DHARMA WORLD

FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

JULY–DEC. 2017 VOL. 44

FEATURES: Religions Tackling Extremism

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

Publisher: Shoko Mizutani
Director: Naoki Taketani
Senior Editor: Kazumasa Osaka
Editor: Katsuyuki Kikuchi
Editorial Advisors:
Miriam Levering, Gene Reeves, Yoshiaki Sanada, Dominick Scarangello, Michio T. Shinozaki
Copy Editors:
Gary Hoiby, DeAnna Satre, Stephen Comee, Catherine Szolga
Subscription Staff: Kazuyo Okazaki
Layout and Design: Abinitio Design

Cover: A woman places a candle in front of the French Embassy in Kiev, Ukraine, mourning the victims of the terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015. Photo: Shutterstock.com Photoshop work by Abinitio Design

2 How People of Faith Can Tackle Extremism
by Nobuhiro Masahiro Nemoto

3 Islam Beyond Extremism
by A. Rashied Omar

6 The Connection between Religion and Extremism
by Olav Fykse Tveit

10 Religious Leaders and Their Roles in Tackling Violent Extremism
by Suphatmet Yunyasit

14 Terrorism: Religious or Political?
by M. Din Syamsuddin

17 No Religion Is Terrorist: The Myth of Religious Violence
by Indunil J. Kodithuwakku K.

22 Understanding and Responding to Violence in the Name of Religion
by David Rosen

25 The Potential for Dialogue with Violent Extremism and the Role of Religious Professionals
by Yoshiaki Sanada

• • • • • • • •

28 Savoring Our Encounters
by Dominick Scarangello

31 Kenji Miyazawa: Embodying the Lotus Sutra, with Mistakes and Failures (1)
by Gene Reeves

36 Being a Person of Faith
by Nomfundo Walaza

39 Speaking Truth in the Kremlin
by Nikkyo Niwano

42 Do You Think Positively or Negatively?
by Nichiko Niwano

THE THREEFOLD LOTUS SUTRA: A MODERN COMMENTARY

43 The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law Chapter 25: The All-Sidedness of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World (7)

Dharma World is published semiannually by Rissho Kosei-kai International, Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo 166-8537. E-mail: pub@kosei-kai.or.jp.
Copyright © 2017 by Rissho Kosei-kai International. All rights reserved. Printed in Japan by Komiyama Printing Company. Change of Address: Please provide both old and new addresses. Six weeks' advance notice is requested. Requests for permission to reprint all or part of any article in this issue must be made in writing to the editor of *Dharma World*.

FEATURES

How People of Faith Can Tackle Extremism

by Nobuhiro Masahiro Nemoto

Terms such as *violent extremism* and *religious extremism* dominate our consciousness as never before. It is incumbent on all of us as people of religious faith to understand exactly why these terms have become so prevalent and why violence is now so rampant—in other words, to understand the background—so that we can take appropriate action in response.

I would like to begin, therefore, by exploring this background in terms of the typology developed by Johan Galtung, a Norwegian sociologist and the principal founder of peace and conflict studies. Dr. Galtung classified violence into the following types:

• *Direct violence*. Physical acts of violence exemplified by wars between nations, ethnic conflicts, terrorism, criminal acts. This type also includes verbal and psychological acts of violence.

• *Structural violence*. Social factors such as inequality, hunger, poverty, disparities, discrimination, and human rights abuses that give rise to direct violence.

• *Cultural violence*. The cultural factors that justify and foster the social factors and acts of violence listed in the two preceding types.

This typology of violence offers an extremely valuable perspective for understanding extremism. Why do people turn to extremism? The tendency is to problematize and discuss extremism solely in terms of the violence that it engenders; unless we can uncover its background and causes, however, we are unlikely to be able to tackle the problem at its root.

People who commit acts of violence (direct violence) harbor anger toward the objects of their violence. Where does this anger come from? It arises out of factors including hunger, poverty, disparities, discrimination, and human rights abuses rooted in inequality and injustice built into a social system (structural violence) and is nourished by aspects of culture in the wider sense that encompass ideas, creeds, and fanatical belief (cultural violence).

Most emblematic and commonly cited of the people who turn to violent extremism and religious extremism are the fighters of the Islamic State. Their savagery and indiscriminateness are naturally unspeakable, and the acts of violence involving mass slaughter that they perpetrate to express their anger are unforgivable. But why do they feel such anger that they will take the lives of those who belong to particular groups?

In the answer to this question, we will find the key to how we should tackle extremism. Let us consider first, then, ways and means.

Violence should not be met with violence. The only means of opposing violence is through encounters and dialogue. Intermediaries have a crucial role to play in creating opportunities for such encounters and dialogue. The question is thus one of finding the individuals and groups that have contacts with extremists. Such a role demands sincerity and the courage to face risks.

Next is the theme of dialogue. Rather than simply criticizing extremists, we must listen to their anger. Who and what do they feel anger toward? Is it discrimination? Inequality? Or injustice? Exploring this question enables us to see, from a religious perspective, that extremists are human beings like us. Rather than viewing them as members of different ethnicities and nations, we must see them as fellow human beings, and I would argue that the ability to see them as such is an intrinsic characteristic of people of faith. When we recognize the equal dignity of all lives—that is to say, when we adopt the ultimate yet simple view that all people are the precious children of God and the Buddha—dialogue will transcend the dichotomous division of people into "friends" and "enemies," ushering in a perspective that leads humankind to a new paradigm of heterogeneous coexistence.

We people of faith should not simply condemn violent extremists as terrorists. We should start instead by praying that those who turn to terror overcome their anger and come to believe in and practice universal and indiscriminate love. It is by ourselves leading lives inspired by universal love that we can take the first step toward tackling extremism, and this is the path that I myself hope to take. ❑

Nobuhiro Masahiro Nemoto is the executive specialist at the Secretariat Department of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo and is the secretary-general of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace.

Islam Beyond Extremism

by A. Rashied Omar

The belligerent environment that is currently being engendered is not helpful in ameliorating the root causes that provide a fertile ground on which extremism thrives. On the contrary, it is generating conditions that favor extremism, thus rendering the task of developing Muslim peacemaking initiatives extremely difficult.

Imam Dr. A. Rashied Omar is a Research Scholar of Islamic Studies and Peacebuilding at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame. His research and teaching focus on the roots of religious violence and the potential of religion for constructive social engagement and interreligious peace building. He serves as Imam at the Claremont Main Road Mosque in Cape Town, South Africa, and as a trustee of the Institute for Healing of Memories in South Africa.

In our time Islam is frequently depicted as predisposed to violence and extremism. The intractable Middle East conflicts; the attacks on the United States of America in September 2001; and recent events in which Muslim extremists groups, such as Boko Haram, Al-Shabab, the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), have been implicated in acts of terror have served only to reinforce this widespread perception.

In direct opposition to this perspective, Muslims often categorically deny that Islam has anything to do with terrorist violence. In their view, all violence in which individuals or groups who claim an Islamic affiliation are implicated is either a conspiracy against Islam or, alternatively, a vile distortion of the peaceful teachings of Islam. (Such apologetic Muslim reactions often claim that *Islam* means "peace," while refusing to acknowledge that violent extremist groups do indeed exist within Muslim ranks. This, of course, is not unique to Islam and Muslims.)

As with all received understandings, there are elements of truth in both of these formulations. The first formulation largely understates the contemporary sociopolitical and economic conditions in which people affiliated to Islam are implicated in violence. The second formulation ignores the fact that virtually all Muslims accept that Islam is not a pacifist tradition.

The overwhelming majority of Muslim schools of law and theology permit and legitimate the use of violence under certain conditions, mostly defensively, but a few also authorize offensive violence. It is here that a large measure of the problem lies. Under what conditions does Islam condone the use of violence?

This critical dilemma is not unique to Islam. All religious traditions agonize about the question of what might constitute a "just" war, and this becomes particularly acute in situations of deadly conflict. Two central points emerge from this that we need to bear in mind if we are to correctly appreciate the relationship between Muslims and violence.

The Text Is as Moral as Its Reader

First, it is important for all of us to acknowledge that most, if not all, of our sacred texts provide opportunities for justifying violence. A pertinent example of this was the vociferous theological debate in my own country, South Africa, concerning the biblical perspective on apartheid.

The white supremacist policy of apartheid was formed in the name of Christianity. Many of the key leaders of the oppressive apartheid regime were also devout adherents of the Calvinist Dutch Reformed Church. This led to an important theological document, the Kairos document (1985), produced by black South African Christians to lament this situation by posing a challenging question: "Can the Bible be used for any purpose at all?" (*The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa*, rev. 2nd ed. [Eerdmans], 1985). The answer, of course, is yes. This is, however, not unique to the Bible; all sacred religious texts display the same "ambivalence."

Arguing within the context of the Muslim sacred scripture the Qur'an, the California-based professor of Islamic law Khaled Abou El Fadl has provided a cogent response to this question. "The meaning of the text," he contends, "is often as moral as its reader. If the reader is intolerant, hateful, or oppressive, so will be the interpretation of the text" ("The Place of Tolerance in Islam: On Reading the Qur'an—and Misreading It," *Boston Review* [2/25/2002]). The point is that all sacred texts provide possibilities of both intolerant and tolerant interpretations.

A distressing Muslim example of this is the interpretations of Qur'anic texts and prophetic traditions (*ahadith*) offered in the intermittent messages that were released by Osama bin Laden—and are currently being released by ISIS—to justify hatred and violence. For trained Muslim scholars it is obvious that the bin Laden/ISIS interpretations of Qur'anic texts have been manipulated to suit their political agendas. It is, however, these kinds of interpretations that have fed into Islamophobic depictions of Islam as a violent religion.

The challenge for Muslims is, first, to acknowledge this, no matter how distressing it may be, and second, to find authentic ways of dealing constructively with those texts, symbols, and rituals within Islam that seemingly legitimate and sacralize violence.

Global Injustices and Extremism

The second critical point that we need to bear in mind if we are to correctly understand the relationship between Muslims and violence is that the religious legitimization of violence does not occur in a sociohistorical vacuum.

An increasing number of academic studies are beginning to highlight this point. For example, a 1999 study by the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict found that "religious diversity does not spawn violence independently of predisposing social, economic and political conditions as well as the subjective roles of belligerent leaders" (*Preventing Deadly Conflict: Final Report* [1997], 29).

Considering the sociohistorical contexts in which Muslim extremist behaviors are demonstrated, we note that they are either contexts in which Muslim citizens are subjugated to becoming victims of state violence or contexts in which Muslims feel vilified for practicing Islam. Globally, the increase in Islamophobic discourse in the Western media; the military alliance of Western forces against Muslim-majority nations in Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq; and the lackluster response globally to the plight of the Palestinian people are just some of the conditions that also have to be considered in relation to the emergence of Muslim extremism.

Taking these into consideration, it should come as no surprise that Muslims who feel marginalized, oppressed, victimized, desperate, and powerless resort to their faith and sacred texts to mobilize their resistance and, in some cases, to seek justification for resorting to violence. We should thus always be cognizant of the sociohistorical conditions that spawn acts of violent religious extremism, while still condemning the loss of innocent lives.

Returning to the initial question of how to account for Muslims who commit violence and atrocities in the name of Islam, in our response we need to avoid apologia, conspiracy theories, and simplistic analyses. Instead, we should attempt to understand the reality and root causes of Muslim extremist violence as a complex combination of a number of variables, including the socioeconomic and global political contexts.

It is important to remember that the contemporary global order is not by any stretch of the imagination a just one. Furthermore, Islam places a strong emphasis on social justice, and hardly any Muslim scholar interprets Islam as a pacifist tradition.

The challenge facing Muslims today is to uphold the fight for social justice and to defend the principle of pluralism in beliefs while at the same time mitigating against the flagrant misinterpretations of Islamic texts for extremist purposes. The primary strategy toward combating Muslim and all other forms of violence should be that of ameliorating the root causes that provide a fertile ground on which extremism can thrive.

Concrete Proposals for Combatting Muslim Extremism

In the final part of this essay, I would like to make four modest proposals that may create the conditions out of which a credible Muslim role in peace building could be spawned. My suggestions emerge primarily from my own assessment of the current geopolitical realities and the corresponding Muslim crisis of extremism.

First, Muslims must not become weary of stating again and again loudly and unequivocally that acts of wanton violence and barbarism are contrary to the teachings of Islam. And the news media must do more to make sure their voices are heard. In Islamic ethics, the end does not justify the means.

For contemporary Muslims this means to acknowledge, no matter how painful it is, that they do have extremists in their ranks. This is, of course, not unique to Islam. What is peculiar to Islam is that extremists appear to have a disproportionate place within their ranks, not least because of the proclivity of the media for sensationalism.

Second, there is a dire need for more rigorous academic studies of the potentially fertile sources of nonviolence and peace building in Islam and Muslim societies. A search of the Library of Congress subject catalog for resources on "Islam, Nonviolence and Peace" produces fewer

than a dozen items. A similar search for items on "Islam and Violence," by contrast, produces a plethora of materials. It is palpable that Islam and Muslim societies are a rather neglected area of peace studies and peace research.

Reflecting on this bias in the current peace-research agenda, Mohammed Abu-Nimer, in one of the most pioneering books to be published recently in the field, *Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam* (University Press of Florida, 2003), argues that shifting the emphasis from war and violence to peace in the study of Islam and Muslim societies can contribute significantly to buttressing and reinvigorating courageous peace initiatives that are already currently in progress in many different Muslim settings.

Despite the paucity of publications directly addressing this topic, the field is rich and includes leading Muslim scholars from diverse countries and cultures, such as Abdulaziz Sachedina (United States), Jawdat Said (Syria), Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (Pakistan), Asghar Ali Engineer (India), Chandra Muzaffar (Malaysia), Chaiwat Satha-Anand (Thailand), and Rabia Terri Harris (United States). (For a useful list of publications on Islam and peace building, see Abu-Nimer's bibliography in *Nonviolence and Peace Building*, 213–28. Also, an outdated but comprehensive bibliography compiled by Karim Douglas Crow titled "Islam – Peace – Nonviolence" can be found online at http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/islambib.pdf.)

Notwithstanding the sterling efforts of these courageous scholars, the field of Islamic peace studies and conflict transformation remains inchoate and urgently needs much more attention.

My third proposal relates to an urgent need for the nurturing and training of a new critically minded class of '*ulamā*' (Muslim religious scholars). The established Muslim religious leadership in many Muslim-majority countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan, has abandoned its role as the moral conscience of its society by speaking out more coherently on the human rights violations and injustices that permeate the society. Many of the leaders, while speaking out apologetically against certain forms of injustices against Muslims, are providing religious legitimacy to despotic and oppressive regimes.

Moreover, nonviolent civil-resistance campaigns are not tolerated in most Muslim countries, and progressive religious leaders are either incarcerated or exiled. It is critically urgent that the Muslim community contribute to the emergence of a new generation of religious scholars who are well versed in *both* the traditional Islamic sciences and the modern social sciences.

Peace education and conflict-transformation skills grounded within the key Islamic principles of compassion and justice must form an integral and essential part of this formation and training of future imams.

Last but not least, peace scholars need to consistently highlight the fact that the current iniquitous global conditions do not lend themselves well to credible Muslim peace building. A number of scholars have already pointed this out. For example, the renowned scholar of Islam John Esposito has ominously warned in his most recent book, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*, that "if foreign policy issues are not addressed effectively, they will continue to be a breeding ground for hatred and radicalism, the rise of extremist movements, and recruits for the bin Ladens of the world" ([Oxford University Press, 2002], 157).

In line with this analysis, peace advocates need to support the call for a public debate concerning the most effective means to counteract Muslim and other forms of extremism. Interreligious activists need to join the many voices all over the world that are questioning the wisdom of the current strategy pursued in the "war on terrorism." They also need to back the call for a serious reassessment concerning the controversial US foreign policy that abets authoritarian Muslim regimes in the Middle East and elsewhere, as well as the uncritical and too often unilateral US support for the present policies of the State of Israel (support for this view is presented by Graham E. Fuller in "The Future of Political Islam," *Foreign Affairs* [March/April 2002], 60).

The belligerent environment that is currently being engendered is not helpful in ameliorating the root causes that provide a fertile ground on which extremism thrives. On the contrary, it is generating conditions that favor extremism, thus rendering the task of developing Muslim peacemaking initiatives extremely difficult.

Conclusion

I have offered four concrete proposals that can make a modest contribution toward creating the conditions necessary for a more positive peace role for Islam to counterbalance the disproportionate yet awesome power of Muslim extremists. There exists a dire need for the followers of Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and all other traditions—and of none—to retrieve our common humanity and to end the horrific dehumanization that is currently taking place on such a wide scale.

The challenge of peace for Muslims in particular is to develop a theology of healing and embrace (*ta'aruf*) so eloquently described in the following verse of the Muslim sacred scripture, the Glorious Qur'an:

> O Humankind! We have created you into a male and female and fashioned you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know each other (not despise one another). The most honored of you in the sight of God, is those who display the best conduct. And God is All Knowing, All Aware. (Q49:13) ❑

FEATURES

The Connection between Religion and Extremism

by Olav Fykse Tveit

I am certain that part of our response to the dreadful acts of religious extremism needs to be a willingness to take interreligious dialogue and engagement more seriously.

When I began writing this article, violent events that had just taken place in Europe (to which I refer below) were at the forefront of my mind. Sadly, even in the course of writing it, two murderous attacks on the Christians of Egypt took place on the holy day of Palm Sunday, causing a large number of casualties. If one needed any confirmation that reflection on religiously motivated violence is only too relevant and needed, sadly, this has provided it.

As I write this article, we in Europe have been experiencing yet another form of what appears to be religiously motivated violence—the deliberate driving of a truck or substantial-sized car straight at a group of pedestrians walking along the pavement in a busy city. A couple of weeks ago it happened in the symbolic heart of London; a couple of days ago on a street in Stockholm. A particular viciousness of the Stockholm attack seems to have been the deliberate targeting of children. The people killed in these attacks do not in purely numerical terms match the numbers killed in some suicide bombings, but the horror is exacerbated by the fact that this happened to people going about the ordinary business of their lives in the daytime in busy streets in their countries' respective capitals. The perpetrators want nobody to feel safe—and that, of course, is precisely their intention. We have to develop a sense of trust between people of different faiths that counteracts these threats, and develop a sense of resilience that shows that together we are not paralyzed by this fear.

I refer to such acts as "religiously motivated violence" because religion, it seems, was in some way the twisted motivation claimed by those who committed these acts. Whether they had understood their religion correctly or not, indeed, whether they were actually faithful followers of their religion—these are other, though not irrelevant, questions. But certainly they—and many others before them—have used religion as a partial, or perhaps even primary, justification for their actions. We are told, probably accurately, that the majority of those committing such actions today claim to be Muslims. But it would be a mistake to see this as just a challenge for Islam.

