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FEATURES The Buddhahood of Plants and Trees: The Environment and Buddha-Nature

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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On Interbeing and Learning to Respect Everything Beyond the Self

by Hiroshi Munehiro Niwano

Human beings capable of attaining buddhahood coexist interdependently with “everything beyond the self.” In other words, it is through their interbeing with the universe and this planet—with the air, water, and earth of the global environment and with the fauna and flora that inhabit it—that they experience and sustain life.

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“It is difficult to be born human; difficult is the life of mortals,” says one of the verses in the collection of sayings of the Buddha known as the Dhammapada. This verse not only reminds us how rare it is to be born human; it also teaches us how precious life is and how grateful we should be, as beings who will one day inevitably die, for our lives in the here and now.

According to the theoretical physicist Haruo Saji, our study of the universe tells us that “all the matter from which [humans, animals, and plants] are made . . . consists of ‘fragments’ of stars scattered into space when they die in a supernova explosion” (*Karada wa hoshi kara dekite iru* [Bodies are made from stars], Shunjusha, 2007, 131). Thus we are all composed of “fragments” of the universe, and when our lives come to an end, all the matter from which we are made turns back into tiny particles and returns eventually to outer space. Human existence is, in other words, “one fleeting moment in the cycle of matter during the immeasurable universe’s evolution” for well over ten billion years (ibid., 53). This makes us realize just how extraordinary our receipt of the gift of life here and now is.

In the same work, Saji goes on to observe that all matter circulates and is interrelated, and that “all things exist in balance with their opposites.” On our own planet, therefore, we and everything around us exist in balance as part of the great cycle that is the earth (ibid., 54). Regarding the question of where we should draw the dividing line between ourselves and what exists beyond us, Saji states that we should “go beyond conceiving of ourselves as the physical body inside our skin to consider also the entire environment that surrounds us as constitutive of ourselves,” so that we can recognize that “what makes me *me* is everything beyond the self.” Humans actually “inter-be”—that is to say, they interdependently coexist—with the other in the universe and, more concretely, in the environment that is the earth, and it is “everything beyond the self” that gives humans life and sustains their existence (ibid., 22–23). In this respect, research on the universe leads to the same conclusions as those taught by Buddhism.

The Bodhisattva Never Disrespectful (*Sadāparibhūta Bodhisattva*), who appears in the Lotus Sutra, greeted all whom he met by bringing his hands

together in prayerful and respectful salutation and saying, “I would never disrespect you, as all of you will become buddhas.” This signifies that all humans are precious beings who have the potential to attain buddhahood. As humans, it is important that we first realize this.

As Saji argues on the basis of our scientific knowledge of the universe, however, even such precious human beings capable of attaining buddhahood coexist interdependently with “everything beyond the self.” In other words, it is through their interbeing with the universe and this planet—with the air, water, and earth of the global environment and with the fauna and flora that inhabit it—that they experience and sustain life.

But these precious humans continue to destroy the global environment that sustains and coexists interdependently with them. That is why it is now time for us to open our own eyes and to show constant respect, in the spirit of the Bodhisattva Never Disrespectful, for “everything beyond the self” that gives us life and makes possible our existence as precious beings who have the potential to attain buddhahood. □

The Buddhahood of Plants and the Japanese View of Nature

by Fumihiko Sueki

According to [Annen], there was not . . . a clear distinction between sentient and nonsentient: at the root of the mind of the generality of sentient beings is the heart-mind (Skt., hṛdaya) held in common with trees and grasses, and it is this hṛdaya that attains buddhahood.

The Buddhist and Japanese Attitudes toward Nature

Buddhist doctrine refers to entities possessing mind (Skt., *citta*) as sentient beings (Skt., *sattva*) and considers them to undergo rebirth through the six realms of existence (hells, hungry spirits, animals, *asuras*, human beings, heavenly beings). It is because they possess mind that they give rise to the defilements, accumulating the negative karma that is the cause of rebirth. The purpose of Buddhism therefore is to release beings from the suffering associated with rebirth, a condition called liberation (Skt., *vimokṣa*) and nirvana. Mahayana calls it the attainment of buddhahood (Jpn., *jōbutsu*). There also exist nonsentient beings (Skt., *asattva*). Since they do not possess mind, they do not undergo the cycle of rebirth and so cannot attain liberation, nirvana, or buddhahood. In principle, therefore, plants, like inorganic substances not possessing “mind,” are not understood to undergo rebirth. It is therefore impossible to discuss their attainment of buddhahood.

However, when Buddhism entered China, the potential for buddhahood of

nonsentient beings became an important subject for debate. Since China had not previously had any concept of sentient beings, no strict distinction was made between sentient and nonsentient, which was why the question of nonsentient buddhahood was taken up. The *Jingangbi lun* (Diamond Scalpel Treatise) of the sixth Tiantai patriarch, Zhanran (711–82), confronted the issue directly and asserted that nonsentient beings could attain buddhahood. This did not, however, mean that they could aspire to enlightenment, practice, and achieve buddhahood of themselves. Rather, when a sentient being attains buddhahood, the whole environment becomes the Buddha’s realm. A sentient being’s subjective existence (Jpn., *shōhō*) arises from past karmic effects and this causes the realm of the environment (Jpn., *ehō*) to arise. Environment is thus dependent on subjective existence, and therefore, when a sentient being attains enlightenment, so do nonsentient beings. What is important here is that sentient beings attain enlightenment through their own practice, whereas nonsentient beings can only do so as the environment of sentient beings. This was a solution consonant with Chinese ideas that placed significance on a person’s own

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actions, seen typically in Confucianism. The Japanese did not view human beings in any special way as did the Chinese. Furthermore, they tended to look on nature in terms of plants. The land of Japan was called the “middle land of the reed beds” (*ashihara no nakatsu kuni*), its landscape being described as a swamp where reeds grew. The fecundity of plants symbolized the evolution of the world. According to the *Nihon shoki* (Chronicle of Japan, eighth century), before Ninigi, grandson of the sun goddess Amaterasu, descended from the heavenly plain, the land of Japan was where “the standing trees, and even the single blade of grass, uttered words.” This is thought to represent the disordered state of nature that existed before the land was civilized. Humankind was referred to as people grass (*hitogusa*); in other words, the mass of people was understood through the model of grasses and trees.

In Japan, therefore, nature was thought of in terms of plants, and people

were thought to be close to them. Japan's view of nature is often described as animism, but this is not necessarily appropriate. Not all natural phenomena were regarded as spiritual entities, nor were they objects of veneration. Deities (*kami*) resided in the depths of nature, manifesting themselves in natural objects serving as receptacles (*yorishiro*). For example, at Ōmiwa Shrine in Nara Prefecture, Mount Miwa is described as the body (*shintai*) of its *kami*. Originally, though, the mountain was regarded as sacred because it was the place to which the *kami* descended: it was not itself the *kami*. The buddhahood of grasses and trees came to be a concern precisely because human beings and plants were thought of as being of the same quality. Whereas in China tiles and stones were presented as representative of nonsentient existence, in Japan it was grasses and trees.

Developments in the Doctrine of the Buddhahood of Plants

With this Japanese view of nature as background, the doctrine of the buddhahood of plants (*sōmoku jōbutsu*) unique to Japanese Buddhism developed. The earliest stage can be traced to the ninth century. The Tiantai teachings that Saichō had brought to Japan were complex in their thought, and the Japanese were not immediately able to understand them fully. Scholar-monks therefore sent their questions about points of uncertainty in the doctrine in writing with monks who were going to study in China and awaited the replies of Chinese Tiantai masters. This correspondence was collected in the *Tōketsu* (Tang decisions), several of which are extant to this day. An important theme among the questions sent was the issue of the buddhahood of plants. What the Japanese priests wanted to know was, if sentient beings can aspire

to enlightenment, practice, and attain buddhahood, could nonsentient beings like plants do the same. The Chinese priests made their replies, according to the Diamond Scalpel Treatise, saying that the attainment of buddhahood by nonsentient beings was contingent upon that of sentient beings.

The thinking underlying the questions posed by the Japanese priests in the *Tōketsu* was further developed by the Tendai priest Annen (841–?) in his *Shinjō sōmoku jōbutsu shiki* (Private notes on discussions of the attainment of buddhahood by grasses and trees), compiled between 869 and 885. There he criticized the answers from the Chinese side, saying “The intention of the question from Japan was to ask whether grasses and trees individually aspire to enlightenment, practice, and attain buddhahood. The response of the reverend master does not answer this question.” Annen held that grasses and trees individually aspire to enlightenment, practice, and attain buddhahood, and he attempted to prove this in the *Shiki*. According to him, there was not such a clear distinction between sentient and nonsentient: at the root of the mind of the generality of sentient beings is the heart-mind (Skt., *hrdaya*) held in common with trees and grasses, and it is this *hrdaya* that attains buddhahood.

Annen refers in the *Shiki* to the existence of disputes in Japanese Tendai concerning whether or not grasses and trees aspire to enlightenment, practice, and attain buddhahood through their own agency. He himself stood firmly on the side of the affirmative. Yet what does it mean that plants practice and realize enlightenment in the same way as sentient beings? This idea seems strange from a common-sense standpoint. Why did Annen hold to this view? It appears that in doing so he was a successor to

the Japanese idea that human beings and plants were of the same quality.

Annen abandoned the *Shiki* before he reached his final conclusion about how this happens, though he seems to have been inclined toward esoteric Buddhism in his search for a solution to the problem. He went on to develop his theory in an esoteric way in a later work of the year 885, *Bodaishingishō* (Discussion on the meaning of *bodhi-citta*), but that is not to say he necessarily followed the same line of argument that he had used in the earlier work. (I will discuss this point further below.) The debate whether insentient beings aspire to enlightenment, practice, and attain buddhahood through their own agency was brought to a conclusion in the possibly eleventh-century *Sōmoku hosshin shugyō jōbutsu ki* (Discourse on the aspiration to enlightenment, practice, and the attainment of buddhahood by grasses and trees), a work of Original Enlightenment (Jpn., *hon-gaku shisō*) teaching that is ascribed to Ryōgen (912–85). Here it is said that the very coming into existence, abiding, changing, and perishing of grasses and trees is nothing other than their aspiration, practice, and nirvana. Here natural change is seen to be the form of the Buddha in itself; the phenomenal world is the Buddha realm. The *Sanjūshika*

no kotogaki (Thirty-four-item report), a representative work associated with Original Enlightenment, goes further, saying that grasses and trees do not in fact attain buddhahood. “The ten realms of this world are eternal without any change at all, grasses and trees are eternal, sentient beings are eternal, and the five aggregates are eternal.” In other words, plants are eternal as they are and there is no need for them to change or practice to attain buddhahood.

The idea that nature in itself was the realm of the Buddha was to exert a great influence on Japanese medieval culture. Not making efforts to seek enlightenment, and indeed abandoning such artificial efforts, while setting up the ideal of a return to nature, had an effect not only on religion but also on the whole spectrum from literature and art to the tea ceremony and flower arranging, thus creating one of the bases of Japanese culture. On the other hand, simply abandoning human effort and trusting to nature does not suffice when it comes to productive activities like agriculture. During the Edo period (1603–1868) such ideas about reliance on nature were criticized. For example, Ninomiya Sontoku (1787–1856), concerned with rebuilding rural villages after drought, while making a distinction between the “principles of heaven,” which underlay the workings of nature, and the “way of humankind,” which was human action, cautioned against veering to one side or the other and spoke of the necessity of the partnership of both. Today we need to reconsider such rational, pragmatic thought.

Plants and Human Beings: Diversity and Unity

As mentioned above, Annen again took up the question of the buddhahood of plants in his *Bodaishingishō*, but his argument moved in a slightly different direction from the course it had

followed from the *Shiki* to Original Enlightenment. To understand this difference we should look at the idea of Suchness (Skt., *tathatā*; Jpn., *shinnyo*) as it appeared in the *Bodaishingishō* and another of Annen’s works, *Shingonshū kyōjigi* (The meaning of teaching and time in the True Word school), also known as *Kyōji mondō* (Dialogues in teaching and time). *Suchness* is a word meaning “Truth.” It expresses the truth of this world of Emptiness (Skt., *śūnya*; Jpn., *kū*) and is used as a synonym for concepts like Dharma realm (Skt., *dharmadhātu*), Dharma body (*dharmakāya*), and Dharma nature (*dharmatā*). The *Awakening of Faith* (Chn., *Dasheng qixin lun*; Jpn., *Daijō kishin ron*) says that the Suchness mind has two gates or modes, the quiescent gate of Suchness (mind is itself Suchness, seen from the Buddha’s point of view) and the dynamic gate of *saṃsāra* (the workings of the mind of sentient beings, seen in terms of birth-death). Chinese interpretations of Suchness added two further aspects: Suchness as an unchanging principle (Jpn., *fuhen shinnyo*) and as conditioned Suchness (Jpn., *zuien shinnyo*). Suchness as an unchanging principle is ultimate Truth and is close to the “quiescent gate of Suchness,” which sees this world as Truth itself. Conditioned Suchness, on the other hand, manifests various phenomena according to the conditions in this world and is the motive force behind sentient beings’ search for enlightenment.

Annen took the idea of conditioned Suchness a step further, saying not only that it underlay the workings of the world but that the world itself was the activity of conditioned Suchness. This means that this world in itself is the realm of Suchness and the realm of the Buddha. Deluded beings, too, rise out of conditioned Suchness, and this being so, are able to seek enlightenment. This is a radical understanding. Since not only plants but all that we encounter in our daily life is conditioned Suchness, there

is nothing that should be abandoned or denied. Everything is conditioned Suchness itself, the one Truth.

Since, according to this understanding of conditioned Suchness, nonsentient as well as sentient beings are what Suchness changes, there is no reason to differentiate between them. Rather, they should be regarded as of the same quality. Therefore, if sentient beings are able to attain buddhahood, so too must nonsentient beings like grasses and trees. It is on this point that the buddhahood of plants as discussed in the *Bodaishingishō* both continues the argument of the *Shiki* and provides an answer.

There is, however, a concern here that this solution represents a retrogression regarding the theory put forward in the *Shiki* that grasses and trees aspire to enlightenment, practice, and attain buddhahood through their own agency. If human beings as well as plants are part of the one conditioned Suchness, their attainment of buddhahood through their individual aspiration and practice weakens, absorbed into a unified principle of Suchness. This, however, is not so. Conditioned Suchness is seen not only as the single principle that integrates all things but as the principle that expands in diverse forms. All the diverse existences of the phenomenal realm are therefore recognized and positively evaluated for their very differences. Grasses and trees have their own value as grasses and trees, and there is no reason at all for them to be assimilated with human beings. Conditioned Suchness may be called the principle that brings out both unity and diversity.

Annen’s theory is not easy to understand, but it is important in that it searches for a theoretical base for the buddhahood of plants, not just a shallow reason. A viewpoint that focuses on both the unity and the diversity of the world, on difference as well as sameness, is one that has a great deal to teach us today. □

Does a Dewdrop Teach Dharma?

Zen Perspectives on the Teachings of the Insentient

by Kenneth Kraft

Can “ecological awakening” stretch to accommodate a spiritual meaning along the lines of Buddhism’s “teachings of the insentient”? Without both kinds of awakening, will future generations find the moon in a dewdrop?

Valley sounds are the long, broad tongue.

Mountain colors are not other than the unconditioned body.

Eighty-four thousand verses are heard through the night.

What can I say about this in the future?

This poem is almost a thousand years old. It was presented to a Chinese Zen master by a follower, Su Shi, who went on to become one of China’s greatest poets. In Zen these four lines are considered to be Su’s enlightenment verse. In addition to being a poet, Su Shi (1037–1101) was a statesman, an essayist, a painter, and a calligrapher. He practiced Zen as a layperson, not a monk, receiving instruction from Donglin Changcong, a leading master. In China, Su is still honored as one of “the four greats” in several fields, including cooking.

Let’s take a look at the poem, using the above translation by Kazuaki Tanahashi (*Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dōgen’s Shōbō Genzō* [Shambhala, 2012], 86).

Valley sounds are the long, broad tongue. “Valley sounds” are the sounds of a stream.

“Long, broad tongue” refers to the Buddha and his teachings, known as the

Dharma. Restated unpoetically: natural phenomena such as streams are capable of expressing the highest truth.

Mountain colors are not other than the unconditioned body. The poet moves from sound to sight, affirming that mountains likewise manifest Dharma. “The unconditioned body” can be the Buddha’s body, the Dharma’s body, or any signifier of ultimate reality. In the original Chinese, this line takes the form of a rhetorical question with a double negative: “Are not the mountain colors the unconditioned body?” Forced to choose between a faithful rendering and a poetic one, most translators reluctantly sacrifice the poetry.

Eighty-four thousand verses are heard through the night. “Eighty-four thousand” means “infinite.” This line is more intimate than the first two, recounting a wakeful night that became a night of awakening. The poet’s whereabouts (for example, indoors or outdoors) are left to the reader’s imagination.

What can I say about this in the future? Almost simultaneously with the experience, he senses that it is unsharable. How will I ever communicate this? Who will believe me, much less understand? Language is inherently dualistic (no “this” without a “that”), limited in its ability to express *nonduality*.

The irony of the poem’s last line is that Su Shi did succeed, extravagantly, in memorializing his experience.

What is the nature of consciousness? It is one of Buddhism’s perennial questions. Human consciousness is the starting point, but the inquiry soon widens to include a reversal of the terms: What is the consciousness of nature? Originally, the category of sentient beings—those endowed with feeling or consciousness—included animals but not plants. In East Asia, the preferred term, “all living beings,” included plants. Some teachers went further, asserting that nonsentient things such as rocks not only have buddha-nature, they teach the highest truth. This claim was compressed into a four-character phrase: “the Dharma teachings of the insentient” (Chn., *wuching shuofa*; Jpn., *mujō seppō*; 無情說法). In English translation, *teaching* and *teachings* are used interchangeably.

This theme was pursued enthusiastically in Chinese Zen. An early master, Nanyang Huizhong (d. 775), gets credit for the phrase itself. Dongshan Liangjie’s intense struggle to get to the bottom of the matter precipitated a sudden realization. One master was addressing his students when he heard a swallow sing. He stopped to listen. Then he said, “This is the profound dharma of real form. It skillfully conveys the essence of the true teaching” (John Daido Loori and Kazuaki Tanahashi, *The True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dōgen’s Three Hundred Kōans* [Shambhala, 2009], 330–31).

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The structure of Su Shi's poem, four lines of seven characters each, reflects a refined literary tradition. Su thought seriously about the relation between poetry and Zen, concluding that meditation helped practitioners write better verses. A good poem should be like the whitest snow, he said, "at once so pure it's startling" (Richard John Lynn, "The Sudden and the Gradual in Chinese Poetry Criticism," in *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, ed. Peter N. Gregory [University of Hawaii Press, 1987], 385). When a poet such as Su expresses intimacy with nature, it is often hard to draw a line between the writer's experience, the poetic conventions of the day, and prevailing Buddhist doctrines.

