

DHARMA WORLD

FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

SPRING 2019, VOL. 46

FEATURES: Is Emptiness the Goal?

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

Publisher: Koichi Saito

Director: Naoki Taketani

Senior Editor: Kazumasa Osaka

Editor: Katsuyuki Kikuchi

Editorial Advisors:

Miriam Levering, Gene Reeves,

Dominick Scarangelo,

Michio T. Shinozaki

Copy Editors:

DeAnna Satre, Stephen Comee,

Catherine Szolga

Editorial Staff:

Eriko Kanao, Kensuke Suzuki

Subscription Staff: Kazuyo Okazaki

Layout and Design: Abinitio Design

Cover:

Photos: Shutterstock.com

Photoshop work by Abinitio Design

2 Is Emptiness the Ultimate Goal of Buddhists?

by Koichi Kawamoto

3 Beyond Emptiness

by Brook Ziporyn

6 Emptiness in Three Dimensions for the Fourth Time

by Douglas Duckworth

11 The Other Side of Emptiness

by Ruben L. F. Habito

14 Emptiness, Buddhist and Christian

by Leo D. Lefebure

.....

17 "Found in Translation": Transpositions of the Lotus Sutra

A Report on the International Lotus Sutra Seminar by Yue Eric Tojimbara

24 Business and Religion: A Historical Look at John Wanamaker and the American Department Store

by Nicole C. Kirk

27 Diversity Is Always Part of Reality

An Interview with Rev. Fadi Daou and Dr. Nayla Tabbara of the Adyan Foundation

31 From Scripture to Social Action: Translating the Lotus Sutra

by Bee Scherer

35 Buddha-Nature (2): We Are Children of the Buddha

by Dominick Scarangelo

42 The Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma

by Nikkyo Niwano

45 People Who Are Like a Fragrant Breeze

by Nichiko Niwano

THE THREEFOLD LOTUS SUTRA: A MODERN COMMENTARY

46 The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law
Chapter 26: Dharanis (3)

Is Emptiness the Ultimate Goal of Buddhists?

by Koichi Kawamoto

***This phenomenal world emerges out of a deluded mind. . . .
When [it] is returned to emptiness, then a new world
will be opened up.***

For Buddhists, emptiness (*śūnyatā*) has become an easy-to-understand catchword that denotes the teachings of Buddhism. To the question the editors of *Dharma World* have posed, “Is emptiness the goal?” my answer would be that emptiness is the turning point for lay Buddhists as followers of the teachings of Mahayana.

The Wisdom sutras are the most fundamental of the Mahayana scriptures and have existed from their earliest period. At the core of their teachings is *prajñā*, or “perfect wisdom.” If we can look at the phenomenal world through the eyes of a wisdom that discerns Truth, we will be able to reach an understanding of emptiness—that nothing in this world has any kind of ultimate substance since all exists simply through the coming together of causes and conditions. This is known as dependent origination. The idea of emptiness is not confined to Mahayana Buddhism but is also the final point of the doctrine of dependent origination in early Buddhism.

The Mahāvagga of the Vinaya-piṭaka relates that, in the first watch of the night seven days after his enlightenment, the Buddha brought to mind the twelve links in the chain of causation (ignorance, actions, consciousness, name and form, the six sense organs, contact, sensation, craving, grasping, becoming, birth, and old age and death) in both direct and reverse order. Direct order focuses on

origination while reverse order focuses on cessation. If, by meditating upon the twelve links in both directions, we are enabled to realize that this phenomenal world has come about through dependent origination (Pali, *paṭicca-samuppanna-dhamma*), it is not difficult to rid ourselves of the notion of substantiality and arrive at the realization that “all is empty.” All Buddhist sects and schools were one in recognizing that meditating upon emptiness was an effective way to attain the ideal of liberation and nirvana. Thus the Suttanipāta says: “View the world as empty, Mogharāja, always (being) mindful. Destroying the views of one’s self, one may thus cross over death” (1119).*

Why I said above that that emptiness is the turning point for Mahayana Buddhists is because as lay practitioners we walk the way of the bodhisattva. The Mahayana Wisdom sutras emphasize the perfection of wisdom in particular among the six perfections to be cultivated by the bodhisattva, based on the idea of emptiness. It was Nāgārjuna (ca. 150–250 CE) who is considered to have established Mahayana thought, who gave this idea a philosophical and logical basis. From the standpoint of the emptiness of *prajñā*, this phenomenal world emerges out of a deluded mind that mistakenly discriminates one thing from another. Emptiness does not however have as its

Koichi Kawamoto is the director of Rissho Kosei-kai’s Chuo Academic Research Institute in Tokyo.

purpose a passive withdrawal from the world, and we are strictly warned not to let a mistaken view of emptiness allow us to fall into nihilism. The emptiness of *prajñā* is founded on the stance that when the phenomenal world is returned to emptiness, then a new world will be opened up, free and liberated, not bound by selfish interests or desires, mystic and wonderful in its activity, opening up the true value.

The principle that secular ethics in society at large and religious practice are one and the same develops as a result of this logic of emptiness, and this allows for the first time the possibility of living the bodhisattva way. This means to be able to live within the world without being lost in it, compassionately taking on the burden of the suffering of all beings at the same time as working for their liberation, and living in a way that constantly seeks their benefit. This is called the nirvana of no abode. Here a person has no attachment either to birth-death (rebirth) or nirvana (liberation) and neither rejects the one nor seeks the other, but acts out of compassion for the liberation of all living beings. Our goal as Mahayana Buddhists should therefore be to dedicate ourselves to bodhisattva practice. □

* K. R. Norman, trans., *The Group of Discourses (Suttanipāta) II. Revised translation with introduction and notes*, Pali Text Society Translation Series, 45 (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1992), p. 126.

Beyond Emptiness

by Brook Ziporyn

One Buddhist school, the Tiantai . . . , actually sees [the] Emptiness teaching as a mere preparation for a further teaching, which it considers the ultimate teaching of Buddhism. It calls this next step the idea of the Middle Way, or the Center.

A very important teaching of Mahāyāna Buddhism is the idea of Emptiness, which asserts that all the things of the world are devoid of “self-nature,” that they have no intrinsic essence of their own in isolation from other things.

This is sometimes interpreted as meaning that all things are interdependent and are thus part of a web of the oneness of all life and being that encourages compassion and care for all things.

Sometimes, on the contrary, it is construed as a nihilistic denial of the reality or the importance of all things in the observable world, even of all definite beings that might be beyond the observable world.

Even as the relatively positive teaching of interdependence, however, many people feel there is something uncomfortably severe about this idea. After all, it still sees each individual thing as ultimately finite and impermanent, even if the whole web of existence is eternal: all are parts of the total net of existence, coming and going while the web itself, the field of relations, is alone what endures eternally. All are interdependent, and in that sense each is real and important, but each occupies only its own position in time and space. No individual entity as such can really be eternal.

There is certainly inspiring beauty and austere majesty in this vision of universal impermanence, universal fragility, and universal participation. But one Buddhist school, the Tiantai (Jpn., Tendai) school, actually sees this Emptiness teaching as a mere preparation for a further teaching, which it considers the ultimate teaching of Buddhism. It calls this next step the idea of the Middle Way, or the Center, which it considers to be not really a completely new idea but a deeper thinking through of the implications of Emptiness itself, with surprising consequences.

This idea of the Center is first introduced in the context of a special teaching for bodhisattvas. These are beings who have made a compassionate vow to liberate all beings by remaining in the world for immeasurably vast eons, to be born again and again, in body after body, so as to interact with innumerable sentient beings, producing innumerable precisely tailored and maximally effective teachings and physical forms as liberative responses to the individual vicissitudes of each of those encounters.

These bodhisattvas have understood that all things are empty, but they see that this is not merely the negation of, and therefore the transcendence of, all

Brook Ziporyn, PhD, is a professor of Chinese Religion, Philosophy, and Comparative Thought in the Divinity School at the University of Chicago. His published books include Emptiness and Omnipresence: The Lotus Sutra and Tiantai Buddhism (Indiana University Press, 2016). He is currently working on a cross-cultural inquiry into the themes of death, time, and perception, as well as an exposition of atheism as a form of religious and mystical experience.

determinate forms but is also a negation of this negation, a transcendence of this transcendence. The first negation is itself something determinate (namely, the definite exclusion of all definite content, of all birth and death, of all arising and perishing), so it too must be transcended. The negation of all content is itself a content, and thus it too must be negated. Thus is the Center just a further thinking through of Emptiness. Practically speaking, the bodhisattvas' detailed work of liberation shows them that each specific attachment to some specific content is transcended only via the creation of a counterbalancing or neutralizing content: 2 is neutralized by -2, not by 0.

This means that the liberation from all determinate forms, the negation of all determinate forms, is accomplished by the bodhisattvas not through application of universal blankness or universal destruction, nor merely by embracing a vision of the entire universal web of being, but by limitless creativity of forms, by the

production in each case of the precisely countervailing form. Liberative negation of all things thus requires infinite creativity and produces infinite forms.

Transcending the transcendence (the emptiness of Emptiness) does not lead the bodhisattvas into some even more unthinkable hypertranscendence but into a new mode of involvement in the world. “Nonarising and nonperishing” does not mean the exclusion of all arising and perishing, of all determinate existence. Rather, Emptiness means infinite *ambiguity*, that is, the lack of determinate identity and the presence of provisionally posited identity at once. This emptiness is also a matrix of infinite productivity of provisionally posited redescrptions and representations. What Emptiness amounts to is the nonfinality of any characterization, including “Emptiness”—which means Emptiness amounts to the positing always of *alternate* determinations and descriptions for any entity, the validity of more descriptions beyond any finite set that might already have been applied. This means that Conventional Truth is not a single set of appearances but is constantly available for reshaping to meet new conventions and new needs, and that all of these are simply further manifestations of Emptiness, further rereadings of Emptiness itself.

This deepened sense of Emptiness as identical with the production of infinite provisional posits is called the Center. It is neither definite Emptiness nor any definite set of determinations: it is the nonultimacy of both of these extremes and is thus something beyond both extremes that at the same time posits both extremes. Both negation of definite characteristics (Emptiness) and affirmation of them (conventional reality) are alternate and opposite ways in which the same thing is presented.

To understand the meaning of “Center” here, we might picture this as a coin that is engraved with a figure on one side and left blank on the other

side. The figure represents the determinate forms of the world as conventionally understood. The blank side is a further alternate revelation of what all of that determinate reality is: the metal of the coin, here understood not to be any specific substance or characteristic but literally the lack of all determinate characteristics. In some understandings of the Emptiness teaching, the unengraved side thus reveals the “reality,” the “Ultimate Truth,” which is also what the whole coin itself is made of and even what the determinate form of the other side, the engraved figure, is made of. But now, with the teaching of the Center, the unengraved side is also seen as a *side*, merely one of two sides, with the same status as the engraved side. *Both* are merely ways of appearing. Even the unengraved side is something seen and cognized and is in its own way determinate, for it is precisely the definite negation of all the determinations of the figure. That is what makes it a kind of figure itself. What is concealed by and also appearing in these two opposite forms is what lies between them, the unseen metal of the remainder of the coin, which is itself neither the figure appearing on the engraved side (conventional truths) nor the blankness appearing on the unengraved side (Emptiness) but is in another way immanent to both of them as what appears in either of the two opposed appearances and is also what both holds them together and holds them apart. The affirmation and the negation can be said to be two alternate presentations of the same content, identical in substance but opposed in form, just as the two sides of the coin—which is both blank and engraved—are opposite and mutually exclusive presentations of the substance of the coin.

But we must now break away from our static coin metaphor, for we no longer have only one fixed engraving on the engraved side. The bodhisattvas, motivated by their infinitely compassionate vow to engage every specific form

of delusion, now see the nonproduced Emptiness of all things as *infinitely productive*. Because there are infinite forms of suffering, bodhisattvas create infinite solutions to suffering, enabled by their apprehension of Emptiness as irreducible to any one form. Since the ultimate reality of this compassionate creative activity is thus neither emptiness nor non-emptiness in the narrower noncreative sense, it is called the Center. Since it can appear in an infinity of different forms, in any form at all, without ceasing to be itself, since its all-pervasive Emptiness is expressed as all-pervasive forms, it is eternal and omnipresent: anything that appears anywhere is its expression, so it can never be replaced by anything other than itself; it can never die. This Center, this Middle Way, is what the Nirvana Sutra also calls “the buddha-nature.”

But for Tiantai there is still something even more wondrous than this, even further beyond mere abstract Emptiness. It is not just that Emptiness is creative, that Emptiness and creativity are actually one and the same. To take this further step, we first note the Lotus Sutra teaching that all sentient beings are witting or unwitting bodhisattvas, and the creative work of Emptiness therefore does not require the special intervention of certain agents at certain times but is happening always and everywhere, is itself constitutive of all being. Emptiness per se is creative, with or without deliberate intervention. But the further implication is that whatever Emptiness creates is not a mere passing chimera, a temporary work that arises and perishes, constrained to a single time and place. Rather, precisely because Emptiness is always identical to whatever it creates, and whatever it creates is always empty, what it creates is always eternal and omnipresent.

This may seem preposterous—after all, a definite thing is always trapped in its own specific moment of time, has a beginning and an end, has boundaries, has an inside and an outside, arises and

then also perishes. How can it nevertheless, and without denying its impermanence, *also* be eternal?

The philosophical arguments in favor of this astonishing claim are subtle and exciting, but too intricate to elaborate here. Instead, we can get some intuitive understanding of what is meant by this Tiantai teaching through a consideration of the idea of *style*. What is a style?

Consider Vincent van Gogh's famous painting *Starry Night*. This is something that was created by smearing some colored paints on a canvas with a brush at a certain time and place by a certain person. As such, it is a very temporary and conditional thing, something both very fragile, very impermanent, and very fake. After all, it is an illusion, a fiction: it is not really a night sky one sees when one looks at this canvas, it is only an illusion created by the coming together of these paints in this particular way at this particular time and place.