Over the last few years the link between religion and violence has been all too apparent in a variety of countries and a variety of religions. There are documented incidents of violence with an apparent religious motivation

Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, of the Church of Norway, is general secretary of the World Council of Churches, based in Geneva. From 2002 to 2009 he was the general secretary of the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations. His publications include The Truth We Owe Each Other: Mutual Accountability in the Ecumenical Movement *(WCC Publications, 2016) and* Christian Solidarity in the Cross of Christ *(WCC Publications, 2012).*

by Hindus in India, by Buddhists in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, and by Jews in Israel and Palestine. And I most definitely do not wish to except my own faith, Christianity, from this sorry list. The civil war in the Central African Republic—one of the world's "forgotten" conflicts—has included vicious Christian attacks on the minority Muslim population, apparently with a religious motivation. Nor can we forget events not too long ago in Bosnia and Lebanon, countries where the actions of those who described themselves as Christian militia brought shame and incredulity to the wider Christian world.

I can understand the honorable motivation of various religious leaders who try to insist that the perpetrators of such violence are not, for example, "really Muslims." I am also aware of the many thousands of Muslims who want to publicly distance themselves from the violent actions committed in the name of their religion. I deeply respect their determination. On the World Council of Churches media we have recently been telling the story of a young American Muslim woman who had got so annoyed with the widespread perception that her fellow Muslims never spoke up against violence that she surveyed Twitter and other forms of social media to prove just how many thousands of Muslims spoke up against violence that was being done in their name.

Yet, along with many others who have reflected on this topic, I believe that it is important, when it comes to violence, that people of "religion"—and by that I would include religious leadership—are willing to admit that religion is indeed part of the problem. I accept the truth in the widespread saying that unless religion is willing to acknowledge that it is part of the problem, then it cannot also be part of the solution. And linked to that we need to accept that religions cannot simply disown those who commit violence in their name—however flawed such individuals' understanding of their faith may be. Nor is it acceptable to claim—as some try to do in certain instances—that conflicts that are labeled religious are not really that at all. Such rhetoric wants to suggest that they are instead conflicts provoked by, for example, social, economic, or ethnic concerns. I would agree that conflict and violence are not generally simplistic, and certainly there can often be a variety of entangled causes. But on many occasions we have to accept that at the very least religion can and does act as an intensifier and prolonger of conflicts that may have had other origins, such as socioeconomic. Religion cannot simply be acquitted as innocent.

I believe that such honesty about the dangers inherent in religion is essential. It is not a gratuitous act of masochism or self-flagellation. For as I have suggested, it is only if we are willing to be honest in such a way that we can move beyond the negative connection between religion and violence to enable religion's positive potential as a means of healing.

How do I understand *religion*? The definition of religion is something that we in the World Council of Churches have explored as part of the work we have been doing in the area of religion, violence, and peace building. Having looked at a variety of well-known definitions of religion, we suggested that what they had in common brought out the way that religion emphasizes the importance of loyalty to a human community that intersects with and somehow reflects an absolute supranatural and cosmic order. It is, I believe, this combination of human desire to honor the transcendent and the "binding" (the word *religion* is etymologically derived from a Latin verb meaning "to bind") of human beings to a communal group that gives religion both its power and its potential danger. For it means that our natural—and often constructive—desire to express our contribution to the human community of which we are a part is somehow reinforced and

"absolutized" by this intersection with the unarguable transcendent. Our loyalty to the divine and our loyalty to other human beings who we think believe as we do (or at least we think they should) mutually reinforce each other. We begin to think that only we, and those who think like us, are full and proper members of the religious community with which we identify, whether we think of it in terms of the Muslim *umma*, the Christian "Body of Christ," or the equivalent in other religions.

This intersection between the community and the divine can become more problematic for a variety of reasons. One is the often overlapping nature of a person's religious identity with national identity or other aspects of identity. Although there has been a long-standing tradition in Christian theology, going back to the New Testament, that our "citizenship is in heaven" and thus our religious identity supersedes national or ethnic identity, in reality we have to acknowledge that for Christians, no less than for people of other religions, the issue is not so simple. Oftentimes there is the expectation, whether verbalized or implicit, that all people of a particular nation or ethnicity will be practitioners of a specific religion or, conversely, that if people are followers of a minority religion, they cannot be fully trusted as loyal citizens of that particular nation. Such views, quite apart from militating against a real understanding of the importance of freedom of religion, function to facilitate the link between religion and aggression.

Another intensifying factor that it is important to acknowledge comes when people have a sense that their community identity, whether religious, ethnic, national, or a combination of various of these, is unfairly disadvantaged in wider economic and political realities. There is a connection between the imbalance in the ownership and control of our world's material resources and the willingness to justify violence on religious grounds. Perhaps it has become even more problematic because of the development of the phenomenon of globalization. Somehow this modern reality, which feels especially disempowering to those who see much less of its apparent benefits, has helped to create the sense that only a cosmic and transcendent religious reality is powerful enough to stand up to the impact of such a large force as globalization and rectify the injustices that may well be real and certainly are so perceived by many. Indeed, the imbalance in our world is all too often made clear by the different levels of media coverage given to acts of religiously inspired violence. Even one death resulting from such actions is too many, but it is all too notable how just a few Western deaths garner more publicity than the hundreds killed fairly regularly in Iraq or Nigeria.

It is interesting—and significant—that we rather often use the term *fundamentalist* as a label to describe those who are responsible for acts of religiously inspired violence. The media frequently speak about "Islamic fundamentalism," for example. In some ways this is a misnomer. The term *fundamentalism* was originally developed in the nineteenth century within Christendom to describe a particular attitude to scripture, and in particular Christian scripture, that treated it as infallible and inerrant. In one sense, from this perspective the great majority of Muslims could legitimately be described as fundamentalist because the normative mainstream Muslim attitude toward the Qur'an would be to treat it as inerrant and infallible. Critical hermeneutical methodologies for scripture are not unknown among Muslim scholars, but they have certainly not taken center ground as they have done in much of Christianity, certainly Western Christianity. Yet, as it is used in common parlance today, the term *fundamentalism* has taken on a broader connotation. A widely used definition describes it as "a proclamation of reclaimed authority over a sacred tradition that is to be reinstated as an antidote for a society that has strayed from its cultural moorings. Sociologically speaking, fundamentalism involves (1) a refutation of the radical differentiation of the sacred and the secular that has evolved with modernization and (2) a plan to dedifferentiate this institutional bifurcation and thus bring religion back to center stage as an important factor of interest in public policy decisions" (Anson Shupe and Jeffrey K. Hadden, "Is There Such a Thing as Global Fundamentalism?" in Anson Shupe and Jeffrey K. Hadden, eds., *Secularization and Fundamentalism Reconsidered* [Paragon House, 1989], 111). In plain language, what this is saying is that fundamentalism is a fear of what modernity brings. Such a fear can be expressed in one of two ways: either by isolating oneself in a small sectarian group that seeks to detach

itself as much as possible from wider society or by an attempt to take over society and organize it on the basis of idealized "fundamental" principles.

There is, however, a real link between this definition of *fundamentalism* and what I would call the earlier "scriptural" one. What connects the two is a sense of absolute fixity—an unwillingness to change, to adapt, to interpret something in the light of something different or new. Rather than adaptation, fundamentalism seeks, or at least is willing to accept, confrontation. Hence a readiness to turn to violence. Hence, too, perhaps we can understand that there is a particular tendency toward fundamentalism in the wider sense in religious traditions that are uneasy about critical interpretation of scripture. Hence, again, there is a particular challenge for Islam to face in relation to these questions, precisely because the traditional ideal relationship between religion and state does differ from that of Christianity or some other religions.

Spirituality is not the same as religion. It is, however, related to it, and one of the tasks of spirituality may be to help to redeem religion from its tendencies toward violence and exclusivism. A key characteristic of spirituality, indeed one of its vital challenges to religion, is its elusiveness. In spirituality a religious tradition often finds itself moving beyond dogmatic certainty to allow itself to become more vulnerable. One of the simplest—yet also profound—definitions of spirituality, by John O'Donohue, is "the art of transfiguration." Spirituality—linked as it is to the word *spirit*—speaks to us instinctively of what is flexible, impossible to pin down, capture, or control. Defining spirituality as "the art of transfiguration" writes into our understanding a positive and open appreciation of change and transformation, as well as a willingness to be rooted in our own religious tradition.

For Christians there is a scriptural warrant for this flexibility, in the great pledge of John 16:13 that the task of the Holy Spirit is to lead the followers of Jesus into new truths that they were not able to receive in Jesus's own lifetime. It is possible that one of these new truths is our willingness—which would have been alien to many of our ancestors in the faith—to engage in serious and constructive dialogue with people of other faiths and other religions. The very act of dialogue is an act of vulnerability, for it is an act that presupposes willingness to be changed by the encounter with another. However, I am certain that part of our response to the dreadful acts of religious extremism needs to be a willingness to take interreligious dialogue and engagement more seriously. It is certainly not what the extremists want—and it is therefore a gesture of defiance of their violence and their hatred.

Alongside this, however, we also need to affirm that in Christian theology there is a close connection between the person of Jesus Christ and the gifts and manifestation of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament defines the primary fruit of the Spirit as being love, and what love is we can gauge from the Gospel story of Jesus himself. At the heart of Christian spirituality is a focus on the incarnation, that in Jesus Christ the divine Word was made flesh, that the very God became a human being—but that is not simply a statement we make about Jesus himself. Rather, the corollary is that the incarnation means that God is intimately concerned with the whole of human existence—and so must we be. And this is a thread that must color the vision with which we engage with the world. We care about the welfare of and justice for our fellow human beings not simply because of a generalized altruistic ethic but because it goes to the very heart of our faith about the relationship between God and human beings.

In the World Council of Churches at the present time we are concentrating our vision and our work on what we call the pilgrimage of justice and peace. Much of what I have been saying above relates to and is summed up in this. A pilgrimage is about traveling, about people spiritually on the move, vulnerable, not always sure of the exact path, rather than being tied to the restrictive certainties of an age past. A pilgrimage is about companionship—and in our case that includes the invitation for people of other religions, other faiths, to join us on our journey toward the goal of peace and justice. A pilgrimage requires us to keep our eyes open, to be challenged and informed by what we perceive on the way. The traditional biblical destination and goal for pilgrimage was to see the face of God. In our pilgrimage today our goal is complementary—to see the face of God in one another ❑

Religious Leaders and Their Roles in Tackling Violent Extremism

by Suphatmet Yunyasit

The first and most important task of religious leaders in tackling violent extremism is to provide their community members with proper understanding and interpretation of religious beliefs and practices.

Since the beginning of this century we have encountered various violent incidents around the world. These violent acts were carried out by groups of people we call extremists. The extremists, their violent approach as well as their seemingly expanding membership, are under the watchful and, more often than not, fearful eye of the world. No state can be sure that it is perfectly safe from this extremism phenomenon. Religious leaders around the world are increasingly asked to play some part in tackling this issue. In this short essay I primarily discuss what religious leaders can contribute. Some examples from the works of Religion for Peace Thailand will be used to elaborate the discussion.

Understanding Violent Extremism

The term *violent extremism* has become one of the topics for debate in the past decade. The debate has intensified during the past six years upon the rise of ISIS (the Islamic State) and the war in Syria, which has cost more than 450,000 lives since 2011[1]. But how much we really know about violent extremism and how accurate our analysis of this phenomenon is are still in question. We have yet to come up with concrete answers to these crucial questions: What is extremism? How does an individual join an extremist group? Is being an extremist almost always the first step to becoming a terrorist? The phenomenon is very complicated, we admit. In fact, what we pick up are just tiny pieces of the whole giant jigsaw puzzle. This hard-hitting truth or, I would say, our failure to decode violent extremism, was openly stated at the United Nations conference "Preventing Violent Extremism—The Way Forward" held in Geneva in April 2016: "While there are some recognizable trends and patterns [of violent extremism], there are only a few areas of consensus that exist among researchers."[2]

What are a few areas of consensus on the traits of violent extremism? Extremism, according to Lake (2002, 18), Coleman and Bartoli (2003, 2), and Zinchenko (2014, 25), is an ideology—be it political, social, economic, or religious—that is the opposite of an ideology upheld by the majority of a society. This so-called extremist ideology is usually transformed into actions by a group of people called extremists. Perhaps the most disturbing trait of extremists is not their different attitudes and beliefs but their unwillingness

Suphatmet Yunyasit is a lecturer and the program chairperson of the Masters in Human Rights and Peace Studies program, Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, Thailand. She received her PhD in the field of anthropology and sociology from the National University of Malaysia. Her current academic focus is the participation and roles of Buddhists in conflict transformation and peace building in Thailand's three southernmost provinces.

to consider other views or to compromise. To extremists the world is painted in "black and white, without shades of grey" (Haslam and Turner 1995, 368). Violent extremism can then be understood simply as an extremist ideology with violent traits. Being a minority and without means and power to achieve their goals, some extremists resort to violence. They believe that only an act of violence will make their voices heard and create the change they want for society. ISIS, Boko Haram of northern Nigeria, and the Al-Shabaab militant group in Somalia are prominent examples of violent extremism.

Violent extremism is also closely connected to structural violence, a concept used in explaining social injustice. Studies found that individuals who were attracted to violent extremist ideas were those who experienced unfair treatment, social discrimination and marginalization, lack of or limited access to education and employment, and violation of human rights (Coleman and Bartoli 2003, 1; Schmid 2014, 3; United Nations 2016, 4; Mirahmadi 2016, 135). According to Mirahmadi (2016, 135), political grievances against the state play a key role in driving individuals to pursue change with violent acts. Therefore, it is not uncommon to see violent extremism taking place in an area with a protracted conflict between the state and a minority group that perceives itself as being oppressed by the state. The two conflicting parties are usually of different political, ethnic, or religious backgrounds.

Religious Leaders and What They Can Do to Tackle Violent Extremism

It is a universal and functionalist understanding that religion exists to provide individuals with answers to questions about their existence and the meaning of their lives. Only with religious beliefs do we learn why we were born, what the purpose of our existence is, and how we should carry ourselves. Religion also tells us how to live in harmony with others. In essence no religion preaches or promotes violence; hence, religion should not be used as a pretext for any kind of violence. However, since the beginning of this century, religions, especially Islam, are increasingly viewed as sources of violence and linked to various acts of religion-based violent extremist groups. This misconception has led religions, their leaders, and communities right into the epicenter of the extremism phenomenon. The world views religious leaders and communities with skepticism and expects to see them offer some possible solutions to violent extremism.

I strongly believe that religions should not take the whole responsibility in countering violent extremism just because some prominent violent extremist groups such as ISIS, al-Qaeda, and Al-Shabaab are religion-based groups. Tackling violent extremism—which also means eradicating structural violence—is a titanic task that requires cooperation from various sections of a society. I propose that religious leaders and communities are assets, not liabilities, when it comes to countering violent extremism, and they have vital roles to play in this critical period of time.

There are three crucial actions religious leaders can take in countering violent extremism within and across their own communities: (1) provide their members with proper understanding of religious beliefs and practices while emphasizing nonviolence and peaceful coexistence principles; (2) strengthen the community bond among their members, especially the youth; and (3) cultivate relationships and build strong cooperation with other communities both within and outside their own faith. I will illustrate these three actions with some works of Religions for Peace Thailand in the three southernmost provinces where violent conflicts between Melayu-Muslim insurgents and the Thai-Buddhist government have cost more than six thousand lives since 2004.

The first and most important task of religious leaders in tackling violent extremism is to provide their community members with proper understanding and interpretation of religious beliefs and practices. We have to understand that not all members of a religious community possess the same level of religious knowledge. Recent converts and youths, with their limited experience and knowledge, might regard the distorted religious beliefs created by the extremists to be literally true (Mirahmadi 2016, 134; Kruse 2016, 206). With guidance from religious leaders, they can differentiate

between true and distorted religious beliefs and thus avoid extremist ideology. Engaging community members—especially youths, who are often targeted for recruitment by the extremists—in active discussions on religious principles and encouraging them to ask questions is also a way to help them become more aware of the right teaching. Kruse (2016, 202) mentioned that this method was used among Muslim youths in Abu Dhabi at the "Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies" in March 2014. Religions for Peace Thailand also employs the same strategy. For example, at our 2014 interreligious youth camp, participated in by Buddhist and Muslim youths from the three southernmost provinces and some violence-driven regions of Myanmar in 2014, our facilitators let the youths speak about the true nature of their own religions and ask religious leaders, whom we had invited to act as resource persons, about some issues they needed clarified.

Apart from providing proper understanding of religion, religious leaders can also emphasize religious principles that strongly signal the concept of nonviolence and peaceful coexistence. In *dharma* (Buddha's teaching) one can find various meaningful principles that promote nonviolence and peaceful coexistence. Two of these principles are: (1) "Whoever settles a matter by violence is not just. The wise calmly consider what is right and what is wrong. Whoever guides others by a procedure that is nonviolent and fair is said to be a guardian of truth, wise and just." (2) "Even though he be well-attired, yet if he is poised, calm, controlled and established in the holy life, having set aside violence towards all beings, he is a holy man, a renunciate, a monk."[3] Islam, too, is a religion of peace. It objects to violence against human beings. This quotation from the Qur'an illustrates well its stand: "If anyone slays a human being, . . . it shall be as though he had slain all humankind; whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of all humankind."[4] If these types of principles are often emphasized by religious leaders, they will resonate in the people's minds and gradually become shared values of the community. At Religions for Peace intra- and interreligious dialogues, religious leaders are encouraged to discuss these principles with the people in their communities as well as translate them into actions.

Strengthening community bonds. Religious leaders and communities can also help counter violent extremism by consolidating their social bond with their people. Although we do not have a concrete understanding of why individuals join extremist groups, some studies found that alienated individuals with few or weak social bonds are more likely to join extremist groups (Steven 2011, 170; Mirahmadi 2016, 132). If an individual develops a strong social bond with his or her community, it is unlikely that this person would walk the extremist path. Steven (2011, 170) interestingly indicates that for any individual the decision to join an extremist group is derived from his or her cost-benefit analysis. If such a group shows that it can provide benefits, making an individual feel that he or she is not alone in the world and is appreciated by a group of people who offer sincere understanding, moral support, and friendship, that individual is likely to join such a group. Moderate religious leaders and key community members should ask themselves whether they manage to provide such benefits for those in their communities. A close-knit religious community with strong bonds among members can be cultivated by face-to-face and meaningful social interaction.

Since 2008 Religions for Peace Thailand has reached out to religious and community leaders of all levels in the south of Thailand. We have encouraged them to build a strong bond among their community members. In 2013 we trained southern religious and community leaders of all faiths to be capable facilitators. The main purpose of this training workshop was to equip them with techniques and skills for organizing fun activities that encourage teamwork and group dynamics in their communities. They also learned and exchanged strategies on how to engage youths in community work and make them a part of the community spirit.