Enlightenment verses are a unique Zen genre. The best are fresh, insightful, joyous. Judging the depth of a person's awakening on the basis of a four-line

poem may sound like a bit of a stretch (indeed, Su's realization was occasionally questioned by later commentators), yet the practice was widely accepted. In Japan, any remaining doubts were put to rest when the Zen master Dōgen Kigen (1200–1253) commented reverently and incisively on the poem. Here are two lines from another Su poem:

Why can't I tell the true shape of
Mount Lu?

Because I myself am in the mountain.
(Burton Watson, trans., *Selected Poems of Su Tung-p'o* [Copper Canyon Press, 1994], 108)

Mount Lu, in present-day Jiangxi Province in central China, is where Su met his teacher. "The true shape" suggests that something out of the ordinary is at stake. Being "in" (or on) a mountain does not necessarily prevent one from seeing it, so a literal reading has limited impact. Rather, Su is using the mountain as a metaphor for mind, in which consciousness and the cosmos are two faces of one reality. It can be known from the inside but not from the outside.

Historians remind us that labels like "Buddhism" and "Zen" are umbrella terms, convenient but simplified. And religions remind us that historical time—itsself a concept—can be transcended in various ways. With a bow to both perspectives, we now make a culture-defying, millennial leap from eleventh-century China to twenty-first-century America. Are there meaningful

continuities between Zen then and Zen now?

John Daido Loori (1931–2009) was a pioneer in Zen's transmission to North America. In the early 1970s he became a student of the Japanese Zen master Taizan Maezumi in Los Angeles. In 1980 Loori founded a practice center in New York's Catskill Mountains, naming it Zen Mountain Monastery. (In American Zen, monasteries are not limited to monks.) "Somehow our monastery ended up on a mountain with two rivers crossing in front," he later explained. "Partly because of this location, we called our order the Mountains and Rivers Order" ("River Seeing River," in *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*, ed. Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft [Shambhala, 2000], 142). Eventually he took the title Rōshi: Zen master or teacher. Today Zen Mountain Monastery is led by a new generation, with satellite groups in the United States and abroad.

Loori embraced the idea that ultimate reality can be accessed through nature. "Mountains, rivers, and the great earth are ceaselessly manifesting the teachings, yet they are not heard with the ear or seen with the eye. They can only be perceived with the whole body and mind," he wrote (*True Dharma Eye*, 22). Elaborating, he uses time-honored Zen language to point to the inexpressible:

The ten thousand things are neither sentient nor insentient; the self is neither sentient nor insentient. Therefore, the teaching of the insentient cannot be perceived by the senses. This teaching is heard before there is a body and after mind is forgotten. It was heard before our parents were born and before the Buddha appeared. It is not a matter of ordinary consciousness. How, then, can it be heard? When body and mind have fallen away, in the stillness that follows, the teaching is intimately manifested in great profusion. Whether we are aware of

it or not, it is always taking place. (Ibid., 201)

Here "the teaching of the insentient" becomes a window into awakened consciousness. The same can be said of Su Shi's verse.

Loori admired Su's verse and commented on it periodically. Parsing Su's line "Eighty-four thousand verses are heard through the night," Loori says, "The songs don't just say om. They sing the eighty-four thousand hymns, the eighty-four thousand gathas, the teachings, the sermon of rock and water" ("River Seeing River," 147). He honors Su's poem by playing off it:

Seeing sounds, the valley streams
expound the dharma.

Hearing forms, the mountain's body
covers heaven and earth.

(*True Dharma Eye*, 352)

This adheres to response-poem conventions, creatively incorporating key elements of the original. Here, the Buddha's tongue becomes "expound the dharma," while the Buddha and a mountain are conflated as "the mountain's body." He accentuates nonduality by transposing the activity of the senses—sounds are seen, forms are heard. This kind of knowing is bone deep, beyond what can be apprehended through the senses or the intellect. There may also be a touch of playfulness in Loori's remix of Su Shi.

Zen pushes "oneness with nature" to uncommon depths. Nature experiences catalyze Zen experiences; Zen experiences catalyze nature experiences. Metaphors are again pressed into service. A classic Zen poem says, in part:

On the tips of ten thousand grasses,
each and every dewdrop contains
the light of the moon.

Loori comments:

"The tips of ten thousand grasses" refers to the myriad forms, the whole

phenomenal universe, and on the tip of each blade of grass is a dewdrop. The light of the moon is a metaphor for enlightenment, realization, so each drop is not illuminated by the moon but actually contains the moon. But more than just a metaphor, this is actually so. If you look at a dewdrop in the light of the moon, you'll see the moon in the dewdrop. And if there are ten thousand dewdrops, all of them equally contain and reflect the moon (*The Art of Just Sitting: Essential Writings on the Zen Practice of Shikantaza*, ed. John Daido Loori [Wisdom, 2002], 133).

Loori uses his own intimacy with nature to reinforce the traditional metaphor. For him there is no substitute for actual closeness to actual nature.

Zen Mountain Monastery seeks to implement these principles on many levels, from mindful consumption to protection of local ecosystems. Environmental themes—for example, "the challenges we face in living with the realities of climate change"—are woven into the training. For centuries, the meditation hall has been the locus of intensive retreats,

optimized for sustained self-inquiry. Can a Zen retreat be conducted in a natural setting? Zen Mountain Monastery's wilderness retreat for women transposes several elements at once:

This is a week-long canoe, meditation, and art retreat in the Adirondacks. We'll head into beautiful backcountry waters, ready to open ourselves to the teachings of the wild. With experienced paddling guides co-leading this retreat, we'll spend time learning the practical skills of canoe strokes, rescues, and environmental awareness, as well as taking time to let our senses open to the treasures all around us. Daily paddling will be integrated with Zen meditation and art practice. (Mountains and Rivers Order, Programs, fall 2017)

"Open ourselves to the teachings of the wild"? *Mujō seppō* paddles on.

Though the forms of expression change, enlightenment has been the axis mundi of Buddhism for more than twenty-five hundred years. When Su Shi wanted to say that nature played a crucial role in his awakening, he relied on the linguistic and cultural resources of his time and place. Today, in very different circumstances, the possible permutations of enlightenment and nature are still being explored. Emergent fields generate emergent vocabularies; words can be useful tools despite their inadequacies. Ideally, new terms are accurate, accessible, flexible, evocative, and free of unwanted cultural baggage. (Neologisms take a while to get used to. Compare the coinages spawned by the Internet, beginning with *Internet*.) Buddhism's encounter with ecology may one day yield a versatile lexicon that reflects a range of experiences and insights.

For starters, "the teaching(s) of the insentient" is due for inspection. "Insentient" is an unfamiliar, technical-sounding word, and the sentient/

insentient distinction is debatable from several perspectives. Zen Mountain Monastery's canoe retreat used "the teachings of the wild," which is more vivid and alluring. Does it inadvertently devalue aspects of nature that lack the appeal of wilderness? "The teachings of nature" is accurate enough, but already carries a number of well-established meanings. "Teachings of the earth" has other connotations—contemporary, homey, perhaps mythical—yet it carries a whiff of New Age trendiness. Would "teachings of the earth" accord with Su Shi's experience? (A plain question, not a rhetorical one.)

Arne Naess, a founder of the deep ecology movement, coined the term "ecological self" to describe "the self that extends further and further beyond the separate ego and includes more and more of the phenomenal world" (Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self* [Parallax Press, 1991], 191). That interpretation of "ecological self" is close in spirit to "the teachings of the insentient," though Buddhists are generally wary of expressions that conjure up a self. Environmentally active Buddhists and environmental activists influenced by Buddhism have been called "ecosattvas," a lighthearted term for a

serious endeavor. The bodhisattva vow to save all beings, a hallmark of Mahayana Buddhism, acquires new dimensions in a time of environmental crisis.

For Su Shi and John Daido Looi, *mujō seppō* was a way of talking about awakening. Awakening is hard to squeeze into language anyhow; the difficulties are compounded if the available vocabulary is thin. Su's proximity to the sound of a stream gave him license to suggest that he awakened *in* nature. At the same time, he awakened to nature, in the sense that it was the first time he experienced nature this way. Awakened as nature also works—he saw that he and nature were not two. One last combination: self-realization is often experienced as nature awakening to itself.

The phrase "awakened ecological consciousness" is accurate and comprehensive, though long. "Ecological awakening" shows promise. In a secular sense, it implies the recognition that many forms of life are undeniably imperiled. Can "ecological awakening" stretch to accommodate a spiritual meaning along the lines of Buddhism's "teachings of the insentient"? Without both kinds of awakening, will future generations find the moon in a dewdrop? □

The Buddhahood of All Insentient Beings

by Brook Ziporyn

The life of each thing, the lifelessness of each thing, the many lives of each thing, the many deadnesses of each thing, the infinite simultaneous alternate lives of each thing, the infinite simultaneous alternate deaths of each thing: that is buddhahood.

So far, no lifeless universe has been discovered. That is, the occurrence of matter without the occurrence of life is, judging by the available empirical evidence viewed globally, something that does not happen. In every case that matter has been there in any universe, life has occurred—eventually.

I do not mean that there has never been a time, a single snapshot moment or a billion such moments, during which there was only matter but no life. Nor do I mean that there is no part of the universe in which, considered in isolation from all other parts, there is only lifelessness. “In every case that matter has been there in any universe, life has occurred” is true even if there are immense periods of time, considered in isolation, and immense swaths of space, considered in isolation, where there is no life.

The crux of the problem, however, lies in those three words, “considered in isolation.” Everything depends on how we divide things up, where our definition of “one thing” begins and ends.

For what I mean when I say that “matter without life has never existed” is that, scientifically speaking, there has never appeared even one particle of any kind of matter found in any

non-life-producing universe, considering that universe as a whole. For no non-life-producing universe has yet been discovered. Likewise, there is no lifeless matter in any period of time that is not part of at least one sequence of time that produces life.

All matter that has ever been discovered has existed only in a universe that also contains life, and all lifeless times were part of this sequence of time we are now in, the total sequence of time that produced this life.

No lifeless universe has ever been discovered. Among all the universes that have been discovered so far, there is not even one that is devoid of life. I challenge you or anyone to show me even one particle of matter, or even one moment of time, from a universe without life.

At this point we have merely been speaking empirically about what has so far been discovered. There are very few things that we can know with absolute certainty without relying on empirical contingency. But in fact this is one thing we can know with absolute certainty: no universe *will ever be discovered* devoid of life.

We can know this for two reasons. The first is perhaps relatively trivial, although some philosophers attach great significance to it. It is that the act of “discovering” itself requires a living being. Ipso facto, wherever any discovering is done, life is also present. Therefore no universe devoid of life can ever be discovered.

The second reason has to do with how we define *universe*. This is the hidden premise of the claims I am making here: it is because we understand the idea of “universe” in a certain way that we can claim, with absolute certainty, that there is no lifeless universe. If the universe is taken in its broadest meaning, which is also its most commonsensical meaning, it means “all that exists.” All that exists certainly includes this planet, this solar system, this period of time. The universe in this broadest sense is what includes any more-narrowly

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construed universes—for example, all alternate universes. If we call the sum total of all possible universes “the universe,” then it is obvious that there is no universe but this one, and since this one contains life, no universe can be discovered that is devoid of life. Whatever might be discovered is by definition part of this totality that includes our lives.

All of the above is true even if life exists only once, for a few million years, on one small planet. Even if there was no life for billions of years—and in most of the universe there never has been and never will be life—even if the phenomenon “life” is a peculiar flash that occurs only on planet Earth between the Hadean Eon 4,500 million years ago until 2018 CE, and never arises anywhere ever again, it is still true that there is no universe devoid of life and that there can never be any universe devoid of life.

And yet people often contemplate those vast billions of years and expanses of space and speak of “lifeless matter.” This makes sense only if we *divide the world in a certain way*. That is, it is only because we are in the habit of dividing self and other, or mind and its objects, or—to put it most generally—inside and outside, that it is possible to speak of lifeless matter. Only if any one part of the universe is thought of as an entity truly separate from all other parts can anything be lifeless. The key question is how much of the universe do we consider to be “one thing.” Where do we draw the line that divides inside from outside? If “me and that rock” are one thing, that one thing has life, just as

“my skin and my fingernails” has life. If me and that rock are separate, then my body has life and the rock has no life.

Mahāyāna Buddhism, particularly that developed in the Madhyamaka school and further elaborated in Tiantai Buddhism, holds that the separation of “inside and outside” is impossible to sustain in any nonambiguous way. These schools generally develop this idea logically by use of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments that try to demonstrate that any way of drawing common-sense dividing lines to define one object in distinction to another end up being self-contradictory.

The *Mahāyāna Parinirvāṇa Sūtra* is not a part of this methodological approach. It claims instead that all sentient beings have something it calls buddha-nature. But it also says this buddha-nature is “like space,” specifically like space in that it “is neither inside nor outside”—or more profoundly, it itself *has* no inside or outside.

It is for this reason that the Chinese Tiantai Buddhist writer Jingxi Zhanran (711–82), combining these two approaches, amended that sutra’s claim that all sentient beings have buddha-nature, arguing instead that even insentient beings have buddha-nature, and that buddha-nature must by all means not be said to be “within” sentient beings. If it were within sentient beings only, it would be restricted to sentient beings. So Zhanran does not allow the idea that buddha-nature is a kind of divine essence or kernel within living beings. Nor is it some kernel within each being,

living or unliving. Nor is it a potential to attain buddhahood in the future. It is not a soul, not an atman, not an essence, not a divine spark, not the Kingdom of Heaven “within you.” Rather, buddha-nature is simply the space-like all-pervasiveness that is revealed when we no longer think of inside or outside, when we eliminate the idea that any given thing is inside or outside any other thing, in either a concrete or an abstract sense. Speaking of the failed exclusion of a stone from all things, we could say “all things have stone nature.” Speaking of the failed exclusion of the quality of buddhahood—that is, of eternal realization of the eternity of each impermanent thing, and the concomitant compassion, wisdom, and bliss of that realization—we say, “all things have buddha-nature.”

Since space has no inside or outside, every entity in space, every physical being, is not outside space. We cannot put space on one side and the thing that occupies space on the other side, considering them two distinct entities. Two distinct entities cannot occupy the same place. If space and the object occupying it were two distinct objects, then they would be two distinct entities that could not coexist in the same place. To be an object in a space is precisely to coexist in the same place as that space. So the claim about space returns, in Zhanran’s handling of it, to the Madhyamaka position that no thing can have a clear line dividing it from the outside, from other things or spaces that are not it. Not only does space itself have no inside or outside, the rock, too,

has no inside or outside. My body, too, has no inside or outside.

That brings us back to the universe and its life. My life may be observed to last for only sixty or seventy years, in one small spot on the surface of one small planet. But if my life has no inside or outside, there is no place in the universe that is an entity outside my small life. No universe has ever been discovered without my life in it. No universe *can* ever be discovered without my life in it.

I can therefore say that all sentient beings, and all insentient beings, have Brook Ziporyn nature.

The same is true of the Buddha Shakyamuni, or any other buddha, or any moment of experience of a buddha, however brief, experienced anywhere or anywhen. Therefore I can say that all sentient beings, and all insentient beings, have buddha-nature.

Life has no outside: therefore, the universe as an inseparable whole is not lifeless. But life also has no inside; it has no essence that is divisible from lifelessness. So we can also say lifelessness has no outside. There is no universe that is devoid of lifelessness. Hence we must not construe the claim that insentient beings have buddha-nature to mean, one-sidedly, that life is ultimate, that life is deeper than nonlife, that the universe is actually one big life. It *is* one big life, but it is also one big lifelessness. And as much as all things are alive as me, I myself am dead as all things.

So the claim that all insentient beings also have buddha-nature, historically deriving from Jingxi Zhanran, is a way of rejecting the following ideas:

1. that buddha-nature is within us, any more than it is without us;
2. that buddha-nature is an essence of purity or buddha-likeness within us;
3. that buddha-nature is the nature of consciousness;
4. that buddha-nature is the capacity or potential to attain buddhahood in the future; and

5. the vitalist idea that buddha-nature pervades the universe as an objective life force, rendering “life” more real and fundamental than “lifelessness.”

Indeed, Zhanran rejects even the idea that we, or other things, merely “have” buddha-nature. One is still distinct from what one “has.” Instead, we *are*, in our entirety, buddha-nature.

We are to see each stone and each shard, each scent and each sight, each stalk and stick and plant and seed, as the Middle Way itself, as space-like, pervading all things even though it is itself nothing (space has no attributes) and neither includes nor excludes anything. Indeed, we can say that the pebble is me and I am the pebble, but not because both of us are really me, and not because both of us are really the pebble. Nor should we say that both of us are some third thing that is neither me nor pebble. The pebble is the ambiguity of me-or-pebble, and I am the ambiguity of pebble-or-me. Life is the ambiguity of life-or-death, and death is also the ambiguity of death-or-life. The universe is indeed one big life, but it is also one big death—and

these two are synonymous. It is in its very lifelessness that the pebble displays its buddha-nature, that it reveals the depth dimension of my own being. It does not have to be painted over or supplemented with some additional thing called life or buddhahood.

We must be careful not to equate the conception of the buddhahood of plants and trees, or stones and shards, with pre-Buddhist animism—the belief that there is a separate individual spirit dwelling within each of these items. There is no spirit other than the item itself, and these items themselves, too, are not separate. We must not imagine a life where there is no life—no life is already life, but only insofar as it maintains its status as no life.

Wherever there is a thing, there is space. Wherever there is space, it is inseparable from whatever thing is in it, and the space that is copresent with any thing is inseparable from the space that is copresent with every other thing. There is no universe without this pebble, nor can there ever be. There is no universe without the dullness, inertness, stupidity, lifelessness of this pebble, nor can there ever be. To deny the dullness, inertness, stupidity, lifelessness of this pebble is to deny the universe and to deny the pebble’s buddha-nature. We need not seek the life within the pebble, its hidden vitality. Its lifelessness is vital enough—for it is our own life and all other lives that crash against that lifelessness, neither within nor without it. Our lives belong to that pebble not because it has some life separate from our lives but, rather, precisely because it does not.

The life of each thing, the lifelessness of each thing, the many lives of each thing, the many deadnesses of each thing, the infinite simultaneous alternate lives of each thing, the infinite simultaneous alternate deaths of each thing: that is buddhahood. □

A Prayer for “Plants and Trees, Countries and Lands, All Become Buddhas”

by Shinsui Okada

“Plants and trees, countries and lands, all become buddhas” is not a question of whether or not plants, trees, countries, and lands attain buddhahood; rather, it is first and foremost a prayer for the repose of the wounded and dead in nature.

