, Shakyamuni’s immediate message was: “This is the source of the supernatural powers of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World.”

When we read a sutra, we should not read casually but try to read between the lines. There is absolutely nothing wrong with spending a month or even a year reading a single page, because of the importance of realizing the true meaning.

**TEXT** Then the Bodhisattva Infinite Thought made inquiry thus in verse.

“The World-honored One with all the mystic signs! / Let me now again inquire of him: / For what cause is this Buddha son named / Regarder of the Cries of the World?”

The Honored One with all the mystic signs answered Infinite Thought in verse:

“Listen to the deeds of the Cry Regarder,

**COMMENTARY** *The World-honored One with all the mystic signs!* This form of address is filled with admiration.

• *Listen to the deeds of the Cry Regarder.* This phrase is very terse and forceful, and the pivotal point of the Buddha’s words is as follows.

Here *deeds* is a translation of the Chinese word *hang* (Jpn., *gyo*), which has very broad, deep meanings in Buddhism. *Hang* usually has three meanings: behavior, religious training, and actual practice.

“Behavior” signifies the deeds we do with clear intention and purpose. These deeds invariably leave some trace within our minds and bodies, and invariably have some direct and indirect, material and immaterial effect, or influence, on something outside, or external.

In Buddhism, deeds are considered not only physical, but also verbal and mental. They are called “the three actions: body, speech, and thought” and equal emphasis is placed on the effects, or influences that these three have upon one’s own body and mind and upon other people’s bodies and minds. This is the concept of karma. Buddhism strictly teaches that a good cause (a good deed) has a good result, and that a bad cause (an evil deed) has an evil result. (See the May/June 1994 issue of *Dharma World*.)

Whether from a rational, ethical, or moral point of view, this is an excellent teaching, so we ought to believe quite obediently in the law that a good cause has a good result and an evil cause has an evil result. We should not be distracted by irresponsible information produced by our shallow scientific knowledge, but should do as much good as

possible—physically, verbally, and mentally. Without doubt, this eventually benefits both society and ourselves.

The second meaning of *hang* is “religious training,” which comprises various practices such as making offerings at the family altar, reciting the *daimoku* (the title of the Lotus Sutra), practicing *samadhi* (contemplation), mid-winter ascetic practices, or asceticism in general, and so on. Religious training consists of specific deeds done by believers to concentrate their minds and efforts on uniting the above-mentioned “three actions” to the most possible limit, for attaining individual purpose of faith. With intense, constant repetition, this kind of religious training yields great spiritual results. Therefore, it is by all means extremely important and necessary for believers, not only to improve their ordinary, daily behavior, but also to grow spiritually.

Shakyamuni practiced asceticism for six years before finally realizing that it could not bring supreme enlightenment. Without considering the matter deeply enough, some people assume that he abandoned asceticism because he decided religious training was unnecessary, but they are mistaken.

His six years of asceticism certainly were not useless. Asceticism does not lead directly to supreme enlightenment, yet for Shakyamuni it was undeniably a major stepping-stone. Moreover, to attain supreme enlightenment, he entered a state of contemplation (*samadhi*) under the Bodhi tree, a form of religious training known as seated meditation. It is important to think deeply about this.

The third meaning of *hang*, “actual practice,” is the complete harmony of behavior (the first meaning) and religious training (the second meaning) in the activities of everyday life.

Hinayana Buddhists were apt to separate the life of religious faith from everyday life, tending to think of a life of faith as noble and everyday life worthy of little notice, but this way of thinking could hardly liberate humanity from suffering. Mahayana Buddhists, especially those of us who take refuge in the Lotus Sutra, must aspire to seeing the Lotus Sutra’s view of human life and applying it to the world in the context of their real life.

What this means in concrete terms is bodhisattva practice, that is, the Six Perfections: donation (*dana-paramita*), or altruistic acts; morality, or keeping the precepts (*shila-paramita*), observing the rules of society in order to improve the self; forbearance, or patience (*kshanti-paramita*), having a generous, tolerant attitude toward others; effort, or endeavor (*virya-paramita*), pursuing wholeheartedly one’s own mission or vocation; meditation (*dhyana-paramita*), the spiritual condition of focusing the mind on the Truth so that it is not distracted; and wisdom (*prajnaparamita*),

the seeking of true wisdom by integrating the other five practices.

The state of true Mahayanist *hang* (deeds) lies not in merely conceiving of these *paramitas* (perfections), nor in separating religious activity from daily life, but in creatively and constructively merging them with everyday life itself.

The Buddha’s words “Listen to the deeds of the Cry Regarder” reverberate forcefully and solemnly. The deeds of the Cry Regarder should be understood as the perfect practice of the three actions of body, speech, and thought as one complete whole. With this in mind, let us read further about the various aspects of the Cry Regarder’s perfect deeds.

**TEXT** Who well responds to every quarter; / His vast vow is deep as the sea, / Inconceivable in its eons.

**COMMENTARY** These verses convey deep and significant meanings in a few words.

- *His vast vow.* This is an extremely broad, extensive vow. I have already explained the vast vows common to all Buddhists: the four universal vows of the bodhisattva (see the May/June 1995 and May/June 2002 issues of *Dharma World*). The purpose of the Cry Regarder’s vast vow is not focused on his own benefit, but is highly altruistic.

