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FEATURES: Religion and Animals

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

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Religion and Nonhuman Animals

by Paul Waldau

Humans' spiritual traditions provide profoundly moving wisdom about the value to both nonhumans and humans of developing caring, informed modi vivendi by which the diverse living beings that compose our shared earth community can coexist and thrive.

In the last quarter century, reflection in many different societies has deepened and broadened regarding the profoundly important intersection of, on the one hand, religious beliefs and, on the other hand, claims about nonhuman animals and their treatment. As a result, today our species is able to tell a far richer story about humans' intersection with the nonhuman living beings that share the earth with us. This richer story includes multiple, intertwined threads as religious communities around the world respond to local, on-the-ground problems. These responses weave together various insights, including ecological perspectives about the importance of a multispecies community, concern for the increasing problem of extinctions caused by human activities, the emergence of social values that prize companion animals as family members or local wildlife as true neighbors, and recent science-based findings about certain animals' emotional and cognitive abilities.

This story composed of multiple strands contrasts greatly with a far more human-centered narrative that became dominant in the last few centuries as modern societies grew increasingly industrialized and urbanized. Attempting

to normalize domination over any and all nonhuman living beings, this one-dimensional narrative advanced human exceptionalism, that is, the view that humans are so special that whenever harming other living beings creates even minor benefits for humans, such as profits or luxuries, humans can pursue their own advantage with no moral qualm. In this version of the human/nonhuman story, other living beings have no moral standing whatsoever.

Religious communities have long been active in a variety of ways when challenging forms of human arrogance that harm nonhuman living beings, such as uncontrolled business development focused solely on short-term profits that, of course, harms many humans as well. On the question of the importance of moral protection for some animals, recent decades have seen some of the larger, mainline religious institutions in industrialized societies respond with approaches that call into question humans' unfettered right to destroy the natural world. Such challenges have at times been driven by a recovery of a tradition's ancient heritage affirming the sacredness of all life. At other times, these challenges have invoked important scientific advances that have provided much

better information about certain animals' lives as individuals or community members.

What makes recovery of ancient heritages possible is that from time immemorial, members of religious traditions have noticed and taken seriously many different kinds of living beings that share the earth with our own species. That deep commitments regarding the sanctity of life and the well-being of other living beings are foundational to many religious traditions is well known. In the Buddhist tradition, for example, the daily undertaking known as "the first precept," which commits one to refrain from killing or otherwise harming seriously any living being, has remained a principal commitment and thus a source of continuity for all Buddhists. Commitments of this kind have their roots in the religious past known as the Axial Age, which

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has been given various dates by different scholars but is generally said to have occurred during the six or seven centuries in the middle of the first millennium BCE in a half-dozen distinct geographical areas of India, China, the Middle East, and Greece. The key insight developed in this seminal period of humans' religious awareness is described by one prominent scholar in no uncertain terms.

The [Axial Age] sages certainly did not seek to impose their own view of this ultimate reality on other people. . . . *What mattered most was not what you believed but how you behaved.* Religion was about doing things that changed you at a profound level. . . . *First you must commit yourself to the ethical life;* then disciplined and habitual benevolence, not metaphysical conviction, would give you intimations of the transcendence you sought. . . . [Y]our concern must somehow extend to the entire world. . . . Each tradition developed its own formulation of the Golden Rule: do not do to others what you would not have done to you. As far as the Axial sages were concerned, *respect for the sacred rights of all beings*—not orthodox belief—was religion. (Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions* [Knopf, 2006], xiii–xiv; italics added.)

The religious traditions referred to—those of ancient India, the Hebrew Bible prophets, ancient China, and the earliest

Greek religious thinkers—are foundations for religious traditions that today are followed by well over half the human race (including Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism, Taoism, Christianity, and Islam). The fact is that very early forms of humans' ancient religious traditions, as well as the vast majority of the thousands of our species' small-scale and indigenous traditions, share in common this breakthrough insight about the importance of all living beings—true spirituality is constituted not by orthodox belief but, instead, by respect for the sacred rights of all beings.

At times, to be sure, this insight has been left behind in human-centered versions of religion advanced by the successors of the Axial Age sages. Some religiously inclined humans found

ways to deny humans' own animality as a way to distinguish humans from, and thereby justify privileges over, all other living beings. The prominence of such religiously motivated denials, as well as noteworthy inconsistencies spurred by traditional forms of domination and even mistreatment of other living beings, has been congenial to the emergence of secular-based tendencies, such as the industrialized phenomenon known as factory farming that subordinates any and all nonhumans for human advantage.

Yet even though it is true that humans' many diverse religious communities have at times inconsistently valued other living beings, there is good news today. As has happened in many places and times since the Axial Age, various religious traditions today

have again attained the Axial Age sages' insight about the importance of empathy and compassion beyond one's own species. Thus today around the world, the human community again is witnessing a foregrounding of concern for the sanctity of life and the well-being of many living beings beyond the species line. This has led many religious leaders to prompt their own local community to inquire into the current harm done to various animals in areas such as food production, destruction of habitat, and use in research. Such inquiries are a potent force for a number of reasons. Not only do the vast majority of humans in modern societies still retain some commitment to the importance of spiritual insights but also religious traditions provide well-developed ethical grounds to challenge the wide array of

harms to animals that exist in human societies. In particular, humans' spiritual traditions provide profoundly moving wisdom about the value to both animals *and* humans of developing caring, informed *modi vivendi* by which the diverse living beings that compose our shared earth community can coexist and thrive.

Despite the deepening and broadening of our species' understanding of the inevitable intersection of humans and nonhumans, and despite the fact that some religious communities today are often among the leaders in challenging harm to animals and their habitat, today's "religion and animals" landscape remains uneven. Thus, in contrast to some religious communities' steadfast and courageous affirmation of the value of nonhuman life and humans' obvious

continuities with other animals, many contemporary religious communities and traditions continue to support secular versions of human exceptionalism by insisting that humans are different not just in degree but in kind from any of the earth's other living beings. A corollary of such insistence has been explicit or implicit denial that humans are now, have always been, and always will be mammals, primates, and thus animals.

The emergence of religious communities as challengers to the human arrogance that drives human exceptionalism is important because the dualistic mentality that "either you are a valued human or you are merely a devalued animal" dominates much of the industrialized world today. Many societies have developed legal systems, educational approaches, ethical systems, and mainline religious institutions that insist it is fully moral to group any and all nonhuman animals in the devalued category "animal." The consequences of this dualism have for centuries now devastated animals and their communities. Extinctions abound, and even when a species is not threatened immediately with extinction, there has been what one observer referred to as "massive diminution of the entire body corporate of animate creation . . . [and] species that still survive as distinct life forms but have suffered horrendous diminishment." (Farley Mowat, *Sea of Slaughter* [Chapters Publishing, 1996], 14.)

Human-generated harm to the world's nonhuman living beings has also created risks on the human side of the divide—the loss of connection has been the subject of many analyses. Richard Louv, for example, has observed that "for a new generation, nature is more abstraction than reality" because "our society is teaching young people to avoid direct experience in nature." This lesson, which is now "delivered in schools, families, even organizations devoted to the outdoors, and codified into the legal and regulatory structures

of many of our communities,” creates great harm to children, the very beings we cherish most. Louv observes, “Yet, at the very moment that the bond is breaking between the young and the natural world, a growing body of research links our mental, physical, and spiritual health directly to our association with nature—in positive ways” (*Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* [Algonquin, 2005], 2, 3). Limiting children’s exposure to the more-than-human world risks impaired development of the children’s cognitive and ethical abilities, and much literature (summarized in Louv’s 2011 sequel addressing problems for adults, *The Nature Principle: Human Restoration and the End of Nature-Deficit Disorder* [Algonquin, 2011]) analyzes the educational and therapeutic benefits for all humans that stem directly from the presence of nonhuman animals in their lives. Other advantages abound as well, including reduced stress and increased environmental awareness. A final and particularly devastating consequence of dismissing and ignoring earth’s nonhuman living beings has been a profound, self-inflicted ignorance about other animals’ actual lives as individuals and members of their own communities.

Such a mentality of “only humans really matter” is open to many different challenges that can be framed in secular or religious terms. Among the most formidable religiously based challenges are those that invoke a religious tradition’s teachings about the sanctity of life, especially because such a claim is so often anchored in the tradition’s very earliest values. This salient fact in the modern debate over humans’ obligations to the “more-than-human world” (this term is from David Abram’s 1996 *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* [Pantheon Books]) is that religious communities can assert their most ancient and cherished values as they work side by side with secular groups to prevent

the mistreatment of animals and educate children and adult citizens of modern communities in ways that impart the wisdom needed to improve human relationships with those animals we are now harming.

It should be acknowledged that, from another vantage point, returning to teachings that prevailed in the earliest stages of a tradition can be a challenging matter. Today, humans collectively possess much better and more detailed information about many nonhuman lives, most of which suggests that specific animals are far more complex than is often taught in modern education, whether secular or religious. Ancient sages in one’s own tradition may have been (indeed, often were) very sensitive to ethical issues such as killing, but today we know about a much wider range of problems, such as harm to food animals and nonhuman research subjects; the effects of man-made poisons; the problems created when we hold other animals in captivity; and anthropogenic causes of habitat loss, species extinction, and climate disruption.

If one examines how those individuals and communities that compose contemporary religious traditions can approach their nonhuman neighbors, the answer is rich with challenges because humans need space, as do other animals, and conflicts are often inevitable. Above all, though, questions

about animals’ well-being can now be answered better on the basis of vastly improved scientific information about other animals that provides many lines of readily available evidence that support assertions that treatment of other animals should be far kinder than is the case with traditional practices now hallowed by the passage of time. The slaughter of certain animals, originally moderated by practices designed to minimize distress to the victim, has been overshadowed by the fact that conditions in which the sacrificial animals are raised have become stark and brutal, such that one’s own religious forebears would surely condemn such confinement as cruelty per se.

In sum, contemporary religious believers and their communities seeking to honor their own tradition’s original insights about the sacredness of life are challenged to come up with solutions that at one and the same time honor the tradition’s commitment to the value of other-than-human lives, honor the known realities of other animals, and yet address inherited practices that entailed domination of certain animals in the name of sacrifice or some other cherished religious value. The good news is, of course, that religious traditions are living traditions capable of deep moral insights that honor the sanctity of life and humans’ great capacity for ethical action. □

Japanese Ethical Attitudes to Animals

by Katsuhiro Kohara

The people of today, who can buy all the meat they want without any sense of pain or gratitude, thanks to intensive animal farming, may conceivably be living in the most barbaric era in human history.

Animals as Intermediaries

Innumerable living creatures die to support a single human life, and that applies as much now as in the distant past. However, being able to open one's wallet and buy as much meat as one wants is, historically speaking, a comparatively recent development and a product of society's modernization and industrialization. In this essay, I propose to critically examine the contemporary relationship between humans and animals from a historical perspective in order to draw out the ethical questions

that we ought to consider. In doing so, I will focus on attitudes toward animals in Japan, and changes therein, in comparison with corresponding attitudes in the West and, in particular, in Christianity.

Despite the fact that we kill so many animals, the death of a pet that has been our companion for many years can induce in us a deep sense of loss. As recognition of the psychiatric disorder known as pet loss syndrome demonstrates, such grief can at times be enormous. I was once asked by a small boy at church who had just lost his long-time pet dog, "Do dogs go to heaven?"

Adhering to the traditional view of animals held by Western Christianity, according to which only humans have souls, one answer might be that as dogs have no souls, they cannot go to heaven. However, I believe that a more useful insight into some of the issues posed by this question is provided by this passage from the Hebrew Bible:

For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knows whether the human spirit goes upward and the spirit of animals goes downward to the earth? (Eccles. 3:19–21, New Revised Standard Version)

These words from the Bible admonish humans for their arrogance toward animals. Indeed, history teaches us that the human sense of difference from and superiority over animals leads to discriminatory sentiment between humans, too, causing "us" to see ourselves as different from "you." When racial discrimination occurs, for example, the object of discrimination is often likened to an animal (typically a monkey or a pig) and despised.

World War I was a war of unprecedented carnage fought between countries with Christian traditions. In his exploration of the fundamental causes of this tragedy, Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965)

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concluded that it arose from the violence inherent in anthropocentrism, which, he argued, had to be overcome by accepting the equality of all life as propounded in his concept of “reverence for life.” The question of how humans relate to animals is one that is also of crucial importance to analyzing human pride and violence in depth.

Relations between animals and humans naturally date back as far as human history itself. Humans have not only needed animals as a source of nutrition in order to survive; animals have also been essential to uniquely human forms of behavior through their use for the ritual sacrifices that accompanied prayer to divine powers. Animals have, in other words, served as “intermediaries” between humans and the supernatural. Given how long animals have been ritually killed and used as offerings, animal sacrifice could in fact be regarded as constituting “religion” itself.

In the Western study of religion that developed in the modern period, religion was defined as something that separated humans from animals (by, for example, Émile Durkheim and Mircea Eliade), and religion was considered to begin where animalism ended. Humans undoubtedly exhibit characteristics not shared by animals. However, the quest to find humans’ origins in recent years in fields including genetics, primatology, archaeology, social anthropology, and evolutionary biology has for the most part demonstrated the existence of continuities rather than fundamental differences between humans and animals.

Drawing on this scientific knowledge, we need to gain broader insight into humans in the context of their interrelations with animals. I consider next, therefore, attitudes toward animals in Japan as a case example to assist in this process.

Attitudes to Animals in Japan

More than twenty million cats and dogs are now kept as pets in Japan, making them even more numerous than children under the age of fifteen (approximately sixteen million). Japan is by any measure a pet-loving nation, but pet-loving nations are not necessarily animal-friendly ones. By reviewing the relationship between animals and humans in Japan in the past and how it has evolved, I intend to shed light on the religiosity of Japanese society and present-day ethical issues.

I begin by sketching the contours of religiosity (including attitudes to animals) in Japan using several examples. The following passage was written by the novelist Roka Tokutomi (1868–1927). In his life as a Christian, Tokutomi wrote many pieces that depicted the subtleties of nature. The following is an excerpt from a chapter in his memoirs about a dog called Shiro:

Perhaps he [Tokutomi] had been a dog in a former life, for even in his present life in human form, he could think of nothing as lovable as a dog. As a child, he was always

out playing with dogs, getting his clothes muddy and ragged, to his mother’s despair, but no matter how much she scolded him for the mess he made of his clothes, he would soon be off again to cavort with his canine friends. He would even share his favorite sweets with dogs, and if he heard a puppy whimper, he would awake even at midnight and look for it, rubbing his sleepy eyes. (“Shiro” in *Mimizu no tawakoto* [Idle words of an earthworm] [Hattori Shoten, 1913])

In this passage, Tokutomi says something that a Western Christian would never have written. Admittedly half in jest, Tokutomi muses that he was perhaps such a dog lover in his present life in “human form” because he was a dog in a “former life.” The concept of reincarnation and of past, present, and future lives is one that gained wide currency in Japan. Although it originated in India, its transmission through Buddhism made

its influence felt throughout East Asia.

Belief in reincarnation may not be scientific, but it has clearly had a strong impact on views of life in a broad sense. As noted above, Schweitzer argued for the equality of all life, and the concept of reincarnation provides us with another angle on the equality of lives and how they are correlated. One country in which the relationship between animals and humans was significantly influenced by this view of life is Japan.

For example, the sacrifice of animals to bring rain, practiced throughout East Asia, ceased in Japan. Its place was taken by the contrasting ritual release of captured animals and prohibition of hunting and fishing, and the Buddhist concept of reincarnation and the precept of non-killing became superimposed upon the aboriginal beliefs (animistic views of life) that preexisted the arrival of Buddhism. As the taking of life was considered to disrupt the natural order, capital punishment was prohibited in ancient Japanese society from the beginning of spring until the autumnal equinox. Human life, animal life, and life in the natural world were understood to be connected at the root.

This ancient view of life has, of course, not been inherited unmodified by contemporary Japan. In Japanese subcultures such as manga and anime, however, its vestiges and influence are still widely observable. The epic *Phoenix* series by the renowned manga artist Osamu Tezuka (1928–89), for example, uses the concept of reincarnation to depict a world from ancient times into the far future, while an animistic, polytheistic worldview can be detected in three of the film director Hayao Miyazaki's most acclaimed works, namely *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *Spirited Away*.

The world of Pokémon, whose popularity shows no signs of abating, may also be interpreted as a product of Japan's animistic cultural heritage. Pokémon species are given plant-, insect-, bird-, fish-, and mammal-like features and

are depicted as coexisting antagonistically with humans. As the Pokémon GO smartphone application shows, today's Pokémon serve as a link between the real world and the virtual. They have in a sense inherited the role formerly played by animals as intermediaries between humans and the supernatural world. While modern humans admittedly no longer possess the animistic sensibility exhibited by ancient people in their interactions with nature and animals, a "virtual animism" that is descended from this sensibility still has a firm hold on the modern psyche.

Changes in the Modern Period and Ethical Issues

Japan has many legends that tell of the relationships between animals and humans. In the eighth-century *Nihon shoki* (Chronicles of Japan), even plants speak. Formerly, all kinds of clever devices were used to redress the imbalance in power between animals and humans. Old tales in which animals converse with humans, adopt human and other forms, and marry them were a part of everyday Japanese lives, and they acted as a "circuit" through which people experienced the pain and gratitude that arose from having to kill animals in order to survive.

In contrast, the people of today, who can buy all the meat they want without any sense of pain or gratitude, thanks to intensive animal farming, may conceivably be living in the most barbaric era in human history. We must recover the ability to "listen" to the voices of dumb animals. This is because animals provide us with a valuable measure of what it means to be human, and this ability will open our eyes to the people among us, too, who have no voice.

Modern people destroy nature to satisfy their own desires and justify the taking of animal life. Animals infected with diseases such as avian influenza and foot-and-mouth disease are exterminated, large numbers of experimental animals are killed, and cats and dogs that have been abandoned by their owners are destroyed for humans' sake. I believe, therefore, that it is the duty of traditional religions that have inherited a fertile view of life to encourage contemporary societies that have become excessively anthropocentric—and consequently also filled with violence—to reconsider how life should be lived. We must critically examine the modern concept of "religion" that privilege humans; liberate ourselves from trivialized human-animal relationships; and spin new "tales" for the future that subsume nature, animals, and humans. □

Islam and Animals

by Magfirah Dahlan

An increasing number of Muslims who are . . . critical of the modern farming and food system have sought more knowledge of and a greater proximity to the animals they consume as an alternative to abstaining from consuming meat or using animals in general.