A Philosophy of Plants

The philosopher Tomonobu Imamichi (1922–2012) pointed out that most Japanese family crests are based on plant designs, indicating that, compared with cultures that employ dragons and eagles, or lions and tigers in their heraldry, Japanese cultural patterns show a strong tendency toward adaptability and harmony. Plants survive not as individuals but by species adaptation. This means that they grow where their seed randomly falls, existing within a pattern of dramatic change as their branches and leaves grow. Imamichi wrote, “In the very workings of their life, plants are a reiteration of elegant beauty as they bud, bloom, fall, proliferate, fruit, and change color, all within an intense yet inconspicuous struggle for life” (*Tōyō no bigaku* [Aesthetics of the East], TBS Britannica, 1980). Plants take root in that space where their seed falls and form a community with other plants. They maintain harmony with their surroundings and continually transform themselves, adapting to changes in their environment. As Imamichi stated, the workings of their life are inconspicuous, but there is no doubt a severity of struggle to survive and flourish.

Are Plants and Trees Nonsentient?

Mahayana Buddhism in general does not consider trees and plants to be capable of sensation and, with the exception of the Lotus and Śūraṅgama sutras, does not hesitate to place them on a par with tiles and stones. For example, the Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra (Sutra of the Great Accumulation of Treasures) says, “Plants and trees, tiles and stones, like shadows, are not sentient” (Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra, 78, Discourse to Pūrṇa, 17.2.4). Why is this so?

The geographer Yutaka Sakaguchi reports that recent research has shown that from the middle of the third century to around the sixth or seventh century the world experienced severe climate change in the form of cooling, drier conditions (see “Kako ichiman sanzennen no kikō no henka to jinrui no rekishi” [Climate change and the history of human beings during the past thirteen thousand years], *Kōza, bunmei to*

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kankyō, 6: Rekishi to kikō [Lecture series, 6, Civilization and the environment: History and climate] [Asakura Shoten, 1995 (revised edition, 2008)], 1–11). The Mahayana sutras, with their prohibition of meat eating, were compiled at this time. Why this prohibition was added to the small simple meals demanded by asceticism can thus be explained in ecoreligious terms. In all probability, the acceptance of ascetic behavior in relation to food and the rejection of meat by religious practitioners

and the societies that supported them derived from severe and long-term food shortages. At such a time, rather than rearing pigs and other animals on plant food and then eating their meat, many more human lives could be sustained by a considerably lesser volume by eating vegetable foodstuffs directly. “Hence, in order to keep both monks and lay followers free from what was deemed unnecessary inconvenience and qualms, the sentience of plants was, by and large, ignored [in the precept against the taking of life]” (Lambert Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature: The Lecture Delivered on the Occasion of the EXPO 1990* [International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1991], 7).

Plants and the Lotus Sutra

Chapter 5 of the Lotus Sutra, “The Parable of the Herbs,” likens the teachings of the Buddha benefiting all beings equally to the rain that falls on all trees, shrubs, herbs, and grasses, enabling them to grow and blossom, producing fruits. This chapter was to have an important influence on the Chinese Tiantai and Japanese Tendai schools of Buddhism. Whereas the Chinese Huayan school held that plants are not sentient and cannot achieve enlightenment, in commentaries such as Fazang’s (643–712) *Huayanjing tanxuanji* (Records of the search for the profundities of the Avatamsaka Sūtra), Tiantai scholars advocated plants’ capability of attaining buddhahood. This must have been because of the image presented in “The Parable of the Herbs.”

In Japan this understanding was adopted into the scripts for nō plays. One script contains these lines:

Appearing in “The Parable of the Herbs,” plants, trees, and the land, sentient and nonsentient beings, are the real aspect of all things—the storm on the mountain peaks,

the sound of the water in the valleys. . . . Thus the willow being green and the flowers being red, the colors and scents of the plants and the trees, are in themselves the realm of buddhahood. (*Yōkyoku-shū, ge* [A collection of nō texts, vol. 2], Nihon koten bungaku taikei [A compendium of Japanese classical literature], vol. 41 [Iwanami Shoten, 1963], 38)

Similarly, the play *Teika* (The jasmine vine) says:

Drenched by the rain that is the oneness of the flavor of the Dharma, all are rehydrated and plants and the land have the opportunity to attain buddhahood. (*Ibid.*, 52)

The phrase “plants and trees, countries and lands, all become buddhas” resonates throughout the world of nō theater. As the phrase appears as the “words of the Buddha” in many texts, including the plays *Nue* (Monster Nue) and *Saigyō zakura* (Saigyō and the cherry tree), it should be found in the words of the sutras; but it has not in fact been discovered in any volume of the extant canon (Shōson Miyamoto, “‘Sōmoku kokudo shikkai jōbutsu’ no busshō-ron teki igi to sono sakusha” [The authorship and significance of the phrase “Plants and trees, countries and lands, all become buddhas” as a theory of the buddha-nature], *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 9, no. 2 [1961]: 262–91).

The Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, in which a massive tsunami devastated the coastal areas of Tohoku, added a new understanding of what was meant by this beautiful phrase, which is said to have been born in Japan.

A Magnificent and Cruel Land

The scholar of Indology and Buddhology Hajime Nakamura (1911–99) wrote, “In Japan the climate is genial, and the

landscape benign. Since nature appears to be benevolent to us, it is easy for us to feel as one with it” (*Nihonjin no shiyui hōhō* [The way of thinking of the Japanese people], Shunjūsha, 1989, 2012. First published by Misuzu Shobō, 1949). When Nakamura wrote this, Japan did not experience great earthquakes, and its climatic conditions were stable. From the end of the twentieth century, however, nature has not been so benevolent. A number of large earthquakes reaching the maximum of 7 on the Japan Meteorological Agency scale have occurred: the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake (1995), the Chūetsu earthquake (2004), the Great East Japan Earthquake (2011), and the Kumamoto earthquakes (2016). In addition, there has been disastrous flooding in Niigata, Fukui, and Toyooka in Hyōgo (2004), in Sayō-chō in Hyōgo (2009), in Hiroshima (2014), and in North Kantō (2015); and also volcanic eruptions on Miyakejima (2000), Sakurajima (2013), Ontake (2014), Kuchinoerabujima (2015), and Kusatsu Shiranesan (2018). Water has inundated the land, fires have broken out on mountainsides, and the earth has trembled.

A similar series of enormous earthquakes is recorded in the *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* (The true history of the three reigns of Japan), an official history compiled in 901: the Jōgan tsunami (869), often compared to the Great East Japan Earthquake; the Great Izumo earthquake (880); and the Tōnankai earthquake (887) (vols. 16, 38, and 50, respectively). When we look back over the past, we see that the reason the Japanese do not act contrary to nature but draw close to it and consider themselves part of it is not in fact because the Japanese climate is mild and the landscape benign. The European and North American climate certainly cannot be called mild, but it is not something with which people are unable to contend. It is possible to survive in it by using intelligence to improve the environment. In the case

of Japan, however, nature can at times be rigorous and cruel, and its power can be overwhelming, far beyond people's ability to withstand. Those who experienced the tsunami in 2011 could only say there was nothing they could do, that their strength was negligible before it.

Words of Prayer

In India, the earth is considered to be typical of that which is solid and firm, and the word *acala*, which means "immovable," is used to express "mountain." The earth in Japan, by contrast, is turbulent, and mountains spew forth fire sufficient to change their shape, while at the time of the 2011 earthquake, the sea rose to a height of 40 meters (130 feet), drowning the land and racing up nearby hills.

During the Jōgan tsunami of 869, the sea roared, "its sound like thunder" (*Nihon sandai jitsuroku*). Japan's mountains and rivers, and the whole land, are not immovable but are, rather, animate beings. People witnessing the movements of the earth and the roaring of the seas must have prayed that the "plants and trees, countries and lands" be calmed and that the "plants and trees" that had lost their lives amid the desolate landscape left by the receding tsunami, and the land itself, might rest in peace. The phrase "plants and trees, countries and lands, all become buddhas" is not a question of whether or not plants, trees, countries, and lands

attain buddhahood; rather it is first and foremost a prayer for the repose of the wounded and dead in nature.

A text exists that shows that such an understanding is in no way baseless. It is in the *Shinjō sōmoku jōbutsu shiki* (Private notes on discussions of the attainment of buddhahood by plants and trees), written by the Tendai priest Annen (841–?) between 869 and 885?, that we find the first mention of the phrase "plants and trees, countries and lands, all become buddhas" (Mitsuaki Hanano, "*Sanjūshika no kotogaki no senja to shisō ni tsuite* (3)" [Thoughts on the compiler and ideas of the *Thirty-four item report* (3)], *Journal of Oriental Studies* 15, no. 2 [1976]: 127–56). The year 869, when the *Shinjō sōmoku jōbutsu shiki* began to be written, was the year in which the Jōgan tsunami took place.

Kōkan Sasaki (1930–), a leading anthropologist of religion, cited a photograph of a Buddhist priest he had seen in a publication—standing alone on a shore reduced to rubble by the tsunami, facing the sea, his hands held in prayer—as an example of a prayer for the buddhahood of plants and lands. Sasaki points out that Japan's smooth acceptance of teachings such as the buddhahood of plants and lands was because the Japanese possessed a view of nature that was accommodating to such teachings. Characteristic of this ease of acceptance was a religio-cultural tendency to perceive *kami* (divine beings) in the workings of nature. He indicates that the Japanese tend to regard nature as having both a rough aspect of *kami* (*aramitama*) and a calm aspect of *kami* (*nigitama*), and that there are many examples of a *tatarigami* (a malevolent and violent *kami*) being converted into a benign deity through the worship and prayer of the people ("Daishinsai go no Nihon shūkyōron ni tsuite" [Religious ideas in Japan about the catastrophe caused by the earthquake], *Bukkyō Kikaku Tsūshin*, no. 25 [September 11, 2011], [https://](https://www.bukkyo-kikaku.com/archive/bk_tusin_no25.htm)

www.bukkyo-kikaku.com/archive/bk_tusin_no25.htm).

These provide an important base when thinking of the phrase "plants and trees, countries and lands, all become buddhas" as a prayer.

For those of us who have experienced over and over again the roaring of the sea and the collapse of mountainsides, witnessed the destruction of pine groves by the force of tsunamis, and seen the sweeping away of villages into the sea, this allows us to think of nature as all the more precious.

Conclusion

In the *Shinmyōkan* (The contemplation of absolute reality) attributed to the Tendai priest Genshin (Eshin Sōzu, 942–1017), we find the following words:

Because plants and trees, tiles and stones, mountains and rivers, the great earth, the ocean, and the sky are all, without exception, embodiments of *shinnyo* (absolute reality), they are none other than buddhas.

The capability of becoming a buddha (the buddha-nature) extends beyond human-kind to plants and trees, tiles and stones, mountains and rivers, the sea, and the sky. Everything is within the network of life. There, plants do not move from the space in which they grow but, changing their form over and over again in a community with others, live in harmony with their surroundings in the same soil. Now is the time for us to learn from them, not just thinking of changing the environment for our own convenience, but respecting both the plants and the land as we attempt to reform ourselves so that we can live in harmony with our environment. □

For a related work, see Mamiko Okada, "Environmental Issues and Buddhism's Potential," *Dharma World*, July–September (2008), 26–30.

How Do We Respect the Buddha-Nature of Nature?

by David R. Loy

We desecrate the natural world when we relate to it only as an instrumental means to some other goal (such as economic growth). We resacralize it when we realize and respect its own buddha-nature.

Before, nature had a life and spirit of its own. The trees, skies, and rivers were living spirits. Now we are only concerned with how they can serve us.

—Phra Paisal Visalo

According to traditional biographies, Gautama Buddha had a special relationship with trees. He was born among trees in Lumbini Grove, when his mother went into premature labor. As a child, while sitting under a tree and watching his father plow a field as part of a religious ceremony, he naturally fell into a meditative trance. Later, when he left home on his spiritual quest, he went into the forest, where he studied with two teachers, later engaged in ascetic practices, and then meditated by himself under a tree, where he awakened. Afterward he continued to spend most of his time outdoors, often teaching under trees and eventually dying between two trees.

Unsurprisingly, the Buddha often expressed his appreciation of trees and other plants. According to one story in the Vinaya monastic code, a tree spirit appeared to him and complained that a monk had chopped down its tree. In response, the Buddha prohibited monastics from damaging trees or bushes,

including cutting off limbs, picking flowers, or even plucking green leaves. One wonders what he would say about our casual destruction of whole ecosystems today.

We may also wonder about the larger pattern: why religious founders so often experience their spiritual transformation by leaving human society and going into the wilderness by themselves. Following his baptism, Jesus went into the desert, where he fasted for forty days and nights. Mohammed's revelations occurred when he retreated into a cave, where the archangel Gabriel appeared to him. The *Khaggavisana Sutta* (Rhinoceros Horn Sutra), one of the earliest in the Pali canon, encourages monks to wander alone in the forest, like a rhinoceros. Milarepa lived and practiced in a cave by himself for many years, as did many Tibetan yogis after him. Today, in contrast, most of us meditate

inside buildings with screened windows, which insulate us from insects, the hot sun, and chilling winds. There are many advantages to this, of course, but is something significant also lost?

Although we normally relate to nature in a utilitarian way, the natural world is an interdependent community of living beings that invites us into a different kind of relationship. The implication is that withdrawing

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into it, especially by oneself, can disrupt our usual ways of seeing and open us up to an alternative experience. Does that also point to why we enjoy being in nature so much? We find it healing, even when we don't understand why or how, but clearly it has something to do with the fact that the natural world offers us a temporary escape from our instrumentalized lives.

Because meaning for us today has become a function of words, we usually miss the meaning of everything else. "For most cultures throughout history—including our own in preliterate times—the entire world used to speak. Anthropologists call this animism, the most pervasive worldview in human history. Animistic cultures listen to the natural world. For them, birds have something to say. So do worms, wolves, and waterfalls" (Christopher Manes, *A Language Older than Words*). Perhaps they have not ceased to speak, but we are no longer able to hear what they are saying.

What does this imply about the relationship between human civilization and the biosphere that supports it? Today, of course, that relationship is more strained than it was in the time of Gautama Buddha. Two hundred years ago little more than 3 percent of the world's population lived in cities; today well over half of us live in urban areas. According to ecopsychologists, many urbanites suffer not only from various types of overcrowding and pollution but also from "nature deficit syndrome."

Why are we so alienated from the natural world, which is not just our home but also our mother? One of the pillars of the worldview we collectively take for granted today is a principle that the ecological crisis exposes as problematic. It is a social construct that, like money, is essential and, like money, has developed in ways that need to be reevaluated and reconstructed.

Property

The basic problem with property—particularly land—is that in belonging to someone else (or something else, such as a corporation), it is reduced to a means for the ends of the owner. Despite being indispensable to civilization as we know it, our modern concept of private property is not something natural to human society in the way that, for example, language and material tools are. Hunting and gathering societies that do not grow their food have a very different relationship to the land they live on and the other creatures they live with. The fact that all conceptions of property are culturally and historically conditioned reminds us that property is not inherently sacrosanct. Our social agreements about property can be changed—and today perhaps need to be changed, as part of our response to burgeoning social and ecological crises.

In his *Second Treatise* the English political philosopher John Locke argued that governments are instituted to secure people's rights to "life, liberty, and property." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the French

Enlightenment philosopher, disagreed: property is not an inalienable right but a social construct that founded the social order. "The first man, having enclosed a piece of ground, to whom it occurred to say this is mine, and found people sufficiently simple to believe him, was the true founder of civil society" (*Discourse on Inequality*).

Although these two views of property are different, they share something more important. Both perspectives are concerned only about the rights of the owner and have nothing to say about the rights of the owned—because property, of course, has none. A more non-dualist Buddhist approach, however, suggests a different perspective.

According to the Pali canon, the Buddha did not critique the concept of private property. When merchants asked him for advice, he emphasized how one gains wealth and how one should use it. Accumulating wealth for its own sake was condemned in favor of generosity—which may have something to do with the fact that the monastic community was dependent on lay support. The Lion's Roar Sutra tells a story about a kingdom that collapses when the ruler does not give property to those who are impoverished. The moral is not that poverty-induced crime should be punished severely, or that poor people are responsible for their own poverty and should work harder, but that governments have a responsibility to help people provide for their basic needs.

Of course, there was also another side to the Buddha's teachings, which

emphasized nonattachment to material goods and promoted the value of having fewer wants. Monastics, for example, should be content with the four requisites: enough food to alleviate hunger and maintain health, enough clothes to be modest and protect the body, enough shelter to focus on mental cultivation, and enough medical care to cure and prevent basic illnesses. Personal possessions were limited to three robes, a begging bowl, a razor, a needle, a water strainer, and a cord around the waist.

This de-emphasis on personal property is consistent with Buddhist teachings about the self. The word *property* derives from the Latin *proprius* “one’s own.” There is no property—whether territory or movable possessions—unless there is someone to own it. The concept is inherently dualistic: the owner objectifies, in effect, that which is owned. Then what does property mean for a tradition that is devoted to realizing there can be no real owner, because there is no self?

Yet property is obviously a necessary social construct. Why? That brings us back to the basic Buddhist concern: alleviating *dukkha* (suffering) in the broadest sense. From a Buddhist perspective, property is a useful social construct insofar as it reduces *dukkha* but problematic when it increases *dukkha*. Needless to say, such a perspective is quite different from the prevalent view that largely determines how our civilization relates to the earth today.

So the issue isn’t whether I own my toothbrush or similar personal items. The question is whether wealthy people and corporations should be free to own as much property as they want, and whether they should be able to utilize that property (especially land) in any way they want—including ways that damage the earth. Today the bottom line, with few exceptions, is “hands off” if they earned their money legally and bought the property legally. It’s theirs, so they can do more or less whatever they want with it. If the earth is to survive the

onslaught of our species, however, this social agreement about property needs to be rethought. Instead of focusing only on what is of short-term benefit to one species, what about the well-being of the planet? Is there another alternative besides relating to “it” (we’re talking about Mother Earth here!) as something for humans to exploit?

This is not an appeal for socialism, in which the state owns everything, in effect, on behalf of all of its citizens. From an ecological perspective, that usually amounts to a collective version of the same owner/owned, subject/object dualism. I’m talking about a new liberation movement.

The Next Liberation Movement?

Sooner or later, we will have to realize that the earth has rights, too, to live without pollution.

—Bolivian president Evo Morales

The development of Western civilization—now globalized—has often been understood in terms of increasing freedom. According to the historian Lord Acton, the growth of freedom has been the central theme of history. Since the

Renaissance there has been progressive emphasis on religious freedom (the Reformation), political freedom (starting with the English, American, and French revolutions), economic freedom (class struggle), colonial freedom (independence movements), racial freedom (antislavery campaigns and civil rights movements), and more recently, gender and sexual freedom (women’s rights, gay and transgender rights, and so forth).