There is a view, as mentioned earlier, that the Cry Regarder was already a buddha when he appeared as a bodhisattva to liberate from suffering all living beings in the *saha* world. Other commentators hold that he is the bodhisattva who vowed never to become a buddha. That is, he meant that as long as even a single person suffers from delusion, he would never become a buddha, but remain a bodhisattva in order to liberate that person. Since there will always be people who suffer from delusion, he will never become a buddha.

I believe that both views are correct. Since the Cry Regarder embodies the truth of the Middle, that is, true wisdom, he is already a buddha. However, since ordinary people feel that as a buddha he would seem too remote from them, he appears as a bodhisattva, who is one stage below that of a buddha, to be closer to ordinary people in carrying out his work as a savior and enlightener. Once he became close to people, he determined not to revert to buddhahood as long as a single person suffered from delusion. In this, we can see that deep compassion is typical of the Cry Regarder. His vast vow is truly as “deep as the sea.”

**TEXT** Serving many thousands of *kotis* of buddhas, / He has vowed a great pure vow. / Let me briefly tell you.

**COMMENTARY** *Serving.* According to this passage, the Cry Regarder has been at the side of the buddhas, serving their everyday needs. Needless to say, while doing this, he

is also receiving the teachings and sharing their inspiration. The teaching methodology of long ago was largely this kind of around-the-clock cultivation of the whole person.

- *A great pure vow.* This vow is extremely pure in that it excludes self-centeredness. There is no doubt that aspiring to improve oneself or achieve something for oneself is in itself good, but the Cry Regarder's vow has no notion of self-improvement.

Then, what kind of vow does he have? His vow is not only to bear the burden of, but also to empathize with and absorb the sufferings of all living beings in order to bring them comfort and ease. Moreover, his spirit is so devotedly self-sacrificing that he continues unceasingly to bear their sufferings on their behalf and does not become a buddha as long as even one human being in this world suffers.

This compassion great enough to be willing to make any self-sacrifice for many other suffering people and the previously discussed "all-sidedness" are the Cry Regarder's two prominent virtues.

If people admire those virtues and only consider the help that they wish to receive, this in effect compels that compassionate bodhisattva to continue sacrificing himself. In other words, if people just leave their sufferings to him and snugly lead a life of comfort, it is surely a selfish kind of faith.

Certainly the true value of faith in the Cry Regarder, as I have emphasized repeatedly, lies in taking him as a model, becoming one with him, and becoming an incarnation of him. In other words, we must awaken to the fact that true faith in the Cry Regarder means working for society by sacrificing oneself as much as possible.

- *Briefly tell you.* To explain the Cry Regarder's great vow in detail would take years, so the Buddha briefly summarizes it for the Bodhisattva Infinite Thought. Even this phrase connotes the vastness of the Cry Regarder's work and virtues.

**TEXT** [He who] hears his name, and sees him, / And bears him unremittingly in mind, / Will be able to end the sorrows of existence.

**COMMENTARY** This is a very important passage.

### Hearing a name

- *Hears his name.* Names are appellations given to people and things. Since names are not substance, some people may think that they are not very important, but surely this is a mistaken way of thinking. For ordinary people, names perform an important function. When we hear a name, we can visualize the substance itself.

When a person is well-known, merely hearing the person's name causes an instantaneous emotion to float into

our minds. When we hear the name "Dr. Schweitzer," we immediately recall the extensive love, self-sacrifice, and iron will with which he devoted his life to the medical treatment of the people of Africa. When we hear the name Kenji Miyazawa (1896–1933), an eminent Japanese poet, we immediately think of the personality of one who was familiar to the common folk and to the farmer, one who was serious yet extremely warm-hearted.

Even if we happened to encounter Dr. Schweitzer or Kenji Miyazawa on the street, if we did not know who they were, we would not have the same rise of emotion that we would from simply hearing their names.

There is a story about Saigo Takamori (1827–77), who had returned briefly to his home in Kagoshima (now in Kagoshima Prefecture on the southern island of Kyushu) after carrying out the great enterprise of the Meiji Restoration in 1868. He was out hunting rabbits with his dog one day, dressed in just the sort of farmer's attire that he is shown wearing in the statue of him in Ueno Park, when he happened to meet a descendant of a samurai family. (The term "descendants of the samurai" had been employed in 1869 to refer to the class of those who had been samurai within the previous class structure. This social structure of nobility, descendants of the samurai, and commoners was to continue long afterward until 1947. The so-called descendants of the samurai still acted haughtily to commoners as had their ancestors to the former classes of farmers, artisans, and merchants in the feudal age.)

"Hey," the man said, calling Saigo to halt.

When Saigo stopped, the man pointed to the broken thong of his wooden sandal and said, "Fix this."

The burly Saigo casually stooped in front of the man and fixed the thong.

It is said that when the man learned later that the "big farmer" was Saigo, he turned completely pale. Just as in the saying "A great sage is often taken for a great fool," this is a case in point of how an ordinary person may not understand the eminence and substance of a great sage who appears right before him, until he first hears the person's name.

Names are in this way quite important. It might seem that it would be sufficient for Buddhists to study the teachings of the Buddha carefully and practice in accord with them, but there is still something lacking, so we intone in invocations of the name of Shakyamuni as the manifest-body Buddha (that is, the historical Buddha) and as the Original Buddha as follows: “We put our faith in the Buddha Shakyamuni” or “We put our faith in the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Great Benevolent Teacher, the World-honored One.” Herein lies the difference between scholarship and religion.