What can Islamic teachings contribute now to the human-animal relationship?

To answer the question above, we can begin with the textual foundations for Islamic teachings, including the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the sayings and examples of the Prophet Muhammad). Both of these sources give Muslims guidance on how to treat animals, which we have historically depended on. In general, by outlining the limits between the permissible and the forbidden, the Qur'an gives permission for humans to consume animals as food and utilize them for other purposes.

An example of the limits with which Muslims and non-Muslims alike are familiar is the restrictions on animal slaughter that define halal (permissible or lawful) meat. Halal meat comes from animals that have been slaughtered swiftly with a very sharp knife to ensure that the animals do not suffer unnecessary pain. The Qur'an specifically forbids meat that comes from animals that have been strangled, beaten, or gored to death (Qur'an V:3). Furthermore, the Qur'an also specifies that halal slaughter must be done by or in the presence of a

Muslim who pronounces the name of God at the moment of slaughter (Qur'an VI:121). Muslims are commanded to minimize not only the physical suffering but also the psychological suffering of the animals they slaughter. The Prophetic Sunnah include prohibition against sharpening one's knife in front of the animals as well as slaughtering an animal in front of other animals (A. B. A. Masri, *Animal Welfare in Islam* [Islamic Foundation, 2009], 50).

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How does this guidance on ethical treatment of animals apply to the contemporary world?

Taking the context into account, living in a modern industrial society is very different in many ways from the context in which the foundational sources of Islamic teachings were first revealed to Muslims. Many Muslims are familiar with stories of how the Prophet treated his sheep, camels, and horses kindly, and they continue to pass the stories down to the younger generations. Those of us who live in modern urban areas, however, do not have similar human-animal relationships. We do not ride horses as a transportation necessity, use camels to carry our heavy loads, or personally carry out or witness the slaughter of the livestock that we consume daily. For many Muslims, observing halal means trusting halal certification and Muslim meat-store owners that the animals have

been slaughtered according to the religion's requirements, but many Muslims have no extensive knowledge of what exactly the animals experience before they reach the dinner table.

Muslims share with others the overall disconnection that marks the human-animal relationship in what has been described by Richard W. Bulliet as the "postdomestic" era (*Hunters, Herders, and Hamburgers: The Past and Future of Human-Animal Relationships* [Columbia University Press, 2005], 3). What makes this era peculiar is that this disconnection between humans and animals is combined with an unprecedented amount of meat consumption. Our continued dependence on animals extends beyond the meat that we eat. We may no longer use animals to plow our fields or transport us and our possessions, but we continue to use animals for a variety of other reasons. We consume products made with animal parts and developed using animal research, as well as using animals for educational and entertainment purposes. What distinguishes the postdomestic era from earlier eras is the

physical and psychological proximities between humans and the animals that they use, with the exception of animals as pets. Pets in our society are treated as part of the human family, possessing names and individual personalities, and people cannot imagine their cats or dogs as food or research subjects.

What are some of the responses that have been developed, based on Islamic teachings and traditions, to the contemporary problems of human-animal relationships?

Proponents of animal rights argue that animals have the right not to be used and exploited by humans. Although the majority of Muslims believe that Islam permits the use of animals for human benefit given the restrictions, some have cast doubt on this belief by questioning the assumptions of such permissibility. A number of scholars have developed arguments for Islamic ethical vegetarianism, for example, by contextualizing the Islamic animal slaughter requirements with modern industrial animal farming in particular and the food system in general (Richard Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures* [Oneworld, 2006]). Central to such arguments is the reality of animal abuse and maltreatment in the system, together with the abundance of nonanimal sources of nutrition available to modern populations. In essence, those scholars argue that while the use of animals, including as food, was permitted at the time when Islamic teachings were first revealed, such permission no longer applies to modern Muslims because we live in a society in which we no longer need to be dependent on animals for our nutritional needs. Given our lack of necessity, they argue, Muslims' moral obligation to avoid inflicting unnecessary pain and

suffering on animals requires abstaining from consuming animals.

An increasing number of Muslims who are also critical of the modern farming and food system have sought more knowledge of and a greater proximity to the animals they consume as an alternative to abstaining from consuming meat or using animals in general. They favor small, local farms where they can witness how the animals are being raised and slaughtered (N. Arumugam, "The Eco-Halal Revolution: Clean Food for Muslims" [*Halal Focus*, <http://halalfocus.net/the-eco-halal-revolution-clean-food-for-muslims/>, November 4, 2009. Accessed November 7, 2016]).

To these Muslims, the problem of modern farming and the food system lies in distancing humans from the animals they depend on and in the concealment of the abuse and maltreatment that the animals experience. While Muslims believe that Islam continues to permit them to slaughter and consume the meat of animals, they believe that Muslims cannot participate in a food system where they cannot personally ensure that the animals are raised and slaughtered humanely. Muslims have the ethical obligation to ensure that the meat they consume is not only lawful (halal) but also wholesome or pure (*tayyib*).

While modern conceptions of human nature emphasize the difference between humans and animals and the superiority of humans over animals, proponents of animal ethics point to the physical and psychological characteristics that humans share with animals. One way that Islamic teachings can contribute to the improvement of contemporary human-animal relationships is to add spirituality as a shared characteristic between humans and animals in the modern narrative. Islamic teachings and traditions speak to the humans' and animals' shared abilities to praise and pray to the Creator (Qur'an XXII:18; XXIV:41). □

Religion and Animals in the City

by Dave Aftandilian

By coming into closer connection with animals in the city, we will have more opportunities and greater reason to care about and for them. Such caring, in turn, can bring significant benefits to our animal neighbors and to us.

Let me start by telling you a story about my first experience with animals and religion in the city. At the time, I was living in Hyde Park, a university neighborhood in Chicago's South Side. One day while my wife and I were walking to the grocery, we noticed a small crowd of people clustered around a tree in a sidewalk planter. As we got closer, we saw the attraction: a small to medium-sized furry brown creature with a scaly black tail, which we soon recognized as a muskrat. How the muskrat got there we hadn't a clue, since it was at least a half-mile away from its closest suitable habitats near Lake Michigan and separated from it by several very busy streets. But the muskrat clearly needed help; she or he seemed weak and disoriented.

As we joined the others in discussing what to do next, a homeless man happened by with his shopping cart filled with old clothes, boxes, bags, and more. He also wanted to help this bedraggled little creature, and so we all pitched in some cash to pay him to take the muskrat back to the lakefront. He used some of the clothes to pick up the muskrat, put him in one of the boxes, and slowly rattled off on his mission of mercy.

Obviously there are a lot of threads in this story that one might follow to interesting thoughts. But the one that

has stuck with me ever since was this: a sense of wonder at the way in which one small furry creature transformed a crowd of diverse urban strangers into a caring community with a unified purpose. I see this as one of the central religious contributions animals in the city can make: they can help connect us with each other; with the city and the natural world; and with the numinous in the everyday, the sacred all around us.

Why Cities? Why Animals?

Before exploring those connections a bit further, let's take a step back for a moment and think about why it might make sense to focus on cities, and on animals within them, for this special issue on religion and animals. For one thing, today most people in the world live in cities, and this trend will only accelerate in the future. According to the United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs, in 2014, 54 percent of the world's people lived in cities; compare that figure to 1950, when just 30 percent were urbanites.

Since most people live in urban areas, cities and suburbs are where most of us encounter animals. Yet we seldom think about these animals as part of

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our urban communities, even though they live with us in our homes, in our backyards, and in nearby parks and open lots (not to mention on and in our own bodies). They also wriggle through the soil beneath us, migrate overhead, and swim in nearby waterways. Animals are all around us in the city, and not just the familiar domestic species, or nuisance species (such as rats), but also animals we usually view as truly wild, such as coyotes, mountain lions, or any number of winged species. Some of these animals have inhabited cities with us all along, but many, like coyotes, have slowly begun to return to now-urbanized environments from which they were once excluded. The question is, will we welcome and make space for our new animal neighbors or drive them out once again?

I would argue that we should carefully consider all that animals offer to us in urban environments as we ponder that question. Let us set aside for the moment the crucial ecological services that city animals provide, from crop pollination to pest control. The acclaimed author Richard Louv wrote in *Last Child in the Woods* about “nature deficit disorder,” how our children are growing up with little sense of connection to nature and the fellow beings with whom we share it. If we pay attention to them, urban animals can help remedy this deficit, connecting us to the natural world that surrounds us even in the grayest corners of our concrete jungles. For one thing, they can attune us to changing seasonal rhythms, like the peeping of the first frogs that announces the arrival of spring, or the return of the cormorants in my current home city of Fort Worth, Texas, that tells me winter has come.

Why Religion and Animals in the City?

But even if we agree that a focus on cities and animals makes sense, it might not be immediately obvious what we

have to gain by thinking about these topics together in a religious sense. After all, until relatively recently, very few people thought animals and religion had much to do with each other. It was not until 2003 that the first scholarly organization devoted to the study of animals and religion was founded (the Animals and Religion Group of the American Academy of Religion), and the first scholarly anthology on

the topic, *A Communion of Subjects*, did not appear until 2006. Yet today more and more scholars are coming to see animals not just as religious objects, such as symbols, but also as religious subjects worthy of study as such, and perhaps even as having the capacity to have their own spiritual experiences. Donovan Schaefer’s recent book, *Religious Affects*, explores this fascinating possibility.

I have already mentioned that attending to animals in the city offers us the possibility of connecting more deeply with all beings, with the places we share, and with the sacred that can be found all around us. Religion is also about reconnection, as we can see if we consider a likely Latin root of the word *religio*, the verb *religare*, which means “to restrain” or “to tie back.” On the one hand, we could read this root meaning of religion as focusing on its peacemaking aspects, which restrain us from harming one another. But we could also see it as highlighting the importance of *connection* to the religious impulse: reconnecting us to the things that truly matter. In this sense, then, the reconnection offered to us by animals in the city is a deeply religious matter.

Thinking about human-animal relationships in the city can also help us envision our ethical and civic commitments. In his essay in the book *City Creatures*, Mike Hogue wrote that “dog companioning and dog parks, which create unique urban civic and associational spaces by bringing diverse people into relationship with one another, are essential to the repair and deepening of democracy” (Gavin Van Horn and Dave Aftandilian, eds. [University of Chicago Press, 2015]). He argues that the same skills we need to be good companions to canines in the city across species barriers, such as active listening and empathy, also prepare us to be good companions to other humans in the city across barriers of race, class, and more. He found this to be true in his own experience of cocreating a “guerilla dog park” on Chicago’s South Side with a very diverse group of neighbors united at first only by love for their dogs but later by their loving care for one another.

Moreover, especially in the hustle and bustle of the urban environment, attending to animals brings us a doubly precious gift: the chance to slow down and reflect. On the one hand, this pause

gives us the chance to dwell more fully in the present moment—rather than always rushing to the next one—which can reduce stress and lead to greater happiness. The Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh has written eloquently on this topic for decades in works such as *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* and *Happiness: Essential Mindfulness Practices*.

On the other hand, attending to animals can also help us see the sacred in the everyday. In Judeo-Christian traditions, animals are often portrayed as having the ability to see the presence of the sacred even when humans cannot. Perhaps the clearest example of this comes from the book of Numbers in the Hebrew Bible (22:21–35), in which Balaam’s donkey saw an angel standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, blocking the path, while his master was oblivious. The donkey tried to find ways around the angel, who moved to block him, until finally the donkey gave up and just lay down in the road. Balaam, meanwhile, beat his mount for disobedience until God opened the donkey’s mouth to let him defend himself, and then opened Balaam’s eyes to the presence of the angel. The angel told Balaam,

“The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If it had not turned away from me, surely just now I would have killed you and let it live.”

But of course, most encounters with the sacred through animals are not so weighty as that. They tend to be much simpler yet no less profound. When I hear the local mob of crows cawing as I walk to work, in that moment I forget whatever cares I have been turning around and around in my mind and instead awaken to the healing magic in the world around me. My heavy-weighted trudge turns to a light-footed dance. Wonder and beauty are everywhere, city animals seem to be telling us, if only we take the time to look and listen.

How Can We Open Ourselves to Religious Experiences with Animals in the City?

And that brings me to one final question: How can we best open ourselves to religious experiences with animals in the city? A good first step is to seek out more direct encounters with city creatures, either on our own or in the company of friends, family, or companion

animals. And we don't have to go out of our way to have such experiences: we just need to take a pause in our hyper-busy lives, open our eyes and ears, and be more mindful of the animals that are already present all around us, no matter what city we live in. By becoming more aware of urban animals, we can begin to feel a greater sense of connection to them and perhaps even come to see them as members of our communities.

By coming into closer connection with animals in the city, we will have more opportunities and greater reason to care about and for them. Such caring, in turn, can bring significant benefits to our animal neighbors and to us.

I have observed a positive feedback loop developing along these lines among animal rescuers I have spoken with in Chicago. The Chicago Bird Collision Monitors (www.birdmonitors.net) rescues birds that have become stunned after colliding with the mirror-shiny glass windows of tall skyscrapers along the city's lakefront. (Monitors also collect birds that have died after such collisions and bring them to the Field

Museum, where researchers use them to study migration patterns.) Several of the bird-collision monitors I spoke with said they started rescuing birds after noting one lying senseless and helpless on the sidewalk and seeing everyone else walking by ignore the bird. These rescuers feel that because we built the skyscrapers along their migratory pathway, it is our responsibility to do what we can to help birds whose lives are endangered by our buildings. In other words, becoming aware of these birds' plight led these people to feel a sense of connection to them and a responsibility for helping them. And in expressing their caring for these birds, many of these new rescuers told me they also began to develop a stronger sense of connection to the natural world that surrounds us all the time, even in Chicago's downtown skyscrapered Loop.

Another word for this positive-feedback loop is *reciprocity*. Native peoples throughout North America speak of reciprocity as one of the highest principles of their worldviews. Because animals care for us, we have a responsibility to care for them, which will then allow

them to continue to care for us, and so on (the same reciprocity is also felt and acted upon by Native peoples in respect to specific places and to the natural world in general).

I can tell one more story shared with me by a dog rescuer as an example of this principle of reciprocity in action among non-Native people in the city. As a child this rescuer had been severely abused, and he therefore decided to leave home when he was quite young. He lived on the streets and became addicted to drugs. As he traveled to some of Chicago's rougher areas to get his fixes, he began to notice homeless dogs in these same neighborhoods, many of them also showing signs of abuse. He felt an immediate kinship with these dogs and began to do whatever he could to care for them, helping them heal from the trauma of their abuse and finding them loving homes. This care work gave the rescuer a sense of purpose that helped him step off the downward-spiraling path he had been following with drugs and alcohol and begin to move in a more positive direction. As he put it, "I'm not saving the dogs—they saved me."

While not all of us are cut out for the physically and emotionally hard work of animal rescue, we can all work to become more aware of the animals with whom we share our cities and suburbs, both domestic and wild: winged, furred, and scaled. That growing mindfulness of animals, in turn, can help us feel more connected not just to them but also to each other and to the home places that we share. Connecting more closely with other animals in the city can also open our eyes to the presence of the sacred in the ordinary and the everyday, both within and outside us. When we learn to see the face of God in the face of a dog or cat or coyote or peregrine falcon, we will also be a lot more likely to see the Beloved in every face we encounter on the street, no matter the person's color or culture, and to treat the person accordingly. □

Gratitude and Treasuring Lives: Eating Animals in Contemporary Japan

by Barbara Ambros

The contemporary Japanese discourse of gratitude envisions an interconnected chain of becoming that is sustained by animal lives and culminates in human lives. As animal bodies are consumed and transformed into human bodies, humans have the moral obligation to face this reality and express their gratitude.

In March 2009, Gifu City began to celebrate the Thanksgiving Festival for Food and Animals (Shoku to dōbutsu no kanshasai), later renamed Thanksgiving Festival for Food and Lives (Shoku to inochi no kanshasai) in 2013. Initially organized by the United Graduate School of Veterinary Sciences of Gifu University in conjunction with a symposium on the safety and quality of meat, the festival promoted the consumption of beef, pork, and chicken produced in Gifu Prefecture. The following year, Think Gifu (Gifu o Omou Kai), a local citizens group, took over the organization of the festival in collaboration with a local agricultural college. This time, the festival highlighted locally produced beef, chicken, and rice, products that have remained the focus of the festival ever since. That same year, the festival featured a talk by Chisen Hori, the abbot of the locally renowned Nichiren temple Myōshōji. Abbot Hori's talk stressed the importance of being grateful for plant- and animal-based foods and the people who labored to produce them. Since then, the festival has become an annual event that promotes local culture and agricultural products. Visitors can sample food for free, purchase local

produce, and enjoy song and dance performances. In addition, the festival usually includes a workshop led by area educators or intellectuals in order to raise awareness that the food requires taking animal and plant lives (Yanai and Nakayama 2015; Gifu 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2014).

Over the past ten years, an increasing number of publications and public events in Japan have drawn attention to the fact that humans must rely on animal lives for food. The moral principle at the center of this discourse is gratitude (*kansha*). While the connection between animals and gratitude has a long history in Buddhism, in modern Japan the meaning of repaying a debt of gratitude has shifted from an emphasis on liberating animals to consuming animals with gratitude. In other words, as meat eating has become normative in modern Japan, even among the Buddhist clergy, a sacrificial rationale that relies on ex post facto devices has replaced anti-meat-eating discourses that have remained central features of a Buddhist identity in other parts of East Asia. The contemporary Japanese discourse of gratitude envisions an interconnected chain of becoming that is sustained by

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animal lives and culminates in human lives. As animal bodies are consumed and transformed into human bodies, humans have the moral obligation to face this reality and express their gratitude.

Debts of Gratitude and the Principle of Retribution

Historically, gratitude has been a marker of both difference and kinship between humans and other animals. In Mahayana Buddhism, animals were often described as “lacking gratitude” (Jpn., *on*; Chn., *en*; Skt., *kṛta*), also meaning “kindness.” According to Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Perfection of Great Wisdom* (Jpn., *Daichidoron*; Chn., *Dazhidulun*; Taishō shinshū daizōkyō [hereafter T], Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabe, eds.,

examples of Maobao's white turtle and the great fish of Kunming Pond, both of which excelled at repaying their debt of gratitude to the humans who saved them. He ends by asking why, if even animals know how to repay a debt of gratitude, a person claiming to be worthy could fail to do so. Even though gratitude was presumably a human virtue and those that lacked it were regarded as inhumane and beastly, exceptional animals served to illustrate the moral imperative to show gratitude (Ambros 2014, 254).