There is, however, another way to describe this historical development. Almost all of those freedom movements can be understood as struggles to overcome hierarchical exploitation, which are forms of means-ends duality. Slavery, for example, has been called social death because the life of a slave is completely subordinated to the interests of the master. Patriarchy subordinated women to men in much the same way, exploiting them for domestic work, sexual pleasure, and producing children. Rulers and the people they oppress, colonialists and the colonized, robber barons and workers: they are all versions of inequitable relationships, which were rationalized as natural and therefore proper. In all of these cases, freedom means not being a means to someone else’s ends. Democracy entails, in principle, that

no one's personhood is defined by their subservience to what someone else wants them to do.

What is the next step in this historical progression? Well, what means-ends subordination remains the greatest problem today, now that our extraordinary technological powers have transformed the earth and all of its creatures into a collection of resources to be extracted and consumed in whatever ways we humans decide?

If this instrumentalist view of the natural world is at the heart of our ecological predicament, perhaps the next development in overcoming hierarchical means-ends relationships is to appreciate that the planet and its magnificent web of life are much more than just a resource for the benefit of one species. Instead of dismissing such a possibility as an unlikely collective self-sacrifice, this freedom movement can be based on the opposite realization: that the ecological crisis demonstrates that our own well-being ultimately cannot be distinguished from the well-being of the whole.

According to the ecotheologian Thomas Berry, the universe is not a collection of objects but a community of subjects. Our own biosphere is a resplendent example of that community. Humans are not the ultimate end, the goal of the evolutionary process, because no species is—or better, because every species is. Today we need to think seriously about what it would mean to live on the earth in such a way.

Of course, given entrenched economic and political realities, any social movement in that direction would be an idealistic fantasy. Except that it's already happening.

“I Am the River and the River Is Me”

According to traditional jurisprudence, nature is property without any legal

rights, so environmental laws have focused only on regulating exploitation. Recently, however, the inherent rights of the natural world have been recognized in Ecuador, New Zealand, and India, meaning that cases can be brought up *on behalf of nature itself*.

In accordance with the traditional worldview of Quechua peoples in the Andes, Ecuador in 2008 passed a new constitution legally enshrining the rights of nature. According to Article 71: “Nature, or *Pachamama*, where life is created and reproduced, has the right for its existence to be integrally respected as well as the right of the maintenance and regeneration of its vital cycles, structures, functions and evolutionary processes. Every person, community, people or nationality can demand from the public authority that these rights of nature are fulfilled.”

In New Zealand, what used to be the Te Urewera National Park on the North Island was granted personhood in 2014 and is now a legal entity with “all the rights, powers, duties and liabilities of a legal person,” according to the Te

Urewera Act. Among other things, personhood means that lawsuits to protect the land can be brought on behalf of the land itself, without the need to show harm to any human. Jacinta Ruru of the University of Otago called the new law “undoubtedly legally revolutionary.” In 2017 the Whanganui River, the third longest in New Zealand, was also granted personhood.

Also last year, a high court in India declared the Ganges and Yamuna Rivers to be legal persons. Later it extended this designation to their tributaries, including glaciers, rivers, streams, rivulets, lakes, air, meadows, dales, jungles, forests, wetlands, grasslands, springs, and waterfalls. Citing the new status of the Whanganui River in New Zealand, the judges ruled that the two rivers and their tributaries are “legal and living entities having the status of a living person with all corresponding rights, duties and liabilities.”

The Indian ruling was in direct response to increasing pollution of the Ganges and Yamuna, which are considered sacred by most Hindus. If present legal regimes of property rights are not working to protect threatened ecosystems, it is acknowledged that new ways of thinking and acting may be necessary.

Although granting personhood to some special places is an important step in the right direction, that by itself will not save the earth's biosphere from the ecological crisis that now challenges civilization as we know it. Yet it points to a change in our collective understanding of our relationship with the earth. Wendell Berry's poem “How to Be a Poet” says “There are no unsacred places; / there are only sacred places / and desecrated places.” We desecrate the natural world when we relate to it only as an instrumental means to some other goal (such as economic growth). We resacralize it when we realize and respect its own buddha-nature. □

Flowers of Sentience, Roots of Consciousness: The Buddhahood of Plants in the Nō Theater

by M. Cody Poulton

Both Shinto and Buddhism acknowledge that sentience can exist across a broad spectrum of life, from the simplest organic structures to supernatural entities that, though invisible, may direct our lives in ways we still don't understand.

It has always pleased me to exalt plants in the scale of organised beings.

Charles Darwin, *Autobiography*
(qtd. in Sacks 2017, 4–5)

For over thirty years I have been encountering a motif or set of motifs in Japanese culture that is, outside of folklore and the children's story, virtually unheard of in European literature. Japanese literature and theater are rife with stories in which the protagonists are not human but are, rather, plants, trees, animals, or supernatural beings. For many Westerners, such tales seem indicative of some kind of arrested development in the Japanese psyche, as if their culture had failed to become modern or, worse, “grow up.”

When I ask my Japanese colleagues about this, most see no problem at all: both Shinto and Buddhism acknowledge that sentience can exist across a broad spectrum of life, from the simplest organic structures to supernatural entities that, though invisible, may direct our lives in ways we still don't understand. Arguably, the Japanese themselves feel a kinship with these other entities to a degree that many people in Europe or North America do not, though such a sensibility is common among indigenous

peoples around the world. As unique as they are, human beings do not occupy any God-given, privileged place in this scheme. The word *animism* is brought out to explain much of this, though the term itself is vaguely used.

I began to realize that a radically different metaphysical construct of the world gives rise to a distinctive poetics and dramaturgy, and that typical Euro-American critical tools fail to adequately interpret even Japanese discursive texts, to say nothing of many of their greatest works of poetry, fiction, and drama.

Consider, for example, a category of nō plays in which the *shite*, the “doer” or protagonist, is a flower, plant, or tree. As many as forty plays refer to the idea of *sōmoku jōbutsu*, or the buddhahood of plants. The phrase is part of a longer verse,

When one buddha attains the Way
and contemplates the realm of
the Law,

The grasses and trees and land will
all become buddha.

(*Ichibutsu jōdō kangen hōkai sōmoku
kokudo shikkai jōbutsu.*)

Can the natural (that is to say, non-human) world be a suitable subject for

drama? Can a play about anything so passive as a plant make for good theater? If the sum effect of such a play is no more than to enshrine in art the glories of nature, where is the drama in that? The majority of plays concerning this theme are now generally grouped as “woman plays,” belonging to a category of plays that are the most lyrical but also the most static, the least “dramatic” in a Western sense, in the nō repertoire. Like women, but far more so, the flowers and trees of the nō are frequently portrayed as pretty objects that do not act except in the sense that they are catalysts for an event or, better yet, a mood.

The woman plays of the nō theater lack many of those very elements that are the sine qua non of modern drama: the delineation of human characters and their social and psychological conflicts. Such plays—for example, about an encounter between a tranquil nature and a Buddhist priest who has abandoned the world—must surely be counted among the least dramatic of all. Very little actually happens in a play like *Kakitsubata*, except in the sense that the plot, such as it is, becomes an occasion for great poetry.

There are obvious limits to our understanding of the inner life of the plant world. Even were we to subscribe to the idea that plants can indeed feel—that they have emotions, even souls—these attributes are surely not the same as ours. This philosophical problem was raised by Wittgenstein (1958, 223) in his famous saying, “If a lion could speak, we

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could not understand him.” The subjective quality of any consciousness—what Thomas Nagel (1974) called qualia—cannot be explained. Empathy can allow us an intuition of the consciousness of another, but this is far easier among creatures of the same species, to say nothing of people of the same family or place. We can understand much by observation of the other, even of bats or bluebells, but we can only be certain of their behavior (if it is possible to consider the life of a flower in such terms); their subjective experience of the world can, at best, only be inferred.

To make such inferences, we tend to project our own thoughts and feelings upon nature. In European poetics, this amounts to a personification of nature, which is typically dismissed as a pathetic fallacy. The point is that plants do not feel as we do, and it is simply sentimental of us to think otherwise. But this poetic fallacy is precisely the premise of a number of *nō* plays. I am increasingly of the opinion that such motifs are not false at all but, rather, express insights into the workings of nature that nonetheless require a certain degree of anthropomorphism in order for us as human beings to make intelligible what is essentially nonhuman in nature. Even in Western poetics, the apostrophe, a device whereby the poet addresses a third party, someone or something—a famous example is Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn”—indicates how inanimate objects may be personified (cf. Johnson 2010). Here what is called new materialism, or green materialism, a way of

thinking advanced by Jane Bennett, is a useful tool to imagine ourselves into the nonhuman world:

If a green materialism requires of us a more refined sensitivity to the outside-that-is-inside-too, then maybe a bit of anthropomorphizing will prove valuable. Maybe it is worth running the risks associated with anthropomorphizing (superstition, the divinization of nature, romanticism) because it, oddly enough, works against anthropocentrism: a chord is struck between person and thing, and I am no longer above or outside a nonhuman “environment.” Too often the philosophical rejection of anthropomorphism is bound up with a hubristic demand that only humans and God can bear any traces of creative agency. (2010, 120)

Current research by a number of botanists and biologists is providing insight into the complex lives of plants and trees. In a much-watched TED talk (to date, over 2.6 million views), Suzanne Simard (2016), professor of forest ecology at the University of British Columbia, explains that forests behave like complex organisms, “sharing information below

ground.” Paper birch and Douglas fir exchange carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, and water through their root systems, but they don’t share with western red cedar. The birch sends more carbon to the fir than the fir to the birch in summer, but in the fall the exchange is reversed. Hundreds of miles of fungus mycelium interact with their root systems, exchanging information and nutrients. “Mother trees” recognize their own children and “hub trees” hold the system together. Through such a communication and exchange of resources, forests increase their overall resilience in a way that monoculture tree farms cannot.

Similarly, Canadian medical biochemist and botanist Diana Beresford-Kroeger (2010, 2016) views trees as complex chemical factories. She is the author of several books on forest

medicine that have inspired the documentary *Call of the Forest: The Forgotten Wisdom of Trees* (2016). And like Qing Li (2016) of Nippon Medical School in Tokyo, Beresford-Kroeger has studied how trees release camphor compounds, and limonene and other essential oils, in addition to oxygen, that improve our physical and mental well-being.

In *What a Plant Knows*, Daniel Chamowitz writes that “plants are capable of registering sights, sounds, tactile signals, and much more. Plants ‘know’ what to do and they ‘remember’” (qtd. in Sacks 2017, 69). The scare quotes here indicate that we must anthropomorphize their physical processes in order to understand them in the form of thoughts, using chemical reactions rather than neurons. In his posthumously published *River of Consciousness*, the celebrated neurologist Oliver Sacks remarks:

It is fascinating to think of Darwin, Romanes, and other biologists of their time searching for “mind,” “mental processes,” “intelligence,” even “consciousness” in primitive animals like jellyfish, and even in protozoa. A few decades later radical behaviorism would come to dominate the scene, denying reality to what was not objectively demonstrable, denying in particular any processes *between* stimulus and response, deeming these irrelevant or at least beyond the reach of scientific study. (2017, 70)

Nowadays, Western science and philosophy seem poised to accept some of the more mystical claims of Japanese and other indigenous worldviews. Whether plants achieve buddhahood or a more Shintoistic apotheosis, what is crucial to the *nō* plays is that these plants demonstrate a kind of sensitivity and loyalty that is essentially a human ideal, if not always a human quality. Love binds the twin pines of *Takasago* to each other, and the pine and the plum of *Oimatsu* to

their master; sensitivity to poetic slights wakes the plum, cherry, and maple from their natural slumber to supernatural epiphanies in *Ume*, *Sumizome-zakura*, *Mutsura*, and *Saigyō-zakura*. But the bathos of a happy pine or a weeping cherry is no more interesting or acceptable in the *nō* than it would be in Western poetry. A good *nō* play is far more subtle and complex than that. The personification of plants can, in fact, work to great dramatic advantage as well as be an occasion to show off a good deal of dexterity with Buddhist ideas.

Neither Buddhism nor the aesthetic sense of the *nō* accepts at face value the notion that plants have emotions. Early Buddhism resisted the notion that the botanical world could be sentient not only because nature in itself was a manifestation of *maya* (illusion) but also because the question of personal salvation was regarded as a fundamentally human one. This doctrinal debate on the buddhahood of plants nevertheless hinted at a much more pressing concern regarding human salvation. Religious beliefs held by men and women obviously concern the working out of their own salvation, and nonhuman life is incorporated into those beliefs only to the extent that it is relevant to matters of human faith. In discussing the philosophical implications of this belief in medieval Japan, William Lafleur (1973, 1974) notes a shift from human to natural salvific models. Human nature and society were fundamentally flawed and therefore in need of salvation; yet, in being so completely itself, the natural world was already perfected and thus was an earthly manifestation of buddhahood. The actual salvation of other species was less important than the extent to which nature itself can furnish humans with the means of salvation. For as Lafleur points out, “the discussion that began with the question of the possibility of salvation for plants and trees eventually led to the position that there was a salvation for man which was derived

from plants and trees” (1974, 227). Thus, in this scheme we are still not entirely removed from an anthropocentric view of nature, but nature has nonetheless assumed an important role in facilitating the salvation of humanity.

That plants are “insentient and without feelings” is a stock phrase in these plays, but these expressions inevitably appear in a grammatical form that at once negates the idea. For example:

Though plants and trees, they say,
have no feelings . . .
Sōmoku kokoro nashi to mōsedomo
(*Kakitsubata*)

Who says that flowers and leaves,
in all their various forms, have
no feelings?
Kayō samazama no sugata o kokoro
nashi to ta ga iu (*Mutsura*)

Though you say you are truly a plant
without feelings . . .
Geniya kokoro naki sōmoku nari to
mōsedomo (*Oimatsu*)

The pines of Takasago and Suminoe
are insentient, yet . . .
Takasago Suminoe no matsu wa hijō
no mono da ni mo (*Takasago*)

For all the talk about the insentience of the botanical world, the point, of course, is that plants are indeed sentient, certainly sensible enough to feel when they are being slighted. These plays pit rather “humane” (if not actually human) flowers and trees against, typically, priests who have tried their best to slough off the attributes of humanity. And one of the highest attributes of humanity for the courtly culture that the *nō* theater emulated was an elegant sensibility.

Within a natural setting, priest encounters plant; they exchange words, a wonder in itself; finally, through this medium of human language, they grow together in sympathy.

That the source for this language is to be found in nature is most beautifully expressed in *Takasago*:

Nothing, neither sentient nor insentient, (*Ujō hijō no*)
goes without voice, (*sono koe mina*)
nor does not give that voice to song.
(*uta ni moruru koto nashi.*)
The grasses and trees, the soil and sand, (*Sōmoku dosha*)
even the wind's voice and the rushing water, (*fūsei suion made*)
all things, (*banbutsu no*)
are filled with spirit. (*komoru kokoro ari.*)
The spring groves (*Haru no hayashi no*)
that rustle in the eastern breeze, (*tōfū ni ugoki*)
or the autumn insects (*aki no mushi*)
crying in the northern dew— (*no hokuro ni naku mo*)
are not all of these too (*mina waka no*)
the very embodiment of our poetry? (*sugata narazu ya.*)

This passage reflects a system of poetics that goes back at least to Ki no Tsurayuki's famous preface in the *Kokinshū* (ca. 905 CE), where it is said not only that the human heart is a seed giving birth to countless leaves of words but also that all life gives voice in poetry. Elsewhere in *Takasago* we are told that "the leaves of words are drops of dew that turn into seeds that illuminate the heart" (*koto no ha no tsuyu no tama kokoro o migaku tane to narite*). Seeds, leaves, and flowers are linked to human feeling and expression in such a way that these become keywords in Japanese poetics.

All nature gives voice in song, while the poet gives expression to the seeds of the "myriad leaves of words": thus are the movements of both the human spirit and natural phenomena linked to each other. With Ki no Tsurayuki's preface to the *Kokinshū* and with many of the *nō* texts, one senses that these

botanical metaphors suggest a kind of faith or ontology in which humanity and nature indeed coexist in a continuum. *Nō* may personify nature, but by the same token it naturalizes language, giving voice to the insentient. The plots of *nō* plays are often a literal working out of this idea, in which such a metaphor is translated into the *shite*'s metamorphosis from lowly plant to the veritable embodiment of song itself. In this way, the verbal is embodied: through a miracle of poetic and dramatic transubstantiation, the word is made flower, if not flesh. □

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Diversity Builds Unity

The Thirty-Fifth Niwano Peace Prize Acceptance Address

by Fadi Daou

The Niwano Peace Foundation awarded the thirty-fifth Niwano Peace Prize to the Adyan Foundation in Lebanon in recognition of its continued service to global peace building, notably its development of a program for children and educators offering guidance to peace and reconciliation for those affected by war in Syria. The award ceremony took place on May 9, 2018, at the International House of Japan, Tokyo. The recipient's address follows.

Honorable Audience, Brothers and Sisters:

A strong feeling of global communion inhabits me while I stand here before you to receive on behalf of the Adyan Foundation and its community the thirty-fifth Niwano Peace Prize. Peace cannot be divided. Peace is one, and it is the way of uniting our divided lives and humanity. By choosing the Adyan as the winner of the Niwano Peace Prize, you not only honor the mission and the work of the Adyan Foundation in strengthening coexistence in diverse societies, and in promoting reconciliation and spiritual solidarity, but you also recognize the

deep invisible bonds that exist between you and us and every peacemaker on this earth. We indeed are all companions in the same journey of peace, which is the future of our human family. Thus, with my colleagues, I came to Japan from the small country of Lebanon, and from the far and wounded Middle East, to thank you for identifying with and offering to strangers like us the deep bonds of brotherhood and solidarity. Therefore, we consider ourselves not a mere name added to the long honorable list of recipients of the prestigious Niwano Peace Prize but a new brother/sister entering this beautiful global family of peacemakers. Although each one

of us works for peace separately, and in different ways and contexts, yet by doing this, we collectively serve and nourish the unique soul of our humanity and build its common future.

With these feelings of communion and solidarity, I would like to thank the Niwano Peace Foundation; the chair of its board of directors, Dr. Hiroshi M. Niwano; and the members of the Niwano Peace Prize International Selection Committee for their trust in the Adyan Foundation, recognizing that its mission and work significantly contribute to furthering the cause of world peace through interreligious cooperation. We are honored and humbled by this recognition. As Nelson Mandela one day said: "A person does not become a freedom fighter in the hope of winning awards," we also consider that our work for peace and unity, despite all challenges and dangers we encounter, is our duty and the source of meaning of our humanity. By receiving the prize, we don't hide our pride, but we also and mainly experience the responsibility to continue this mission, with its daily and simple details, to ensure that the light of humanity won't vanish from any heart and that the hearts' communion will bring the sunshine of peace.