### Seeing him

- *Sees him.* This, too, is absolutely essential and indispensable for ordinary people. It is regrettable, but despite hearing the name, one’s respect and admiration for a venerable person still does not really burst into flame. It is actually seeing the person himself that proves to be the ignition point for the spirit of longing and thirsting for that person.

When famous musicians and entertainers arrive on tour in a foreign country, ardent fans pack the airport, and their performances are filled to overflowing. This is due to just this sort of psychology.

We are unable to see the true body of the Buddha or Kannon, but our desire to see them is unbearable. We want to deepen our feelings of devotion and ignite our feelings of longing and thirsting through actually seeing them. It is because of this that we represent them in sculpture and painting, and venerate and make offerings to them in such forms.

### Idolatry

Unless such a manner of veneration is truly proper, however, it becomes idolatrous. That is to say, worshipping filled with very selfish desires and believing that by praying to an image one will be blessed with good fortune amounts to worthless idolatry.

### Worship the central figure (*honzon*) in your heart

By worshipping an image of the focus of devotion, people are able to feel vividly that through the sculpture or painting they are actually merging with the spirit of the focus of devotion itself, and this is the true reason why these images are made. In order for us to experience such a full realization, we must bear that focus of devotion in our minds. To bear it in mind means to believe in it firmly. Not just to vacantly think about it, but to intensely yearn for it so as to sear it into one’s mind.

Nor should one forget it. This means that one must not let the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World slip from one’s mind and then lead life carelessly. This is the meaning of the line “And bears him unremittingly in mind.”

### Becoming selfless

If one believes in the focus of devotion fervently, then what one knows as oneself will disappear. The sense of the “small self”—the desire to be blessed with happiness, the desire to make oneself commendable—will disappear completely. This is the state of selflessness or non-self.

Selflessness does not refer to the state of “no thought,” that is, absence of all ideas and thoughts. There is still a definite “idea” and “thought.” The idea or thought, of course, concerns the focus of devotion. If one has the object at heart and keeps one’s mind on it, filling the mind completely, then there is no room for other thoughts. When this happens, one’s presence selflessly merges with the focus of devotion.

### The culmination of religious enlightenment

If one reaches such a state, then, like the focus of devotion, one’s presence will spread throughout the universe. The self that is left behind will become instead an entity that fills heaven and earth. This is because in place of the “small self” that has been discarded, the “great self” has appeared. When this happens, one’s body and mind will be truly emancipated from all constraints, all that one does will naturally correspond to the Truth, and one will be able to attain the supreme state of freedom that gives life to the self and others. We can only call this the core and culmination of religious enlightenment.

- *The sorrows of existence.* In short, this means the sufferings of human life.

“Existence” here refers to the phenomenal world, and is normally accompanied by discriminations and, accordingly, adhering the mind to them generates various kinds of sufferings.

Still, to ignore these phenomena, one has to be like some kind of hermit and cannot live actual life. That is why the way of life in accord with the “truth of the Middle”—captivated by neither “emptiness” nor “provisional existence” (phenomena)—becomes absolutely necessary (See the October–December 2015 issue of *Dharma World*).

The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World embodies this “truth of the Middle,” so by hearing the name of the bodhisattva, keeping him in mind, and never forgetting him, one will be able to naturally become one with that “truth of the Middle.”

**TEXT** Though [others] with harmful intent / Throw him into a burning pit, / Let him think of the Cry Regarder’s power / And the fire pit will become a pool.

**COMMENTARY** As has been mentioned before, “fire” is often synonymous with the defilement of humankind, and a burning pit certainly fits this pattern. Defilements arise from

attachment to the self that is originally incorporeal, and therefore the burning pit means the various pains and distresses which are brought about by such attachment to the self.

In the passage “Though [others] with harmful intent throw him into a burning pit,” it seems as if someone else were pushing the other into the pit of fire in order to torment that person, but actually this phrase does not mean such an external force.

The fire of defilements is such that even if another person attempts to ignite it, it will not flame up unless the recipient reaches an ignition point. On the contrary, there are many cases where without the incendiary agitation by instigators, the person ignites the burning flames on one’s own.

Therefore, one must realize that one who is “with harmful intent throw[ing] him into a burning pit” is not another person, but one’s own attachment to the self. If such attachment is strong, then whether or not it is set aflame by another person, it will start to burn. In other words, whatever happens, it is the voracious attachment to the self that casts one into the burning pit.

In consequence, when one has fallen into the pit of fire and is feeling tormented, if one wholeheartedly bears in mind the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, attachment to the self will completely vanish. If the attachment to the self but disappears, then without making any effort at all to extricate oneself from the fiery pit, one will be liberated right then and there. One will feel refreshed as if one had been bathing in a cool pool of water. (In the intense heat of India, nothing is more pleasurable than bathing in cool water.) This is the meaning of “the fire pit will become a pool.”

There is profundity in the fact that the sutra says nothing about climbing up out of the pit of fire or extricating oneself from it, but rather that the fiery pit changes into a pool of water, that is, a situation of extreme adversity as it is will be transformed into paradise.