Nichiren is alluding to a long tradition of gratitude tales that can be traced back to India and China. In the Golden Light Sutra (T. 16 no. 663: 335a–359c), for instance, the Buddha in his previous life as Jalavāhana is generously rewarded by the fish he saved during a drought. After the fish are reborn in Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, they shower him with jewels and flowers. This scripture became one of the texts on which East Asian ritual animal releases were modeled (Ambros 2012, 38, 42).

In China, gratitude tales involving animals became a popular genre. In such didactic tales, animals were depicted as doling out generous rewards to humans who showed them kindness and as repaying debts of gratitude in kind—saving a human life for being saved from certain death or freeing from imprisonment humans who had released them. Conversely, animals wronged by humans would mete out equivalent punishment for the cruelty they had experienced. Such tales taught powerful lessons about karmic retribution and reward. They also carried strong messages against killing or harming animals and endorsed the release of living beings (Pu 2014, 163–203).

Similar lessons also appear in ancient and medieval Japanese didactic tales. For instance, the *Nihon ryōiki* (*Miraculous Stories from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition*) (late eighth or early ninth century) and the *Konjaku monogatari*

(*Tales of Times Now Past*) (ca. 1100) portray animals that save the lives of their human benefactors to recompense a debt of gratitude, while humans who harm animals find their lives imperiled. Such tales encouraged humans to emulate animal paragons of virtue and cautioned against killing animals. As the *Nihon ryōiki* explains, “Even an animal does not forget gratitude and repays an act of kindness. How, then, could a righteous man fail to have a sense of gratitude?” and “Even an insect which has no means of attaining enlightenment returns a favor. How can a man ever forget kindness he has received?” (Nakamura 1973, 118, 178; Ambros 2014, 254)

Significantly, as in medieval China, ancient and medieval Japanese gratitude tales about animals tend to link karmic retribution and repaying a debt of gratitude to not killing animals and releasing life. The following story from the *Nihon ryōiki*, which also appears in the *Konjaku monogatari*, is a good example for this connection. After his death, a man from Settsu Province who had previously sacrificed seven oxen to a Chinese divinity is brought before King Yama, the judge of the underworld. The seven oxen seek their revenge, but because the man had eventually given up such sacrifices in favor of releasing life, he is rescued by the countless small animals he liberated and is safely returned to life (Nakamura 1973, 164–66). In other words, killing or sacrificing animals was closely associated with illness and premature death, whereas sparing animal lives was thought to prolong life and lead to karmic rewards.

Gratitude and Animal Memorial Rites

As animals became increasingly commodified in early modern Japan, new ritual technologies allowed people involved in killing animals for their livelihood to express gratitude for the animals whose deaths sustained them. Rather

100 vols. [Daizō Shuppan, 1924–34], 25 no. 1509: 413c23–24), gratitude is a human prerogative that leads to the cultivation of compassion, and humans who lack this virtue degenerate into beasts (Long 2005, 29). Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū* (T. 84 no. 2682: 37c19–c20) likewise associates animality with the lack of gratitude. He explains that rebirth in the beastly realm is retribution for stupidity, doing evil without regret, and lacking gratitude for receiving alms (Ambros 2014, 251–53). Yet even though animals were associated with the lack of gratitude, many didactic tales also featured grateful animals.

Paradoxically, animals were expected to lack gratitude but became paragons of this exact virtue in order to teach humans a lesson. Nichiren (1222–82), for example, uses this reasoning in *The Opening of the Eyes* (*Kaimokushō*; T. 84 no. 2689: 217b09–b15) when he argues that those who fail to repay their debt of gratitude to the Lotus Sutra are in fact beasts who know no gratitude. He juxtaposes this moral deficiency with the

than supporting the abstention from animal flesh or avoiding killing animals, memorial rituals for animals canceled out the karmic burden incurred by such acts. Whaling communities, for instance, were among the first to conduct memorial rites for the animals they killed, acknowledging the animals' death as a blessing for their communities while also averting potential retribution from the dead whales. While the whalers showed empathy for the plight of the whales, killing the animals was also regarded as inevitable, even fated, and as long as the whalers did not waste any part of the whales' bodies, the whalers could atone for the violence against the whales by holding annual memorial rites for them (Ambros 2012, 57–63).

Such animal memorial rituals have continued to the present. As Hirochika Nakamaki argues, public memorial rituals, including those for animals, serve as *ex post facto* devices that help the living deal with premature death, but in the modern period, such memorials tend to rely on the concept of gratitude rather than emphasizing the propitiation of potentially vengeful spirits. For Nakamaki, modern animal memorial

rituals have played an important role in justifying the production and consumption of animal-based goods. In other words, the expression of *ex post facto* gratitude does not curb consumption but actually endorses it (Nakamaki 2005, 45, 55–56). Ikuo Nakamura has also critiqued the rationale behind such memorial rites. He argues that they support rampant consumption by providing participants with an opportunity to assuage their guilt without ever having to change their exploitative practices (Nakamura 2001, 243–44).

Arguably, in postwar Japan the notion of vengeful retribution did not disappear entirely, but often it was not voiced explicitly. Instead, the concept of gratitude was embedded in a sacrificial rationale that cast animals as willing victims to their own destruction for the benefit of Japanese society and consequently forestalled negative repercussions from the act of killing (Ambros 2012, 71–80). A recent survey of memorial services for laboratory animals illustrates the confluence of spirit propitiation (36 percent) and the expression of gratitude (43 percent) as the primary motivations for such rituals

(Ôue et al. 2008, 70–72). It should also be noted that since rituals for laboratory animals are often conducted at public research institutions, they are sometimes termed a “thanksgiving festival” (*kanshasai*) rather than a “memorial rite” (*kuyō*) or “spirit-propitiation rite” (*ireisai*), both of which carry religious connotations. Thus the commemorative rite is secularized to avoid violating the separation of religion and the state (Ambros 2012, 6–7, 80–83). In addition, the name highlights that the rite is a formal expression of gratitude.

Treasuring Life and Endorsing Grateful Consumption

Significantly, expressing one's respect for life (15 percent) was the third-most-cited reason for memorial rites for laboratory animals (Ôue et al. 2008, 70–72). This theme points to an emerging discourse that links the *ex post facto* expression of gratitude with valuing life—a rationale that also informs Gifu's Thanksgiving Festival for Food and Lives. The combination of gratitude, valuing life, and meat consumption has likewise become a popular theme in several recent children's books that are aimed to instill in the young a sense that they are valuing life by eating meat and not wasting food as long as they utter a heartfelt “*Itadakimasu*” and “*Gochisōsama*” before and after the meal.

One example is the picture book *Shinde kureta* (They died for me) by award-winning poet Shuntarō Tanikawa (b. 1931) (Tanikawa 2014). Nowadays, most people in Japan only purchase meat at supermarkets or restaurants without ever encountering the living animals whose flesh they are about to consume. Tanikawa, however, brings children face-to-face with the reality that meat is the flesh of animals. The text of the book, spoken in the voice of a young boy, is short enough to be cited here in full (translation mine):

The cow
Died for me
And became a hamburger
Thank you cow

Actually
The pig also died for me
As did the chicken and
Sardines and mackerel pike and
salmon and clams
A lot of beings died for me

I cannot die for anybody
Because nobody eats me
Besides if I died
Mother would cry
Father would cry
As would Grandma and my little
sister

That's why I live
The cow's share and the pig's share
And the shares of the living beings
that died for me
All of them (Tanikawa 2014)

Shinde kureta strongly endorses the consumption of meat as a means for human survival. As author Tanikawa states on the dust jacket, "If living beings didn't eat living beings, they would not go on living. Humans are actually living thanks to other living beings." The narrative justifies the consumption of meat by depicting how animal flesh is transformed into healthy, strong human bodies.

The narrative of *Shinde kureta* conceals human agency in the animals' death but does not shrink away from death itself. The animals are portrayed as willingly sacrificing their lives to sustain humans, who are, in contrast to other animals, described as inedible. Yet the book's illustrations visually allude to the bloody reality behind the production of meat. The words "died for me" appear in white characters on a black background suggesting death. On the opposite page bold brushstrokes of red and white evoke splashing blood. A later double page shows the shady,

yellowish outlines of various food animals against a brown background—hinting at the dark, lingering presence of animal spirits. Despite alluding to the deathly aspects of meat consumption, the book ends on a life-affirming note as the protagonist promises to live the animals' lives in their stead. By choosing to live life to the fullest, humans can lead interrupted animals' lives vicariously. The final illustration shows the young boy framed by a rising sun—a symbol of life, hope, and light, and a strong counterpoint to the images of death, darkness, and gloomy shadows. *Shinde kureta* suggests an interlinked chain of becoming that culminates in vigorous human lives.

These sentiments have also taken root in contemporary Japanese Buddhism. The clearest example is the new meal verses adopted by the Nishi Hongwanji branch of Jōdo Shinshū in 2009. The sectarian leadership decided to shift the focus from Amida Buddha to the sacrifice of lives. The sectarian leadership replaced an earlier version of the verse recited before the meal, "Thanks to the Buddha and to everybody, we were blessed with this feast," with the new wording "Thanks to many lives and everybody, we were blessed with this feast." According to the official commentary, the substitution of "many lives" for "the Buddha" was intended to dispel the misunderstanding that the Buddha was like a creator divinity who had created animals so that they could serve as food for humans. Instead, the new phrasing was meant to highlight "that the sacrifice of 'many lives' and our indebtedness to the Buddha are different things" and to express remorse (Kyōgaku Dendō Sentā 2009, 8).

Jōdo Shinshū may be singular in having officially incorporated the idea of gratitude for the sacrifice of plants and animals into its sectarian teachings, but clerics of other Buddhist schools embrace similar positions as indicated by Nichiren cleric Chisen Hori's participation in Gifu's 2010 Thanksgiving Festival for Food

and Animals. Similarly, the annual Gion Hōjōe in Kyoto, an event organized by the Tendai temple Sekizanzen'in, is performed to express gratitude toward the plants and animals consumed as food. The event typically features a Dharma talk by Kanshō Kayaki (b. 1946) (currently the vice-abbot of Zenkōji's Daikanjin), in which Kayaki bemoans the waste of food in modern Japanese society and exhorts his audiences to be grateful for the animals and plants they consume.

Conclusion

Meat eating has long been considered problematic in Buddhism: many East Asian forms of Buddhism categorically reject meat eating as a whole, whereas the orthodox *vinaya*, such as the *Ten Recitations Vinaya* (T. 23 no. 1435: 265a03–06), only allows the consumption of so-called clean meat and prohibits as unclean any meat that has been specifically killed for the monastic community. In contrast, as Richard Jaffe has demonstrated, the consumption of any kind of meat has become commonly accepted in modern Japanese Buddhism. Once considered an antinomian practice

peculiar to Jōdo Shinshū, meat eating became a potent symbol of a strong modern nation and modern Buddhism from the Meiji period (1868–1912) onward (Jaffe 2005).

Contemporary Japanese arguments for the consumption of meat, including those made by Buddhist clerics, have adopted a sacrificial reasoning. Unlike earlier Buddhist discourses that stigmatized meat consumption or averted the human gaze from the slaughter, contemporary Japanese discourses propose that witnessing the killing of animals makes the consumption of meat wholesome as long as humans avoid wastefulness and express their gratitude for the animals' sacrifice. Recognizing the indebtedness of humans to animals creates an opening for reflection that makes it possible to see animals as subjects and to destigmatize the labor involved in animal slaughter and the manufacture of animal-based products. Yet while the expression of gratitude validates the deaths of animals, it does not necessarily better their lives. On the contrary, the expression of remorse and gratitude can serve to spur consumption without the need for altering any exploitive practices inherent to the modern animal-industrial complex. □

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Miracle Stories of the Horse-Headed Bodhisattva of Compassion, Batō Kannon

by Benedetta Lomi

The horse's head of the bodhisattva Batō Kannon has, canonically, a number of functions, the most important of which is the ability to remove the afflictions and defilements of sentient beings.

Batō Kannon, literally meaning “horse-headed” Kannon, is the Japanese form of the Indic deity Hayagrīva. Originally a Hindu demon, an avatar of Viṣṇu, and an attendant of Avalokiteśvara, Hayagrīva maintained the same fierce demeanor in the East Asian Buddhist context, where he can take the forms of a ferocious demon guarding the gates of hell, a wisdom king (Jpn., *myōō*), and a manifestation of the bodhisattva of compassion. As such, Batō is often referred to as the ferocious Wisdom King of the Lotus quarter of the Taizōkai Mandala.¹ The deity's angry mien, red complexion, and multiple weapons may seem more befitting to a wrathful protector than to a compassionate deity, but it is the latter form that became prominent in the Japanese context.

Since Batō Kannon's appearance in the Japanese Buddhist pantheon in the eighth century, Batō has been featured predominantly as part of mandalas and groups of Kannon.² In the course of the Heian period (794–1185), Batō was specifically systematized as one of six forms of Kannon, responsible for delivering beings across the six realms of rebirth. Traditionally included in this group following the elucidations of the Ono monk Ningai (ca. 950–1046), Batō was put in charge of the animal realm (Jpn.,

chikushōdō), no doubt due to his equine features. The horse's head on top of the bodhisattva has, canonically, a number of functions, the most important of which is the ability to remove the afflictions and defilements (Jpn., *bonnō*) of sentient beings.³ For this reason, Batō is the manifestation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion most capable of removing hindrances caused by lowly passions and attachments burdening animals.

While faith in the power of the Six Kannon was widespread at this time, a specific, independent worship of Batō did not immediately emerge within the courtly circles of Heian. At this time, the lack of fascination with the only wrathful form of Kannon mirrored the dearth of images as well as the lack of compelling accounts of the deity's powers and miraculous deeds in the canonical scriptures.

The most comprehensive source on Batō Kannon is the sixth chapter of the renowned Collection of Dharani Sutra.⁴ Dedicated almost entirely to Batō, this section of the scripture would be considered by Kamakura-period (1185–1333) monks as the *locus classicus* for its ritual instructions, and eventually also circulated independently as “Rules to make an image of Hayagrīva,”⁵ and “Rules to build the altar of the Bodhisattva Hayagrīva.”⁶

However, this text reveals very little in terms of unique features and ritual functions of the horse-headed Kannon. Invoked to defeat demons, to protect the country, and for healing from a variety of ailments—from headaches to toothache—the Batō Kannon described in the Collection of Dharani Sutra betrays a paucity of characterizing attributes that could distinguish Batō from any other fierce guardian deity of the esoteric pantheon. Furthermore, it does not provide a consistent, overarching narrative to make sense of Batō Kannon's function and powers. Since Batō is called by a variety of names, mostly transliterated from the Sanskrit, and identified at times with Kannon and at times with groups of wrathful protectors, the text makes it easy to conflate and confuse Batō with other deities.

By the beginning of the Kamakura period, however, independent images of Batō Kannon start to be enshrined in temples around modern-day Kyoto and Nara Prefectures, along routes that would become part of or adjacent to the Saigoku Kannon Pilgrimage. These images are couched in a more coherent set of beliefs, shaped by myths and legends that, although not originally exclusive to Batō Kannon, had a key part in reshaping the role of this bodhisattva within the Japanese Buddhist pantheon.

One example paradigmatic of this phenomenon is provided by the Batō Kannon of Matsunoodera, a temple located on Mount Aoba (or, Wakasa Fuji), not far from the city of Maizuru in present-day Kyoto Prefecture, which is

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thirteenth-century sources, according to which the image was constructed following a vow made by two fishermen of Wakasa province.⁷ Set off course by unfavorable winds, the two fishermen washed up on the shores of a land of ogres. Desperate, they single-mindedly prayed for salvation and vowed to have a Kannon statue built if they were allowed to return to their homeland safely. Immediately following this plea, a dapple-gray horse appeared and delivered the fishermen back to their village, where, full of gratitude, they dedicated the Batō Kannon statue.⁸

This theme is not at all new to the Buddhist context. A retelling of the famous tale of the merchant prince Sinhala's shipwreck on the island of Ceylon, together with five hundred fellow merchants, and their rescue by Kannon's manifestation as the divine horse Bālāha is found in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sutra*.⁹ The narrative is here adapted to the profile of the horse-headed Kannon.¹⁰ This interpretation is, however, unique to Matsunoodera.

In the Japanese context, the story of the flying white horse was well known in the Heian period and was popularized through *setsuwa* (short didactic stories or legends) collections.¹¹ The story was also found in lavish pictorial representations of the "Universal Gateway" chapter of the Lotus Sutra (Jpn., *Fumonbon*).¹² The first sections of this chapter, detailing the thirty-three afflictions that Kannon will save sentient beings from, explains: "If there are hundreds of thousands of billions of beings

who, in search of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, seashell, agate, coral, amber, pearls, and other treasures, go out to sea and have their ships blown off course by a fierce wind to the land of the ogre demons, and if among them there is even a single person who calls the name of Regarder of the Cries of the World Bodhisattva, all those people will be saved from difficulties caused by the ogres. This is why the bodhisattva is named Regarder of the Cries of the World."¹³

Evidently, none of these sources mentions Batō Kannon nor indicates that the horse should be interpreted as this specific form of Kannon. However, it is clear that the horse should be perceived as one of the many expedient devices used by the bodhisattva to uphold the vow of saving all beings. Similarly, although none of the canonical scriptures on Batō make any reference to the tales discussed above, they suggest that the horse's head is considered one of Kannon's many expedient devices.

Furthermore, Batō's equine strength has a specific relation to the sea. The deity's ability to remove any obstruction and affliction is symbolized by his horse's mouth, which is said to have the power of swallowing "all the water of the ocean without any difficulty."¹⁴ In explaining this passage of the Dharani Sutra, the scholar-monk Kakuzen remarks that Batō's mouth can absorb hardships and hindrances like a horse drinking muddy water; similarly, he can also devour sins and poisons like a horse eating fresh grass.¹⁵ For this reason, Batō is referred to as "the adamantine

also station twenty-nine of the Saigoku Kannon Pilgrimage route. The presence of the Batō Kannon statue—now a hidden sacred image (Jpn., *hibutsu*) unveiled every seventy-seven years—is attested already in twelfth- and

devourer" (Jpn., *kanjiki kongō*), and one of his defining mudras is the "horse's mouth" (Jpn., *bakōin*).¹⁶ If in canonical scriptures and ritual sources any reference to the ocean-drinking, obstacle-devouring might of Batō is intended to address karmic afflictions and obstructions of the mind, the same interpretation can be applied to the parable of the fishermen's or merchants' shipwreck, where the horse represents the promise of overcoming the lust and desires provoked by the female demons.