Fadi Daou is the chairperson and CEO of the Adyan Foundation, a Catholic priest in the Maronite church, and a professor of fundamental theology and geopolitics of religions. He holds a PhD in theology and a pre-PhD in political philosophy (University of Strasbourg, France). After serving as the director of the High Institute for Religious Sciences in Beirut, he is now a visiting professor in many universities in Europe and in the Arab World. He has written a few books and studies, the most recent being Divine Hospitality: A Christian-Muslim Conversation (with Nayla Tabbara, Berlin, 2017).

Inspired by the example of the founder and first president of the lay Buddhist organization Rissho Kosei-kai, Nikkyo Niwano, we do believe with you that “peace is not merely an absence of conflict among nations but a dynamic harmony in the inner lives of people, as well as in our communities, nations, and the world.” Hence peace is not an activity reserved to some experts. Peace is the responsibility of every human being, and especially of every believer. Peace is a life journey that we approach in the Adyan through our slogan “Diversity Builds Unity.” This slogan reflects the foundation’s spirit, which ensures that only by recognizing and enabling diversity can we build authentic and sustainable unity and honor human dignity. Therefore the three core values that hold, in our view, this peace journey

are diversity, solidarity, and human dignity. Yet, unfortunately, peace is not a peaceful journey. Rather, it is a daily struggle, facing deviations from these values and healing humanity from its sicknesses. I would like to mention three of these challenges and share with you how together we are called to face them while building peace and unity.

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

First, where there is no diversity, there is no peace. Instead there are domination, discrimination, exclusion, and oppression. Those who want to build peace without recognizing diversity finish by creating unfair and hegemonic situations that generate suffering and violence. One of the biggest threats to the world today is extremism. In fact,

extremists are those who see the world according to their sole image and refuse to see truth, beauty, and reality outside their ideological realm. Today our world is indeed sick of different forms of extremism: religious, ethnic, cultural, ecological, nationalistic, and ideological. When diversity is denied, people become the enemy of life, including their own. The whole world is still experiencing the shock of the atrocities recently committed by Daesh (ISIS) in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and elsewhere in the world. It’s a deep wound in the soul of our humanity when we witness the killing of people and the destruction of churches, temples, and mosques, as well as archeological and cultural heritage, in the name of God. It’s also a betrayal of the human soul when cultural differences, or economic privileges, are used as an argument to close the doors in front of refugees and to exclude and discriminate against ethnic or religious minorities, or to abuse vulnerable people.

We are today called more than ever to become “global citizens,” in the sense of holding a shared responsibility toward each other and toward the environment. But we cannot be global, in the meaning of encompassing and embracing human and environmental causes, if we are not inclusive. This is why we at the Adyan Foundation developed the concept of “inclusive citizenship” to contribute to healing the world from extremism, sectarianism, and populism. It’s a cultural, educational, and political approach of enabling diversity to build unity.

The late pope Saint John Paul II, former head of the Catholic Church, saw in the Lebanese experience of coexistence a model for the world when he said, "Lebanon is more than a country, it's a message of freedom and an example of pluralism for East and West." Others advocate for Lebanon to become a world center for dialogue between cultures and religions. Thus, I receive this Peace Prize not only on behalf of the Adyan but also on behalf of Lebanon, so that the country regains confidence in its internal and global civilizational mission, where coexistence is the beautiful synonym of peace.

Despite all current wars and conflicts in the Middle East, we are glad to share with you that the younger generation in the multicultural and multireligious Arab countries is eager to embrace diversity and be agents for coexistence and inclusive citizenship. More than twenty-three million of them used our online Media Platform for Pluralism, called "Taadudiya," in its first year, and hundreds of trainers in Lebanon and twelve other Arab countries are spreading the values of citizenship and coexistence among tens of thousands in their societies. With these youth, we firmly believe that the sun of peace is just here

behind the clouds of injustice and violence. And the clouds never last.

Second, because peace is a struggle for justice and common good, it can't coexist with this second world's sickness, which is indifference. We are fortunate to live in an era in which great achievements have been accomplished for humanity. It's impressive to see the scientific, medical, and technological progress of the last century. It's even amazing to notice how much we are currently connected through the revolution of social communication. Yet we all know how much our world is still suffering from wars, conflicts, starvation, exploitation, and so on. It seems that we can be simultaneously globally connected through satellite and Internet, exposed to global information, and still be extremely isolated within our own bubble. Hence, we very much lack awareness of our interconnectedness and our responsibility toward each other. For some people, even religion can be used as a segregating bubble that isolates them in a peaceful mind-set and, unfortunately, nourishes a kind of spiritual egoism and irresponsible indifference.

Since its foundation, the Adyan has worked to move interreligious dialogue

from formal and apologetic debates to a common commitment based on what we named "Religious Social Responsibility." It is important that dialogue constitute a platform for mutual understanding, for helping in overcoming stereotypes and prejudices, and for bridge building and cross-communal relations. However, it's even more important today, for the credibility of religions themselves, that interreligious dialogue become a platform for common commitment to uphold together the just causes of humanity.

Religious social responsibility pushes believers from different backgrounds to serve together to defend the rights and dignity of persons in need, and to work as partners for peace and reconciliation. Believers cannot seek peace and good only for themselves or their own community. Religions hold a universal mission, and so they have to demonstrate that what they promise is not exclusive. When our global and even local challenges are common, why do we need to insist on working separately, and sometimes in competition? Humanity and human vulnerability are not and should not be the field for interreligious competition. Human vulnerability is and should always be the opportunity for all persons, and especially believers, to join their compassionate efforts to serve and love their brothers and sisters in humanity. I know that compassion is an essential value in Buddhism as well as in other Asiatic spiritualities. Similarly, in the Islamic tradition, it is clearly said in a hadith for the Prophet Mohamed that the closer to God is the best servant for mankind, regardless of its religion. In Jesus's teachings as well, it is made clear that the way to love and serve God is to render service to vulnerable humans.

As a response to the dramatic situation of the Syrian population affected by this terrible lasting war, the Adyan gathered experts and religious leaders from different Christian and Muslim denominations and invited them to join

We need nowadays this type of hero to save our world and humanity: disarmed people who can stop conflicts and overcome discrimination by the only force of faith: love and determination.

Honorable Audience, Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Peace is one of the names of God in many religions. Thus, we do believe that peace is both our legacy and our future, and therefore we can't escape our mission of peace building. A former winner of the Niwano Peace Prize, the theologian Hans Kung, stated that there won't be world peace if there is no peace between religions. I think that today we can reverse the statement and say there won't be religions if we don't have world peace. I mean that as well as religions and interreligious collaboration being a major path for peace, peace itself is also the path for authentic religious belief and interreligious relations. Religions will lose their force and credibility if they continue to be instrumentalized to legitimize conflicts and hatred, or if they are unable to recognize and embrace their own diversity, to come together in solidarity, to serve and honor human dignity.

The award we are receiving from you today, with immense gratitude, will be our daily reminder that despite all sacrifices, we shall work to make sure that nobody loses hope in peace, so they don't lose faith in religion and even in humanity. Since 2006, from the early beginning of the Adyan Foundation, we have been working for this mission. Starting from today, we will continue serving this vision, with a new reality, that we will move forward being aware of the presence on our road of beautiful partners, brothers and sisters, represented by the global community of the Niwano Peace Foundation. Peace is the only victory worth fighting for, and we are glad and proud to work hard to win this battle together. □

their efforts with ours to offer to the displaced population, and especially to the youngest generation, education for peace and resilience, and to protect them from the risk of radicalization. We are thereby trying to prepare the Syrian children to become the future peacemakers instead of becoming the fuel for an endless war.

Rather than using religious teaching for the justification of any type of egoistic or sectarian domination or segregation, especially in times of conflict, Religious Social Responsibility helps believers from different communities to live empathetically beyond sectarian borders. In brief, this reminds us that religion is made for human beings and not the opposite. Therefore, the work for humanity is the most authentic reflection of the heavenly message of any religion.

Third, our humanity is also sick from discrimination that is against the fundamental dignity of every human being. Like peace, human dignity is also indivisible. Therefore, nowadays the strongest heroes are those who stand against the current, sometimes of their own people, to fight discrimination and ensure respect and human dignity for all.

Allow me to share with you one meaningful story and powerful example of interreligious collaboration in protecting human dignity. Sameh and Hanaa are a Christian Copt man and a Muslim woman from Upper Egypt. They both live in a rural and poor area where social and religious discrimination is a source of recurrent conflicts between their respective communities. Within such a conflictual framework, the "other" is usually dehumanized and demonized to justify hatred and violence against them. Sameh and Hanaa refused to fall into this antagonism and decided to stand together against this situation that is generating victims and injustice. They both and together had the courage to go against the current, creating a shared program of peace education activities for the youth from both Christian and Muslim communities. They were totally unknown until we learned about them, and we produced a short movie to promote their story two months ago. More than two million Egyptians saw their story. They became models for refusing discrimination, and they recently received in Egypt, their country, the National Award for Coexistence.

Buddha-Nature (1)

Revering Buddha-Nature

by Dominick Scarangelo

Revering another's buddha-nature develops one's own innate "buddhaness" by drawing attention to and revealing the buddha-nature in others, making them aware of their own intrinsic human dignity and their ability to realize their full potential.

Making offerings to thousands of millions of buddhas is given as a condition for attaining buddhahood. We might think that this is a long shot for us. But we have been given a concrete example to follow—Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva's practice of bowing in reverence to others. Never Disrespectful revered each and every person he met, treating even those who were violent or abused him as buddhas.

Nikkyō Niwano, *Kaiso zuikan*
10, 108–9

version of this retreat, and also completed additional ascetic practices to gain the title of Great Ācārya. Having achieved the humanly impossible, they are sometimes referred to as living buddhas.

Hagiographic sources tell us that the founder of this practice, the Tendai monk Sōō (831–918), was motivated to seek enlightenment when as a novice monk he studied the part of the Lotus Sutra that tells the story of Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva. Sōō set his heart on emulating Never Disrespectful's way of practice, walking about making

obeisances to other people as future buddhas. Unfortunately, Sōō's responsibilities to look after his teacher, and the daily task of going into the mountains to harvest anise-tree leaves for the offerings at the monastery's central hall, prevented him from dedicating himself solely to the reverence of other people's buddha-nature. According to tradition, however, Sōō's daily forays into the mountain became the origin of today's marathon-monk practice, in which ascetic monks revere the shrines of Buddhist deities and places where Japanese divinities abide in the mountains. It is often said that the marathon monk's true object of reverence is the buddha-nature of the natural world.

The Lotus Sutra's Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva is an archetype of respect for the inherent dignity of sentient beings. As told in chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra,

Emulating Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva

The Quest of the Monk Sōō to Practice Revering Buddha-Nature

The "marathon monks" of Japan are one of the iconic images of Japanese Buddhism, familiar to people the world over. These monks walk excruciating mountain circuits on Mount Hiei near Kyoto and Mount Kinpu in Nara Prefecture for a summer retreat of one hundred days. A handful in the postwar period have performed the insufferable thousand-day

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one time in the past there was a monk who did not practice by chanting sutras but instead went around making obeisance to every person he met, telling them, “I would never dare to disrespect you, because surely you are all to become buddhas!” As the reader can probably anticipate, the Lotus Sutra tells us that Never Disrespectful was oftentimes ridiculed, even physically attacked, but he bore it all patiently and through this practice not only purified his mind and body but also transformed the hearts and minds of the people around him. The Lotus Sutra tells us that performing this practice leads to quickly attaining the Buddha Way.

Revering Buddha-Nature in Rissho Kosei-kai: Putting the Focus on People

Although Sōō became an eminent monk in his own right, it is said that his fame and responsibilities prevented him from doing what he most wanted: following the example of Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva. Even today, many Buddhists are inspired to undertake Never Disrespectful’s “practicing only reverence” (*tangyō raihai*) because they believe that it encapsulates the ethos of the Lotus Sutra within a single practice. Reverence is a simple act, but as the sutra explains, it holds incredible power to transform oneself and others to quickly achieve buddhahood. In addition to marathon-monk practice, Never Disrespectful is said to be the inspiration for the related practice

of mountain asceticism (Shugendō), as well as the custom of making hundreds or thousands of consecutive prostrations to buddhas or bodhisattvas. It goes without saying that Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva is also an exemplar for members of Rissho Kosei-kai.

I think one of the most interesting aspects of Rissho Kosei-kai practice is that whereas the immediate object of reverence in the practices described above is nature, or a Buddhist deity, Rissho Kosei-kai returns the focus to reverence of the buddha-nature of other people, making it an intensely social and intersubjective practice. Members of Rissho Kosei-kai emulate Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva by endeavoring to revere other people’s buddha-nature in their daily lives. Revering another’s buddha-nature develops one’s own innate “buddhaness” by drawing attention to and revealing the buddha-nature in others,

making them aware of their own intrinsic human dignity and their ability to realize their full potential. In terms of specific ritual practices at Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma centers, this translates into the religious discipline of “standing reverence” (*ritsurei*) performed by greeters at the entrances, who, as Sōō sought to do in antiquity, embody the archetype of Never Disrespectful by respectfully bowing to everyone who comes to the center.

Before we look at revering buddha-nature in Rissho Kosei-kai in greater detail, we must first define *buddha-nature*. Readers should be aware that given the diversity of Buddhist traditions and the large number of texts that treat buddha-nature, our examination will invariably only scratch the surface. We must also take a short detour in order to explore the controversy of whether buddha-nature appears in the Lotus Sutra.

We will then be ready to explore revering buddha-nature in Rissho Kosei-kai, first looking at how revering buddha-nature is practiced in daily life through one's relationships with other people, and then delving into how Rissho Kosei-kai members follow the example of Never Disrespectful by performing standing reverence—greeting people at the entrances to Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma centers with a deep and reverent bow.

Buddha-Nature in a Nutshell

Just what exactly is buddha-nature? Answering this question from the standpoint of the historical study of Buddhism is no simple task—numerous studies have been written on the subject, yet so much work remains to be done. Buddha-nature has also been contested within Buddhism, and remains so today. Various sutras and commentaries describe buddha-nature differently, and this has contributed to sectarian variations in understanding buddha-nature. There are even contemporary scholars who hold that buddha-nature is un-Buddhist. Having given these caveats, I can say that the most common and simplest definition of buddha-nature is “the capacity of people to become buddhas.” Buddha-nature is also explained in contemporary humanistic terms as the inherent dignity of human life, or the creative human potential that individuals possess to develop and actualize themselves.

Our English word *buddha-nature* is derived from the Chinese *foxing*, which is most commonly thought to have been a translation of the Sanskrit term *buddha-dhātu*. The word *dhātu* can mean a fundamental component or building block, such as the elements of earth, water, fire, and wind, which were thought of as the basic components of all reality. It could also refer to the remains of something, such as a physical relic of the Buddha. We can understand

buddha-dhātu to mean “the elementary component of the Buddha” or the “essential nature of the Buddha,” which facilitates the attainment of buddhahood. The highly influential Nirvana Sūtra asserts that all sentient beings possess buddha-nature and also associates buddha-nature with the One Vehicle teaching of universal buddhahood.

Buddhist sutras and commentaries treat *buddha-nature* as a synonym of several other terms, such as *tathāgata-garbha*, which was understood variously as the “matrix,” “storehouse,” “womb,” “element,” or “seed” of the Tathāgata, as well as *buddha-gotra*, the “lineage of the Buddha,” and *buddha-kula*, the “family of the Buddha,” among others. Buddha-nature is also identified with the concept of the original purity or luminosity of the mind. These terms facilitate different allegorical ways to depict the capacity of sentient beings to become buddhas, and consequently, they open avenues for doctrinally developing the concept of buddha-nature in various directions.

According to Michael Zimmerman (2002, 34), the Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra, the earliest sutra explicitly devoted to the notion of a buddha-nature, teaches that the *tathāgata-garbha* is a *tathāgata* (buddha) contained within sentient beings but hidden by defilement. This unseen buddha is endowed with the qualities of the Buddha, such as buddha insight (*tathāgata-jñāna-darśana*), which, complete in themselves, need only to be manifested. The Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra illustrates this using nine similes that a nonspecialist in India would have easily understood. Some of the most memorable similes of the matrix of the *tathāgata* within ordinary sentient beings include fully formed buddha icons sitting on the calyx of yet-to-blossom lotus flowers, a gold nugget encased in excrement, a statue of a buddha wrapped in rags, a seed of a great tree, and the child of a wheel-turning king in the womb of a woman of low-class origins.

The buddha-nature teaching brought a message of great hope and encouragement but also posed several questions to Buddhists. Is buddha-nature something that is immanent, needing only to be discovered and uncovered? Does disinterring buddha-nature require arduous practice, or is it only a matter of realizing that people are already buddhas but simply don't know it? Or must buddha-nature be nourished and developed in order to be brought to fruition, as two of the similes in the Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra could be taken to suggest? How could the idea of an *inherent* buddha-nature be reconciled with core Buddhist teachings of nonself, impermanence, causation, and emptiness? Even today, several Japanese scholars argue that the way buddha-nature is often understood runs afoul of causation and other bedrock Buddhist principles (see Hubbard and Swanson, 1997). Buddhism is a religion of great diversity, so it is natural that the various traditions have answered these questions in differing ways.

One conclusion many Buddhists reached was that while similes like those above are powerful soteriological tools, we should not overly reify buddha-nature into a “thing” but instead understand it as the flip side of the emptiness of things. All phenomena are “empty” because they are constantly changing (the truth of impermanence) insubstantial entities made to exist and sustained through a myriad of causes and conditions (the truth of nonself). While “impermanence” or “nonself” may sound like life-negating, pessimistic concepts, Buddhism argues that it is precisely because of impermanence and nonself that we are not forever stuck in our present identities as the people we are today and that given the right causes and conditions (that is, religious discipline), we can improve ourselves, even so far as to become buddhas. Thus “buddha-nature” can be thought of as a way of expressing the inherent dynamism of emptiness—of impermanence and nonself—with

affirmative language in order to grasp it as a cause of buddhahood and har-binger of all the merits and virtues of a buddha. This conclusion is implied by a passage of the Nirvana Sūtra in which Shakyamuni Buddha teaches that buddha-nature is dependent origination.

Another interpretation was to identify buddha-nature with suchness (Skt., *tathatā*), the ineffable nature of reality, the only thing that truly “exists.” Suchness is sometimes described as being like the “water” of an ocean of all that exists, with concrete forms and living beings such as ourselves being the waves that travel through the water, always changing, mutually interacting, and never remaining the same. Suchness is said to come into view when one transcends conceptualization or subject-object dualism, or alternatively, when one’s way of seeing the world brings together the two perspectives of things as existing, that is, their distinctiveness, and of all things as empty, their sameness or equality. Because suchness is the nature of all phenomena (Skt., *dharma-matā*; Chn., *faxing*), it is shared by the Buddha and sentient beings, and non-sentient existence as well. This is why some Buddhists have maintained that even nonsentient things have buddha-nature. Buddha-nature-as-suchness may also be identified with Buddha as ultimate truth, or *dharma-kāya*, which some buddha-nature texts tell us is inseparable from all phenomena. These texts tell us that when *dharma-kāya* is sullied with defilement or delusion, it appears as sentient beings, but when freed from such obstructions, it manifests as a buddha.

