

DHARMA WORLD

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FEATURES: Buddhism's One Vehicle in a World of Many Religions

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

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Interreligious Dialogue from the Viewpoint of the One Vehicle

by Koichi Kawamoto

Dialogue with other religions, one of Rissho Kosei-kai's main activities, is based on the idea of the One Vehicle expounded in the Lotus Sutra.

Religious pluralism, which does not recognize that any one religion is superior to another, is the ideal model for interreligious dialogue. On the other hand, from the standpoint of salvation, an inclusivist standpoint breaks away from exclusivism, which sees only one's own religion as having the power to save people, and draws out the worth in other religions, but nevertheless, it affirms that in the end people are saved by their own religion.

The editors of *Dharma World* have given me the task of asking whether this inclusivist standpoint is latent in the teachings of the One Vehicle, and whether a discrepancy has arisen between those teachings and interreligious dialogue.

My answer is a firm "No."

In the "Skillful Means" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha revealed the One Buddha Vehicle, the teaching that would bring all living beings to a realization of their inherent buddhahood: "Śāriputra! The Tathāgata, by means of the One Buddha-vehicle, preaches to all living beings the Law; there is no other vehicle, neither a second nor a third" (*The Threefold Lotus Sutra* [Kosei Publishing, 1975], 60).

Here, "second" refers to the two vehicles of the *śrāvakas*, ordained practitioners whose sole purpose is their own enlightenment, not that of others, and the *pratyekabuddhas*, who seek to break the

bonds of illusion through their own efforts alone, without the guidance of a teacher. "Third" refers to these two vehicles plus that of the bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism, who work compassionately for the benefit of others. This means that in terms of the Three Vehicles, the bodhisattva vehicle does not include either the *śrāvaka* or the *pratyekabuddha* vehicle. The One Vehicle of the Lotus Sutra, however, respects all three while revealing an absolute common truth that goes beyond all distinctions. This is expressed in the phrase "opening up the three and revealing the one."

At the root of the teaching of the One Vehicle in the Lotus Sutra is the idea of the universal presence of buddha-nature. Though the word *buddha-nature* itself does not appear in the Lotus Sutra, the ability of all people, including *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, to attain buddhahood because they are endowed with buddha-nature is taught there in the form of predictions concerning buddhahood. The sutra confirms that all people everywhere will eventually become the ideal perfected beings taught in Buddhism, and reveres them. The world of the Three Vehicles possesses an element of the danger of giving rise to perceptions of superiority or inferiority between different religions and ideas. The One Vehicle of the Lotus Sutra, on the other hand, does not discriminate but receives all equally, its standard being a spirit that reveres all of those who hold to different ideas and the religions of others. In other words, it is an affirmation of diversity.

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The twentieth chapter of the Lotus Sutra draws the picture of Bodhisattva Never Despise, who continued to revere the buddha-nature within all of those he met (the two vehicles that opposed Mahayana) despite their revilement and abuse, saying that they would all become buddhas in the future. This also shows the sutra's strong commitment to respect all people and to exclude none.

From the perspective of the One Vehicle of the Lotus Sutra, the ideological basis for our activities concerning interreligious dialogue must be to respect all people over and beyond the framework of Buddhism while at the same time recognizing, as Buddhists, that all people possess buddha-nature. Moreover, the type of world we construct together as we affirm positions different from our own and accept a diversity of people is of extreme importance.

Today many problems have arisen in the world that have their origins to some extent in religion. People of religion are required to seek ways to contribute to a better world by studying with humility the circumstances of those problems and their religious background, and deepening mutual understanding between religions through dialogue. What is needed above all is for religious dialogue founded on the idea of the One Vehicle, which begins with people being strong in their own faith while affirming and respecting the faith of others. □

One and All: The Single Vehicle and Universal Salvation in Tendai Buddhism

by Matthew McMullen

The single vehicle signifies the ultimate truth that, despite the differences in our abilities and knowledge, everyone, from the most advanced bodhisattvas to the lowliest denizens of hell, will eventually attain enlightenment.

Tendai commentaries and treatises are filled with numerical expressions. The “five times,” for instance, refers to five distinct moments during the Buddha’s lifetime when he preached the teachings of a particular sutra, beginning with the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* immediately following his awakening and ending with the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* on the day of his death. The “four teachings” are the classification of the Buddha’s teachings, or Dharma, into four increasingly comprehensive categories according to both the content of these teachings and the method through which they are disseminated. One also finds various enumerations of vehicles. In addition to the polemical “Great Vehicle” (Mahāyāna) and “Lesser Vehicle” (Hīnayāna), Buddhist commentators often parse these vehicles into sets of two, three, four, five, seven, ten, and, of course, the one vehicle.

Unlike other doctrinal paradigms, however, these vehicles do not denote specific teachings or practices, nor do they specify a time or location where the Buddha preached such teachings. Rather, the category of “vehicle” is instrumental. In other words, vehicles are metaphors for the soteriological process of moving from this world, with all of its familiar forms of suffering,

to the incomprehensible extinction of *nirvāṇa*. A vehicle, whether in the form of a teaching, practice, or action, is a means to an end. In the context of the vehicle metaphor, the one, or single, vehicle simply denotes all possible means for obtaining buddhahood and, therefore, the salvation of all sentient beings.

Accounting for the completeness of the single vehicle was a primary concern for medieval Tendai intellectuals. According to their worldview, all teachings or practices must be subsumed within the single vehicle to ensure that, ultimately, every being attains salvation. However, one might ask, is this ancient metaphor relevant to our contemporary world? Can the all-embracing notion of the single vehicle serve as a model for inclusion in the diverse religious landscape of today? Expanding the meaning of the single vehicle to include new traditions is not unprecedented in Japanese Buddhism. A brief examination of previous efforts to broaden the single, universal vehicle to incorporate new perspectives may shed some light on how this concept could be applicable to religion in the modern world.

Although the language of vehicles is ubiquitous in East Asian Buddhist texts, the Tendai notion of the single vehicle is rooted in the “Skillful Means”

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chapter of the Lotus Sutra. In a verse on the meaning of the single vehicle, the Buddha exclaims that in all directions throughout the cosmos “there is only the Dharma of the single vehicle” (*Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* [hereafter T], ed. Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabe, 100 vols. [Daizō Shuppan, 1924–34], 262.9.8a17–19. For an English translation, see Tsugunari Kubo and Akira Yuyama, trans., *The Lotus Sūtra*, BDK English Tripiṭaka 13–I [Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1993], 39). Although it is possible to discuss multiple vehicles for propagating the Dharma, the Buddha explains, these divisions are simply a skillful means to assist sentient beings along the path to awakening. Ultimately, the single vehicle of the Buddha Dharma necessarily includes all teachings preached at all times in all locations. Therefore, the single vehicle is universally applicable to all sentient beings.

In his *Tendai Hokkeshūgishū* (Collected doctrines of the Tendai Lotus school), Gishin, the second patriarch of

the Japanese Tendai school, elaborates on the Lotus Sutra concept of the Dharma as a single vehicle. In his third chapter, on the meaning of the single vehicle, Gishin asserts that all Buddhist teachings are subsumed within this term. *One*, he explains, means nondual, or that which cannot be divided into two or more parts, and he defines *vehicle* as simply a means of transportation. Thus the single vehicle is a universal and all-encompassing vehicle that necessarily accommodates all beings (T 2366.74.269a–271a1; for an English translation, see Paul Swanson, *The Collected Teachings of the Tendai Lotus School*, BDK English Tripitaka 97–2 [Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1995], 49–61).

Gishin was attempting to reconcile the traditional notion of three distinct vehicles for those who directly hear the voice of the Buddha (*śrāvakas*), those who awaken on their own (*pratyekabuddhas*), and those who work for the awakening of others (bodhisattvas) with the Lotus Sutra doctrine of a single vehicle for all beings. In doing so, his commentary on the meaning of the single vehicle brings up one of the fundamental conundrums of this doctrine. How can the Buddha Dharma be universally applicable when the differences between the levels of knowledge and spiritual capabilities among sentient beings are so obvious? In other words, how does the concept of the single vehicle maintain that the Buddha's teachings are ultimately true while accounting for the myriad of differences in how these teachings are received by a diverse array of beings?

According to the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha adapts his teachings to the needs and abilities of the individual. An advanced bodhisattva does not hear the words of the sutra in the same manner as the typically foolish human. The same can be said for other creatures of the Buddhist cosmos, such as dogs, insects, ghosts, gods, and so forth. Therefore, depending on one's personal situation, the Dharma is understood in different

ways. However, the objective is the same: to save all beings regardless of their status or rank along the path toward buddhahood. The single vehicle signifies the ultimate truth that, despite the differences in our abilities and knowledge, everyone, from the most advanced bodhisattvas to the lowliest denizens of hell, will eventually attain enlightenment. Gishin concluded that there are countless variations in teachings, practices, and the capabilities of individuals, but the Buddha's intent is to speak to all beings through any number of teachings and practices. The means for transmitting this intent and its ultimate resolution to guide all beings to buddhahood is called the single vehicle of the Dharma.

A couple of generations after Gishin, another Tendai monk, named Annen, expanded on the classical Tendai definition of the single vehicle to include newly imported Buddhist texts and rituals. Annen inherited a trove of sutras, commentaries, and ritual manuals from his predecessors. Most of these texts concerned new teachings and practices related to the recitation of mantras and had only recently been translated or composed in China. Annen's vast body of writing primarily addresses the relation between these new mantra teachings (*shingon*, in Japanese) and the Tendai system of teachings.

The problem with incorporating these new teachings into the Tendai system was that the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, the main sutra of the mantra teachings, declared itself to have been preached by Mahāvairocana Buddha, not Śākyamuni Buddha. Furthermore, unlike the Lotus Sutra and *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, the mantra teachings were not preached at a particular time or location. Rather, they were extraneous to the four-teachings and five-times paradigm of the Tendai school.

To resolve this problem, Annen invoked the concept of the single vehicle. Regardless of which teaching one

follows, whether the perfect teachings of the Lotus Sutra or the timeless mantra teachings of the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, all teachings are merely manifestations of the single vehicle of the Buddha Dharma. Therefore, specific teachings differ as they pertain to the needs of the individual, but all teachings lead to the same goal of universal salvation (T 2396.75.388c3–18).

Annen's synthesis of the mantra teachings with the traditional Tendai classification of teachings addressed the

question of whether or not the single vehicle could accommodate new perspectives on religious thought and practice. Like Gishin and other commentators on the Lotus Sutra, Annen understood the single vehicle as a means to universal salvation. The details of how one boards this vehicle depend on the circumstances of the individual. However, ultimately, all beings will be liberated from suffering through the single vehicle of the Dharma.

As a metaphor for universal salvation, one could interpret the single vehicle as a concept intended to be inclusive of all religious traditions. In medieval Japan, Tendai intellectuals employed the notion of a single vehicle to account for the diversity of teachings and practices available to them at the time. However, the term also had a polemical purpose. By claiming the mantle of universal salvation, the doctrine of the single vehicle was deemed superior to the doctrines of other schools. This assertion exposed an inherent contradiction in the concept of the single vehicle. If all vehicles for attaining buddhahood are included within the single vehicle, does this not render other interpretations of the Buddhist path inferior? In other words, if the universality of the single vehicle makes it superior to other doctrines, such as the notion that there are three vehicles for attaining buddhahood or that the mantra teachings constitute a new vehicle of the Buddha Dharma, then it does not completely account for other perspectives regarding the Buddhist path and, consequently, is not universal.

A similar problem arises when applying the single-vehicle concept to religious pluralism in contemporary society. As an instrument for universal salvation, the single vehicle must be comprehensive in order to be complete, or perfect. Thus, it must accommodate all people regardless of their knowledge, spiritual capability, or institutional affiliation. However, what if one does not accept the premise of universal salvation or share the same goal of liberation from suffering? Would this exclude such a person from the objectives of the single vehicle? If individuals who reject the concept of the single vehicle are nonetheless saved by its all-encompassing passage to buddhahood, then this doctrine of universal salvation does not take into consideration their personal religious aspirations (or lack thereof) and cannot be said to be universal.

In the worldview of medieval scholastics, this possibility would never have been considered an option. Although there were a number of competing doctrines and practices at their disposal, for the most part they presumed a similar soteriological presupposition that suffering is something that must be overcome, either through one's own commitment to practice or through devotion to the Buddha's teachings. In the modern context, however, different metaphors are used to explain abstract theories of salvation. The notion of a single vehicle makes sense for Buddhists, but it might not resonate with practitioners of other faiths that utilize an alternative metaphorical language. By attempting to subsume other religious traditions within the single vehicle, we risk repeating the contradiction that the universal nature of the single vehicle makes it superior to other vehicles.

On the other hand, as an ideal signifying a means to an ultimate goal of salvation (whatever that goal might be), the metaphor of the single vehicle could potentially be grounds for interreligious dialogue. Simply asserting that the single vehicle embraces all religious traditions might be interpreted as a tacit dismissal of the teachings, practices, and beliefs of non-Buddhist

traditions. However, divorced from the specific doctrines of any particular religion, the single vehicle as a universal signifier could serve as a model for transcending the more mundane differences between religious traditions. In other words, modern-day proponents of the single-vehicle doctrine are faced with a similar conundrum that Gishin and Annen were forced to address over a millennium ago: How can the path to salvation universally encompass all beings if our individual religious aspirations and abilities so drastically differ?

Ultimately, the aim of religious pluralism should not merely be the acceptance of diversity for the sake of generating interreligious dialogue, although this is no doubt a noble endeavor. As an ideal, the single vehicle of the Dharma promises that, in spite of our numerous differences, all human beings can overcome the obstacles of our given circumstances to achieve liberation. The challenge is to discover a mutual language for expressing this soteriological process. For medieval Tendai commentators, this language was the "single vehicle." But in a more diverse and globalized society, the significance of the vehicle metaphor is still uncertain. □

Tiantai, Tendai, and the Lotus Sutra: Religious Diversity and Change

by Aaron P. Proffitt

Religious texts are not inert. They have a kind of life of their own, as they are continually reinterpreted by later generations of disciples. This is especially the case for the Lotus Sutra, as within its pages we see a number of distinct views on a variety of topics—religious diversity and change in particular.

As a university professor in religious studies, one of the major concerns I see students struggling with is the question of religious diversity. “If there are so many different religions, which one is right?” These days my initial response is to ask them why is religion singled out, why is religion special? For example, we do not ask such questions of language. Which is more “correct”: Hello? *Nihao?* *Konnichiwa?* *Annyeonghaseyo?* When you put the question that way, a kind of absurdity emerges. With language, we accept diversity as a matter of fact: people in different places and times do things differently.

Following this example, then, for the sake of discussion, I look to a single religion, let’s say Christianity, and discuss the different beliefs and practices among different groups: Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Lutheran, Southern Baptist, Anglican, and so on. An Oxford University graduate student in theology and a Grand Wizard of the KKK might both self-identify as Christian, and yet they are unlikely to agree upon much else. In what sense are they both Christians? To account for religious diversity, some scholars of Christianity have begun to use the term *Christianities*, for example. The same is the case in

Buddhist Studies. For some time now, scholars have wondered if instead of a singular Buddhism, we are, rather, dealing with different Buddhisms, distinct religions under the neologism “Buddhism.”

Another related issue is the question of religion and change. Religious professionals and scholars are often guilty of speaking of religion as if it were this timeless and unchanging thing that stands apart from human culture. Students often bring this common misconception to class and initially seem confused at just how much traditions and cultures change overtime. Whether I am teaching a class on Zen, Pure Land, or Tantric Buddhism, or courses on Japanese or East Asian religions, time and again, students confront the ongoing transformation and diversity of Buddhist practices and concepts: Does enlightenment take aeons, or can it be achieved in one lifetime? Is awakening something I achieve through my own efforts, or is it something that the buddhas and bodhisattvas and gods are actively helping me achieve? Should I meditate? Should I not meditate? Which sutras should I read? How are different lineages related to one another? And so on.

On the first day of class in my Introduction to Buddhism course, I present a summary of the material we will be covering, from South Asia to East Asia, from Theravada to Vajrayana, and so on. Students look confused at first: “How can all of these things be Buddhism?” I do not answer their question on the first day because that question is something that will be answered over the course of three to four months of readings, lectures, and site visits. Some students will come away with some notion of how Buddhism coheres, while others will see the inherent “emptiness” of the label *Buddhism* itself. I would like to suggest that the Buddhist tradition itself may provide new ways for thinking about these questions.

Intra-Buddhist diversity and interreligious diversity have been major areas of concern for the Buddhist tradition as far back as we are able to see. Buddhists describe the Buddha as a doctor who prescribes particular remedies for particular ailments. Perhaps this characterization is a remnant of the memory of the Buddha as formed by the early Buddhist community, as monks sat in awe at the pedagogical prowess of their great teacher, the Buddha. Or perhaps this way of thinking about the Buddha was one tool that later generations of Buddhists used to deal with changes in the Buddhist tradition, one way for Buddhists to come to terms with religious otherness.

In this short essay, I will suggest that the Lotus Sutra, as we have access to it now, represents a distillation of the

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efforts of some Mahayana Buddhists to come to terms with religious differences among their peers. As a result, the traditions that have grown out of the Lotus share this concern for dealing with religious difference and change. I will first present a few of the ways the Lotus Sutra responds to religious difference, and then I will examine ways in which the Chinese Tiantai and Japanese Tendai traditions built upon this foundation.

The Lotus Sutra is one of the most important scriptures in East Asia, and yet it was only marginally important for Tibetan Buddhists, and the text's importance in ancient India is a matter of scholarly debate. In the first chapter of the Lotus, a group of the Buddha's disciples leave before the Buddha has finished his teaching and thus do not hear the Lotus Sutra. Scholars of Buddhism view this introduction as providing an answer to an assumed question the early readers of the sutra may have had as to why they had never heard of this teaching. Scholars of Indian Buddhism recognize that the Mahayana was not a major school during the time when those texts we define as Mahayana sutras were being written down and compiled (ca. 100 BCE–100 CE). Therefore, in many Mahayana texts we see what might be described as defensiveness about the significance of these teachings, the Lotus Sutra included. The account in the first chapter indicating that many disciples left before the teaching was delivered may have served as an explanation for why some Buddhists had not heard of the Lotus Sutra. In other words, the Lotus

Sutra presents itself not as an obscure doctrine upheld by a Buddhist minority group, but as a secret teaching revealed initially only to the most dedicated and advanced of the Buddha's students.

Religious texts are not inert. They have a kind of life of their own, as they are continually reinterpreted by later generations of disciples. This is especially the case for the Lotus Sutra, as within its pages we see a number of distinct views on a variety of topics—religious diversity and change in particular. While the text may begin with a clear insider versus outsider view—those who cherish the Lotus versus those who do not—the further one reads into the text, new perspectives emerge. Later chapters reveal that all Buddhists, and

in fact, all beings of all traditions, are always-already en route to buddhahood. According to the Lotus, though we may not know it yet, all of us are already bodhisattvas on the way to being buddhas. This view is sometimes referred to as “hierarchical universalism,” and in some circles may be referred to as the “many paths, one mountain” view that all difference is only an illusion covering up a more real unity.