In the same way, we can say that all the fictions created by bodhisattvas in their creative and compassionate use of the ambiguity of Emptiness, just like all our own one-sided attachments to these ambiguities, which try to force them to really be one thing or another that we want, are illusions. All our experiences are a mere one-sided way of seeing a set of conditions and relations and "reading into" them a certain figure, coherence, idea, being.

But Van Gogh's painting, once it exists, has a certain style. It conveys a certain *way of seeing*. To see it once is to learn this new way of seeing. And the most amazing thing about a style is that once one has experienced it, it is not limited to the initial content in which it was experienced. Once I have seen Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, I can go outside and look at the night sky and suddenly see it through the lens Van Gogh has given me, I can see it "in the style of" Van Gogh. In fact, I can now see *everything* in Van Gogh's style, "Van Goghishly": after seeing *Starry Night* I

can also see my table and chair in this new way. Van Gogh's style, once I have experienced it truly in a single time and place, even though it is completely an illusion no different from the empty ambiguity of the colors that create it, is now eternally available as a manner in which each and every object in the world, in all times and places, can be seen. Style is at an omnipresent availability, a revelation of an eternal mode of being that can take literally any content at all. Nothing can limit it. Garbage can be seen Van Goghishly just as well as emeralds and diamonds, evil as much as good, ugliness as much as beauty—and in this way all of them, while remaining ugly, are also beautiful. Once I see this style, all things can express this style.

Similarly, when we see the emptiness of a thing but also realize that this emptiness is not the definite negation of the contents of that thing—that is, when we see the Center, the buddha-nature—what do we actually see? The answer is that we see the thing as something that *can* be seen here, as an available figure for experiencing, but that does not *compel* us to see it here, since it is ambiguous. It is to discover a creative opportunity to see that content but not a requirement to see that content. I see a cup. Emptiness tells me it is not really a cup that I see, that seeing a cup is merely a certain biased way of seeing the totality of conditions that are present here; it can also be seen otherwise, as not-a-cup. The idea of the Center tells me that these two ways of seeing are one and the same, that seeing that the cup is not necessarily a cup is also seeing that this is what enables me to see it as a cup, that the impossibility of

a cup being a cup plain and simple is also the possibility of being a cup at all. The cup is not definitely there, but it is not definitely absent either. To see a cup is a revelation of the availability of the experience of cupness, not a requirement to identify precisely this thing as a cup. So every new experience is not a revelation of what is actually true but, rather, simply a new knowledge about something to look for, something to produce, something to express: a creative opportunity. Once I know that it can be looked for, I find that there are ways to find it in every place and time, albeit in each case a different way, just as Van Gogh's style can be present in any content but differently in each specific one. There are infinite new ways that cupness expresses itself; cupness *per se* is the source of infinite creativity. "Cup" is a style of being. It can be expressed everywhere. Thus it is not merely the abstract "Emptiness/creativity" *per se* but specifically "cupness *per se*" that is the Center, which is discoverable everywhere and which produces and includes all things.

But in Buddhism, we are not just the observers of someone else's painting style. We are ourselves the painter. To see any ordinary object is to be like Van Gogh painting *Starry Night*: constructing from Emptiness some definite thing, which turns out not to be one definite thing but an eternally and omnipresently available style for all things. Whatever thing we are experiencing, it is not a simple content constrained to a single object at a single point in time and space but a new style available for all things, a new form of beauty that can be expressed both as every ugly thing and as every beautiful thing. We are creators of new styles of being with each moment of experience, each of which without exception is eternal and omnipresent, expressible through all things, containing all things. As Tiantai says, every scent, every form is the Middle Way. □

Emptiness in Three Dimensions for the Fourth Time

by Douglas Duckworth

While realizing emptiness is necessary, it is not necessarily sufficient for actualizing the complete Buddhist path, so understanding emptiness alone is by no means the final realization of Buddhism.

Emptiness designates the ultimate truth in Mahāyāna Buddhism and is an extension of the Buddhist doctrine of no-self. Yet there are several meanings that the term *emptiness* can be understood to convey. I will describe a few of them before considering whether realizing emptiness is the final goal of Mahāyāna Buddhism. I first discuss three dimensions of the meaning of emptiness and then consider the process of its realization. Lastly, I address the question of whether realizing emptiness is enough. I conclude that while realizing emptiness is necessary, it is not necessarily sufficient for actualizing the complete Buddhist path, so understanding emptiness alone is by no means the final realization of Buddhism.

Three Dimensions of Emptiness

Emptiness has several meanings, so it can be helpful to carefully delineate its different aspects. I will begin by drawing out three dimensions of its meaning. For the first, as proclaimed by the second-century Indian Buddhist Nāgārjuna, *emptiness* refers to the lack of intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) in things. All things lack a stable essence or core. This absence of intrinsic nature in everything, which

I refer to as the *qualitative* dimension of emptiness, is a quality that all things have (including emptiness itself).

A second way to think about the meaning of emptiness is as the fundamental nature of all things. It is in this dimension of emptiness's meaning that we find representations of emptiness in a more positive light. That is, we can see in this dimension the way that emptiness is not just a quality that things have, like the first (qualitative) emptiness dimension, but also the ground or foundation of all things—the “place” upon or within which all things “take place.” This way of representing emptiness underscores the way that emptiness need not be solely delimited as an *absence* or *lack* of intrinsic nature but can also be understood as what remains after any and all false notions of intrinsic nature have been swept away. This kind of pure ground is what I will call the *substantive* dimension of emptiness.

We can see a third dimension of emptiness in its nature that is *inconceivable*. This dimension contrasts with both the qualitative (emptiness = interdependence) and substantive (emptiness = pure ground) dimensions by a direct appeal to the ineffability of emptiness. Rather than delimiting emptiness in terms of its being a quality (in the first

sense) or a substance (in the second), the inconceivable dimension of emptiness is its aspect of being beyond description. This dimension thus represents the collapse of any and all dichotomies, highlighting the way that the nature of emptiness eludes all strictures of thought and language.

All three of these dimensions of emptiness can play a role in the process of its realization, yet one or another tends to get emphasized in different texts by different traditions in different contexts. Indeed, there is often polemical rhetoric between competing traditions supporting their favored interpretations of emptiness. Yet these three dimensions of emptiness need not always be viewed as incompatible or in competition; they can be seen to be complementary when one or another of these dimensions is understood to play a role at different stages of a genuine realization. For this reason, emptiness need not be bound to any single dimension exclusively and can be interpreted to include (and transcend) them all.

One way that emptiness has been described in Tibet is in the language of “self-emptiness” (*rang stong*) and “other-emptiness” (*gzhan stong*). Self-emptiness can be understood as the qualitative dimension of emptiness, the quality that all things have in lacking intrinsic nature. That is, “self-empty” refers to a thing's lack of its own identity or intrinsic nature. Other-emptiness, in contrast, can be understood as the substantive dimension, the pure ground that is empty of all that is false or unreal

Douglas Duckworth is associate professor at Temple University in the Department of Religion. He is the author of Mipam on Buddha-Nature: The Ground of the Nyingma Tradition (SUNY, 2008), and Jamgön Mipam: His Life and Teachings (Shambhala, 2011). His latest works include Tibetan Buddhist Philosophy of Mind and Nature (Oxford, 2019) and a translation of an overview of the Wisdom Chapter of the Way of the Bodhisattva by Künzang Sönam, entitled The Profound Reality of Interdependence (Oxford, 2019).

and is replete with all the pure qualities of true reality. For instance, other-emptiness conveys nirvana's emptiness of samsara. The third dimension of emptiness, its inconceivability, contrasts with these other dimensions but can also be understood in a way that is compatible with them. When this third dimension is lacking, the first two alone tend to become static, metaphysical truths that are antithetical to the genuine meaning of emptiness.

The presence or absence of the third among these three dimensions of emptiness marks a distinction between a bounded, delimited meaning of emptiness (the fact of the matter about how things are) and its unbounded, indefinable meaning (the nature of things that cannot once and for all be defined or delimited). We can think of the difference between these two interpretations as the difference between the enframed or unenframed ultimate, respectively, which are also known as the conceptual (*paryāya-paramārtha*) and nonconceptual (*aparyāya-paramārtha*) meanings of ultimate truth.

The enframed interpretation plays an important role in enabling one to make an unapologetic thesis of emptiness and empowers us to clearly and unequivocally delineate between a view that maintains there are intrinsic natures and one that denies them. Without being able to make this kind of distinction, there is danger in a position

that holds that a view of emptiness itself can never be claimed. This kind of position can lead to the view of emptiness becoming simply another token of a cheap relativism that lacks any viable resources to discriminate between what is true and false (concerning the ultimate truth) and lacks any ability to discern between right and wrong, virtue and vice (in terms of conventional truth). That is, without the enframed interpretation, reason and language cannot serve as tools to construct a system. A system that includes this enframed truth, however, empowers the use of

language and thought to clearly convey the meaning of emptiness rather than simply interpret emptiness and other ideas as solely part of conceptual systems that are always and necessarily only to be deconstructed.

Along with the enframed ultimate truth, the unenframed interpretation of emptiness also plays an important role in the Buddhist tradition, particularly because without it, emptiness can become simply another metaphysical system or dogmatic claim, precisely the kinds of ideas targeted by Buddhist critiques of intrinsic nature. That is, recalling the unenframed emptiness undermines any notion of emptiness (or anything else) that is circumscribed by language and thought. The unenframed interpretation thus makes room for emptiness to be open-ended, beyond the limits of thought, and acts (indirectly) to convey a nature of reality that exceeds our grasp and extends beyond our current conceptions (like a finger pointing to the moon). Thus, the unenframed interpretation always remains open to the unfathomable mystery of emptiness.

Timeless Emptiness

Tibetan Buddhist traditions describe the process of realizing emptiness in terms of first understanding (*go*) it, then experiencing (*myong*) it, and finally, realizing

(*rtogs*) it. These levels of understanding can be clearly seen in the case of coming to understand something more mundane, such as the nature of mortality or impermanence. For example, when we first hear about impermanence and death, we gain some basic level of understanding. Then we get a deeper appreciation by gaining further understanding of these facts of life through sustained reflection and contemplation. Finally, we can gain a full realization when we have integrated this knowledge into our being through sustained cultivation (also known as meditation). The realization of emptiness can be seen to work in a similar way through these stages of knowledge, as a progression of knowledge gained through studying, contemplation, and meditation.

Yet the question remains: is it enough to *realize* emptiness through knowledge gained in meditation? Realizing emptiness conceptually (as in the enframed interpretation) is, of course, incomplete. Realizing the nonconceptual (unframed) emptiness in meditative equipoise might be thought to be the complete and final realization, but this, too, can be understood as a beginning, not necessarily an end. For one reason, nonconceptual realization of emptiness marks the beginning of the bodhisattva path on the first of ten bodhisattva grounds (*bhūmi*). Of course, this realization in meditative equipoise on the first bodhisattva ground is the end of a conceptual understanding of emptiness, when one has moved from the path of joining (*prayoga-mārga*) to the path of seeing (*darśana-mārga*), but this nonconceptual realization, too, has to be cultivated, on the path of meditation (*bhāvanā-mārga*) on the bodhisattva grounds (for two incalculable eons) before achieving complete buddhahood. Furthermore, the bodhisattva path is characterized not only by wisdom (that realizes emptiness) but also by methods (like compassion), so emptiness without compassion is not sufficient for actualizing buddhahood.

The goal of Mahāyāna Buddhist practice is the completion of the bodhisattva path, to become a buddha. Yet is becoming a buddha necessarily reaching the final stage of realization, or is it an ongoing process of responding to the world? That is, does a buddha's realization end in a climactic vision in which everything disappears into a nirvana without remainder, or is it an ongoing enlightened engagement with the world? It seems that the answer to this question is something only a buddha can know, yet given that in Buddhist doctrine samsara is generally held to be beginningless, there is a case to be made for nirvana's being beginningless as well. After all, all things are said to be unborn in Mahāyāna Buddhism, and without a beginning there is no end. Does this go for the realization of emptiness too?

Leaving speculations about nirvana and a buddha's realization of emptiness aside, I want simply to pose the question of whether realizing emptiness is enough, or whether it is just a preparation for the "subsequent attainment" or aftermath of its realization in a postmeditation (*prṣṭhalabdha*) that expresses the meditative realization of emptiness in enlightened engagement in the world. We find different answers to this question in Buddhist texts and in different portrayals of nirvana, but I want to argue here that the realization of emptiness is not the final goal, and I will return to the three dimensions of emptiness to make a case for this interpretation.

In the first sense of emptiness as discussed above, the qualitative dimension of emptiness that is a lack of intrinsic nature, emptiness is not necessarily something that is realized once and for all. This is because whatever appears with an intrinsic nature is always the site of deconstructive analysis. Thus, when emptiness is found and held in mind, this emptiness is again subjected to critique (hence, the emptiness of emptiness). This

is because nothing is found when sought after in terms of an intrinsic nature, not even emptiness. That is to say, nothing is found that is truly singular, independent, or permanent, and nothing that appears with intrinsic nature has any intrinsic nature.

In other words, upon searching for the true essence of things, nothing is found (this unfindability of anything is emptiness). Emptiness is only "found" to the extent that no thing at all is found. This is because once something called emptiness is found, this, too, becomes the target of analysis and becomes what is to be undermined by a further analysis. Thus, emptiness, too, must be realized as empty. This cascading emptiness is groundless; there is no final realization "this is really it" once and for all, because any real thing that is emptiness would become something else to be realized, once again, to be empty.

This process of realizing emptiness (in its qualitative dimension) can thus be likened to free-falling through space without any danger of hitting the ground because there is no ground.