Like many in the Lotus Sutra tradition, Rev. Nikkyō Niwano subscribed to the teaching of threefold buddha-nature (Chn., *sanzhong foxing*; Jpn., *sanshu busshō*). This understanding avoids reifying buddha-nature by incorporating causation and emphasizing the contingency of practice. It sees buddha-nature as a mutual coproduction of three types of interdependent functioning, each

of which can be seen as partial causes of buddhahood. First, buddha-nature as the primary cause: a basic transformative potential common to all phenomena, which Rev. Niwano identified with suchness. Second, buddha-nature as conditions: the practice of spiritual disciplines that take advantage of this transformative potential and develop it. Third, buddha-nature as realization: the wisdom that can become aware of buddha-nature as the primary cause.

When these three aspects reinforce one another in a virtuous cycle, people transform in the direction of buddhahood. Without the original potential, the primary cause, there could be no self-transformation, but this potency can be uncovered and polished only because of conditions—the practices of spiritual discipline. Practice also assists realization—the wisdom that discovers the original potential, which becomes the person’s deepening awareness of buddha-nature. The increasing clarity with which one can see buddha-nature in turn motivates the continuation and intensification of spiritual discipline, and so on. The cycle can begin from any point because of the interrelationship among these three aspects of buddha-nature. By the same token, neglecting any one of these, such as failure to practice assiduously, can diminish the others. These three aspects of buddha-nature work together as an integrated whole, and their interdependence shows that buddha-nature is not a thing but essentially action, as Sally King (1991, 150) describes, based upon what is initially a promise (the primary cause), a promise that must be manifested, she writes, in our mental and physical acts.

Buddha-Nature in the Lotus Sutra

Before we consider the place of buddha-nature in Risshō Kōsei-kai practice, we must also address the commonly heard assertion that the teaching of

buddha-nature does not appear in the Lotus Sutra. In purely philological terms, this critique is accurate. Although the Lotus Sutra’s depictions of the One Vehicle appear to use word imagery and allegory to infer universal buddha-nature as a correlate or synonym of the One Vehicle, the Chinese word for *buddha-nature* (*foxing*) does not appear in either Dharmarakṣa’s (286 CE) nor Kumārajīva’s (406 CE) translations. Some related or similar terms can be found in the text, most famously *seeds of buddhahood* (Chn., *fozhong*), which appears only in Kumārajīva’s translation. Generally speaking, *fozhong* was a translation of *buddha-vaṃśa*. *Vaṃśa* can carry the meaning of a pedigree, lineage, descent, or clan, similar to *gotra* and *kula*, and so on the face of it, Kumārajīva’s translation would seem to contain a reference to buddha-nature. However, we are reasonably sure now that the Sanskrit behind this term was actually not the usual word *buddha-vaṃśa* but instead two different terms: *dharma-netrī*, often translated as “Dharma eye,” and *buddha-netrī*, usually translated as “Buddha way” or “guidance of the Buddha.” The most common terms associated with the idea of an inherent buddhaness, including *gotra*, *kula*, and *vaṃśa*, do not appear in extant Sanskrit manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra (Fujii 1996, 343).

However, the authoritative basis for the traditional understanding of the Lotus Sutra as a buddha-nature teaching is the highly influential *Commentary on the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*, attributed to the fourth-century Indian scholar-monk Vasubandhu. This text interprets several of the sutra’s parables and allegories of the One Vehicle using the concept of buddha-nature. The earliest extant framing of Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva’s practice of obeisance as revering universal buddha-nature appears in this text’s section on assurances of buddhahood. This is one of several passages that came to have

buddha-seeds arise interdependently. This is why they teach the One Vehicle.

Lotus Sutra, chap. 2

In the final analysis, embarking on the path to buddha insight is nothing other than day in and day out keeping our eyes fixed on others' buddha-nature to reveal our own buddha-nature. This is truly the meaning of the sutra's line that says: "meeting buddhas in age after age."

Nikkyō Niwano,

Bodai no me wo okosashimu, 168

important roles in the doctrinal systems of influential Lotus Sutra votaries such as the Chinese exegete monks Zhiyi (538–97) and Jizang (549–623). Jizang, in particular, makes an argument that is still compelling today when he takes on the issue of the missing buddha-nature in *Fahua xuanlun*, one of several commentaries he authored on the Lotus Sutra. Jizang writes that although the word *buddha-nature* is not found in the Lotus Sutra, Vasubandhu identified seven passages revealing the presence of buddha-nature in the text, and for that reason, the Lotus Sutra's *One Vehicle* is arguably a synonym for *buddha-nature*. Jizang also pillories those who would quibble over semantics. "Words can be different but essentially the same in meaning," he writes, and chides doubters, continuing: "those of shallow knowledge are confused by the words and lose the truth of those words. Because they hear different words they think the truth of those words differ, and so they say that the 'One Vehicle' of the Lotus Sutra is not buddha-nature" (Okuno 2002, 58).

Echoing Jizang, contemporary Japanese scholar Masatoshi Ueki (2012, 317) also concludes that while the term *buddha-nature* does not appear in the Lotus Sutra, the general notion of the equivalence of the Buddha and sentient beings as having the capacity for attaining buddhahood is present

implicitly in the text. As Ueki and Zuiei Itō (1985, 352) before him pointed out, the Lotus Sutra locates many of the qualities that are associated with buddha-nature/*tathāgata-garbha* within ordinary unenlightened living beings, such as the aforementioned buddha insight (*tathāgata-jñāna-darśana*). The teaching of buddha-nature that appears in later sutras can be thought of as a development of what was already implied in the Lotus Sutra. Zimmerman (1999, 166) observes that whereas the Lotus Sutra declares that all sentient beings can become buddhas, the Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra explains *how* all sentient beings *can* become buddhas. There is reason to think that Kumārajīva translated *buddha-netrī* as "seeds of buddhahood" precisely to reveal the Lotus Sutra's "implicit teaching of buddha-nature" to Chinese readers of the text (Fujii 1996, 343). Instead of thinking of Kumārajīva's choice as a mistranslation, then, we could see it as his attempt to prioritize the truth of the text as he understood it over and above a literal interpretation.

Revering Buddha-Nature: Intersubjective Practice

The buddhas, the most honored of people, know that nothing exists independently, and that

The doctrinal exegesis of the Buddhist commentarial tradition refined the concept of buddha-nature in intellectually challenging ways, but at heart the purpose of the teaching is soteriological: to affirm the capacity of people to attain buddhahood and increase their confidence to do so by telling them that even as ordinary unenlightened beings they already have a buddhanness about them. The Lotus Sutra's Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva provides an example of how to put this abstract principle of universal buddhahood into concrete practice. Taking their cues from Vasubandhu, who explained that Never Disrespectful revered others because all sentient beings possess buddha-nature, East Asian Buddhist traditions, including Risshō Kōsei-kai, understand Never Disrespectful's practice as the act of revering buddha-nature. Risshō Kōsei-kai also understands the Lotus Sutra to be telling us that revering buddha-nature is something that is done between people, in other words, that revering buddha-nature is an *intersubjective* practice. Many Risshō Kōsei-kai members associate Never Disrespectful's spiritual discipline with the sutra's counsel that "the buddha-seeds arise interdependently," meaning that buddha-nature is discovered and developed through encounters between people. For lay Buddhists in particular, the most accessible practice is

daily life itself, and for Rissho Kosei-kai it entails availing oneself of one's interactions with others to make the buddha seeds of both self and other arise interdependently, developing our own buddha-nature by "revealing the buddha-nature of others," manifesting it by revering it (*busshō wo ogamidasu*).

But why should this be so?

Let's answer this by beginning from the basic Buddhist tenet of nonself. This Buddhist teaching tells us that nothing exists independently, that nobody lives solely through their own power. Instead, all living beings come into existence through dependence upon a myriad of things, and because of this all of us are interdependent and sustain one another. We are, in Rissho Kosei-kai's language, "given the gift of life." It would be impossible for any one of us to make it through a single day without the contribution of innumerable others, and this goes not only for our bodies but for our minds as well. We cannot even retain our own sanity if we are isolated from other people for too long. This is the truth of our existence. The same can be said for achieving liberation and attaining enlightenment. Because our lives are so inseparably bound up with others, there can be no true liberation of self that does not also include the liberation of others. Put in simple terms, we cannot find happiness if everyone around us is still unhappy. It goes without saying, then, that we can't truly realize and develop our own buddha-nature without seeing the buddha-nature of others.

Universal buddha-nature is also a call to respect and revere others because they also have the Buddha woven into their very existence. Ultimately, when we face another person, it is always the Buddha looking back at us. As Shakyamuni Buddha explains in chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, "Sometimes I appear as myself, sometimes as someone else; sometimes I appear in my own actions, sometimes in the actions of others; but

all that I say is true and not empty" (Reeves 2008, 293). Because the other is the Buddha looking back at us, it leads us to continually ask ourselves, "What is the Buddha teaching me through this experience?" "What is the message of the Buddha coming to me through the other person?" Grasping buddha-nature means that all of our interactions are "true and not empty" in that they all have something to teach us.

Developing our Own Buddha-Nature and Manifesting the Buddha-Nature of Others in Everyday Life

"Making the most of your encounters" means renewing your hearts and minds through the conditions of every encounter, which is also becoming a "good condition" for the other person. When it comes to specifics, first make every person you encounter important, exerting your very best for them. As Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva, press your palms together in reverence towards every single person that you meet,

revealing the other person's buddha-nature. This is what it means to make the best of your encounters.

Nikkyō Niwano,

Bodai no me wo okosashimu, 162

One account of revering the buddha-nature of others in daily life goes something like this: Imagine that someone's buddha-nature is a hidden inner light, "under a bushel," to use a Biblical idiom. When we interact with others, we search for expressions of their buddha-nature, seeking out their abilities, good points, excellent qualities, and other potentials for praise. We can think of these aspects of a person's personality or behavior as evidence of their veiled buddha-nature, visible through small openings, like light escaping through cracks in a wall. When we spot these traces that enable us to discover an opening exposing the light within, we should keep encouraging the other person and nurture those qualities, which is a way of enlarging those cracks, widening them until they become windows through which the light of the person's buddha-nature shines forth to illuminate themselves and the people around them (Rissho Kosei-kai 1963, 364).

To be honest, sometimes these sources of the light within another person can be hard to find. It might

be someone who rubs you the wrong way, or a person whom you find hard to be positive about. However, revering the person's buddha-nature necessitates this work on our part. It demands that we change how we look at others, working to see the positive in them, the best in them, instead of getting stuck on the negative, which often appears to us most conspicuously. In other words, working to revere the buddha-nature of others makes us more buddha-like, enhancing our own buddha-nature. Rev. Niwano taught that "the Buddha is hidden behind people who grind you with angry faces and nasty remarks, because such people refine you like a whetstone sharpens a knife" (Niwano 1997b, 137). This is not to say that we should put ourselves in danger or simply allow ourselves to be abused. As Rev. Niwano pointed out, when people threw rocks and sticks at Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva, he responded by retreating a safe distance, but from there he continued his practice of reverence. The difficult people in our lives provide us the opportunity to really practice the "three tracks" by which we can become emissaries of the Tathāgata and spread his teaching: compassion, having gentle patience, and viewing the world around us impartially by seeing the emptiness of all things. These are precisely the qualities that Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva embodies, and revering the buddha-nature of others is the most effective way to nurture these qualities in ourselves.

Revering Buddha-Nature as the Basis for Practices of Religious Discipline: "Standing Reverence"

Nobody can do [standing reverence] "for real" from the very beginning. There is nothing wrong if it is just mimicry at first. But as

you continue to repeat it again and again, it becomes ingrained as a habit. Before one realizes, it becomes "real."

Nikyō Niwano, *Kaiso zuikan*
7, 247

One of the concrete practices of religious discipline in Rissho Kosei-kai that occurs between people is the role of greeter at Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma centers. Literally called "standing reverence" in Japanese, this practice entails standing at the entrance to the Dharma center and greeting people by placing one's palms together in reverence and bowing. Standing in reverence is literally inspired by the example of Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva: revering people's buddha-nature by making an obeisance to them as future buddhas.

Placing one's palms together and bowing is enacting reverence by lowering one's body in the vertical register with respect to others and precariously exposing one's head. Not only does it signal or represent deference, it is deference itself, and in this sense form and meaning are one. To think reverently is to act reverently. Try, for example, to make an angry face while pressing the palms together in reverence. It is quite difficult, and we feel the need to choose between one posture—one mindset—or the other because these two bodily actions are mutually incompatible states of consciousness. Emotions do not exist simply within an inner mental realm but

are fully embodied states. When presented with an angry face, for example, we do not have to recall or remember our own emotional experience in order to comprehend the other person's emotion. As the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2002, 214) notes, "the gesture does not make me think of anger, it is anger itself." These kinds of observations led Merleau-Ponty to assert that emotions are ways of acting toward and perceiving the world. With regard to the bodily postures and actions of ritual, Nick Crossley (1996, 43) points out that ritual avails itself of this embodiedness of emotion. Ritualized bodily action invokes particular emotional states, making ritual, in essence, a form of practical psychology.

For many people, ritual strikes them as fabrication—empty ritual—unless it is preceded by the appropriate feeling or mindset, which they think ritual should work to express. However, ritual practice can be thought of as a kind of play, an "acting as-if" (Sharf 2005, 256), which we can think of as akin to the way children first try out social roles and states of mind through make-believe. Even if we do not "feel" the emotional state in the beginning, just like children who learn emotions and attitudes through play, over time the outward display can become spontaneous and natural. Repeated acting as-if in religious ritual can lead to permanent transformation precisely because

thinking and acting are not distinct things (Wright 2008, 13).

Standing reverence is intersubjective in several ways. When we interact with another person our perceptions, and therefore our bodies, intertwine. To quote Merleau-Ponty (2002, 412) again, our bodies “together comprise a system, so my body and the other’s are one whole, two sides of the same phenomenon.” We can think of the interaction of the greeter and the greeted at Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma centers as akin to a dialogue in which the states of their hearts and minds are cocreated: the participants transform each other’s momentary consciousnesses by eliciting thoughts and emotions from each other, thus constituting each other through the interaction. Merleau-Ponty (2002, 413) writes of dialogue that “we have here a dual being, . . . we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity. Our perspectives merge into one another, and we co-exist through a common world.” When bowing to another, we draw that person’s attention to their own preciousness, their inherent human dignity. They are indeed somebody. We prompt them to take notice. This can help them feel better about themselves, boost their mood by putting a smile on their face, or, for example, prompt introspection, causing them to reflect on whether they are living up to that level of respect. As one whole, moreover, the person receiving the greeting and bow can, through their reactions, in turn elicit similar emotional states in the initiator of the encounter—the person reveals the buddha-nature of the greeter who bowed to them.

The gaze of another person is also extremely powerful because it makes us conscious that we are presenting ourselves for another. As the anthropologist Alfred Gell writes (1998, 120), “mutual looking is a basic mechanism for intersubjectivity because to look into another’s eyes is not just to see the other, but to see the other seeing you. Eye-contact prompts

self-awareness of how one appears to the other, at which point one sees oneself ‘from the outside.’” Although we do not lose our primordial orientation, being seen by another shifts the “zero point” of our perspective to that of the other person. The camera is filming, and the mike is hot, so to speak. This self-consciousness can draw from us the image that we desire to show to others, or that we feel we should project, which, if we accept that embodied actions are also mind states, means that the gaze of others can facilitate our experience of those particular states of consciousness that the gaze draws out of us. This might not always be a positive experience in our everyday lives, if we are in a situation where we must project an image we find unpleasant. Such an undesirable objectification, when repeated often, becomes a kind of self-alienation. In a form of spiritual discipline like standing reverence, however, this functioning of the mind-body can work in our favor. The practice may at first indeed be like a mask, or akin to play, but it provides us a way of trying out mind states that we can eventually incorporate into our psyches. Just as primary socialization happens between people, the practices of a religious path, including standing reverence, are often highly intersubjective, and this should be particularly true of spiritual disciplines associated with the bodhisattva way—the path of helping ourselves by helping others.

The Experience of Standing in Reverence

Testimonies of the experience of practicing standing reverence help to illustrate the transformative power of revering others. One Rissho Kosei-kai member writes of the introspection that practicing standing reverence as a greeter brought about in him:

I hadn’t even realized it, but for one reason or another I haven’t been able to sincerely show respect to others, so it feels to me like the Buddha has given me this practice of bowing to each and every member who comes to the Dharma center. I feel like the Buddha has done this so that I will be able to lower my head with humility to greet those in my family, at work, and in the neighborhood. When I stand up straight in front of the gate with my palms pressed together in reverence and with a smile on my face, I greet people by energetically saying “good morning” in all sincerity in the hope that I can open the hearts of the members who come to the Dharma center in various states of mind. (Rissho Kosei-kai 1983, 110)

In this short reflection we see how practicing standing reverence as a greeter can stimulate a realization of one’s own failings and become an

impetus to bring one's heart and actions into harmony. Also, the speaker demonstrates the desire to elevate the mood of others through a spirited greeting that is sincere, opening the heart of the other person.

I can concur with the writer, having also participated in the practice of standing reverence as a greeter. The Dharma center leader told us that we should greet people “so that they feel glad that they had come to the Dharma center this morning.” This made me especially conscious of my posture and facial expressions in order to have an effect on others. We could say this was a performance of sorts, even manipulative, perhaps only a second-order sincerity—a sincere desire to be sincere. But the feeling became real as it elicited truly warm and friendly responses from the people to whom I was bowing, and I found it increasingly easier to bow without a sense that the movement was in any way artificial—my reverence felt more real to me, as it was perceived as real by those whom I greeted. Both times I have practiced standing reverence as a greeter, I walked away from the experience feeling that I had somehow reconfirmed for myself the goodness and human dignity of others.

Conclusion: Being Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva

It is doubtful that the monk Sōō had the kind of ideal circumstances for revering others' buddha-nature that Rissho Kosei-kai members benefit from at their local Dharma center. Revering people's buddha-nature in everyday life is not always easy—we all run into people who throw rocks at us, metaphorically if not literally. Greeting people by undertaking standing reverence at the Dharma center is a well-designed practice that provides an opportunity to revere others' buddha-nature in a reassuring environment where they

can feel the warmth of others, sense their goodness, and become deeply aware of their inherent human dignity. I think that these experiences can develop into a faith in buddha-nature that, in the face of the “rock throwers,” can sustain the compassion, patience, and impartiality to discover the buddha-nature of even the people who are hostile toward us.