Perhaps the most famous example of this view is the Parable of the Burning House in chapter 3. In this parable a father comes home to see his house engulfed in flames. Try as he might, he cannot convince his ignorant children to leave the house. So he uses expedient means to trick them into leaving,

telling them that they will receive a deer cart, an oxcart, or a goat cart if only they will leave the house. Excited by the gifts they will receive, the children run outside. What they discover is that instead of three different carts, drawn by three different animals, outside were oxcars more glorious than they could have imagined. The Buddha is the father in the story, and the sons are the disciples that follow the bodhisattva, *śrāvaka*, and *pratyekabuddha* paths. The oxcart symbolizes the bodhisattva path to buddhahood. The other two vehicles have served their illusory purpose of getting people out of the Burning House of samsara, and now the true vehicle is revealed. As the text progresses, we learn that all beings of all traditions are just like this. Buddhas and bodhisattvas—most notably, Avalokiteśvara in chapter 25—may take on the form of a man, a woman, or a child, an arhat, a god, and so on, in order to lead beings to awakening.

My students enjoy this transition within the Lotus Sutra, from an exclusivist “us versus them” mentality to a more inclusive and universalistic sensibility, because it fits nicely within their modern liberal-progressive worldview. However, non-Mahayana Buddhists and non-Buddhists, of course, might not like being told that *in fact* they were really always-already Mahayana Buddhists all along. This is one of the problems with hierarchical universalism, that it tends to negate the importance of diversity and change. Some Buddhists in East Asia read the Lotus Sutra as an inert document, following literally either the exclusivist claims in the early chapters or the hierarchical universalistic claims in the later chapters. Others, it seems, took the Lotus as a starting point, or a foundation upon which to build other views of the Dharma and religious difference. It seems that the Tiantai tradition of China and the Tendai tradition of Japan, in particular, took the Lotus as inspiration for moving in new directions.

For several hundred years, various Buddhist texts and traditions flowed into China beginning at least by the first century CE. This material included a vast array of different sutras, commentaries, spell texts, ritual manuals, and so on, originating in different parts of South and Central Asia. In addition to the diversity of this Buddhist material, there was also the considerable divide between the cultures of South Asia and East Asia. In the first few centuries of the development of Chinese Buddhism, Daoist vocabulary was mined by Buddhists to translate Buddhist concepts for a Chinese audience. Over time, Chinese Buddhist monks developed different doctrinal and ritual systems to better organize the cacophony. One of the earliest and most influential doctrinal and meditative systems was developed by Tiantai Zhiyi (538–597), or Zhiyi of the Tiantai Mountains, commonly regarded as the founder of the Tiantai tradition (Kor, Cheontae; Jpn, Tendai). Zhiyi developed a comprehensive approach to meditation and doctrine that established a foundation for thinking about Buddhist diversity. Zhiyi argued that the Buddha taught differently at different times in his life and presented his teachings in accordance with the needs and capacities of a given audience, like the proverbial doctor who provides different remedies for different ailments.

The first teachings of the Buddha were revealed while he sat under the Bodhi Tree. The *Avatamsaka-sūtra*, which reveals a dizzyingly ornate and kaleidoscopic vision of an interconnected and infinite multiverse of Pure Lands all cultivated by living buddhas, is said to contain this initial teaching. Realizing that this all-encompassing view of reality would not be comprehensible to ordinary beings, the Buddha then delivered the teachings recorded in the non-Mahayana corpus, the *Āgamas*. After a period of time the Buddha revealed the Mahayana teachings in the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* and other mainstream Mahayana

texts. For advanced bodhisattvas, the Buddha revealed the *Prajñāpāramitā* teachings on emptiness. Finally, in his last days, the Buddha taught the Lotus Sutra and Nirvana Sutra. In this systematic presentation, Zhiyi sought to accommodate and account for the diversity of both Mahayana and non-Mahayana Buddhist traditions. Even more interesting is the fact that it was the Lotus Sutra that he placed at the pinnacle, a text that itself seems to be concerned with accounting for religious diversity.

Systems of doctrinal interpretation and meditation (Zhiyi’s approach to meditation was as comprehensive as his views on doctrine, but this is beyond the scope of this article) developed around the Tiantai Mountains. Generations and centuries later a lineage developed that looked to Zhiyi as its founder. Later Tiantai thinkers drew upon and influenced the broader Chinese religious culture, including Daoism and Confucianism, to think deeply about religious diversity, ethics, and the universe, and in turn, influenced the whole of East Asian Buddhism. Tiantai Buddhists envisioned the purported distinction between good and bad, between Buddhist and non-Buddhist paths. According to this view, all beings participate in an interconnected environment, all things are interconnected with all other things, and therefore nothing is separate and nothing is distinct or autonomous. All hierarchies are rendered both “empty” and “real” simultaneously. In this way, difference and the capacity for change and transformation are taken as a given. This Tiantai view moves beyond the hierarchical universalism of the Lotus Sutra, one might say, by pushing that notion further than perhaps the early compilers of the sutra would have intended. Buddhists and non-Buddhists, Mahayana Buddhists and non-Mahayana Buddhists, are reimagined as nonbinary nodes in an ever-changing kaleidoscopic web of

infinite interrelation. In some sense, Tiantai Zhiyi's comprehensive system of doctrine and meditation was expanded to include all things.

Tendai is the Japanese pronunciation of Tiantai, and when this lineage was finally established in Japan as a major tradition in the early Heian period (794–1185), the expansiveness of the Lotus Sutra and Zhiyi's Tiantai system was transmitted as well. The Japanese monk Saichō (767–822) is regarded as the founder of Tendai in Japan. Saichō, like Zhiyi, saw the Tendai tradition as presenting a comprehensive view of the Mahayana. Under the guidance of Saichō and his later lineage descendants, Japanese Tendai focused on the precepts, meditation (including early Chan/Zen), Pure Land practices, and Esoteric Buddhist practices.

While Zhiyi's earlier system accommodated *dhāraṇī* and other spell-like incantations prevalent throughout traditional Mahayana literature, he lived before South Asian tantric systems came to dominate Tang dynasty elite Buddhism. Later Chinese Tiantai and Japanese Tendai thinkers, however,

adapted to fit the newly introduced Esoteric Buddhist traditions.

Scholars of Buddhism often emphasize the differences between normative Mahayana culture and Esoteric Buddhist rituals, which emphasize secret initiations, mantra recitation, the performance of secret hand positions known as mudras, complex visualization practices, the worship of mandalas, and the rapid attainment of awakening. Other scholars, as well as Japanese Tendai thinkers, however, emphasize the continuity between normative Mahayana practice and the Esoteric ritual corpus. While Zhiyi used the Lotus Sutra as a starting point for encompassing the breadth of the Buddhist tradition, Chinese Tiantai and Japanese Tendai theorists used both the Lotus Sutra and Zhiyi's system as a starting point for approaching an even more diverse Buddhist context, not as an inert and unchanging text and tradition, but as a starting point for opening up the Dharma to new interpretations.

In conclusion, a literal reading of the Lotus Sutra may present one with two different views:

(1) Exclusivist: There is only one true teaching, the Lotus Sutra; all are not welcome at the table.

(2) Hierarchical universalism: Everyone is welcome at the table because actually all views are ultimately one.

The Tiantai and later Tendai traditions take the Lotus Sutra first as an organizing principle to say that there is in fact coherence to the diversity of Buddhism. Moving further, these traditions take the text as a starting point, opening the way for a recognition of difference *as* difference, accommodating the views of Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions as well. In other words, “difference” is accounted for and integrated into a larger whole, but the “difference” is not necessarily neutralized, subsumed, or rejected. This, I think, not only provides the philosophical justification for Japanese Tendai thinkers to further expand the traditional Tiantai view

to create a dual focus on the Esoteric Buddhist teachings, becoming different from Chinese Tiantai in the process.

The evolution inspired by the Lotus Sutra and developed by Chinese Tiantai and Japanese Tendai thinkers continued throughout the history of both traditions. In China and Japan, the Lotus Sutra and the Tiantai/Tendai tradition influenced Zen traditions in China (Chan) and Korea (Seon); inspired distinct approaches to Pure Land thought and practice such as the White Lotus Society in China and the Jōdo and Jōdo Shinshū schools in Japan; and helped inspire the development of medieval Japanese Shintō traditions. In addition in Japan, Lotus-focused traditions such as the Nichiren school, Soka Gakkai, and Risshō Kōsei-kai also evolved, taking a view critical of tradition and forging new pathways.

The Lotus Sutra is a complex and multilayered text, and throughout the history of East Asia, countless Buddhists have used it as inspiration for the development of new approaches to the Dharma. It seems as if the text itself invites reinterpretation and revision. I would like to suggest that through studying how this text was used throughout the history of East Asian Buddhism, students and scholars of religion may encounter new ways to think about religious diversity and change. □

Recommended Reading

Hurvitz, Leon, trans. *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma (The Lotus Sūtra)*. Columbia University Press, 1976.

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Aligning Religion with Reality Itself

by Joseph S. O'Leary

As skillful means at the service of universal salvation, religions are vehicles whose worth is measured by their capacity to heighten awareness of reality itself. Reality itself is the One Vehicle, and all religions are skillful means generated by it.

Since religions, broadly speaking, are concerned with ultimate reality, there is an inevitable pull to give to their founders and icons, and to the religion itself, a status commensurate with that reality. Thus the key salvific formula of a religion, at first a precious possession of the lucky few, the elect, takes on universal scope as the salvation is generously offered to all. This tendency is multiply illustrated in Buddhist and Christian tradition. It could be seen as arrogant self-inflation, but I think that at a deeper level it represents a consciousness of the true nature and purpose of

religion. The process of universalization has three dimensions: soteriological, epistemological, and ontological, which I shall discuss in turn.

Universal Salvation

The New Testament oscillates between statements that stress the urgency and difficulty of attaining salvation and those that seem to assure salvation for all. In theology, Origen's (185–253 CE) universal restoration, or *apokatastasis*, represents the high point of optimism about salvation, while the low point is reached by Augustine (354–430 CE), with his grim view of a *massa damnata* from which God selects a few to be saved. Theological optimism like Origen's is now back in fashion. However, the universalist thesis cannot be a matter of mere taste or opinion but must be shown to be grounded in the Christian revelation and in deep harmony with it. Universalism must emerge as the *honne* (true intent) of the biblical revelation, while texts apparently contradicting it are interpreted as *tatemae* (one's public façade).

Buddhist universalism, similarly, must be shown to cohere with or to be essential to the structure of the Buddhist

faith. The hermeneutical prowess by which it reduces the status of texts that seem to conflict with it, such as references to the *icchantika* (those lacking any potential or desire for buddhahood) in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, must not come across as mere ingenuity but must be found to make sense of the entire structure in a way that the alternatives do not.

What is also needed is a “phenomenological reduction” of the entire discourse on salvation, in the sense of recovering the bedrock realities that give rise to it. In Christianity, trust in the divine goodness offers a secure foundation; in Buddhism an equivalent bedrock stance would be trust in the security of the path of wholesome practice. Since limits cannot be set to divine goodness or grace or to the wholesomeness of Buddhist action and contemplation and the reality to which they are attuned, representations of a restricted salvation are constantly being shown up as inadequate.

The offer of universal salvation was a matter of competition in the past. Justin Martyr's vision of the universal reach of the Logos incarnate in Christ, such that “seeds of the Logos” could be recognized in the rational insights of Greek philosophers, presented the new religion as a respectable “philosophy” before the imperial authorities. Origen's vision of the universe as a vast pedagogic process in which souls grow to perfection through the exercise of their freedom defeated his Gnostic rivals with their determinism and cosmic pessimism.

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Rivalry between Mahāyāna and earlier Buddhism also turned on the scope of salvation. If in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* Hīnayāna is treated as a dead end and its spokesperson Śāriputra as a figure of fun, the Lotus Sūtra goes one better by adopting a generous inclusivism such that Hīnayānists are already in the buddha vehicle without knowing it. Śāriputra is the first figure to whom the Buddha promises buddhahood, in chapter 3, followed in chapters 6, 8, and 9 by a string of others, until finally he promises to confer supreme perfect enlightenment on anyone who hears with delight a single verse of the Lotus Sūtra. The five thousand proud monks, nuns, and lay devotees who leave the assembly are not necessarily protesting against a put-down of Hīnayāna but represent any who cling to traditionally defined identity and lack the imagination to embrace a wider vision. The Buddha says, “My congregation, Śāriputra, has been cleared from the chaff, freed from the trash” (H. Kern, trans., *The Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka* [Clarendon Press, 1909], 39); “the pith only remains” (44). Weeding out the recalcitrant thus shapes a broad community, and no doubt that is one of the main purposes of the Lotus Sūtra. Just as Christian universality is a communal matter, imaged as incorporation into Christ’s mystical body, likewise in Buddhism, salvation is not attained by single isolated individuals but is a communal achievement, a buddha field in which all share the joy of liberation in processes of compassionate communication.

Salvation is communal of its very nature, and it seeks to be realized fully as universal community. It extends to all sentient beings, or it aims to “gather together in one all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:10). The idea of a limited salvation is ultimately a contradiction in terms.

Universal Truth

To iron out contradictions that inevitably accumulate in the development of religious traditions, one must establish a secure authoritative vantage point from which rival discourses can be assessed and arranged in order. The Lotus Sūtra is the most eminent instance of such inclusivist hermeneutics in Buddhist tradition. Its first epistemological claim is that the three vehicles of *śrāvaka*, *pratyakabuddha*, and bodhisattva were skillful means used by the Buddha to save deluded beings but that in the One Vehicle, truth itself is manifest fully. “Now thou speakest plainly, and no longer in parables,” the

hearers might say, as the disciples of Jesus do in John 16:29.

Today, with the recognition of genuine pluralism, this inclusivist strategy is no longer convincing. Recognizing the rationality of all religious constructions within their contexts, one sees as well how they are conventional constructs, as is one’s own religion. Those that claim to speak plainly, no longer in parables, turn out to be promoting a construct that is every bit as conventional as what they overthrow.

What does the One Vehicle manifest? Its proclamation of a universal way of salvation is closely linked with a new vision of Śākyamuni that raises him far above the familiar figure of previous Buddhist belief. The complete universality of his message begins to affect the ontological status of the messenger himself, now seen as the embodiment of all truth. In earlier Buddhism, Śākyamuni’s unique role prompted exploration of his former lives in which he

must have accrued the merits enabling his enlightenment. Śākyamuni's hugely enlarged status in Mahāyāna requires a commensurately enlarged past history, involving many other buddhas, and magnificent roles for Śākyamuni himself. For instance, Sadāparibhūta, Never Despising Bodhisattva, heard the true Dharma from Buddha Bhīṣmagarjitasvararāga, the first of two billion *koṭis* of buddhas of that name, and pursued a long and glorious career as a bodhisattva under many buddhas. "It is myself who at that time, at that juncture was the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Sadāparibhūta" (Kern, 359).

Then the ultimate reality of Śākyamuni as the *dharmakāya* (originally the corpus of the Buddha's teachings, but now the body of Dharma in the sense of reality itself) becomes the foundation of the inclusivist vision. The one who sees and embodies ultimate reality must himself be ultimate reality in person, and as such the source and origin of all other buddhas. When a buddha returns to his core essence as *dharmakāya*, he becomes *adhībuddha*, source of all buddhahood. His teachings, too, become cosmic: "It has been remarked that *upāya* [skillful means] likewise denotes the world, the energy of nature (*prajñā*)" (Kern, 307); all is skillful means; life itself is what thrusts one forward to enlightenment.

While this enlarged Buddhology offers a satisfying comprehensive vision in which everything can find its place and be given salvific significance, the foundation of the construct might give rise to doubt. How can a single man be a universal savior? The historical Śākyamuni seems condemned to disappear into the universal buddhahood at work always and everywhere.

The parallels with the Christological trajectory may be illuminating. In the New Testament Jesus of Nazareth is acclaimed after his resurrection as "Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36). The figure of Jesus is stretched back over Israelite history, via the schema of typological fulfillment, and even projected back to the beginning of the cosmos: he is "the lamb that was slaughtered from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). Then it is discerned that the ultimate identity of this man is rooted in the eternal divine Logos, seen as coming into the world. Theologians today, trying to do justice to the pluralism and conventionality of religious constructions, may differentiate more carefully between the eternal Logos, which is ultimate divine reality, and the contingent historical texture of the Christ event. While warding off the dangers of Docetism (the idea that Christ is only seemingly human and physical) and Monophysitism (in which the humanity of Christ disappears into his divinity), this approach lies exposed to the danger of Nestorianism, which enfeebles the unity between the human Jesus and the eternal Logos.

Buddhism does not seem overconcerned with such doctrinal headaches. Subordinating the historical Śākyamuni to the universal reality of buddhahood, it is tolerant of narrations that make Śākyamuni's earthly career a skillful fiction. But perhaps it would be salutary to subject both traditions to an epistemological critique and to reground them in their founding experiences: Śākyamuni's attainment of enlightenment and Jesus's fate in his radical commitment to the

Kingdom of God. In both founding figures a universal truth makes a powerful breakthrough, but that truth need not occlude or falsify the historical specificity of its bearers and their contexts.

Ultimate Reality

Ontological argument can shore up the doctrine of the One Vehicle. All conditioned things are doomed to decay, but there must be a nondecaying beyond. Phenomenological accounts of enlightened or nirvanic experience further strengthen the case. Though little is said about the ultimate ontological upshot of the Buddha's message, what is said clearly locates it in the Mahāyāna mainstream. All realities are dependently originating, and all dharmas are ultimately "empty" of fixed identity or substance. The bodhisattva "clings to no dharma whatever and sees the real character of the dharmas" and refrains from investigating or discussing them (see Kern, 262). "All dharmas are alike, equal, for all, and ever alike." Directly preceding this sentence is the assertion: "There are no three vehicles by any means; there is but one vehicle in this world" (141). The ultimate nature of dharmas, or of reality itself, is beyond any categories that speech could handle. Whatever defined identity they seem to present is due to "a perversion of perception" (265), or as Madhyamaka, the School of the Middle Way, will clarify, it has a merely conventional reality but no ultimate reality.

The One Vehicle is *paramārtha*, or ultimate truth (chap. 3, vv. 137–8), and this must be the truth of emptiness, *śūnyatā*. One of the manifestations of emptiness is the capacity of bodhisattvas to freely take on any shape they wish in the pursuit of their salvational work. In chapter 23 Bodhisattva Gadgadasvara takes many shapes, divine and human (Kern, 401), and chapter 24 recounts the similar salvific transformations of Avalokiteśvara (410–12). These saving

figures become all creatures to all creatures in order to save all creatures, pushing to a fantastical maximum the saving strategy of the Apostle Paul, who became “all things to all men” (1 Cor. 9:22). They can do this in virtue of the emptiness and sameness of all dharmas, which frees us from fixed identities.

In chapter 5 of the Lotus Sūtra the Buddha speaks as a powerful all-present reality. And his nondiscriminatory presence to all beings is not merely moral but ontological, implying the sameness (*samatā*) of all dharmas: “I recreate the whole world like a cloud shedding its water without distinction; I have the same feelings for respectable people as for the low; for moral persons as for the immoral. . . . Inaccessible to weariness, I spread in season the rain of the law” (Kern, 125). Here Śākyamuni is already morphing into the universal *dharmakāya*, and his voice is becoming the murmur of reality itself.