The second dimension of emptiness, the substantive dimension, is also not necessarily a final realization. This can be understood with reference to the distinction between self-emptiness (qualitative) and other-emptiness (substantive). When emptiness is interpreted in its substantive dimension, a realization of self-emptiness is not final because it is an inferior type of emptiness that is realized simply as a temporary corrective to misconceptions. That is, while self-emptiness, the lack of true nature in things, is a corrective to the mistaken notion that things have their own identities or intrinsic natures, this notion of emptiness is simply another concept that undermines false conceptions. Even while it is a concept that removes misconceptions, in light of other-emptiness (the substantive dimension), self-emptiness alone does not account for the unconditioned nature that is the pure ground of this reality. Thus, realizing this kind of self-emptiness is not final for a proponent of other-emptiness.

We might then think that the realization of other-emptiness, the pure ground of reality, is the final realization. While this might be the case, this interpretation of emptiness can also be understood as simply a way of describing the world in postmeditation—providing a way to distinguish between the real that is separate from the unreal—*after* emptiness has been realized. Alternatively, such a positive description of other-emptiness might be seen as pedagogical in the sense that it serves the purpose of helping someone to enter into a direct encounter with emptiness in meditative equipoise, in which case its meaning is only instrumental (skillful means), and therefore not final. That is, the discourse of other-emptiness can be evocative of an experience of emptiness; it can lead

to it in the future. Thus, the interpretation of other-emptiness can be seen to represent emptiness in a way that allows distinctions to be made between samsara and nirvana in postmeditation *after* a meditative realization of emptiness, when all such distinctions have dissolved, or it can be understood to evoke an experience of emptiness *before* it happens. In either case, other-emptiness is not something final.

Moreover, some Buddhist texts also argue that what I have called the substantive emptiness, in which emptiness is a pure ground (i.e., buddha-nature), is in fact an expedient for those who are not yet ready to hear about the true meaning of emptiness, which is a mere absence of intrinsic nature. Some texts even say that certain people are not capable of appreciating the groundless and liberating emptiness and need something to hold on to until they are ready. Other texts claim just the opposite: that it is emptiness that is a stepping stone for understanding the deeper reality that is buddha-nature. In any case, other-emptiness, as the pure ground or buddha-nature (*tathāgatagarbha*), might be considered to be a climactic or final realization, but it need not necessarily be the case, as when interpreted in light of its descriptive, evocative, or pedagogical functions.

Lastly, I will consider whether realizing an inconceivable emptiness is a final realization. Realizing an inconceivable emptiness can, like the realization of other-emptiness, be seen to be a final realization, but this need not necessarily be the case. Further, what is simply “inconceivable” is not necessarily even a realization of emptiness, for otherwise we could all just hit each other on the head with a sledgehammer and become liberated by realizing this kind of inconceivable experience. In other words, realizing the dimension of inconceivability on its own is not enough. While necessary, understanding the dimension of inconceivability

is not sufficient for a genuine realization of emptiness.

Moreover, when we consider that what is “inconceivable” includes *all* of our conceptions (including those related to time), the idea of a “final” inconceivable realization is an incoherent notion; it implies a concept of linear time. Once we take inconceivability seriously, we cannot enframe its realization within our conceived notions of time, particularly since our common-sense notions of things like time tend to embed intrinsic natures that are supposed to be undermined by a complete realization of emptiness. The realization of emptiness thus is not final in the sense of the culmination of linear progression of time but might be said to happen in a fourth time, the timeless time beyond the times of past, present, and future.

A Three-Dimensional Object in Subjective Time

The three dimensions of emptiness can be represented as a complex, three-dimensional “object” where each of the three dimensions plays an integral part in its meaning. As is the case with a three-dimensional object, it is impossible to capture emptiness fully from any single dimension or perspective. For instance, when you look at a cube, you don’t see it fully. You can only see one side of it at a time, not the back of it when you look at it from the front. Even with a lot of mirrors you cannot capture the cube in its entirety, inside and out. Likewise, emptiness cannot be fully captured in any of its dimensions in isolation.

Furthermore, each dimension of emptiness can be seen to function to counteract misconceptions that occur when emptiness is understood partially or only in one of its dimensions. For instance, the qualitative dimension (emptiness as the lack of intrinsic

nature) can serve as a corrective to the notion of emptiness as a “thing” or substance, which is a danger that lurks in the substantive dimension of other-emptiness in particular. Emptiness is supposed to undermine substantial existence, but when emptiness is understood as only a *substance*, there is a problem that can be remedied by understanding emptiness as the empty *quality* of all things. The qualitative dimension of emptiness also serves as a corrective to the dimension of inconceivability, particularly when emptiness is only understood as a vague notion of an inconceivable reality that transcends the mind. The qualitative dimension of emptiness, as the emptiness of intrinsic nature, directly counteracts all kinds of misconception.

Emptiness understood in its substantive dimension can also counteract problems with each of the other two dimensions held in isolation. For instance, emptiness understood only as a *quality* that things have, as a mere absence of intrinsic nature, can also become a mistaken notion of some kind of *thing* that is an “absence” held to be ultimately real. That is, to the extent that anything held to be intrinsically real is supposed to be undermined by a genuine understanding of emptiness, a notion of an intrinsically existent *absence* is just as bad as holding on to a substance that is held to be intrinsically real (in fact it may be worse). The substantive dimension can also correct the idea that emptiness is simply inconceivable because once emptiness is spoken of and conceived, emptiness is just that, conceived. Rather than getting caught in the paradox of conceiving the inconceivable, substantive emptiness takes up a positive claim about an emptiness beyond words, the “other emptiness,” and thus need not succumb to an irresolvable paradox.

Lastly, the inconceivable dimension can overcome the problems with understanding emptiness solely in its dimension as a substance or as a quality. Since emptiness is beyond substance and quality, good and bad, and even the empty and the nonempty, the dimension of inconceivability serves as a clear reminder of the limits of any conceptions about it. When a notion of emptiness stops in any one dimension at the expense of the others, it tends to stagnate and become a dogmatic notion. When all three dimensions work together, emptiness can be understood in a fuller way. In this light, the realization of emptiness can be seen as a dynamic process of negotiating the fullness of emptiness through these dimensions—and there can be more than three dimensions as well: a fourth (time), mind, . . . infinite dimensions? In any case, realizing emptiness need not be held as a once-and-for-all, final realization that stops in any single dimension.

Conclusion

To conclude, we get a fuller sense of the meaning of emptiness when we do not think of it in only one dimension but in three, like a cube. As discussed above, we never see a whole cube at one time, only one side of it. Likewise, when we see only one side of emptiness, we get only one dimension. In one

dimension, emptiness is like a line. Emptiness is the nature of phenomena, and there are no straight lines in nature; likewise, one-dimensional emptiness is not the nature of things. Two-dimensional emptiness is a richer representation of emptiness, like a square. But a square is nonetheless flat and lifeless, like a dry intellectual; as the saying goes: “Don’t be a square!” And similarly, emptiness is not understood fully as just a dead idea, like a square.

A cube represents three-dimensional emptiness, and a cube, like emptiness, has depth as well as surface. Yet a cube is an *object*, and emptiness also includes *subjectivity* (and transcends subjects and objects). In contrast to objects, emptiness includes living subjects. Furthermore, the metaphor of three dimensions is a notion about *space*, and emptiness includes space and time (and transcends them). As space and time are related—time being intimately related with matter shaping space, as revealed by twentieth-century physics—time can also be said to be integrally related with emptiness.

Like space-time, emptiness is not just an *object* in space. Rather, emptiness can be seen as that which allows space-time to “take shape” (after all, “form is empty; emptiness is form”). Thus, emptiness not only includes spatial dimensions and the dimension of subjective time but also transcends them in a timeless dimension—the fourth time—of mind-nature or buddha-nature. In any case, emptiness, understood solely in any of its spatial or temporal dimensions, is not its final realization. Emptiness realized in its fullness—which is mind-nature, buddha-nature, the spirit of awakening (*bodhicitta*) that includes the heart of compassion—can be said to be a final realization in the sense that there is no-thing more to realize than this, ever and always again. □

The Other Side of Emptiness

by Ruben L. F. Habito

Realizing emptiness, one's life is no longer lived as centered on the egoic self that perceives everything else as "objects" before it. . . . In this liberated and decentered state of mind, one is able to freely behold the world as Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, seeing and hearing the cries of sentient beings caught in the web of dissatisfaction and suffering.

Ruben L. F. Habito teaches world religions and spirituality at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, and serves as Guiding Teacher of the Maria Kannon Zen Center, both in Dallas, Texas.

Seeing Emptiness, Being Liberated from Suffering

The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra (or Heart Sutra, as it is popularly known) is a short scriptural text that is said to convey the “content” of the Buddha’s enlightenment. Its message is summed up in the formula “Form is no other than emptiness, emptiness no other than form.” Here “form” (*rūpa*) refers to “that which leaves an imprint on the senses as their object, all visible and tangible things, all that exists.” What then is “emptiness”?

The Sanskrit word for this is *śūnyatā*, an abstract noun that derives from *śūnya*, used in Indian mathematics to denote zero, or the neutral point that stands between negative and positive numbers. “Emptiness” has come to be the most widely used translation in English for this enigmatic term, but *śūnyatā* can also be rendered as “zerness” or “zero point,” or “void” or “voidness,” that is, devoid of substantial being. It has also been translated as “openness,” “spaciousness,” “relativity” (referring to the interdependent origination of all things), “thusness” (referring to “the way things are”), “goneness,”

“transparency,” “boundlessness” (referring to the dissolution of boundaries of time and space), and so on, with each translated term bearing its own nuance and bringing in its particular philosophical and religious undertones.

The opening line of the Heart Sutra proclaims: “When Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva practiced the depths of wisdom, he saw that all the things that make up the world are empty, and was thus liberated from all suffering.”

The main actor of this sutra is the male figure of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, the Sovereign Master who beholds the world with the clear eyes of wisdom and a heart of compassion. In East Asian Buddhism, this bodhisattva is now transgendered, appearing as a

feminine figure whose name (Guanshiyin or Guanyin in Chinese; Kanzeon or Kannon in Japanese) translates as “One who beholds the sounds of the world,” that is, who hears the cries of sentient beings in their plight of suffering and who reaches out with a thousand arms and hands to assist in alleviating that suffering. As we will see later, this will be a vital clue in appreciating the significance of this highly regarded scriptural text as well as in elucidating the import of “the other side of emptiness.”

A key point to note here is that seeing that all the things that make up the world are empty is what leads to liberation from all suffering. In other words, awakening consists in seeing all things that make up the world as we know it as empty, and thereby being freed from suffering. This might seem like belaboring the point, but there is a direct connection here between seeing all things as empty and being liberated from suffering.

This resonates with the famous dictum of the Buddha as found in Pāli scriptures: “In the past, O monks, and so even now, indeed, I teach suffering, and the end of suffering” (MN I, 140, *Alagaddupama Sutta*). The hallmark Buddhist teaching of the Four Ennobling

Truths begins with the fact of suffering (*dukkha*) and its dissolution (*nirodha*) through the eradication of its root causes.

In elucidating the Mahāyāna Buddhist term *emptiness* as conveying the “content” of the Buddha’s awakening, it will be helpful to refer also to discourses of the historical Śākyamuni Buddha as handed down in Pāli sources.

Invitation to Awaken: Come and See!

When the Awakened One was asked by his followers how they themselves might arrive at awakening and be liberated from suffering, the Buddha’s response was by way of an invitation: “Come and see for yourself (*ehi passiko*)!”

From this response we can draw an important point of emphasis, namely, that at its core, Buddhism is neither about believing in a set of doctrines nor faithfully assenting to a set of truths but, rather, is about accepting this invitation to take on a spiritual practice and way of life whose hallmark is “being awakened.” From the example of the very life of the Buddha himself, we can glean how this is a life marked by deep inner peace—the kind of peace that surpasses all fear and anxiety, coming out of a genuine wisdom that sees things truly as they are and generating boundless compassion that encompasses all beings in its reach.

The spiritual practice prescribed for earnest followers who wish to “come and see,” aspiring to take on this path of awakening, consists of a twofold movement: first, stop the analytic and discursive mind from its usual activities and simply allow it to be still, thus cultivating a state of single-minded awareness (*shamatha*); and second, open one’s inner eye to see through things just as they are (*vipassanā*), without obstructions placed by a deluded egoic self. Taking on this practice of stopping the discursive mind, bringing it to a point of stillness, and seeing things as they are without obstruction means an engagement in

sustained meditative practice, which leads to the formation of a habitual state of mind marked by that inner stillness, opening out to an awareness of a boundless horizon that encompasses all existing things in themselves just as they are.

Three Marks of Dhamma

Entry into this path of awakening is also described as realizing the “three marks of Dhamma”—namely, seeing the dissatisfactory state of living in a self-centered way (*dukkha*), seeing the impermanence (*aniccā*) of all things in this life, and seeing through the selflessness (nonselfness) (*anattā*) that characterizes the nature of things (*Dhammapada* 277, 278, 279). In short, once one has realized these latter two marks, one is able to overcome the dissatisfactory condition of a self-preoccupied life, having dissolved the causes of *dukkha*, and is thus able to experience liberation and concomitantly attain well-being (*sukha*). (This last move is sometimes referred to as the “fourth mark of Dhamma” in some textual sources.)

We find ourselves enmeshed in a state of dislocation and suffering as long as our lives are caught up in self-centered pursuits—pining after pleasure, possessions, power, and the like. In such a state of mind preoccupied with pursuits of the egoic self, either we fail to get what we want and thus experience frustration and anger and harbor ill-will against others, and ourselves as well, or we may get what we think we want for a time and then realize that we are no longer content with just that and want even more. We find ourselves caught up in a vicious cycle of deluded and frenetic activity, where we never arrive at true satisfaction and contentment but are ever grasping for something beyond our reach.