When faith is really deep, one is able to reach the mental state of being one with the Buddha, with the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, and with all existence in the universe. When this occurs, there is no longer any fiery pit into which to fall or be thrown. The enemy becomes an ally, the burning pit becomes a cool, clear pond, and everything in heaven and on earth becomes a good companion. This is the merit of religious faith.

**TEXT** Or driven along a great ocean, / In peril of dragons, fishes, and demons, / Let him think of the Cry Regarder’s power / And waves cannot submerge him.

**COMMENTARY** *Driven along a great ocean.* This phrase connotes drifting away on the sea of life, and always wandering

about on the border between life and death without even being aware of it. The condition of fluctuating in quick succession between joy and sorrow from the ups and downs of each day is compared to people on a ship drifting on a great sea, dependent on a limited amount of provisions and drinking water.

Many true stories are told of how people have escaped a sinking ship, clung to small rafts and boats, and drifted for weeks. The psychology and actions of those who are thrown together in such a situation seem the epitome of this world.

Despite the fact that they are literally all in the same boat, under such circumstances it may be no wonder that shameful things do occur, such as wishing that even one of the others on board would hurry up and die, looking for a chance to throw someone overboard, and snatching food from the others.

Similar things occur everywhere in the way we live. When a person tries to climb to a higher position, someone else tries to thwart that person’s progress. When someone else tries to climb up to one’s own position, one kicks that person back down. Deceiving, threatening, stealing, killing, endlessly coveting the money and possessions of others, trying to monopolize reputation and affection—people do all these kinds of things, and these acts all take place on a single “raft.”

People living in despair, people who are triumphant, people who have won, people who have lost, people who are strong, people who are weak are all aboard the same raft that floats upon the sea of life and death. Therefore, those who have not truly awakened to true wisdom and made true wisdom the foundation of their minds, no matter how successful they may be or how happy they may seem, are after all doing no more than floating on the sea of life and death. This is the true meaning of “driven along a great ocean.”

• *In peril of dragons, fishes, and demons.* Dragons are weird, imaginary beings. Fishes here are frightening fish that are large enough to swallow a man whole. Demons are evil spirits that cause human beings various kinds of harm (in the original Sanskrit text, they are called *asuras*).

These are all said to be the mysterious or grotesque actions of our own minds, which bring us to our own ruin or fate.

## Jealousy

When one sees the happiness of another, one would think it easy to be happy for that person, but this is not how it works. From somewhere deep within the mind, the monster of jealousy appears and begins to rage about. One becomes overwhelmed by a feeling of tremendous irritation. One makes oneself suffer.

Things are bad enough when one is suffering in mind, but when jealousy swells and gives rise to actual action,

such as trying to thwart others and entrap them, one may be able to cause them some trouble, but at the same time one will definitely bring misfortune on oneself and inevitably throw the order of society into disarray.

It has long been held that jealousy is particular to women, but such is certainly not the case. Women's jealousy is in large measure based on affection and it is quite personal, so its bad effects remain only within a narrow range. But when it comes to men's jealousy, this is not the case. One can hardly imagine the indescribable extent of the negative effects of men's jealousy in the workplace, political circles, academic circles, artistic circles, almost anywhere.

The jealous mind acts fiercely even in ways that do not have a direct influence on one's own interests, so it is entirely unpredictable. It is properly compared to a ferocious dragon, despite the fact that such animals do not actually exist.

The dragon mentioned here does not signify jealousy alone. The dragon symbolizes all the monstrous, evil thoughts that rise from somewhere in the depths of the mind.

## Ignorance

To what does the enormous fish that swallows up human beings refer? It is none other than folly (ignorance). It is the folly of not understanding well one's own situation and having no regard for the consequences. Since I have already explained this in detail (See the April–June 2016 issue of *Dharma World*), please review that passage.

It may seem unfair, but fish have long been held to be ignorant, dumb creatures. Unaware that the bait which humans dangle in the water conceals a frightening hook, out of great hunger fish snap at it with mouths wide open.

If they were clever, of course, they ought to make sure that the bait is really something they should eat before they actually bite into it. But driven by the impulse of instinct, having no sense of judgment, they give no thought to the consequences and gulp down the bait. It would be understandable if the bait were something delicious, such as a worm, but they will even go for a lure that is made of wood, plastic, or hair. This manner is typical of ignorant beings.

Human beings, however, are hardly in a position to laugh at fish. There are an astounding number of actual cases of people who fell for a swindler's temptation about a profitable business and invested what little money they had, only to end up losing everything. A disinterested party would look at such talk with presence of mind and know from the beginning that it would not work so smoothly, but when one is dazzled by greed, one is incapable of such rational decision-making.

Then there are disreputable moneylenders who approach managers of enterprises that are suffering financially and get them involved in troubles over discounted bills, which

lead to complete and irredeemable ruin. There are lots of stories like this. If a man is smart enough to run a business, it is expected that he is rather capable of judging people, but because of the hardships he is confronting he inadvertently begins trusting in the unbelievable and irrevocably slides toward hell.

People who are engrossed in such things as horse racing and bicycle racing are just this kind. These forms of gambling are set up in such a way that one will lose. Let us say for the sake of argument that the total amount of tickets purchased is ¥100,000,000. Whatever the exact amount, from this total are deducted contributions to national and local governments, expenses required for holding the races, and prizes for the winners of the races, and what is left from that is distributed to holders of winning tickets.