Cooperation among communities. Tackling violent extremism is a titanic task that requires cooperation from various segments of a society. It is, therefore, not a task of a single religious leader or community. In the United States key members of various communities are encouraged to work together and form a cohesive network to counter violent extremism. Mirahmadi (2016, 137) reported that a community-based model for countering violent extremism—known as Building Resilience Against Violent Extremism, or BRAVE—launched by the World Organization for

Resource Development and Education in Montgomery County, Maryland, in 2013, resulted in a strong network of communities of various faiths that serves as a monitoring agent for violent extremism was constructed. The network's roles are to identify individuals who are vulnerable to extremist ideology and to seek proper solutions for each case.

A rather similar strategy has also been employed by Religions for Peace Thailand during the past few years. An intra-Buddhist community network and an interreligious (Buddhist-Muslim) network have been operating since 2011. Each network consists of more than forty religious leaders across five provinces in southern Thailand. The network members constantly exchange experience and strategies in dealing with conflict situations as well as extremist ideas and activities at various platforms organized by Religions for Peace Thailand. Although we have yet to officially and systematically train religious leaders of both networks on how to counter violent extremism, having them actively engaged in our activities is one of the ways to keep them posted on the trends and updates on violent extremism and best practices from abroad. In the future we hope to equip them with some practical skills in tackling violent extremism and develop a working group comprising key members from both networks for this specific mission.

Concluding Remarks

On January 9, 2017, Pope Francis delivered his New Year speech to diplomats at the Vatican. The Pope viewed violent extremism in the name of religion as a reflection of "spiritual and social poverty" and urged religious and political leaders to work together in countering violent extremism.[5] While political leaders are doing their part to alleviate social poverty—making society a place where every group can enjoy equal rights and access to political, socioeconomic, and educational opportunities—religious leaders can focus on the spiritual issues.

From our discussion in this essay, we can see quite clearly that while trying to accomplish this challenging spiritual work—helping people understand the true nature of religion and internalize nonviolence and peaceful-coexistence principles—religious leaders also have to enhance the social cohesion within and outside their own communities. Spiritual and social missions have to go hand in hand when religious leaders embark on tackling violent extremism. ❑

References

Coleman, P. T., and A Bartoli. 2003. "Addressing Extremism." Position paper, International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution, Columbia University.

Haslam, S. A., and J. C. Turner. 1995. "Context-Dependent Variation in Social Stereotyping 3: Extremism as a Self-Categorical Basis for Polarized Judgement." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 25 (3): 341–71.

Kruse, M. 2016. "Countering Violent Extremism Strategies in the Muslim World." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (November): 198–209.

Lake, D. 2002. "Rational Extremism: Understanding Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century." *Dialog IO* 1 (April): 15–29.

Mirahmadi, H. 2016. "Building Resilience against Violent Extremism: A Community-Based Approach." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (November): 129–44.

Schmid, A. P. 2014. "Violent and "Non-violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?" Research paper, International Center for Counter Terrorism, The Hague.

Steven, D. 2011. "Reasons to Be Fearful, One, Two, Three: The 'Preventing Violent Extremism' Agenda." *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 13: 163–88.

Zinchenko, Y. 2014. "Extremism from the Perspective of a System Approach." *Psychology in Russia: State of the Art* 7 (1): 23–33.

Notes

1. Data from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), accessed April 5, 2017, http://www.syriahr.com/en/.

2. United Nations, "Geneva Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism—the Way Forward" (concept note, Geneva Conference, Switzerland, April 7–8, 2016), 4.; accessed December 25, 2016, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism.ctitf/files/Geneva%20PVE%20Conference%20Concept%20Note%20Final.pdf.

3. Dhammapada 256–57, 142, quoted in "Yogyakarta Statement: Shared Values and Commitments" (High-Level Summit of Buddhist and Muslim Leaders, Indonesia, March 3–4, 2015), 9.

4. Qur'an 5:32, quoted in "Yogyakarta Statement," 8.

5. Accessed February 14, 2017, http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/01/09/peace,_security_focal_points_of_popes_speech_to_diplomats/1284541.

Terrorism: Religious or Political?

by M. Din Syamsuddin

It can be said that terrorism could be both religious and political. It is "religious" because there have been cases of the misuse and abuse of religion in order to justify terrorist acts. It is also political because the purpose of terrorist acts has always been to achieve certain political goals.

Introduction

It has been more than a decade and half since the horrific terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in the United States, followed by other terror actions in many parts of the globe. However, the world continues to feel and endure the impact of the attacks and the United States' and its allies' responses to it. As terrorism has come to be seen as the most lethal threat to international peace and stability, global politics of the twenty-first century is now defined by the global war on terror. This global politics is characterized by two major features: First, the United States has continued to prefer and pursue a policy of unilateralism in combating terrorism across the globe. Second, the war on terror has increasingly become a source of tension between the West and the Muslim world. With these two characteristics of today's world, the society of nations is indeed at the brink of entering the most vulnerable trajectory of history.

Every civilized nation and its citizens share the conviction that terrorism is an evil act that needs to be deplored, condemned, and abhorred. Everyone agrees that it is a global and national obligation to combat terrorism and that all nations should act and work together to fight terrorism. The problem, however, emerges when nations differ on how to address the threat and even disagree on what constitutes "terrorism." The picture becomes even more complicated when an adjective—which currently refers to a particular religious dimension of the problem—is attached to the concept. In this regard, unfortunately, the world has become accustomed to speaking about "Islamic terrorism," as if the two words—*Islam* and *terrorism*—give a mutually reinforcing meaning to each other.

From the Islamic perspective, it is very clear that terrorism of all kinds is an evil and is in contradiction with the very teachings of Islam, which emphasize love, mercy, and peace. Islam is a religion of peace (*din al-salamah*). It is imperative, from the Qur'an, for Muslims to engage in peace as well as to enter peace wholeheartedly: "Oh ye who believe! Come, all of you, into peace, and follow not the footsteps of the devil. Lo! He is an open enemy for you" (2:208). Terrorism, which creates fear and kills innocent people, is strongly prohibited in Islam, as the Qur'an states: "Whosoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whoso saveth the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind" (5:32).

In this context, terrorism has no relation to or root in religion, particularly in Islam. And the fight against terrorism will not be effective if we cannot think clearly about what we mean by terrorism and what motivates a terrorist act. In other words, the fight against terrorism requires an understanding about the nature of terrorism. This is not an easy task. Before September 11, the debate and discourse on terrorism

Dr. M. Din Syamsuddin is a professor of Islamic Political Thought at National Islamic University, Jakarta. He has been an active leader in interfaith dialogues and cooperation and now serves as moderator of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace and as a president of Religions for Peace. He was president of Muhammadiyah, the largest modernist Islamic organization in Indonesia, from 2005 to 2015 and the Indonesian Council of Ulama from 2014 to 2015 and is now acting as chairman of its Advisory Council.

had focused on the definition of terrorism itself, a debate that has not been resolved even now. After September 11, the debate has received an additional dimension, on the nature of terrorism: is it religious or political?

The Problem of Understanding

This paper will examine the question above, but a few words on the problem of defining *terrorism* are important for our understanding of the problematics surrounding the concept. The complexity of the problem is soon evident when we are confronted with the fact that there are at least sixteen different definitions of *terrorism*. In the United States, for example, different state institutions use different definitions of terrorism. The State Department, the Department of Defense, and the FBI offer different definitions of *terrorism*. The United Nations itself has been locked in a prolonged debate to find a consensus on what *terrorism* means.

However, it seems that there is a degree of consensus that terrorism, regardless of what name it is waged under—be it religious, ethnic nationalism, or an ideology—always has a political purpose behind it. It uses violence in order to create fear, and the target is random. The purpose is to create political change.

The complexity of the problem of terrorism increases when the concept is used in conjunction with the word *Islamic* as an adjective. Here, the idea of *Islamic terrorism* could suggest two meanings: First, it represents a notion about the existence of a religious-motivated terrorist act. Second, it could also presuppose the existence of a religion that propagates terrorism. While the first notion could be easily misunderstood, the second one is clearly flawed. It is often misunderstood because religious arguments can, in fact, be used to justify an act of violence, including terrorism. However, it should also be noted that in such cases, certain aspects of religious teachings used to justify terrorism always become a subject of contestation. In other words, it represents a case of misuse and abuse of religion. It is a flaw because no religion condones or propagates acts of terrorism.

In that context, it is indeed a serious and fatal error to equate terrorism and Islam simply because the terrorists justify their evil acts in the language of Islamic discourse. Indeed, Muslims around the world are obliged to defend their religion from such misuse and abuse by terrorists. It is the obligation of all Muslims to make sure that their religion be understood as a great religion that teaches, preaches, and practices tolerance, nonviolence, moderation, and peace.

From this discussion, it can be said that terrorism could be both religious and political. It is "religious" because there have been cases of the misuse and abuse of religion in order to justify terrorist acts. It is also political because the purpose of terrorist acts has always been to achieve certain political goals.

The Problem of Contemporary Terrorism

As mentioned earlier, it is unfortunate that many, especially in the West, have tended to link today's terrorism with Islam. Indeed, the misleading notion of "Islamic terrorism," as it is often used by the international media, usually refers to the phenomenon of terrorism in the Muslim world, from the Middle East to Southeast Asia. This has been exemplified by the discourse on al-Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiyah, and other groups that have been labeled as terrorist groups. Some resistance and insurgence groups in Iraq, specifically, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, have also been put into this category. If we are to consider whether contemporary terrorism is political or religious, then the answer is both.

The political nature of contemporary terrorism should be considered from two angles, in terms of both motivation and purpose. Most acts of terrorism, for example, have been carried out against the United States and Western countries or their interests around the world. Those attacks have often been framed by the perpetrators within the language of grievances and resentments against what they perceive as injustice toward the Muslim world. They can also be seen as an extreme reaction or response to what they perceive as a dominant hegemonic power. In this context, terrorism is often meant as an instrument to effect policy change, thus "political." However,

regardless of the end goal that wants to be achieved, such terrorist acts and the use of violence against innocent civilians should never be condoned. An end should never justify the means, and all terrorist acts should be condemned.

It is "religious" as well as political because acts of violence are also carried out in the name of Islam, by using the syntax of Islam. The use, or misuse and abuse, of the language of jihad, for example, becomes the most common form of injecting a sense of religious duty and obligation into those acts of violence. *Jihad*, as an important Islamic doctrine, has the connotation of making the best effort in seeking the noblest aim. Indonesian Muslims, for example, are all too familiar with the abuses of religion for justifying an act of violence, both carried out in the name of Islam and for achieving a political goal. Therefore, it is the duty of Islamic leaders, *ulama*, scholars, and even every individual Muslim to ensure that Islam will not be easily manipulated by misguided minds. Our main obligation is, therefore, to ensure that Islam is correctly understood by Muslims.

Way Forward: Mutual Respect, Interfaith Cooperation, and Civilizational Dialogue

The most worrying aspect of the problems created by contemporary terrorism has been the danger of the clash of civilization along religious lines. One such danger can easily be found within the tension between the Muslim world and the West, between Islam and Christianity, and between Islam and Judaism. This disquieting development should surely come to our attention, because no one would like to see the emergence of intercivilizational conflict, especially along religious lines.

Unfortunately, the fight against terror has also created disturbing developments. War, which we thought to be obsolete, continues to be treated by some countries as a major instrument for dealing with the problem of terrorism. In the era of globalization, we should do our best to renounce war as a means of conflict resolution. Through war, humankind will not accomplish anything but misery. We should encourage the international community to understand that international cooperation, through the United Nations, is still the best means of addressing various global problems, including terrorism. We should also maintain that in many cases, the problem of terrorism is even best handled at regional and national levels.

As mentioned earlier, everyone shares the view that terrorism poses a serious challenge to all of us. Indonesia has also become the victim of such heinous crimes. Indonesian people, both non-Muslims and Muslims, also condemn and abhor the use of religious language to justify terrorist acts. However, the fight against terrorism should not be diluted by misperceptions about the nature of the problem. We believe that terrorism is against any religion. Linking terrorism with Islam, for example, will only undermine our common stand and efforts to combat terrorism around the globe. We should not vindicate Huntington's prophecy of the clash of civilizations.

Terrorism is best dealt with through a common endeavor to address the root causes of the problem. We should ensure hatred will disappear when justice prevails. Apprehension will evaporate when mutual respect triumphs. Mutual respect and tolerance among religions and civilizations is a key to this. The absence of respect and tolerance, as demonstrated by the case of Islamophobia through making cartoons or films insulting the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, undermines civilization. The sanctity of religion should be upheld, and freedom of expression should not be allowed to become a pretext for desecrating another's religion.

Within that context, the best way forward is to promote interfaith cooperation and intercivilizational dialogue. Through this endeavor, we can promote better understanding of the problem, encourage mutual respect, and fight the threat of terrorism in a more effective way. Through dialogue and cooperation, misunderstanding and mutual suspicion can be reduced. The future of humankind depends on the willingness of all parties to learn about each other, to respect each other, and to work together to create a just and peaceful world.

In this context, it is pertinent for Muslims, as an *ummah* (community) of the middle path (*ummatan wasathan*), to face the challenges of the world today as opportunities for Muslims to present Islam as a religion of peace. There is no better way for us except to fulfill what Allah has commanded us: "Thus We have appointed you a middle nation, that ye may be witness against mankind" (2:143). ❑

FEATURES

No Religion Is Terrorist: The Myth of Religious Violence

by Indunil J. Kodithuwakku K.

If religion is not inherently violent, if it stands for love, peace, and justice, then how do we account for the apparent relationship between religion and violence?

Not a day passes without stories of violence in the media. Violence in the name of religion and the growing phenomenon of religious fundamentalism have provoked a heated debate in many societies with regard to the causes of violence. Religious fundamentalism, religious extremism, and the hijacking of religion by some religious leaders and political leaders with personal agendas are topics that challenge religious leaders, scholars, journalists, policy makers, and members of the general public. How do we account for this volatile scenario? Is religion inherently prone to violence? If so, how and why does religion instigate violence? Do historical and religious texts act as a contributing factor to violence? If not, then what are the real causes of what people refer to as religious violence today? What role can religion play in fostering peace and harmony in the world?

Let me first explain the title of this article: "No Religion Is Terrorist: The Myth of Religious Violence." The first part, "No Religion Is Terrorist," is a phrase from Pope Francis. He forcefully argues that "no people is criminal and no religion is terrorist. Christian terrorism does not exist, Jewish terrorism does not exist, and Muslim terrorism does not exist. . . . There are fundamentalist and violent individuals in all peoples and religions—and with intolerant generalizations, they become stronger because they feed on hate and xenophobia."[1]

The second part of my title comes from the book *The Myth of Religious Violence* by William T. Cavanaugh. He points out the following:

> The idea that religion has a tendency to promote violence is part of the conventional wisdom of Western societies. . . . What I call the "myth of religious violence" is the idea that religion is a transhistorical and transcultural feature of human life, essentially distinct from "secular" features such as politics and economies, that has a peculiarly dangerous inclination to promote violence. Religion must therefore be tamed by restricting its access to public power. The secular-state appears as natural, corresponding to a universal and timeless truth about the inherent danger of religion. . . . In this book, I challenge this piece of conventional wisdom, not simply by arguing that ideologies and institutions labelled "secular" can be just as violent as those labelled "religious," but by examining how the twin categories of religious and secular are constructed in the first place.[2]

Father Indunil J. Kodithuwakku K. is the Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. He was a member of the clergy of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Badulla, Sri Lanka. He has also served as a professor of the Faculty of Missiology at the Pontifical Urban University in Rome.

Accordingly, Cavanaugh seeks "to contribute to a dismantling of the myth of religious violence."[3] We will come back to his argument later.

In this essay, I want to argue that no religion is terrorist and that the common accusation against religion as solely responsible for violence is a myth. This does not mean that there have not been individuals or communities belonging to different religions who were and who are explicitly or implicitly involved in violence. My argument is that religions as such are not inclined to violence, even if religious individuals and communities commit violence because of sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and even religious factors. The "core" message of religion is love, peace, and fraternity. Thus, what is referred to as religious violence is a deviation from this core message.

In what follows, I first take note of different scholars who maintain the theory that religion has a propensity to violence. Second, I analyze some writings of scholars and popes who refute the religion-and-violence argument. Third, I present interreligious dialogue as a remedy for our current crisis.

Upholding the Religion-and-Violence Argument

Let us now briefly analyze the thesis that claims that religion is inherently violent. *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence* contains forty original scholarly articles that examine the religion-and-violence argument. The editors make the following statement:

"Our hope is that the handbook will help to unravel some of the perplexing aspects of the relation of religion to violence and will show how acts of destruction in the name of God (or gods) or justified by faith have been rooted in historical and literary contexts from early times to the present. Contemporary acts of religious violence, of course, are profuse. Since the end of the cold war, violence in the name of religion has erupted on nearly every major continent, and many of its perpetrators have been revered by those who find religious significance for such actions."[4]

The editors challenge the thesis that religious violence is not religious but rather a distortion of the core religious teaching. As they point out, the authors of the essays in this volume argue that "it is precisely foundational religious teachings that are claimed to sanctify violence by many of its perpetrators."[5] It would be beyond the scope of this paper to analyze all forty of the essays contained in this volume. Therefore, I will limit myself to the article "Religion and Violence from a Sociological Perspective" by John R. Hall.

Religion and Violence from a Sociological Perspective

In his essay Mr. Hall cites Martin Riesebrodt as defining religion as "a complex of practices that are based on the premise of the existence of superhuman powers, whether personal or impersonal, that are generally invisible." Riesebrodt defines violence as "actions that inflict, threaten, or cause injury" and specifies that injury may be "corporal, written or verbal."[6]

Hall sets up two contrasting principles: (1) "There is no firewall between specifically religious actions and processes and the wider social world. Religions face many of the same organizational dilemmas as other social groups." (2) "Religious phenomena are distinctive relative to other social phenomena in the efforts that practitioners make to interact with the divine."[7]

He then questions "under what conditions and how religious meanings, actions, and organizations per se become concatenated with violence" (365). He further argues that religion differentiates the sacred from the profane, both of which are culturally defined, and goes on to say, "It is well within the realm of religious possibility that violence—whether extreme asceticism, martyrdom, war, or some other act—can become sacred duty" (ibid.). Having established a link between religion and violence, Hall affirms there may be other contributory factors to violence and that it is incorrect to say that all religion is inherently violent, even if it may be true that religion offers a seedbed for violence (ibid.). He adds, "Moreover, it is important to reaffirm that religious meanings are culturally specified and historically situated rather than ontologically given, or even socially determined by sacred texts" (366). He further points out that to ask whether one or another religion is intrinsically violent or nonviolent is to ask the wrong question. Instead, he asks whether some religious formations—which are different from religious traditions—or religious or broader social circumstances are especially likely to involve violence (ibid.). Accordingly, he argues that violence is situational: different historical moments, institutional formations, and cultural meaning are determining factors.

He identifies two arenas in which religious involvement with violence can take place: (1) within a given religious group and among its participants and (2) in situations where religious groups engage in actions connected to broader social processes, mainly relationships between religious groups, political power, and hegemonic culture (366).