In this sense, the early Kamakura period saw a conflation of three themes: Batō's power to remove *bonnō*, the flying horse rescuing merchants at sea, and Kannon's ability to save from perils.

As temples that would later become part of the Saigoku Kannon Pilgrimage route started attracting the attention of aristocratic patrons in the course of the twelfth century, different miracle tales detailing the unique powers of the Kannon and of its sacred representations started to emerge and circulate. In this context, Batō Kannon narratives also evolved—or rather, were altogether created as a practical solution to fill a gap left by the existing canonical scriptures suggested at the beginning of this paper. Such conflation between Batō and Bālāha at Matsunoodera may reflect the need for a distinctive narrative for this specific iconography at a moment in which the thirty-three-station Kannon pilgrimage route was becoming popular. Facilitated by the activities of those wandering practitioners acting as guides for those visiting the temples, different versions of the tale have survived.

The late Kamakura-period opening statement of the temple restoration record,¹⁷ the *Matsunoodera saikō keihaku bun*, still held at Matsunoodera, explains that Matsunoodera was founded between the Keiun (704–708) and Wado

(708–715) eras, when the ascetic Ikō Shōnin—supposedly a Tang monk who is also associated with another temple on the route, Kimiidera, station number two—opened Mount Aoba and established a hermitage there.¹⁸ The Batō Kannon statue, however, is not attributed to the ascetic in this version of the tale but, following the narrative explored so far, to a fisherman from Wakasa named Kasuga Tamemitsu. As in a previous case, his ship was hit by strong winds and lost at sea, and Tamemitsu was cast off in a land of ogres. After the merciful Kannon returned him safely to his homeland, he carved a statue of Batō Kannon and enshrined it in the temple founded by the Chinese ascetic Ikō Shōnin. The period given for the dedication of the statue is the Shōryaku era (990–995), under the reign of Ichijō Tennō (980–1011), thus placing its realization between 980 and 995.

The late-Kamakura version of the story modifies the existing narrative not only by narrowing the number of

fishermen down to one but also by adding the figure of the ascetic as founder of the temple. Like many other temples on the pilgrimage route, Matsunoodera is likely to have been initially established as a mountain hermitage for ascetic practitioners. These sites started gaining popularity thanks to the proselytizing activities of Onjōji temple in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but they also thrived thanks to the activities of the local *yamabushi* (mountain ascetic hermits).¹⁹ In this context, it is not surprising that figures of ascetics were woven into existing myths concerning the foundation of temples and the erection of their main icons. In fact, according to Ryūken Sawa, one version of the temple *engi* (origin legend) explains that it was Ikō Shōnin who first erected a Batō

Kannon statue at the temple by carving a piece of sacred wood found in the middle of Mount Aoba.²⁰

Eventually, the version of the myth that would become popular in the Tokugawa period (1603–1868) is the one attributing the statue's dedication to a local fisherman, here called Yūki Sodayū, saved by the miraculous appearance of a flying white horse sent by Kannon. The *Matsunoodera engi*, included in the *Kannon reigenki* and in the *Kannon reijōki zue*,²¹ says that after delivering Sodayū from the demons' island, the white horse transformed into a log and disappeared toward the mountain. When the villagers went back to the spot where Sodayū was delivered, they indeed saw footprints leading to Mount Aoba and heard a horse neighing. By following the prints, they found the log and carved a statue of Batō Kannon out of it. Eventually, Ichijō Tennō heard the miraculous story and sponsored the construction of the hall to house the statue.

The case of Matsunoodera thus provides a perfect example of how an

existing narrative of a horse deity had been applied to Batō Kannon in order to construct a legend around the statue and temple. From the late Heian to the late Kamakura period, Batō Kannon quickly went from being a marginally known statue carved by two fishermen to being the main icon of a mountain temple opened by a powerful and mysterious ascetic. Furthermore, the legend of the flying white horse perfectly fits the purpose: it was drawn from an already popular, hence recognizable, tale of Kannon, and it presented a horse as the hypostasis of Kannon's compassion, thus strengthening the connection between Batō's key attributes and the compassion of Kannon. In the Matsunoodera context, this was facilitated by the activity of different agents. Scholar-monks involved in the collection of iconographical and ritual materials had a key role in bringing together information on Batō Kannon scattered among the different scriptures included in the Buddhist canon. Their activities systematized and made available details that helped give a more definite shape to the horse-headed deity. The impact of these narratives can also be seen in the proliferation of Batō Kannon worship in the area, which begins in the Kamakura period. At this time, Batō Kannon statues were also enshrined in two temples located in proximity to Matsunoodera—Nakayamadera and Magōji. Although each temple would eventually develop a unique myth underpinning the creation of its icon, both temples maintain a connection, to different extents, to the power of Matsunoodera's Batō. Thus, the growth and progressive popularization of Kannon pilgrimages in the course of the medieval period represented an ulterior steppingstone for the worship of Batō Kannon, which had repercussions on local forms of worship. Revamping the role of the horse-headed bodhisattva within the Buddhist pantheon, these myths led to a local-specific development of Batō Kannon worship. Furthermore, Batō's role of protector

of the animal realm was expanded and made relevant in the human realm as well, which was essential to the establishment of a discrete set of Batō Kannon beliefs and provided the basis for the subsequent popularization of its ritual practices. □

Notes

1. For example, see *Darijingshu*, in Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabe, eds., *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* (hereafter T), 100 vols. (Daizō Shuppan, 1924–34), 39 no. 1796, 632c10.
2. The earliest extant statue, for example, belongs to a set of five Kannon, including Eleven-Faced Kannon (Jpn., Jūichimen), Willow Branch Kannon (Jpn., Yōryū), Infallible Lasso Kannon (Jpn., Fukūkenjaku), and Holy Kannon (Jpn., Shō) held at Daianji in Nara.
3. *Kakuzenshō*, compiled by Kakuzen, in *Dai nihon bukkyō zensho* (hereafter DNBZ) (Kodansha, 1970–73), 47:1013.
4. *Darani jikyō*, T. 18 no. 901:833c03–838b26. It is a scripture in twelve fascicles translated in the seventh century by the monk Atikūṭa. For further studies on the compilation of this text, see Koichi Shinohara, *Spells, Images, and Mandalas* (Columbia University Press, 2014).
5. *Kayaguriba zōhō*, unknown translator, T. 20 no. 1073.
6. *Kayaguriba Kanzeon bosatsu juhōdan*, unknown translator, T. 20 no. 1074.
7. One of the earliest mentions of this vow is found in the late-twelfth-century collection *Kakuzenshō* and in the slightly later thirteenth-century *Jimon kōshō ki* (1220–30) (DNBZ 47:116a; DNBZ 127:250–51).
8. *Kakuzenshō*, DNBZ 47:1004a.
9. The story of Sinhala has been presented, with some variations, in a variety of Buddhist sources, and its *locus classicus* is generally considered to be the *Valāhassa jāataka*, although this attribution is debated. For a further analysis see Naomi Appleton, “The Story of the Horse-King and the Merchant Sinhala, in Buddhist Texts,” *Buddhist Studies Review* (2006), vol. 23 no. 2: 187–201.
10. Mark MacWilliams, “Living Icons: ‘Reizō’ Myths of the Saigoku Kannon Pilgrimage,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 60–61.
11. Both the *Konjaku monogatari* and the *Uji shūi monogatari* include a tale titled “How Sōkyata went to the Land of the *Rakkhasis*,” which narrates, with some minor variations, how a merchant called Sōkyata was rescued from a land inhabited by evil female demons by Kannon in the guise of a flying white horse.
12. Both the Kamakura-period *Kannongyō* held at the Metropolitan Museum and the Heike Nokyō frontispiece of the twenty-fifth chapter depict the scene.
13. Gene Reeves, *The Lotus Sutra: A Contemporary Translation of a Buddhist Classic* (Wisdom Publications, 2008), 371.
14. *Batō nenju giki*, T. 20 no. 1072A: 155 15b–c.
15. *Kakuzenshō*, DNBZ 47:1007.
16. *Besson zakki*, compiled by Shinkaku, in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō zuzō*, 12 vols. (Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–35) 3, 3007: 234. The mudra is created by joining together the palms and bending the two forefingers so that the nails touch. The name “horse's mouth mudra” also refers to the space created by the forefingers and thumbs, representing the shape of the horse's mouth.
17. The main hall of the temple was destroyed in a fire at the end of the Einin era in 1298, and the reconstructions were completed in 1308. The new hall was inaugurated on the twenty-seventh day of the eighth month of Tokujō 3.
18. *Maizuru shishi* (A historical record of Maizuru City), vol. 5 (Maizuru Shishi Hensan Inkai, 1973), 331–33.
19. Tasuku Hayami, *Kannon shinkō* (Hanawa Shobō, 1970), 270; MacWilliams, 40–42.
20. *Saigoku junrei* (Shakai Shisōsha, 1970), 242. Contemporary booklet guides of the Saigoku pilgrimage route link the Batō Kannon statue to the alternative name of Mount Aoba: Mount Baji (horse ear mountain). A recent version of the story maintains that Ikō Shōnin, recognizing the shape of a Chinese mountain called Ma'er shan, decided to carve a Batō Kannon out of a piece of wood found in the mountain. He then built a small hut where he enshrined the Kannon statue.
21. This is included in Utagawa Hiroshige, Utagawa Kunisada, and Mantei Ōga, *Kannon reigenki* (Nanden Nisanshō, 1858–59); and in Kōyō Shun'ō, *Saigoku sanjūsanshō Kannon reijōki zue*, ed. Tsujimoto Motosada, vol. 5 (Tanaka Jihē, 1886), 71–73.

Nikkyo Niwano's Vision for World Peace

Interview with Dr. Gene Reeves, an International Advisor to Rissho Kosei-kai

Gene Reeves has researched and lectured on the Lotus Sutra worldwide for more than a quarter century. He has also put much effort into nurturing members of Rissho Kosei-kai's International Buddhist Congregation since its founding in 2001, as well as organizing the annual International Lotus Sutra Seminar. In June Rev. Kosho Niwano, president-designate of Rissho Kosei-kai, interviewed him at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo, on such topics as his impressions of Founder Nikkyo Niwano, Dr. Reeves's reasons for concentrating on the Lotus Sutra, and the great principles in which the Founder believed.

Kosho Niwano: Dr. Reeves, thank you for being here today. I understand that you met Founder Nikkyo Niwano around the time you headed Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago.

Gene Reeves: In the spring of 1983 the Founder came to Chicago and visited Meadville Lombard, and that was the first time I met him. Meadville Lombard,

as you know, is historically a Unitarian theological school. Since the merger of the Unitarians and Universalists, it's been a Unitarian Universalist theological school. Of course Unitarian Universalism is a kind of religion, but it's a kind of secular side of religion and very active in the world. At the time of Founder Niwano's visit, Unitarian Universalists didn't know Rissho Kosei-kai at all. A great many of them thought maybe Rissho Kosei-kai was another Japanese cult group.

We didn't, including me, know what to expect when your grandfather first came to Chicago. From the very beginning of his visit, I was very deeply impressed, favorably impressed. I don't know if you've ever heard of Gabriel Marcel, who was a famous existentialist philosopher and theologian in Paris. He talked and wrote about the "presence" that is shared in virtue of our openness to each other, and I think that the Founder had that kind of presence.

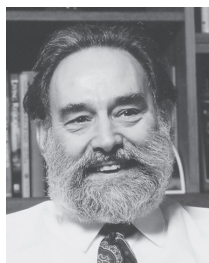
Niwano: What was your impression when you actually met the Founder?

Reeves: If I enter a room where there are a lot of people, maybe nobody knows

that I entered the room. I can just go over to the side, but when the Founder entered a room, everybody knew he was there. It's awfully difficult to explain. The way I'd like to think about him is that he was a giant of a man. Maybe he was a little tall for a Japanese, and as I remember him, he was about as tall as I. He was probably taller than anyone else in the room. In that sense, maybe he was a rather big man, but that was not the most important thing about him.

Niwano: Was it that he had a presence such that one couldn't help but notice him? What did you talk about then?

Reeves: We had a long talk. I think mostly, or maybe only, about Buddhism, and my memory is that we talked about some Sanskrit terms. For example, I think we talked about *pratityasamutpāda*, or *engi* [interdependent origination]. I was very favorably impressed with Founder Niwano and his depth of understanding of Buddhism. I knew that he was not merely the leader of a religious organization but that he had a very deep, profound understanding of Buddhist tradition.



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Of course he was Japanese, but he was more than that. He was a universal man. Already at that time, in 1983, he had established relationships with people from many places in the world. So that was a second way in which he impressed me as a big man. Another way in which he impressed—he had big ideas. A cult leader always has a kind of narrow thinking, but the Founder was the opposite. He was very, very broad-minded, big minded. In that connection, I should also mention that he had very big ambitions.

Niwano: What was his biggest idea?

Reeves: For him, I think, the purpose of Buddhism was world peace. He really believed that world peace was not just an idea but something doable, something possible. Later—not at the time at Meadville but later—I also came to believe that the Founder had a very big heart. He was big-hearted in the sense that he cared a lot about other people.

At that time I didn't know it, but now with reflection I realize he made a huge difference in my life. It was a turning point in my life when he visited me in Meadville. It's embarrassing to remember, but in 1982, maybe in Rochester, New York, Rissho Kosei-kai had a workshop on the Lotus Sutra. To prepare for that workshop, I read the Lotus Sutra in English. The embarrassing thing is, I didn't like the Lotus Sutra at all.

Niwano: You later concentrated on studying the Lotus Sutra. Did your

interest in Buddhism begin when you met the Founder?

Reeves: After the Founder's visit, I decided I needed to study the Lotus Sutra a little harder. I eventually learned to read the Lotus Sutra in Japanese and in Chinese. As you probably know, I came to love the Lotus Sutra. I really tried to devote my life to teaching the Lotus Sutra—first understanding the Lotus Sutra, then teaching and promoting the Lotus Sutra.

Niwano: Apparently the Founder introduced you to several teachers for your studies.

Reeves: I have been teaching the Lotus Sutra all over the world—in Singapore,

China, Japan, America, Europe—but the start of all that, my transformation, began with the Founder's visit to Chicago. However, I shouldn't make it sound as though the Founder was the only influence on me.

Later that same year, soon after the Founder left Chicago, I received a telephone call from Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters wanting to know if I could come to Tokyo for the Founder's seventy-seventh birthday. In November I came to Tokyo for the first time. The Founder was very kind to me, and we toured the facilities. The day after I spoke in the organization's Great Sacred Hall for that birthday celebration, he introduced me to Dr. Yoshiro Tamura.

Dr. Tamura and I became very good friends. Actually, the very next year, in

the spring of 1984, I had him come to Meadville and give a series of lectures. He visited Chicago maybe ten or twelve times. We taught together a course on the Awakening of Faith in Mahayana.

Niwano: So from your first meeting with Founder Niwano came an ever-widening succession of connections. Was there a point at which you felt empathy for Rissho Kosei-kai?

Reeves: I remember, for example, in 1983 or 1984, I heard a speech in Tokyo by Rev. Motoyuki Naganuma, then chair of Rissho Kosei-kai's Board of Trustees. He was speaking to overseas ministers. I was very impressed with that speech. He said to them, "In ordinary religions, people always expect to be missionaries or recruiting members, but we of Rissho Kosei-kai think that if you find people who are doing well in their own religion, you leave them alone—we don't need them." That seemed very strange to me. He said, "There are plenty of people out there who really need our help, and those are the people we should be talking to."

In those days—maybe it's a little different now—it would have been impossible to imagine a Methodist or a

Lutheran or a Catholic saying that kind of thing to the missionaries.

That's a good example of the things I heard from Rev. Naganuma, but the idea also came from the Founder. I don't know who had it first. But it was the Founder's way of thinking.

Niwano: After visiting Japan many times, you immigrated here to concentrate on studying and translating the Lotus Sutra, and you have become an indispensable advisor to Rissho Kosei-kai.

Reeves: During the years before I moved to Japan, I also met with the Founder every time I came to Japan. We talked about exchanging or inviting professors, back and forth, things like that, but the Founder always said, "How can we help you?" "How can we help each other?" He didn't say, "How can I teach you?"

Niwano: Are there any anecdotes you recall from your talks with the Founder?

Reeves: I recall something; I think it was on one of those occasions that the Founder took me into the Horin-kaku Guest Hall. He pointed to a statue of the Eleven-Headed, Thousand-Armed Kannon Bodhisattva enshrined in the

hall. He said many people think that Kannon holds tools in every hand, a thousand tools representing a thousand ways to help the people who pray to him. The Founder said Rissho Kosei-kai members believe that's wrong and that they shouldn't be praying to a bodhisattva, but that a bodhisattva should be a model for them. If Kannon has a thousand tools for helping people, it means we need to develop a thousand tools to help people.

Another thing was that, where you go up the front stairway into the Great Sacred Hall, there are three pictures of bodhisattvas. On the right is Manjushri, on the left Maitreya, and in the middle is Fugen [Samantabhadra]. I remember learning that Manjushri was a symbol of wisdom. Manjushri is depicted on a lion. Maitreya, I always like to think, is riding on a cow. I learned, I think from the Founder, that Maitreya is a symbol of compassion. That understanding of Manjushri and Maitreya is very common, but I also learned, which is not so common, that unless wisdom and compassion are somehow brought together in life, they are not so useful. So what we need are compassion and wise compassion. This is symbolized by Fugen. I think that is a very profound understanding of bodhisattvas.

From Rissho Kosei-kai, under the teaching of the Founder, I learned about a very profound, energetic, relevant kind of moderate Buddhism, described by the title of one of the Founder's books, *Buddhism for Today* [Kosei Publishing, 1976].

Niwano: The Founder thought that bodhisattva practice is the essence of Buddhism, didn't he.

Reeves: Another thing that impressed me was that the Founder was extremely well-connected. He had friends, not necessarily emotionally close friends, but people he knew well and trusted and who trusted him. What I want to make

clear here is that the Founder and almost all Buddhists recognize the importance of interrelatedness. We are all interrelated, everybody knows that, especially in Buddhism. But the Founder not only recognized interrelatedness, he created it. He worked at it. That's what was behind, for example, his creating, not alone but working with others, Religions for Peace.

Niwano: When I visited Rome recently, many people said to me, "I wish I could have met Founder Niwano." "I feel nostalgic for the old days."