Another reason that revering others' buddha-nature is so powerful, especially through practicing standing reverence, is that by emulating Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva we insert ourselves into his narrative within the Lotus Sutra, making his story our own. We incorporate the qualities Never Disrespectful epitomizes into ourselves by making him present in the world today. Form and content become one—we become Never Disrespectful. As Thich Nhat Hanh (2008, 151) put it so poetically, “We can be in touch with his action and aspiration at any moment. . . . He is reborn in us right that very moment. We get in touch with the great faith and insight that everyone is a Buddha, the insight that is the very marrow of the Lotus Sutra.” □

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Living Joyfully

by Nichiko Niwano

In late January–early February of this year, Japan had a series of very large snowstorms that blanketed the whole country. The snow fell during the time of Rissho Kosei-kai's annual observances, mid-winter religious training (*kanshugyo*), in which members gather at the Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo or at local Dharma centers in the predawn darkness to recite the Threefold Lotus Sutra during the coldest time of the year. There were many members who were unable to make it to their Dharma centers. There was so much snow that it caused delays in the Tokyo transit system. At the time of the snowfall, someone made the following comment at the Great Sacred Hall.

"Why does it have to snow like this, just when I am going to the trouble of practicing midwinter religious training?"

Of course, it may be natural for people to grumble because the snow makes it difficult for them to leave home early in the morning and get to their Dharma centers by car, bus, or train.

On the other hand, someone else said, "I am glad that, thanks to the snow, I have been able to perform the midwinter religious training in the truest sense!"

The question that I want to ask all of you is this: Which person's viewpoint do you think represents the more enjoyable way of life? I think that the second person will be declared the winner. The second person did not say anything particularly difficult. What is wonderful about the second point of view is this ability to see the changes in the natural world with humble eyes and accept them, just the way they are. Why is it, though, that

merely accepting things humbly like this makes you feel as if you have thrown off the cold and the sleepiness for yourself and for the people around you?

I think that the difference is whether or not you are seeing things with right view.

The Middle Way Is Important

We may be apt to think that the right view of Buddhism's Eightfold Path is something we cannot easily have or that is attainable only by enlightened persons, because we feel overwhelmed by the weight of the word "right." Some people might immediately reply that "seeing things from right view" means "doing the impossible," but, as with the example of the snowy day, seeing the workings of the natural world for what they are is the right view, isn't it.

Right view also means seeing things by accepting whatever happens in a broadminded way—including what dissatisfies you or makes you angry when you see it with a wrong view or biased view, in other words, self-centered views—and, as a result, it puts your feelings at ease. It is certainly quite difficult to fully grasp such matters as the Buddha's wisdom and the real aspect of all things, but a way of seeing things (wisdom) like the example of the snowy day must be already at work, naturally, in the course of our daily lives.

Recently, a man who was released from the hospital after heart surgery calmly said that, "Up until now, I was

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never grateful for the fact that my heart was beating. However, that is not something to take for granted." When I heard this, I felt as if I were being taught anew what right view really means.

Without your willing it to do so, your heart goes on beating, without resting. When that man looked directly at this natural providence, his refreshed feelings erased the anxiety of illness. That he felt completely at ease could be perceived from his expression. I was taught anew that if we see, from the perspective of right view, the fact that we are alive here and now, then even sickness can become the object of our gratitude.

To see things in the light of the truths of this world—All things are impermanent; All things are devoid of separate self; All phenomena are characterized by suffering—indicates right view, the first component of the Eightfold Path, which teaches us the true way to eliminate suffering. This is the basis, and we could also call this the entirety, of living in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha.

Since Buddhism teaches us a way of life, namely the Middle Way, which is neither suffering from overindulgence in pleasure nor being restrained by asceticism or abstinence, our religious practice should therefore not be difficult. □

Eastern Initiative and Western Response

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.

Affiliation with IARF

I would like to mention here the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), another great organization that, like Religions for Peace, is working for interreligious cooperation. In one way it could be called the parent of Religions for Peace. My connection with it began when we were preparing to hold the First World Assembly in Kyoto, which was held in 1970.

IARF is the world's oldest interfaith organization and was set up under Unitarian leadership in Boston in 1900 to work for dialogue and cooperation among religions. Its first congress was held in London the following year. Delegates confirmed their resolve to overcome religious prejudice and dogmatism and to seek interfaith dialogue with liberal, genuine, creative, and universal religions. Congresses were held every three years after that.

Unitarians are concerned that Christianity has gradually become formalistic over the centuries, so that the true spirit of Jesus Christ is in danger of being lost. Their creed encourages the belief, practice, and propagation of

Christ's teachings as an ethic for humankind. This closely resembles what Rissho Kosei-kai is trying to do.

In the beginning, IARF was called the International Council of Unitarian and Other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers. It was renamed the International Association for Liberal Christianity and Religious Freedom in 1930, reflecting the core presence of European and American Christians. The present name dates from 1969, the year Rissho Kosei-kai joined.

The decision to affiliate Rissho Kosei-kai with the IARF in 1969 came through my close friendship with Dr. Dana McLean Greeley, who became IARF president that same year, and through the encouragement of Dr. Shinichiro Imaoka, a Unitarian minister and former head of the Japan Free Religious Association, whom I revered as a father. Dr. Imaoka had been a student of Professor Masaharu Anesaki, who had established religious studies at the Tokyo Imperial University. During his time at Harvard University, Dr. Imaoka came into close contact with Unitarianism and was one of the founders of the Japan Free Religious Association in 1948. He

held monthly study groups to discuss interreligious cooperation, which I took part in, being in agreement with Dr. Imaoka's way of thinking.

On reflection, I learned a lot from Dr. Imaoka. He would say, "There is no contradiction in saying that I am a Christian but at the same time a Buddhist and a Shintoist. Of course, religions are different one from the other, but they also complement each other." He once said that Shakyamuni's last words to his disciples, "Make yourself the light, make the Dharma your light," may have expressed the Buddha's hope that his disciples would go beyond him after his death. Dr. Imaoka said repeatedly that no world religion had a monopoly on religious truth and that no one religion could be said to have realized the ultimate religious truth. It was for this very reason that all religions needed to work together more. His words benefited me greatly as a follower of the Lotus Sutra, which expounds the Mahayana spirit.

As more and more non-Christian members joined the International Association for Liberal Christianity and Religious Freedom, there was a growing

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.

opinion among progressives within the organization that it should be renamed the International Association for Religious Freedom. There was strong opposition to this, however, among European members. This was probably natural, given the fact that European religion virtually meant Christianity. Nevertheless, in 1969, the same year Rissho Kosei-kai became a member, the name was changed, omitting any reference to Christianity. This reflected the aims of the IARF to seek dialogue and cooperation with non-Christian religious people. It was perhaps the most momentous event in the association's seventy-year history.

I was elected a trustee of the IARF at that time. My appointment was recommended on the grounds of my being the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, which had grown to three million members in thirty years, and of my strong commitment to interreligious cooperation.

The Twenty-Fifth President of the IARF

I attended the IARF congress for the first time in Boston, in 1969. It was the twentieth such congress. Christian interest in Buddhism was very great, and I was subsequently invited to speak at the congresses held in Montreal (1975) and Oxford (1978) about how Rissho Kosei-kai members put Shakyamuni's teachings into practice in their daily lives, and about the actual running of *hoza* sessions. I worked hard to give Western religionists a correct understanding of Buddhism, and gave a speech about the

Six Perfections, translating them as the "six roads to happiness."

At the twenty-fourth congress, in the Netherlands in 1981, I, a Buddhist from East Asia, was unanimously elected the twentieth-fifth president of the IARF. Perhaps Western members felt that it was important to look more to the East. I was not sure that I could perform sufficiently such an important office as the president of the IARF, with its long history and traditions. However, I was very much aware how serious Western religionists were about wanting to learn about religions in Japan, especially Buddhism. I determined that I would do all I could to help them do so.

The great British historian Arnold Toynbee once wrote to me something to the effect that in the twenty-first century, the Eastern wisdom of Buddhism and Confucianism would take center stage in saving humanity. What the modern world most greatly needs is a mainstay on which to build the human community so all can get along together and live happy lives. Professor Emeritus Hajime Nakamura of the University of Tokyo was convinced that Buddhism best pointed in this direction. Professor Nakamura, a world authority on Indian philosophy, Buddhist studies, and comparative philosophy, said the following in conversation with me:

Ideological confrontation still runs deep in the modern world. Though there are grounds for the various ideas advocated, they are causing confusion throughout the world.

Shakyamuni said that though the truth is one, and there is no other, philosophers of different schools proclaim their own truths and denigrate those of others. Ideology is no more than a means to give life to the ultimate truth that is far beyond. Seeing only one aspect of the truth and thinking it is the whole takes you further away from the truth and gives rise to disputation. Shakyamuni taught how to see the whole by ridding yourself of such attachment. Throughout the Lotus Sutra we consistently find the idea that we must take hold of the truth as a whole.

People of religion in Japan, particularly we Buddhists, have been given a teaching that provides the answer that the world is now earnestly seeking. I acutely felt that here was my mission as a Buddhist.

During my term as president, Tokyo was chosen to hold the twenty-fifth IARF congress. It was the first time in the long history of the IARF that the congress would be held in Asia.

Growing Interest in the East

More than eight hundred people of religion from twenty-two countries assembled in Fumon Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai's Tokyo headquarters on July 27, 1984, for the opening of the twenty-fifth IARF congress. Besides Fumon Hall, the Great Sacred Hall and the Horin-kaku Guest Hall were used as venues.

literally the embryo of a buddha. All people possess this seed, and it is brought to full bloom by practicing the way of the bodhisattva. Conflict prevails because people have forgotten this potential in the hearts of all, and because people of religion have failed in their efforts to call it forth. . . . It is not enough to rely passively on the love and mercy of God and the Buddha; we must actively practice those virtues ourselves. This age when the Law seems almost lost is an opportune time to remove the dust of the ages that has collected on religions and to reawaken people to the true nature of religious salvation.

The theme of the Tokyo congress was “Religious Path to Peace: Eastern Initiative and Western Response.” This was the first time that peace had been taken up as the main theme for a congress. The subtheme, “Eastern Initiative and Western Response,” had been set in the hope that a reevaluation of Eastern thought and religion by Western religionists might provide a breakthrough in the current global impasse.

Rudyard Kipling, the English novelist, wrote in “The Ballad of East and West,” “East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,” but today’s world is in the process of becoming a “one-day zone.” Certainly there is a trend among Western intellectuals to seek in the wisdom of the East a way to overcome the crisis confronting humankind as they reflected that Western ways of thinking were at the root of all the problems facing the world today—the nuclear threat, the depletion of resources, human rights abuses, and the growing gap between rich and poor.

For instance, when Rissho Kosei-kai opened its liaison office in Frankfurt in West Germany, the headline of an article about it in the *Offenbach-Post* was “Japan Is Not Thinking Just of Export Business.” The article opened by saying

that Rissho Kosei-kai had taken up residence in the district of Sachsenhausen and that although Frankfurt has many Japanese companies and banks, restaurants, and travel agencies, Rissho Kosei-kai, as a lay Buddhist organization, was of a completely different dimension, and the article commented that “now Japan has come even closer to us.” I think this may be an example of the extent to which interest in Japanese spiritual culture has grown. This was also evident in the fact that more than four hundred people, mainly Christians, came from abroad to attend the Tokyo congress.

At the opening ceremony, I addressed the delegates as the president of the IARF:

The humanity to acknowledge that all human beings have a limited existence is the most important requisite for being fully human. In the absence of such humanity, God is also absent—indeed, dead. Buddhism terms such an age one in which the true Law has been largely forgotten and defines it as one of conflict. . . . Buddhism teaches that all have the potential to attain buddhahood. This is termed in Sanskrit *tathagata-garbha*,

A feature of the IARF congresses is that religious scholars and theologians take part of their own free will as individuals. There is some group participation, but at the core are individuals who hold to the idea of religious freedom. There is much importance attached to promoting interreligious dialogue at a grassroots level and deepening individual faith through it. We tried in the Tokyo congress to widen this into cooperation and dialogue among religious people for the sake of world peace.

Rev. Diether Gehrman, the general secretary of the IARE, visited Japan many times from his base in Frankfurt to assist in the preparations for the congress.

Seeing how Japanese religion was an active force rooted in people’s lives, delegates from Western Europe were particularly interested in finding out where its motive power was located, especially because church attendance in Europe had been falling over the last half century. Therefore we devised an “Eastern Initiative” to show delegates Japanese religion as it is, and prepared a variety of programs. One was a “learning experience” aimed at foreign participants. Visits to temples and shrines, and to centers associated with organizations affiliated with the IARF, were

arranged before the congress convened, and delegates were able to take part in actual religious activities there. For example, they followed the mountain circuit pilgrimage route at the Buddhist temple Enryakuji on Mount Hiei, Shiga Prefecture, and did meditation there. At the Tsubaki Grand Shrine in Mie Prefecture, they stood under a waterfall to perform a purification ritual, and at Ittoen in Kyoto they learned about social service. They also took part in *hoza* sessions at a local Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma center. The programs were very successful, deepening the understanding of Japanese religion and culture among foreign participants through exposure to such rituals and practices.

The congress lasted for nineteen days, including the pre- and post-congress programs, from July 23 to August 10, using Rissho Kosei-kai facilities such as the Great Sacred Hall and Fumon Hall. Rissho Kosei-kai members who were involved with the running of the congress were thrilled to have the opportunity to live side by side with the foreign participants. Meeting religious leaders face-to-face further deepened their conviction in their own faith and gave them a personal sense of the importance of interreligious cooperation.

Rev. Gehrmann summed up the outcome of the Tokyo congress in the letter of thanks he sent to me: "This was the most successful Congress in the history of the IARF. In particular the exchanges between people went far beyond my expectations. Everyone always drew us into their circle, whether it was in discussion, in field trips, in home visits, in the Japanese festival, or in the opening and closing ceremonies. I am grateful that we could join hands as fellow members."

The Fourth World Assembly of Religions for Peace

Less than two weeks after the IARF congress finished, the Fourth World Assembly of Religions for Peace opened in Nairobi, Kenya, on August 23, 1984. Fourteen years had passed since the first in Kyoto. The second had been held in Europe and the third in the United States, and this was the first, therefore, to be held in a Third World country.

Africa is described as a place that condenses the sufferings of the world. Twenty-seven of the world's poorest thirty-six countries are to be found there, and poverty, famine, refugee problems,

and abuses of human rights were rife. These are the same problems that are found in other developing countries. It was predicted that the Fourth World Assembly of Religions for Peace would address these issues directly, forcing the participants to ask themselves what people of religion can do.

More than four hundred religionists from sixty countries met in the Kenyatta International Conference Centre for the opening ceremony. This was the largest conference so far in terms of the number of both delegates and countries represented. More than half the delegates were from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This in itself speaks of how many people of religion have come face-to-face with the actuality of suffering in their own countries, and of their search for a forum to speak about what is happening. I felt keenly that many gathered there were looking to Religions for Peace as a place where they could express their hopes for peace and engage in dialogue with like-minded people.

There is a proverb in Africa that says, "When spiderwebs unite they can tie up a lion." People are much stronger than spiders. If people of religion work together, they should be able to bring their combined strength into full play.

Africa has a history of suffering and hardship. African religionists told us, “Christian missionaries came and said, ‘Close your eyes and pray,’ and so we did. However, when we opened them again, we had been robbed of everything.”

The main theme of the Nairobi conference was “Religions for Human Dignity and World Peace.” Bishop Desmond Tutu, the general secretary of the South African Council of Churches and a leader in the movement against racial discrimination, spoke strongly

about the actuality of apartheid and the mission of people of religion. He said that in South Africa, apartheid deprived people of their human rights, and as many as three million people had been forcibly evicted from their homes. “South Africa produces enough food to export, yet black people have been forced into starvation by government policy, and they cannot return to the places where they were born. Blacks are less free now than they were in colonial times. Less than five million white people enjoy

a very high standard of living, while more than twenty million black people live in poverty.”

Bishop Tutu and the religionists from South Africa announced that they would go without lunch on the second day of the conference and donate the money thus saved to the peace movement in South Africa. Hearing this, virtually all the conference participants donated not only the lunch money but additional money from their own pockets. Two months after the conference, Bishop Tutu was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Mr. Saichiro Uesugi, secretary-general of the Buraku Liberation League, spoke about the Buraku discrimination issue in Japan in the commission “Human Dignity, Social Justice, and the Development of the Whole Person,” describing the league’s history and present situation to religionists from around the world. Religions for Peace Japan invited him to participate in, and speak at, the conference as a fraternal participant.

Francis Cardinal Arinze, president of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians (which was later renamed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue), attended the conference as a special envoy of Pope John Paul II. This

was the first time the Vatican had been formally represented at the conference, though we had asked for a Vatican representative from the time of the First World Assembly in Kyoto. Many Catholic cardinals and archbishops had taken part in the world assemblies, but this was the first time the Vatican had officially recognized them. Now Religions for Peace had become a forum for global interreligious dialogue in fact as well as in name. Pope John Paul II expressed a deep prayer in the message that he sent to the conference: "May fellow religionists from different traditions living in the single house which is this world find the way toward even closer cooperation and create the basis for true peace among people and nations, spreading justice and equality among all people."

The Japan "Blankets for Africa" Campaign

One outcome of the Nairobi conference was the creation of Religions for Peace's interfaith initiatives, one of which was a project to aid African refugees and drought victims, with a budget of four hundred thousand US dollars. Religions for Peace Japan promised to raise half of this amount.

Religionists who had come to Nairobi for the conference had seen with their own eyes those suffering from poverty and hunger and had heard their pleas themselves. The urgency of the need was palpable. Hospitals were necessary and wells needed to be dug, and for that we required the knowledge of experts from many fields. I realized that to do so we had to raise money. I had proposed that Japan should take on that responsibility, and so the aid project came about.

Exactly the same thing happened as with our efforts to aid the boat people. At first the appeal seemed a modest endeavor on the part of people of religion, but it gradually grew as sympathetic people joined in increasing numbers. What was important was that people bravely became involved with

difficult work that no one wanted to touch, and so the first steps were taken.

After the Second World Assembly in Leuven, Belgium, Religions for Peace Japan promoted the Donate-a-Meal Movement among all of its constituent organizations. At that time, Rissho Kosei-kai raised a total of twelve billion Japanese yen to assist developing countries through donating a meal and through street collections for UNICEF, mainly by youth members. The Donate-a-Meal Fund for Peace alone gave aid to fifty projects in more than a dozen countries in one year.