When universalism is allowed full swing, it becomes another name for “being as such” or “reality as such.” Buddhist soteriological universalism can boil down simply to a trust in the ultimate nature of reality, an openness to its empty thusness. Christians, too, might reduce their faith to a basic trust in the goodness of being, with Christ’s death and resurrection as a cipher of this. Or a more orthodox faith could still insist that the full truth of Jesus appears only when his message and presence are fully aligned with reality as such.

Insisting on points of dogma as if they were absolute is inconsistent with this wider sense of ultimate reality as freedom and openness, or we can say that the true sense of the dogmas appears only when they are seen to accord with that sense of ultimate reality. In their shared commitment to ultimate reality, all religions can proceed together, according to their lights, to the ultimate triumph of good. As skillful means at the service of universal salvation, religions are vehicles whose worth is measured by their

capacity to heighten awareness of reality itself. Reality itself is the One Vehicle, and all religions are skillful means generated by it. Christian Logos universalism is in harmony with this perception, though it remains in tension with the claim that all are saved through the death of Jesus and none other.

Conclusion

Picking up the messages that come to us from the vast heritage of religious traditions, we inevitably filter them through our modern consciousness. While many cling to premodern attitudes, the conversion to modernity is irreversible once it takes hold. A modern consciousness is essentially marked by science, demythologization, historical perspective, secularization, the embrace of pluralism and dialogue, a keen sense of the contingencies of language and culture.

Yet mystical insight and religious revelation—enshrined in tried and trusted traditions stretching over millennia—carry their own distinctive, autonomous authority. Even when we have boiled religious traditions down to a sum of historical contingencies, imaginative myths and metaphors, and merely conventional articulations, a quality of “ultimacy” attaches to the phenomena

they bring into view. Though the schemas of Logos inclusivism or *dharmakāya* inclusivism may come to seem ramshackle constructions, they do serve to indicate the ultimate dimension of religious vision despite the infinite pluralism of its conventional and contingent forms.

It could be argued that what survives best of classical religious claims is their universal dimension, that which emerges when one reduces their message to an account of reality itself. Yet what is most alive and gripping in them is the concrete figures and stories that convey their insight into reality, or in which the ultimate reality is sensed as present and active. To engage with reality itself in wisdom and compassion, and to fare forward in a creative and saving endeavor, is the task in which all religions are engaged, or in which they ride together as in a single vehicle. The unique vocation of Judaism or Islam or Christianity or any given Asian creed is revealed as a historical “skillful means” now transcended by the shared vocation of all religions together. Enigmatic tensions within and between the religious traditions continue to abound, but the emergent new sense of sharing one macrovehicle and coming together as one community places all of these debates on a new basis. □

Two Stories of a Rich Father and a Poor Son: An Exercise in Interreligious Dialogue

by Ernest Valea

Wearing a label, such as Buddhist or Christian, is never enough if it lacks the proper mind-set and lifestyle that prove we are a poor son or daughter who has been truly found by the Father.

Any Christian reading the Lotus Sutra for the first time will be surprised to find a familiar story in its fourth chapter, that of the rich father and his poor son. It will certainly make him or her think and rethink its counterpart in the Christian scriptures, which can be found in the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel According to Luke, the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

We all like good stories, and these are two of the best our traditions have produced. And in addition to being inspirational in following our own tradition, they provide a good contact point for Buddhist-Christian dialogue, for the two stories help us discern the views we hold in common as well as those that make us different and why.

Before engaging in the comparative study of the two stories, a few words about interreligious dialogue per se. What I do *not* attempt here is to work under the constraints of the three theologies of religion, the ways in which a religion sees the salvific value of another religion. These theologies are known as exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Exclusivists hold that salvation or liberation can be attained only by following their own religious tradition and thus cannot generate motivation for studying other beliefs. Inclusivists are more

moderate with regard to other traditions. They acknowledge a salvific or liberating truth in another tradition, but only as an inferior path to their own. For example, Christian inclusivists see salvation for Buddhists as mediated by Christ as the Logos at work in all humans. Buddhist inclusivists see Christ as one of the many bodhisattvas, who used skillful means for the Jews living in Palestine in the first century AD and for many others who did not come to know the Buddhist dharma. As such, inclusivism is more generous to other traditions but can work only at the cost of ignoring fundamental doctrines that build up those traditions. Pluralists hold that all religions are valid as means for attaining the ultimate goal of salvation or liberation, for neither is superior to the other. This means that both Christians and Buddhists will reach their expected destinations or even one beyond what they currently expect. As such, pluralism disregards the uniqueness of both traditions and fosters views that are neither Buddhist nor Christian.

A more constructive approach in interreligious dialogue is that of comparative theology, for it promotes both commitment to one's tradition without being bound to exclusivism and openness toward other religious traditions

without compromising one's own. This new approach was started by Francis Clooney and James Fredericks in the late 1980s as an attempt to make space for the other's thought in its own setting. As such, this approach leaves space to the other and does not subsume another's tradition into one's own. Comparative theology is not about establishing the best path toward salvation but about looking beyond one's own truth of faith, in the light of the other's faith. As a result, interreligious dialogue can help us to appropriate the truths of our own religious tradition in a new and unexpected way by looking back on our beliefs through someone else's eyes.

And now let us cross the boundaries of our own religious tradition and learn from the two stories.

The Buddhist story, which is known as the Parable of the Poor Son, is described by Nikkyo Niwano in his book *Buddhism for Today: A Modern Interpretation of the Threefold Lotus Sutra*. Following is a summary of that story.

A man ran away from home when he was young and lived in a distant country for decades, until he was fifty years old. In desperate poverty, he wandered here and there, working for meager wages.

The father, who was sorrowful over his son's leaving home, searched in vain for him all over the country. Meanwhile the father settled in a town and became very rich and powerful.

One day the son came by chance to his father's house. He saw from afar a dignified elderly man surrounded

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by many respectable-looking people. Thinking that if he stayed there he would be seized and forcibly put to work, he hastily ran away.

The father recognized his son at first sight. He was pleased that he had finally found his son, to whom he could now entrust his whole wealth as his successor. But seeing his son run away, he immediately sent attendants to bring his son back. When the attendants caught up with him, the son was so terrified at the thought of being imprisoned that he fainted and fell to the ground.

The father, seeing this from a distance, ordered the messengers to sprinkle cold water on the son's face to restore him to consciousness. The father knew that his son's disposition was servile because of his long life of deprivation. Therefore, though he was sure that this was his son, he said nothing to others but decided to befriend his son gradually. So he sent two poorly dressed men to tell his son that they would hire him at double wages to clean out the dung at the rich man's house. The poor son, thinking this to be work fit for him, joined them.

Feeling pity for his son, who looked gaunt and filthy, the father disguised himself in dirty garments and went to his son to praise him for his diligence and encourage him to continue to work there, saying that he would treat him just like a son. The son rejoiced and diligently continued the menial work for twenty years.

Then the father became ill, and knowing that he would shortly die, he

entrusted the son with the management of all of his wealth, while still treating him as a servant. Though the son had gained the confidence of the wealthy man (not yet known to him as his father), he still could not eradicate his own sense of inferiority. But over time he became familiar with his father's household and all the treasure, and his thinking gradually broadened so that he could imagine managing all of his father's household by himself. The father was greatly relieved at this.

Seeing that his end was near, the father gathered various officials and his relatives and friends and citizens of the country and proclaimed to them that the poor man was really his son and he was really his father, and told them that all the wealth that he possessed entirely belonged to his son. Great was the joy and amazement of the son when he learned that the immense treasure had now come to him of itself (Kosei Publishing, 1976, 65–68).

The Christian counterpart of this story is that of the prodigal son and his brother. Jesus addressed the religious experts of his day, the Pharisees, who were scandalized by his entourage—by his willingness to teach, heal, and save the lowest of Jewish society, such as tax collectors and prostitutes. Those people were responding well to his teaching and were reforming their lives, while the Pharisees had other expectations from the long-awaited Savior. They expected one who would free Israel from the Roman occupation, restore it to its former glory, and make it the first among

nations. These two social and religious categories, the apparently just and the “sinners,” are well illustrated in Jesus's Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Once upon a time there was a rich father who had two sons. One day the younger dares to claim his inheritance, the fortune he is supposed to receive at his father's death. Amazingly, instead of chasing him away for such a grave insult, the father consents and divides his wealth between his sons. The younger son leaves home, wastes his wealth in reckless living, and one day finds himself very poor, so poor that he accepts the most humiliating job, as a servant of a pig farmer. Pigs are unclean animals in the Jewish tradition, and to tend pigs would be the lowest social status a Jew could imagine.

But one day the young son comes to his senses, acknowledges his misery, and decides to return to his father. He plans to ask for forgiveness and hopes to be accepted as one of his father's servants. However, a big surprise awaits him at home. His father is waiting for him, knows his broken heart and true repentance, and restores him fully to the condition of a son and heir. He even throws a party to celebrate the return of his prodigal son. This happy ending in the story portrays God's willingness to forgive all of those who see their condition as it really is, as sinful, and act accordingly. God does not oppose one's freedom of will in choosing how to live. He does not seize us whenever we go astray but awaits us until we are ready to change. In Buddhist terms, the

skillful means he uses is that of letting us realize for ourselves the big trouble we have gotten into.

As the son in the parable claims his inheritance and then squanders it, we too use all that God has granted us (wealth, health, time, and relationships) for selfish interests and not for serving him and our neighbors. This attitude is called sin and brings humans to the lowest possible stage of decadence. Although living a sinful life is at first very attractive and pleasurable, in the end it leads to destruction, not only spiritually, but also physically, emotionally, and socially. The son's coming to his senses speaks about the need of repentance on the part of sinners, of letting go of their pride and acknowledging their failure in finding happiness by pursuing selfish and hedonistic ways.

The second part of the story speaks of the older son. Once he finds out about the return of his younger brother and the party that his father throws to celebrate his return, he gets very angry. He accuses his father of being unfair and complains of not having been given even a young goat to have his own little party with his friends during all of those years of faithful service. Thus he proves that his self-praised obedience and service in his father's house is hypocritical. While the younger son's hope at arrival is to be treated as a servant, and instead he is fully restored, the older brother has acted as a servant all of his life while being a true son. His father rebukes him for his ignorance for not being capable of enjoying (or willing to enjoy) his status and especially for not being capable of rejoicing for the return of his (prodigal) brother. This kind of hidden bitterness, while keeping good appearances, was the state of the Pharisees in Jesus's time. Neither did they know God as a loving father.

Now we are familiar with both stories, let us figure out what a parallel reading of the two stories would reveal from a comparativist perspective. Unfortunately, I can attempt only one half of this approach: as a Christian I will turn to the Buddhist story and try to learn its lessons. The other half of this comparativist approach, that of looking at the Christian story through Buddhist eyes, will be left to my Buddhist readers.

What would a Christian learn from the Buddhist story? Of great help is the short commentary to the Buddhist story by Gene Reeves in his book *The Stories of the Lotus Sutra* (Wisdom Publications, 2010, 67–73). Following his thoughts, I found the following to be interesting points for a Christian to consider:

1. One has to have faith in oneself, which is not enough but nevertheless an important beginning in one's

spiritual quest. The Buddhist son had to gain some confidence in himself in order to be promoted and finally be made heir of his father's riches. In Buddhist terms it means growth toward realizing our true nature and identity. Self-confidence should lead one toward living the bodhisattva ideal, that of seeking the enlightenment of all beings, not just of oneself.

2. For a Christian, one's faith rests in God, and this is the foundation of self-confidence. A Christian should be confident that God provides all necessary graces for following him and reaching sainthood. The poor son in Jesus's parable had to take the initiative to go home and have confidence in his decision. No matter how low one has fallen into depravity, one still has the option of returning to a loving relationship to the father.

3. Reeves argues that the Lotus Sutra "stresses that each of us is somebody important" and "of great potential." While the Buddhist concept of this potential we all have is our buddha-nature, which we cannot "earn or purchase in any way" (p. 69), for it already belongs to us, the great potential Christians should rely on is the universality of God's love for each of us, which we cannot earn but need only respond to.

The same effect of understanding our nature, of self-respect for "what has been given to you, including your body" (p. 69) must be considered by Christians as well. They too must refrain from eating, drinking, or taking drugs to excess, in order not to hinder the work of Christ in their lives and through them in the lives of their neighbors. And as Buddhists see Buddha's compassion as extending to everyone, so must Christians see the love of God.

As in Buddhism oppression is seen as "the worst kind of evil, because it denies

the buddha-nature of all creatures” (pp. 69–70), in a corresponding way, Christians must also condemn oppression, for it denies that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. Religion should show its results in how we care for our neighbors, Buddhists and Christians alike.

This convergence in the attitude toward our neighbors can lay the foundation for cooperation between Buddhists and Christians in the social realm, despite their holding to different spiritual doctrines. As Reeves adjures the followers of the Lotus Sutra to “be concerned about social as well as individual evil” and to act against “war, class oppression, racism, and environmental pollution,” for they are “affronts to the Buddha,” so Christians must see the same plagues of our world as affronts to the creator God. A follower of the bodhisattva way must, in Reeves’s words, “devote oneself to the happiness of others and the life of the whole . . . to share in a kind of common human faith that life is meaningful, a faith that finds expression in a variety of religious and other forms” (p. 70). This is valid for a Christian as well, for the Christian is taught to love one’s neighbor as oneself.

4. From the Buddhist story we learn that “the Buddha needs his son, yearns for his son, and seeks to find him,” which is the same point made by the Christian story. A famous verse cherished by all Christians says that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). God showed his love in a very concrete way, by the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus, whom Christians acknowledge as God and man. Reeves points out that according to the Buddhist story the Buddha “wants to give him [the poor son] the

great treasure that is his inheritance” (p. 70). For a Christian the true inheritance he or she awaits is everlasting communion with the God that loves us so much.

5. Both stories teach that life is meaningful if we look from the right angle. Reeves invites us to understand the teaching of the Lotus Sutra and sees how it provides “assurance, over and over again—assurance that life can be meaningful, even wonderful, assurance that can overcome our natural tendency to run away in fear.” Therefore we should be able to undertake even the most humble tasks (such as the removal of dung in the parable) and take them as lessons toward “something greater” and “find in every situation that there is something to be learned” (p. 72). In the same way, the difficult situation of the prodigal son in Luke’s gospel can be seen as the necessary turning point for his final

coming to his senses. Making use of every little or great affliction, seeing the call of God in every circumstance, is the attitude of great Christian saints as well. Many of them started from scratch, by doing little, insignificant things. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux called her way to sainthood “the little way,” that of doing little things in service to her neighbors, and so she came to be taken as a great example (and saint) for our days.

6. At the end of his essay on the Buddhist story, Reeves states that “we should never become complacent and satisfied with some lesser level of awakening, such as some great experience of nirvana, but always pursue the Buddha Way.” He concludes with an exhortation, a short conclusion to the Buddhist story, “never to be complacent with what one has achieved, . . . to grow in wisdom, compassion, and service” (p. 73).

For a Christian there must also be a continual striving for perfection, for reaching the perfection of human nature that Jesus has shown, that of perfect obedience to the Father’s will. This is called sainthood, and a Christian should not be satisfied with a lesser level of spiritual development.

At the end of each story, both poor sons are happy, both have regained their lost status. But in the Christian story we are told of another son, the older son, who ruins the happy-ending of the parable. While appearing to have been faithful to his father all of his life, by his hatred toward his converted brother he proves himself a hypocrite. All he knew was servitude instead of love, and laws instead of grace. His stand is a warning for all of us that wearing a label, such as Buddhist or Christian, is never enough if it lacks the proper mind-set and lifestyle that prove we are a poor son or daughter who has been truly found by the Father. □

Kenji Miyazawa: Embodying the Lotus Sutra, with Mistakes and Failures (2)

by Gene Reeves

He [Miyazawa] thought of himself as trying to embody the bodhisattva path of the Lotus Sutra. Others, too, saw a bodhisattva in him. 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.

Introduction

This essay is a revised version of the second part of a paper presented at the 2016 International Lotus Sutra Seminar held at the National Women’s Educational Center in Saitama Prefecture, Japan. The first part appeared in the previous issue of *Dharma World*.

Kenji Miyazawa

Kenji Miyazawa was one of 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 of tuberculosis at age thirty-seven in 1933.

Though still largely unknown in the West, since his death Miyazawa has 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 still 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 by Miyazawa; none was ever perfected. Mostly written in the Japanese script known as katakana and obviously intended to evoke feelings rather than describe things, these poems include some elements that are extremely difficult to read or understand. Though perhaps no more than many other poems, they can also be very difficult to translate.

The Lotus Sutra

Buddhism was strong in the Miyazawa household in Iwate. Shinran’s (1173–1263) *Shoshin nembutsu ge* (Hymn to nembutsu as true faith) was very familiar there. Kenji Miyazawa’s father was a dedicated follower of the Higashi Honganji branch of Jodo Shinshu. In 1898 he started a study group in his home, to which he invited religious scholars and leaders as lecturers. He also bought many Buddhist books and built a small library where everyone, including his children, was free to read.

Kenji’s conversion to Nichiren Buddhism started in 1914 when he was “extraordinarily moved” by the

just-published Chinese-Japanese edition of the Lotus Sutra edited by Daito Shimaji (1875–1927) that he found in his father’s library.

He soon became interested in the Kokuchukai, founded by the charismatic Chigaku Tanaka (1861–1939). In the ’20s and ’30s the Kokuchukai was an ultranationalist religious body. Tanaka proclaimed its duty to achieve “a spiritual unity” throughout the world with “Japan as the Imperial Headquarters.”

In December of 1920 Kenji joined the Kokuchukai, and in January of 1921 he left home to go to Tokyo, where he tried to work for the Kokuchukai as a resident member. This decision to work for the society may have come not so much from religious feelings as from conflict with his father.

Kenji grasped the central idea of the Lotus Sutra that every living being is

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endowed with buddha-nature and therefore capable of becoming a buddha. This led to a decision not to eat “bodies of living things.” His feeling about eating bodies of living things was so strong that he felt guilty even eating vegetables.

Obviously, he thought of himself as trying to embody the bodhisattva path of the Lotus Sutra. Others, too, saw a bodhisattva in him. 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 subsistent farmers in whatever ways he could.

But Kenji also thought of himself as an *ashura*. (In Indian mythology and in East Asian Buddhism, an *ashura* is a kind of angry demigod, one of the six states of existence that are subject to rebirth. When interpreted primarily psychologically, it symbolizes anger. It should not be confused with the Arabic term for “tenth,” from which comes the “Day of Ashura.”) In the poem “Spring and Asura,” he proclaimed, “I am an asura incarnate.” He used it as the title poem of his first collection of poems and gave the same title to three subsequent collections he put together but was unable to publish. His letters described the fury that would sometimes seize him, leading him to think of himself as an *ashura*.

It is clear that he not only sought to understand the teachings of the Lotus Sutra but tried to embody the Lotus Sutra both in his life and in his writing.

Often, perhaps usually, this was done without mentioning the Lotus Sutra. This is not to suggest that Miyazawa rejected sutra recitation or more intellectual pursuits such as lecturing and discussion on the sutra, but he felt that what was most important was embodying the deep meaning of the Lotus Sutra in one’s everyday life.

Why the Lotus Sutra?