So although the ticket buyers have put up ¥100,000,000, what is returned as prize money is as little as ¥70,000,000 or so. From a normal point of view, everyone is definitely losing. On an individual basis, however, people may sometimes win, but over the long run the number of people who end up ahead of the game must be rather small. The statistics are rather harsh. The majority of people will always lose, because this is the way the system is set up from the very beginning.

Since this is the way it is, even though those who go to the races for a little excitement and diversion in life may come out all right, it is a big mistake to try to make money through such races. Without fail the great fish is waiting, with mouth wide open. One's whole livelihood will inevitably be swallowed up. That most who on their own fall into the mouth of the great fish are led on by short-term desires is truly a typical example of folly.

## Asuras

Asuras are demons, always filled with wrath, who contend with someone. It hardly needs reiterating how much suffering and misfortune this sort of anger and strife gives to people and human society.

Despite this, it sometimes happens that we humans are stirred by the anger of the "small self" which suddenly surges up in our minds and plunges us into misfortune.

Here we are, fellow human beings all together on a single raft afloat on a great sea, yet we oppose each other and contend among ourselves. When we think about this, it is truly silly of us to do such a thing.

Although falling victim in this way to the three poisons of greed, anger, and folly (ignorance) and bringing suffering upon oneself through jealousy, ordinary people can be instantly freed of this suffering if they but intently keep the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World in mind. It must be true. Bearing the bodhisattva in mind is putting

trust in true wisdom, and if one places trust in true wisdom, then one will awaken completely from such foolish mistakes.

Consequently, “waves cannot submerge him,” means that people who do this will not be swallowed up by the great waves of human life, however towering they may be. Nor will they be troubled by monsters such as dragons, fishes, and demons. This is the relieving power of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World.

**TEXT** Or if, from the peak of Sumeru, / Men would hurl him down, / Let him think of Cry Regarder’s power / And like the sun he will stand firm in the sky.

## COMMENTARY

### Confidence

In the ancient Indian conception of the world, Mount Sumeru was held to be the highest peak on the face of the earth. Standing upon its summit means having great confidence that one is “on top of the world.” One may inadvertently think of this as arrogance, but actually it is entirely different.

It is the mental state of having awakened to the dignity of one’s own true nature. When we look closely at our own definite existence within this universe, we certainly come to recognize that we exist in this way because there is a reason for us to exist. We are alive in this way because we are entrusted with a mission we must live for. Surely we ought to become able to firmly grasp that our existence is indispensable for the universe.

If a person probes even deeper into this feeling, the person will ultimately be able to feel, “I am seated at the center of the universe. I am seated at its highest summit” and will come to feel vividly, “Even though I may be infinitesimal, I am at its center and the universe is spread forth around me.”

This state of mind, called “we become, wherever we are, the master of our surroundings” in *Hekiganroku* (The Blue Cliff Record), a Chinese Zen text, has been discussed in the May/June 2003 issue of *Dharma World*, and if one awakens to the true reason for living and learns the dignity of one’s own true nature, then one can hardly do other than enter this state.

This “great confidence” and “arrogance,” which is like confidence in appearance but quite different in nature, are close neighbors. Completely different in character, they are separated by a very thin line. That is, true great confidence arises from looking intently at the dignity of one’s own true nature, but if one’s eyes are averted even slightly and one is caught up in the phenomenal self, this is immediately transformed to arrogance, considering oneself more worthy and virtuous than one actually is.

Unfortunately, we ordinary people tend to fall into the habit of overvaluing ourselves. Moreover, we are unaware that we are doing it. We assume that we are standing on the peak of Mount Sumeru.

However, if we embrace great confidence with arrogance and not with truth, even a slight change in the conditions of the external world can in a moment cause us to fall into the lower realm. Because arrogance is a state of mind in which a person is preoccupied with the phenomenal self, it stands to reason that if the phenomena change, so will the person’s state of mind. If one fails slightly, is criticized by others, or falls in the estimation of the world, the triumphant height will immediately crumble and collapse.

This is the point where great confidence differs from an overly optimistic appraisal of one’s virtue. Though these two are usually confused with each other, in their essential character they are entirely different. Losing confidence because of something others say or losing confidence due to a failure or two means that originally one did not have confidence, but was simply arrogant. When confidence is real, it will never waver or falter because of changes in the phenomenal world, such as pressure from outside or one’s own failures.

Returning to the text, the verse that says “if, from the peak of Sumeru, men would hurl him down” means that the state where he originally had real confidence, was unfortunately transformed to ordinary arrogance, and as a result of encountering changes in the external conditions he is about to crash into the depths of despair.

At such a moment, if we can quickly recover our senses and bear in mind the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, we will instantly be saved from falling, and will stand firm like the sun in the sky. It is truly meaningful that we will not be merely restored to Mount Sumeru’s peak, but actually able to reside in the sky.

The sun occupies its place in the sky with a great presence. It gives light and heat to all nature and living beings in the universe and gives them life. Far from the earth though it is, the sun is closely linked to everything on the face of the earth.

In the same way, if we become one with the bodhisattva, we will be able to see things with the “truth of the Middle” that is his embodiment. If that happens, even though we chance to experience an event such as being hurled from the peak of Mount Sumeru, we will be able to maintain immeasurable confidence that like the sun, we will never fall down.