I think that the most important aim of the Donate-a-Meal Movement was that by going without a meal in a well-fed country like Japan, members are able not only to realize the significance of honest poverty but to have the experience of feeling the sufferings of people in the developing countries as their own, and becoming aware of their wish to help them, even if only in a small way.

Three months after the end of the Nairobi conference, Rissho Kosei-kai as an organization began a campaign to send blankets to Africa. It had been reported that the drought in the northern part of Ethiopia had spread to the east and south and that already half

a million people had died from hunger. Relief food supplies began to be flown into Addis Ababa from all parts of the world. However, six million victims who had escaped from the disaster area with little more than the clothes on their backs were facing a crisis situation because of the severe cold at night, when temperatures plummeted to around five degrees Celsius (forty-one degrees Fahrenheit). One million of them were innocent children.

At the beginning of December, Mr. James P. Grant, the executive director of UNICEF, launched an emergency appeal. Two million blankets were required, and Japan was asked to provide half that number. In response, the Japanese Foreign Ministry and four nongovernment organizations, including the Japan Red Cross and the Japan International Volunteer Center, set up a liaison committee for African famine relief. Rissho Kosei-kai joined the effort and from all over the country collected 1.75 million blankets that were shipped to disaster-stricken areas in Africa.

There is the expression "a beggar seated on a throne of gold." This perhaps refers to Africans who live unaware of the rich natural resources under their feet, or perhaps to the fact that even if

they do know about them, they allow themselves to be plundered by other nations because of lack of technological skill.

And what is our attitude to this? Don't we tend to forget to share what we have, as we fall into a poverty of feeling and scramble after material things? The sight of Africans lining up quietly and in an orderly manner to receive the blankets donated in the Blankets for Africa Campaign surely teaches us to be ashamed of such an attitude.

Death of the Emperor

The television news on January 7, 1989, reported the death of Emperor Hirohito. He had been ailing since the previous autumn, and an increasing number of bulletins had been issued from that time forward, drawing people to gather at the front of the imperial palace in Tokyo, praying for his recovery. By the end of the year his condition was critical, and people were glad and saddened in turns according to the daily bulletins. He died on the morning of January 7, the day the New Year decorations are taken down, aged eighty-seven.

I called the Rissho Kosei-kai officials together, and we decided to announce a six-day mourning period. I went immediately with Rev. Motoyuki Naganuma,

chair of the board of trustees, to sign the condolence book at the palace. On my way back, I realized that the tumultuous Showa era was now over, the era during which the emperor and the people alike had shared great suffering. Suddenly I remembered August 15, 1945, the day the war ended. Members had gathered at Rissho Kosei-kai in such great numbers that not everyone could enter the building. At that time there were some thousand members who had firm, unwavering faith. After we listened together in tears to the emperor's announcement, which was aired on radio, that the war had ended, we offered sutra recitation before the main altar. For some reason, I was now remembering this as clearly as if it had been yesterday. Existing value systems collapsed with the war's end, and there was much unease about what would happen next. I clearly recall that my conviction of the importance of walking the way of the bodhisattva became even stronger at that time.

Emperor Hirohito, Japan's 124th emperor, had been born in 1901 and ascended the throne at the age of twenty-five. Just before the enthronement ceremony at Kyoto in 1928, the Huanggutun Incident occurred. This was the assassination of the Chinese warlord Zhang Zuolin, which had been plotted by the

commander in chief of the Japanese Kwantung Army to protect vested interests of Japan in Manchuria. From the very beginning of his reign [the Showa era: December 1926–January 1989], the emperor was faced with the challenges of the military running away from his control and then becoming increasingly independent. This was also the time of the Great Depression.

The Showa era was a time of crisis followed by crisis. Japan moved closer to the Pacific War of 1941, first with the Mukden Incident of 1931 and then with the Sino-Japanese War of 1937. In 1945 the Potsdam Declaration defined the terms of Japan's surrender. Under the terms of the new constitution, the emperor became the symbol of national unity, and as the representative of a peaceful nation, he played a large role in building international goodwill.

It saddens me to think of what the emperor must have suffered. The efforts and cooperation of the Japanese people in postwar reconstruction were made possible by the emperor's single-minded concern over the national welfare. He accomplished the feat of turning "Showa at war" into "Showa at peace."

Emperor Hirohito was succeeded by his son Akihito, and the new era name Heisei was decreed by the cabinet. A new era began. The name Heisei (peace everywhere) was taken from two sentences appearing in two Chinese classics that imply that if peace exists within, then it can also be constructed without.

Peace in Sanskrit is *śānti*, the peace that does not depend on strength. Like the English word, it implies tranquillity and ease. Here the underlying idea is that it is only when peace is built in people's hearts that we will have a truly peaceful society and a truly peaceful world.

The Melbourne Conference

I left for Australia on January 17, 1989, soon after the six days of mourning for

the Showa emperor. The Fifth World Assembly of Religions for Peace was held at Monash University in the suburbs of Melbourne for six days starting January 22. Its theme was “Building Peace through Trust: The Role of Religion.” At the opening ceremony, attended by six hundred representatives from eighty-two countries, I spoke about the Buddhist teaching that “nothing has an ego”:

Buddhist teachings term all of those relationships that allow mutual support and survival “causal conditions.” When I look toward you now, it seems as if there is nothing but air between us. However, what cannot be seen are the causal conditions, the relationships, between us all, religious comrades working together to bring about peace in the world. These very clearly exist, for as a result of them we are here together today. I give thanks to God and the Buddha for extending to us such conditions. Standing together on a shared foundation, I believe we can accomplish a significant discussion on the theme of the conference, “Building Peace through Trust: The Role of Religion.”

It seemed as though at last tensions were easing throughout the world. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) had been agreed between the United States and the Soviet Union in 1987, and people had begun to hope that both countries would reduce their intercontinental ballistic missiles. I continued:

It would be no exaggeration to say that the world has come to recognize that nuclear weapons have made total war impossible. It is a thing of the past now to assert that prosperity must be sacrificed to military needs, or that economic problems can be resolved through war. People have instead begun to realize that the only way left for human survival is to build a world of harmony in which all people help and support one another.

We must not lament that people are uninterested in religion but stand firm to our appointed mission of peace, giving our whole in working toward it.

In closing my opening speech to the conference, I quoted from a poem by Kotaro Takamura, who died in 1956:

The fruit before the flower,

The sprout before the seed,
Summer before the spring—
Don’t accept what does not stand
to reason,
What is unnatural.

If we truly want peace, we must work steadily, first planting its seeds in our hearts, plucking away the weeds that could damage it, and then plowing the field of our heart. If we skimp in our efforts, we will never see peace come about.

Besides the five plenary sessions, there were four commissions and eight subgroups discussing ways that would best contribute to peace. The commissions covered the themes of disarmament, human rights, development and the environment, and peace education, and sought mutual understanding on ways of resolving these issues.

The Melbourne Declaration, which was adopted unanimously, stated “We are sustained by a spiritual trust: our belief in the creative forces within the universe by which we are given life, in which we find beauty, by which we perceive truth, by which we live in hope.”

To be continued

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 26

Dharanis (2)

This is the 130th installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.

TEXT “World-honored One! These supernatural *dharani* spells have been spoken by buddhas numerous as the sands of sixty-two kotis of Ganges rivers. If anyone does violence to the teacher of this Dharma, then he will have done violence to these buddhas.”

COMMENTARY *Supernatural dharani spells.* This term, *dharani*, means “mystic syllables” that have the power to encourage all good and restrain all evil (Jpn., *soji shingon*), as explained in the second of the five kinds of untranslatable words.

TEXT Then Shakyamuni Buddha extolled the Medicine King Bodhisattva, saying: “Good, good, O Medicine King! Because you are compassionate and protect these teachers of the Dharma, you have pronounced these *dharanis*, which will abundantly benefit the living.”

Thereupon the Bodhisattva Courageous Giver spoke to the Buddha, saying: “World-honored One! I, too, for the protection of these who read and recite, receive and keep the Dharma Flower Sutra, will deliver *dharanis*. If these teachers of the Dharma possess these *dharanis*, neither yakshas,

nor rakshasas, nor putanas, nor krityas, nor kumbhandas, nor hungry ghosts, nor others spying for their shortcomings can find a chance.”

COMMENTARY *Yakshas.* These are a variety of frightening demons that reside on earth or in the air and are held to torment humans. It was said that there were some who converted to Buddhism and became followers of the Divine King Vaishravana.

- *Rakshasas.* These are a variety of demons that inflict harm on human beings through violence.

- *Putanas.* These are a variety of hungry spirits. They emit a horrible smell, so they are called putrid demons.

- *Krityas.* These are demons held to devour human corpses.

- *Kumbhandas.* These are small demons of monstrous appearance, which also appeared in chapter 3, “A Parable.” They are said to drink the lifeblood and eat the living flesh of animals. In chapter 3, they were treated as symbolic of swallowing mistaken religious precepts.

- *Hungry ghosts.* These are a variety of demons held to ceaselessly suffer from hunger and thirst. They are those who were born into the realm of hungry spirits, one of the

three evil paths, as a result of the evil karma accumulated in a previous life, particularly out of a greedy nature. They are pathetic demons that symbolize human greed.

• *Neither . . . nor others spying for their shortcomings can find a chance.* “Shortcomings” refers to weaknesses, faults, and defects. These words indicate those who, with the evil intent of entrapping and persecuting a person of religion (a teacher of the Dharma) and obstructing the person’s dissemination of the Dharma, seek out some shortcoming or some weakness in that person. They seek to take advantage, find fault with the person, and launch arguments. As compared here to a variety of demons, this is a quite inhuman, contemptible manner that one often finds in society.

However, whoever bears the Truth (the Wonderful Dharma) and believes and preaches in accordance with that Truth, despite having personally some trivial weakness and shortcomings, will not in the end be vanquished by malicious powers. The strength and righteousness of the Truth will not permit the malicious any chance to take advantage.

TEXT Then, in the presence of the Buddha, he delivered the following spell*:

“[1] *Zare* [2] *maka-zare* [3] *ukki* [4] *mokki* [5] *are* [6] *ara-hate* [7] *nerete* [8] *nereta-hate* [9] *ichini* [10] *ichini* [11] *shichini* [12] *nere-chini* [13] *nerichi-hachi*.”

COMMENTARY [1] *Zare*. Radiance; light and flame, as a literal translation from Chinese. [*jvale*]

• [2] *Maka-zare*. Great radiance; great light and flame. [*mahajvale*]

• [3] *Ukki* [4] *Mokki*. *Ukki*: Light, which symbolizes wisdom. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies this as “Oh, bright flame!” (*ukke*). *Mokki*: All that spreads the light; to extend the light of wisdom endlessly. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies this as “Oh, my bright flame!” (*mukke*). According to Dr. Tsukamoto, the *m* in *mukke* is identified as a Sandhi-consonant (*ukke-m-ukke*) and together the two phrases mean “Oh, numbers of bright flames!”

• [5] *Are*. Favorable attainment. [*ade*]

• [6] *Ara-hate*. Affluence. [*adavati*]

• [7] *Nerete*. Joy, delight, or rejoicing. [*nritte*]

• [8] *Nereta-hate*. A manner to do things joyfully and willingly. [*nritavati*]

• [9] *Ichini*. Settling of an existence; the long-range continuation of the state of something. [*ittini*]

• [10] *Ichini*. Establishing order. [*vittini*]

• [11] *Shichini*. Residing permanently; to stay perpetually in a certain state of mind. [*cittini*]

• [12] *Nere-chini*. Not uniting. This is interpreted as neither carelessly courting the inclinations of others nor thoughtlessly

keeping up with the trend in the world. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies it as “Oh, they who dance!” [*nrityani*]

• [13] *Nerichi-hachi*. Not gathering. “Gathering” here means a meaningless gathering, as of the rabble or a disorderly crowd, where people come together in large numbers with no principles or advocacy. In other words, there should be no gathering without meaning. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies it as “Oh, she who wishes to dance!” [*nrityavati*]

TEXT “World-honored One! These supernatural *dharani* spells have been spoken by buddhas numerous as the sands of the Ganges, and all approved. If anyone does violence to the teachers of this Dharma, he will have done violence to these buddhas.”

COMMENTARY *Approved*. To experience a profound joy from the bottom of one’s heart in regard to something.

TEXT Thereupon the Divine King Vaishravana, protector of the world, spoke to the Buddha, saying: “World-honored One! I, too, in compassion for the living and for the protection of these teachers of the Dharma, will deliver these *dharanis*.”

COMMENTARY *Divine King Vaishravana*. In Brahmanism, Vaishravana is under the jurisdiction of Indra, who oversees and protects human beings and is one of the four heavenly kings, and is also held to be the protector of the north. Later incorporated into Buddhism as its guardian deity, he is also known as “Much-Hearing Heavenly King.”

TEXT Whereupon he delivered the following spell:

“[1] *Ari* [2] *nari* [3] *tonari* [4] *anaro* [5] *nabi* [6] *kunabi*.”

COMMENTARY [1] *Ari*. Abundant possessions; having all the power or strength. [*atte*]

• [2] *Nari*. Arranging for play. Dr. Giei Honda translates this as “Oh, dancer!” in his book, *Hokekyō-ron* (Treatise on the Lotus Sutra [Tokyo: Kobun-do, 1944], p. 160). [*natte*]

• [3] *Tonari*. Without play. Dr. Honda translates this as “Oh, one who dances in praise” (*tunatte*) (ibid., pp. 160–61). [*nunatte*]

• [4] *Anaro*. Boundlessness. It is also said to be the name of a god of fire. [*anade*]

• [5] *Nabi*. One who is without riches; a pauper; also the name of a god of song. [*nadi*]

• [6] *Kunabi*. A term of irony meaning: “Why do I never grow wealthy?” One view holds that this is the name of an unsightly god of song; another holds that it is the name of a goddess that is sure to make everyone rich. [*kunadi*]

TEXT “World-honored One! By these supernatural spells I will protect the teachers of the Dharma. I will also myself protect those who keep this sutra, so that no corroding care shall [come] within a hundred *yojanas*.”

COMMENTARY While protecting with the extraordinary power of supernatural spells, he will also protect them himself directly, bringing happiness.

- *Corroding care*. When fortune fades, various apprehensions and obstacles spring forth.

TEXT Thereupon the Divine King Domain Holder, who was present in this congregation, with a host of thousands of myriads of kotis of nayutas of gandharvas reverently encompassing him, went before the Buddha, and folding his hands said to the Buddha: “World-honored One! I, too, with supernatural *dharani* spells, will protect those who keep the Dharma Flower Sutra.”

COMMENTARY *Divine King Domain Holder*. Domain Holder (Skt., Dhritarashtra) is also one of the four heavenly kings and is held to be the protector of the east.

- *Gandharvas*. These have appeared repeatedly in this sutra. They are celestial spirits who serve Indra as musicians.

TEXT Whereupon he delivered the following spell:

“[1] *Akyane* [2] *kyane* [3] *kuri* [4] *kendari* [5] *sendari* [6] *matogi* [7] *joguri* [8] *buro-shani* [9] *acchi*.”

COMMENTARY [1] *Akyane*. This means “innumerable.” (*agane*)

- [2] *Kyane*. A distinguished goddess of fortune with the head of an elephant and the body of a human being. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies it as “Oh, she who is many! Oh, divine group!” (*gane*)

- [3] *Kuri*. A Himalayan goddess who radiates white light. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies it as “Oh, she who is radiant!” (*gauryi*)

- [4] *Kendari*. A goddess known as Incense Holder. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies “Incense Holder” as an epithet of the Naga king. (*gandhari*)

- [5] *Sendari*. A goddess of illuminating the darkness. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies it as “Oh, candala woman!” (*candali*)

- [6] *Matogi*. The goddess of Matanga, a kind of Candala. (*matangi*)

- [7] *Joguri*. A giant goddess bringing misfortune (or of a fierce temper, like poison). Dr. Tsukamoto identifies it as “Oh, Janguli [female deity]!” (*janguli*)

- [8] *Buro-shani*. Preaching according to order. [*vrusali*]

- [9] *Acchi*. That which is most excellent; Truth. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies it as “Oh, she who is evil!” [*agasti*]

TEXT “World-honored One! These supernatural *dharani* spells have been spoken by forty-two kotis of buddhas. If anyone does violence to these teachers of the Dharma, he will have done violence to these buddhas.”

Thereupon there were female rakshasas, the first named Lamba, the second named Vilamba, the third named Crooked Teeth, the fourth named Flowery Teeth, the fifth named Black Teeth, the sixth named Many Tresses, the seventh named Insatiable, the eighth named Necklace Holder, the ninth named Kunti, and the tenth named Spirit Snatcher.

COMMENTARY Of all the names of these ten female rakshasas, Lamba, Vilamba, and Kunti are transliterations of Sanskrit and the others are thought to be translations of the meanings of their names. This is common in translation of the scriptures as in the following. Among the names of the Tathagata, for example, we find Shakyamuni (transliteration) and Abundant Treasures (translated meaning), and among the bodhisattvas we find Maitreya (transliteration) and Never Despise (translated meaning).

- *Lamba*. A female rakshasa who wanders around the world.
- *Vilamba*. A female rakshasa who rambles through the world.
- *Crooked Teeth*. (Skt., Kutadanti).
- *Flowery Teeth*. (Skt., Pushpadanti).
- *Black Teeth*. (Skt., Makutadanti).
- *Many Tresses*. (Skt., Keshini).
- *Insatiable*. (Skt., Acala). A female rakshasa who is neither weary of anything nor satisfied.
- *Necklace Holder*. (Skt., Maladhari).
- *Kunti*. Kunti is the leader of the ten female rakshasas. The Chinese word *kao* employed for *Kun* is said to be the voice summoning back the spirit of the deceased from the top of the roof.
- *Spirit Snatcher*. (Skt., Sarvasattvojohari). A demoness who sucks out the vitality from all living things.

* 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, 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

Rissho Kosei-kai *A Global Buddhist Movement*



Participants in the fourth World Sangha Assembly held at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters in Tokyo in May 2016.

Rissho Kosei-kai is a global Buddhist movement of people who strive to apply the teachings of the Threefold Lotus Sutra, one of the foremost Mahayana Buddhist scriptures, in their daily lives and contribute to world peace. It was founded in Tokyo in 1938 by Nikkyo Niwano (1906–1999) and Myoko Naganuma (1889–1957). It now has some 1.15 million member households worldwide. Members actively share the Dharma widely and engage in peace activities both locally and internationally in cooperation with people from many walks of life, both religious and non-religious.

Rissho Kosei-kai has 238 Dharma centers in Japan and 65 branches in 20 counties and regions overseas. For further information, please visit our website.



Hoza (Dharma circle) during a training seminar for US leaders at the Oklahoma Dharma Center.



Leaders from Dharma centers across Japan participate in *hoza* at the headquarters.



Sutra recitation during a training seminar for Mongolian associate Dharma teachers.

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