Once we see through the futility of this kind of self-centered life that is always hankering for something or other that keeps on eluding our grasp anyway, and

are thereby able to let go of this desire for something lasting or permanent that we think would give us a sense of security and stability, we arrive at true freedom. Further, in letting go of our clinging to this deluded egoic self that is the subject of those desires and allowing ourselves to simply go with the flow of things and take things as they come moment to moment, we are thus enabled to “see things just as they are,” with inner peace and equanimity. It is in coming to this turning point that we find true liberation. Coming to what we can also call zero point, liberated from our clinging to things in realizing their impermanence, liberated from our deluded egoic self and realizing the truth of selflessness (non-self), we are able to overturn that dissatisfactory and dysfunctional state of suffering (*dukkha*) and arrive at a state of well-being (*sukha*).

Cultivating a Boundless Heart

To arrive at this state of well-being is to find one’s foothold in the “place, or path, of peace” (*santam padam* in Pāli.) There is a well-known passage in the Metta Sutta (Treatise on Loving-Kindness) that describes the state of mind of one who has reached this place of peace. It describes one “who is skilled in goodness, and knows the path of peace” as declaring this aspiration:

In gladness and in safety,
May all beings be at ease.
Whatever living beings there may be
Whether they are weak or strong,
omitting none . . .
May all beings be at ease!
.
*Even as a mother protects with her
life, her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart, one should
cherish all beings. . . .*
*Radiating kindness over the entire
world
Spreading upward to the skies, and*

*downward to the depths,
Outward and unbounded . . .*

The underlying theme of this treatise is in its title, Metta, a Pāli word that derives from the Sanskrit *maitrī*, translated as “friendship” or “friendliness” but is more properly translated as “kinship,” “a sense of affinity” that begets and sustains an attitude of benevolence and loving-kindness. To arrive at the place of peace is to arrive at a state of mind that would regard all beings in the universe with this gaze of loving-kindness out of intimate kinship, as a mother regards her own only child.

Loving-kindness, the heart that seeks the well-being of all, is one of the four inner states called the four immeasurables—qualities of a boundless heart and mind of one who walks the path of awakening. The other three are compassion (solidarity with all beings in suffering and the concomitant aspiration toward its alleviation), sympathetic joy (solidarity in joy, celebration, and gratitude with all), and equanimity (the ability to see things clearly without fear, anxiety, or undue expectation but with deep inner peace).

To summarize, early Buddhist sources handed down in Pāli describe how awakening, spelled out as the realization of the three marks of Dhamma brought about by the practice of stillness (*śamatha*) and clear-eyed seeing (*vipassanā*), leads to liberation from dissatisfaction, suffering, and delusion. This liberation brings forth the deep inner peace that is grounded upon the wisdom that sees things as they are, which in turn generates a heart of loving-kindness and compassion toward all beings, along with sympathetic joy and equanimity in all things.

Emptiness as Liberation from Clinging

The Mahāyāna term *śūnyatā* can be seen against the background of early Buddhist

understandings of liberation from suffering through letting go of clinging to objects of desire (in realizing their impermanence) and clinging to the egoic subject that desires (in realizing selflessness). In other words, this term is understood and appreciated as we abandon the quest for an objective concept or idea that corresponds to this term *śūnyatā*, which can then be grasped and understood by the subjective mind. “Emptiness” is not a concept or idea for our mind to grasp and understand but, rather, a pivotal event of transformation of our way of being.

This transformative moment, a turning point in life, can occur in one who, “practicing the depths of wisdom”—that is, brings one’s mind to a point of stillness—*sees through things as they are* without desire or clinging and without the obstruction of the egoic self. In so doing (that is, in letting go of both object and subject), the root cause of delusion and suffering is dissolved and one is freed from fear and anxiety, arriving at deep inner peace, the true peace of awakening. This is what “the realization of emptiness” entails.

Yet the realization that “form is no other than emptiness” is only the first part of the Heart Sutra’s message of what awakening entails. The second part, the other side of emptiness, is crucial to full understanding and realization: “Emptiness is no other than form.” What does this mean?

The Other Side of Emptiness: Plunging into the Heart of the Wounded World

Realizing emptiness, one’s life is no longer lived as centered on the egoic self that perceives everything else as “objects” before it. It has now been decentered, as it were, and thus is no longer preoccupied with the egoic self and its delusive desires for passing objects. In this liberated and decentered state of mind, one is able to freely behold the world

as Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, seeing and hearing the cries of sentient beings caught in the web of dissatisfaction and suffering. Avalokiteśvara is no longer some mythical figure in ethereal space and time who “symbolizes” compassion but is precisely the one who has arrived at inner peace and freely beholds the world as such: the practitioner on this path of awakening.

Such a state of inner peace and freedom is what generates the heart of boundless compassion toward all beings, seen no longer as “other” to one’s (egoic) “self” but precisely from a standpoint of selflessness, a standpoint of emptiness, seen *just as they are*, in intimate interconnectedness with oneself, in fact, as *one’s very own self*.

The term *self* as used here has now shifted radically in meaning, from the egoic self that one has already let go of in the moment of realizing emptiness to a true self for whom there is no longer an other, as it now encompasses all things within itself. “All things in the universe” are now seen from this standpoint of selflessness and freedom, as not separate from oneself but within a circle of intimate kinship. Seeing all sentient beings, all things in the universe, in intimate kinship is to naturally generate a heart of loving-kindness and compassion toward all, being deeply bonded together as kin.

This is what the second part proclaims. *Emptiness is no other than form*. It is to freely behold the world, with its struggles and pains, with its travails and woes, but also with its joys and aspirations and, with inner peace and full freedom, to take part in all this with commitment and engagement. It is to plunge oneself right into the heart of this world, seeking in some way to be of help in alleviating the suffering of all, in whatever mode or form this is found. It is to cultivate a heart of loving-kindness and compassion in the midst of this wounded world and to blossom like a lotus flower in the midst of murky waters. □

Emptiness, Buddhist and Christian

by Leo D. Lefebure

Teachings on emptiness call attention to the transitory nature of all experiences in this world and challenge grasping and greed as ultimately futile. Buddhist perspectives on emptiness invite practitioners to wisdom and compassion, while Christian viewpoints call practitioners to follow the path of Jesus Christ in lives of service to others.

Sunyata and Kenosis

In ordinary English usage, the image of emptiness frequently connotes a negative condition lacking meaning and purpose, even leading to despair. Confessing “I feel empty” suggests that life has lost meaning and interest; when we feel empty, we are often tempted to fill up the void, often with activities that are harmful. The website Betterhelp offers guidance:

Feeling empty is scary. Why do you feel this way? Feeling empty inside can make you feel helpless, like nothing you do can get rid of this uncomfortable feeling. It might be hard for you to determine why you feel this way and that’s okay. You’re entitled to your feelings including not feeling anything at all. You may try to blame external factors for your emptiness. This makes sense because you want relief from this uncomfortable state of being.

The emptiness you feel makes you uneasy and not like yourself. External factors aren’t the cause of your emptiness. Feeling empty isn’t determined

by the absence of money, a relationship or success. Emptiness is connected to your internal state. Emptiness is not easy to get rid of. It takes effort and working through your problems to get to the source of why you feel this way (“I Feel Empty: When a Lack of Meaning Is Something More Serious,” Betterhelp, <https://www.betterhelp.com/advice/general/i-feel-empty-when-a-lack-of-meaning-is-something-more-serious/>).

Paradoxically, both the Buddhist and the Christian traditions find positive value in emptiness, reversing the usual meaning of the word and inviting practitioners to realize emptiness through a conversion of awareness and lifestyle. In each tradition this involves a fundamental revaluation of perspective and values, leading to a new way of being in the world.

One of the most important questions in Buddhist-Christian dialogue concerns the degree to which the conversions of Buddhists and Christians converge and how to understand the areas of divergence. There is a linguistic

convergence because the English word *emptiness* frequently serves to translate both *sunyata* in Sanskrit and *kenosis* in Greek. The Sanskrit word *sunya* means “empty,” referring to an object that is puffed up but hollow inside. It can also mean “zero” (and it played an important role in the development of mathematics). In Buddhist life, emptiness means the realization that things are impermanent and insubstantial; this realization leads to liberation.

The English phrase “emptied himself” is often used to translate the Apostle Paul’s use of the Greek verb *ekenosen* to describe the action of Christ, who “emptied [*ekenosen*] himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (Phil. 2:7). The abstract noun *kenosis* (emptiness) does not appear in the New Testament. The Hebrew word *hebel* has some overtones that are similar to *sunya*. The book of Ecclesiastes describes all things as “*hebel hebelim haqol hebel*” (1:2). This is usually translated as “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!” (Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*. [Oxford University Press, 2007], 945). The word *hebel* means “breath” or “vapor” or “air,” and the assertion suggests the futility of grasping at air that flows through one’s fingers. The editors of the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* comment that in Ecclesiastes *hebel* “is used repeatedly as a metaphor for things that cannot be grasped either physically or intellectually, things that are ephemeral, insubstantial, enigmatic, or absurd. Elsewhere

Leo D. Lefebure is the Matteo Ricci, SJ, Professor of Theology at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. He is the author of numerous works, including *True and Holy: Christian Scripture and Other Religions*. He is also the coauthor with Peter Feldmeier of *The Path of Wisdom: A Christian Commentary on the Dhammapada*. He is vice president of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, an honorary research fellow of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and a Trustee Emeritus of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions.

in the Bible, the human life-span and human beings themselves are said to be 'hebel'" (ibid., n. 1.2). Youth and pleasurable experiences are said to be *hebel* in the sense that they do not last. It is not surprising that Masao Abe translates *hebel hebelim* as "emptiness of emptiness, all is emptiness" (Masao Abe, *Zen and Western Thought*, ed. William R. LaFleur [University of Hawaii Press, 1986], 283, n. 10).

Buddhist Perspectives

The Heart Sutra tells us that all things are empty but also asserts that form is emptiness and emptiness is form, prodding the hearer to think beyond accustomed patterns (Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Understanding: Commentaries on the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra*, ed. Peter Levitt [Parallax Press, 1988], 1; Edward Conze, *Buddhist Wisdom Books, Containing the Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra* [Unwin Paperbacks, 1988], 101–3). Thich Nhat Hanh explains that "form is the wave and emptiness is the water. . . . Because one exists, everything exists" (*Heart of Understanding*, 15). Nhat Hanh interprets emptiness as interdependence, as "interbeing." We cannot be; we can only inter-be (*Interbeing: Commentaries on the Tien Hien Precepts*, ed. Fred Eppsteiner [Parallax Press, 1987]).

Buddhists have interpreted emptiness from many different angles. Masao Abe explains: "In Buddhism, there is nothing permanent, self-existing and absolutely good, for everything without exception is co-arising and co-ceasing,

impermanent, without 'own-being,' empty. The doctrine of dependent co-origination, one of the most basic teachings of Buddhism, clearly emphasizes that everything without exception is interdependent with every other thing" ("Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata," in *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*, edited by John B. Cobb Jr. and Christopher Ives [Orbis Books, 1990], 48–49). Acknowledging the impermanence of all realities leads not to despair but to a new way of being in the world. Abe insisted on the existential meaning of emptiness: "True Sunyata is neither outside nor inside, neither external nor internal, neither transcendent nor immanent. Sunyata completely empties everything, including itself. That is to say, the pure activity of absolute emptying is true Sunyata" (ibid., 27). Abe asserted that emptiness is not an abstract theory to be debated but a realization to be lived: "We are Sunyata at every moment of our lives.

For true Sunyata is not Sunyata thought by us, but Sunyata lived by us" (ibid., 28). Abe preferred to translate *sunyata* not as a noun, "emptiness," but as a verb, "emptying," because "true Sunyata is not static but dynamic—it is a pure and unceasing function of self-emptying,

making self and other manifest their suchness" (ibid., 61).

If we ask what it means to live a life realizing emptiness, Abe cites the virtues of wisdom and compassion as exemplified in the bodhisattva vow to save all beings: "This is because in Sunyata the wisdom aspect and the compassion aspect are always working together through Sunyata's self-emptying" (ibid., 58). If we are empty of pride and self-centeredness, we can care for those around us, rejoice in their well-being, and persevere in the path of wisdom.

Christian Perspectives

In writing to the followers of Jesus in Philippi, the Apostle Paul cited what was probably a very early hymn that presented Christ Jesus as a model of self-emptying for all to follow: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as

something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (Phil. 2:5–7). According to the book of Genesis, the first humans grasped at equality with God, transgressed boundaries, and fell, leading to mistrust and suffering (Gen. 3:4–19). Instead of following their example, Jesus Christ offers a new example of service by emptying and humbling himself. Jesus Christ did not view his status in the form of God as something to be exploited or taken advantage of but emptied himself to serve others (Bonnie B. Thurston, "Philippians," in Bonnie B. Thurston and Judith M. Ryan, *Philippians and Philemon* [Liturgical Press, 2009], 83). Christians find in this image of Christ's self-emptying a call to reject worldly ambitions and live a life of humble service.

Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 306–73) reflected on the emptying of God in the incarnation: "By the mercy of His Father, He [Christ] lowered Himself to us" (*Hymns*, trans. Kathleen E. McVey [Paulist Press, 1989], 119). In powerful poetic hymns Ephrem playfully ponders the many paradoxes of divine emptying; the all-powerful Son of God enters the womb of Mary of Nazareth only to emerge humble and in need of care.

A wonder is Your mother: The Lord
entered her

and became a servant; . . .
The womb of your mother over-
threw the orders:
The Establisher of all entered a Rich
One;
He emerged poor. He entered her
a Lofty One;
He emerged humble. He entered her
a Radiant One,
and He put on a despised hue and
emerged.
He entered, a mighty warrior, and
put on fear
inside her womb. He entered,
Nourisher of all,
and He acquired hunger. He entered,
the One who gives drink to all,
and He acquired thirst. Stripped
and laid bare,
He emerged from [her womb], the
One who clothes all. (Ibid., 132)

The Son of God emptied himself in order to give hope and life to humans, and so Ephrem joyfully exclaims: "Glory to Him Who became earthly although heavenly by His nature!" (ibid., 188).