In concrete terms, this means that while we lead ordinary lives as ordinary people, we can realize the fundamental truth of the universe, discover the dignity of the buddha-nature that is possessed equally by all people, and can relate to them with an attitude filled with understanding and affection appropriate to their individuality and position. In other words, we can ourselves assume the role of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World.

**TEXT** Or if, pursued by wicked men, / And cast down from Mount Diamond, / He thinks of the Cry Regarder’s power, / Not a hair shall be injured.

#### COMMENTARY

##### The evil are weak

- *Wicked men.* These are symbolic of “weak minds.” If the mind is weak, when something good happens, people become carelessly self-complacent and lose sight of themselves. If the mind is weak, when something untoward happens, people become flustered in a panic and lose their presence of mind. If the mind is weak, when one is criticized, one will lose confidence, and one’s associated conviction and position will be shaken.

The reason why “wicked men” are employed as symbolic of weak minds is because the wicked men of the world are all possessors of weak minds. People who steal, cheat, murder, make others cry, and cause harm to others are extremely weak people, who do not possess the strength to refrain from such evil acts on their own.

It is impossible not to recognize that bad deeds are bad, and as long as the person is of normal mentality, even a wicked person recognizes that what he does is not good. Even though he knows it is wrong, he cannot desist from doing it and ends up carrying out the evil deed. In other words, his mind is weak.

As has been discussed in the teaching of “the interpenetration of the ten realms,” that is, “the ten realms of beings found in one another” (see the January/February 1998 issue of *Dharma World*), even within the mind of a buddha there exists the “factor” for falling into hell. Among ordinary people, however unsurpassed they may be in the moral sense, deep inside their minds there exists the possibility that they may do something evil.

This is because evil deeds are originally caused by the natural desires of human beings. Stealing something from someone else, put simply, comes out of a desire to get hold of something that would be of value in the person’s life.

To obtain those things, ordinary people make efforts through work. A person who is weak, however, tries to avoid the hardships that always accompany labor and steals in order to get easily what he wants. The thief commits the sin against the precept “not to steal.”

A more cunning person need not even make a physical effort to steal, but instead deceives others with words in order to obtain what is wanted. In doing so, this thief offends against the precepts “not to steal” and “not to lie.”

The same is true for the precepts “not to commit adultery” and “not to drink intoxicants.” All the precepts admonish that the desires human beings naturally possess may swell up too much, and that from the weak mind which is unable to restrain these desires may spring an attempt to fulfill such desires by improper means.

As a result, the so-called evil men are weak human beings. Ordinary people, while they harbor the potential for taking the path of evil, will instead by force of will suppress that potential, and one may call them strong people.

##### Mount Diamond is a firm identity (subjectivity)

- *Cast down from Mount Diamond.* The text refers to being pursued by wicked men (of weak minds) and falling from Mount Diamond. This peak represents “oneself that is truly firm” and “unwavering identity.”

The Sanskrit term for “diamond” is *vajra*, and signifies the strongest of all the metals or the hardest of all precious jewels, hence something so hard (firm) that it cannot be broken by anything else. Therefore, “Mount Diamond” means a mountain so firm that it will not sway or crumble.

We human beings must maintain an identity that is firm like this Mount Diamond, which will not sway or crumble under any external force. One who has such a sense of self is one who is strong and respectable.

Yet as I mentioned earlier, even such a strong, respectable person inevitably possesses the factor for an inclination toward evil, so there are cases where that person may waver as a result of slight changes in routine circumstances, or praise or blame from others. Herein lies the danger of being “pursued by wicked men, / And cast down from Mount Diamond.”

In case of such a crisis, if one by chance bears in mind the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, then one will be able to recover one’s own true identity that is not swayed by such phenomena as changes in circumstances, or praise or blame from others. One can once again discover one’s own true nature (buddha-nature) that is firm and unshakable.

Though dense clouds may fill the sky, and though rain or snow may fall, the sun is still there in the sky, shining brilliantly. The sun, so to speak, is also symbolic of that which neither sways nor crumbles away. So from the viewpoint of the sun, it is of little concern whether clouds cover the earth or rain and snow fall on the surface of the minuscule planet.

The same is true of human beings. If one ascertains what one's true nature is, it is a firm and immutable entity like the sun, and however the surrounding situation may change, however one is lauded or censured, one should feel no concern at all.

Yet, to the misfortune of ordinary people, the majority of people are easily swayed by one thing or another. At such moments, if a person recalls the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World and rediscovers that he is enveloped in the bodhisattva's compassion, he will understand that the external forces that are attempting to make him waver actually have no substance. He will recognize that they are like clouds on the surface of the earth from the perspective of the sun, so he will be able to recover from wavering in an instant.

As a result, "not a hair shall be injured." This of course means that one who independently puts true faith in this bodhisattva and keeps his power in mind will not suffer even a scrape on one's body—that is, it connotes that the person will be able to discover once again his own true nature that none can harm in the least.

**TEXT** Or if, meeting with encompassing foes, / Each with sword drawn to strike him, / He thinks of the Cry Regarder's power, / All their hearts will turn to kindness.

## COMMENTARY

### Greed

The term "foes" represents the greed of human beings. We are fearful of being harmed in some way by other people and are anxious that something we have will be taken by others, so we tend to think that suffering is something that comes upon us from without, but that is not true. It is one's own greed that causes one to suffer.