There are at least three reasons why Miyazawa was powerfully attracted to the Lotus Sutra. For one thing, it tells stories, giving the reader some drama, some appeal to the human imagination as well as to the intellect, and this provides some religious or spiritual feeling in addition to doctrine. The sutra is a book of enchantment, using a variety of stories, including its famous parables, to draw the reader into its world, a world in which, if one truly enters it, one is likely to be transformed.

Miyazawa understood this well, understood how the imagination can lift the human spirit, not to escape from the world, but as a kind of renewal for living well, or at least better, in this world. Living well is like the lotus flower reaching toward the clouds while well anchored in the mud. I know I would feel terribly uprooted if my feet were not in the mud of this world, and I believe the same was true of Miyazawa.

When he was about to graduate from agricultural college, in a letter he wrote about the *o-daimoku*: “*Namu myoho renge kyo, Namu myoho renge*

kyo! I sincerely offer myself in service to the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, the foundation of the greatest happiness for all. When I chant *namu myoho renge kyo* just once, the world and I are enveloped in a wondrous light.” (See Yoshiro Tamura, *Introduction to the Lotus Sutra* [Wisdom Publications, 2014], 144.)

When he joined Tanaka’s Kokuchukai, a copy of Nichiren’s mandala was sent to him. He had it mounted and installed it in his home in a special ceremony.

Though literally meaning only the title of the Lotus Sutra, the *o-daimoku* is, of course, a kind of sacred mantra, but it is one that works on the human spirit, elevating the human spirit by enabling us to identify with the affirmations of the whole Lotus Sutra. Since it represents and embodies the sutra, it provides a connection, a passage as it were, between earth and heaven, between earthly and cosmic perspectives, between fact and fantasy, between science and imagination.

A second reason for Miyazawa’s being attracted to the Lotus Sutra is its radical affirmation of the reality and importance of this world. The Lotus Sutra is a very worldly book. It does not advocate sex or wine or accumulating wealth but is radically world affirming.

Philosophically this has to do with the affirmation of the reality and value of concrete everyday things—the *dharma*s—the idea that the many are all part of one life or energy. Practically, this is based on the idea of the bodhisattva way, which is the way, most simply, of

doing good: doing good not as an act of extreme sacrifice but as the way to one's own health and liberation. What the Lotus Sutra is after is an ethical life in this world, working both for clean neighborhoods and for world peace.

At the center of the Lotus Sutra is Shakyamuni Buddha, who is at once both the historical person who grew up in a castle and escaped home to lead and teach a group of wandering beggars and one whose life span can be understood to be practically infinite in duration. In the Lotus Sutra, this Shakyamuni Buddha is placed in the center of the cosmos. Yet, unlike other buddhas—such as Amida, who lives in a paradise in the West—Shakyamuni's world and paradise are right here. This intimate association of Shakyamuni Buddha with this world in which suffering has to be endured and can be endured means that to whatever extent we honor or respect the Buddha, we must also honor and respect his home, which is also our home.

Miyazawa would have understood this intuitively and immediately, as he too was devoted to working to improve the world, not only but especially for the poor. I suspect that his devotion to the poor, like my own interest in politics, did not originally come from the Lotus Sutra. But in the sutra he would have found a powerful and powerfully poetic affirmation of what he felt deeply from a young age, in part at least from being in his father's pawnshop. Like Buddhism generally, the Lotus Sutra does not advocate pure self-sacrifice for the sake of others but teaches that the way to supreme awakening, to embodying the Buddha in one's own life—gradually becoming a buddha—does lie in helping others, especially through teaching Buddha Dharma. That Kenji Miyazawa largely abandoned family wealth and privilege—as the Buddha is said to have left the comforts of his father's castle—in order to try to find ways to effectively help the rural poor of Iwate is completely

consistent with being a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra.

Miyazawa found strength in the Lotus Sutra. Like poets before him, he understood the deepest meaning of the Lotus Sutra—an affirmation of the reality and importance of this world, which is at once the world of Shakyamuni Buddha and the world in which suffering has to be endured and can be combined with an imaginative cosmic perspective engendered by devotion to the Lotus Sutra.

A third reason for Miyazawa to be attracted to the Lotus Sutra is its ability to empower people. Running through the entire sutra is the idea of what would later be called buddha-nature. This is basically the idea that everyone, beginning with oneself, has the power and potential to become a buddha. Becoming a buddha means being a bodhisattva for others, something everyone is some of the time. This means that one should try always to respect others; try, no matter how difficult it may be, to find the good in others. It also means trying to find the good in bad situations, the silver lining in the clouds, making the best of bad situations when that's what we are faced with.

The Lotus Sutra, even just chanting the *o-daimoku*, makes it possible for people to believe and deeply feel that they can do something about their own lives, do something to improve bad situations, turning perpetual losers into winners. I've never thought of myself as a loser, so this has not meant as much to me personally as it has to many others, but that it works, that people really are empowered by the sutra—sometimes by recitation, sometimes by study—to gain some control over their own lives, is evident in testimonials that can be heard every day.

This was important in India, enabling people to deal with a terribly oppressive caste system. It's important still in helping people overcome modern fashions in oppression, whether they be intellectual systems of determinism—whether

Christian, Freudian, scientific, or karmic—or attitudes, sometimes inherited, sometimes beaten into them, of hopelessness that say “I can do nothing.” Some years ago, Jessie Jackson went around to high schools on the Southside of Chicago and got kids to chant with him, “I am somebody; I AM somebody.” Though he didn't know it, he was teaching the Lotus Sutra.

A Night on the Milky Way Railroad

The now-famous story *A Night on the Milky Way Railroad* was not published until 1934, after Miyazawa's death. And then it was a jumble. Not until the '70s did we have a readable manuscript. But even from the late '30s, the story was enormously popular in Japan, if nowhere else, where it was made into children's books many times, turned into animated movies, and so on.

The story

A boy, having set out to fetch a bottle of milk for his mother, falls asleep on a hill overlooking a festival in a small village. The festival is called Centaurus and includes elements of the Japanese *tanabata* and *obon* festivals and even of Christmas.

The boy imagines himself traveling on a very strange and special railroad along the Silver River (*ginga*), which in English is called the Milky Way. He encounters a variety of interesting, strange characters on the train and sees amazing scenes outside the train.

The main characters in the story, two boys, are clearly Japanese, but they are named Giovanni and Campanella. Needless to say, these are not Japanese names. During much of the trip, with these two boys on the train is a young man with two children. These children, in every other way Christian and Western (they think they are in England or Connecticut), have Japanese

names—Tadashi and Kaoru. It turns out that they had drowned in the sinking of the *Titanic*. This is a way of announcing entrance into a special world, where conventions of familiar and foreign are cast aside.

Among the special characters on the train is one called Birdcatcher: stooped over and wearing a red beard and carrying bundles of flattened herons and geese that might be made of cake.

In addition to a variety of strange characters and sights, the boys hear interesting sounds, for example Dvorak's *New World Symphony*.

There is even a bodhisattva story, sort of. Scorpion, being chased by a weasel, falls into a well. Beginning to drown, he prays, "I have eaten thousands of insects, and myself was about to be eaten by the weasel. I escaped the weasel only to drown in this well. Why did I not give my body to the weasel? At least he would have lived for another day. In my next life, may my life not be in vain like this, but contribute to the happiness of everyone." Then Scorpion saw his own body burn, lighting up the night. Now called Scorpio, it is burning still.

It is gradually revealed that the train is actually a ferry for souls going to various heavens. The young man and two children from the *Titanic* have been "called by God." There are multiple heavens—Christian and otherwise, the Southern Cross, and the Coal Sack (a "hole in the sky"), none of them particularly Buddhist.

When Giovanni first sees Campanella on the train, sitting in front of him, he notices that his jacket is wet. And at the mysterious Coal Sack, Campanella disappears.

One of the more interesting episodes, from a Lotus Sutra point of view, has to do with the ticket. When the conductor comes through the train to check tickets, Giovanni can't find his. He searches through his pockets looking for it until he comes up with a large piece of paper

with unrecognizable writing on it. Seeing it, Birdcatcher says, "Wow, this is really valuable." This lets you go wherever you like. Though not stated, the ticket that Giovanni—and no one else on that train—has is the *o-daimoku*, the title of the Lotus Sutra. It can take you anywhere, Miyazawa seems to say.

The conductor asks Giovanni, "Did you bring this from three-dimensional space?" The point here being that there is a fourth dimension, the imagination. In it, Earth and cosmos are connected. Much of what the boys see outside the train is celestial—stars and lights and mysterious triangles. Sometimes strange things appear, and we don't know whether they are actual or mythic—for example, a weather-wheel pillar, which may be related to an actual Dharma wheel outside a local temple.

With his imaginative power and skill as a writer, Miyazawa offers Giovanni's round-trip ticket to his readers, to all of us. It can take us anywhere, via the imagination.

As the train passes Centaurus in the southern sky, we learn that the festival being celebrated on Earth is also being celebrated in the stars. Mysterious birds, electric squirrels in walnut trees, a light-house keeper, an archeology professor, and others are there.

When Giovanni wakes up, he learns that his friend Campanella has drowned in the river while trying to save another classmate. On the train, he too was being ferried to the next world.

In an epiphany, Giovanni sees the heavenly river, which is the Milky Way, reflected in the earthly river in which his friend has just drowned, and he knows that the two rivers are somehow united.

Then he can complete the very ordinary task he set out to do in the first place—bring a bottle of milk home to his sick mother. Like the sutra itself, Miyazawa uses his imagination to invite us into an imaginary world in order to have us be empowered to function more effectively in this world. □

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Understanding the One Vehicle for Today

by Aura Di Febo

This is a report on the International Lotus Sutra Seminar, held June 28–July 1, 2017, at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters in Tokyo.

Introduction

The International Lotus Sutra Seminar is a yearly event gathering scholars from a range of nationalities and disciplinary fields, such as theology, history of religion, Buddhist studies, and more, to debate about the Lotus Sutra with the purpose of advancing academic knowledge and raising awareness about the text. This year the seminar focused on the teaching of the One Vehicle, which was explored in terms of the inclusiveness and universalism of its message. The topic resonates with the origins of the seminar, which started as a continuation of an interreligious dialogue between Buddhists and Christians. Past sessions saw renowned scholars and young researchers participate in the dialogue on the history and contents of the Lotus in the name of openness and constructive exchange. As stressed by Dr. Dominick Scarangelo—the coordinator of the seminar—in his initial address, the initiative is primarily conceived as a space of “encounter with the other,” which embraces the creative tension emerging from such engagement.

Throughout the four days of the seminar, the ten papers presented and the subsequent discussion addressed the doctrine of the One Vehicle from a variety of perspectives, including its

potential as a foundation for social and environmental ethics or its value as a message of inclusiveness in the field of interreligious dialogue. Participants also tackled inherent ambiguities of the Lotus Sutra, hidden behind the apparent simplicity of its universalistic message. In addition, the seminar featured visits to the temple Nakayama Hokekyōji and the Suginami Dharma Center of Rissho Kosei-kai, which provided participants with the opportunity to integrate academic discussion with firsthand insights on the Nichiren Buddhist traditions and the teaching and practices of Rissho Kosei-kai.

Summary of Presentations

“Universal Salvation, between the Lotus Sutra and the New Testament”

Joseph S. O’Leary, Sophia University, Tokyo

Dr. O’Leary addressed the notion of universal salvation in Christian and Buddhist traditions, focusing on the three dimensions of religious universality: soteriological, epistemological, and ontological. Moving between the New Testament and the Lotus Sutra, the paper investigated many possible

implications that the message of universal salvation holds for religious traditions, from serving as an instrument of control and distribution of power or as a valuable tool in sectarian competition, to proving a higher, more integrated understanding of the traditions and rooting them in reality itself as what is most universal. While universal salvation is indeed an attractive idea, it also harbors many contradictions. On the soteriological level, universalistic rhetoric easily incurs the risk of turning into a hollow slogan and “selling salvation cheap,” thus instituting a necessity for theological optimism to be based on a solid doctrinal foundation. In their epistemological aspect, claims of universality can succumb to a monochrome inclusivist outlook that suppresses genuine pluralism. Moreover, as a religious message becomes identified with affirmation of the ultimate truth, a tension emerges between the alleged universality of divine revelation and the contingency of the founding figure as a human being who lived in a specific place and time. Different traditions adopted different strategies to reconcile the contradiction between the universality of the message and the singularity of its historical bearer.

At the ontological level, Dr. O’Leary suggested that soteriological universalism could be reduced to a claim on the nature of reality as such, thus turning the historical founder and universal savior into a cipher for reality. In the Lotus Sutra, “the Buddha becomes coterminous with reality itself,” no longer

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limited by space and time, an embodiment of the ultimate truth of emptiness. However, this ontological vision again bears potential tensions and contradictions. As reality as such is established as the supreme object of devotion, the risk for religion is to “disappear into reality,” becoming only one among its many possible accounts, not intrinsically different from those offered by art or philosophy.

“Right Speech in the Abhaya Sutra and Skillful Speech in the Lotus Sutra”

Kin Cheung, Moravian College, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

What is the relationship between right speech and skillful speech? Can a lie ever be regarded as right speech? These are the questions opening the paper presented by Dr. Cheung, who investigated the meaning of deception in Buddhism. Moving from the notions of “right” speech and “skillful” speech as illustrated by the Abhaya Sutra and the Lotus Sutra, the author attempted to define a Buddhist approach to truth, investigated through both correspondence theory and pragmatic theory of truth.

Early Buddhism held inconsistent theories of truth, simultaneously holding naive interpretations of both correspondence and pragmatic theories. Approaches toward lying appear contradictory as well, in some cases condemning deception as a fundamental violation while admitting “skillful lies”—statements that are untrue but

beneficial—as possible actions for a bodhisattva. The attempt to give a definition of *right speech* adds a further layer of complexity. To navigate among many possible conceptualizations of truth, such as absence of logical inconsistency, soteriological validity, ethical obligation, Dr. Cheung referred to Francisca Cho and Richard Squier’s study on Buddhist use of language. In their analysis of the parable of the physician, the authors advanced an idea of plurality or multiplicity of truth not ascribing to either correspondence or pragmatic theory. The relationship between true speech as part of the eightfold path and skillful speech as *upāya* or *hōben* seems to mirror the apparent contradiction between correspondence and pragmatic theories of truth.

In the debate that followed, convenors expanded the issues raised by the paper, adding an ontological dimension. Buddhist principles such as the notions of emptiness or impermanence question the existence of an ultimate reality, or at least its accessibility by verbal means. If we define truth in terms of correspondence with reality, to state that the Dharma is accessible only through conventional and provisory statements denies the very possibility of affirming an ultimate truth. If right speech cannot be conceptualized in correspondent terms, it could be intended as an ethical commitment whose rightfulness depends on the intentions of the speakers. This formulation would imply a strictly pragmatic conceptualization of truth.

“Two Stories of a Rich Father and a Poor Son: An Exercise in Interreligious Dialogue”

Ernest Valea, Pro Vita Medica Foundation, Timisoara, Romania

Dr. Valea presented a comparison between the Buddhist story of the rich father and poor son and the Christian parable of the prodigal son, from the perspective of comparative theology. When talking about interreligious dialogue, there are three possible approaches to the salvific message of other religious traditions: pluralism, inclusivism, exclusivism. While each one has its own merit, they all harbor some problematic aspect. Dr. Valea finds a more constructive attitude toward interreligious dialogue in comparative theology, an alternative approach originally formulated by Francis Clooney and James Fredericks in the late 1980s, whose distinctive feature lies in moving from the standpoint of one's faith. Investigating other doctrines from a specific religious background allows one to acknowledge the alterity of the other without judgment while also providing an opportunity to deepen the understanding of one's own faith.

Moving from these considerations, Dr. Valea examined the Buddhist story of the rich father and poor son found in chapter 4 of the Lotus from his perspective as a Roman Catholic Christian, dialoguing with the commentary compiled by Dr. Gene Reeves. In his analysis, he detected several points of convergence,

such as the substantially positive view of the nature of human beings. Buddhist and Christian traditions share the conviction that each person is a locus of enormous potential, rooted, respectively, in the notion of buddha-nature and in the belief of creation in the image and likeness of God. Attitude toward neighbors can be identified as another common trait, and one that could provide fertile ground for Christian-Buddhist cooperation in the domain of social action. In the concluding section, Dr. Valea carried on the comparativist exercise offering a possible interpretation of the parable of the prodigal son from a Buddhist standpoint.

“Wŏnhyo's Understanding of the One Vehicle and Its Application in Contemporary Korea”

Lucy Hyekyung Jee, Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea

The paper presented by Dr. Jee addressed two fundamental issues, our present understanding of the doctrine of the One Vehicle and its possible applications to contemporary society, investigated through the work of the Buddhist exegete Wŏnhyo (617–686 CE). Wŏnhyo analyzed the doctrine of the One Vehicle with two categories, the aspect of a person and the aspect of the Dharma, or truth, which in turn is examined through four subcategories.

The first category moves from the question, Who can ride the One Vehicle? In his discussion, Wŏnhyo adopted an inclusivist perspective, arguing that all beings are potential subjects for enlightenment based on a logic of nondifferentiation between the world of sentient beings and the world of nirvana. The second category, the Dharma, deals with the content of the One Vehicle, examined through four rubrics. The principle is the nature of the One Vehicle, which ultimately consists in the truth of all sentient beings equally possessing buddha-nature. The teaching is the truth revealing the principle of the One Vehicle. Wŏnhyo explained the existence of three vehicles as indicating a differentiation of levels, not content, and corresponding to various degrees of understanding and capacities in practitioners. The cause of the One Vehicle is the cause of becoming a buddha, while the effect is becoming a buddha or acquiring a buddha-body.

Dr. Jee advanced that Wŏnhyo's interpretation, if applied to contemporary Buddhism, has the potential to promote inclusiveness and equality as well as encourage self-affirmation and positive thinking, responding to the needs of an increasingly multicultural society. In support to her argument, she presented two cases of Korean Buddhist practitioners, the monk Pomyun and the nun Daehang, whose marked inclination toward syncretism, ecumenical dialogue, and innovative approaches to practice appear in line with the thought of Wŏnhyo.

“Girō Seno'o's Buddhist Socialism, the Lotus Sutra, and the Interreligious Social Movement in the 1930s–1940s”

Kunihiko Terasawa, Wartburg College, Waverly, Iowa

Girō Seno'o was a Buddhist practitioner and founder of the Shinkō Bukkyō Seinen Dōmei (the Youth League for

Revitalizing Buddhism), a transsectarian movement opposing capitalism and the ultranationalist militarism of 1930s Japan. The front built an alliance among Buddhists, Christians, Marxists, socialists, and labor unionists but ultimately did not succeed in its intent of reforming Japanese society, collapsing shortly after Seno's arrest in 1936. As argued by Dr. Terasawa, the failure of the Youth League offers precious insights into several critical issues, such as transsectarian dialogue within Buddhism and the inherent tension between nationalism and transnationalism, the relationship between Buddhism and Marxism in terms of sociopolitical reform, and interaction with Social Christianity.