Guided by the model of Christ Jesus, Christian spiritual writers have explored the dynamic process of self-emptying that disciples must traverse to become more Christ-like. The sixteenth-century Carmelite mystic John of the Cross described the painful process of emptying as a dark night of the senses, followed by a dark night of the soul, during which the practitioner has to let go of all grasping after pleasures and ambitions and even of all images and concepts of God. John urged Christians to empty the contents of their memory, intellect, and will, since these finite human faculties cannot contain the infinite divine reality but only substitutes. John describes the experience of God as *nada* (nothing, in Spanish), for God is no thing.

According to John of the Cross, the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love produce emptiness in the intellect, memory, and will: "Faith causes darkness and a void of understanding in the

intellect, hope begets an emptiness of possessions in the memory, and charity produces the nakedness and emptiness of affection and joy in all that is not God" (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, bk. 2, ch. 6, in *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, rev. ed. [Institute of Carmelite Studies Publications, 1991], 166). John urges Christians "to remain in emptiness and darkness regarding all creatures. They should base their love and joy on what they neither see nor feel (nor are capable of seeing or feeling), that is, upon God who is incomprehensible and transcendent. This is why it behooves us to go to God through the negation of all" (ibid., 2:24, 244). Psychologist Gerald May explains, "With Christ as the model, John emphasizes that liberation comes neither through understanding, nor through any perception or image of God, but only through the total emptying of all these things. Only then can the 'perfect purity' of love shine through the human soul" (*The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection between Darkness and Spiritual Growth* [HarperSanFrancisco, 2005], 83).

Continued on page 41

“Found in Translation”: Transpositions of the Lotus Sutra

by Yue Eric Tojimbara

This is a report on the International Lotus Sutra Seminar held June 13–16, 2018, at Rissho Kosei-kai’s headquarters in Tokyo.

Introduction

The 2018 International Lotus Sutra Seminar (ILSS) was held June 13 to June 16 at the Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Suginami-ku, Tokyo. The theme, “Found in Translation”: Transpositions of the Lotus Sutra,” invited an esteemed international group of scholars to discuss the various ways in which the Lotus Sutra is “translated,” not only in terms of a linguistic transfer between two unlike languages but also as transposition between sociocultural contexts and across temporal and spatial boundaries. In this way participants also had occasion to discuss the Lotus Sutra’s lasting impact as it took and continues to take shape in various, sometimes surprising new configurations.

As in previous years, presenters and interlocutors were encouraged not to simply read and respond to the papers as one might be expected to do at a standard academic conference but to take the opportunity to add extra depth in an open-discussion format. As lead organizer Dr. Dominick Scarangelo emphasized, the goal of the paper sessions was to pursue the *plus alpha*: the additional complexities, layers, and possibilities suggested by all of this year’s uniformly intriguing papers. The

resulting discussions raised important questions about not only translation proper but also the difficulties and problems presented in transposing the teachings of the Lotus Sutra across contexts that sometimes differed greatly from the original historical context of the text’s compilation. At the same time, papers also considered the positive and productive potential of translation, which continues to allow the Lotus Sutra to act on and in the contemporary world.

During the latter half of the second day of proceedings, this year’s ILSS also included a visit to the Shibamata Taishakuten, which houses a *honzon* purportedly crafted by the hand of Nichiren himself, as well as stunning reliefs of scenes from the Lotus Sutra carved into the walls of the main hall. As in previous years, participants were also invited to take part in both a Dharma assembly and a subsequent *hōza* held at Rissho Kosei-kai’s Suginami Dharma Center during the third day of proceedings. Through these excursions, participants were able to interact with living Lotus traditions in their everyday manifestations, which in many ways exemplified and encapsulated the thematic focus of this year’s event.

Yue Eric Tojimbara is a PhD candidate in Buddhist Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). He received his BA (English, Philosophy, and Religious Studies) and MA (Asian Studies) from the University of Oregon. His research currently focuses on the impact of print culture on the intellectual activities of early modern Buddhist monks in Japan, with a special interest in how print became a medium of public debate between non-Buddhist and Buddhist intellectuals.

Summary of Papers (in order of presentation)

“On Teaching the Lotus Sutra: Translating the Lotus Sutra in the Classroom”

Aaron P. Proffitt, University at Albany–State University of New York (SUNY), New York, New York, USA

Dr. Proffitt’s paper kicked off this year’s ILSS by asking an essential question for scholars and educators of Buddhism: how do we responsibly address the challenges of teaching the Lotus Sutra in the modern university classroom? For many of us at this year’s seminar, Dr. Proffitt’s paper also posed an even more urgent question about pedagogy in the humanities more broadly speaking: how do we negotiate the demands of students who encounter historical texts already filtered through processes of transposition that do not always produce “accurate”

treatment of Buddhist textual sources but also the pedagogical imperative of educators in Buddhist studies (and for that matter, in the whole of humanities).

“Thought of Impartiality in the Lotus Sutra: Translation of Kumarajiva and Influence on Practitioners”

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

understandings of such works, including processes of modernization (e.g., mindfulness), commodification (e.g., the ever-growing market for “Barnes and Noble Buddhists”), and Westernization (among other issues, the colonial origins of the discipline of Buddhist studies).

Drawing from his experiences teaching an undergraduate course on the Lotus Sutra, Dr. Proffitt introduced his various approaches to these questions from the perspective of in-class pedagogy as well as to larger problems bearing upon methodological and disciplinary divides in the field, particularly between “theology,” on the one hand, and historical-critical approaches on the other. In Dr. Proffitt’s final analysis, scholars and educators should view such divides as false binaries, leaving room for charitable readings that simultaneously take seriously the work of traditional Buddhist studies methodologies, while also contextualizing and historicizing the discipline itself in a way that acknowledges its colonial legacy. At the same time, Dr. Proffitt took the convincing and important position that situating our readings of Buddhist texts within the context of the lived experiences of Buddhist practitioners, both past and present, did not fundamentally preclude historical-critical work, and that the fullest treatment of Buddhist texts comes when we take care to address both. Finally, Dr. Proffitt made the timely argument that such a comportment was not only the most suited for the fullest academic

Where Dr. Proffitt’s paper left us with the quintessentially Mahayana position of taking a middle way between the false binary of theology and historical-critical studies, Dr. Niwano’s paper seamlessly picked up by presenting a careful analysis of the role of the concept of impartiality in Kumarajiva’s translation of the Lotus Sutra, especially as it was adopted and deployed in the life and work of the modern Buddhist thinker and founder of Bussho Gonen-kai, Mugaku Nishida.

Dr. Niwano’s paper proceeded by giving an overview of impartiality through a reading of the phrase “great impartial wisdom” and a discussion of the related concept of equality as they appear in Kumarajiva’s translation of the Lotus Sutra. Dr. Niwano further argued that the importance of equality can be found in its embodiment and realization of the most basic of Mahayana virtues: compassion for all sentient beings. Mugaku Nishida’s own practice, especially his practice of memorial services for the members of Bussho Gonen-kai, therefore takes this notion of “great impartial wisdom” from Kumarajiva’s translation as the axis of great compassion and demonstrates not only the complex shifts from interlingual translation to intersemiotic translation (or more concretely in this case, from text to ritual and social practice) but also what can be gained in such shifts from the perspective of Buddhist practice. Dr. Niwano argued that Nishida could envision his practice of memorial

dedication as one not of individual salvation but of the salvation of the many—a scale that, thanks to its use of impartiality, not only included the individual but was also infinitely extendable to collective units, from the family to the nation to the cosmos comprising all sentient beings. Finally, Dr. Niwano shared with us a model example of a Rissho Kosei-kai *sōkaimyō* (the posthumous name for all the spirits of ancestors in the family) and its unique inclusion of families from both the paternal and maternal sides in one comprehensive schematic. Dr. Niwano used the *sōkaimyō* to highlight the resonances of Nishida’s practice with that of Rissho Kosei-kai’s founder, Nikkyō Niwano, as well with the wider rubric of contemporary Nichiren traditions.

“Translating the Lotus Sutra into Social Action: Hermeneutics and Public Dharmology”

Bee Scherer, INCISE research center, Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, Kent, England

Continuing the thread of discussion regarding the translation of the Lotus Sutra into differing sociohistorical and cultural contexts launched by Dr. Proffitt and Dr. Niwano’s papers, Dr. Scherer’s paper investigated the possibility of a dharmic foundation for social action or, in Dr. Scherer’s words, a “Public Dharmology.” Beginning from a discussion of the importance of hermeneutics in the study of religious traditions, Dr. Scherer’s paper sought to provide a provisional prolegomenon to a methodology of public dharmic action, which negotiates not only public but also scholarly considerations. To this degree, the paper dovetailed with the issue of the disciplinary division of labor addressed in Dr. Proffitt’s paper, particularly in its reflection on the fraught category of “theology” in the field of Buddhist studies, and in religious studies more broadly speaking.

Dr. Scherer's treatment of hermeneutics emphasized that a given text encounters a reader or translator with various layers of negotiation, ranging from the text in itself (as an always historically contingent object of inquiry) to the linguistic dimensions of a text to the wide and ever-expanding horizons of understanding that ground the reading of a text. Such an understanding of the hermeneutic enterprise therefore lends itself to the necessary critical position that reading and translation constitute contingent interpretive exercises that demand that all layers of a text be treated seriously in our attempts to decode and make sense of them. Dr. Scherer argued, however, that rather than placing restrictions on readings, this process of hermeneutic negotiation creates openings wherein texts can be treated in the very moment of their transposition. For the context of this paper, Dr. Scherer argued that in the case of Buddhist texts, where translation also requires that we be attentive to the transference of ideal modes of practice between differing contexts, there also arises a need to continually recontextualize these ideal configurations. It is to this degree then that "theology," so often dismissed as a space for articulating the vicissitudes of the "religious experience" of practitioners, actually helps to open up a space for putting Buddhism to work in the contemporary social world.

As Dr. Scherer showed, this type of theological or dharmological hermeneutics can provide a space for inclusivity in contemporary Buddhist communities that still follow the teachings of texts that sometimes appear to exclude a variety of groups. This can take the form of using methodologies from queer studies, critical race theory, gender studies, liberation theology, disability studies, and so on, in conjunction with traditional philological analysis. For example, as Dr. Scherer noted, many Buddhist scriptures, including the third chapter of

the Lotus Sutra, seem to suggest a karmic determinism that implies that differently-abled bodies are the result of karmic punishment. However, by reading from the vantage point of a "dharmology of crip liberation," while also comparing various recensions of such textual moments, Dr. Scherer found instead that such bodily afflictions were simply poetically overextended metaphors of spiritual affliction that passed no judgment about actual bodies, at least in the language they used. To this end, the onus for inclusion lies not with the text but with its interpreters.

"Translating the Iconography of Skanda in East Asian Buddhism"

Sujung Kim, DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana, USA

Dr. Kim's paper shifted the focus of discussions from modes of intersemiotic translation to intermedial translation through her case study of Skanda iconography across traditions of East Asian Buddhist art. Examining the shifting modes of Skanda's iconographic and textual representation in Indic, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean Buddhist art and literature, Dr. Kim not only provided a riveting historical account of how one Buddhist deity came to occupy a range of significations through various meaning-making practices but also took the opportunity to reconsider the enterprise of translation in Buddhist studies, particularly its fundamentally textual biases.

In contrast to a commonsense view of translation, Dr. Kim argued that the translational enterprise, especially of iconographic translation, not only provided a means by which universalized traditions became localized but also served as a vector through which multiple negotiations (indigenous and "foreign," Buddha/bodhisattva and *deva*, tradition and innovation) took place. To these ends, while Skanda iconography played a critical role in fulfilling

the demands of localized cults of worship as a Pan-Asian deity emblematic of a specific kind of (Mahayana) cultural order, this very same nexus of significations also provided opportunities for the generation of new and constantly transforming meaning in ever-shifting cultural and religious landscapes. Dr. Kim's contention that Skanda iconography reflected this productive tension between the universal and the particular also played well with the broader discussion as a whole. Dr. Kim's emphasis on the constantly shifting and constantly negotiated stakes of this productive tension was particularly resonant with the previous three papers, especially in their attention to the shifts and turns that cultural transposition demands of us, as well as to the need to be constantly attentive to the processes of negotiation that inform them.

"The Lotus Sūtra in Inner Asia"

Kaie Mochizuki, Minobusan University, Minobu, Yamanashi, Japan

The final paper session for the first day of proceedings featured that of Dr. Mochizuki, whose presentation focused on a persistent blind spot in the contemporary study of the Lotus Sutra, namely, its textual legacy in Inner Asia. When imagining the translation of the Lotus Sutra (or any canonical scripture for that matter) into Chinese, it is very easy to imagine a clean transference of meaning from an original Sanskrit manuscript, but as Dr. Mochizuki stressed, this vastly oversimplifies the process by which Buddhist texts and tradition were actually transmitted. Stressing the need to move beyond a presumption of the supremacy of Indo-Iranian languages, Dr. Mochizuki directed our attention toward a rich sampling of textual examples produced in Ural-Altaic and other languages that represent the transmission of the Lotus Sutra through Inner Asia, including various

implementation, as well as what exactly that meant for cultures in which the vast majority of people were only semiliterate, if not completely incapable of reading, became a point of consideration. Dr. Mochizuki's observations about the gap between systems of writing and practices of reading in many ways set the tone for these later discussions.