Kojun Shichiri (1835–1900) was a priest of the Nishi Hongwanji Branch of the Jodo Shinshu sect of Japanese Buddhism and noted for his distinguished learning and virtue. He was a priest at Mangyoji in the present city of Fukuoka, Fukuoka Prefecture, on the southern island of Kyushu. One night a robber holding a bare sword forced his way into the temple, thrust the blade at the priest who was reciting the sutra, and demanded, "Give me money!" Kojun continued the sutra as if he had heard nothing. The robber demanded money two or three more times, but

Kojun continued as before quietly reciting the sutra. After finishing the evening service, Kojun slowly turned around and asked, "Now, what's going on here?"

"I want money," the robber said in a threatening tone of voice.

"Money, is it? Well, in that case, just ask politely. It's nothing to demand at the point of the sword. Just come with me."

He guided the robber to the inner room and, pointing to a chest, said, "It's in there, so open the drawer." The robber took all of the money out of the drawer and was about to put it in his pocket. The Reverend Shichiri said, "You can't have it all. Tomorrow is the day for paying taxes. Just leave enough for the taxes." The robber obediently left that much and was on the point of hurrying off.

The Reverend Shichiri called to him from behind. "Who ever heard of a person taking money from someone else and leaving without expressing his gratitude!" The robber said, "Thank you," in a faint voice and furtively left.

Before too long, the same robber was arrested and brought to the police station in connection with another crime. He also confessed to having broken into the temple Mangyoji, so the police called in the priest and complained to him for not submitting a robbery report.

The priest replied, "But this fellow didn't take any money from me. I gave it to him." The robber who had been brought forth to where the Reverend Shichiri was then expressed his true heart and insisted, saying, "No, I broke in and stole it." The priest laughed as he replied, "You certainly are forgetful. When you left, you said, 'Thank you,' didn't you? You said, 'Thank you,' because I gave you the money, didn't you?"

The man was put in prison for his other crimes, but when he came out of prison, he immediately went to the priest, shaved his head, and for the rest of his life attended upon Kojun.

The Reverend Shichiri remained composed even when menaced by a robber wielding a sword. He was able to do this because he was not greedy. In this way, no matter how someone tries to harm you, if your mind is serene, you will feel no fear or anxiety. If you hold money in the least bit dear and do not want to be killed—if you have the slightest mind of attachment to the self—then you will become afraid.

All of the sufferings of human beings are like this. They are not things that assault one from without, but are created by one's own mind. The greatest robber that creates these sufferings is greed. Therefore, the "foes" in the passage "if, meeting with encompassing foes, each with sword drawn to strike him" are none other than greed.

When such greed grows strong, if it does not get its way, a person becomes frustrated, grows angry or uneasy, and experiences excruciating suffering. If at such a moment one

recalls the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World and directs the mind to the true teachings, that greed will immediately subside.

By subside, we mean just a return to a normal state. Desire is from the beginning a natural instinct, so in itself it is not definitely bad. In its normal state, desire brings no harm to human beings. It is only when the mind is self-indulgent that desire expands beyond normal bounds into “greed,” and begins to make humans suffer, becoming a negative energy that harms human character.

If greed is quelled and returns to desire in its ordinary condition, it becomes a valuable energy as a source of truly human activity. It is said that Great Britain’s broad-ranging decline in national strength for a certain period of time was due to the fact that its citizens lost the desire to devote themselves to their jobs as a result of the overextension of social security benefits. Since they had lost the positive energy that comes from desire in its normal state, it is said that the entire nation fell into a malaise.

Be that as it may, the text says that by transforming “encompassing foes,” known as greed, into energy with positive value “their hearts will turn to kindness.” There may have been some who thought as follows: “Even though a robber who had intended to commit murder might lose that malicious intent, his mind would surely not turn toward compassion.” If one knows that the true meaning of this section of verse concerns the reorientation of the energy of desire, then such suspicions will be dispelled.

This can also occur in cases where we are assaulted by evil and harm from the outside, if we are delivered from greed, and if we have attained the state of selflessness or non-self. This corresponds exactly to the case of the Reverend Shichiri and that robber. That the thief obeyed when told to leave enough money to pay the taxes is evidence that the compassionate mind had partially sprouted. Admonished to express his gratitude before departing, the robber replied, “Thank you,” indicating that his compassionate mind was fairly well developed. Finally he came to possess a sufficiently compassionate mind to enter priesthood and serve Kojun as attendant for the rest of his life.

We must recognize that the fearsome enemy is not without, but is the greed that exists within one’s heart.

**TEXT** Or if, meeting suffering by royal [command], / His life is to end in execution, / [And] he thinks of the Cry Regarder’s power, / [The executioner’s] sword will break in pieces.

**COMMENTARY** *Suffering by royal command.* As for the hardship that results from royal command, this refers to the distress of people being oppressed and tormented by a despotic

monarch of old, a hereditary feudal lord, or some other absolute power. In this case, too, a perfectly innocent person may be captured and is to be executed at the king’s command.

The “king” alluded to here indicates the “self” of ordinary people. The “self” is very much like an autocratic lord, believing that the physical body is his own and convinced that he can do whatever he wants. He believes that he can have his own way with his property, his wife and children, his own enterprises, and so on.