In treating violence within a religious domain, he points out four kinds of sociologically significant violence:

- Identifying the sacred with the community involves conditions in which ritual purification of the group is sought through scapegoating, witch hunts, discipline and punishment, or other kinds of boundary maintenance.
- Charting boundaries can create conflicts over identity and the allegiance of individuals; a person leaving the group may be subjected to psychological and physical violence, and violence may be involved in rescuing a member from a sect.
- Violence may be committed in order to obtain salvation: self-directed violence; asceticism; pursuit of martyrdom, including altruistic suicide.
- Religious officials violate the trust placed in them and engage in the violence of sexual abuse.

Hall states that "all the four types of violence occurring within religion may arise in other social formations as well" (368). However, I would question his affirmation that "especially in scapegoating, boundary conflicts, and asceticism, the basic logic that makes violence possible centers on the sacred and that logic is religious at its core" (ibid.).

Hall indicates that the alignment of religious groups with political power can serve as a basis for legitimizing violence. In an extreme theocracy, a religious organization exercises state power within a territory, or a religious organization legitimates a ruler as a manifestation or representative of the divine. Expansion is accomplished through the subordination

of secular powers or by the conquest of new territories through a crusade or jihad. On the other hand, in the political structure known as caesaropapism, a secular ruler claims authority in all religious matters. Religion is used to provide a veneer of legitimation for wars of conquest and the building of empires. In the modern secular state, religion and public policy have a relative degree of autonomy. Yet the state may appropriate religious legitimation in order to justify its "sacred mission" of warfare, colonial expansion, or the building of an empire (369). Hall argues that "a religion can engage in violence in order to maintain its monopolistic position or, further, to try to purge society of infidels. . . . In contrast, liberal, secular modern societies are marked by religious pluralism that involves tolerance of diverse religious groups, so long as those groups operate within the rule of law" (ibid.).

Under the subtitle "Hegemonic Legitimation under Contestation," Hall refers to the apocalyptic visions of emerging charismatic figures that exceed the boundaries of the established order (370). Religious communities within a state may nurture countercultural ideologies and give birth to religious movements that "not only legitimize violence but also actually shape its character as well as the patterns of social organization and process in which violence occurs" (373). With reference to the causes responsible for violence, Hall affirms that "not religious traditions but religious formations and their contextual circumstances shape their potential instantiations with violence" (ibid.).

The Myth of Religious Violence

What is the core argument of Cavanaugh? He states that the conventional wisdom insists there is an essential difference between religions (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and so on) and secular ideologies and institutions (nationalism, Marxism, capitalism, and liberalism). On this basis, this theory concludes that religions are more essentially inclined to violence than secular ideologies and institutions. Cavanaugh argues that this thesis is both unsustainable and dangerous. "It is unsustainable because ideologies and institutions labelled secular can be just as absolutist, divisive, and irrational as those labelled religious. It is dangerous because it helps to marginalize, and even legitimate violence against, those forms of life that are labelled religious."[8]

Cavanaugh further adds that "there is no such thing as a transhistorical or transcultural 'religion' that is essentially separate from politics" (9). As he noted, the separation between religion and the state is an invention of the modern West, which "helps to separate loyalty to God from one's public loyalty to the nation-state" (ibid.). Therefore, "the idea that religion has a peculiar tendency toward violence must be investigated as part of the ideological legitimation of the Western nation-state" (10).

Cavanaugh points out that the most commonly cited historical example of religious violence is the "wars of religion" of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. These wars were depicted as Protestants and Catholics killing each other over doctrinal differences. It is commonly accepted that "the modern state was born as a peacemaker in this process, relegating religion to private life and uniting people of various religions around loyalty to the sovereign state" (ibid.). Cavanaugh states that the reference to these conflicts as "wars of religion" is a myth, since "the last half of the Thirty Years' War was essentially a battle between the Hapsburgs and the Bourbons, the two great Catholic dynasties of Europe" (11). Thus, the real causes of violence in this period were political, economic, and social.

Cavanaugh then raises the question of what purpose the religion-causes-violence argument serves its consumers in the contemporary West. He contends that such an argument helps domestic and foreign policy. At home, this argument helps to marginalize religion and its practices; at an international level, it helps reinforce and justify Western attitudes and policies toward the non-Western world, especially Muslims. Cavanaugh maintains that the same logic is used to justify Western military actions in the Islamic world. If we have to deal with inherently violent and irrational social orders through military force, we do so to spread the blessings of a liberal social order. Thus, violence that is labeled religious is condemned, whereas violence that is labeled secular is not regarded as violent but as peace making. He further underscores this contradiction by noting that "the United States did not merely fund the *mujahedeen*, but played a key role in training them both tactically and ideologically. . . . The tradition of jihad was revived with significant U.S. help in the 1980s. . . . We must restore the full and complete picture of violence in our world, to level the playing field so that violence of all kinds is subject to the same scrutiny" (230).

Terrorism Is Fundamentally and Inherently Political

If religion is not inherently violent, if it stands for love, peace, and justice, then how do we account for the apparent relationship between religion and violence? One way of doing so is by recognizing that there is a close relationship between religion and cultural identity. Today, mismanaged globalization and rapid secularization along with poverty, injustice, insecurity, and uncertainty have contributed to the revitalization and reaffirmation of one's identity and culture at the expense of other identities and cultures. This, in turn, generates tensions, violent conflicts, discriminations, and even killings.

Karen Armstrong notes that terrorism is fundamentally political, even when other motives—religious, economic, or social—are involved. She further states that even though it is clear that the primary motivation of a terrorist action is political, some "find religion, which they regard as a byword for irrationality, to be the ultimate cause."[9] Thus, the danger is that the political instrumentalization of religion can make it a marker of identity and a tool of political mobilization and thereby turn it into a mere ideology.

Papal Views on Violence

Having analyzed the pros and cons of the religion-causes-violence position, I would reiterate that religion *per se* has nothing to do with violence. Yet, some people exploit and manipulate religion for ulterior motives. Recent popes, including Pope Francis, have supported this position. Therefore, to buttress my argument, let me succinctly mention some of the views expressed by recent popes.

Pope John Paul II

Pope John Paul II, who governed the Church at the latter part of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, saw many wars and conflicts. He fostered dialogue as a solution to bloody conflicts and promoted the first interreligious prayer meeting at Assisi in 1986. He cried out repeatedly to the world, "War never again!" He stated that "violence, in any form is opposed not only to the respect which we owe to every fellow human being; it is opposed also to the true essence of religion." He further insisted, "Religion is not, and must not become, a pretext for conflict, particularly when religious, cultural, and ethnic identity coincide. . . . *Religion and peace go together*: to wage war in the name of religion is a blatant contradiction."[10] He considered religious wars as a contradiction in terms, stating, "No one can consider himself faithful to the great and merciful God who in the name of the same God dares to kill his brother."[11] He denied that religion was part of the problem. "There are some who claim that religion is part of the problem, blocking humanity's way to true peace and prosperity. As religious people, it is our duty to demonstrate that this is not the case. Any use of religion to support violence is an abuse of religion."[12] John Paul II also stated, "Religion is the enemy of exclusion and discrimination; it seeks the good of everyone and therefore ought always to be a stimulus for solidarity and harmony between individuals and among peoples."[13] He delineated the mission of Christians thus: "In facing this situation, disciples of Christ, Prince of Peace (cf. Is. 9:5), are called to proclaim with constancy that *any form of terrorist violence dishonours God's holiness* and human dignity and that religion can never become a motive for war, hatred or oppression."[14]

Pope Benedict XVI

Like Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI also made peacemaking central to his papacy. In his address "Pilgrims of Truth, Pilgrims of Peace" for the Day of Reflection, Dialogue, and Prayer for Peace and Justice in the World, in Assisi on October 27, 2011, he said, "The post-Enlightenment critique of religion has repeatedly maintained that religion is a cause of violence and in this way it has fuelled hostility towards religions. . . . This is not the true nature of religion." In 2012 he also stressed that "fundamentalism is always a falsification of religion. It goes against the essence of religion, which seeks to reconcile and to create God's peace throughout the world. . . . The essential message of religion must be against violence—which is a falsification of that message, like fundamentalism—and it must educate, illuminate and purify consciences so as to make them capable of dialogue, reconciliation and peace."[15]

Pope Francis

Pope Francis often says that we are living a third world war, but in pieces. He stresses, "We never tire of repeating that the name of God cannot be used to justify violence. Peace alone is holy. Peace alone is holy, not war!"[16] Furthermore, he reiterates that "God's name is peace" and "war in the name of religion becomes a war against religion itself."[17] According to Pope Francis, "Extremism and fundamentalism find fertile soil not only in the exploitation of religion for purposes of power, but also in the vacuum of ideals and the loss of identity—including religious identity."[18] Furthermore, he states that "we need a greater commitment to eradicating the underlying causes of conflicts: poverty, injustice and inequality, the exploitation of and contempt for human life."[19]

Dialogue as a Remedy

Religion is a part of the solution to the prevailing deplorable situation. Thus, once again, there arises the urgent need for dialogue, as a tool to diffuse fears and tensions, to overcome prejudices and misunderstandings, to heal the wounds, to strengthen mutual understanding and collaboration. Above all, dialogue also paves the way for us to unmask the real enemies, to show that it is not the "religious other" but those who manipulate religions who are responsible for a wounded and needy humanity. In this regard, Pope Francis noted at an interreligious audience, "May the religions be wombs of life, bearing the merciful love of God to a wounded and needy humanity; may they be doors of hope helping to penetrate the walls erected by pride and fear."[20] Today we find a wounded and needy humanity everywhere. Thus, mercy becomes a rallying point to wipe away the tears of the

suffering, the afflicted, and the needy, irrespective of their religion, nationality, ethnicity, or language. Mercy provides us with a common platform for cooperation.

Prayer and Dialogue

Pope John Paul II once said, "If prayer is neglected, the whole edifice of peace is liable to crumble."[21] Today the common commitment of leaders of different religions to the cause of peace through prayer is crucial in order to build a reconciled world. Interreligious dialogue and prayer are intrinsically related, since dialogue is first a dialogue with God and then becomes a dialogue with oneself and with others. We all agree that the flame of peace, lit in Assisi, has spread throughout the world and become a beacon of hope for our troubled times. This was also the appeal of Pope Francis at Assisi in 2016: "We do not have weapons. We believe, however, in the meek and humble strength of prayer. On this day, the thirst for peace has become a prayer to God, that wars, terrorism and violence may end."[22]

Conclusion

It is no exaggeration to say that throughout the history of Christianity, some Christians have failed to live up to the core message of Jesus Christ. The failure to live up to the spiritual ideals of one's religion is also true of other religious people. The papal documents *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past* and *Incarnationis Mysterium* included a call for the purification of memory and the seeking of reconciliation for past failures. Pope John Paul II asked for pardon in these words: "I ask that in this year of mercy the Church, strong in the holiness which she receives from her Lord, should kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters."[23]

Religions have their dark and troubled side. Nonetheless, there is also a bright and a sunny side. By harping only on the shadow side and completely ignoring the brighter side of religion, one presents a partial picture of the reality. In our recent history and also in our present day, we have life stories of extraordinary persons who have wrestled interreligiously with questions of justice, nonviolence, and ecological well-being in an age of racism, religious prejudices, nationalism, colonialism, terrorism, and nuclear war. Mahatma Gandhi, a Hindu, and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, a Muslim, worked together for the independence of India. Martin Luther King Jr., a Christian pastor, drew on Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence to launch the civil rights movement and to protest the Vietnam War. The Jewish rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel marched with King and was himself a leader in the protest against the Vietnam War. King nominated the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh for the Noble Peace Prize for his nonviolent struggles against the Vietnam War. They were able to share a common ethical vision of nonviolence while maintaining their respective religious identities. May they be our models for today as well. ❑

Notes

1. Pope Francis, "Message of His Holiness Pope Francis" (address, dated February 10, 2017, for the World Meetings of Popular Movements, Modesto, CA, February 16–18, 2017).

2. William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.

3. Ibid., 14.

4. M. Juergensmeyer, M. Kitts, and M. Jerryson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 2.

5. Ibid.

6. Martin Riesebrodt, quoted in John R. Hall, "Religion and Violence from a Sociological Perspective," in *Oxford Handbook*, 364.

7. Hall, "Religion and Violence," 364–65. All further citations of this work are given in the text.

8. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 6. All further citations of this work are given in the text.

9. Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence* (Anchor Books, 2014), 344.

10. John Paul II, "Address of His Holiness John Paul II" (address, for the Six World Assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, Rome, November 3, 1994), 567.

11. Ibid., "To the Faithful in General Audience" (address, October 26, 1994).

12. Ibid., "To the Interreligious Assembly in Assisi" (October 28, 1994).

13. Ibid., "Address to the new Ambassadors of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Holy See" (Rome, September 7, 2000).

14. Ibid., "Address of John Paul II to the Members of the Curia . . ." (Rome, December 22, 2001).

15. Benedict XVI (press conference, apostolic visit to Lebanon, September 15, 2012).

16. Francis, "Address of the Holy Father" (address, World Day of Prayer for Peace, Assisi, September 20, 2016).

17. Ibid., "Appeal for Peace of His Holiness Pope Francis" (Assisi, September 20, 2016).

18. Ibid., "To the Members of the Diplomatic Corp Accredited to the Holy See" (address, Rome, January 11, 2016).

19. Ibid., "Appeal for Peace."

20. Ibid., "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Representatives of Different Religions" (address, Rome, November 3, 2016).

21. John Paul II, "To the Monks of the Christian and Buddhist Traditions" (address, September 20, 1989).

22. Francis, "Address of the Holy Father."

23. "*Incarnationis Mysterium*, The Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000" (Apostolic Penitentiary, Rome, November 29, 1998), n.11.

Understanding and Responding to Violence in the Name of Religion

by David Rosen

> ***It is not possible to begin to understand the hostility that exists among certain extremist militant groups that find their succor and inspiration in religion if one ignores the power of . . . alienation, [the] sense of disparagement and humiliation.***

Saint John Paul II declared that "religion is the chief antidote to violence and conflict" (address to the Representatives of the World Religions, Assisi, January 24, 2002). Most people of religious faith would surely share this view. Indeed, virtually all the world's religions declare that their goal is peace, harmony, and the well-being of human society. Yet we cannot ignore the fact that not only has terrible violence been perpetrated in the name of religion but there are not a few adherents of religions in different parts of the world today who actually believe that conflict and violence against others is precisely what their religion demands.

Accordingly, when addressing the question of how to tackle the violent abuse of religion, the question that must be addressed is precisely why religions all too often do *not* play the role they should, especially in contexts of conflict in our world. Why do religious attachments seem so frequently to exacerbate conflicts rather than help resolve them and promote the peace and reconciliation that ostensibly is their métier?

The Jewish sages some two millennia ago showed an amazing willingness for self-critique in this regard when they declared that Torah—used here to mean the Jewish religion as a whole—can be *sam hachayim*, the elixir of life, or it can be *sam hamavet*, the potion of death (*Babylonian Talmud*, *Hagigah* 7a). Religion can be the most powerful force of vivification, and it can also be a most potent poison of destruction. But this still begs the question, What *is* it that leads to the abuse—sometimes the most terrible abuse—of religion?

The eleventh-century Jewish scholar Yehudah Halevi long preceded Lord Acton when, in his magnum opus *The Kuzari*, he highlights the fact that when religious communities have been in a position of political power, they have invariably been corrupted by it and behaved violently toward others. The unholy alliance of religion with power inevitably leads to the betrayal of religion's most noble values.

This truism is very evident in human history and in our world today. For most religionists, the source of the abuse of religion is not in religion itself but in the human character that is corrupted by many factors, arguably power being the most insidious of them. Therefore, for many religious thinkers, the marriage of religion to state is always dangerous and usually degenerating. Religion is far healthier when it lives in creative tension with political power.

Yet much violence in the name of religion today actually derives from power*less*ness, precisely reflecting the alienation of the marginalized.

Of course, we must not fall into the trap of assuming that religions are the same across confessional or geographic lines. Indeed, the same religion can often take on a very different form in one place than in another, and the relationship of that religion to the society in which it functions may vary considerably in different places from one extreme to another.

The social scientist Douglas Marshall has described religion in terms of three Bs—belief, behavior, and belonging ("Behavior, Belonging, and Belief: A Theory of Ritual Practice," *Sociological Theory* 20, no. 3 [November 2002], 360–80). Different religions may comprise different combinations of or emphases on these three aspects.

The abuse of religion has often been related to the first two: belief and behavior. It cannot be denied that arguments over doctrine and even ritual have led to violent clashes, and even today such disagreements are used as a pretext for violence toward those who do not share the same beliefs and practices.

However, I believe that violence in the name of religion, especially in our modern world, usually has far more to do with the third aspect of religions—belonging—and reflects the sociocultural, territorial, and political contexts in which religions function.

Most modern conflicts that are portrayed as religious ones are territorial

Rabbi David Rosen, former chief rabbi of Ireland, is the international director of interreligious affairs of the American Jewish Community. He is honorary advisor on interfaith relations to the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, serves on its Commission for Interreligious Dialogue, and represents the Chief Rabbinate on the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land. He is an international president of Religions for Peace and honorary president of the International Council of Christians and Jews.

in origin. Whether between Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir, Buddhists and Hindus in Sri Lanka, Christians and Muslims in Nigeria or Indonesia, Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, or Muslims and Jews in the Middle East, these conflicts are not at all religious or theological in origin. They are territorial conflicts in which ethnic and religious differences are exploited and manipulated, often mercilessly.

In order to understand how and why religion is abused in such contexts, we need to understand how much religion has to do with belonging.

Because religion seeks to give meaning and purpose to who we are, it is inextricably bound up with all the different components of human identity, from the most basic, such as family; through the larger components of communities, ethnic groups, nations and peoples; to the widest components of humanity and creation as a whole. These components of human identity are the building blocks of our psychospiritual well-being, and we deny them at our peril. (Scholars studying the modern human condition have pointed out just how much the counterculture, drug abuse, violence, cults, and so forth are a search for identity on the part of the disorientated who have lost traditional compasses of orientation.)

These components of our identity affirm who we are, but inevitably, at the same time they affirm who we are not. Whether the perception of distinction and difference is viewed positively or negatively depends overwhelmingly on the context in which we find ourselves or perceive ourselves to be.

In his work *The Territorial Imperative: A Personal Inquiry into the Animal Origins of Property and Nations* (Atheneum, 1966), the popular writer on animal and human behavior Robert Ardrey referred to three basic human needs: security, stimulation, and identity. He pointed out that the absence of security serves as automatic stimulation that leads to identity. When people sense a threat, such as in wartime, they do not face the challenge of loss of identity. On the contrary, the very absence of security itself guarantees the stimulation that leads to strengthening of identity.

However, in contexts of conflict, identity tends to be not just a nurturing of positive affiliation but also a vehicle for self-righteousness and disparagement of "the other," to the point of portraying the opponent—in the words of the historian Richard Hofstadter—as "a perfect picture of malice" ("The Paranoid Style in American Politics," *Harper's Magazine* [November 1964], 77–86).