Reeves: This is related to what I said at the beginning, that Unitarians and Universalists in America were sometimes thinking that maybe Rissho Kosei-kai was a kind of cult. But a cult group is very closed, unrelated to other people. Rissho Kosei-kai is the very opposite, very, very much so, more so than the Catholic Church, more so than the Methodists, more so than almost anybody else you could think of. Some of that probably is because of Founder Niwano's personality. He was a very outgoing, friendly person, but that's not the whole story. He once told me that it would be ridiculous to think that any

one religion, never mind one organization within a major religion, such as Rissho Kosei-kai, could actually create world peace.

We need cooperation, not only among religions, but also with other kinds of organizations, nonreligious organizations. In this case also, the Founder didn't just talk about these ideas, he worked with them.

In the modern world, the Founder is still not well recognized, I feel. But he really was a giant of a man. He has had a very big effect on the lives of many, many, probably millions, at least hundreds of thousands of people.

Niwano: What sort of person was the Founder to you?

Reeves: There is another thing I remember about him. He told me one time that all Japanese religions place a lot of emphasis on the importance of ancestors. In Rissho Kosei-kai also, we place a lot of emphasis on ancestors, but the Founder said that we should not narrowly restrict the meaning of ancestors to blood relatives.

Our ancestors are everyone who has had an important influence on us, regardless of whether they are parents,

teachers, or friends. In this sense, the Founder is my most important ancestor.

I don't want to take anything away from my mother and father, I love both of them, or from my grandparents. I didn't know my grandparents very well, but they are obviously important for me. But somehow the Founder is embedded in my heart where no one else is. I remember that almost every day when I visit the former headquarters of Rissho Kosei-kai, because it's not far from my home. I go there for a walk almost every day, and there I have an opportunity to say thank you to the Founder.

Niwano: You are still studying the Lotus Sutra, and you are passionate about nurturing the next generation. What sort of mental attitude propels you?

Reeves: I think my life is just beginning. I don't know my life as a whole. I only know that until now the Founder has been the most important influence on my life, on what I think and how I feel. He, in a way, led me to a better understanding of the Lotus Sutra. I'd like to say "true understanding," but I don't know that even. I just know a better understanding of the Lotus Sutra, and therefore of Buddhism, because I like

bodhisattva approach to life. I believe it's the essential spirit of Rissho Kosei-kai.

Reeves: I think people are impressed by actions. Not just words put in a book, but what Rissho Kosei-kai does in the way of helping people. Whether it's in Bosnia, Africa, or Japan, if Rissho Kosei-kai is really genuinely active in the world, people will learn about it. They will understand that this is the Founder's teachings. If we are really active in the world in different ways—participating in interfaith organizations is one way, but also maybe more important, participating in activities that are genuinely helpful to other people—if we do that, people will understand that Rissho Kosei-kai is an embodiment of the Founder's teachings.

Niwano: It's not essential that the world know about the Founder's achievements, but what's important is what he accomplished in the world through bodhisattva practice, isn't it?

Reeves: Yes, I think so.

Niwano: In what form will bodhisattva practice be conducted from now on? I believe we must think about this and continue to take action.

Reeves: Please do not forget that someday soon Rissho Kosei-kai will have a woman president. I hope that will be an opportunity for Rissho Kosei-kai: the rise of women, the importance of women. I think Rissho Kosei-kai can take a stronger lead in promoting their status and power. That's related to the question of how Rissho Kosei-kai, how the Founder, can be recognized. If we make a difference in the world, it will be seen.

For example, Rissho Kosei-kai is a very important and prominent member of Religions for Peace. We can use Religions for Peace to promote the status of women. We need to stand up for

women. Yes, the world is in a lot of trouble. We have lots of big, big problems in the world. None of them can be fixed without a lot of participation by women.

The Unitarian Universalist Association [UUA] also has the same problem. They have decided to try to solve it by having only women candidates for president. There will be an election, maybe in one or two years, and the only people running will be women. The next president of the UUA will be a woman. It has to be a woman, so in a way they are doing something like your father did when he decided that you're going to be the president and cut off any kind of talk of somebody else being the president.

Niwano: The Founder walked the Buddha Way without concern for his own advantage. People tend to ask, "Is there any meaning in my conduct?" or "Is there any benefit from it?" and think about future results. But what we do should benefit other people and the world, and I believe it is Rissho Kosei-kai's tradition to do things wholeheartedly without regard for its own advantage. Although it's also important for religious organizations to think about their future, I feel that we are called upon first and foremost to consider what we can do about the many issues in the world. That may be the shortcut on the Buddha Way.

Reeves: Yes, the point is that the way for institutions to be appreciated is probably to be not only helpful but hospitable. We don't think about hospitality very much, but it's very, very important. Actually, Rissho Kosei-kai has been pretty good at that, but we need to continue it. Hospitality is not just about food and wine.

We Buddhists think there's no such thing as simple as the "other." Nobody is purely "other." The Founder forged a path to create communities of diverse peoples. I think we also need to continue that in many different ways. □

to think that the Lotus Sutra is a central expression of Buddhism as a whole.

The first thing I do every morning, as soon as I open my eyes . . . it's a little different some days, but on most days I recite *o-daimoku*, which helps me to remember where I am and what I'm doing in my life.

When the Founder came to Chicago, he gave me a scroll. I'm sorry I've forgotten the middle kanji, but I remember what it means. It says "Mushin daido," meaning "selflessness (*mushin*) leads you to the great Way." That's what the *o-daimoku* should do. It helps us because there's always a big temptation to put oneself first, making too much of one's self. One of the most important insights of the Founder—maybe *the* most important—was that we can move along the Way only by caring for others. That teaching, that understanding, is not very different from many people's understanding of the Christian way.

Niwano: I've been told that whenever the upcoming year was being planned, the Founder would caution, "Don't make a plan that will make Rissho Kosei-kai better; make a plan that will make society and other religious organizations better." One can sense in that the Founder's

Bodhisattvas in Action: Living the Lotus Sutra in Text, Image, and History

by Thomas Newhall

The International Lotus Sutra Seminar is an annual academic conference sponsored by Rissho Kosei-kai that brings together researchers from Japan and other countries to engage in an ongoing discussion about the Lotus Sutra. They discuss the impact it and its ideas have had on history, thought, art, and religion, from the distant past to the modern day, in India, China, Japan, and beyond. From June 28 to 30, 2016, fourteen scholars from Europe, North America, and Japan were invited to participate in this seminar at the National Women's Education Center of Japan in the town of Ranzan, Saitama Prefecture.

Thomas Newhall is a PhD student at the University of Tokyo in the Department of Indian Philosophy and Buddhist Studies. Before coming to the University of Tokyo, he earned a BA in East Asian Studies at Oberlin College in Ohio (2007) and an MA in Buddhist Studies at Foguang University in Taiwan (2011).

The theme of this year's seminar was "Bodhisattvas in Action: Living the Lotus Sutra in Text, Image, and History," a theme that was open to a variety of interpretations and allowed for specialists from fields as broad-ranging as Japanese literature and East Asian art, history, and more to take part in lively discussions and debates over the course of the three days. What follows is a summary of the presentations given during the three days and of the discussions that took place afterward.

"Kenji Miyazawa: Embodying the Lotus Sutra, with Mistakes and Failures"

Gene Reeves, an international advisor to Rissho Kosei-kai, Tokyo

For the first research presentation of the seminar, Dr. Gene Reeves, one of the seminar's founders, presented a paper on the life and work of Kenji Miyazawa (1896–1933). Although Miyazawa is best

known for his literary contributions, such as *Ginga tetsudō no yoru* (*Night of the Milky Way Railway*), he was also known to have developed a passion for the Lotus Sutra and to have become acquainted with the Nichiren-inspired activist Chigaku Tanaka (1861–1939) before moving to the countryside to experience a simpler life among farmers.

Reeves's paper tries to weave these three elements together—Miyazawa's writing, in particular *Night of the Milky Way Railway*; his biography; and his relationship with the Lotus Sutra—in order to offer an overarching view of Miyazawa's life, work, and motivations. Reeves does this by first giving a vignette of Miyazawa's life, focusing particularly on his time in the countryside and the difficulties of adapting to life there that he is said to have had—the "mistakes and failures" Reeves alludes to in the title.

He then goes on to ask, "Why was Miyazawa powerfully attracted to the Lotus Sutra?," giving three potential reasons: first, that the sutra "tells

stories . . . that appeal to the human imagination as well as intellect"; second, that it "affirms the reality and importance of this world"; and third, that it has an "ability to empower people," particularly through the chanting of the title of the Lotus Sutra, or *o-daimoku*. Reeves then goes on to explain how these elements can be seen in *Night of the Milky Way Railway*. At one particular point in the story the protagonist, a boy named Giovanni, finds a ticket that can "take him anywhere." This powerful ticket, Reeves believes, symbolizes the *o-daimoku* and the power it has for believers, further implying that the character of Giovanni is a stand-in for Miyazawa himself.

Although respondents pointed out the importance of looking at other influences beyond the Lotus Sutra to understand Miyazawa's work, Reeves's paper gave us a unique insight into some potential links between Miyazawa's life and work and the world of Buddhist scriptures.

“Giving Shape to Batō Kannon: The Kamakura-Period Reinvention of the Horse-Headed Bodhisattva of Compassion”

Benedetta Lomi, University of Bristol

With Dr. Benedetta Lomi’s paper, the discussion turned from literature and literary theory to art history and material culture. Her paper focused on Batō Kannon, a form of perhaps the most well-known bodhisattva, Avalokiteśvara, known in Japanese as Kannon, depicted with the head of a horse and a fierce, wrathful expression, a stark contrast to the gentle-looking female figure of Avalokiteśvara typically found in East Asian art. In this paper, Lomi aims to explain how Batō became used in Japanese religious iconography of the Kamakura era (1185–1333), paying particular attention to the place of Batō images in temples along pilgrimage routes.

Lomi finds two different archetypes for the stories that feature Batō in Buddhist literature, the first being that of a “flying white horse”—a mythical horse able to rescue those lost at sea; the second is that in stories involving the “favorite steed,” or *aiba*, of a ruler or figure of authority.

This first archetype appears to be the basis for the *engi*—or origin legend—of the figure of Batō Kannon housed at Matsunoodera, a temple in Kyoto, which is also the twenty-ninth temple of the Saigoku Kannon Pilgrimage route, which focuses on temples housing images of Kannon. Among the variations to this figure’s origin legend, several involve fishermen lost at sea who are saved by a white horse sent by Kannon.

The second archetype for Batō appears in the origin legend of the statue enshrined at Magōji, on the coast of the Sea of Japan in Fukui Prefecture, a temple that is part of the Hokuriku Kannon Pilgrimage route. Lomi finds that this Batō is linked to the “favorite

steed” of the prince Shōtoku Taishi. Furthermore, a similar story is found in the account given by the Shingon monk Chōen (1218–84), which links Batō to the horse ridden by Shakyamuni Buddha out of his palace.

Through stories that employ these two narrative models—the flying white horse and the ruler’s favorite steed—Lomi demonstrates that “Batō’s role as protector of the animal realm was expanded and made relevant to the human realm as well.”

“Reevaluating Jikyōsha as Mountain Ascetics”

Hiroki Kikuchi, University of Tokyo

Professor Hiroki Kikuchi’s paper focused on Buddhist practitioners known as *jikyōsha*, or “sutra upholders,” a term that features prominently in the “Preachers of the Dharma” (*hosshihon*) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, but became important in later Buddhist *setsuwa* (a type of folk tale) literature such as the *Hokkegenki* (A record of miracles of the Lotus Sutra) and the *Konjaku monogatari shū* (Anthology of tales of times now past).

Typically, *jikyōsha* are depicted as ascetics who live and practice in the mountains, away from the main monastic centers, and whose practice is based mainly on the Lotus Sutra. However, Kikuchi questions some of

this received wisdom in his paper, focusing in particular on the relationship between *jikyōsha* and centers of monastic power. Rather than strictly considering *jikyōsha* as people who practiced in the mountains away from society, Kikuchi’s approach “problematicizes the perspective that isolates secular society from mountain practice” and instead links *jikyōsha* more closely to a liminal zone “between the mountains and the zone of human activity”—an area known as the *satoyama*.

Kikuchi does this by observing that although many of these *jikyōsha* were self-ordained, eventually the roles of “practitioners” and “sutra upholders” became merged under the state’s monastic ranking and ordination system, thus creating an incentive for such monks to become part of the state hierarchy.

Kikuchi also points out that many temples of this time found in the plains were coupled with a temple nearer to a mountain, a *satoyama*, and as part of their basic training, monks would travel between mountain and plains temples at different times of the year. At the temple in the lowlands they focused on doctrinal study (*gaku*), and at the mountain hermitages they focused on practice (*gyō*), of which sutra recitation was considered an important part. This typical pattern both of the structure of temples and of the training process

quandary to close out the first day of the seminar.

“Pūrṇa as a Bodhisattva: Living the Teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*”

Hiroshi Munehiro Niwano, president of Rissho Kosei-kai's Gakurin Seminary, Tokyo

Beginning the second day of the seminar, Dr. Hiroshi Niwano's paper dealt with the role of the character Pūrṇa (Jpn., Furuna) in the Lotus Sutra. Pūrṇa is known in Buddhist literature as one of Shakyamuni Buddha's "Ten Great Disciples" (*jūdai deshi*), said to be "foremost in preaching" (*seppō daiichi*), and appears not only in Mahayana literature but also in Nikāya literature (such as that of the Pāli Canon), though the characteristics of this figure differ in each genre.

As is well known, according to the Lotus Sutra, the highest teaching of Buddhism, the One Buddha Vehicle (*ichi butsujiō*), is a teaching appropriate only for bodhisattvas, so Dr. Niwano first outlines the qualities of bodhisattvas described in the opening chapters of the Lotus Sutra, comparing them to the description of *śrāvakas* (*shōmon*), adherents to the teaching of the "lesser vehicle" (*shōjiō*). He then brings in the description of Pūrṇa from the Lotus Sutra, whom the Buddha praises for his preaching ability but who is said to appear to people around him as a *śrāvaka* rather than a bodhisattva.

Later in Pūrṇa's story, he is asked by the Buddha about what he would do if he were threatened with a knife in a town he preaches in. These episodes reveal which, of several Pūrṇas found in Nikāya literature, the character from the Lotus Sutra is likely to correspond to. Although the question of what Pūrṇa's unique characteristics are as a bodhisattva is unresolved, Dr. Niwano is more concerned with seeing the figure of Pūrṇa as one of the people

shows that there was a dynamic relationship between religious practice in the mountains and in the plains.

On the whole, Kikuchi's paper gave an overview of the development of how practitioners in the mountains and outside the centers of power functioned within the greater sphere of Buddhism in this early period, thus giving a snapshot of such "bodhisattvas in action" in the early stages of Buddhism's development in Japan.

“Bringing the Buddha Down to Earth: Eighth-Century Chan Use of the *Lotus Sutra* in the *Platform Sutra*”

Miriam Levering, Professor Emerita, University of Tennessee, Nashville

Dr. Miriam Levering's paper found reference to the Lotus Sutra in what may perhaps be an unexpected place: a Zen (Chn., Chan) text. Although Zen bills itself as being a separate transmission outside the teaching (*kyōge betsuden*) that does not rely on words or letters (*furyū monji*), with slogans seeming to indicate that the study of sutras was irrelevant, in fact, Levering points out, references to sutras are made frequently throughout Zen literature.

Specifically, Levering's paper focuses on how the Lotus Sutra is used in a

fundamental text of the Zen tradition, the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch (Jpn., *rokuso dangyō*). This work features a story of a monk named Fada who meets the sixth Chinese Zen patriarch, Huineng (Jpn., Enō, 638–713), and reports that he has recited the Lotus Sutra "three thousand times." Hearing this, Huineng tells Fada that "even if you recite it ten thousand times, it won't help," thus making Fada doubt the efficacy of his practice. In response, Huineng tells Fada that "the sutra is fundamentally without doubt; it is your mind itself that has doubt" before lecturing Fada on the meaning of the sutra. After "comprehending the mysterious purport" of the sutra, Fada returns to his former practice with renewed faith and vigor.

Although this story begins by denying the efficacy of learning from sutras in the classic Zen sense, Huineng in fact confirms his respect for and comprehension of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, and thus his criticism of Fada is not of the sutra itself, nor of its recitation or study, but of practicing such recitation without a deeper understanding.

Levering's fascinating paper led us to the depths of Zen thought, asking that if Zen texts present such a vastly different view of enlightenment, "can the Buddha of the Lotus Sutra and the Buddha of Chan discourse fully coexist?" leaving the participants with a philosophical

who “made an effort to embody what the Buddha wanted them to do because they were aware of the Buddha’s true intention,” thus being models of living the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in action.

“Development of the ‘Identity of the Purport of Perfect and Esoteric Teachings’ (*enmitsu itchi*) in the Medieval Tendai School: The Significance of Esoteric Symbolic Objects in *Kōen hokke gi*”

Takahiko Kameyama, Ryukoku University, Kyoto

Professor Kameyama presented what was perhaps the most doctrinally oriented paper of the seminar with his research on a work called the *Kōen hokke gi* and how it combines concepts from both the Lotus Sutra and the *mikkyō*, or esoteric, tradition.

Although the author of the *Kōen hokke gi* is traditionally thought to be the Heian-period monk Enchin (814–91), known as the founder of the branch of the Tendai school called the Jimon branch (*jimon-ha*), this attribution has come under scrutiny. In addition to the fact that the text is not mentioned in Enchin’s biography, some statements in the *Kōen hokke gi* seem to contradict statements in other works that are known with certainty to be Enchin’s, suggesting that the *Kōen hokke gi* is not in fact Enchin’s at all. Based on his comparison to related works from this period, Professor Kameyama concludes that the work was most likely written by someone in Enchin’s Jimon lineage but after the death of Enchin himself.

The content of the work depicts an interesting application of what Kameyama describes as *enmitsu itchi* thought. *Enmitsu itchi* (identity of the purport of perfect and esoteric teachings) is the idea that the “perfect” (*en*) teachings—those of the Lotus Sutra and the Tendai school—are identical (*itchi*)

with “esoteric” (*mitsu*) teachings, those associated with Kūkai and the Shingon (esoteric) school of Japanese Buddhism.