Because of the illusory misunderstanding of this “self,” ordinary people tend to want to act egoistically. They always want to have things their own way. However, selfishness cannot always continue having its own way. In short, one’s physical body will certainly perish some day. There is also no guarantee that one’s possessions will remain forever, as they are. If a person tries to force his own selfishness too far, his wife and children will rebel and may even leave home. As a consequence, the “self” is always accompanied by suffering. This is the meaning of “suffering by royal command.”

If you discern the true aspect of things, you will see that even one’s physical body is not essentially one’s own. All things arise through the contact of causes and conditions and are sustained by the Original Buddha.

If this “self” increases in intensity, giving rise to suffering, then one should turn one’s mind toward the wisdom of the “truth of the Middle” that is the embodiment of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World. If one does so, the suffering will immediately vanish into thin air like the raised sword that is shattered to pieces.

**TEXT** Or if, imprisoned, shackled, and chained, / Arms and legs in gyves and stocks, / He thinks of the Cry Regarder’s power, / Freely he shall be released.

**COMMENTARY** That which restricts our freedom is our own defilements and greed. If we but realize this truth, the buddha-nature that is our own true nature will manifest itself and we will be freed. Please refer to the previous section on “Misfortune of imprisonment.”

**TEXT** Or if, by incantation and poisons / One seeks to hurt his body, / And he thinks of the Cry Regarder’s power, / All will revert to their originator.

**COMMENTARY** *Incantation.* In the original Chinese text this word has two meanings: curse and incantation. The first is praying to the gods (though they are not real gods) to bring calamity upon someone in revenge. Incantation, on the other hand, is a word that also refers to praying for good fortune. But in this case, the reference is to an incantation whose intent is to cast a spell for calling down misfortune upon someone else.

The curse is hardly limited to things that one prays to god-like beings to impose. Some people incant by keeping something deep within their mind. Others curse through spoken or written words. However, no matter what malicious intent is hurled upon one, if one truly comprehends the true Dharma and has firm and unwavering faith, one will never be poisoned by such a grudge. With the power of the true Dharma and faith, one is able to repel this sort of curse.

The same is true of magical spells. Here the term represents temptations. It is human weakness to be easily poisoned by the various incessant temptations that are thrust into our private lives by our surroundings—temptations involving money, sexual desire, fame and reputation, and power and authority.

A person who understands deeply the true Dharma and has a firm faith, however, will not be swayed by such temptations. These temptations will be repelled by the power of the true Dharma and faith.

If curses and temptations are repelled and rejected, then in the final analysis the only one who will be poisoned by them will be the person who cast them. This is the meaning of “All will revert to their originator.”

It is certain that one who places a curse on others, or tries to tempt them, will, regardless of whether the curse or temptation is successful, always end up poisoning oneself. The certainty of this idea can be verified within the field of psychoanalysis, and this is a very important lesson in terms of mental health.

The malicious intent that one directs toward others will invariably cause harm to oneself. The beneficial intent that one directs to others will invariably make one noble. This is a lesson we must always keep etched in our minds.

**TEXT** Or if, meeting evil rakshasas, / Venomous dragons, and demons, / He thinks of the Cry Regarder’s power, / At once none will dare to hurt him.

**COMMENTARY** *Evil rakshasas, venomous dragons, and demons.* We may interpret these in the same way as the yakshas and rakshasas previously discussed in an earlier section. In other words, they are wicked ideas and mistaken faith.

**TEXT** If, encompassed by evil beasts, / Tusks sharp and claws fearful, / He thinks of the Cry Regarder’s power, / They will flee in every direction.

**COMMENTARY** *Evil beasts.* This phrase means to act entirely according to the impulses of instinct, like a wild beast, and possess a spirit that knows no shame. It goes without saying how severe it is when human beings are

tormented and corrupted by a brazen spirit, just like that of a beast.

**TEXT** If, scorched by the fire-flame / Of the poisonous breath / Of boas, vipers, and scorpions, / He thinks of the Cry Regarder’s power, / Instantly at his voice they will retreat.

**COMMENTARY** These animals are all representative of small defilements. Even though these defilements are not so dangerous that they can destroy someone, like the “evil beasts” mentioned above, many of these minor defilements are able to cause a decline in one’s character and make one’s life unpleasant. One may not explode in anger but grow angry in a way that is sullen and gloomy. One may not tell big lies but will keep slight things secret. One may not be actively covetous but will be stingy. This kind of defilement is compared to these animals. This is a truly ingenious comparison.

If a person tries to recall the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, when these defilements do occur, they will all immediately disperse. If, for example, a person should suddenly screw his face into a sullen expression because of some incident or another, one’s countenance will quickly become relaxed. In other words, the defilements will of their own accord do an about-face and go away.

**TEXT** Clouds thunder and lightning flashes, / Hail falls and rain streams: / He thinks of the Cry Regarder’s power / And all instantly are scattered.

**COMMENTARY** The meaning here should be easy enough to grasp. The indiscriminate awfulness of the overwrought mind is compared to inclement weather, which seems like the wrath of heaven.

Vexing black clouds spread throughout the mind. Before one knows it, an angry voice explodes forth. The eyes emit sparks. The person throws things. The person screams. The future looks black and there is no knowing what the person will do.

When such a thing happens, at least one should try to recall the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World. The mind that gets excited by the attachment to the self will, as a matter of course, become composed naturally, and the blue sky will peek through. That is the message of this passage.

*To be continued*

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