The image I find useful in explaining the behavior of particular identities for good or bad is that of a spiral. These different components of identity are like circles within circles. When people feel secure within the wider context in which they find themselves, they can then affirm, open up to, and contribute to the broader context: families engaging other families, communities working together with other communities, nations contributing to the commonweal of nations, and religions affirming all human dignity within the family of humankind. However, when these components of human identity do not feel comfortable in the broader context, they cut themselves off from the wider context, isolate themselves, and invariably denigrate "the other," compounding the sense of alienation.

Because religion is bound up with identity, it plays a key role in nurturing identity when threatened (or perceived as such), providing support and succor in contexts of conflict. However, all too often in giving people a sense of value and purpose, especially when they feel vulnerable and insecure, religions often tend to become part and parcel of that aforementioned self-righteousness that delegitimizes the other, exacerbating conflict and alienation, betraying religions' most sublime universal values.

Where there is a feeling of inferiority and even a sense of humiliation or historic injury in relation to more dominant elements in a society, the need to find a sense of value and purpose in one's life all too often goes hand in hand with the need to deprecate the rest of society and view it in a hostile, violent light. Indeed, the proximity of an inferiority complex to a superiority complex is well known. Thus, we see the development of a mindset in which the injured parties see themselves as part of a community of the elect in violent conflict with those who do not share their worldview. Such an ideology is powerfully attractive for those alienated from the wider society—especially younger

people who seek a sense of self-worth and prestige. In such contexts religion is easily abused, becoming nothing less than a "potion of death."

Accordingly, in seeking to combat such terrible violent extremism in the name of religion, it is essential that the sources of social alienation be addressed.

Of course, the threat of violence demands that necessary steps for self-defense are taken, and many, if not most, would argue that sometimes there is no moral recourse in the short term but to paradoxically use violence to stem violence. Nevertheless, all of our religions teach that this is not good enough. Ancient Jewish wisdom declares that "a true hero is he who makes his enemy into a friend" (*Ethics of Rabbi Nathan*, 23).

Combating violent extremism certainly demands efforts to drain the swamps of material alienation in which the anopheles mosquitoes of conflict breed—economic and political marginalization, and so on. However, as indicated, there is more to the source of alienation that threatens societies today than just material and political factors. The psychology of rejection is arguably the most potent of all the sources of alienation, and it is not possible to begin to understand the hostility that exists among certain extremist militant groups that find their succor and inspiration in religion if one ignores the power of this alienation, this sense of disparagement and humiliation.

Thus not only is it essential that people, especially young people, be enabled to live lives of material and social dignity, but it is no less important that they feel a sense of connectedness to and responsibility for their wider society, both as individuals and as part of their respective communities.

In this regard, interfaith relations in particular can play such an important role.

The value of hospitality is central to all religious traditions. Reaching out to welcome the other can play a critically valuable role in giving communities and their members a sense that they are accepted and respected by other communities and in helping these community members contribute to the wider circle of identity rather than be alienated from it. When this is done in respect of the spiritual core identity of the other, it has even greater impact and significance.

Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions trace their origin to Abraham (Ibrahim), who is seen as the embodiment of this quality of hospitality. His tent is described as having its flaps raised so that sojourners from all four corners could find hospitality and welcome there.

Chapter 18 of the first book of the Hebrew Bible, Genesis, opens with a description of Abraham sitting at the entrance to his tent: "And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold three men were standing in front of him; and he saw and ran toward them." Abraham greets them and offers them hospitality. No questions as to their identity, their origins, their beliefs, or anything else.

In the course of this encounter, he discovers that they are divine messengers, as he is promised the wondrous birth of a son in his advanced old age.

However, two of the three emissaries still have to go on to Sodom and Gomorrah to warn the residents there of the consequences of their sinfulness and to save any righteous from the impending doom. Thus the next chapter in Genesis opens with the words "And the two angels came to Sodom." A Hassidic master noted that while in relation to the sinful city of Sodom, the Bible describes the divine messengers as "angels"; in relation to the loving and righteous Abraham, the Bible only refers to them as "men." This, he explained, is because Abraham didn't *need* to be told that they were angels, because Abraham saw the angel in every human being.

That is the ultimate ideal of hospitality, when we can see the transcendent value in each and every person, all created in the Divine Image, and receive them accordingly. This is the critical role of religion in itself and, in a particular way, of interfaith relations that express genuine respect and even celebration of the other's diversity.

In addition to all the other steps that need to be taken to combat extremism, it is critical to ensure that different people and communities feel that they are truly respected and are thus part of the wider society, whether as immigrant communities or as part of the commonwealth of nations. This can enable them to view their own religious identities and sense of belonging as vehicles for a constructive contribution and enhancement for the well-being of society as a whole and prevent these differences from being a source of alienation and conflict. ❑

The Potential for Dialogue with Violent Extremism and the Role of Religious Professionals

by Yoshiaki Sanada

The Buddha teaches us that "hatred cannot be appeased by hatred; hatred can only be appeased by nonhatred." Humankind makes no attempt to understand this truth.

Violence Begets Violence

Violence is almost impossible to define unambiguously. Even the word *terrorism* is said to have more than a hundred definitions. Violence can take all kinds of forms, including not only physical, psychological, verbal, visible, and invisible violence but also individual, organized, and state violence, and politically, economically, and socially structured violence on a national and international scale.

Violence is not extreme at the outset. Meeting hate with hate does not eliminate hate; instead, it feeds and strengthens it. Similarly, answering violence with violence only causes it to escalate progressively and become more extreme.

In verse 5 of the Dhammapada, the Buddha teaches us that "hatred cannot be appeased by hatred; hatred can only be appeased by nonhatred." Humankind makes no attempt to understand this truth.

Today, Iraq and Syria are not the only places where law has broken down and humanitarian crises are unfolding.

Yoshiaki Sanada is former director of the Peace Research Institute of Religions for Peace Japan and a Professor Emeritus of Chuo University, Tokyo, where until March 2007 he was a law professor. Dr. Sanada is also a former president of the Society for the Study of Legal Culture and has been a visiting professor at the Institute of Comparative Law of the China University of Politics and Law in Beijing.

Plunged into a crucible of chaos, the world itself is on the brink of collapse, and lawlessness is everywhere. Humanitarian crises escalate by the day, and the signs of collapse are evident. As in chapter 3 of the Lotus Sutra, "A Parable," humankind does not realize that it is in a burning house and is on the point of being burned to death. Instead, we continue charging madly into more and more wars.

War—A Fight for Civilization?

On April 6 this year, President Trump of the United States responded to the use of chemical weapons in Syria, allegedly committed by Assad government forces, by ordering a cruise missile attack on an airbase in the west of the country. In an address after the attack, the president called on "all civilized nations to join us in seeking to end the slaughter and bloodshed in Syria and also to end terrorism of all kinds and all types," and asked for "God's wisdom."

The Trump administration appealed for the understanding and cooperation of "all civilized nations" in order to "end terrorism of all kinds" without disclosing any evidence for the use of chemical weapons by the Assad administration and without the grounds under international law for the US attack. This appeal is a carbon copy of the Bush administration's actions when it used military force against Iraq and revives memories of the tragic consequences of that misguided national strategy.

The Bush administration invaded and launched an attack on Iraq based on false information concerning Iraq's development and possession of weapons of mass destruction, resulting in the annihilation of the Hussein administration. On September 20, 2001, following the attacks of September 11, President Bush gave an address to a joint session of Congress in which he argued, "This is not, however, just America's fight. . . . This is the world's fight. This is civilization's fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom."

Both former President Bush and President Trump appear particularly emotionally attached to "civilization" and "civilized nations." However, isn't the "civilization" of which they speak a civilization of death and slaughter that kills opponents through violence by the state in the form of military force? By praying for "God's wisdom," isn't President Trump actually seeking from God the "wisdom" to murder?

Moving from a "Civilization of Death" to a "Civilization of Life"

War costs the lives of many innocent, ordinary citizens, regardless of age or sex, and inflicts a heavy toll that leaves deep physical and mental scars. In the Qur'an it is written that God said, "Because of that We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder, or (and) to spread mischief in the land—it would be as if he killed all mankind, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind" (Sura 5:32; Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, trans., *The Noble Qur'an: The English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* [King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, 1998]). Human life everywhere and always is bestowed with dignity, is sacred and inviolable, and has universal value.

A civilization of death and slaughter inherently rejects what *civilization* means. Civilization means not killing people, not destroying things, not taking natural life, and respecting human life. It means, in other words, seeing things from the other's point of view, understanding one another, and pursuing continued dialogue through reason informed by a spirit of compromise and the creation of God in order to build peace.

Bound by the interests of their nations, their regimes, and their own religions and tribes, however, those in positions of power make no attempt to listen to the cries for peace of the ordinary people who, caught up in the horrors of war, are killed or injured and flee in search of food and shelter. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they are not even on the right wavelength to hear the cries of those bereft of a voice of their own.

The Destruction of Iraq and the Parastate of Islamic State

In May 2003 US and allied forces destroyed the Hussein administration of Iraq. Ironically, their actions helped bring into the world a militia group that hijacked the name of Islam and advocated a fanatical new form of jihadism. This group is Islamic State.

On March 31, 2003, in the immediate wake of the invasion of Iraq by the United States and its allies, President Mubarak of Egypt told Egyptian soldiers in the city of Suez, "This war will have horrible consequences. Instead of having one [Osama] bin Laden, we will have one hundred bin Ladens." In fact, the consequences turned out to be even more horrible than President Mubarak had foretold.

Violence begot more violence. It was like attacking a beehive with a baseball bat. Even if Islamic State is destroyed in the future, its fighters will scatter like bees from a hive and build new nests again all over the Muslim world.

The Potential for Peace in the Middle East and Dialogue with Violent Extremism

As the Ottoman Empire declined and headed toward collapse at the turn of the nineteenth century to the twentieth, the Western powers began to intervene

in territorial and ethnic issues and build a new system of Middle Eastern states dominated by them. As the McMahon-Hussein Correspondence of 1915, the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, and the Balfour Declaration of 1917 demonstrated, the Arabs were at the mercy of the duplicitous diplomacy and power politics waged by Western powers, and they were left with no choice but to accept the artificial states that the West created.

The Iraq War as it was waged by the United States and its allies in the period of March to May 2003 amounted to the dismantling of the Western-centric Middle East system of states. Now, in its place, there are plans to rebuild the Middle Eastern world around the wreckage of Iraq to create a Middle East that is more to the West's liking.

In exploring the potential for peace in the region and dialogue with violent extremism, we must bear in mind the historical background to the construction, dismantling, and reconstruction of a Western-centric system of states in the Middle East that disregarded the unique historical, religious, geopolitical, and social relations in the Islamic world, not to mention the Muslim soul and the spirit of Islam in the Arab countries.

There are many possible prerequisites for engaging in dialogue with violent extremism, but below I consider only seven.

1. Simply criticizing the violent extremism of Islamic State will solve nothing. We must have a shared, accurate understanding of the background and causes of the rise of Islamic State, including the colonization of the Muslim world of the Middle East; the ongoing hypocritical political interference by the West; the anger and grievances felt by people in the Muslim world and the Islamic revival; military dictatorships and government decay; the political and economic systems that give rise to the unequal distribution of wealth, corruption, and poverty; the poverty of education; and the ignorance of the masses.

2. We must prevent as far as possible the imposition of Western values. We should appeal to public opinion throughout the world, including the Muslim world, to awaken awareness of the universal values shared by the world's religions and the importance of safeguarding the internalization of these values and respecting fair and neutral international standards.

3. Rejecting the "war on terror" and the naked display of power by countries interfering in Middle East issues as part of their power games, we must strive to achieve peaceful political solutions through direct dialogue (both publicly and behind closed doors) among the parties concerned, instead of through force.

4. An appeal must be made—not just to the Muslim world but also to the broader international community—through interfaith dialogue involving fair and enlightened religious figures of authority in the Islamic world, to take an even clearer stand against Islamic State's unique, un-Islamic interpretation and coercive enforcement of the tenets of Islam.

5. Humanitarian aid for refugees and victims of war must be delivered by appropriate agencies that transcend national, ethnic, and religious differences, such as the International Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières, and the World Conference of Religions for Peace, without the involvement of the governments of "aggressor" states that use military force.

6. Conflicts and confrontations within countries should be tackled by creating an environment that allows fair, democratic, and highly transparent solutions to be reached that respect conditions and interests in those countries and are led by their inhabitants.

7. The most important concern of all is the Palestinian question. It is the question that sticks in the craw of the Middle Eastern world, and there can be no permanent peaceful solution to the problems of the Middle East unless this question is solved. Moving from resolution through force to resolution through dialogue under the leadership of the United Nations, efforts should be made to help Israel and Palestine come to an agreement on the mutual suspension of military action, enable the peaceful coexistence of the two states of Israel and Palestine, and actively galvanize international public opinion. ❑

Savoring Our Encounters

by Dominick Scarangello

In order to savor our karmic encounters, we have to let go of preferential judgments of good and bad, take with equal gratitude that which is pleasant and that which is painful, as equal parts of reality, that is, as Buddha Dharma, and then no experience, no encounter will be for naught.

The Buddha is hidden behind people who grind you with angry faces and nasty remarks, because such people refine you like a whetstone sharpens a knife.

—Nikkyo Niwano, founder,
Rissho Kosei-kai

Mixing Oil and Water

People who study Buddhism will often come across the enigmatic phrase "Samsara is in itself nirvana" (Skt., *saṃsāra eva nirvâṇam*). This assertion appears in a number of well-known Buddhist texts, including Nagarjuna's *Madhyamaka-kārikā*.

Samsara, often translated into Chinese as "birth and death," is the cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth that living beings have repeated since the beginningless past. The basic Buddhist view of this cycle is, on the face of it, pessimistic: Samsara is synonymous with suffering. Life begins with the trauma of birth, and while we experience much joy in our lives, we are also visited by sickness, the unavoidable decline of aging, the certainty of death, and all manner of suffering. *Samsara* can also refer to how our hearts and minds ceaselessly wander through a range of emotional states rooted in various degrees of greed, anger, and ignorance.

Nirvana, on the other hand, means the extinguishment of the ignorance and desire that cause us to suffer through the cycles of birth and death in both senses mentioned above. Living beings who attain nirvana are no longer driven through rounds of birth and death because of ignorant delusions and desires, and in the phenomenal sense, they no longer wander through unstable, unwholesome states of consciousness, because their hearts and minds are tranquil and at ease. Nirvana is the end of suffering because one is no longer captive to the changing circumstances of one's life.

"Samsara is in itself nirvana" would seem a contradiction in terms, then, because it identifies two things that appear, by definition, to be polar opposites. In order to obtain nirvana, shouldn't we be escaping samsara? How could these two be concurrent and concomitant? Metaphorically speaking, wouldn't this be like mixing oil and water?

When forms of Mahayana Buddhism make this perplexing declaration that "samsara is in itself nirvana," it means that ultimately samsara and nirvana are not two different places or planes of existence but different ways of experiencing and acting in the world. The Buddha Shakyamuni did not promise to magically reverse aging, nor forestall sickness and death. If, as Buddhism teaches, sentient beings come into existence through causes and conditions and are therefore destined to age, become sick, and die, as well as meet with all manner of suffering, then nirvana cannot be the avoidance of suffering but instead its transformation.

From this perspective, the practice of Buddhism is about confronting our sufferings and learning to understand them in the light of the Buddha's teachings, in order to grasp them differently. Much of our suffering is

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

subjective, stemming from the fact that things do not go as we wish. Arguably more objective experiences of suffering, such as sickness and death, moreover, while obviously not pleasant, do not have to be accompanied by fear, anger, or loneliness if we comprehend them through the light of the Buddha's teachings of impermanence and interdependence and the conviction that while life is transient, the progression of existence itself, like a river, is immutable.

The Place of Attaining the Way Is Ordinary Life

This means that we don't have to forsake our ordinary lives for some isolated existence in order to achieve the cessation of suffering. The place where we attain the serenity and peace of mind of nirvana is daily life. Cutting ourselves off from the world could even be counterproductive, because instead of facing the truth of suffering, we could be only running away from it, and in the end this would solve nothing. And if we think about this the other way around, it is precisely the difficult, unpleasant experiences in life that provide us opportunities for enlightenment. Even if we could escape to some idyllic place, not only would we become bored out of our wits in no time whatsoever, we would also lack opportunities for growth. We achieve enlightenment in the events and circumstances of ordinary life.

If this is so, then it stands to reason that the circumstances of our daily lives, the people we meet and even the troubles we face, are not different from Buddha Dharma but part and parcel of it. It is here that we arrive at the radically world-affirming teaching of the Lotus Sutra. The sixteenth chapter of the sutra reveals the Buddha to be omnipresent and indicates that *this world* is his pure land. We come into contact with the Buddha—wisdom and compassionate action—through all manner of situations, phenomena, and people. The Buddha teaches this in chapter 16 when he explains: "Sometimes I appear as myself, sometimes as someone else; sometimes I appear in my own actions, sometimes in the actions of others; but all that I say is true and not empty."

Putting Principle into Practice

The "good news" of the Lotus Sutra is that we are living in the realm of the Buddha. But how do we put such a lofty principle into practice? In Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhism, one important way to experience our daily lives as Buddhist practice is to make the most of our encounters with others, literally to savor our karmic encounters. The Japanese word for association, contact, or encounter, is *en*, a translation of the Buddhist term *pratyaya*. Encounters are opportunities or conditions for various people and situations to come into contact, which then become causes for subsequent phenomena. All of our interactions with others are gifts, valuable opportunities to discover the Buddha's immanent wisdom and compassion in our lives. This is why "savoring" our encounters by appreciating them, contemplating them, and making the most of them is critical to our growth as people and as practitioners of the bodhisattva Way.

Of course, not all of our encounters are pleasant, but the unpleasant encounters are the ones that hold the most profound consequences for us. The founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, emphasized that we should treasure the difficult people we encounter in life, because they provide us occasions to perfect ourselves. Without these people who "grind us with angry faces," how would we develop the bodhisattva's forbearance and deepen our compassion? It is through our relationships with these people that our faith becomes more than lip service to lofty principles. In Rev. Niwano's words, they "refine us like a whetstone sharpens a knife." Our encounters with them are "teaching moments," and when we realize this, we can appreciate them just as they are, as precious encounters rather than simply difficulties. In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha teaches this when he refers to Devadatta, the archrival who once attempted to kill him, as someone who served as a great teacher. Shakyamuni explains that because of his encounter with Devadatta, he was "able to become fully developed in the six transcendental practices," and that the reason he could attain full awakening and go on to liberate many people was his "good friend Devadatta."