Seno's work sheds new light on Buddhist social engagement and interreligious dialogue with Christianity. Dr. Terasawa emphasized the key role played by constant dialogue with progressive Christians in shaping his unique understanding of Buddhism. The influence of Marxism can be regarded as just as relevant. Seno became interested in Marxism after his experience within the Nichirenshugi movement led by Nissō Honda, which helped him realize some limitations of Buddhism in the promotion of sociostructural change. Combining Marxist socioeconomic analysis with Buddhist teachings, he elaborated a new interpretation of the "threefold refuge" (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha), which

became the ideological foundation for the Youth Front. Seno shared Honda's ideal to return to the figure of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, which could be expected to foster a unification of Buddhism beyond transsectarian boundaries. His formulation was also imbued with a strong sentiment of compassion and love for the other stemming from the principle of interdependent co-arising, and was expected to foster a spirit of communitarianism within the Sangha.

His thought further developed in virtue of his encounter with the Social Christianity movement, in which he saw an ally with which to tackle social injustice. The author stressed how Seno did not conceive interreligious dialogue as a mere intellectual conversation but as a "dialogue in action" aimed at practical cooperation. His example could offer a model for contemporary interreligious cooperation for social reform or critical response to controversial issues such as public support of the Yasukuni Shrine.

"One Lesson Learned: The Burning Mansion Parable in Contemporary Manga and Ehon"

Jon Holt, Portland State University, Portland, Oregon

Across the centuries, the Lotus Sutra managed to charm countless people, including Buddhist practitioners and

scholars as well as artists, performers, and many others. Beyond religious and scholarly interpretations, the text was approached from a multiplicity of perspectives, encompassing a wide range of visual adaptations. Dr. Holt chose to look at picture books (*ehon*) and comic books (*manga*) focusing on the rendition of the parable of the burning mansion.

The author examined textual and visual contents of four works by different authors, considering their stylistic choices in narrative flow, character design, proportion between text and pictures, predominance of stylized over realistic imaginary, and so on. Moving from Helen Kilpatrick's considerations on the relationship between text and its original source (pretext), Dr. Holt investigated how the visual medium was employed to emphasize, disclose, challenge, and reinterpret the powerful message of the Lotus.

One of the peculiarities of hybrid media such as *manga* and *ehon* is the capacity of images to expand or add something to the original message of the text. Figurative language can even be used to convey individual interpretations and pursue a specific ideological agenda, as in the case of the last work examined in the paper, a commentary by Jirō Kuwata. Dr. Holt observed how Kuwata used extremely iconic images and a flow-chart layout to recode the Lotus and convey a philosophy based on the concept of "spirit" (*tamashii*). These considerations brought fascinating insights not only on the relationship between the Lotus and the authors of its adaptations but also on its impact on the readership, outlining a triadic relationship where author, text, and audience dynamically engage with each other. Another theme outlined by the paper was the capacity of the Lotus to adapt to multiple forms of artistic and cultural expressions, turning into a powerful medium to convey a range of meanings that transcend its religious value.

“Universalism or Exclusivism? Ekayāna in the Early Layers of the Lotus Sutra”

James B. Apple, University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada

The teaching of the One Vehicle is commonly interpreted in inclusive and egalitarian terms. More generally, when talking about the Lotus Sutra and the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, their universalistic stance tends to be taken for granted. The paper presented by Dr. Apple questioned such established understanding of the Lotus, particularly the assumption of its total universalism, by looking in more detail at the conceptualization of *ekayāna* (the One Vehicle) in the early layers of the text (chapters 1–10), unveiling its hidden ambiguity.

The paper opens by outlining the development of the notion of *ekayāna* in the broader Buddhist historical context of the period of the Three Vehicles, based on the use of the term in several Mahayana sutras. The gradual development of the concept within a minority of Buddhist groups was also connected to an increasing glorification of the figure of Siddhartha Gautama and the status of awakened being, which instituted a new and more prestigious religious goal.

Consequently, in early bodhisattva sutras, the three vehicles were formulated as three paths that individuals can follow to attain three different spiritual goals (arhat, *pratyekabuddha*, and buddha).

Digging into the early layers of the Lotus Sutra, Dr. Apple observed how compounds of the derogatory term *hina* are repeatedly used in relation to the three vehicles, thus connoting them as lesser pathways. Although acknowledged, other teachings are regarded as unreal or generally inferior to the one of the Lotus. The argument unveils inherent contradictions between the seemingly universalistic message of the sutra, centered on the egalitarian statement that all sentient beings possess buddha-nature and can attain buddhahood, and an exclusivist attitude toward the message itself, recognized as the only right path to full buddhahood, which rejects all those who do not accept it.

“The Influence of the Concept of One Vehicle in the Lotus Sutra on Jizang’s Discussion of Universal Buddha-Nature”

Chih-mien Adrian Tseng, Fo Guan University, Jiaosi, Taiwan

Do plants and trees possess buddha-nature and thus the capacity to become enlightened? The paper presented by

Dr. Tseng addressed this issue through the work of the Chinese exegete Jizang (549–623), arguing how the universalistic formulation of buddha-nature deriving from his understanding of the One Vehicle can be said to include nonsentient beings (plants and trees). These considerations are linked to pressing challenges faced by contemporary society, notably the impact of climate change and environmental devastation, which institute an urgent need to rediscuss the relation between nature and mankind in terms of equality rather than dominance. The author suggested that a universalistic formulation of buddha-nature may constitute a Buddhist response to environmental ethics, and a crucial step in that sense.

The analysis of Jizang’s assertion of a universal buddha-nature was articulated on two levels. From an epistemological point of view, nonsentient beings such as plants and trees are perceived as being nondual with sentient beings. In an ontological perspective, instead, plants and trees can be said to possess buddha-nature by themselves. The author identified the peculiarity of Jizang’s approach in the combination of the teachings of the One Vehicle with the doctrine of emptiness and the Middle Way stated in the Nirvana Sutra. While the Nirvana Sutra excludes nonsentient beings from the concept of buddha-nature because of their lack of consciousness, Jizang conceptualized a truly universal notion, called the “Middle Way buddha-nature.” His interpretation is rooted in the idea of the One Vehicle as universal true reality, understood in terms of principle and ultimately identified with the doctrine of emptiness. He also postulated the existence of two kinds of wisdom, provisional and true, which can be regarded as two aspects of reality. While “reality with the aspect of skillful means” is associated with the aspect of being able to explain, involving cognitive activities, true reality is conceived as the passive

“The *Ekayāna* Doctrine in the Lotus Sutra and the Humanity Quest by Two Contemporary Japanese Buddhists”

Shinobu Arai Apple, University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada

In the present context marked by religious violence, conflict, and proliferation of nuclear armaments, how can religious institutions contribute to humanitarian discourse? In the attempt to combine research on the *ekayāna* doctrine with contemporary pacifist debate, Dr. Apple looked at conceptualization of the One Vehicle in the thought of Daisaku Ikeda and Nikkyo Niwano, leaders of Soka Gakkai and Rissho Kosei-kai, respectively, and its application to peace building and interreligious cooperation initiatives.

In the case of Rissho Kosei-kai, the author stressed how the bodhisattva practice is conceptualized in terms of action, notably efforts to improve one's home, society, state, and the world. In this respect, she suggested that the Donate-a-Meal movement constitutes a “practical life-style framework of the bodhisattva practice.” More broadly, Rissho Kosei-kai's application of the *ekayāna* doctrine can be defined as a “linkage model” that aims to create a strong sense of connection between members and people in the world.

On the other hand, Daisaku Ikeda's take on the *ekayāna* doctrine is centered on the idea that all human beings inherently possess a condition of buddhahood but that a process of inner personal transformation is needed to bring this inner potential into life. This notion of “human revolution” is deeply embedded in Soka Gakkai's activities in the areas of peace, culture, and education on a global scale. In contrast with Rissho Kosei-kai's tendency to build federations and cooperative ties with other religious institutions, Soka Gakkai's approach, defined by Dr. Apple as “activating model” of the

condition of being explained, which lies beyond mind and consciousness. This formulation allows one to define buddha-nature as a truly universal condition, embracing all existences.

“Who Rides on the One Vehicle? From the Viewpoint of the Buddha”

Hiroshi Munehiro Niwano, Rissho Kosei-kai Gakurin Seminary, Tokyo

In his analysis of the teaching of the One Vehicle, Dr. Niwano shifts the focus from the vehicle itself to its passenger, the subject of the teaching. As the question of who rides the One Vehicle is intrinsically connected to the Mahayana concept of buddha-nature, this becomes an inquiry into who is acknowledged to have the ability to attain buddhahood. The Lotus Sutra does not clarify who rides the vehicle but, rather, focuses on the “destination,” that is, the achievement that comes from riding it, which is Buddha-wisdom. The text, though, repeatedly stresses the impossibility for practitioners to comprehend Buddha-wisdom and the teaching of the One Vehicle itself. However, such emphasis on the inability to understand the teachings turns into an affirmation of potential: the hidden wisdom that is not understood when it is revealed institutes a possibility of being known in the

future. At the same time, this turns into an affirmation of equality among practitioners. Faced with the incomprehensible wisdom that underlies all teachings of the Buddha, they recognize that they are equal in their potential to become buddhas. In general, the One Vehicle can be seen to affirm that the Buddha's audience consists entirely of bodhisattvas and that all living beings share the inherent capacity to become a buddha, overcoming a discrimination existing in previous vehicles. The bodhisattva vehicle achieves that by moving from a limited focus on individual enlightenment to the greater goal of liberation of others. Such interpretation of the teaching of the One Vehicle also resonates with the thought of Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai.

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Niwano wondered about possible contributions that the wisdom of the One Vehicle can offer to present society. The law of dependent origination states that existence is in constant change, reminding us that all people, even those who seem unchangeable, can be transformed. In spite of how attractive this idea might sound, it may be hard to reconcile with some aspects of our everyday reality, such as the existence of evil. Becoming able to see everyone as a bodhisattva, then, becomes the first, fundamental step toward the liberation of others.

ekayāna doctrine, appears more focused on individual development and formation of global citizens. In this respect, she referred to the notion of “humanitarian competition” advanced by the organization, defined as a cooperative form of competition alternative to military, political, and economic competition, where one could benefit oneself by working for the sake of others. In conclusion, both approaches show that the teaching of the One Vehicle can turn into a principle for social change and peace building, and that organizations like Soka Gakkai and Rissho Kosei-kai have the potential to significantly contribute to the pacifist debate.

Discussion— Common Themes

The Unfading Charm of the Lotus Sutra: Adaptability of the Text and Radicalness of Its Message

Across the centuries, the Lotus Sutra managed to charm generations of practitioners and scholars, and today it still continues to attract vibrant academic interest. Among the many reasons for such unfading attractiveness, the seminar drew particular attention to the high degree of adaptability of the text and the radicalness of its message. The content of the Lotus has inspired countless adaptations employing a range of different media, as in the case of the visual renditions examined by Dr. Holt. Adaptability can be regarded as an integral part of its teachings: the importance of knowing one’s audience—and articulating the message accordingly—is repeatedly stated in the text, primarily in the idea that Buddha resorts to countless means to convey the truth to sentient beings depending on their characteristics and degree of understanding. We can also talk about adaptability in another sense, as the capacity of the sutra to maintain its relevance despite

the passing of time and changing historical and social circumstances, which can be attributed in great part to the radicalness of its message. The innovative strength stemming from the idea that all sentient beings possess *buddha-nature* makes the Lotus a powerful tool for action, and across the centuries many have been attracted by the text’s inherent potential as a vehicle of religious and social reform. Girō Seno’s reinterpretation of the three treasures based on a combination of the teachings of the sutra and Marxism offers a relevant example in this sense. The message of the Lotus remains valid at present, as argued by papers suggesting that it could serve to address pressing challenges such as environmental ethics (Dr. Tseng), peace work (Dr. Shinobu Apple), or the promotion of equality as diversity in contemporary multicultural societies (Dr. Jee). Still today, the innovative power of the text remains unchanged.

Hidden Ambiguity of the Message of the Lotus: Contradictions within Inclusivism and Universalism

We could also think about the Lotus Sutra as a masterful piece of rhetoric seducing the reader into a narrative so fascinating that he or she fails to notice its inherent contradictions. As argued, for example, by Dr. James Apple, the alleged universality and inclusiveness of the message of the Lotus hides some ambiguities: while claiming to transcend all sectarian differences, the sutra harbors the potential for exclusion of alternative religious traditions. The doctrine of the three vehicles is among the sources of such ambiguity, owing to its contradictory interpretations. In the parable of the burning house, for example, the One Vehicle emerges as a fourth vehicle, which can be seen as either embracing all the three vehicles or emerging as a new vehicle, superior to all others.

These issues are also linked to the relationship between different Buddhist traditions, since at times the doctrine of the One Vehicle and the three vehicles has been used to articulate sectarian differences and institute hierarchical classifications of Buddhist schools and teachings.

A further element of ambiguity can be identified in forms of weak and strong paternalism pervading the Lotus, especially in relation to discussions on the “right way” of teaching. The use of lies and deception to convey truth, examined by Dr. Cheung, is one among many examples of paternalistic attitudes mentioned in the text. The teacher is attributed complete discretion over what to disclose to disciples, and when and how, as seen in the parables of the burning house and the physician. The sutra itself can turn into an instrument of paternalism when used to impose a message on the readership, as suggested by Dr. Holt when arguing that Jirō Kuwata “almost turned the text into *hōben* (skillful means) to spread his own religious thought.”

Considerations on exclusivist and paternalist undertones also relate to the discussion on potential applications of the One Vehicle to interreligious cooperation. Possible approaches to interfaith dialogue were one of the leitmotifs of the seminar. Several papers, such as those of Dr. Valea and Dr. Niwano, considered advantages and dangers of the main approaches (inclusivism, exclusivism, pluralism), which were discussed also in relation to another recurrent topic: universalism and its potential risks. The claim for universal salvation is without doubt an attractive message. However, as argued by Dr. O’Leary and further elaborated in the debate throughout the seminar, it also harbors many conceptual risks. Notably, universalizing a religious message, even with the intention of promoting inclusiveness in interfaith dialogue, implies the risk of flattening out the

particularities of specific religious traditions, depriving them of their own peculiar identity. Epistemological universalism harbors similar risks. Adopting an inclusive perspective when discussing religious messages as expressions of ultimate truth easily leads to the assumption that all religions ultimately state the same truth but through different formulations. Although this approach might be helpful in overcoming transsectarian divergences, the risk of nullifying the particularity of specific religious traditions remains high.

Historicizing the Lotus: Influence of Sociohistorical Circumstances on the Development of the One Vehicle Teaching

Another relevant issue that emerged from the discussion is the importance of “historicizing” the Lotus Sutra. Participants observed how analysis

of the text tends to focus on its doctrinal contents, often failing to take into account the historical circumstances in which they were formulated and received throughout the centuries. Theological interpretations need to be integrated with awareness of the socioeconomic, political, and cultural circumstances of the time, as argued by Dr. James Apple, whose paper underlined the influence of dynamics of interaction within Buddhist community on the compilation of the Lotus, arguing that the One Vehicle could be seen as an attempt to proclaim the superiority of the one path without openly questioning the *shravaka* tradition.

Among other factors that contributed to shape the way teachings were articulated and interpreted, we could also list authorship and socioeconomic conditions for publishing manuscripts and commentaries, or the circumstances in which the text spread across different geographical and linguistic areas, such

as developments and cultural adaptations that occurred in translation.

Personal experiences of Buddhist exegetes and thinkers offer another perspective from which to reflect on the effect of historical factors on the reception of the teachings of the Lotus. Dr. Jee observed how Wŏnhyo’s interpretation of the One Vehicle was influenced by his marked concern for the suffering of the underprivileged, probably developed in response to the rigid social stratification of his time. The influence of sociocultural circumstances appears manifest in Girō Seno’ō’s earnest social commitment and political engagement.

On a slightly different note, Dr. Tseng mentioned possible pragmatic reasons behind Jizang’s universalistic conceptualization of buddha-nature: his innovative approach could have been an attempt to obtain legitimacy and state support for his school and to make it more appealing in a context of fierce competition among Buddhist schools.

In general, these examples showed how social and historical circumstances represent a key factor in the development of doctrinal interpretations and the commentary tradition.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the seminar showed how the teaching of the One Vehicle still today possesses a significant potential for application not only in the field of interreligious dialogue but also in response to a wide range of pressing issues faced by contemporary societies. The seminar also shed a new light on hidden contradictions of the Lotus Sutra, despite its apparent universalism and total inclusiveness. However, we could argue that it is precisely in virtue of its complexity that the text never ceased to charm religious practitioners and scholars alike and continues to attract the interest of a wide range of people even centuries after its compilation. □

The Role of Religion Today

The Thirty-Fourth Niwano Peace Prize Acceptance Address

by Bishop Munib A. Younan

The Niwano Peace Foundation awarded the thirty-fourth Niwano Peace Prize to Bishop Munib A. Younan, president emeritus of the Lutheran World Federation and bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, for his perseverance and compassion in his work to encourage dialogue between interreligious groups in the Holy Land. The award ceremony took place on July 27, 2017, at the International House of Japan, Tokyo. The recipient's acceptance address follows.

My dear friends,

It is my great pleasure to be here with you today. I greet you from the Holy City of Jerusalem, sacred to the faithful of three religions—Jews, Christians, and Muslims—and the political center of life for two peoples, Israelis and Palestinians. Jerusalem is a place where religion affects every aspect of life. There is almost no decision made in Jerusalem that does not relate, in ways large and small, to questions of religious commitment.

I am therefore grateful to organizations like the Niwano Peace Foundation that take seriously the role of religion in the deepest questions of life. Nothing is more important for the peoples of Jerusalem or for the many communities of our shared planet than the quest for a just and lasting peace.

It is a great honor for me to be included among this great cloud of witnesses, as the thirty-fourth recipient of the Niwano Peace Prize. The list of former recipients includes people whom I have admired and from whom I have learned much. From its first recipient, Archbishop Hélder Câmara, to Pastor Esther Abimiku Ibanga, to General Secretary Philip Potter, to Bishop Gunnar Stålsett, to HRH Prince El Hassan bin

Talal, the Niwano Peace Prize has communicated the significance and necessity of religious involvement in peace-building efforts.

I also treasure the opportunity to visit this beautiful country and to be received so graciously by the Japanese people. Japan and her people have much to teach the world about strength, resilience, and the power of spirituality to bring beauty and new life out of the ashes of war and great human suffering.

On this occasion, I wish to speak about the role of religion in public life, especially in the quest for building peace. To begin, I would like to reflect on the insights of another Niwano Peace Prize laureate, the Swiss Catholic priest and theologian Professor Hans Küng. As early as 1982, Küng articulated his conviction that there could be “no world peace without religious peace.” In the years that followed, he expanded that original thought to these lines:

No peace among the nations
Without peace among the religions.
No peace among the religions
Without dialogue between the religions.
No dialogue between the religions

Without investigation of the foundations of the religions.

(Islam: Past, Present, and Future
[Oneworld, 2007], xxiii)

In his book on Islam, Küng was reacting specifically to the fragmenting worldview of Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis. (The notion was first articulated by Bernard Lewis in “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” *Atlantic Monthly* [September 1990]: 47–60. It was operationalized for policy-making in Huntington’s “The Clash of Civilizations?” [*Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993): 22–49].) While Huntington sought to articulate the essence of other cultures different from his own Western, Christian perspective, Küng advocated *listening* to persons from other faith traditions so we could better understand the foundations and motivations of their communities.