“Ritually Embodying the Lotus Sutra: An Interpretation of the Japanese Kurodani Lineage Consecrated Ordination (*kai kanjō*, 戒灌頂)”

Paul Groner, Professor Emeritus, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, USA

The second day of proceedings began with Dr. Groner's paper. In his presentation, Dr. Groner walked us through his thick description of a ritual manual of the Kurodani lineage, the *Kaikan denju shidai*, 戒灌伝授次第, which leaves us with one of the clearest and most systematic outlines to the Consecrated Ordination, or *kai kanjō*, in the Tendai tradition. As in much of his scholarship, Dr. Groner's focus was on letting the text speak for itself, thus giving as much credence as possible to the intentions of those who compiled it and shedding light on the religious and historical contexts that animated them.

One of Dr. Groner's main contentions was that the almost automatic presupposition that anything in any way related to the *abhiṣeka* (consecration) necessarily equates to Esotericism overextends the scope of Esoteric Buddhism and therefore carries the risk of veiling the significance, meaning, and possibilities of texts and the language they actually deploy. In this case, Dr. Groner showed that when one proceeds from the text's own descriptions of the ritual, the *Kaikan denju shidai* was almost certainly based on the Lotus Sutra, citing and referencing it in order to structure the ritual space

and protocol it describes. Similarly, it clearly takes the Lotus Sutra, rather than the Brahma's Net Sutra, as the primary source of the Perfect-Sudden precepts. Coupled with its lack of reference to the three mysteries or any Esoteric deities, these observations indicate that for the Kurodani lineage, the Consecrated Ordination was neither primarily nor exclusively an Esoteric initiation. On the other hand, the manual's description of a *gasshō* in which student and teacher intertwine their hands, as well as the standard call for keeping the protocols a secret, certainly reflects a distinctly Esoteric flavor. Nevertheless, Dr. Groner cautioned that the same standards appear not just in manuals for Esoteric practice but also in *hongaku* (original enlightenment) thought, pointing toward the vague lines separating the two traditions. With these observations in mind, Dr. Groner resituated his discussion within the positionality of the Kurodani lineage's own contentions and suggested that this manual perhaps constituted a part of the refutation that the Kurodani lineage had stolen or, more generously, repurposed the Consecrated Ordination.

Dr. Groner's paper also set the tone for later discussions by introducing a series of issues that were revisited again in later paper sessions. First, his paper instructively pointed toward a perennial question in Buddhist studies, namely, how and in what ways did Buddhist practitioners conceive of their own sectarian practices and affiliations, and in what ways do modern scholars of Buddhism overextend their own understandings of such practices and affiliations? This question would be an important issue in Dr. Dominick Scarangelo's and Dr. Takahiko Kameyama's papers as well. Second, his paper paved the way for discussions regarding the embodiment of the Lotus Sutra (ritual and otherwise) that would be key points of analysis in both Dr. Kameyama's and Dr. Pamela Winfield's papers.

Tibetan sources, Mongolian and Tangut translations, fragments in Uyghur, and a Khotanese commentary.

Dr. Mochizuki's paper also provided inroads into an issue of critical importance, not only for specialists of East Asian Buddhism but for specialists in East Asian literature and history as well. That is, he stressed that the use of Chinese characters and Sinitic script does not always represent writing in the Chinese language and that we must therefore understand the ways in which Chinese characters function as a kind of interlinguistic system of signs that frequently represent languages other than Chinese on the written page. As Dr. Mochizuki mentioned, for example, the script of the Tangut translation is Chinese, but the language represented is that of Tangut, and therefore of a non-Sinitic Tibeto-Burman language. While this is, of course, familiar territory for premodernists focusing on Japan, Dr. Mochizuki's insights in the case of Lotus Sutra translation were highly illuminating. Additionally, through closely reading citations and other intertextual hints, Dr. Mochizuki showed that Chinese recensions and commentaries were read in Inner Asia and therefore represented a situation of mutual illumination rather than a simple Eastward transmission.

In later discussions on ritual, such as those instigated by Dr. Paul Groner's paper, the question of the gap between reading texts and their actual

“Memes, Foreign Dissemination, and Retroactivity: Translation in Rissho Kosei-kai”

Dominick Scarangelo, International Advisor, Rissho Kosei-kai, Tokyo, Japan

Dr. Scarangelo’s presentation closed the second day of paper sessions and focused on the critical role that translation played in the formation of Rissho Kosei-kai doctrine and in the thought of its founder Nikkyō Niwano, as well as the methodological and hermeneutic considerations required of translators of Niwano’s works and those working on the currently ongoing update of the Rissho Kosei-kai (RK) translation of the Lotus Sutra. The key contention of Dr. Scarangelo’s paper and presentation was that translation frequently necessitates that the translator act on and change the “original” text. In the case of RK translation projects, especially those of the Lotus Sutra and Niwano’s commentaries on it, the process of translation cannot simply entail a transference of meaning between a static “original” and the target language (in this case English) but must also contend with the ways in which the “original” has already been filtered through the intercessions of Niwano’s own exegetical and translational aspirations.

The Lotus Sutra that the team of RK translators encounters is therefore already a “different” Lotus Sutra, one that comes prenegotiated by way of Niwano’s readings. Dr. Scarangelo’s paper therefore showed how these factors could be actively engaged in the work of translation and proceeded by first giving a close reading and historical treatment of Niwano’s exegesis of the Lotus Sutra. Dr. Scarangelo’s observations focused on how Niwano’s interpretations, which would become key aspects of RK doctrine, centered on the translation of Buddhist doctrine into intelligible Japanese, which over time took the form of idiomatic expressions and

maxims: “memes” intended to serve as focal points on which practitioners could center their actualization of Lotus Sutra teachings in daily life. As Dr. Scarangelo also noted, the exegetical work involved in formulating these maxims was informed not only by Niwano’s own brand of autodidactic interpretations of Nichiren thought, as is often explained, but also by the work of Zhiyi and Tiantai thought. To this degree, the paper dovetailed nicely with Dr. Groner’s observations concerning the fluidity of so-called sectarian practice.

Finally, Dr. Scarangelo described how these considerations of Niwano’s translational and exegetical work could, with a healthy dose of caution, be factored into the translation of RK’s Lotus-centered teachings. Specifically, Dr. Scarangelo suggested that in the context of “foreign dissemination,” the translator encounters the problem of “good” and “bad,” or perhaps “faithful,” translation, insofar as form and content need to be recontextualized in order to become fully intelligible in the target language. This is doubly the case in the context of maxims, which deliver highly contextual meanings that do not always translate. Dr. Scarangelo argued that in such cases, translation involves an aspect of “retroactivity,” or in other words, the need to account for and reflect how the “original” text has changed. In the case of RK translation, this process of retroactivity presents the dual demand to be faithful not only to the original text but to Niwano’s maxims, which have already acted on and changed it. If Niwano’s own work was based on circumventing the arduous textual and doctrinal exegesis of Buddhist scripture so as to be rendered intelligible to practitioners, the work of translating such teachings into English today should reflect the same aspirations. Dr. Scarangelo ended his presentation by leaving open the question of whether such translational considerations were ultimately faithful, and instead paved

the way for further discussion by reiterating the importance of being attentive to the ways—whether for better or worse—that translation shifts rather than fixes the position of the original.

“Stupas and Buddhas: Dōgen’s Rhetorical and Material Translations of the Lotus Sūtra”

Pamela Winfield, Elon University, Elon, North Carolina, USA

The third and final day of paper sessions began with Dr. Winfield’s presentation, which focused on the many ways that the Lotus Sutra is embodied and materialized in Dōgen’s writings in the *Shōbōgenzō* that coincide with the building and construction of Eihei-ji in 1244. By paying close attention to moments of citation and intertextual reference to the Lotus Sutra in such writings, Dr. Winfield provided a vivid picture of the ways in which Dōgen’s deployment of the text in both his rhetorical repertoire and his concrete activities as the founder of Eihei-ji display his use of the Lotus Sutra in both of his roles as a celebrated exegete as well as a savvy builder of institutions. In this way, Dr. Winfield showed how the Lotus Sutra itself becomes materialized in Dōgen’s work and, at the same time, how the Lotus Sutra provided a basis for Dōgen’s own rhetoric of materiality, especially in the context of building up the sangha at Eihei-ji.

Dr. Winfield’s analysis proceeded by focusing on three fascicles of the *Shōbōgenzō* that were composed and delivered to audiences across a two-day span from the fourteenth to the fifteenth days of the second month in 1244, just before the building campaign to construct Eihei-ji that spring began in earnest. In the first of the three fascicles, Dōgen uses the Lotus Sutra as a basis for his discussion of “building stupas and making Buddhas” and also integrates Sinitic theories of the “five

phases” as a means of describing the integrity of the natural resources needed to build his temple to an audience of lay patrons. In the next fascicle, the Lotus Sutra is deployed as a means of calling the audience of monks to “attain a Buddha’s body.” Dr. Winfield showed how Dōgen also gestures toward the five aggregates and four elements in order to describe the human resources required to constitute a sangha at Eihei-ji that embodies the Buddha Dharma. Finally, in the last of the three fascicles discussed, Dr. Winfield showed how the types of somatic metaphors for the Three Jewels that appear in the first two fascicles (the bones of buddhas, the sutras as embodiments of the Dharma, and the physical localities and activities of the sangha) are revisited in a comprehensive and summative manner, providing the rhetorical foundation for Dōgen’s building campaign. In these ways, Dr. Winfield also showed how Dōgen’s use of the Lotus Sutra and its material metaphors reflects a quintessentially Zen conviction, recast in the context of temple construction (or of “building stupas and making Buddhas”) in medieval Japan, namely, that the whole of the monastic structure, including—or perhaps especially—the embodied practices of monks, could relay the message of the Dharma just as effectively as the sutras. Dr. Winfield’s analysis of such modes

of embodiment continued the ongoing conversation about the various material manifestations of the Lotus Sutra. Her talk was also quite nicely foreshadowed by the previous day’s visit to the Shibamata Taishakuten, which literally materializes the Lotus Sutra in its temple architecture.

“Shingon Esotericism in the ‘Identity of the Purport of the Perfect and Esoteric Teachings’ (*enmitsu icchi*): Annen’s Exegesis of ‘Attaining Buddhahood within This Very Body’ (*sokushin jōbutsu*)”

Takahiko Kameyama, Ryukoku University, Kyoto, Japan

Dr. Kameyama’s paper focused on the “identity of the purport of the Perfect and Esoteric teachings,” or *enmitsu icchi*, as it was reflected in Annen’s exegetical treatise on *sokushin jōbutsu* (enlightenment in this very body), with special attention toward the ways in which Kūkai’s Shingon-based Esoteric teachings (*tōmitsu*) are mixed with the Perfect teachings, or *engyō* (namely, the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and the Tiantai/Tendai teachings based primarily upon it). Dr. Kameyama showed that in presenting a set of doctrines in which Esoteric and Perfect teachings were interpenetrated,

Annen provided one of the crucial pillars for *enmitsu icchi* thought, itself a key to understanding the complex Tendai system of the Heian era wherein Tendai Esotericism (*taimitsu*) and the Perfect teachings were dynamically imbricated. On a more concrete level, Dr. Kameyama argued that the ideological connection between Shingon Esoteric thought and Tendai teachings in Annen’s work lies in his deployment of Kūkai’s interpretation of Esoteric *yoga* (literally, “interpenetration”) as a means of clarifying the Tendai notion of the “six levels of identity,” which Annen recasts as the “six levels of interpenetration.”

As with Dr. Groner and Dr. Scarangelo’s papers, Dr. Kameyama’s paper also raised the important question of how the hard boundaries of sectarian division that modern-day scholars often assume were much more fluid than they might appear. As Dr. Kameyama took great care in clarifying, while *enmitsu icchi* is often understood as a key factor that set Tendai Esotericism apart from that of Shingon in the religious landscape of Heian Japan, Annen, one of the great exegetes and systematizers of *enmitsu icchi*, drew liberally from Kūkai throughout his treatise and especially in the formulation of his “six levels of interpenetration.” Perhaps, by extension, it might be possible to say that such fluidity also marks one of the critical aspects of the Lotus Sutra’s persistent and enduring appeal, that is, the Lotus Sutra’s wide-ranging and multivalent formulations of Mahayana doctrine, and at the same time, the ways in which the authority that such formulations have bestowed upon the Lotus can be deployed to legitimate new and burgeoning models of Buddhist thought. Dr. Kameyama’s paper showed how this fluidity was a key aspect in the formation of a comprehensive Tendai system that would in time come to dominate the ideological and religious landscape of Japan. In many ways, then, Annen stood at the precipice of a coming sea

change that would leave the unmistakable mark of Tendai's influence on the face of Medieval Japanese Buddhism.

“Translating the Buddhist Canon in the 21st Century: Experiences from the Perspective of Editing and Managing Large Translation Projects”

A. Charles Muller, Center for Evolving Humanities, University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan

The final paper of the last day of proceedings was that of Dr. Muller, who discussed his involvement as an editor in large-scale translation projects, such as those of the Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai (BDK). Dr. Muller's discussion touched on important issues in the profession of Buddhist studies scholarship; the work of translation; and at the level of graduate training, shedding light on persistent problems that remain in the translation of Buddhist canonical texts. These included graduate training geared more toward producing quality peer-reviewed articles than mastering translation; the difficulty of finding appropriate translators among the pool of available scholars, who are either senior academics unable to fully commit to translation owing to their many responsibilities or junior scholars for whom translations do not count toward tenure; the reliance on modern meanings of Chinese words and characters; the breaking up of compound words into two; and so on.