Although Kameyama writes that in the Tendai works of this period, discussion about *enmitsu itchi* “was basically limited to the realm of doctrine,” he shows that the *Kōen hokke gi* “goes beyond the realm of doctrine to reach the realm of practice.” Professor Kameyama illustrates this by showing several passages where symbolism taken directly from Shingon practices is equated with such famous imagery in the Lotus Sutra as the white ox (*byakugo*) from the parable of the burning house (*kataku*). Although Kameyama dealt with a highly technical topic, his paper clearly illustrated how the author of this work made connections between the Lotus Sutra and Shingon ritual and developed this important strand of medieval Japanese thought.

“Printing Women’s Interests in Kannon Pilgrimage Temples”

Sherry Fowler, University of Kansas, Lawrence

Dr. Sherry Fowler presented a paper that, similar to Professor Lomi’s paper, dealt with images of Kannon at temples along pilgrimage routes, paying particular

attention to how women are depicted in the printed copies of founding legends of these temples. To do so, she focused on four of the thirty-three temples of the Saigoku Kannon Pilgrimage route: Okadera in Nara Prefecture; Mimurotoji, south of Kyoto; Kannon Shōji in Shiga Prefecture, and Nakayamadera in Hyogo Prefecture.

Okadera’s image of Nyoirin Kannon is closely linked to the monk Kūkai (774–835), but printed materials from the nineteenth century also include the story of a young girl who nearly drowns in a ship bound for the Saigoku Pilgrimage, only to be saved by a school of fish that appear after she has prayed to the temple’s image.

Mimurotoji’s image of Senju Kannon (Thousand-Armed Kannon) is linked to the story of a girl whose father has offered her to be the bride of a shape-shifting snake, but after she prays to this image, a swarm of crabs attacks the snake, saving the girl from this fate.

The image of Senju Kannon at Kannon Shōji temple was said to be built by Prince Shōtoku in the belief that Senju Kannon took pity on a mermaid. Senju Kannon was said to be the reincarnation of a fisherman but is clearly depicted in feminine form in printed literature.

Stories about the Kannon image at Nakayama-dera feature both the Indian queen Śrīmālā (Shōman bunin) and Japanese empress Kōmyō (Kōmyō kōgō, 701–60), and the temple itself is linked to pregnancy, safe childbirth, and child-rearing, fueling the sale of votive merchandise such as *haraobi*, “waist belts” thought to aid pregnancy.

All in all, Professor Fowler’s paper shows how women were the principal actors of several of the founding legends of temples along the Saigoku Pilgrimage route, legends that she argues “were used to create *kechien* (spiritual connection) between both female and male worshippers and the Kannon icons,” a conclusion that also reinforces the argument presented in Professor Lomi’s paper.

“Wielding the Lotus Sutra in Late-Medieval Japanese Fiction”

R. Keller Kimbrough, University of Colorado, Boulder

Professor Kimbrough, an expert on medieval Japanese fiction, presented a paper on how the Lotus Sutra was “wielded” in works from several different genres of late-medieval and early-Edo-period (1603–1868) fiction. Here

“wielding” in the title refers not only to the use of the Lotus Sutra as “an instrument of pacification, rejuvenation, and transformation” but also to “wielding a weapon.”

To show these two aspects, he focuses on examples from two works, the first titled *Manjū*, from a genre of literature called *kōwaka-mai*, the second called *Sayohime*, from a genre of literature called *sekkyō*.

In the first work, *Manjū*, the titular character known as Tada Manjū comes to have faith in the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and commands his son, Bijo Gozen, to become a monk and learn to read it. Bijo, however, spends his time at the temple making mischief and is unable to read the sutra for his father when he returns home. Enraged, Manjū goes to strike Bijo with his sword but is blocked by Bijo with the scroll of the Lotus Sutra lying on the table in front of him. In this story, the Lotus Sutra is not only “wielded” as an object of devotion for the father, Manjū, but as a weapon of self-defense for his son, Bijo.

A similar tale occurs in the story of *Sayohime*, where the titular character is to be sacrificed to a great serpent deity. On the way to meet the serpent, Sayohime begins chanting part of the Lotus Sutra, and right as she is about to

be swallowed, she hits the snake over the head with the sutra scroll, causing its horns and scales to fall off. The serpent then proclaims, “Thanks to the power of this sutra, I am sure to become a buddha and obtain release.” Here Sayohime has “wielded” the sutra as a weapon not only for her own protection but for the liberation of the snake as well.

Although the Lotus Sutra was not the only Buddhist text with this kind of salvific power in medieval literature, Kimbrough’s paper showed that sutras were not simply reading material but that they could be “wielded” for their spiritual power—even as weapons.

“Emerging from the Earth: Underground Haunting, Bodhisattvas, and Nichirenist Discourse in Modern Times”

Gerry Iguchi, University of Wisconsin–La Crosse

Professor Gerry Iguchi began the final day of the seminar with a paper dealing with a range of issues—everything from the Lotus Sutra’s imagery of the “bodhisattvas emerging from the earth” (*jiyu bosatsu*) to the modern Nichirenist activist Chigaku Tanaka (also mentioned in Professor Reeves’s essay) to issues of social justice in the modern world, and even to rock-and-roll music. The overarching theme of his paper is using the image of “bodhisattvas emerging from the earth” as a metaphor for emergent social issues and the possibility of revolutionary change. In particular Iguchi shows that Chigaku Tanaka saw his world as being “haunted” by bodhisattvas that “will at some point surge forth and transform this degraded world into a utopian Pure Land of Eternally Tranquil Light.”

In the first part of the twentieth century, Chigaku and other Nichirenists in Japan thought of themselves as “bodhisattvas emerging from the earth . . . to undertake the role of righting the modern world’s wrongs.”

see that Kannon had a particular significance for those people who spent their lives on the land and at sea and that the relationship between Kannon and the sea in Japanese religion is indeed an important part of the mythos surrounding Kannon. In addition to these examples, Sekimori presents the theoretical model of a “maritime cultural landscape” for thinking about this relationship and the symbolism employed that links these two elements together.

“Lotus Sutra Woodcuts in Song China and Beyond”

Shih-shan Susan Huang, Rice University, Houston, Texas

Professor Susan Huang focused on woodblock illustrations of the Lotus Sutra made in China during the Song dynasty (960–1279). Throughout the history of printing in East Asia, when printers made copies of Buddhist works such as the Lotus Sutra, they often included woodblock illustrations of scenes from the texts as frontispieces. Such illustrations from the Song dynasty are among the oldest examples of mass-produced woodblock printing, and many were produced by publishing houses in the city of Hangzhou, China’s capital during the Song dynasty. These woodblock texts and their illustrations were then taken to other parts of the Chinese empire or to Japan by monks who studied in Hangzhou. Sometimes such illustrated texts were enclosed within hollowed-out statues of buddhas or bodhisattvas. Because the written word of the Buddha itself was thought to have great power, “stuffing” statues with texts in this way was thought to imbue the statues with the power of the text itself, and because of this practice, there are some well-preserved examples of printed works from this period.

By comparing examples of such works preserved in Japan and China, including in Dunhuang, Huang showed how the same mass-produced image

The wrongs of the world, from their perspective, seemed to be the hegemony and colonial thinking that dominated the world at the time, whereby Japan was but a subject within a global order dominated by Western industrialized nations. This inequality between nations and social groups and the dissatisfaction it engenders linger like “ghosts” or “specters” below the surface of our world, according to Iguchi, only to be rectified by the “bodhisattvas”—reformers—who emerge out of this ground. In this sense, the imagery of the “bodhisattvas emerging from the earth” is linked not only to the prewar Nichirenist movement but to communist concepts of inequality and to the social activism of the modern world, embodied by musicians such as Bruce Springsteen. On the whole, Iguchi sees the modern world as a world of *mappo* (the age of the decline of the Law), “haunted” by social problems and inequality but believes that it is possible to rise “out of the earth” to promote social change.

“Kannon, the Deity from the Sea”

Gaynor Sekimori, SOAS, University of London

Dr. Gaynor Sekimori’s paper dealt with the role of the bodhisattva Kannon and the relationship of this figure to the ocean, themes that were touched upon in

Professor Fowler’s and Professor Lomi’s papers, but here they are given the full spotlight. Like their papers, Sekimori’s focused on legends about Kannon and on the Kannon images enshrined at certain temples but framed them in terms of a “maritime cultural landscape” by which there is a “liminal zone” that “includes the site of ritual interaction between the land and the sea,” and also a “liminal agent”—in this case, the figure of Kannon—who acts as both “a deity from beyond the sea” and a protector of that which connects the land to the sea, in particular, ships.

Sekimori points out that in addition to there being many temples near the seaside dedicated to Kannon, many of these enshrine pieces of driftwood and other objects found at the seaside—objects that come from the sea to the land, in a sense bridging these two worlds. Furthermore, there are many stories that depict Kannon as a protector of fishermen and boats, including a well-known story of Kūkai scratching an image of Kannon into the boards of his vessel for protection. Sekimori notes that there were also rituals in which priest-ascetics, instead of coming from the sea to the land like driftwood or fishermen, went from the land to the sea, embarking for the “other shore” of Kannon’s Pure Land, known as Potalaka (*fudaraku*). With these stories, we can

from the same publishing house in Hangzhou has been preserved in different places, showing how widely such texts circulated during this period. Furthermore, comparing illustrations of the same scene, Huang showed how different publishers may have emphasized one part of the sutra over others, and regional variations in the depiction of certain scenes may be a product of the differing environments in which such images were produced. Even so, the basic motifs found in such woodblock prints were reused and became templates for similar illustrations that were created in later periods.

Saying that “these exuberant frontispieces . . . mark the high point of Hangzhou printing,” Huang’s paper and presentation gave a beautifully illustrated overview of Buddhist woodblock prints from Song-dynasty China and indicated how these works can shed light on the history of printing and the reproduction of texts both inside and outside China.

“The Lotus Sutra and the Ritual of Sutra Copying in Premodern East Asia”

Bryan Lowe, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee

Professor Bryan Lowe closed out the seminar with a paper surveying the practice of sutra copying (*shakyō*) in East Asia. Although he principally focused on Japan and on evidence from the sutra-copying bureau at the temple Tōdaiji during the Nara period (710–94), he also incorporated evidence describing sutra copying in China and the Korean peninsula.

For Buddhists throughout East Asia, the act of simply copying a scripture was thought to be a “morally good” act that produced merit (*kudoku*) that could affect one’s karma and future fate. Part of the reason for this belief is that sutras, such as the Lotus Sutra, explicitly encourage the reader to make copies. In addition

to benefiting the copyist’s karma, copies of the text itself were thought to have special powers, such as being fireproof, a striking similarity to the uses of the text that Kimbrough described in his paper.

With such spiritual powers, sutra copying was performed as a religious ritual, first by practitioners’ bathing and donning clean clothes in order to purify their body beforehand, then by performing the act of copying according to a procedure that was “in accordance with the Dharma” (*nyohō*), and finally, by dedicating the merit of copying the text once it was completed. Professor Lowe even gives evidence that sutra copying was more often performed on certain “pure” (*sai*) days of the month, a concept originally from Indian Buddhism that can be seen not only in Nara but also in manuscripts from Dunhuang, in northwestern China.

During the discussion, Professor Kameyama brought up the issue of copying sutras in blood, a well-known practice in East Asia. Even though blood is generally thought to be “impure” and thus at odds with the “purity” of “normal” sutra copying, Lowe suggested that perhaps the dedication required for such an extreme practice may have neutralized any concerns about impurity.

Lowe’s holistic approach to the study of sutra copying illustrates a phenomenon

not limited to one nation or region but practiced in all of the premodern Buddhist world, and what would otherwise seem to be a mundane matter of copying text became a sacred and meritorious ritual that was “a central value to the Buddhist notion of a well-lived life.”

Concluding Remarks

On the whole, this year’s International Lotus Sutra Seminar was a great success, with a wide range of papers illustrating “Bodhisattvas in Action” and showing how the text of the Lotus Sutra, and images based on it, were an integral part of the lived experience of Buddhism throughout its history in East Asia. All the scholars expressed admiration for the high quality of the presentations, and everyone found the discussions to be extremely interesting and informative. Everyone who participated expressed their deepest gratitude for being invited, and for the generous hospitality provided by the sponsors of the seminar, as well as to the coordinating staff at Rissho Kosei-kai and at the National Women’s Education Center. It is hoped that the conference will continue in future years as an opportunity to build bridges between Rissho Kosei-kai and academic communities in Japan and around the world. □

The Vow on Mount Tiantai

by Nikkyo Niwano

In March 1999 an autobiography by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (1906–99), the founder of Rissho Koseikai, 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 a global Buddhist movement 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.

Pilgrimage to Mount Tiantai

Ever since coming into contact with the Lotus Sutra, it had been my heart's desire to make pilgrimages to Divine Eagle Peak in India, Mount Tiantai in China, and Mount Hiei in Japan.

Divine Eagle Peak was where Shakyamuni preached the Lotus Sutra, and I visited it in 1964. I had taken my wife and my eldest son, Nichiko, on a tour of the Buddhist sites in India, the first time we had ever traveled together.

When I lit incense and recited the Lotus Sutra at the summit of Divine Eagle Peak, I felt I was hearing the Buddha's discourse directly and was filled with gratitude for my encounter with the Lotus Sutra. All Buddhists who visit Divine Eagle Peak must be equally overwhelmed by the feeling that they have come at last to the actual place where Shakyamuni taught.

Since my visit in 1969 to the temple Enryaku-ji on Mount Hiei, too, I have received much kind instruction from two of the head priests, Most Ven. Shutan

Tsukuma and Most Ven. Etai Yamada. Only Mount Tiantai was left. At that time China did not permit free travel, so I approached the Buddhist Association of China and waited for the opportunity. The time finally came when my wish would be fulfilled.

Guoqing temple, at the foot of Mount Tiantai, which rises above northern Tiantai County in Zhejiang Province, was founded in 598 by Master Zhiyi (538–97), the founder of the Tiantai tradition of Chinese Buddhism, and so has a history of close to fourteen hundred years. Zhiyi became a student of Master Nanyue Huisi (515–77) when he was twenty-three and is said to have been greatly influenced by him. Later he went to Mount Tiantai, where he immersed himself in intensive study of the Buddhist scriptures. There he formulated the Tiantai teachings, saying "The Lotus Sutra is the essence of all the Buddha's teachings." Two hundred years later, in 804, the Japanese priest Saicho (767–822) visited Mount Tiantai when he went to China with a diplomatic and trading mission, and on his return he founded the temple on Mount Hiei.

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.

The mission set out in four ships from Tanoura in Kyushu. Two ships were lost in a heavy storm on the way, but Saicho's ship eventually reached China after fifty-four days at sea. It was a journey he had undertaken at the risk of his life. He studied the Lotus Sutra on Mount Tiantai and brought it back to Japan, where he founded the Tendai sect in 806 on Mount Hiei. The patriarchs of Kamakura Buddhism all studied on Mount Hiei before leaving to establish their own schools: Yosai (1141–1215) of Rinzaï Zen, Dogen (1200–1253) of Soto Zen, Shinran (1173–1263) of the Shin Pure Land school, and Nichiren (1222–82) of the Nichiren school.

Saicho is credited with saying, "A single mesh of a net cannot catch a bird." In the same way, a single teaching or sect cannot liberate the mass of people with their very different capacities to understand the teachings. It is said that Buddhism contains eighty-four thousand gateways to enlightenment. Their purpose is to liberate everyone from suffering, whatever their stance, leaving no one behind. Saicho's words should be accepted as an admonishment that if different schools are vying with each other in advocating the supremacy of a particular way, whether it be Zen meditation, reciting Amida's name, or chanting the *daimoku*, even a single person cannot be liberated.

Saicho's words reveal the very starting point of interreligious cooperation. To apply them today, no religion, whether it be Christianity, Buddhism, or Islam, should claim supremacy but realize that

various religions exist in order to save people according to time, place, and capacities, and to fit in with their own culture and geographical situation. They must respect one another and join forces for the benefit of all.

When I first studied the Lotus Sutra with my revered teacher, Mr. Sukenobu Arai, he told me, "It is only when you visit Divine Eagle Peak, Mount Tiantai, and Mount Hiei that you will tread the path leading to the origins of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra." My longed-for pilgrimage to Mount Tiantai at last came about through the good offices of the Buddhist Association of China.

I flew from Narita to Shanghai on May 2, 1982. I stayed in a hotel there overnight and on the following day arrived in Hangzhou in Zhejiang Province after a three-hour train ride. I reached Mount Tiantai that day after a six-hour, two-hundred-kilometer drive by car.

I was met at the gate of Guoqing Temple by its abbot, Master Wei Jue, whom I had met four years previously when he visited Rissho Kosei-kai with Mr. Zhao Puchu as a delegate of the Buddhist Association of China. "I have eagerly awaited your visit," he told me, and guided me around the broad precincts of the temple. After we visited the Maitreya Hall, amid a lush grove of camphor trees, and the Main Hall, he took me and my companions to stand before an old plum tree. He said, "This plum tree has lived for more than thirteen hundred years, since the Sui dynasty [581–618], but did not bear fruit for a

long time. Last year, however, it produced three plums, and this year it is full of fruit. We thought it was an auspicious sign, that distinguished friends would visit Mount Tiantai—and here you are with us today!" I felt greatly honored by his words.

Returning to the Origin of Japanese Buddhism

Staying overnight in the temple, I settled down in the quiet to sleep. Every so often, the beautiful call of a bird floated into my hearing from the depths of the dark-enshrouded mountain. "I wonder

if that's a bupposo [broad-billed roller]. No, I remember reading somewhere that that's the name given to the call, not the bird, and the bird itself is the konohazuku [Japanese scops owl]." With my mind flitting from place to place, I couldn't sleep.

Even though it was May, the mountain was cold, and all I could hear was the penetrating cry of the owl. When it stopped, everything seemed all the quieter. Waiting to fall asleep, I thought about various things, or perhaps I should say I recalled them to mind, as I traced back along the path of the Buddha's teachings that I had followed so single-mindedly and that flowed so deep in my heart.

I had learned so much, when I thought about it, from Nichiren: the awareness of being a messenger of the Tathagata, the spirit of devoting myself entirely to the teachings without regard to my life, and sharing the sorrows of others as my own. I also learned that the founder of our religion is none other than our original teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha, and that the bodhisattvas described in the Lotus Sutra as springing out of the earth should not be seen as metaphors but ideal bodhisattvas. Nichiren dedicated himself to bodhisattva practice.

He studied on Mount Hiei and learned the teachings of Saicho. Saicho had criticized the bias of his time of depending on sutra commentaries rather than the sutras themselves and sought to make Japan a truly Mahayana land, with the Lotus Sutra its fundamental text. If we look for the origin of this teaching, we come to the Chinese Tiantai (Tendai) master Zhiyi, who in turn was strongly influenced when he was a sensitive youth, both personally and intellectually, by his master Nanyue Huisi.