Religion continues to assert itself as a factor in politics. This reassertion has regional and global implications. And as one famous American politician once said, “All politics is local.” In many communities throughout the world, religious conviction is making ever-greater contributions to public debates.

Dr. Munib A. Younan is bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and is president emeritus of the Lutheran World Federation. Bishop Younan was ordained in 1976 at the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem. Over his long career he has held numerous positions in Lutheran and interfaith organizations, and has used his position to establish a wide-ranging network among religious leaders of different faiths in the Middle East.

In many circles, religion is viewed as having nothing but a negative role to play in local and world affairs. In recent years we have seen many extremist groups extracting verses from their holy books, reading them out of any reasonable context, and generalizing them to justify the oppression of others. We have seen politicians try to capitalize on extremism either by *supporting* it through demagoguery and populism or by *opposing* it through demagoguery and populism.

This alliance between political interests and religiously sanctioned extremism is a dangerous trend. It has been especially dangerous in the Middle East. Extremism is not tied to one religion alone; no single religion has a monopoly on extremism. In Jerusalem, we are challenged daily with extremism coming from Jewish settlers and the politicians rushing to support their efforts to seize land in the name of the Bible; we are challenged by Muslims who think the darkest interpretations of Islam are the only way to confront an opponent strong with worldly power; and we are challenged by Christian Zionists who come to our city to view it as an Armageddon playground where their visions of the End Times will one day unfold. I would warn that these voices are promoting an apocalyptic war, not only in Jerusalem, but in the whole world. All religions have extremists.

What we know, however, is that the core of religion is found in the dual call of love: to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your

soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37) and “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). The world was reminded of this unifying message through the Common Word document issued in 2007, signed by 138 Islamic scholars from throughout the world. The document declared that the core message of the Holy Scriptures, including the Qur’an, is summed up in these two commandments: love God and love the neighbor.

This loving, embracing message of religious commitment stands in stark contrast to what Charles Kimball has identified as the “five warning signs” present when religion becomes evil. Rather than loving God and loving the neighbor, religious faith taking the turn toward evil exhibits: (1) absolute-truth claims, (2) blind obedience,

(3) efforts to establish an “ideal” time, (4) a sense that eschatological expectations justify any means, and (5) declarations of holy war. (These concepts are drawn from the chapter titles of Kimball’s *When Religion Becomes Evil: Five Warning Signs* [HarperCollins, 2008].) For Kimball, these five characteristics of harmful religious faith are challenged by the notion of “an inclusive faith rooted in a tradition.” Those extremists who claim to love God, in fact, hate their neighbor, and this is a corruption of the true religion. As it is written in 1 John: “Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen cannot love God whom they have not seen” (1 John 4:20). Unfortunately, there are many liars in our world.

Today, leaders within faith traditions must confront the extremists in their midst. We do this through a witness of robust moderation, rejecting that extremism is somehow the measure of faithfulness. To be moderate is not to be wishy-washy. The moderate is not a person without identity. If we are going to challenge extremist theologies and the extremist politics they support, we must reclaim the center within our respective traditions. As a Lutheran Christian, my hope is anchored in the hope of God's coming reconciliation of all things. This hope is present today, both for our neighbors and for our global ecology and environment. This hope does not separate us from our neighbors but calls us into ever-greater concern for their well-being. From this foundation we embrace rather than exclude, standing for common values of justice, peace, equality, living together, and accepting the Other. As we Lutherans are commemorating five hundred years of Reformation this year, a movement that carried the core message of liberation by God's grace, I think that we must today liberate religion from extremism and corruption.

It is a common misperception that many of the world's problems and conflicts have religious disagreements at

their foundations. Although religious elements are present in many conflicts—including the Palestinian-Israeli conflict—one can often question whether religion is the *cause* of a particular problem. Moreover, focusing on religious elements can often obscure the true sources of a particular conflict. This sort of analysis further diminishes the role of religion in global and local politics, making it seem far simpler than it actually is.

Religious leaders in complex situations know that religion has the ability to help or harm the present and future of the communities they seek to serve. While religious leaders must not become miniature politicians, they must become aware that they have a role to play in seeking peace with justice for their community, their country, and the world. To speak authentically, religious leaders must approach the problems of their societies through the basic elements of their respective faiths. In order to love God and love the neighbor, one must dig to the deep foundations of true religion.

Jerusalem has taught me the deep importance of interfaith dialogue. In Jerusalem you not only see other faiths on a day-by-day basis but see the many facets within each of those faith communities. There are many ways to live out what it means to be within each of the broad categories of faith. As I have reflected on the many different faces I have seen in each of Jerusalem's religions, my sense is that this diversity is itself the antidote to extremism. Through my neighbors in Jerusalem, I have learned not only the importance

of dialogue but also the truth that dialogue will not succeed unless it is based on trust and friendship.

If you are not humbled in the face of these diverse faces within each tradition, your path will lead to exclusivity and extremism. First and foremost, religious extremists cannot accept diversity within their own community. As a result, they cannot accept diversity outside of their traditions; everyone else is an infidel, an unbeliever. What I have learned from this is that addressing extremism begins first within one's own tradition; this is a core responsibility of religious leaders today. Often we find that some religious leaders are even complicit in tolerating extremism within their communities. But if we allow extremism in our own communities, then how can we confront it in others? For this reason, I ask religious leaders not to be complicit but to boldly confront the sick ideologies that pervert our religions.

The agenda for interreligious engagement today must focus on confronting extremisms within each particular tradition. Religious leaders must come together to compare efforts and share wisdom. While there is, of course, a role for secular and governmental leaders in combatting extremism, the most effective efforts to address these dynamics will come from within each particular community itself. If it is true that extremism is the antithesis of love, we must be motivated, first and foremost, by love.

In the Abrahamic traditions, we have a strong emphasis on speaking prophetically, challenging the standard ideas and practices of those in power. I strongly believe that the faithful practice of any religion has prophetic commitments. What we too often forget, however, is that the prophetic is not just directed toward others. Authentic prophetic critique and witness is directed first at my religion, my community. If we are self-critical, boldly addressing those elements in our faith communities that

have become corrupted, our religion can become a source of life for our people and for others. When religion is promoting love, then it is truly prophetic.

This prophetic, loving message—a message that is the antithesis of extremism—is needed more than ever in my city of Jerusalem and in the whole world. While religious leaders alone cannot deliver a just and peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, peace cannot come without religious leaders. I invite religious leaders locally, regionally, and globally to promote education that accepts the otherness of the Other regardless of race, gender, or political affiliation. We badly need this education in our schools, in our homes, and in the media.

On an even more fundamental level, the Middle East—and indeed, the entire world—can benefit from the concept of equal citizenship with equal rights and equal responsibility that embraces diversity. Today it is often accepted that some people can be equal but some are less equal. It is my conviction that we have equal citizenship because God created each of us equally and, according to my confession, Christ saves each of us equally. All human beings should live in dignity and the peace God intends for them in this world.

The work of interfaith dialogue is an art, and today we need many artists. We need a multitude who will work in

concert to become a symphony of love. Together, with God's help, we must compose a new world free of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, Christianophobia, xenophobia, and any other kind of hatred. We have the duty and the joy to sing the song of creation, in which all have a voice, regardless of religion, gender, denomination, class, or tradition.

Finally, my friends, let me again express my extreme gratitude for bestowing upon me the Niwano Peace Prize. Receiving this prize does not graduate me from doing interfaith work. On the contrary, knowing that others have seen and heard my humble contribution motivates me to work on interfaith issues of global importance until I no longer have breath.

I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude for my family, in particular for my wife, Suad, who has been accompanying me on this journey of interfaith witness. I thank my church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, and the Lutheran World Federation, which has given me a platform from which to speak and work internationally.

Dear sisters and brothers, when we see the face of God in the Other, they may in turn see the face of God in us. Only then can we implement God's own purposes for peace, justice, and reconciliation in this world.

May God bless each of you. □

The Niwano Peace Foundation

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.

The road to peace is long. We have to walk along it deliberately, step by step. The work to bring together the efforts of those walking this road needs the kind of perseverance that literally wears away both mind and body. Furthermore, the fruits of these efforts are not immediately visible. This is why I have always said that the road to peace is a slow road.

One country alone, one religion alone, cannot build world peace. To

do so, we must increase the number of those who volunteer to devote themselves to achieving it one by one. What is most important, above everything else, is funding those activities.

Even in Religions for Peace, virtually all of the snags we have hit concerning our conferences and activities originated with questions of who would be responsible for funding them. If some people or countries boldly declare their

financial support, others are sure to soon join in. Without people who selflessly serve, giving money and effort unstintingly without any thought of their own profit, the cause of peace cannot survive. The activities of Religions for Peace are supported by such people.

The Niwano Peace Foundation was set up in 1978 with the help of Rissho Kosei-kai members with the idea of aiding such efforts. It set out to give financial assistance to activities and research in a religious spirit aimed at world peace, in such fields as thought, culture, science, and education; to promote international exchanges between religious people and peace campaigners; and to spread the idea of peace through various types of symposia. Five years later, in 1983, the foundation established an annual Niwano Peace Prize of twenty million Japanese yen [about US\$83,333 at the exchange rate then] to recognize the efforts of those promoting peace activities through interreligious cooperation.

Many people seem to think that people of faith are powerless to change society. But if those people witness people of faith coming together to tackle the

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.

issue of world peace, they will realize that surely a road will be found that transcends differences in ideology and state systems. I deeply believe that inter-religious cooperation is a vital step in achieving peace, but it is an uphill task, since it has to painstakingly gather together various activities one by one. This task will not, however, be completed unless there are people who come one after the other to take up the burden. The Niwano Peace Prize was established to encourage this. We asked six hundred religious figures and other knowledgeable people in eighty-two countries to nominate candidates for the prize. The first recipient was Archbishop Hélder Pessoa Câmara of Brazil.

Archbishop Câmara had been a supporter of Religions for Peace since the Kyoto conference, where he acted as cochair. In his keynote speech there he appealed for reform of social structures to bridge the gap between rich and poor. He made a strong impression on all the delegates. An exponent of non-violence, he worked in his native Brazil and throughout Latin America to liberate people from oppression and poverty and had overwhelming support as “the lawyer of the Third World.”

The award ceremony was held in a Tokyo hotel on April 7, 1983. In his commemorative address, “Interreligious Cooperation for World Peace,” the archbishop quoted from the Kyoto Declaration, issued at the first World Assembly of Religions for Peace, and emphasized its significance, saying that it should be read over and over, because

it tells us clearly what we should do to achieve peace from the standpoint of our own religions. He then referred to Buddhist teachings. He told us, “Buddhism teaches that living according to the Four Noble Truths brings a person to nirvana, and that we must rid ourselves of the delusions of greed, selfishness, and ignorance. We must help love conquer hatred, hope conquer fear and despair, and peace conquer war. Let us live by doing good.” The audience of more than five hundred people from the worlds of religion and business, and from the United Nations, was deeply impressed by his words.

The following day, April 8, Rissho Kosei-kai celebrated the anniversary of the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha.

As the recipient of the prize, the archbishop spoke before a gathering of Rissho Kosei-kai members in the Great Sacred Hall at our organization’s headquarters in Tokyo, referring to Shakyamuni’s Fire Sermon:

When Shakyamuni was crossing Mount Gaya with a group of new disciples, he said to them, “Bhikkhus, all is burning.” The eye is burning with the fire of greed. When seen through this eye, all seems to be burning. The ear is burning; the nose, the tongue, the body, all are burning. When we listen, breathe, speak, walk, they are all shrouded in burning flames. They are the flames of greed, hatred, and ignorance. They

with adherents of all religions to work for peace. This is what our Buddhist brothers have taught us through the Niwano Peace Prize.”

The archbishop’s report drew global attention to the significance of the Niwano Peace Prize and brought understanding from Christians as well.

Later Recipients of the Niwano Peace Prize

The Niwano Peace Prize is offered annually. The second recipient was Dr. Homer A. Jack, a Unitarian Universalist clergyman and the first secretary-general of Religions for Peace. In the thirteen years since its foundation, he had worked tirelessly for peace. Dr. Jack was an activist who sought to bring about world peace from a standpoint of religious tolerance by promoting human rights, disarmament, and interreligious cooperation. He was known as a specialist in disarmament. He received the prize in recognition of his leadership in projects for the relief of Vietnamese boat people and aid to Cambodian refugees.

The third recipient was Mr. Zhao Puchu, president of the Buddhist Association of China, who made every effort to bring about China’s participation in Religions for Peace. The fourth was Dr. Philip A. Potter, from Dominica, who worked for twelve years as general secretary of the World Council of Churches. The fifth Niwano Peace Prize was awarded to the World Muslim Congress, whose secretary-general, Dr. Inamullah Khan, was a supporter of Religions for Peace.

The sixth recipient was Ven. Etai Yamada, head priest of the Tendai Buddhist denomination, the first Japanese to receive the prize. It was given for his work to raise religious sentiment through the Light Up Your Corner movement, based on the spirit of the Lotus Sutra; for his role at the religious summit meeting on Mount Hiei in 1987, following the World Day of Prayer for

Peace held by the Vatican in Assisi the previous year; and for his powerful assistance to Religions for Peace.

The recipients between 1990 and 1998 were the journalist Dr. Norman Cousins; Dr. Hildegard Goss-Mayr, a core member of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation; Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement; Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, a joint community of Jews and Palestinians in Israel; Cardinal Paulo E. Arns, founder

are the flames of birth, aging, sickness, and death. They are the flames of sorrow and despair. In the world today, the flames of karmic fires are blazing. Four-fifths of the world’s resources are owned by one-quarter of its population. Though technological advancements have taught us how to eradicate poverty, the so-called superpowers are desperately competing with each other in an arms race, and as a result untold millions of people all over the world are dying of starvation. Can we just stand aside and watch the karmic fires burn?

After his stay in Japan, Archbishop Câmara stopped in New York on his way back to Brazil. There he spoke powerfully at a meeting with religious leaders and UN personnel about the meaning of the Niwano Peace Prize. He said, “From now on, Christians must not only talk about God’s love in church but join hands

of the São Paulo Justice and Peace Commission; Dr. M. Aram, founder of Shanti Ashram, an inheritor of Gandhi’s spirit; Ms. Marii K. Hasegawa, leader of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom; the Corrymeela Community, dedicated to encouraging reconciliation in Northern Ireland; and Ven. Maha Ghosananda, a spiritual pillar of Cambodian reconstruction.

To be continued

The Forgotten Genocide

The DR Congo in the Geostrategic Battle of Information Technology

by J. P. Mukengeshayi Matata

The unforgotten genocide in Congo calls for an international solidarity in protecting human life and forging our conscience to do to other people what we would like others to do for us.

Since 1990 Congolese people have been struggling to get rid of the Western-backed government that has killed more than ten million Congolese people these last years, plundering the Democratic Republic of the Congo of its natural resources and minerals in order to promote mobile phone and the electronics businesses and to develop the heavy industry of automobile manufacture. In his article titled "A Criminal State: Understanding and Countering Institutionalized Corruption and

Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo," Sasha Lezhnev advocates the creation of a global network of competent people who can help the Congolese government to enforce the rule of law. He asks the international community, especially the United States and other Western countries, to freeze the assets of some Congolese leaders as a method to put pressure on the government to fight the money laundering system, promote freedom of speech, and protect citizens' rights. He insists also on imposing targeted penal sanctions on some members of the said government in order to oblige them to safeguard civil rights and protect Congolese lives.

How can we comprehend that more than ten million Congolese men, women, children, and older people have been slaughtered, killed in a highly motivated way, while the international community, mostly the decision makers, has remained silent? Who is going to raise his voice against this genocide? Are we going to let President Joseph Kabila

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kill Congolese people with impunity in order to fulfill the American, British, French, and Belgian diabolic process of balkanization of the country? Why did the United Nations let Rwanda and Uganda invade the DR Congo without sanctioning them? What are the US foreign policies on this rich and beautiful country in the heart of the African continent? Why hasn't the UN (MONUSCO) presence in the Congo for more than twenty years brought peace and democracy to this country?

The history of the DR Congo is repeating itself. Today's situation is completely the same as it was in the 1960s when Belgium, England, and the United States decided to kill Patrice Emery Lumumba, plunging the country into political chaos, in order to control the mines and keep the businesses of their countries going.

The above-mentioned countries have always been at the height of the tragicomic situations that have occurred in our territory since the Berlin Conference (1884–85). These countries have organized various projects and orchestrated hidden wars inside the country to keep the mother cow called DR Congo weak so that they can always provide their

industries with the Congolese rare metals needed in the development of their heavy industries. Today the US foreign policies are still sustaining despotic and mass-killing leaders such as President Joseph Kabila, Yoweri Museveni, and Paul Kagame because they are protecting US interests and can probably do the dirty business in the Congo and all of Africa that American people would not find acceptable.

The DR Congo has been under a state of siege created by the battle of the British-American geostrategic policies on the Great Lakes region in the eastern part of the Congo. These policies go against the long and persistent French Foccarism ideology of favoring neocolonialism and clientelism that was ended by the outgoing French president Francois Hollande. To put it another way, under the Clinton presidency and the Tony Blair administration, a new geostrategic map of DR Congo balkanization was drawn up in order to extend Anglo-American influence in Central Africa. And through the creation of a global network called American Mineral Field International (AMFI), the United States, Canada, England, and their allies Rwanda and Uganda elaborated a project to invade without impunity the DR Congo in order to have access to the rich resources of the eastern part of the country.

Despite the Rwandan genocide guilt felt by various ruling leaders of the time, the genocide rhetoric propagated by Rwandan president Paul Kagame has served as an excuse for fulfilling a vast and Machiavellian process of plunging the Congo into political chaos in order to destabilize it, thus enabling the AMFI and its allies in plundering the Congo's minerals, and boost business in the rising tide of information technology. The so-called crises in the Congo have to be understood within the prerogative of the ambiguous UN and US foreign policies, which have always sustained strongmen in the Congo and in Africa

instead of promoting democracy and advocating the welfare of Congolese citizens.

Following the example of King Leopold II, colonial leaders as well as former Congolese leaders have destroyed this country during its 130-year existence, and Joseph Kabila, in collaboration with his business allies from the West, has robbed the precious natural resources and wealth of the Congolese people.

Since the establishment of the Congo Free State in 1885, the fate of the Congo has been compromised by the ambiguous economic projects of the ruling leaders in France, the United States, Germany, and England, who entrusted the Congo to the king of Belgium. Until today, the Congo has been considered a "puppet state" (a state that exists only on paper), where Belgium, England, France, Germany, and the United States could decide at various times to whom it could belong and if need it be, determine the kind of business they might want

to do in this rich transatlantic colony. These decisions have brought the great ambiguity that always sets the Congo on fire. It has created within the troika (Belgium, France, the United States) an insatiable appetite, a hubris, to raise more capital by investing in the mineral-rich Congo while breeding conflicts among the Congolese people for the interests of the old metropole.

The DR Congo is, however, not a failed state. Despite the illegal exploitation of its resources, which has worsened the social security system and destroyed the medical and educational systems, the Congo still has great potential for rebuilding its country if its leaders adopt the rule of law and good governance.