In order to savor our karmic encounters, we have to let go of preferential judgments of good and bad, take with equal gratitude that which is pleasant and that which is painful, as equal parts of reality, that is, as Buddha Dharma, and then no experience, no encounter will be for naught. This is what the Lotus Sutra's attitude toward a person like Devadatta teaches us. A practical method for learning to see the world in this light is to savor our karmic encounters by thinking of them as arrangements of the Buddha. To some this might sound like overly anthropomorphizing the Buddha, or a kind of fatalism. However, as Rev. Nichiko Niwano, the current leader of Rissho Kosei-kai, writes, taking things as the arrangements of the Buddha "switches off the selfish mind, and by doing so, we can follow the Dharma and pursue a life of moderation and ease." That is to say, this blocks the kind of imputation that in Buddhist parlance is called discrimination in order to view things "through the eyes of the Buddha." Learning valuable lessons by understanding our encounters through the perspective of the Buddha's teachings is a way of receiving a "message from the Buddha" via our relationships with others. It is the Buddha appearing to us through the actions of others.

Living with Joy

We all know someone who always has a smile for us, a person who can find the silver lining in almost any cloud. These bright and cheerful people do not deny the realities of the world, but they always try to make the best of every situation. They seem to know instinctively that when we face every encounter positively, trying to make it a happy one, our lives are filled with joy. A smile begets a smile, and happiness and joy are also contagious. Savoring our encounters in this way allows us to live with a sense of joy and bring this joy to others. The Lotus Sutra describes the first inklings of the Buddha's omnipresence, a glimpse of the Buddha Dharma in all things, as an experience of joy. Through approaching every encounter warmly and positively, we actualize this joy, gradually opening our eyes to the Buddha Dharma in all things while also doing the bodhisattva work of bringing peace and harmony to those around us.

Encounters Past and Present

"Savoring our karmic encounters" means to approach every encounter joyously, taking both pleasant and difficult interactions with others as precious gifts that are the arrangements of the Buddha. In this way, no experience is for naught, and the people in our lives become "good friends" whose actions are the means through which we receive the message of the Buddha. Savoring our karmic encounters is a powerful and effective practical method for realizing the Mahayana Buddhist principle that "samsara is in itself nirvana," and for learning to see the Buddha Dharma in all things, thus making everyday life the place of practice and enlightenment.

The term *karmic encounter* can also refer to how our recent encounters are dependent on those we had in the past. We are who we are today because of a series of causes and conditions, that is to say, earlier encounters with situations and people that have shaped us tremendously, such as our ancestors and parents, who literally gave us life. There is a trend in Western Buddhism to deemphasize the doctrines of karma and rebirth (see *Dharma World*, July–September 2016 issue), but in much of the Buddhist world there remains a belief, also found in the Lotus Sutra, that this web of interdependence with others can span multiple lifetimes, and that many of the encounters we have in this life occur because we have formed a connection to these people in past lives. Consequently, our encounters in this life can be thought of as unfinished business or continuing projects, a notion that makes our interactions with others especially meaningful. In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha explains to his disciples that he had actually taught them over the span of many lifetimes, and for this reason they were fully prepared to hear his exposition of the Supreme Dharma and to eventually become buddhas themselves.

In Buddhism, birth as a human being is said to be exceedingly rare, as unlikely an occurrence as the actions of a blind turtle, who when surfacing for a breath once a century, inadvertently pokes his head through a small hole in a single piece of driftwood that is floating on the surface of the ocean. Most of the matter in our world is inanimate, and human beings comprise only a small portion of the life on this planet. If we think of our existence in this way, we are sure to savor our encounter with this human life by treating our own life and the lives of others as priceless treasures. ❑

ESSAY

Kenji Miyazawa: Embodying the Lotus Sutra, with Mistakes and Failures (1)

by Gene Reeves

In Miyazawa I find not just an interesting historical figure but an inspiration, a man who was truly a living, modern bodhisattva.

Gene Reeves is a professor emeritus at Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago and was a visiting professor at Peking University and a professor at Renmin University of China in Beijing until retiring in 2012. He serves as an international advisor to Rissho Kosei-kai. His four books on the Lotus Sutra include The Lotus Sutra *and* The Stories of the Lotus Sutra *(Wisdom Publications, 2008 and 2010).*

Introduction

This essay is a revised version of the first part of a paper I presented at the 2016 International Lotus Sutra Seminar held at the National Women's Educational Center in Saitama Prefecture, Japan. The second part, along with references, will appear in the next issue of *Dharma World*.

This part will be devoted largely to some of the received biography of Kenji Miyazawa. By "received biography" I want to suggest that in the case of Kenji Miyazawa, separating actual events from legend is not a simple matter, at least not for me. Though I have probably read all of the relevant literature written in English, and a great deal in Japanese as well, there is much more in Japanese that I have not read. Thus, I am often incapable of making a distinction between the facts of Miyazawa's life and the legends that I have received.

In Miyazawa, I find not just an interesting historical figure but an inspiration, a man who was truly a living, modern bodhisattva.

The Life of Kenji Miyazawa

Kenji Miyazawa was one of the world's great poets, storytellers, and teachers. He wrote fanciful poems and stories such as never seen before, or since. In addition, he studied geology and agriculture, taught at a small agricultural school, tried to be a peasant, and finally, made fertilizer plans for peasants before dying at thirty-seven in 1933.

Though largely unknown in the West, since his death Miyazawa has long been enormously popular in Japan. Bits of his poetry have been memorized by generations of Japanese schoolchildren, several of his short stories have been turned into children's books, and some have been transformed into animated movies several times.

Though hardly published at all when he was alive, he left thousands of poems in a trunk. Some are in traditional forms, many are in free verse. Most of these poems were often revised; none was ever perfected. Mostly written in the Japanese syllabic script known as katakana and obviously intended to evoke feelings rather than to describe, some elements of these poems are extremely difficult to read or understand. Though perhaps no more than many other poems, they can also be very difficult to translate. The American poet and Zen Buddhist Gary Snyder was one of the first to try.

While still living, Miyazawa came to be known by locals as Kenji Bosatsu (Kenji Bodhisattva), in large part because of his extraordinary generosity and kindness. He was a kind of one-man not-for-profit organization, traveling around Iwate and offering his time and money to help subsistence farmers in a variety of ways.

One of the major themes in Kenji's poetry is that overcoming profound grief is possible if we focus our thoughts, sentiments, and actions on the plight of others. This is one reason his literature has had a huge impact on the Japanese people since the Second World War. At best, the resilience of Japanese people is rooted in selflessness; their charity and grace, in empathy—all core concerns of Kenji Miyazawa.

Giovanni, the main character in Miyazawa's famous story *Night of the Milky Way Railway*, says that even if his body were to be baked a hundred times in exchange for the happiness of all people, he would not mind. This is one expression of Kenji's decision to be like a bodhisattva, one who finds his own salvation in helping others.

Kenji was very powerfully influenced by his personal relationship with his

father and, perhaps even more especially, by the sickness and death of his younger sister. In addition to family, I think there were two major influences on Miyazawa's life and view of the world—the Lotus Sutra, which he loved in a special way, and his experience of the suffering and poverty of others, including the contrast between people of wealth and the poor peasants.

Kenji Miyazawa was born on August 27, 1896, in the town of Hanamaki in Iwate Prefecture. The eldest of five children—two boys and three girls—he was born into a very well-to-do family. In fact, in their day the Miyazawas were among the wealthiest people in Iwate Prefecture. Both his father, Masajiro, then twenty-two, and his mother, Ichi, nineteen, came from wealthy business families named Miyazawa. Kenji's parents' main business was secondhand clothing, but his father was also the very successful town pawnbroker and a pillar of the commercial and religious communities. The economy was predominantly feudal tenant farming. From an early age, Kenji had to witness miserable tenant farmers pawning their meager belongings for a pittance. Kenji was well aware of being the son of a rich man, one who in addition to being highly respected was also much despised and resented.

Zenji, Kenji's grandfather on his mother's side, was even richer, one of the most wealthy men in the entire Tohoku (northeast) area of Japan. He kept a distance from Kenji as an adult, taking a dim view of his grandson's attempt to do good for peasants, and he could not have approved of abolishing tenant farming to give land to those who actually cultivated it. On the morning that Kenji died, Zenji brought him a bear liver, regarded as a cure for all illnesses. How Kenji, a vegetarian, reacted is not known.

Iwate Prefecture had just one city, Morioka; twenty-one towns; and two hundred nineteen villages. In 1896 Hanamaki was a town of some twenty-four hundred people. Iwate both inspired and distressed Miyazawa throughout his life. It was highly prone to disasters. Just in the year in which Kenji was born, the region was hit, on June 15, by a 125-foot tsunami that killed eighteen thousand people; by a flood on June 21; by an earthquake that destroyed a great many houses on August 31; and by another flood on September 6.

Worse, Iwate was in the middle of one of most famine-prone regions of Japan. So many died of starvation that the region was called "the earth of white bones." Major crop failures increased during Kenji's lifetime, significant ones in 1902, 1905, 1913, 1926, 1929, and 1931.

Agriculture was of grave concern in Iwate—and also to Kenji, who studied and taught at agricultural schools and started a group to advocate "farmers' art" and worked for a rock-crushing company to promote the use of lime as a fertilizer. Iwate, among other things, established agricultural stations. It also founded the Morioka Higher School for Agriculture and Forestry in 1902. Equivalent to today's college, it was the first of its kind in Japan.

Kenji entered this college in April of 1915, and in the spring of his third year graduated and became a researcher on geology, soils, and fertilizers. The research eminently suited Kenji, who had been a collector of stones since a small boy. In May of 1918 he was promoted to "assistant in guiding experiments"

and was expected to become an assistant professor. It's said that he used his entire salary to collect books and records.

At end of June, that year, however, he was found to have pleurisy. In those days a family that had TB was shunned, if not ostracized. So it was necessary to camouflage the disease. Kenji's mother, Ichi, and his sister, Toshiko, also had it; so did Ichi's sister.

Kenji sensed the true nature of what he had and went home to rest in July. He predicted to a friend that he would live only another fifteen years. He recovered from the first attack after several days, but the disease kept recurring, at times severely enough to put him in bed again for several days at a time. He died exactly fifteen years later.

Kenji made a final research report in 1920 and graduated from the agricultural school in May with the equivalent of a master's degree.

In 1921 he went to Tokyo for seven months, returning home to take care of his sick sister. That period in Tokyo was the only time Kenji managed a life more or less independent of his father.

He had nursed his sister, Toshiko, when she fell ill and was hospitalized in Tokyo toward the end of 1918, while she was a student at Japan Women's University. When she could travel he brought her back to Hanamaki, and even though the Miyazawas were rich enough to employ a professional nurse and two maids to look after her, he stayed with her during the months of her quarantine in the Miyazawas' second house, until she was moved to the main house and died in November of 1922 at age twenty-four. As she died, he shouted in her ear the mantra *Namu Myoho Renge-kyo*, invoking the Lotus Sutra. It was about her that he wrote some of the most moving elegies ever composed in Japan. It can be said that Toshiko's death was a great shock to Kenji, one from which he never fully recovered.

In December of 1921 he began teaching at the County Agricultural School in Hanamaki. When he arrived, the school was a humble establishment with thatched roofs. He taught algebra, English, fertilizers, agricultural production, produce, meteorology, chemistry, and soils. In addition, he did practical training in growing rice.

His creative energy surged after he began teaching at the school. A day after the ceremony for opening the new school year, in April 1922, he wrote the famous poem "Spring & Asura," and two years later he brought out his first book of poems with the same title. In December he published a selection of stories. While at the agricultural school, he also wrote a dozen songs and slapstick plays for his students, composing the music as well as the words.

In the summer following Toshiko's death, Kenji visited what was then Karafuto Prefecture (Southern Sakhalin) and during the trip wrote a series of poems for Toshiko, some extraordinarily moving.

Kenji thoroughly enjoyed teaching. He said the secret to success lay in arousing interest in one's students and not paying much attention to textbooks—a heresy.

Becoming a Peasant

Despite the fun and the vigor of the school, Kenji left in the spring of 1926 to become "a real peasant." The sentiment was not unique to Miyazawa. At the time, there was a wide, growing sense that one could not ignore the plight of workers and peasants.

Acutely conscious of his "idle rich" status, Kenji was sympathetic to the workers' movement. Though in the end he would decide that the kind of revolution advocated by communists was not for Japan, at one point he helped the Labor and Farmer Party, although he and his family had to keep this secret because of police surveillance. His idea of promoting "farmers' art" was one result of this sympathy.

Kenji left the main family home to live alone as a peasant in the Miyazawas' other house—the smaller house where he had nursed Toshiko.

There he set up a society to educate farmers, which he called the Rasu Earthmen Society, but what he meant by *Rasu* was never explained. "We are all farmers," he declared. But Kenji was

identified from the outset as the first son of Masajiro Miyazawa, and the thought police made an overt move to look into Kenji's activities as potentially socialist and dangerous. The Rasu Earthmen Society soon stopped functioning, and ceased to exist in 1928.

Kenji cultivated land, as he said he would. He had to clear a plot of sandy land atop a cliff. Even though a walker and a good mountain climber, he wasn't cut out for that kind of labor, and tired easily. In the meantime, he tried to live like a regular peasant. He insisted on subsistence food, rejecting, for example, the lunchboxes his mother made and brought to him. He ate mainly vegetables that he grew himself. For kitchenware and such, he had only two rice bowls and a set of chopsticks.

Not that Kenji could not afford adequate food, or anything else. He could have received any amount of money he wanted from his father.

Kenji's life as a peasant had many incongruities. The flowers and tomatoes in his garden were grown from seeds he ordered from the Yokohama branch of the British firm Sutton & Company, an extravagance in Iwate.

He held concerts with friends in his backyard, himself playing the organ or the cello, both very expensive instruments.

He loved to wear rubber boots, but no peasant in those days wore such expensive things.

According to students, Kenji always wore socks. The heels became holes, so he wore them with the holes up. But not a single peasant in Tohoku in those days wore socks at all. Even in the dead of winter people usually went barefoot, wearing *tabi* (traditional Japanese socks) only for the first three days of the New Year or for weddings and funerals.

Sometimes Kenji went to town to sell vegetables from his garden, loading them on a cart, the kind you pull behind you. Of course, the son of a distinguished family could not go about loudly calling out his wares. So he simply pulled his cart, smiling, and most of his stuff would end up unsold. Then this peasant would give away his vegetables to anyone who cared to take them. Of course, no real peasant would give away his produce.

In other words, Kenji was not wholly successful at being a peasant.

In August of 1928 he came down with a high fever that lasted for forty days. He was diagnosed with TB. He had to leave the small house in order to be cared for at home by his family and never had another chance to live in the house where he tried to create a new rural culture.

In February of 1931 he went to work at a friend's Tohoku Rock-Crushing Company as an engineer and became known as the "god of fertilizers." The work required him to travel a lot, and it did not take long to make him ill. In September 1931, when he arrived in Tokyo lugging a large trunk heavy with samples of lime for fertilizer, he had a fever again. He took to bed as soon as he reached an inn, convinced he was about to die.

During that fall, he scribbled the poem "November 3rd" in his notebook, "*Ame ni mo makezu*." Discovered only after his death, it would make him famous:

> neither yielding to rain, nor yielding to wind
> yielding neither to snow nor to summer heat
> with a stout body like that
>
> without greed, never getting angry, always smiling quietly
> eating one and a half pints of brown rice and bean paste and a bit of vegetable a day
>
> in everything, not taking oneself into account
> looking, listening, understanding well, and not forgetting
> living in the shadow of pine trees in a field, in a small thatched hut
>
> if there is a sick child in the east

going there and nursing him back
to health
if in the west there's a tired mother
going there and carrying bundles
of rice for her
if in the south someone is dying
going there and saying you don't
have to be afraid
if in the north there's a quarrel or
a law suit
saying it's not worth it, stop it

in a time of drought, shedding tears
in a cold summer pacing back and
forth, lost

by everyone called a good-for-nothing
neither praised nor thought a pain

someone like that is what I want
to be.

During the next two years, at times Kenji seemed to feel better, but he knew he would never recover. In September of 1933, his condition took a sudden turn for the worse. A doctor diagnosed acute pneumonia. Kenji and his father talked about the last days of Shinran and Nichiren.

About seven in the evening of the twentieth a farmer came for advice on fertilizers. Kenji got dressed, came down from the second floor, sat formally in the foyer, and listened to the visitor's long explanations of his problems. The interview dragged on and on; the family became worried and impatient until at last the visitor left.

About 11:30 the following morning, the family heard Kenji loudly chanting *Namu Myoho Renge-kyo*. They rushed upstairs. He had vomited blood and was deathly pale. He asked his father to print a thousand copies of the Lotus Sutra and distribute them. Shortly after noon, this bodhisattva died.

To be continued

References

Miyazawa Kenji zenshu (The complete works of Kenji Miyazawa), 1995, 2003. 10 volumes. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo.

Oshima, Hiroyuki. 1992. *Miyazawa Kenji no shukyo sekai* (The religious world of Kenji Miyazawa). Hiroshima: Keisuisha.

Pulvers, Roger, trans. 2007. Kenji Miyazawa. *Strong in the Rain: Selected Poems*. Hexham, England: Bloodaxe Books.

Sato, Hiroaki, trans. 1973. *Spring & Asura: Poems of Kenji Miyazawa*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press.

_______, trans. 1989. Kenji Miyazawa. *A Future of Ice: Poems and Stories of a Japanese Buddhist*. San Francisco: North Point Press.

_______. 2007. "Miyazawa Kenji: The Poet as Asura?" *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 5 (9), September 3.

_______, ed. 2007. *Miyazawa Kenji: Selections*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Snyder, Gary. 1967. *The Back Country*. New York: New Directions.

Yano, Ko. 2010. *The Manga Biography of Kenji Miyazawa*. Translated by Michael Brase. Asaka City, Japan: Japan & Stuff Press.

RELIGIOUS TESTIMONY

Being a Person of Faith

by Nomfundo Walaza

I have learned over time that having the ability to humble myself and be open to the possibility of being taught by those I interact with has had a positive effect in my work life. This to me speaks to the ability to encounter others as human beings deserving of honor and respect.

I was raised in an Anglican household surrounded by a loving family. My grandmother, the person from whom I source my spiritual inclination and spiritual path, was a devout Anglican woman. She attended church regularly and was a staunch member of the Mothers' Union (Umanyano). She wore her Umanyano uniform with much pride and dignity, and we, her grandchildren, secretly aspired to be just like her when we grew up. My grandmother regularly gave offerings to the church on behalf of all of her grandchildren, and this she did until she considered us old enough to take care of this task ourselves. Not only did she inspire us to be generous, she ensured that we were spiritually nurtured as children and made sure that we learned to give thanks for the simple blessings of food, shelter, and the many other things that we might have taken for granted. As children we knew that it warmed her heart and pleased her enormously that we regularly observed prayer. As very small children, we were always keen to kneel and pray whenever asked to do so. This meant that I learned the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father, which art in heaven," from a tender age. This is the prayer that has accompanied and guided my journey for years.