Zhiyi is said to have been twenty-three when the two first met on Mount Dasu. Huisi greeted him with the words, "In the past we two together heard the Lotus Sutra on Divine Eagle

Peak. Our relationship in a past life has now brought us together again." In other words, when Shakyamuni preached the Lotus Sutra long ago in India, they were companions who had listened to the teachings together.

Nanyue Huisi was a master who superbly wove the strands of the various meditative practices together. Having studied under him, Zhiyi made a deeper and broader inquiry and constructed a comprehensive system of religious practice on a strong theoretical basis. Many people gathered around Zhiyi, attracted by his doctrine. Reflecting, though, that very few of them truly acquired the Buddhist teachings, he decided to go to Mount Tiantai in order to give himself the opportunity to critically appraise his own theories.

In the year 575 the Chen dynasty emperor requested Zhiyi to stay in the capital, but the master replied firmly, "I have to act according to my own resolve," and went to Mount Tiantai, the very mountain where I was now resting. I was moved to tears to think of the wonder of the Dharma connection that joined me in the lineage that Zhiyi had brought into being here, on this same mountain, more than fourteen hundred years ago.

Zhiyi had written about how pleasant were the dark valleys and the gentle, quiet nights of Mount Tiantai. This seemed to be the very atmosphere that surrounded me now as I was resting in my room. In the distant past, life on the mountain must have been inconvenient and harsh. Nevertheless, Zhiyi called a life spent diligently pursuing Buddhism "pleasant." Having come to the mountain with such a great resolve, he laid out a training method that was truly severe. It was difficult to train and study according to his teachings unless the aspirant turned his back on the secular life for seclusion deep in the mountains and immersed himself in religious training. It was not a method that we lay Buddhists could use in everyday life.

Take for example the teaching of Three Thousand Realms in One Mind, which developed out of the theories of the Mutual Penetration of the Ten Realms (from the hells to buddhahood) and the Ten Suchnesses. We should not understand it simply as a worldview. It is more than that. Three thousand realms are contained in any one thought we have at the moment. Moreover, one thought does not preexist three thousand realms nor do three thousand realms preexist one thought. The three thousand realms, which means all existences, have a mutually identical and common relationship. However, this explanation alone is not enough for people to come to an immediate understanding of this teaching. So, to put it in a nutshell, our mind is influenced by everything that goes on in the world around us, but it also has a limitless possibility for changing that world. If it is dominated by anger, there the hells appear, and if it is overcome by greed, the realm of hungry spirits takes form. If we arouse our mind to seek a teaching that can defeat suffering when we meet it, and are heedful of the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths, then the realm of shravakas, the Buddha's disciples, results. And if we feel true sympathy for those who suffer and want to do something to relieve them of their suffering, the realm of bodhisattvas appears. In other words, the teaching of Three Thousand Realms in One Mind tells us that we should pay careful attention to our mind, not neglecting it even for a second.

This teaching, contained in Zhiyi's *Mohe zhiguan* (Great cessation and contemplation), tells us that the Buddha's realm can be opened up through one thought of our own, just as the hells can be made to appear in the same way. If we realize that human beings contain all of these possibilities within themselves, we understand that nothing is more important than our own mental attitude. Our lives are not something we cannot change. We can change them in any way according to our own attitudes.

When we realize this, we will feel confidence and joy in knowing that our lives are filled with bright possibilities.

I have expressed this before very simply as “consideration is the true reward of love” and “others change as we change.” There are many other things that Zhiyi taught that have been woven into Rissho Kosei-kai practices like *michibiki* (introducing others to the Dharma) and *tedori* (guiding fellow members), such as overcoming defilements (eliminating delusions originating from defilements), understanding of the reality of all things, and meditation. I have worked hard to make these teachings more than mere words, as I considered they should be understood through the body.

I have always thought that Buddhism is meaningless unless it can be made somehow or other to work in daily life. We are people of faith, not scholars specializing in textual studies. Zhiyi himself must have sought throughout his life a means to liberate people from delusion. It has been my hope that I have been able to extract out of his teaching what is suited for our time for the practice of Rissho Kosei-kai members.

As the times continue their inevitable change, we will soon find ourselves in the twenty-first century. I appeal to members to make Rissho Kosei-kai an organization that looks to the original spirit of the eloquent teachings of the Buddha and that will be a worthy leader in the new century, returning to the teachings and spirit of Shakyamuni.

Once when I was talking with Dr. Kazuo Kasahara, an emeritus professor of the University of Tokyo, he said, “The greatness of the founders of new religions in the Kamakura period [1185–1333] was that they were never resigned to following in the footsteps of their predecessors, but when asking themselves ‘Why?’, they always returned to Shakyamuni.” His words remain with me still.

The following morning I climbed to the summit of Mount Tiantai to pay

my respects at the tomb of Zhiyi. From there the mountain spread below me like the leaves of an eight-petal lotus. Standing in front of the tomb, I experienced again the joy of having come into contact with the Lotus Sutra.

That year I turned seventy-seven, a birthday known in Japan as *kiju*, or “the happy age.” It is said that it is very difficult to be born human; it is rare to encounter the Buddha Dharma. Since coming across the Lotus Sutra, I have devoted my life to it, regretting nothing. Saicho famously stated, “What is the treasure of a nation? It is the aspiration to seek the Buddha Way. Those who have this aspiration are treasures of the nation.” I vowed again to myself to keep on walking the Way single-mindedly in order to make all people shining jewels.

Discussing Nuclear Weapons Issues in China

After my visit to Mount Tiantai, I flew directly to Beijing to join other members of Religions for Peace’s peace mission to China. This mission grew out of the decision at the Third World Assembly of Religions for Peace, in Princeton, New Jersey, to persuade countries with nuclear weapons to ban their preemptive use. The mission to China was one of the missions to five countries with nuclear weapons for discussions with their leaders. Each of Religions for Peace’s member countries made representations to those five countries. The Japan committee asked for a meeting with leading members of the Chinese government through the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo. Permission being granted, the visit to China was arranged.

The evening before the talks, members of the mission gathered from all parts of the world at a hotel in Beijing. They included Archbishop Angelo Fernandes, the president of Religions for Peace; Dr. Dana Greeley; and Dr. Homer

Jack, secretary-general of Religions for Peace. There were also four members from the Japanese committee. On the Chinese side, representing the government were Mr. Ji Pengfei, a member of the State Council and a former vice-premier; Mr. Qiao Liansheng, a member of the State Council and director of the Religious Affairs Bureau; and Ambassador Kang Mao Zhao, appointed China’s representative at the upcoming Second Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament. Joining them were Mr. Zhao Puchu, president of the Buddhist Association of China, and Mr. Li Rongxi, its vice chief secretary.

From start to finish, the talks were conducted in a friendly manner. Mr. Ji asked, “What countries will you be visiting as members of the peace mission of Religions for Peace?” I replied, “We hope to visit the United States, Soviet Union, France, and the United Kingdom, in addition to China and have asked for meetings with government leaders. The Chinese government was the first to respond and we would like to express our gratitude to it.” I then explained that Japan was the first country to suffer a nuclear attack and had witnessed its horrors. It was because of this unhappy experience that we as Japanese religious leaders have supported the three nonnuclear principles that Japan shall neither possess nor manufacture nuclear weapons, shall not permit their introduction into Japanese territory, and will be the first and last country to experience atomic bombing. “There will be neither winners nor losers in a nuclear war. People of religion in countries that have nuclear weapons and in those that don’t must join forces and stand together. Religions for Peace was established for such a purpose.” Mr. Ji nodded in agreement.

Next to speak was Archbishop Fernandes. He announced Religions for Peace’s four-point plan that would be presented at the Second Special

Session of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament (SSOD-II) in June: the declaration that the use of nuclear weapons is a crime against humanity; the promotion of a freeze in nuclear stockpiling by both the United States and the Soviet Union and of the conclusion of a nuclear test ban treaty; a global disarmament campaign by the United Nations; and the diversion of military expenditure to aid for developing countries. Mr. Ji agreed this was a wonderful appeal and promised to support it. He then stood up and shook hands with each member of the mission.

The Origin of Buddhist Ethics

I had also visited China the previous year at the invitation of the Buddhist Association of China in appreciation of the work I had done at the Princeton conference. That time I had gone with my wife.

The storms of the Cultural Revolution had by then died down. Damage sustained at that time to the temples we were taken to was being repaired, and reconstruction was going forward steadily. What made me happier than anything else was the fact that virtually all the people of religion we met for the first time had heard of Religions for Peace. I had received a request from Mr. Zhao Puchu to speak to Chinese religious leaders about how religious leaders from all over the world had come together to form Religions for Peace to promote the peace movement, and about its basic ideas.

About fifteen hundred people, mainly religious leaders, had gathered in the hall of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in Beijing. Besides religious leaders there were representatives from various sections of the government, as well as young men and women who, I was told, were students at religious academies. Religious leaders were being trained in a socialist country.

I voiced my thanks to the audience. "My faith, which enables me to work for world peace through the cooperation of people of religion, comes from the precious jewel that is Mahayana Buddhism, which we [Japanese] were able to encounter thanks to its transmission from China." Then I spoke about the Bodhisattva Never Despise in the Lotus Sutra and his practice of honoring people for their potential buddhahood:

Long, long ago, there was a bhikshu who bowed to all he met, putting his palms together reverently, and saying to them, "You will become a buddha." Since he would never slight others, he was called Never Despise. He never doubted that everyone he met possessed the buddha-nature. Though there were those who, unaware of their own buddha-nature, challenged and hurt each other, Never Despise continued to revere them, determined to make them aware of what they truly possessed.

Though some people beat him with sticks or threw stones at him, Never Despise did not flinch but retreated to a distance and continued to revere them, since they more than anyone

else needed awakening. I think this kind of attitude can rid the world of all strife. Whatever system we follow, if it is not rooted in a spirit of reverence for others' buddha-nature, it will not lead to peace. It is the action of Never Despise that is our basic stance in promoting Religions for Peace.

Hoping I had not been too direct, I said:

Here is another story that has come down to us, about what happened in Shakyamuni's lifetime. One night, King Pasenadi and his queen, Mallika, were viewing the moon from the roof of their palace. The king turned to his wife and asked, "Is there anyone that you love more than yourself?" Probably the king expected her to reply, "Of course, I love you more than myself," but she said, "Actually, I love myself most of all." The king must have felt disappointed at that moment. Then the queen asked him, "Do you love anyone more than yourself?" He thought again and had to admit, "No, I also love myself most of all." This was

true not only of King Pasenadi and Queen Mallika. We all love ourselves most. That is why the starting point of Buddhist ethics has to be “those who love themselves must never harm others.”

I then recounted a story I had heard from Hajime Nakamura, a professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo. Its point was that *ren* (altruism), one of Confucianism’s most fundamental virtues, has the important meaning of love and compassion for everyone. I had ventured to mention a teaching of Confucius that had not yet been revived in China.

I was quite anxious about how people in positions of leadership from various sections of Chinese society, with its different system, would react to my talk. However, there was great applause when I finished.

Mr. Zhao stood up and added a few words. “The dangers the world faces arise because people are not acting like Never Despire. If the world’s religious leaders follow his spirit, then peace will surely be achieved. Mr. Niwano, who has shown us this, is truly my brother.” Again there was great applause.

My Second Speech at the United Nations

With the United States announcing the deployment of the Pershing II missile in 1983 in West Germany in response to the Soviet Union’s deployment of the SS-20 intermediate-range ballistic missile, there was a sense of impending crisis throughout the world over nuclear armament. The antinuclear movement rapidly expanded its activities, especially in Europe. The Second Special Session of the UN General Assembly devoted to Disarmament took place from June 7 to July 10, 1982, in New York against this backdrop, a month after my visit to China. It heard statements by representatives of NGOs, one of which was the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), which appealed for nuclear disarmament. Since I happened at the time to be the organization’s twenty-fifth president, I was deputed to address the special session. It was the second time I had undertaken such an important task.

Before the session, Rissho Kosei-kai inaugurated a committee to promote the disarmament and the abolition of nuclear weapons, and conducted a

nationwide campaign with the aim of collecting twenty million signatures. With young people in the lead, Rissho Kosei-kai members asked people to sign a petition for global disarmament and the abolition of nuclear weapons. They stood in the streets, made door-to-door visits, and appealed to fellow students at school and coworkers in the workplace. In two months they exceeded their target and collected twenty-seven million signatures. At the same time, documentary films were shown and photo exhibitions held showing the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and peace rallies and lectures were held all over Japan. Member organizations of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan) also responded to Rissho Kosei-kai’s peace campaign, gathering ten million signatures. In the Philippines, young members of the Bataan Christian Youth Civic Circle, with whom Rissho Kosei-kai had strengthened ties with the construction in 1975 of a Friendship Tower in the city of Bagac in Bataan Province, the Philippines, collected seven thousand signatures from Philippine citizens, and they brought them to Japan.

The morning of June 24, 1982, in

New York was clear and sunny. That day, the eighteenth day of the special session, I stood on the podium of the General Assembly as president of IARF. I said:

As [IARF's] representative and as a Buddhist from Japan, the only nation ever to suffer atomic attack, I feel it is my duty to call to the attention of all peoples everywhere the drastic alteration the existence of nuclear weapons makes in the meaning of war. In the past, belligerents have usually been able to find some kind of justification for bellicose action. But in the face of the horrendous destruction and slaughter of nuclear war, all justifications become less than meaningless. There can be no victor in a war without survivors, a war in which it is impossible to remain an onlooker. Such war is impiety against the sacredness of life itself. Hiroshima and Nagasaki have shown us that this is true, and the victims who perished in those cities are martyrs whose sacrifice teaches humanity that nuclear weapons must under no circumstances be used a third time. . . . [T]he fate of humankind must be determined, not by the governmental representatives of a handful of national states, but by the grassroots wishes of the broadest possible united segment of humankind.

After making a concrete proposal for the first steps for world peace, I concluded:

I am particularly alarmed that there are still many people in the world who have a wrong understanding of the effects of nuclear weapons and who are ignorant of the cruel destruction nuclear weapons wreak on humankind. Therefore, what is needed now is to mobilize world public opinion for the cause of the abolition of nuclear weapons. I am

pleased to announce that Risho Kosei-kai will contribute one million dollars over the coming year for the promotion of peace and international understanding through campaigns for world disarmament.

The day after my address I held a reception in the Delegates' Dining Room at UN Headquarters. The guests included Mr. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, the UN secretary-general; Mr. Yasushi Akashi, the under-secretary-general; other UN officials; UN ambassadors from various countries; and representatives of NGOs. Six hundred people from around the world attended, among whom was Baron Noel-Baker, who had entrusted me with a message to the Japanese government at the Second World Assembly of Religions for Peace in Leuven in 1974. He told me, "That was a wonderful speech. Now is a turning point in history." A renowned authority on disarmament affairs and the recipient of the 1959 Nobel Peace Prize, he held out his hand to me and congratulated me.

People have varying opinions about the United Nations. Some have decided it is powerless and others laugh at Japanese diplomacy as being UN centered. Others even say the UN is dominated by the Third World and that a second United Nations should be created in its place. However, in a world like the present, suffused with national pride, only the United Nations can observe the situation in the most global way. Without the United Nations, the present critical situation would probably have been even more severe.

The United Nations is needed not only for goals like nuclear disarmament and conflict resolution. According to a UNICEF report in 1981, in developing countries around 40,000 children die every day, 100 million people go hungry or are ill, 10 million suffer from physical or mental harm, and 200 million children between the ages of six and eleven do not go to school. Infant

mortality rates are ten times greater in developing countries than in advanced countries, and it predicted that of 125 million live births, more than 1.7 million infants will die before the age of five.

Anyone who knows this situation has to think about what can be done to relieve it. If the United Nations did not exist, those people would die in silence. Its existence is necessary, as it gives a voice to the voiceless.

When I met the former secretary-general, Mr. Kurt Waldheim, he earnestly appealed to me, saying, "The United Nations is a superb peace mechanism. If we can get it to work, it is capable of securing world peace. I hope that religious leaders will provide the backbone to secure peace so that we can make the ideals of the United Nations charter live."

As far as the United Nations is the only mediator of international conflicts, I believe that those people of religion who are affiliated with United Nations NGOs have a mission to make it effective. Though there are unsettled questions in Japan about the right of collective self-defense and a multinational force, we must remember that above all, Japan has a constitution that is underpinned by the very ideal of peace that the United Nations aims for. □

Look Up to the Heavens, Feel No Shame in Doing So

by Nichiko Niwano

In Japan, during the holiday season surrounding the end of the old year and the start of the new year, many of us have frequent opportunities to gather with other people. At such times, we usually share some snacks. When sweets are served, they seem to be everyone's favorite, but they come in many shapes and sizes. Which one do you reach for, a large one or a small one?

You might suppose that the bigger the sweet, the better, but I think that most people tend to reach for one that is comparatively small, because we feel ashamed to behave in an openly greedy way.

Although this is an extremely simple example, we Japanese people, from long ago, have developed the mental attitude of avoiding doing anything one would feel ashamed of or feel guilty about, expressing it with the phrase "have a sense of shame."

Even so, we are sometimes defeated by the temptations of greed and do things for which we, as human beings, should feel ashamed. Of course, among us, there are some people who feel no shame at all about telling lies or engaging in wrongdoing.

However, just as Buddhism teaches the theory of the Mutual Inclusion of the Ten Realms, everyone has, within his or her heart, an "I" with selfish desires as well as an "I" with honesty and integrity. We simultaneously can have the self-centered, shameful heart—like that of the realms of hell and hungry spirits—as well as the heart of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, full of compassion, which allows us to take joy in devoting ourselves to other people.

This reminds me of a stanza from a poem by Hiroshi Yoshino (1926–2014): "Passing day after day, / And failing day after day, / These two things / Are we doing as one?"

Because the poem uses the same kanji character for both "passing" and "failing," it layers the meanings of the two words, showing us that we cannot live life without ever failing. Therefore, it is important that we always reflect upon and ask ourselves, "Do you have a guilty conscience?" and return to the heart of the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Feeling Shame Leads to Self-Improvement

Honen (1133–1212), founder of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism, left behind these words of earnest self-reflection: "I should be ashamed, I should be ashamed. I am sorrowful, I am remorseful."