In order to restore the rule of law and to foster respect for human rights, the National Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Congo and different opponent political leaders have called the Congolese people to resist any public and unlawful violence from the government. The bishops want to safeguard the nation against any attempt at balkanization of the country and any extermination of its citizens in Kasai, Kivu, and other provinces.

The Congolese project of society will be carried out only when Congolese citizens become capable of asserting their inner rights and participating fully in the building of a new state in which both leaders and citizens, bound by the same rules, decide to work for the development of their beautiful country.

This struggle for freedom, justice, and democracy compels many Congolese to bear hope for restoring a new social order based on respect for human dignity. Congolese people, at home and through the worldwide diaspora, are engaged in finding ways to free their country from the long-imposed oppressive regime controlled by the Rwandan president, Paul Kagame. They are protesting against the manipulation of their leaders by the United States, France,

Belgium, England, and Germany, whose long relations with the Congolese ruling leaders have been of benefit to them rather than to the defense of the DR Congo territorial integrity and the promotion of a sustainable, healthy, social security for the Congolese people.

Toward the Creation of a New Society

The Congolese crisis is now viewed as a complex one. It is a general crisis of development that requires a comprehensive, sustained, and systematic response, with a long-term focus on all fronts: economic, social, and political. The alleviation of poverty should be an overall, central objective, for which high economic growth in food and agricultural production and in all other sectors is an essential condition.

But higher economic growth must be human centered and must go hand-in-hand with the pursuit of equity and the satisfaction of the basic needs of adequate food and nutrition, health, education, and shelter for all people.

Such a vision will be effective if the new government in the Congo singles out education as the first priority and considers it the cornerstone that must be used for the building of a new society, where justice flows “like a stream, and righteousness like a river that never goes dry” (Amos 5:24).

The government must strengthen the intellectual capacity and knowledge base in order to revitalize all segments of education: primary, secondary, and tertiary. All of those segments have suffered a serious decline in quality because of the lack of financial and physical resources and facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, books, journals, and other learning materials. There is, above all, at all levels, a serious shortage of teachers, researchers, and managers. A largely illiterate people cannot achieve meaningful, long-term, sustainable human development. A major challenge to a new

government is to enhance the quality and output of scientific research amid training in the country.

A second urgent challenge is to stop the external brain drain of such skilled and trained people from the Congo to the developed countries. In recent years, this drain of skilled intellectuals has become a real threat to the development of the country. Whatever its complex political, financial, and social causes, there is little doubt that the continuing emigration of doctors and other technically skilled professionals constitutes a costly resource loss in skills and human capital in the Congo.

The Congo will not be liberated from the neocolonial system unless the government, policy makers, and professional organizations take practical steps toward giving the brain-drain phenomenon the highest priority in their reform programs. They need to attract back from abroad, through incentive schemes and other mechanisms, the skilled Congolese professionals and experts now living and working overseas.

A third challenge is a struggle by the state to make a close connection between the nation’s cultural endowment and authenticity and its capacity to master science and technology and development. These are the most important challenges. If the new government takes them as one of its priorities, it will help the Congolese people to understand that there can be no process of development, no effective nation-building effort without a viable relationship between peasants and intellectuals, without a viable relationship between the president and the people, without the participation of all its people in the creation of a new society.

What constitutes a nation is its commitment to common ideals, goals, and values. As in many Asian countries, African countries and, for instance, their presidents and leaders, must learn that a belief in hard work, thrift, filial piety, national pride, and honesty, particularly

on the ministerial level, is an important tool for the building of a national conscience.

The consensus of consciences, says Michael Polanyi, is a sign of a democratic spirit among the people. Democracy and freedom of speech are bound together. They are an expression of a community commitment to certain metaphysical beliefs. Fairness in discussion is an attempt at objectivity, a preference for truth. The love of truth and confidence in the government are not effectively embraced by people in the form of theory; they are embodied mainly in the practice of that speech.

Toward an Integral Liberation

This picture of the Congo portrays the injustice and violence of which we are victims. But our resignation, or our protection of some immediate material interests, makes us the perpetrators of this injustice as well. Those of us belonging to the younger generation of Africans (born in the 1960s) think that the struggle for a self-determining society that takes into account respect for human rights is a global ground where Japanese, American, African, and European young people have to work hand-in-hand for the real independence of Africa.

In fact, our basic utopia consists in the total and integral liberation of our people: political, economic, cultural, social, and religious liberation; the liberation of the whole person and of all persons. Liberation and total independence for Africa remain a dream.

They are not given; they must be achieved by us. Since they are never fully accomplished, they remain an everyday struggle. The unforgotten genocide in the Congo calls for international solidarity in protecting human life and forging our conscience to do to other people what we would like others to do for us. □

Skillful Means

by Dominick Scarangelo

Skillful means are certainly not ad hoc temporary solutions or stopgaps, nor are they “provisional” in the sense of being something entirely different or separate from ultimate truth. Instead, skillful means are, as skillful means, part and parcel of ultimate truth.

A lie is also a skillful means.

—Japanese proverb

Skillful means are precious.

—Nikkyo Niwano

Upāya, or skillful means (Skt., *upāya-kaśālya*; Chn., *fangbian*; Jpn., *hōben*), is an important Buddhist principle that becomes a core issue in Mahayana Buddhist texts, including the Srimaladevi, Vimalakirti, and Lotus sutras. The most basic meaning of *upāya* is “to approximate, draw near, or arrive,” and by extension *upāya* may also indicate what one uses to attain one’s aim. In Buddhism *upāya* indicates opportune methods, means, or teachings, which are deftly tailored to particular needs in order to end people’s suffering and guide them to enlightenment. However, as temporary or highly contextualized means to these ends, *upāya* are also understood as relative and provisional. On this account, *upāya* are often described as “expedients”—an ambiguous word that also captures another shade of the meaning of the original Sanskrit: a craft or artifice.

It is this last notion of *upāya* that is especially prominent in Japanese popular

culture. The Japanese word *hōben* invariably evokes the proverb “A lie is also a skillful means,” which may be uttered with a mischievous wink and nod to excuse a white lie. It can also carry a disapproving tone when directed at the self-serving behavior of someone who cheats or causes harm in the selfish pursuit of their own advantage, such as a scam artist or a shady businessperson. The most common English translation of this proverb—“the end justifies the means”—goes even further in demonizing the notion of skillful means, evoking images of the great evil figures of world history.

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, repeatedly pointed out this Japanese proverb in order to correct what he saw as a long-standing misapprehension of the meaning of skillful means. For Rev. Niwano and Rissho Kosei-kai, skillful means are indispensable ways of teaching and transforming the hearts and minds of living beings without which no one could encounter the Dharma or attain liberation from suffering. In this sense, skillful means are certainly not ad hoc temporary solutions or stopgaps, nor are they “provisional” in the sense of

being something entirely different or separate from ultimate truth. Instead, skillful means are, as skillful means, part and parcel of ultimate truth. In the words of Rev. Niwano, “skillful means are precious.”

What’s in a Name?

Upāya is multifaceted, even within a single text like the Lotus Sutra, and this is part of what makes it so difficult to get a handle on. Since translation is essentially an interpretive exercise, the various English renderings of *upāya* capture one aspect of it, or what various scholars might consider the most salient feature of *upāya*. Common translations utilizing *expedient* emphasize the opportunistic, convenient sense of *upāya*, and consequently its provisional nature. The metaphor of a raft is often used to explain *upāya*—a helpful tool or partial truth to get one to a desired goal but whose usefulness comes to an end once the goal has been attained, or when one grasps the higher order truth.

Several parables in the Lotus Sutra do indeed accentuate the interim nature of *upāya*. Others seem to directly address the issue of artifice, and the degree to which these parables succeed is an ongoing debate. Some passages of the Lotus Sutra seem to dismiss *upāya* as relative truths, while others laud their power and efficacy. The entire second chapter of the sutra, “Skillful Means,” juggles the provisional character of skillful means on the one hand and their merit and indispensability on the other, holding

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both views in a precarious balance. Even after Shakyamuni Buddha declares that he will forthwith put aside *upāya* and fully disclose the truth to his disciples, he proceeds to teach the Dharma through forms of *upāya* such as parables and examples from the past, suggesting that as long as one seeks to convey truth, one can never really eschew *upāya*.

For Rev. Niwano, the salient feature of *upāya* is “properness” or “tact,” a sense that Gene Reeves’s term *appropriate means* captures well. The Buddha’s *upāya* are appropriate in two ways. First, they properly accord with the dispositions, abilities, and desires of living beings. This is a critical point that the Lotus Sutra makes repeatedly. *Upāya* are “tactful”—designed with great skill and sensitivity in dealing with others. But for Rev. Niwano, appropriateness carries another meaning. To be appropriate also means to be in accord with the ultimate truth. Thus, as appropriate means or methods, skillful means embody a dialectical movement: toward living beings, their dispositions, abilities, and desires, on the one hand, and toward ultimate truth on the other. This understanding considerably complicates the notion of skillful means as simply provisional and relative.

The Relationship of Skillful Means and Ultimate Truth

Perhaps the best way to explain this dialectic is to use the metaphor of a bridge, which Rissho Kosei-kai has sometimes

used to understand skillful means and its relationship to ultimate truth. The buddhas and bodhisattvas establish skillful means as a bridge in order to allow people to cross from the shores of delusion to the opposite bank, which is the realm of enlightenment. Just like a bridge, skillful means extend to people on the far side of delusion and transport them over to the opposite shore of enlightenment.

The end of the bridge on the shores of delusion must be anchored to the river bank at exactly the place where people stand, which is a way of saying that skillful means must reach out to people in ways that are tailored to their needs, perspectives, and life circumstances. The person who begins to cross the bridge from the side of delusion may not fully understand from the very beginning exactly where the bridge is leading them, but the person who lays down the bridge for them—a buddha or bodhisattva—knows where it leads and realizes that the bridge is a means or measure that is directly connected to ultimate truth, to the shores of enlightenment, and as such, is one with ultimate truth.

In the case of an actual bridge, such as the span over the Tama River connecting Kawasaki and Tokyo, can we say that the bridge is entirely in one city or the other? Of course, maps will show us that somewhere in the middle of the river there is a determined borderline, and as we travel across the span we may be conscious of being closer to one side or the other. But when we think of the

bridge as a whole, it is anchored in both cities, and consequently we can say that as a whole, the bridge is located in two places at the same time.

In this sense, there is no clear distinction between skillful means and ultimate truth: they are of one body, one whole, which is to say they are consubstantial. Hence Rev. Nikkyo Niwano’s formula “skillful means are inseparable from the ultimate truth.” In addition he writes:

It is through skillful means that people come to understand truth. . . . It is not possible to say that ‘up until this point is skillful means, but beyond this is truth.’” (*Kono michi*, 384)

In other words, the truth that the Buddha teaches us can be realized through all the events and experiences of daily life. Anything and everything can be a method that the Buddha uses to teach us and transform our hearts and minds. There is no set of practices for dealing with practical or mundane problems that is entirely separate from another set of practices for realizing ultimate truth. Like the lotus, whose flower blooms at the same time it bears fruit and its seeds appear, true skillful means embody both cause and effect. They are both causes of enlightenment and expressions of enlightenment. Skillful means are reflexive in this way, and for this reason it could be more productive for us to think of skillful means as process rather than as static entities.

firmly rooted on the side of truth and has fixed their side of the bridge on the shores of enlightenment. Using skillful means should necessarily entail self-reflection—“repentance” (Jpn., *sange*) in the parlance of the Threefold Lotus Sutra. Gene Reeves, a translator of the Lotus Sutra and an advisor to Rissho Kosei-kai, alludes to

Importance of Wisdom and Telos

In these ways, “everything can be skillful means,” as Rev. Niwano taught. However, if everything can be skillful means in order to realize the ultimate truth, the specter of a certain antinomianism, an attitude of “anything goes,” would appear to present a problem. Indeed, a certain moral laxity and permissiveness is often associated with skillful means, the attitude of “whatever gets you through the night.” While historically there is evidence to substantiate such fears, in the sutras, skillful means come with qualifications. Wisdom and skillful means are supposed to work together, like two doors connected by a hinge, or the wings of a bird. As Michael Pye observes in his seminal work on skillful means, “skillfulness in means” is “inextricably related” to *prajñā*, or insight, in the Perfection of Wisdom literature, as well as the Lotus and Vimalakirti sutras (*Skillful Means*, 2). Compassionate wisdom reorients ordinary activities or phenomena into means to help people transform their hearts and minds in the direction of buddhahood.

This is why it is critical that the person who lays down the bridge—the Buddha or a person undertaking the compassionate bodhisattva work of a buddha in this world—has his or her feet

this when he writes of another sense in which skillful means implies a “double appropriateness”: they allow for the capabilities of both the practitioner and the recipient. The practitioners of skillful means must ask themselves, “What needs to be done?” and also, “What can I do?” (*The Stories of the Lotus Sutra*, 52). Reeves reminds us that practitioners must always be self-reflective, aware of their own abilities, appropriately tailoring what they can do to the needs of others.

Skillful Means in Rissho Kosei-kai

Perhaps the most effective way to learn about the theory and practice of skillful means in Rissho Kosei-kai is to consider *hoza*, often translated as “Dharma circles” or “circles of compassion,” which are regarded as the “life” of Rissho Kosei-kai practice. Sometimes described as a unique form of group counseling, Dharma circles are gatherings of Rissho Kosei-kai members who sit in a circle—symbolizing harmony—for their discussions. The subjects for discussion in Dharma circles are surprisingly ordinary—members share their worries, challenges, sufferings, as well as their joys. Participants in Dharma circles learn that the problems of ordinary

life, even gripes and complaints or the dissatisfaction we feel with others or ourselves, are all precious opportunities for growth and personal development to be faced rather than avoided or ignored. “Don’t change others, change yourself,” “always practice self-inspection,” “everything is the workings of the Buddha,” “savoring our encounters,” and “everything is within me” are some of the pithy phrases that sum up the way members of Rissho Kosei-kai approach solutions to the challenges in their lives.

In the absence of contemplative practices and the dearth of Buddhist jargon, some observers may see Dharma circles more as a form of group therapy, empathic listening, or a teaching of positive thinking than as a Buddhist practice. They are indeed all of these things, but Dharma circles also possess a telos that makes them skillful means, like the bridge that is anchored on the other side to the realm of enlightenment. Rissho Kosei-kai members learn that “a seed of enlightenment is contained within your delusions” and “liberation is found within delusion.” Rev. Niwano recognized that the afflictive emotions are extremely difficult to sever directly, but because these emotions are in the end not separate from the truth, and since the truth can be found within them, when we can objectively examine them in a calm and composed state of mind, we can free ourselves from being ruled by them. This resonates with the famous Chinese monk Zhiyi’s (538–97) practice of “contemplating the objects of affliction” (Chn., *fannao jing*). Instead of attempting to directly suppress or cut off negative feelings and desires, one takes them as objects of contemplation and uses them as the very means of achieving enlightenment. This approach assumes the nonduality of delusion and enlightenment, which is to say they are inseparable, like two sides of a coin. In Dharma circles we see an example of how Rev. Niwano strove to weave

many of Zhiyi's teachings into the fabric of Rissho Kosei-kai practice in ways that could be practiced in the context of daily life (*Kono michi*, 313).

Negative emotions and hurtful feelings are embraced without being grasped, recognized but not endorsed. When we take this middle-way approach, these feelings teach us rather than beguile us. Even greed and attachment are understood as transformations of buddha-nature, and Dharma-circle participants begin their approach to problems by affirming the feelings of others in the faith that within those passions they will discover the seeds of enlightenment. For example, in lieu of condemnation, the gripes or impositions of an angry spouse might be reframed as an earnest desire for emotional intimacy, or the disobedience of a rebellious child understood as a cry for help. This is not necessarily a moral judgment, that is, an assertion of the rightness or wrongness of a person's feelings, but an acknowledgment that those emotions stem from basic human desire for affirmation, human connectedness, and other wholesome aspirations, which in Rissho Kosei-kai are seen as the virtues of one's buddha-nature.

Adopting the viewpoint of the other and affirming their emotions are done by those standing on the enlightenment side of the bridge, those who have faith that "the Buddha is always with us" and that "everything is a gift of the Buddha." These pithy phrases are themselves skillful means designed to help people apprehend delusions as indivisible from enlightenment and see our world as the world of the Buddha. In an attempt to alleviate another's suffering, Dharma-circle participants will also offer simple practical advice based on these perspectives as well as their understanding of causation. What becomes important, however, is that the person who has shared their suffering in a Dharma circle and has afterward attained a degree of relief progresses to some realization

of the basic principles behind what they have practiced. If so, the workings of a retroactive theology ensue. The ground upon which they are standing links up with "the other shore," and the "provisional" or "exigent" methods they have practiced become consubstantial with ultimate truth.

Journeys and Steps

There is a famous maxim taken from chapter 64 of the *Daode-jing* that goes: "A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step." If we consider skillful means akin to the steps of a journey, we might say "A journey of a thousand miles is a collection of single steps." Furthermore, since each of these steps is ultimately connected in sequence to the goal, each step articulates the goal. Thus, we can also say that the journey of a thousand miles is a *single step*. Or as Hegel said in one passage of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*: "The True is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself though its development" (p. 11).

In Rissho Kosei-kai, skillful means are understood as appropriate methods—appropriate to the person, their character and understanding, and even their desires. When we think about skillful means as mediated, particular phenomena, we see their situatedness most clearly, and this tends to highlight their provisional and expedient nature. However, what takes concepts and practices in Rissho Kosei-kai that sound like positive thinking or moral proverbs and transforms them into Buddhist skillful means is the orientation that anchors them to the other shore of liberation. In Rissho Kosei-kai the contingent, that is, the ordinary praxis of everyday life, is taken as necessity—the practices and mind-sets required to obtain liberation from suffering and attain awakening. When the ordinary and mundane, which everyone can comprehend and put into effect,

is given soteriological orientation, you have a "great vehicle"—a practice that can benefit a wide range of people.

Allow me to conclude with some words from Rev. Niwano:

If we lead people to the Way of the Buddha by explaining right off the bat the truth within the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, the great principle of the cosmos, it will not come to them immediately. People are understandably most concerned with themselves, and dealing with the problems that immediately confront them. So, first, we must ask people to share what concerns them right now, what troubles or worries them. Then we respond to their problems with practical advice, suggesting, "Why not think about it this way, or how about giving this a try?" And by doing this, they will get a grasp of what this teaching of truth means. This is skillful means. That's why skillful means are themselves the ultimate truth, and the reason everyone is able to understand the ultimate truth through skillful means. (*Kaiso zuikan*, 112–113) □

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Moving Forward through Suffering and Hardship

by Nichiko Niwano

No one wants to endure suffering or hardships. However, no matter how happy people may appear to be, though there may be some difference of degree, surely they have one or two worries.

I have often heard of cases in which someone has gone through many sufferings and hardships that later on became great spiritual assets. Founder Nikkyo Niwano became connected to religion through his worrying about a child's sickness, which led him to the Lotus Sutra, which would greatly transform his life. In this way of thinking, precisely because we suffer, we seek out various teachings and seriously consider what is most important in our lives. Frankly speaking, the more we suffer, the more we can grow, and, therefore, suffering is a valuable experience for human beings.