One of my earliest childhood memories is running with my cousins to fetch my grandmother on her way back from attending the Thursday meetings of the Mothers' Union. We constantly fought over who would get to carry her bag, which contained her most prized possessions, her bible and her prayer book. I can also so clearly remember how her faith was consistent with how she lived her life. She believed in being both a leader in our family and a leader in our village. She was an educated woman who generously shared and felt responsible for using her skills to help others.

During those days the postbag for Walaza Village was delivered to our house. The women in the village who couldn't read or write would receive letters from their husbands, who worked in distant towns, and my grandmother would read them and also help with the recording of the money that was being sent. She later allowed us to do this task when we were able to read. As a young child, I witnessed my grandmother's Christian faith in her dedication both to the Anglican Church and to her family and community. These fond memories of my loving grandmother, who did not waiver in her love of her God

Nomfundo Walaza is the Chief Executive Officer of the Desmond Tutu Peace Centre in Cape Town, South Africa. She is also a clinical psychologist and has worked in the human rights field for the past two decades. For eleven years she was Executive Director of the Trauma Centre for Survivors of Violence and Torture in South Africa. Since 2012 she has been a member of the independent International Niwano Peace Prize Committee, which selects the prize recipient each year.

and her creator, formed the basis of my faith and spiritual life. My grandmother's life served as an example that has inspired me and my commitment to the Anglican Church and its traditions for many years.

The fact that South Africans, as a nation, are predominantly a people of faith has also added to my spiritual trajectory. While we, as a country, cannot escape the painful truth that apartheid (the system that denigrated black lives and caused much suffering) was justified on religious grounds, I am often amazed at how black South Africans have been able to use the same texts that sought to dehumanize them as a means to find hope when there was none. Even during the darkest of moments, South Africans held firm to the belief that God loves all of us irrespective of the color of our skin, and that tomorrow would bring a brighter future for all people.

It is important for me to declare from the start that while going to church and worshipping within the context of a community is important to me, I derive most of the joy of worshipping from having an opportunity to sing. In church there is something liberating and unburdening in those moments when I can sing from the bottom of my heart. It is also important for me to say that singing is significant in that it is the time that I feel I am in conversation with the other congregants. My voice blends with the voices of others, and what transpires is an offering that is far greater than any individual person's. This kind of musical divine offering emanates from the soul and soothes the heart. Singing at the Sunday church services continues to be one of the most precious and sustaining gifts in my life.

What does it mean to be "a person of faith"? For me, being a person of faith means that I strive for a life of humility, simplicity, gratitude, and reverence.

As a psychologist, peace practitioner, and mediator, I am involved in work that requires that I approach interaction with others with humility. I have learned over time that having the ability to humble myself and be open to the possibility of being taught by those I interact with has had a positive effect in my work life. This to me speaks to the ability to encounter others as human beings deserving of honor and respect. In return, others can see me as a human being deserving of the same virtues. This is what Pope Francis, in his recent TED talk titled "Why the Only Future Worth Building Includes Everyone," refers to as "tenderness" (April 2017). He describes tenderness as an act of being on the same level as others. This is the path of solidarity and humility. He calls on us who impact the lives of others to always connect the power we hold with humility and tenderness.

In order to counteract the complex challenges inherent in the work that I do, I try to live a life of simplicity. By that I mean I try to source pleasure and relaxation from the simple things in life, such as walking, appreciating the many gifts from nature that one encounters every day, cooking supper for my family and friends, and relaxing at home after a grueling week of work. My work often involves carrying the burdens of others or holding the space of vulnerability. Keeping life simple in this technologically advanced world is a challenge that I have to navigate every day. Staying away from social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, and other such social media sites that feed instant gratification, helps me by eliminating distractions and ensures that I have much more time for reflection. The need for simplicity often goes along with flexibility, and holding the tension between these values ensures that I am able to take time to breathe and be kind to myself. This way of being replenishes my soul and ensures that I stay focused on important aspects of my work and personal life.

As I indicated earlier, gratitude is a value that my grandmother taught me as a young girl before I even knew or appreciated its meaning. There is so much to be grateful for as I reflect on the many blessings of my life. I am grateful for the life that I have lived thus far and always feel grateful for the opportunities I have been given. I am grateful that I have had an education that has exposed me to a multitude of experiences and provided me with invaluable skills. I am grateful that I have a lineage of ancestors whose dedication, love, and hard work are responsible for who I am and continue to impact who I am becoming. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve others in my work and in my personal life, mindful that there are others who would like to do

the same but are not given the opportunities to do so.

As a person of faith, I am keenly aware that my life thus far has been sustained by what Mother Earth continues to provide and offer humanity. I am also aware of the simple fact that without air we cannot breathe. Hence I do my best to protect and preserve the environment.

I am grateful for the knowledge I have gained over the years that has taught me that suffering and hardship can be overcome through improving ourselves every day, and that overcoming hardship is the essence and purpose of our lives. This knowledge helps me put things into perspective and sustains me at times when hope seems to fade.

I grew up and was natured within a cultural tradition that prizes respect above all else. We were brought up to put our hands together when receiving something from another person as a sign of respect and reverence for that which we received. We were taught never to be on a first-name basis with a person older than ourselves. I remember feeling a sense of inner glow and pride when those younger than I accorded me the respect of not calling me by my first name without a prefix as an older sister, cousin, or aunt.

In the book *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue*, Paul Woodruff observes that the loss of reverence in contemporary societies is reflected in disdain for the government, destruction of the environment, and disrespect for rules and rituals. He defines reverence as "the well-developed capacity to have the feeling of awe, respect and shame when these are the right feelings to have" (Oxford University Press, 2014).

It is my contention, therefore, that we reach a state of irreverence when we abandon the value of respect and do so without feeling shame or guilt. In my language, isiXhosa, it is said, "*Intloni zikwenza umntu*," which means that having an ability to be shameful makes you a person. It is this example that makes me proud to say that my sense of reverence emanates from both my spiritual grounding and traditional values. As a Christian I have come to appreciate that there is a correlation between Christian religious principles and traditional Xhosa values and rituals that are integral to my personhood.

My lifelong mission is to live a life filled with loving compassion and the desire for peace for all beings. Every day I pray for a life of connectedness, not isolation. A life that respects and honors solidarity and inclusiveness. In my work I interact with individuals and groups who survive hardships and suffering every day. Demonstrating loving compassion and promoting peaceful coexistence helps restore the hope that is often the only source of comfort for those who have nothing to hold on to. Having borne witness to so much trauma, pain, and suffering, I pray that humanity will one day find lasting solutions to address the civil strife and war that many in the world endure. It is my fervent hope that we all strive to ensure that the world will be a better place for future generations.

Since being nominated and accepted as a member of the Niwano Peace Prize Committee in 2012, I have come across many people of different faiths and religions and have been positively impacted by these encounters. While I have learned from and have been greatly inspired by the encounter with the Buddhist faith through Risso Kosei-kai, I have come to realize that there is a lot in Christianity that resembles what people of the Buddhist faith and other faiths believe.

These are some of the observations that I have made that give me a sense of comfort as a Christian: There is the desire among all religions and faiths for solutions to be found for lasting peace—this is the reason the Niwano Peace Prize was founded, which awards those who dedicate their lives to fostering interreligious cooperation. The different religions often use different words and concepts to talk about the same or similar values. All people of faith (irrespective of religious affiliation) aspire to a world where all will live in peace and harmony. There is a complementarity and resonance in the values espoused by different religions; being compassionate and considerate of the needs of others is a value that cuts across many different religions. ❑

Speaking Truth in the Kremlin

by Nikkyo Niwano

In March 1999 an autobiography by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (1906–99), the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, was published in Japanese under the title* Kono michi: Ichibutsujo no sekai o mezashite *(The path that we have walked: Aspiring to the world of the One Buddha Vehicle). The book is a lively account of the life of Founder Niwano as a leader of 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.

My Second Visit to the Soviet Union in Nineteen Years

The Second Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament, held in New York in 1982, bore great fruit. In his address on the ninth day of the session, the Soviet foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, delivered a statement from Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in which he pledged that the Soviet Union would not be the first to use nuclear weapons.

The following are the statement's most important points:

> What is the most important, the most urgent . . . is concern for halting the endless buildup of ever more destructive types of weapons . . . and preventing a nuclear disaster. . . .
>
> Guided by the desire to do all in its power to deliver the peoples from the threat of nuclear devastation, . . . the Soviet state solemnly declares the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics assumes an obligation not to be the first to use nuclear weapons. This obligation shall become effective immediately at the moment it is made public from the rostrum of the United Nations General Assembly. . . .
>
> The peoples of the world have the right to expect that the decision of the Soviet Union will be followed by reciprocal steps on the part of the other nuclear states. . . .
>
> In the search for measures which would actually halt the arms race, many political and public figures of various countries have recently turned to the idea of a freeze; in other words, stopping a further buildup of nuclear potentials.

This statement was the answer to the appeals and wishes of people around the world, including what I had sought in my address to the First Special Session on Disarmament in 1978 when I called upon President Jimmy Carter and Mr. Brezhnev, as the leaders of the superpowers engaged in the Cold War, to "take major risks for peace and disarmament instead of taking risks with arms."

We were told that ill health had prevented Mr. Brezhnev from attending the special session. I wanted very much to visit the Soviet Union following my return to Japan to express my thanks to him.

I immediately transmitted my wish through the Soviet Embassy in Tokyo. It issued an invitation surprisingly quickly. I had hoped the Soviet Union would allow a peace mission from Religions for Peace to go there, but for the present this invitation was only for a group from Rissho Kosei-kai. Nevertheless, some people were anxious about the proposed visit.

At that time, some people tended to regard visits by anyone to the Soviet Union as a support of communism. Others were concerned that we might be brainwashed by being shown only the good aspects of the country. But isn't it true that seeing is believing? At any rate, if I could not actually see the Soviet Union for myself, there was no way I could know what it was truly like as a country.

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.

To fear the country just because its social system and ideology were different and to gird for confrontation was no way to contribute to world peace. It is said you should use force to subdue force, but even if you pin down an opponent temporarily with formidable force, this will not bring about true peace. History tells us that inevitably the tables will be turned, again by force.

After Religions for Peace's first World Assembly in Kyoto in 1970, a number of sympathetic people in the Soviet Union were sure to participate in later world assemblies. I told myself, "The more we communicate with one another, the more surely the day will come when delegates from Religions for Peace will be able to visit the Soviet Union. No particular force will be able to prevent the exchange of religious representatives."

The first thing we had to do was to believe in Soviet people of faith. If we believed in them, they would surely believe in us. Only then could we meet and talk, opening our hearts to one another.

I spent six days in the Soviet Union starting September 22, 1982, nineteen years after my previous visit as a member of a peace delegation of religious leaders from Japan, who in the autumn of 1963 traveled to ten nations, including the United States and the Soviet Union, seeking the abolition of nuclear weapons.

We left Tokyo's Narita airport on September 22 and arrived in Moscow that evening. We were met at the airport by leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church: Metropolitan Philaret and Mr. Alexey Bouevsky, secretary of the Moscow patriarchate's department of external church affairs. Mr. Bouevsky had attended preliminary meetings for the Kyoto conference. He embraced me, rubbing his cheek against mine and saying, "I've been waiting for this moment for a long time. Welcome." He escorted me to a hotel and looked after me in various ways. In 1982, sixty-five years after the Russian Revolution, the Soviet Union seemed completely different from what it was in 1963.

"A Truly Brave Man"

The following day, we visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and met the director of the Second Far Eastern Department, with whom we spoke of our hopes for our peace mission to the Soviet Union and expressed gratitude for the invitation. Although Soviet officials can express their opinions forcefully when speaking from a political standpoint, they were careful and considerate of their guests from Japan.

That evening Metropolitan Philaret invited us to a dinner party. We toasted one another time and time again, but as we exchanged toasts we also talked. Everyone was truly congenial.

At that time the Soviet population was 280 million, of whom no more than 18 million were members of the Communist Party. But the Soviet Union had 30 million Christians and 20 million Muslims, as well as many adherents of other religions, including Buddhism.

We visited the Trinity Lavra of Saint Sergius, the spiritual center of the Russian Orthodox Church in Zagorsk (now Sergiyev Posad), and attended Mass there. I was moved by the beautiful singing of the hymns. I was told that groups of believers throng to the monastery every day from all over the Soviet Union. Since I thought that communists

regarded religion as "the opium of the people" and it had been completely outlawed, I was surprised to learn that there were so many people of faith in 1982, sixty-five years after the Revolution.

On the third day, we were guided around the Kremlin and were able to meet government officials in the Kremlin Senate, which housed the Supreme Soviet, adjacent to Lenin's Tomb. Mr. P. G. Gilashvili, a deputy chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, granted us an interview. I said, "I am encouraged by the statement made by Mr. Brezhnev delivered at the UN Special Session on Disarmament, which accords with the hopes of humankind for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Today, in the nuclear age, nothing is more important than peace. The Soviet Union, as one of the superpowers, has a decisive influence on world peace, and its responsibility and mission are great. I would remind you that the Soviet Union is a country that holds the key to the fate of humanity."

I then told him about the peace mission of Religions for Peace to China the previous May and its meeting with leading members of the Chinese government to appeal for a ban on the preemptive use of nuclear weapons, and I asked if a similar mission would be permitted to visit the Soviet Union.

I have always felt misgivings about the fact that while public opinion excoriated the United States for its nuclear weapons, there were those who unfairly made no mention of the Soviet Union's. I felt that it was illogical not to make the same demands of the Soviet Union as of the United States. Mr. Gilashvili listened to me without blinking and then gave a great sigh and replied, "It is important that you are not afraid of meeting communists. I think you a truly brave man to come here to the Kremlin and express your opinions about nuclear issues. But however much we talk companionably together, I cannot make you a communist and you cannot make me a religious person. However, although we cannot force our doctrines on each other, we can work together for peace. This is what is most important, I think."

I certainly had no idea that I might be called brave in the Kremlin, and I felt really embarrassed. During our talk I had told him that we were not appealing just to the Soviet Union for a ban on the preemptive use of nuclear weapons but had already made a similar request to the United States. I spoke frankly, but what I felt through the conversation was that the Soviets were also worried and doubtful about the United States. It thought that the United States felt invulnerable between two oceans. For that reason, Americans felt overconfident about military confrontation. One of the most important things I learned in the Soviet Union was that its people were continually anxious, not knowing when the United States might declare war against them.

Russia suffered invasions in more than three centuries, by the Mongols in the thirteenth century, led by the sons and grandsons of Genghis Khan; by Napoleon in the nineteenth century; and by Hitler in World War II, the last leaving more than twenty million people dead. The wariness Russians felt as a result toward possible aggressors was almost beyond our imagination. Therefore we must first work to dissipate that feeling.

I do not regard myself as particularly brave, but I do believe that all people, of whatever country and belief, are the children of God and the Buddha, all possessing at root the buddha-nature. As a result, I was free of fear or anxiety when visiting the Soviet Union and meeting Soviet officials.

Mr. Gilashvili at first seemed very stiff, but gradually his expression and his words lightened and we bounced from subject to subject. I felt we had gone beyond ideology or doctrine to understanding each other as human beings.

To be continued

Do You Think Positively or Negatively?

by Nichiko Niwano

As people age, their bodies develop problems in one place or another. I, too, have experienced physical pain and the slight inconvenience that comes with it. No matter how much we want to escape from such reality, it is inevitable. At these times, what comes to mind are complaints about pain, suffering, inconvenience, and the desire to be healed and return to normal. In other words, we have negative thoughts toward our current state of affairs.

In addition to such physical problems, we tend to feel disappointed when things do not happen as we wish, and view situations negatively. For instance, rainfall is welcomed as a blessing by vegetable farmers, but the same rain is a cause of resentment by people who want to put their laundry out to dry or who want to enjoy outdoor activities.

However, such thoughts of dissatisfaction as "I don't like that thing" or "Why has this happened to me?" have no bearing on reality. Why not distance yourself for a while from the emotional reaction of disliking something and try to look at it objectively, and then observe it positively? By broadening your thinking, you enrich your mind.

I have decided to accept my physical pain as a good experience that helps me become more considerate toward people who are similarly suffering.

Sickness and injuries can be painful, and at times we may think they are unjust experiences. By accepting them positively, however, from the moment we do so we not only lessen the suffering and pain of the here and now, but also start to build up the energy to lead the rest of our lives to the fullest.

Living Broadmindedly

I mentioned above that rain may be seen as a blessing or may be the cause of resentment. This is an example of how we may view rainfall, which is a natural phenomenon, and it teaches us that when we look at something from different perspectives, we certainly can find an element that makes us feel grateful, no matter how trying or painful the situation may be. The reason we can do so is that nothing in the world is without purpose.

On the basis of the teaching of the reality of all existence, that is, that phenomena and all things are manifestations of the truth, the Buddhist scholar Kazuyoshi Kino (1922–2013) said, "We must positively accept that each and every thing itself embodies ultimate truth, whether it is the fact that people are born and that they die, or any other thing that happens in this world."

In other words, there is nothing to do but accept that everything that we see, that we hear, and that we experience is, to refer to the expression of Mr. Kino, "positive, positive, absolutely positive."

I said above that we certainly can find an element that makes us feel grateful, no matter how trying or painful the situation may be. And in this sense, not only are we able to find that element, but in fact, everything we experience is a gift that, no matter how difficult it may be to accept, enriches our lives and is therefore nothing else but something for which we should feel grateful and receive positively. It is only natural, of course, that depending on the individual and on the situation, a person may not be able to immediately accept what happens with gratitude.

This is similar to some people being able to show gratitude toward their parents from early on, while others only become aware of their parents' feelings when they themselves become parents. So from one person to another, the time of gaining of awareness and the level of understanding can differ.

When we cannot accept something positively, let us try to concentrate on the point of self-reflection. When we cannot suppress the feeling of wanting to find faults with someone, we should ask ourselves, "Aren't we forgetting about kindness?" When we cannot accept reality positively, then we should ask ourselves, "Aren't we forgetting about honesty?" These are two important points, because when people look at things from the viewpoint of their own wishes, that is, their ego, they are apt to lose sight of kindness and honesty.

By looking at things positively, we can live broadmindedly and without unnecessary cares. And from that fact, it is clear which viewpoint, positive or negative, will bring us happiness. ❑

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

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 (7)

This is the 128th installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.

TEXT True regard, serene regard, / Far-reaching wise regard, / Regard of pity, compassionate regard, / Ever longed for, admired and respected!

COMMENTARY Finally the most beautiful and profound phrases of these verses unfold, which seem to be by far the best of all. The section from here to the conclusion should surely be kept in mind as a work of superior literature, too, although, of course, what is more important is to meditate upon the teaching included therein.

The five regards

True regard, serene regard, far-reaching wise regard, regard of pity, and compassionate regard are known as "the five regards." In the Sanskrit text, the words praise the eyes of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World in phrases such as "Oh, one with eyes of clarity," "Oh, one with eyes filled with compassion," and so on. These figures of speech employ the eyes to represent ways of seeing things, so Kumarajiva decisively translated the word "eyes" as "regard" (*kuan* in Chinese). It is used in the sense of what

we mean when we refer to a way of regarding the world or regarding human life.