One of Japan's well-known scholars of Oriental philosophy, Masahiro Yasuoka (1898–1983), said that the humanity of human beings in one aspect is found in pursuing something precious and great, from which arises a mind of respect. Moreover, according to Mr. Yasuoka, when one develops such a mind, "a sense of shame about the lowly reality of one's self would begin to grow." And from a religious standpoint, as your faith deepens more and more and you gaze upon yourself sternly, you cannot help but reflect and repent your shortcomings. Indeed, Honen's words are a testament to this.

When you look up to and revere the gods and the buddhas, and when you are face-to-face with the gods and the

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buddhas, you may regretfully think, "I am not yet worthy." But just as Shakyamuni Buddha said, "The mind endowed with a sense of shame is a purer and more beautiful adornment than any kind of robe a person could put on," so a sense of shame can serve as the dynamic power that spurs our growth as human beings. Mencius, an ancient Chinese philosopher (372–289 BCE) said, "Look up to the heavens, feel no shame in doing so." That is a good motto for a lifestyle that is richly human and that aims to draw a little closer to greatness.

Of course, this is not some special way of life. What is important is leading a life that always aims to be equally honest before the gods and the buddhas, and toward other people and yourself. In other words, never forget to be polite to people, and do gladly what is expected of you. And then, if you remember to always be considerate of other people, you can pass your days with a clear conscience, free of guilt.

Even so, if you find yourself getting lost along the way, by all means remember how important it is to consider other people's feelings first. When you are making a sincere effort to help others, you will not feel like advancing your own selfish interest. Perhaps we human beings develop, little by little, by repeating self-reflection and showing consideration for others. □

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 (6)

*This is the 127th installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra
by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.*

TEXT The living, crushed and harassed, / Oppressed by
countless pains: / The Cry Regarder with his mystic wis-
dom / Can save [such] a suffering world.

COMMENTARY This is the concluding verse of all that
has been described about the power of the Bodhisattva
Regarder of the Cries of the World, who saves living beings
from suffering.

- *The Cry Regarder with his mystic wisdom.* This phrase refers to a supreme and mysterious wisdom that is able to regard and distinguish between the voices in the minds of living beings and to provide the most appropriate salvation to them, according to their respective cries. It is the wisdom of the truth of the Middle, wisdom that is constantly united with the Truth, being adapted to each individual person and circumstance, and in perfect accord with the purpose of deliverance.

The power to repel

If this wisdom springs forth when one is undergoing various difficulties and hardships and suffering unbearably from them, then one can repel that suffering in a flash. This “repelling” is extremely important to human life and those who possess the strength to repulse suffering are able to overcome any kind of trouble. Those who lack this strength become crushed, spiritless, and neurotic, or fall upon a perverted path, becoming so-called failures and stragglers in human life. A fork in the road of human life is very difficult to distinguish because it is as thin as a knife’s edge. It is all a matter of whether one can repulse suffering or not. A person with wisdom is able to repel it. A spirited person, full of drive, is also able to repel it.

There are many people in this world who are not so-called people of wisdom and who are timid and fainthearted. How can such people ward off hardship?

Herein lies the importance and value of faith. By virtue of one's own faith, everyone has a firm spiritual foundation as a guide, and anyone can rise up from the depths of suffering in one way or another. The world is such that as long as one can rise up, one will be able to get by somehow.

The mysterious strength to somehow rise up and recover from suffering through the conviction of faith can surely be called the power of the wonderful wisdom of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World. "Somehow" may seem at first to be an extremely vague word, but it is in this "somehow" that we find the exquisite wonder of the workings of true wisdom.

It is a kind of flash in which one is firmly convinced that "if I do this, then that will happen." Those who have religious faith are visited by such flashes when the occasion demands. When they fall into the abyss of despair, they experience this kind of flash and are able to obtain new courage.

Hardship becomes sustenance for growth

Thus, those who are able to ward off hardships are able to grasp something important from them. They are able to use those hardships as provisions for growth and are able to grow further as human beings. As the proverb says, it is in turning misfortune into good fortune that one finds the unimaginable exquisiteness of human life.

This internal strength to repulse hardships when one meets them, and on the contrary, through this wondrous strength of mind, to take nourishment from hardships and use them as sustenance for growing—this kind of strength is the power of the mystic, wonderful wisdom of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World.

TEXT Perfect in supernatural powers, / Widely practiced in the tactfulness of wisdom, / In the lands of the universe there is no place / Where he does not manifest himself.

COMMENTARY

Supernatural powers

• *Perfect in supernatural powers.* To us as ordinary human beings, supernatural power is an ultimately free and unhindered power. It is the power to think, speak, and act in accordance with any given circumstance at all times. It is a penetrating wisdom.

The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World is the personification of such wisdom, and therefore we must learn from him. We too must become the incarnation of the bodhisattva.

Such wisdom is able to understand objective circumstances easily, comprehend all information clearly, and perfectly perceive the core. In a given case, what one should do

naturally becomes self-evident, with nothing overlooked. This is the way one must become.

Then, one is able to understand well the feelings of others, what and how they think, and what they desire. At the same time, one is capable of knowing precisely the most appropriate and correct thing to do for a particular person at a given moment, and the best way one can bring them true happiness. Thus, such discernment enables one to have an exquisite sense of judgment in these matters. This is the way one must become.

This is the supernatural power of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World that we must learn.

• *Widely practiced in the tactfulness of wisdom.* This expression refers to fulfilling the above-mentioned practice repeatedly. Since tactfulness signifies appropriate means, this phrase indicates that the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World has perfected the practice of employing the proper means most suitable for each person in any given circumstance, always with penetrating wisdom.

True meaning of all-sided appearance

• *In the lands of the universe there is no place where he does not manifest himself.* This does not refer merely to spatial location, but also to the spiritual world of human beings. Here, the emphasis is on the latter.

Within the spiritual world of human beings, there is a slight variance from person to person. These disparities emerge from differences in gender, age, occupation, position, and education. It is these various spiritual worlds that are indicated by "the lands of the universe."

That which is able to penetrate and communicate widely with these worlds of infinite variety is the wisdom of the Cry Regarder. It may be said that an excellent leader is one who is able to recognize the various reasons why a person is suffering—because of financial problems, romantic problems, health problems, disharmony in the home, or difficult interpersonal relations at the workplace—and accurately assess the severity of the suffering, taking into account the how this person's individual needs might be different from other people's. An excellent leader can comprehend the delicate nuances specific to the category of distress in a particular situation, and apply the correct mental prescription so that it is extremely effective against that suffering.

This is how we should understand the "all-sided appearance" of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, who manifests himself, as if omnipresent in all lands and throughout the universe, to save all human beings from suffering. And again, we ourselves must become like the Cry Regarder.

There are probably a lot of people who will think to themselves: "I couldn't possibly imitate the bodhisattva. Why, I

haven't even a fragment of such wisdom. As for becoming a leader, it is entirely out of the question."

Such thinking is greatly mistaken. Any parent who has even one child is in the position of being an admirable leader. At the workplace, if you have even one subordinate or younger employee working with you, then you ought to realize that you are a leader for that person. Even among university students, there are many occasions when they serve in a position of leadership with fellow classmates and junior students.

Therefore, no one should fall into thinking that he or she has no opportunity to lead others in this world. To think that way is a kind of irresponsibility, and also a rather mean-spirited way of thinking.

Whether it is in relation to a single child, a subordinate, a younger member of a group, or younger siblings, we must become like the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World. We must manifest ourselves in an all-sided manner in all the mental worlds where others reside, and bring happiness to them.

Further, it is a great mistake to think, "I'm not as smart as the Cry Regarder, and I certainly don't have the wisdom of a bodhisattva." Even without having accumulated education and cultivation, if one is noble and pure-minded, one can become an excellent leader. Even without the gift of being able to guide others with spoken and written words, one can serve as a guide by one's own example of self-conduct and presence of mind.

A person with a firm and deep faith, in the true sense of the words, can guide many people in this world. A good example of such person is that of the so-called *myōkōnin*, the title given to a wondrously virtuous person who is an exceptionally devout lay believer in the Jōdo Shinshū sect of Japanese Buddhism. If we only recall a devout man called Asahara Saichi (see the November/December 2002 issue of *Dharma World*) and think how during his lifetime he guided so many people to the proper way of life, how even today his life continues to make such a deep impression on people, and how his way of life still serves as a model for others, then we will realize how shallow it is to believe that leadership is determined by such things as position or education.

This omnipresent manifestation of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World is therefore an actual matter that concerns ourselves.

TEXT All the evil states of existence, / Hells, ghosts, and animals, / Sorrows of birth, age, disease, death, / All by degrees are ended by him.

COMMENTARY *Evil states of existence.* This term is the same as the evil realms (or paths) (see the "six states of

existence" in the January/February 1993 issue of *Dharma World*).

• *Sorrows of birth, age, disease, death / All by degrees are ended by him.* Of course the phenomena of suffering in human life do not themselves disappear. Human beings do not stop falling ill, growing old, and dying. It is just that they cease to be suffering.

Suffering stops being suffering

That "suffering stops being suffering" can surely be said to be the merit of being capable of knowing the truth of the Middle, which is the essential substance of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World. In other words, it may be called the most realistic aspect of the merits of faith. Therefore, let us use this opportunity to consider *suffering* once again in greater detail.

Suffering never comes to an end

From the very beginning of human history, the one thing that human beings have consistently done is to endeavor to escape from suffering. The most fundamental endeavor of the human race has been the struggle to escape from or abolish all forms of suffering, whether they derive from heat and cold, natural disasters and calamities, illness, death, and poverty, or suffering that comes from human relationships.

But when it comes to whether, after these efforts of tens of thousands of years, human beings have been liberated from suffering, the answer is of course "no." Hereafter, and forevermore, there will never be a perfect release from all suffering. It is true that by the use of intelligence and the progress of technology human beings will be able to gradually alleviate suffering that comes from heat and cold, natural disasters and calamities, illness, and poverty. We will always have to continue such efforts.

Still, it is absolutely impossible to escape from death, and new sufferings that originate in human relationships will continue to come forth, one after another, without end.

If that is the case, what can we do? There is only one thing to do and that is to make it so that suffering is no longer suffering, that is, to build up our minds so as to never be swayed by it. Given that for all eternity suffering will never disappear, this is the one and only way to overcome it. Human wisdom has progressed to the point of enabling travel to the moon and sending rockets to the edge of the solar system, so why not likewise quit this futile and impossible struggle to escape from suffering and attempt a great mental revolution of conquering suffering by probing its real condition?

Let us now consider how we can accomplish this.

Awakening to the fact that suffering is an ordinary state

First, one must realize the fact that “human life is characterized by suffering,” as Shakyamuni preached in the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths. The majority of people think that comfort is the normal state and that suffering is the abnormal state. Consequently, they struggle to escape from suffering or abolish it. Because they are always struggling against it, they are unable to turn off the idea of suffering which adheres to their minds. Accordingly, they always feel they are suffering.

Thus, one should change one’s way of thinking completely and realize, “This world is filled with suffering. Suffering is an ordinary state.” If one comes to this recognition, one will come to have nerves of steel. One will be able to change one’s attitude and decide: “If suffering is an ordinary state, I will be unable to escape it even if I try. Therefore, I will just have to stand face to face with it.” If one is thus resolved and able to confront suffering head on, by this alone, most suffering will shrivel up and go away by itself. To make a long story short, when a child who hates bitter medicine has to take some, the child will cry, run away, and refuse it frantically. Although the child has not yet taken the medicine, and although the suffering of “bitterness” has not come yet, the child is already suffering. In contrast, an adult who has recognized that “medicine is bitter and bitterness is an ordinary state” will swallow the medicine, since the person is ready to get it down. Then, in a twinkling, the matter is finished. There is no difference itself in the bitterness that the adult or the child tastes; however, there are great variations in the ways of sensing it and for regarding it as suffering. As a result, one will scream and cry and the other will be able to cope with the matter calmly.

Therefore we can say that the first path to overcome suffering is “to realize that suffering is an ordinary state.”

Awakening to the fact that suffering is without substance

Next, as the second path, there is a realization by acknowledging the fact that “suffering has no substance.” This may appear to contradict the first awakening to the fact that “suffering is an ordinary state,” or in other words, that “human life is suffering,” but it is not a contradiction. Rather, in comparison to the first awakening, the state of mind of this realization is one step further advanced.

As we have noted time and again, everything in this world is “empty.” It is exactly because everything has a cause and conditions to promote the cause that they appear as phenomena. Therefore, when the cause and conditions disappear, the phenomenon will invariably disappear as well. This is the great law of the universe and, as you are already aware, in the Buddha Dharma it is referred to as

“the law of dependent origination” and “the law of causes and conditions.”

What is called suffering also is not that which deviates from this great law. Suffering is merely something that human beings feel, and just like an illusion, it has no substance. If suffering had substance, then one would have to escape from it, or smash it to pieces in order to dissolve it. But suffering originally has no substance, so if one just awakens to this fact, in that very instant suffering will disappear.

If you stick a needle in your arm, it will hurt. That is the keen sense of an ordinary person under ordinary circumstances. It is painful because the person thinks it is painful. However, so-called ascetics nonchalantly stick themselves with large needles. They are not calm despite the pain; it is really not painful to them.

Even an ordinary person, when put under hypnosis and made to respond to the suggestion that there is no pain will, like the ascetic, feel no pain. Such a huge difference is evidently a result of psychological functions. Painless childbirth under hypnotic suggestion is also an example of this.

For a person who is only able to see things from a materialistic point of view, such phenomena must be absolutely amazing. The same physical body, with the same active nerves passing through it, will feel pain when not under autosuggestion but will not feel pain when under autosuggestion. Such a person must think it amazing that despite not being under anesthesia there could be such a vast difference in sensitivity. Despite such doubts, facts are facts.

Physical pain is felt by nerves. The nerves’ perception is a type of electric signal that is transmitted to the brain, and then the person feels pain or an itch. Contemporary science has still not made clear a lot of things about how the brain operates, but there seems no doubt that there is a close interrelationship between the function of the brain and the workings of the mind. In other words, the pain and suffering felt by the physical body is deeply connected with the mind. Therefore, the lessening of physical pain, or even entirely ceasing to feel pain, is possible just by means of how one positions one’s state of mind. It is no more miraculous that the same is true of mental suffering. When one suggests something to another person who is under hypnosis, one is doing no less than changing the other person’s mind. Through a change of mind, what is normally painful is not felt as painful. When we look at it this way it is easy to comprehend that if one changes one’s mind, perfecting the realization that “suffering has no substance,” suffering will vanish on the spot.

However, the person who has been able to fully attain such a level of enlightenment is a considerable adept. Ordinary human beings find it very difficult to achieve. That is why we must bring about a great revolution in our minds, and

carry out a conversion of our minds. We must penetrate “emptiness” and achieve completely the awareness that suffering has no substance.

Having said that, if we only understand this intellectually, we will not be able to obliterate easily the adherence to phenomena that have clung to our minds and that we feel through our minds and bodies. So there is no other way to eliminate this adherence except through religious means of mental concentration, such as meditation (*dhyana*) or contemplation (*samadhi*).

The above two paths are wholly means of changing the mental attitude, so they cannot be achieved without accumulating practices of the mind. Moreover, it is no easy thing to attain that degree of practice. Consequently, unless we can think up a way that any person can follow, starting right this moment, the general population cannot be saved. Is there indeed such a splendid means?

Overcoming suffering by means of creative activity

There is a way. There is a path of Mahayanist salvation, which all people can carry out immediately. It is “overcoming all suffering by means of creative activity.” Creative activity is that which creates things of value. First of all, so long as one’s occupation is a good one, it means exerting one’s utmost strength in that occupation and doing good work. It may also be creating valuable things through a hobby or avocation. Every such creative activity is always accompanied by pain. Without hardship such acts of creativity would only produce things of little value if at all. The activity of creating something is in itself always in accord with the mind of the Original Buddha, and because it is, in a manner of speaking, the true essence of humanity, in the depths of suffering is concealed a deep joy. Enchanted by such delight, without realizing it we become totally absorbed and are able to grapple with truly arduous tasks! So when hardship is more than you can bear and ordinary intellectual ability or resources are of no avail, simply set it aside for the time being, and whether it be in your occupation, avocation, or a hobby, immerse yourself in some kind of creative activity.

“Overcoming all suffering by means of creative activity” is an application of this logic. As long as one is measuring oneself against some creative task, grapples with its hardships, and becomes captivated by the joy that lies concealed within that hardship, the other hardships will cease to seem like hardships. What is even more important, as mentioned above, is that since suffering has originally no substance, while you are absorbed in creative work, the actuality of suffering will gradually fade away, and when you take note, it will have grown dim and entirely blurry.

With this method, all that is necessary is determination.

Anyone can do it right away, by just making up one’s mind. Moreover, the act in itself will make a person’s life fuller and increase its value. As I said earlier, suffering is a provision for growth. More than that, creative activity has significance for the world as a whole, so it can be said that there is no more Mahayanist path for salvation.

The greatest act of creation is dedication to the wellbeing of others

If one goes one step further and becomes active in order to bring happiness to others, this is surely the highest form of creative activity. It can even be a very small thing. By some act of self-sacrifice, one can do something that benefits one’s neighbor or the world at large.

The teaching that “all things are devoid of self” shows us that society is constructed like a net woven from the interplay of every person’s labor. A society in which that interchange is conducted to perfection can certainly be called “a wholesome society.” When we add to that the element of dedication to serving others, and the dedication of every person is warmly interwoven together, we can surely call it a “beautiful society” or a “bright society.”

Due to the fact that human beings live not only materially and physically, but also in many more ways live spiritually, they cannot experience full satisfaction with a society that is merely “wholesome.” They are able to feel deep joy in residing in it only when that society is beautiful and bright.

As a consequence of this, the act of self-sacrifice in the service of others is indispensable in creating a society that is truly humane. At the same time, performing such service can surely be called the most noble creative activity a person can perform.

Therefore, a person who sincerely devotes oneself to actively serving people and the world at large knows no suffering despite living in the midst of suffering, is always filled with joy, and is moreover able to live a life of the highest value as a human being.

Thus, one who knows the true wisdom (the truth of the Middle) which is the substance or true form of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World will be able not only to extinguish one’s own suffering in life, such as aging, illness, and death, but also to alleviate or even terminate the suffering of others. In other words, one will have become like the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World.

To be continued

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.

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Attendees at the inauguration of Risho Kosei-kai of Rome,
on October 12, 2013.



A hoza session, or Dharma circle, during the Sunday service at the
Dharma Center of Oklahoma.