Dr. Muller not only highlighted these problems through examples from his own service as an editor and manager of large-scale translation projects but also provided critical suggestions for improving the overall quality of translations. For example, Dr. Muller highlighted the use of digital resources as a potential corrective, including his Digital Dictionary of Buddhism (DDB) and the CJKV-English Dictionary of

Confucian, Daoist, and Intellectual Historical Terms (CJKV-E), as well as the recently developed DDB Access tool, emphasizing their efficiency and accessibility while cautioning nevertheless that these very same boons could also lead to uncritical application of such resources. One key aspect in his discussion of these resources was their ongoing expansion, in which scholars can submit alternative meanings to terms or even suggest improvements. As more scholars contribute, the available pool of resources increases in quality, a fact that Dr. Muller noted mirrors the very act of producing translations: as more translations appear, new possibilities for rendering difficult passages into readable and accurate English emerge, giving hints to new translators to draw from as they proceed in their work. In this sense, the BDK and other projects like it provide “first drafts” for scholars undertaking the difficult work of translating canonical Buddhist texts. Dr. Muller's paper drew the proceedings to a close by asking participants to critically evaluate their own responsibilities when faced with the arduous task of reading, interpreting, and making accessible texts like the Lotus Sutra, and provided a perfect means of capping the four days of rich, dynamic, and productive discussion.

Concluding Remarks

As highlighted throughout this report, while this year's papers approached the question of the Lotus Sutra's translation from a variety of methodologies and thematic concerns, paper sessions included animated and involved conversation about issues that bridged across all of the paper sessions. Broadly categorized and resummarized, these included (1) the division of labor between theological and critical historical approaches to Buddhist scripture (and by extension, between theory and practice); (2) the negotiation of

sociocultural difference and spatio-temporal distance in the act of translation; (3) the material and embodied aspects of translation (including the ritual, visual, and architectural registers, the latter of which was also reflected in our viewing of the Lotus Sutra reliefs at the Shibamata Taishakuten); (4) the role of translation in negotiating the place of the Lotus Sutra in everyday life (something participants were able to experience firsthand during the visit to the Suginami Dharma Center and the tour of Rissho Kosai-kai headquarters); (5) the distance between idealized textual configurations (including the issue of linguistic determinism) and historical and lived experience; (6) the fluidity of Lotus-centered teachings and their sectarian affiliations; and (7) the capacity of translation to both obscure and open up the possibilities that inhere in Buddhist texts.

Beyond this list of shared concerns, this year's ILSS reflected an even more fundamental concern, namely, that the translation of the Lotus Sutra is emblematic of the variety of challenges as well as possibilities that fall to the responsibility of academics and practitioners alike in their work of studying, teaching, and in some cases, living the Lotus Sutra. The many rich discussions that this year's theme gave occasion for wonderfully encapsulated the mission of the ILSS as it was imagined by its founder, Dr. Gene Reeves, which is continued today by Dr. Dominick Scarangelo: the conviction that a productive space of engagement can exist for scholars and practitioners to come together in their mutual appreciation of the Lotus Sutra. If the reader would permit of the author a moment of loftiness here, it is perhaps possible to say that in bringing together such groups, so often regarded as clashing fundamentally in their concerns, this year's ILSS was in itself another moment in the long history of the Lotus Sutra's translation. □

Business and Religion: A Historical Look at John Wanamaker and the American Department Store

by Nicole C. Kirk

Business owners are . . . using their companies to express their values. In recent years, new corporations have emerged that seek to balance profit and purpose. These businesses claim to reduce the price of common goods and to provide a positive benefit to society, the environment, and their employees.

In 1877 John Wanamaker, a successful merchant of clothing for men and boys, opened a department store in an old freight-train terminal on the edge of the American city of Philadelphia. The new store was an experiment. Wanamaker wanted to expand his merchandise offerings to include ladies' wear, girls' clothing, and small household goods. To fill the immense floor space of the glass-roofed train shed, Wanamaker's staff installed 129 display counters in a large radiating circle, crisscrossed by four long aisles. More counters stood in neat rows outside the circle. Each counter was meticulously organized and displayed the goods attractively. As one of the first department stores in the United States, Wanamaker's changed the way people shopped and spent their free time. However, Wanamaker's store was more than a business enterprise. An active Protestant Christian, Wanamaker looked for ways that the store could support his religious commitments, and he brought those commitments into the life of his store. By examining his efforts, we can see both the possibilities and the potential pitfalls of expressing religious commitment through business.

The Birth of Department Stores

The forerunner of American department stores emerged in Paris at the beginning of the nineteenth century when entrepreneurs covered side streets and shop-lined alleys with glass roofs—called *passages* in French or *arcades* in English. Shoppers could view a variety of goods in a well-lit environment while sheltered from the weather and carriage traffic. By the 1830s and 1840s, French shops, which had been specialty stores, began to expand the types of merchandise they offered. As they shifted toward customer-friendly practices, some shops allowed merchandise to be returned for a cash refund, and many moved away from haggling over the price of goods to a uniform pricing system. World exhibitions, which introduced new architecture, technology, and methods of display and organization, also influenced the birth of the department store.

Although there had been industrial fairs and expositions prior to 1851, London's Great Exhibition introduced a new framework for such events by constructing a building designed specifically for the fair, keeping its doors open

for six months, and drawing millions of visitors. In addition to its economic purpose, the exhibition made an ideological claim about the cultural superiority of the host country over other cultures. However, the displays also introduced visitors to new cultures, art forms, and technology sent by participating countries.

London's exhibition, which covered twenty-three acres of Hyde Park, featured an architecturally magnificent iron structure covered in glass that was tall enough to encase several large elm trees: the Crystal Palace. It brought together the emerging architecture technology with new techniques for organizing and displaying goods. Other major cities sought to replicate London's success. Great exhibitions followed in major cities worldwide, with four held in Paris alone. The exhibitions encouraged window shopping—that is, looking at merchandise without intending to purchase anything—a practice generally discouraged in retail businesses at the time.

Embracing these breakthroughs in

Nicole C. Kirk is an Associate Professor of Religious History and the Frank and Alice Schulman Chair of Unitarian Universalist History at Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago, Illinois. Dr. Kirk visited Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters and its seminary in the summer of 2018. Her book Wanamaker's Temple: The Business of Religion in an Iconic Department Store was published in October 2018 by New York University Press.

display, retail practices, and architecture, Parisians Aristide and Marguerite Boucicaut laid the cornerstone for a new building in 1869 to house their store, Le Bon Marché (meaning both “the good deal” and “the fair market”). By 1873 they hired engineer Gustave Eiffel, long before he designed the famous Eiffel Tower for the 1889 Paris Exposition, to create an iron-and-glass dome and to install another new technology, plate glass windows, in their store. Other Parisian department stores followed Le Bon Marché and constructed architecturally interesting stores to house spectacular displays of goods. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the department store had spread to urban centers throughout Europe and the United States, and by the mid-twentieth century it reached Japan with the opening of Mitsukoshi, Takashimaya, and Daimaru.

Reforming Society through Capitalism

When John Wanamaker launched his department store in 1877, he wanted to change the way Americans shopped and retailers sold goods. Wanamaker was a part of a new wave of business leaders who hoped to transform the poor reputation of American merchants. He also worked to change the way American retail functioned.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the popular press frequently depicted shopkeepers as greedy tricksters who made their money by cheating customers.

These criticisms had merit: many retailers showed higher-quality samples to customers but then, in a bait-and-switch move, delivered subpar goods, and merchandise came without a money-back guarantee. The price customers paid depended on their ability to haggle and their relationship with the store clerk. Browsing was discouraged—shoppers were expected to make a purchase if they entered a store. Retail employees suffered from poor working conditions, including bad ventilation, dim lighting, and long hours. Stores frequently employed children as young as twelve years old to carry money to a central cashier desk for customers, to dust displays, and to restock shelves.

Wanamaker began his efforts to transform retailing with his men's and boys' store as early as 1861. He launched a one-price system, eliminating the need for customers to haggle with sales clerks. All customers paid the same price for the same item. Later, Wanamaker's labeled goods with price tags and began offering a limited money-back guarantee for a full cash refund. Advertisements explained, “One Price and Return of Goods!” Soon the store's guarantee expanded to four points—one price, cash payment, full guarantee, money refunded—thereby promoting a dedication to service, good value, and quality merchandise.

Wanamaker fashioned his stores as regional enterprises and special destinations, drawing customers from across the eastern United States with promises of more than shopping. He wanted to educate the public through his curated

music programs, history displays, and art galleries. Wanamaker believed beautiful art and music had the power to influence people to live moral lives and to raise religious emotions. His store advertisements offered shopping advice, homespun wisdom, in addition to marketing goods and educating consumers. This expansive understanding of the role of retail extended beyond consumers to the employees who worked at Wanamaker's department store.

As his business grew, Wanamaker hired tens of thousands of employees. As he enlarged his stores and constructed new buildings, he paid attention to air quality and other environmental factors to improve the store atmosphere for employees and customers alike. He started a store school to educate his youngest employees, and soon expanded the program. Wanamaker brought the principles of nineteenth-century moral reform movements to his employees through programs emphasizing physical fitness, hygiene, and education. He also provided health care, advanced training in business, music programs, and even a summer camp on the New Jersey shore. The benefit was twofold. Employees learned valuable skills, and Wanamaker ensured an ongoing supply of loyal and well-trained employees. While his employee programs were popular, some criticized them for being paternalistic and self-serving. Wanamaker also held different standards of education for his African American employees—all employees did not have the same access to resources, benefits, and promotions.

Were Wanamaker's religious activities and his store's holiday promotions merely a ploy to increase sales? Was his incorporation of Christian themes into the material world of his store self-serving and a corruption of his spiritual message? Certainly, some historians have made these accusations. Or were his efforts part of a larger endeavor to breathe new life into an evangelical Protestant message to meet the challenges of the time?

Wanamaker's Legacy

All of these efforts were tied to the values that emerged from Wanamaker's commitment to Protestant Christianity. Wanamaker desired to make his business reflect his religious devotion. He did this by applying the Golden Rule of the New Testament—the idea that you treat others as you want to be treated—to his business. He called it the “businessman's gospel” and also described it as “scientific business practices with ethics.” As a dedicated Christian and founder of a Presbyterian Sunday school and church, Wanamaker sought to use his business to improve the lives of his shoppers and workers, as well as the conditions of Philadelphia. Like many business leaders in the nineteenth century, Wanamaker worried about the negative impact that migration, immigration, poverty, crime, and industrialization was having on people who lived in cities. From his earliest years, Wanamaker had joined movements that worked to reform society, including the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Sunday School movement, the Temperance movement, and the City Beautiful movement. As Wanamaker's wealth grew, he acquired luxurious homes and collected art from around the world, but he also used his riches to develop employee education and recreation programs and to support his church and dozens of other American philanthropic and moral reform programs.

In December 1911 John Wanamaker dedicated a new store building in Philadelphia. It covered an entire city block and boasted its own subway-station entrance. Wanamaker's store became one of the largest department stores in the country, employing thousands of workers in Philadelphia and New York City, where Wanamaker had purchased another department store. Wanamaker's massive stores, his active mail-order business, and his enormous buying and production power put him in the same league as the other American merchant princes: A. T. Stewart, Marshall Field, Edward Filene, Aaron Montgomery Ward, and Julius Rosenwald. Wanamaker helped to create modern American retail and the conventions of global retail. His example helps us understand the complex relationship between religious values, business, and efforts for social improvement.

John Wanamaker and his contemporaries were not the last business leaders who wanted to make an impact on their employees and the world. For example, the founder of the airline JetBlue Airways, David Neeleman, based his customer service philosophy in lessons he learned as a Mormon missionary. Some business leaders expressed their values through philanthropy, as in the case of Andrew Carnegie, who built public libraries across the United States; John D. Rockefeller, who expressed a commitment to education and health; and

more recently, Microsoft founder Bill Gates and his spouse, Melinda, who have funded global health initiatives to vanquish malaria, prevent disease, educate the poor, and provide emergency relief.

Business owners are, like John Wanamaker, using their companies to express their values. In recent years, new corporations have emerged that seek to balance profit and purpose. These businesses claim to reduce the price of common goods and to provide a positive benefit to society, the environment, and their employees. For instance, when I purchase a pair of affordable prescription eyeglasses from the company Warby Parker, they donate another pair of glasses to someone who does not otherwise have access to vision correction. Other businesses focus on the environment. For example, the shoe company Rothy's sells comfortable women's and children's shoes made of recycled plastic. These companies are becoming more popular as they try to remain profitable while promoting moral and religious values, and positively impact the world.

But blending religious or moral values and business can be paternalistic, overly self-interested, and too controlling, as in the case of the American chain Hobby Lobby, whose owner's religious beliefs have restricted employees' access to birth control through the company's health insurance plan, resulting in a legal battle. While many tout the benefits of corporate philanthropy, there are risks when leaders with extraordinary economic power impose their vision of “the good” on the world. To whom are these businesses accountable? Good intentions do not guarantee good outcomes. And philanthropic efforts can distract attention from damaging business practices that hurt the environment or treat employees unfairly. What are the best practices? What kind of protections are needed to limit corporate power while allowing business owners to express their values and work to make a better world? □

Diversity Is Always Part of Reality

An Interview with Rev. Fadi Daou and Dr. Nayla Tabbara of the Adyan Foundation

The Niwano Peace Foundation awarded the thirty-fifth Niwano Peace Prize on May 9, 2018, to the Adyan Foundation of Lebanon in recognition of its continued service to global peace building, especially its programs for children and educators offering guidance for peace and reconciliation. Dr. Hiroshi M. Niwano, chair of the Niwano Peace Foundation, interviewed Rev. Fadi Daou, the chair and CEO of the Adyan Foundation, and Dr. Nayla Tabbara, vice-chair of the foundation, after the award ceremony at the International House of Japan in Tokyo.

Niwano: I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the fact that although you started with only five core members just over a decade ago, you have accomplished much. However, when you began your project in 2006, wasn't Lebanon caught up in a conflict?

Daou: Yes, it was during the time that Israel was bombing Lebanon. Lebanon's civil war had ended in 1990, but there was still tension. For example, in 2008 too, we had new tensions between Hezbollah and other communities. We can't say we are in a conflict, but it is a very fragile situation.