The five regards are not independent of one another, but rather a single coherent view of the world and human life which proceeds logically and inevitably from true regard to serene regard, from serene regard to far-reaching wise regard, and so on, so please understand it in this way.

• *True regard*. This means a worldview of Truth. This is "the truth of emptiness (*shunyata*) which has been explained in detail earlier. The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World is extolled for being one who possesses this true vision of the world.

• *Serene regard.* If one possesses "true regard," as explained above, even when one looks upon phenomena (temporariness), one becomes able to take a view of things that is perfectly clear and devoid of illusion, and with no admixture of egoistic attachment to the self. Such a view of temporariness is like the eyes of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World and is "serene regard."

• *Far-reaching wise regard*. If one perceives clearly that everything in the universe is empty in essence ("true regard") and sees its "temporariness" with pure eyes, having no impurities from one's own defilements in view ("serene regard"), then, combining these two views (or regards), the profound view of things in accord with the truth of the Middle will be generated naturally. When this occurs, one is bound to arrive at a way of seeing things in which one is united with everything in the universe. One sees oneself in all things within the universe; one sees within oneself all things in the universe. When you see a flower, you become one with that flower; when you see a cloud, you become one with the cloud; when you see a person, you become one with that person. You spontaneously come to the recognition that you are united with everything in this universe. This is the absolute correct way of seeing things and the way of seeing what is boundless. This is "far-reaching wise regard."

• *Regard of pity*. "Pity" is the deeply felt feeling of sorrow for another's suffering or misfortune, as if it were one's own, the feeling always accompanied by the irresistible urge to help the person escape from this suffering. That is, it is the desire "to remove suffering" (*bakku*).

If one possesses "far-reaching wise regard" which sees the union of all other beings or things and oneself, then no matter what one may undertake, this "regard of pity" is bound to spring forth. In other words, one will not consciously think how pitiful someone is, but there will naturally come forth a heartfelt desire to reach out and help. This is the true feeling of pity.

• *Compassionate regard*. It should be clear that compassion is the feeling that naturally wells up when one sees someone and wants to make the person happy somehow. In contrast with pity, which is the desire "to remove suffering," this is affection, that is, the desire "to give pleasure to others" (*yoraku*). Such "compassionate regard," too, cannot but emerge naturally from "far-reaching wise regard" that sees all things in union with oneself.

King Prasenajit of the Kaushala Kingdom, feeling a gap between the Buddha's altruistic teaching and the king's own conclusion that "no one is more beloved than oneself," immediately went to the Buddha to entreat for his teaching. It is said that the Buddha taught him as follows: "Yes, that is true. There is nothing one has more affection for than oneself. Therefore, if one truly realizes how beloved oneself is, then one must also realize that everyone else in the world is the same. If one recognizes that, in turn, one must have affection for them."

If one has attained a penetrating view that one is united with all other beings, one cannot help loving others as one loves oneself. Then one will think only of how to make others happy, wishing to do one thing and another for others. This is the "compassionate regard" of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World.

• *Ever longed for, ever admired and respected*. This phrase means that we must always keep it in mind to have as superb a view of life and the world as those "five regards" that the Cry Regarder holds and to look upon his wonderful eyes with respect, taking him as our model. This is extremely important. As ordinary people, if we merely hold the ideal in our heart, we may fall into indolence or even lose our direction.

That is why we need a definite model. If we have a living example to serve as our guide, then we have something we can always look upon with respect and reverence. It becomes fuel for courage, and we are always able to determine the direction in which we ought to progress.

As mentioned earlier, all of the bodhisattvas serve as such examples and models for us. This is how we must receive the admonition to always entreat, long for, and look upon the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World with respect and reverence.

TEXT Pure and serene in radiance, / Wisdom's sun destroying darkness, / Subduer of woes of storm and fire, / Who illumines all the world!

COMMENTARY This too is a beautiful verse.

Because of his penetrating wisdom and immense compassion, the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World always emits from his body brilliant rays of pure and serene light permeated by nonself, in other words, a halo.

In the world at large, there are people who emit such rays of light at any time. They seem to illuminate everything

around them and emit warmth to those around them, and one feels happy just being around such a person. And just as fragrance penetrates, before long one will receive that person's influence. That person is none other than the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World.

Moreover, the light of his wisdom destroys the darkness (of delusions). As often mentioned earlier, darkness disappears as soon as true wisdom's sun shines upon it, because darkness is nothing more than the state in which the delusion of attachment to the self covers one's eyes that discern the real aspect of all things, and the delusion has originally no substance.

When delusion has vanished, various misfortunes too will be destroyed, and the whole of society will become bright. The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World can be compared to this kind of light, which shines forth upon the whole human world.

TEXT Law of pity, thunder quivering, / Compassion wondrous as a great cloud, / Pouring spiritual rain like nectar, / Quenching the flames of distress!

COMMENTARY

Admonition springing from compassion

This is surely an elegant, well-turned verse.

• *Law of pity, thunder quivering*. These words commend the character and the great power of the precepts of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World. By precepts is meant such admonitions as those against taking life and stealing.

The worth of precepts depends on the fundamental spirit of the person who issues (or gives) them. The value of rules, regulations, laws, and so forth, depends on the spirit of those who establish and issue them. The more that selfish and egoistic feelings are blended into the spirit, the lower the value of such rules, regulations, and laws becomes. Even if the formulators have an elevated state of mind, it is not good to force people to observe difficult laws or rules without being considerate of them. It goes without saying that admonitions based upon such a self-centered and self-satisfied premise are inferior in their value.

On the other hand, the precepts of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World arise from his mind of "compassion," through which he feels pity for all living beings and wholly desires to remove their suffering. His precepts are the embodiment of "compassion." This is the meaning of the "law of pity."

Because they are precepts based on compassion, which is a great form of selfless love, they have the power to reverberate within the human breast like a roll of thunder, and one cannot but obey them respectfully, with awe. This is the meaning of "thunder quivering." This is a model for those who are in positions of leadership.

• *Compassion wondrous as a great cloud, pouring spiritual rain like nectar, quenching the flames of distress*. "Wondrous compassion" indicates an inexpressible gratefulness of the mind that desires to make all living beings happy. This is a description that is filled with feeling (or realization). It is just like a great rain cloud that spreads across the whole sky above the earth where people are suffering from persistent drought.

With this mind of great benevolence, the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World pours the rain of the Wonderful Dharma like nectar on to living beings and extirpates the flames of their defilements, just as the rain falling from that great cloud reinvigorates withered plants. In ancient India, nectar was held to be the drink of the gods, and it was said that if one drank it, one would become immortal.

The Wonderful Dharma is truly like nectar in that it has an indescribable flavor. Whoever savors it will experience supreme delight. Moreover, anyone who could master completely the Wonderful Dharma in its study and practice would be able to obtain a steadfast spiritual power that is neither afraid of anything nor destroyed by anything. The Wonderful Dharma is truly "spiritual rain like nectar."

TEXT In disputes before a magistrate, / Or in fear in battle's array, / If he thinks of the Cry Regarder's power / All his enemies will be routed.

COMMENTARY Here we must read between the lines.

• *In disputes before a magistrate*. The surface meaning here is some dispute placed in the hands of a court for a decision, but it implies such troublesome matters as verbal arguments, quarrels conducted via letters or documents, or asking for the intervention of a third party to help settle such an affair. If anything, these conflicts follow peaceful means, but they too can be rather distressing.

There are quarrels between individuals as well as conflicts between groups. There is also strife between nations. They are all unpleasant.

When they cannot be settled by peaceful means, they may turn into violent affairs. When this occurs between nations, war breaks out. This is truly fearful. "Or in fear in battle's array" means that one may even be thrown into fear by a threat to one's very survival.

All disputes, large or small, originate in the conflict between "adherence to the self" and "attachment to the self." If everyone embraces a selfish adherence, and is unwilling to even slightly compromise one's own rights, and is determined to persist in one's desires no matter what, then selfish-attachment is bound to clash with ego-attachment.

Moreover, such disputes, large or small, come from one's own merciless mind, which does not care what becomes of others, and the other's intolerant mind, which cannot definitely forgive others. When such mercilessness and intolerance clash, conflict is sure to arise.

Therefore, at times when we are unfortunately drawn into the whirlpool of conflict, we must remember the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World. The bodhisattva has made a great vow to regard and recognize the cries of all people's minds and to sacrifice himself to remove their sufferings. We must remember his gentle mind, his self-sacrificing spirit, and his benevolent face, full of warmth.

Responsive communion

If we recall the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, our minds become naturally one with his mind. If we do so, our minds will commune with the mind of the bodhisattva, and this is what we mean by the word "response" (*kanno*).

As a result, we will mutually generate feelings of warmth and tolerance. We can rid ourselves of disputatiousness caused by egoism and attain a peaceful state of mind. We will feel easy even in conflicts and disputes, and accordingly these will be brought to a peaceful settlement.

All in all, a compassionate mind and the spirit of tolerance do not bring about conflict, or bring conflict to a settlement. We must realize that this, in fact, is the true meaning here.

TEXT His is the wondrous voice, voice of the world-regarder, / Brahma-voice, voice of the rolling tide, / Voice all world-surpassing, / Therefore ever to be kept in mind,

COMMENTARY

The five wondrous voices

What beautiful reverberations echo in the heart from reading these lines—the wondrous voice, voice of the world-regarder, Brahma-voice, voice of the rolling tide, voice all world-surpassing! We can see that the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World is the perfected embodiment of a variety of the most wondrous voices. The literary expression of this section is truly excellent.

• *Wondrous voice*. As explained in chapter 24, "The Bodhisattva Wonder Sound," the wondrous voice (or the wonder sound) means the words of Truth. The wondrous voice does not refer to a theoretically clear-cut and prosaic interpretation of the truth, but rather the words of truth that with indescribable expressiveness and warmth cannot but soak into people's minds and jolt them.

This is extremely important. Shakyamuni's teachings all spring forth from the truth of emptiness, that is, the real aspect of all things. These teachings (the Wonderful Dharma), by means of Shakyamuni's mind of great benevolence and great compassion, were expounded in words whose reverberations are sometimes mellow, sometimes gentle, sometimes solemn, and sometimes sharp. It is precisely because of this that they impress upon the minds of the people, draw them near and guide them with great strength.

Therefore, it is not true that all the words of truth are "the wondrous voice." There is a world of difference in timbre between how a beginner and a virtuoso play the piano, despite the fact that they are striking the same keyboard. In the same way, the real sense of "the wondrous voice" is the words of truth preached by a superior preacher, and it is the discourse on the Dharma which invariably plays upon the heartstrings of those who hear it.

• *Voice of the world-regarder*. This has been explained previously.

• *Brahma-voice*. Brahma has a sense of "pure, serene, tranquil" and therefore this term corresponds with the "serene regard" mentioned earlier in the section on the five regards. In other words, the Brahma-voice means the words that, with pure and clear resonance and without the illusion of the small self, penetrate into people's minds and reverberate therein.

• *Voice of the rolling tide*. The roaring sound of the sea is very solemn; it seems to be creeping up from the bottom of the sea, and it travels a long way away. This phrase captures quite well one aspect of the Wonderful Dharma, which is the wondrous voice.

• *Voice all world-surpassing*. His voice is one that can overcome the world. What is called "world" here indicates a world that is filled with a large variety of illusions and suffering. To "surpass" such a world means to have supernatural power that enables one to overcome any illusion and suffering. Therefore, the "voice all world-surpassing" means that the words of truth that come forth from the mouth of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World extinguish all the suffering of the world.

• *Therefore ever to be kept in mind*. All living beings should ever keep in mind the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, meaning that they must always consider the true wisdom which is his substance, recall to mind his image of great benevolence and great compassion, and always aspire to be like him.

TEXT With never a doubting thought. / Regarder of the World's Cries, pure and holy, / In pain, distress, death, calamity, / Able to be a sure reliance,

COMMENTARY *With never a doubting thought*. We must pay particular attention to the fact that the Buddha

emphasizes this phrase. The reason is that it is closely connected with earlier phrases concerning those who "hear of this Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World," those who "with all their mind call upon his name," and those who "keep the name of that Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World."

Hearing of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World

Only when one has read this far in this chapter is one likely to clearly understand that the Buddha's words "hear of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World" signifies explicitly that he is not a substantial bodhisattva. In other words, he is "pure and holy" in the sense of the Law-body. As has been explained before, the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World symbolizes true wisdom and also symbolizes the virtue of taking on the suffering of others out of great compassion. As a result, "to hear" of this Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World means to hear of and know the true wisdom symbolized by this bodhisattva and the wonderful acts of his virtue of great benevolence and great compassion.

Calling upon his name with all one's mind

However, at the level of just hearing of him and knowing his stature, one has still not attained salvation. One has simply acknowledged the fact, but has not yet deepened that awareness through experience to the point that the person's mind has become united with the Cry Regarder's true wisdom and his virtue of great benevolence and great compassion.

That is why the religious practice of "calling upon his name with all one's mind" becomes essential. By bearing it in mind with one's whole heart, and devotedly intoning his name, one gradually becomes united with the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World. The wisdom of truth and the virtue of great benevolence and compassion come to fill one's entire body to overflowing. Only when this happens does true salvation become manifest.

Those who keep the name of that bodhisattva

Moreover, in achieving true salvation, one does not simply experience such a wonderful state of mind every once in a while, but must always maintain it. Those who accomplish that state are "those who keep the name of that Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World."

We must awaken to the fact that "hearing," "calling upon," and "keeping" tacitly signify the order by which religious faith deepens.

The first step in finding the Buddhist faith is "hearing" the teachings of the Buddha. But to come to a standstill at that level, one cannot be called a Buddhist believer yet. One has to practice devotedly in order to impress these teachings on the mind and in conduct. It is essential that one should devotedly call upon the name of the Buddha and the bodhisattvas. By doing this, one will first become united with the virtues of the Buddha and the bodhisattvas. With such an inner experience, one has to make further efforts and progress toward maintaining constantly that state of mind. This effort is what is meant by the practice of "keeping."

Making mention of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, Shakyamuni has preached the wondrousness of the wisdom of truth and the working of great benevolence and great compassion. Because he cannot point out the bodhisattva in visible form and say, "Look at this," he said to the multitude, "With never a doubting thought," to remind them of their understanding of and faith in the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World.

• *Pure and holy.* Literally, "a holy person of pure body" is meant by this phrase, but here we should interpret it as meaning the "Law-body" (*dharma-kaya*). (See the May/June 1992 issue of *Dharma World.*)

• *Sure reliance*. This signifies a foundation of devotion to depend on.

TEXT Perfect in all merit, / With compassionate eyes beholding all, / Boundless ocean of blessings! / Prostrate let us revere him."

COMMENTARY *Boundless ocean of blessings*. This too is a memorable phrase. From long ago people have chosen it as a quotation for hanging scrolls. The ocean absorbs all rivers, is filled with water, and cultivates life without bound. In the same way, if one possesses the wisdom of truth and the virtue of great benevolence and great compassion, one will be able to gather all happiness and cultivate it boundlessly. One can truly compare this merit to a great expanse of ocean.

• *Prostrate let us revere him*. This phrase suggests paying reverence while touching one's forehead to the ground or floor.

TEXT Thereupon the Bodhisattva Stage Holder rose from his seat, went before the Buddha and said: "World-honored One! If any living being hears of the sovereign work and the all-sided transcendent powers [shown] in this chapter of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, it should be known that the merits of this man are not a few."

COMMENTARY *The Bodhisattva Stage Holder*. This name "Stage Holder" is said to be another name for the Bodhisattva

Kshitigarbha (or Jizo in Japanese). He is the bodhisattva who was entrusted by the Buddha with the task of relieving the suffering of living beings during the interim between the Buddha's entering into extinction (nirvana) and the appearance in the *saha* world of the Bodhisattva Maitreya as the next Buddha. Within folk religion, he is venerated as the savior of children and their departed spirits, but actually he is the Bodhisattva Stage Holder who protects all living beings during an extremely long period (5.67 billion years) when no buddha lives in this world. It seems to be very significant that he appears when the Buddha's preaching of the Lotus Sutra is coming to a close.

All-sided

• *All-sided*. Two ideographs (*p'u-men*) are employed for this term in the original Chinese text. *P'u* means "universal, widespread, omnipresent." *Men* signifies "gateway, entrance" and in an extension of these meanings, "house." *Men* is also used in other combinations to refer to categories or divisions used to classify things into groups or types. All together *p'u-men* means "universally in every house" and "in every area of human concern." In other words, it means "freely throughout this world, in each and every problem, in each and every situation."

The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World is "all-sided" in that he appears at will throughout this world, in every problem and every situation, in the appropriate form for each.

TEXT While the Buddha preached this chapter of the All-Sided One, the eighty-four thousand living beings in the assembly all set their minds upon Perfect Enlightenment, with which nothing can compare.

COMMENTARY *With which nothing can compare*. Since there is no equivalent, this phrase emphasizes the meaning of "precious beyond comparison." Just as Perfect Enlightenment (wisdom of the Buddha) is also called the "supreme, right, and complete enlightenment," it is unsurpassable and invaluable wisdom, beyond comparison in being able to discern the real aspect of all things in the universe.

This wisdom of the Buddha is not set aside for special people, but is equally accessible to all, if they but have a great wish to attain it and practice the teachings single-mindedly.

With this, chapter 25, "The All-Sidedness of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World," comes to a close, so let us summarize the main teachings of this chapter.

Becoming one with the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World

First, because this bodhisattva symbolizes the wisdom of truth as well as great benevolence and great compassion, he is not the object upon whom one merely relies and asks for salvation by means of the power of others. We must do our utmost to become united with the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World. We ourselves must become the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World.

Precise insight and leadership ability

Second, if one is at all in a position of leadership, one must possess the ability to lead others at will, in that one can, like the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, discern the voice of the mind of every person, discover the most appropriate course for that person in that situation, and lead the person to that path.

The spirit of accepting others' sufferings based on compassion

Third, excellence in leadership alone is insufficient, for the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World is one who has perfected the mind of compassion and willingly takes on the sufferings and hardships of others.

Visualizing the merciful face

Fourth, the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World symbolizes a peaceful, broad-minded, gentle, warm-hearted character. So everyone should try to remember and keep in mind the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World when they encounter various hardships and disputes, or when a wicked mind arises in one form or another. Then, one's mind will naturally become congenial and cheerful, one will be able to composedly cope with any tribulation, conflict will be settled spontaneously, and a wicked mind will disappear in an instant.

The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World is a goal

Fifth, we must aim at reaching the same state as that of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, who has excellent wisdom, virtue, and supernatural power. For this purpose, we must follow the wonderful Dharma taught by Shakyamuni and practice the teachings without negligence and without retrogression.

It seems that, from these teachings, the true intention of the Buddha in this chapter must have been well understood by readers.

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.