Even so, however, our human nature is to want to avoid suffering.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with that. The Zen phrase *reidan jichi* (Cold or warm, you know for yourself) means that you will find out for yourself whether the water is cold or warm when you actually take a drink. As this phrase implies, it is only after first having had various experiences that we can begin to accept suffering and hardship as valuable experiences for which we should be grateful and see for ourselves that "Truly, it is only because there is suffering that there is joy."

Someone Who Has Seen the World

Shakyamuni teaches us that "All phenomena are characterized by suffering," which

means that we find suffering in everything in this world. And Founder Niwano proclaimed that "The most important thing is that we look squarely at this truth and accept it with firm resolve," and "When we do so, we come to understand that suffering is no longer something out of the ordinary; it is a completely normal part of life," and that "Precisely because we think about suffering as something unusual, we only feel more pain and by anticipating it, we feel frightened and uneasy."

However, even though we understand that there is nothing we can do to avoid life's suffering, we still worry and anguish not a little over what to do about it and pass our days in mental agony.

Yusai Sakai (1926–2013), a great teacher (*dai ajari*) of the Tendai Buddhist denomination, said about such times that "Instead of constantly using your head to think about things, it is better to intensely use your body to get something done."

In a time of suffering, when we are constantly using our heads and worrying about something, our minds are in disarray and vexed and we feel as if a problem is stagnating in our minds, going round and round in circles. On the other hand, when we use our bodies to get something done, we may experience bone-breaking fatigue from working, but it includes the *action* that moves us one step forward in solving the problem.

The Japanese word *kuronin* means a person who has seen the world, that

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is, someone who has suffered many reverses, who is conversant in the conditions of society and able to turn those experiences into the nutrients of spiritual growth, and who is recognized as having achieved the greatness of the expanse and depth of the human heart. Shakyamuni, who was determined to bring liberation to all people and made great strides to disseminate the teaching, was a great exemplar of a man who has seen the world.

In this sense as well, when you are facing some suffering or hardship, why not put your body to work "getting something done?" Then, your mental distress will be transformed into sweat that achieves something. And such experiences will make your thinking more profound, broaden your perspective, make your mind more flexible, and deepen your consideration for others, all of which will give you greater human appeal.

In Rissho Kosei-kai, we often say that when you are worried about something, you should listen to someone who has the same kind of worry. That is because being active and working for the sake of others is the key to turning "stagnation" into "action." Furthermore, this leads to gratitude. □

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 26

Dharanis (1)

This is the 129th installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.

INTRODUCTION This chapter declares how with mystic syllables those who are deeply moved by the Buddha's discourse on the Lotus Sutra vow with steadfast conviction, in the strongest terms, to protect those who receive and keep this teaching.

First, two bodhisattvas, Medicine King and Courageous Giver, appear before the Buddha, and vow to guard and protect the preachers of the Lotus Sutra. Their vows are only to be expected, for these two bodhisattvas are distinguished disciples and messengers of the Buddha.

Next, two Brahman heavenly kings, the Divine King Vaishravana and the Divine King Domain Holder, vow to protect this Lotus Sutra. The vows of these two non-Buddhist divine kings signify that the Buddha Dharma, the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in particular, comprehends the teachings of all faiths and infuses true life into them.

Following this, ten female rakshasas, and the Mother of Demon Sons vow to protect the preachers of the Lotus Sutra. These fearsome female demons declare with one voice before the Buddha that if anyone were to harass the preachers of the sutra, they would protect the preachers and rid them of such persecution. Their declaration bears witness to the fact that the Buddha-mind is found universally, even in these demons. Conversely, the teachings of

the Lotus Sutra can be said to have the power to equally enable even these demons to attain buddhahood.

Five kinds of untranslatable words

Many mystic Sanskrit words appear in this chapter. Why were these words not translated? The reason is due to the prudence of Kumarajiva, who translated the Lotus Sutra from Sanskrit into Chinese. When the Buddhist sutras were rendered into Chinese, the translators, including Kumarajiva, left "untranslatable words" untouched, merely providing phonetic equivalents. The translators defined as untranslatable the following five kinds of words:

1. Words with meanings alien to Chinese, that is, the names of animals, plants, and traditional demons peculiar to India but foreign to China. For example: the fragrance of *tamalapattra* and of *tagara*, mentioned in chapter 19, and such beings as *garudas* and *kimnaras* that appear quite often in the sutra.

2. Words with many meanings, that is, words that cannot be fully translated by a single word. For example, the meaning of *dharani* can be understood in three ways: (1) It sometimes means the mystic power that enables a reciter to retain and not forget the teaching he or she has heard; (2) sometimes it means the power of restraining all

evil, including misfortune, and of encouraging all good, including happiness (Jpn., *soji*); (3) sometimes it means the mystic syllables (mantra; Jpn., *shingon*) by which the reciter can directly enter the world of buddhas. The mystic syllables in chapter 26 primarily belong to the second meaning, and also much to the third. For this reason, *dharani* is translated as mystic syllables that have the power to encourage all that is good and restrain all that is evil (Jpn., *soji shingon*).

3. Mystic words. For example: the *dharani* spells appearing in chapter 26. These words were left as they are because their profound and mystic meaning would be impaired if they were translated.

4. Transliterations well established by precedent. For example: *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*, which can be translated as “Perfect Enlightenment” or “supreme, right, and complete enlightenment.” These words were left in the original Sanskrit (likely for the reason mentioned in number 5 below), and this established a precedent of transliteration.

5. Words with profound meanings, which would lose their true meaning if translated. For example: *buddha* and *bodhi* (enlightenment).

However, modern people are different from their ancestors, for they have become unable to consider mystic words that they cannot understand as wonder-working, or containing miraculous virtue. They cannot feel appreciation for them. Although the magnitude of the power of words can be perceived to a great extent, these must always be words that can be understood. Only when they are understood can words touch the heart, and when the heart is touched, the person’s view of life and worldview change. By achieving a conversion of one’s thought from evil to good (Chn., *hui-hsin*; Jpn., *eshin*) the person’s way of life changes, conditions of physical health change, poor circumstances improve, and a new life opens up. This is the significance of religion in the contemporary world and the exceptional power of words.

Therefore, if we leave the mystic spells that appear in this chapter untouched, without explaining their meanings at all, because reciting words without understanding them is no longer accepted in the world today, it would run counter to the true spirit of religion.

Since the words are esoteric, the translations by interpreters of the Lotus Sutra from ancient times have been diverse, and among these are words whose meanings are said to be impossible to understand anyway. Yet the leading scholars of the Lotus Sutra in Sanskrit generally agree with the theory that all of these incomprehensible mystical incantations are either names of various goddesses or other ways of addressing them. Both for this reason and because it seems important to carefully interpret the meanings of

the words, we will attempt here a tentative translation, making reference to the works of the sages of old, including the *Fa-hua-i-shu* (Commentary on the Lotus Sutra) by Jizang (549–623), and choosing the words that correspond as much as possible to the sense of language of contemporary readers.

The reason that this will be a “tentative” translation is because, as mentioned in the explanation of the “five kinds of untranslatable words,” the original words encompass various meanings and also have delicate nuance and wondrous mystery. Therefore, it is impossible to make a perfect translation.

Why these mystical utterances have miraculous virtue is obscure because contemporary society is very remote from ancient India where this sutra was established. Furthermore, since the point of this volume is not a scholarly study of Buddhism, and there is, therefore, no significance in exploring the matter, I will not touch upon it at all. It should be sufficient to have a vague idea of the meanings of the words.

Now let us turn to the text.

TEXT At that time the Medicine King Bodhisattva rose from his seat and, humbly baring his right shoulder, folded his hands toward the Buddha and spoke to the Buddha, saying: “World-honored One! If there be any good son or good daughter who is able to receive and keep the Dharma Flower Sutra, either reading or reciting or studying or copying the sutra, what is the extent of the blessings obtained?”

The Buddha answered the Medicine King: “Suppose any good son or good daughter pays homage to eight hundred myriad kotis of nayutas of buddhas, equal to the sands of the Ganges. In your opinion are not the blessings so obtained rather numerous?”

“Very numerous, World-honored One!” [was the reply]. The Buddha continued: “If any good son or good daughter is able, in regard to this sutra, to receive and keep but a single four-line verse, read and recite, understand its meaning, and do as it says, his merits will be still more numerous.”

COMMENTARY *Four-line verse.* This is a teaching that is composed of a singular verse of four lines. The following “verse of commandment of the seven buddhas” is an example of this.

To do no evil,
To do all good,
To purify one’s mind,
This is the teaching of the buddhas.

If any good person would receive and keep but a single four-line verse, read and recite it, understand its meaning, and do as it says, that person’s merits would be still more

numerous than those of another person who paid homage to eight hundred myriad kotis of nayutas of buddhas, equal to the sands of the Ganges.

This is a quite rational teaching. It is clearly taught here that in the Buddha Dharma what is of foremost importance is to receive and keep the true Dharma, learn it repeatedly, and put it into actual practice.

TEXT Thereupon the Medicine King Bodhisattva said to the Buddha: “World-honored One! To the preachers of the Dharma I will now give *dharani* spells for their guard and protection.” Whereupon he delivered the following spells*:

“[1] *Ani* [2] *mani* [3] *mane* [4] *ma-mane* [5] *shire* [6] *shari-te* [7] *shamya* [8] *shabi-tai* [9] *sente* [10] *mokute* [11] *mokuta-bi* [12] *shabi* [13] *ai-shabi* [14] *sobi* [15] *shabi* [16] *shae* [17] *ashae* [18] *agini* [19] *sente* [20] *shabi* [21] *darani* [22] *arokyaba-sai-ha-shabi-shani* [23] *neibite* [24] *abentara-nebite* [25] *atanda-hare-shudai* [26] *ukure* [27] *mukure* [28] *arare* [29] *harare* [30] *shugyashi* [31] *asamma-sambi* [32] *bodda-bikiri-jitte* [33] *daruma-hari-shite* [34] *sogyane-kushane* [35] *basha-basha-shudai* [36] *mantara* [37] *mantara-shayata* [38] *urota* [39] *urota-kyo-sharya* [40] *ashara* [41] *ashaya-taya* [42] *abaro* [43] *amanya-nataya*.”

COMMENTARY [1] *Ani*. Mysterious; extraordinary. (*anye*)

- [2] *Mani*. Pondering. (*manye*)
- [3] *Mane*. Mindfulness; contemplating deeply. (*mane*)
- [4] *Ma-mane*. Freedom from all ideas and thoughts; in other words, a perfect serenity of mind. (*mamane*)
- [5] *Shire*. Eternity; perpetuity. [*cite*]
- [6] *Shari-te*. Religious practice. (*carite*)
- [7] *Shamya*. Tranquility; calm, tranquil, and pure state of mind unswayed, or undisturbed, by changing things. (*shame*)
- [8] *Shabi-tai*. Indifference; non-attachment. (*shamitavi*)
- [9] *Sente*. Inexpressibly serene silence; maintaining composure after having attained profound enlightenment. (*shamte*)
- [10] *Mokute*. Emancipation. (*mukte*)
- [11] *Mokuta-bi*. Salvation. (*muktatame*)
- [12] *Shabi*. Equality. (*same*)
- [13] *Ai-shabi*. No vices; a state without evil. (*avishame*)
- [14] *Sobi* [15] *Shabi*. *Sobi*: mental peace; a peaceful, harmonious state of mind. *Shabi*: equality. (Appeared previously; no. 12). Dr. Tsukamoto says they can be identified as tranquility. (*samasame*)
- [16] *Shae*. Extinction of illusions; to be completely freed of illusions. (*kshaye*)
- [17] *Ashae*. Imperishable good. This means that if illusions are completely annihilated, then good is never destroyed. (*akshaye*)

- [18] *Agini*. Perfect emancipation; a completely emancipated state in which one no longer needs to undergo any hardship or strain. [*akshine*]

- [19] *Sente*. Inexpressibly serene silence; maintaining composure after having attained profound enlightenment. (*shante*) (Appeared previously; no. 9).

- [20] *Shabi*. Indifferent mind; a mental state captivated by nothing. (*shami*)

- [21] *Darani*. The power to sustain all good and restrain all evil. (*dharani*)

- [22] *Arokyaba-sai-ha-shabi-shani*. *Arokyaba-sai*: subtle observation. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies *arokyaba-sai* as “Oh, she who shines with radiance!” [*alokabhase*] and *ha-shabi-shani* as “Oh, she who observes!” (*pratyavekshana*). According to Dr. Tsukamoto, the whole phrase may be identified as “observing magnificence.” (*alokabhasapratyavekshana*)

- [23] *Neibite*. Shining light. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies this as “Oh, she who is dedicated!” He also says that it may be identified as “trustworthy.” (*nivithe*)

- [24] *Abentara-nebite*. Reliance; the mind to rely upon or confide in oneself; in other words, “making the self one’s light.” [*abhyantaranivishte*]

- [25] *Atanda-hare-shudai*. Extreme purity. (*at[y] antaparishuddhi*)

- [26] *Ukure*. Evenness without asperity. [*utkule*]

- [27] *Mukure*. Evenness without relief. [*mutkule*]

- [28] *Arare*. Unturned mind. A spiritual state in which the mind does not turn around and around, and is able to establish its direction. (*arade*)

- [29] *Harare*. Non-revolving mind. A state of mind that does not go here and there, and is therefore sure to settle. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies this as “Oh, she who is completely coiled around!” [*parade*]

- [30] *Shugyashi*. Pure eyes. (*shukakshi*)

- [31] *Asamma-sambi*. In appearance all things are different and distinctive (or unique), but in true nature they are equal. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies this as “Oh, she is without compare!” (*asamasame*)

- [32] *Bodda-bikiri-jitte*. The stage of having apprehended Buddha-knowledge (*jnana*) and having transcended secular affairs. (Becoming one with the Buddha.) [*buddhaviлокite*]

- [33] *Daruma-hari-shite*. Perfect insight about the Dharma. (Uniting into one with the Dharma.) [*dharmmaparikshite*]

- [34] *Sogyane-kushane*. Not letting [the members of] the Sangha utter superfluous words; that is, all of the members of the Buddha’s community are of one mind and one body so that their minds are able to communicate without words. (Perfect unity in the Sangha.) (*samghanirghoshani*)

- [35] *Basha-basha-shudai*. Lucid preaching; that which is preached is clear-cut. [*bhashyabhashyashodhir*]

Mantras and mandalas

• [36] *Mantara*. (*mantre*) The Japanese word *mantara* is *mantre* or *mantra* in Sanskrit, which refers to “true words” or mystic truth, words that are without falsehood. It has also been interpreted as having the same meaning as “mandala.” Because the word “mandala” is quite familiar not only to Buddhists but also to the general public, I would like to take this opportunity to explain it in detail.

The Sanskrit word *mandala* is variously translated as platform (Chn., *t'an*, Jpn., *dan*), complete circle (Chn., *luen-yüan-chü-tsu*, Jpn., *rin'en-gusoku*), and a gathering of gatherings (Chn., *chü-chi*, Jpn., *jushu*).

It is said that the *mandala* originated in ancient India where people would purify the surface of the ground, and draw a circle on this ground, making it a “holy place” (platform) where they heartily aspired the advent (or coming) of all of the gods of every realm. It is probably from this that we have the translation *rin'en-gusoku* (complete circle as a holy place filled with buddhas and bodhisattvas).

However, the original meaning of *mandala* is “genuine true nature.” The true nature of the universe is *tathata*, the ultimate truth—that is to say, the world of enlightenment. The completely consummated state, with no impurities, is a *mandala*. This is the abstract meaning of *rin'en-gusoku*.

If we consider that absolute state concretely, we can see it as a world filled with buddhas and bodhisattvas and overflowing with their merits, so it is also called “a gathering of buddhas” and “a gathering of merits,” and taken all together as “a gathering of gatherings.”

The reason we think in such concrete terms is that even if you explain to ordinary people the philosophical concept of the true nature of the universe or the non-visible *tathata*, the ultimate truth, it will not be very clear to them. They may say, “I see,” and have a tentative understanding, but they will not form a definite concept in their minds. That is entirely natural for they do not know exactly where to focus.

Therefore, if the true nature of the universe and the universal truth, *tathata*, are personified and the mind can picture a form of the world filled with the buddhas and bodhisattvas and with their merits, it becomes a clear focus of religious faith.

Moreover, if one could lend even greater concreteness by drawing a circle on the ground as a platform for the advent of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, it would be even more possible to concentrate one's devotion to them.

It is for the same reason that Buddhist followers of later ages portrayed scenes filled with buddhas and bodhisattvas in paintings and drawings and made them objects of reverence. These are the mandalas used in the Shingon (True Word) sect (of Japanese Buddhism) and so on. However, Nichiren, founder of the denomination that bears his name,

with his own unique conception portrayed the worldview of the Lotus Sutra with written characters. This is the so-called Dai-mandara (great mandala) of the interpenetration of the ten realms, which is the main focus of devotion in the various Nichiren-related sects.

• [37] *Mantara-shayata*. The mind of settling peacefully in the realm of *mantre* (mantra). Dr. Tsukamoto identifies this as “Oh, imperishable mantra!” (*mantrashayate*)

• [38] *Urota*. With no limits made. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies this as “Oh, sound [of the mantra]!” [*rute*] (He also considers that if we read the first character of Kumarajiva's translation as *hieu* [*u* in the Japanese reading], it will be the Sanskrit syllable “*Hum*”—“Oh, the sound of *Hum*!” [*hum-rute*])

• [39] *Urota-kyo-sharya*. To make the voice resound far in the distance; in other words, to skillfully spread the teachings. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies this as “Oh, she who has mastery of the sounds!” [*ruta-kaushalye*] (As in the case of 38, Dr. Tsukamoto also considers that the phrase may be “Oh, she who has mastery of the sound of *Hum*!” [*hum-rutakaushalye*])

• [40] *Ashara*. Discernment of people's voices; to clearly understand the meanings contained in the voices of living beings. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies this as “Oh, she who is imperishable!” [*akushaye*]

• [41] *Ashaya-taya*. Understanding well the written words; in other words, to awaken fully to the teachings. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies this as “Oh, savior with the imperishable colored [i.e., physical] body!” [*akshayavanataye*]

• [42] *Abaro*. To be inexhaustible. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies this as “Oh, she who is powerless!” [*abale*]

• [43] *Amanya-nataya*. To be able to progress at will, without any concerns. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies this as “Oh, savior, difficult to comprehend!” (*amanyanataye*)

* These *dharanis* have been given in Japanese reading and have been numbered to facilitate a smoother reading. The original Sanskrit words for the following *dharani* spells cannot be specified because there is no extant version of the Sanskrit text that the translator Kumarajiva used as a basis for translation, which also makes it difficult to clarify the original meanings of these words. In his book *Source Elements of the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Integration of Religion, Thought, and Culture* (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 2007, pp. 394–403), Dr. Keisho Tsukamoto gives the equivalent Indic readings closest in pronunciation to Kumarajiva's found in Sanskrit manuscripts, and when there are discrepancies in the pronunciation of equivalent Indic forms, the presumed Prakrit form has been appropriated. The Sanskrit words are put in parentheses, and those presumed to be Prakrit are in brackets. He also gives meanings conjectured from the originals. The meanings are inserted when necessary.

To be continued