Niwano: Believing that education is most important for conflict resolution and peace building, Adyan implements programs for youth, educators, and believers. We are interested in your emphasis on education.

Tabbara: When we started Adyan, we wanted to work in schools. In Lebanon, most young people in school don't meet

people from other religions. Then they go to work or to university afraid of others. We decided from the beginning that we wanted to work in schools so that students could meet students of different religions from different schools and different regions and discover the heritage of Lebanon together.

We started by training volunteers who went to schools and helped us start pilot projects. The second year, the Lebanese National Commission for UNESCO partnered with us for one year. Then we received funding, which we still receive now.

Now we have forty schools, and about a thousand students per year go through our program for active citizenship and coexistence. Many students from this project go on to become part of the Adyan youth network and continue to spread this message in their universities.

In parallel, we started a long-term project with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to reform the educational curriculum and to include

within it education on citizenship and diversity. We focus mainly on "civic education," and "philosophy and civilizations." Now we are working on history lessons to propose later to the ministry a new methodology for teaching history. We activated community service by encouraging schools from different religions to do community service together.

Niwano: There are various kinds of education, and some foster intolerance and even hatred against other people, nations, or religions. Considering the plasticity of youth, their ability to change according to educators' intentions, education plays a key role.

Tabbara: When we started the project with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, we first checked all our materials to see what is in them concerning accepting others. Based on the results, we started our program.

Simultaneously, we thought that we also had to work on religious education—not with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, but with religious authorities who are in charge of religious education in public schools in Lebanon. We created a network of religious leaders and experts responsible for religious education, and we tried to see how we could integrate the values of accepting diversity and reconciliation within religious education. We created sample classes for youth from ages seven to eighteen about these values, one for

Christian religious education and one for Muslim religious education, to help the religious discourse and also to help religious leaders and educators who want to include these values in their discourse and teaching.

Daou: I would like to add that education is power. Education is used by powerful people to shape youth and to uphold them. So we don't always succeed in achieving what we want. For example, Nayla spoke about two curricula on which we are working with the Ministry of Education as being under reform. We have also developed other new curricula for civic education and philosophy. To become official, they need to be endorsed by the council of ministers, but not all the ministers approve the curricula. That's why it's very difficult, because we always need to negotiate with both political and religious authorities, and we don't always succeed.

So we sometimes think it would be easier if we opened our own school, where we could teach the programs we want. But even though it's more difficult, we feel that it's better to work with other schools within the national program rather than work on our own.

Niwano: Would you please tell us about the textbooks created in your

National Strategy for Citizenship and Coexistence Education (NSCCE) project? Additionally, could you give an example of your engagement to show what kind of education is given from the field?

Daou: The project called NSCCE is what Nayla discussed; it is in partnership with the Ministry of Education. As she shared, we developed two curricula: civic education, and philosophy and civilization. We are now in negotiations with politicians to have them approved.

Another achievement that was officially endorsed is a community service program. The Minister of Education signed a decree that asks every student at high school to do sixty hours of community service in society. We helped the Ministry of Education to implement this program. We trained nine hundred teachers all over the country to help them to facilitate the community service work of the students. Last year, we had 1,108 community-service projects done by students. Around twenty-five thousand students were performing community service.

It was a beautiful project, so we gathered the students and gave them awards in a national festival to encourage students from different backgrounds to work together.

Niwano: Could you elaborate on the objective of teacher training?

Daou: The objectives were mainly three. First, to transform education from memorizing to active learning, especially about citizenship. Instead of us putting the students in the classroom and teaching them how they can be citizens, they come out onto the street to experience by themselves the challenges and responsibility of being citizens.

The second objective is to foster the idea of the public interest and the common good. The teachers get the students to understand that their own

good is related to the good of others. For example, they do social work projects by helping with social and ecological initiatives.

And third, we want to help teachers meet other teachers from different regions because, unfortunately, sometimes we live in segregated and closed communities. Therefore, they become able to collaborate together and to learn from one another.

I will give an example of one exercise we do with teachers. We put calendars of the twelve months of the year on a wall. We ask every teacher to write on an adhesive note a date that he or she remembers as a painful one, and then to stick that note on the calendar. They discovered that they have painful memories that are not shared among one another. For example, a teacher from southern Lebanon will remember the war with Israel. Somebody from the north of Lebanon will remember the war with Syria. The idea is to help them to be compassionate, to understand the suffering and the pain of others. When they listen to one another, they become able to work and collaborate together.

Niwano: I think that the results of training teachers will bear fruit among children and students. What kind of fruit do you expect?

Tabbara: Sometimes if we are buying something from a shop, the young person working in the shop looks at us and says, "You are from Adyan? I was an Adyan student."

I think what happens with this program is that it gives students a practical way of working and living together. An example from community service is that those students learn that they can change something. Some students saw that Syrian refugees in their village were waiting in the rain for the bus to go to work—because some jobs are allowed to Syrians in Lebanon. And because there was no bus station, the students made

Daou: There are both intellectual and practical reasons. The intellectual reason is that we cannot abolish diversity. Diversity is always part of reality. Starting from the smallest circle in a family, for example, if parents don't recognize that all children have their distinct personalities, they'll have a problem. If we don't see that the beauty of nature is because of the diversity that it offers—and between human beings, if we think that all people have to think the same way or have to believe the same way—it is impossible. That leads to conflict and war. Some ideologists try to do it—Nazis, Communists, Extremists. The history of human beings has proved that we cannot abolish diversity. Diversity is a fact. Trying to deny or abolish diversity is counterproductive and leads to conflict.

I will give an example. In Iraq under Saddam Hussein before 2003, they had a totalitarian dictatorship saying that all Iraqis are the same. It was imposed by force. In reality, the Iraqi society is quite diverse in religions, in cultures, in language. Once the totalitarian regime was toppled, diversity emerged. Because people hadn't learned to live with diversity, it led to conflict between groups.

Again, we consider that diversity cannot be denied. So we need to develop the capacity to deal with diversity, because if we don't have that capacity, it leads to conflict and war. If we can manage diversity, it leads to creative development and to better societies. That's the key: the most important point is the capacity to manage diversity.

Niwano: Of course, it is true that everyone is different. When you say that diversity is richness, however, surely you also mean that there has to be a change, I feel, toward accepting the totality of others. So how can you nurture such a capacity? There must be a secret.

Daou: Yes, maybe the secret is to believe in goodness. If I am egoistic and I want only what is for my own good, I won't be

a station for them. It's solidarity with foreigners; based on what they learned, they can be better citizens.

Another example is that children with disabilities are not only receivers; they can also be givers. There's a group of students with disabilities that make sandwiches and cakes and then give them to families of patients in hospitals. It shows the students that even if we feel we are very limited or if we have a lot of problems in the country, we can still do something. Each one can do something.

For us, it's the two main things, because one of the major problems in Lebanon for youth is that they feel there are too many problems and they cannot do anything, so they leave Lebanon. It's also giving them a place where they can be and they can act. Instead of saying that we don't want them to be extremists, we encourage them to be active members of society.

Niwano: About the richness of diversity, Adyan's home page says: "Adyan envisions a world where diversity between individuals and communities is lived as an enrichment, generating mutual understanding, inclusive citizenship, creative development, sustainable peace, and spiritual solidarity." Please tell us why you believe that diversity is an asset and strength.

able to live in peace. I think it is important to believe that we share a common good. I think it is even more important to be self-confident and not to harbor fear or any negative feelings. In the end, the goal is for us all to understand that we have a shared responsibility to make life better. Maybe another factor is not to think that we are better than others but to believe that there is good in others too.

There are two categories of people in the world—those who live for themselves and those who live for the good of others; they can be from any religion or culture. Of course, it's easier to work with diversity with the people who live for the good of others. It's harder to work with people who have their own egoistic way of thinking.

Tabbara: Another aim of education on diversity is to teach students the wisdom taught by the different religions of the world as part of the common heritage of humanity. For instance, we give them quotes from different religions without telling them where they come from. We tell them, "Choose the one that you like the most." When they choose, they explain why they chose it, and then we tell them which religion it came from. We ask them if they feel strange when they like something from a different religion.

I always give this example: I used to teach religion to children, and one little girl asked me, “Can I like something in another religion without feeling that I am betraying my own religion?” I think it’s a question even grownups ask. We try to let children know that you can fully be a believer in your religion and still appreciate the wisdom of other religions.

Our aim is to be able to work with one another for the common good and totally accept others of different religious and cultural backgrounds. We aim also to let youth see that each of us is the product of our culture which affects the way we see the world. We come to understand that we don’t have an objective view of everything, that our view is linked to our context, so we understand that others are also linked to their context. This opens the way for people to hear each other and be less extremist in their positions. We try to include this in all our programs.

Niwano: You’ve used the term *good* or *common good*. So, do you use terms like *common good* when you develop and carry out the education program in Lebanon?

Daou: Yes, we use the term *common good* very much.

Niwano: How about God’s love?

Daou: Yes: if the program is about citizenship education, we use “common good”; when it is about religious education, we use “God’s love.”

In Adyan we have the idea that “the other who is simply different” is the channel of God’s love for us. We don’t think that we first have to work on ourselves personally to live in God’s love and then go to meet the other. The difference here is that we go to the other, and with the other, we try to share, to understand God’s love, as if the meeting with the other were where God reveals his love.

This is what we call spiritual solidarity. For example, in our board meetings, we always start the meeting with a reading from spiritual texts, sometimes from Christianity, from Islam, from Buddhism, or from other religions. The board members who are from different religions share their understanding of the texts. Always, it is a very beautiful moment because, for example, even though I’m a Christian, if the text was from the New Testament, I still discover new things through the non-Christian members.

But I know that it’s not easy for everybody to accept this. As believers, we tend to think that we have the best faith and the ultimate truth. Indirectly or unconsciously, sometimes this makes us spiritually arrogant, and we can’t really listen to the experience of others. It’s a challenge. We learn at Adyan that listening comes by experience.

Niwano: Being a Buddhist and having my own experience of learning something about Christianity, I have felt that the more I learn, the more my faith as a Buddhist has deepened. This doesn’t mean that as I learn more about Christianity, I want to become a Christian. I feel I have established my identity as a Buddhist. Perhaps my study abroad in Italy has helped to establish my identity as a Buddhist.

I try to imagine that people of different religions have something in the depth of their hearts that is sacred. Rather than just saying that I try to understand the others and then accept them on that basis, I understand that the others also have a similar process of developing themselves, which I sincerely respect and honor.

I would also like to ask what, in your view, is the role of people of religions?

Tabbara: Father Daou spoke this morning of our concept of religious social responsibility. We believe that the role of people of religion is to work for all

humanity, not just their own group, and if they are in a country, to work for all society, not just their own community, and to work for human rights and human dignity, reminding society of the most important values—compassion, mercy, and solidarity.

Niwano: Under such a multireligious environment as that of the Adyan Foundation, what do you find as shared or common?

Daou: We always say at Adyan that a religion is like a flowing river. We don’t want to make a single river from different religions. We all have our own rivers, but by working together we discover two things. The first is that all these rivers share the same source. The second is that every river gives its water to anyone who wants it. At the same time, we have, for example, Christian and Muslim members, and we hope that one day we’ll have Buddhists or members from other religions in Adyan. We don’t want to mix religions, but we want to live the conviction that despite our differences, we all have a common source and a common mission. That is why we believe that we don’t need to have a board made up of 50 percent Christians and 50 percent Muslims, because we believe that each member can represent everybody. For example, today it was nice that we had the honor of the attendance of the representative of the Lebanese ambassador to Japan during the award presentation ceremony. I was greeting her, and she asked me, “Are you Muslim?” and I said, “No, I’m Christian.” She said, “But you were quoting the Prophet Mohammed, and I thought that your speech sounded Muslim.” This is Adyan. Every one of us represents everybody. We speak on behalf of our common source and common mission.

Niwano: Thank you both very much. □

From Scripture to Social Action: Translating the Lotus Sutra

by Bee Scherer

As one of the most influential Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures, it is reasonable to expect that the Lotus Sutra has spawned a wealth of applications to social action. However, any such application is far from straightforward.

The Buddhist traditions of the One Vehicle (*ekayāna*) invite us to reflect and lean on the (Threefold) Lotus Sutra as our guide for navigating the trials and tribulations of *saṃsāra*. In the Japanese traditions we find that the transformative power of even the smallest portion of the scripture is regarded as liberatory. Hence meditative use of the sutra's title in the *o-daimoku* (お題目)—*Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō* (南無妙法蓮華經)—has been propagated by great masters such as Saichō (最澄, 767–822) and Nichiren (日蓮, 1222–1282). The latter centered his dharmology (i.e., Buddhist theology) around his firm conviction that the one true Buddhist teaching for his lifetime was the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren interpreted his own age as *mappō* (末法), the period of decline, and saw the scripture as a template for his own struggles: he pronounced himself an incarnation of the bodhisattva Viśiṣṭacāritra, defender and preacher of truth (chapter 22). For Nichiren, the minimalist *o-daimoku* practice was already aimed at wider social impact and concerned with transforming society.

When we look at the three most prominent new Buddhist charitable organizations in Japanese Buddhism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—Sōka Gakkai (創価学会), Risshō

Kōsei-kai (立正佼成会), and Nipponzan Myōhōji Daisanga (日本山妙法寺大僧伽)—we note that they are all anchored in the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren's thought, both of which they interpret and translate in complex, distinct, and divergent ways suited to their social welfare activities.

These action-translations of scripture build on the realization that sacred texts need to be transferred from their own context into new environs. *Transfere* (past participle: *translatum*) in Latin means to “bring across”; *translatio* is the “process of bringing across”: a scripture's specific position in space and time at the moment of its creation, revelation, or emergence must be translated for any new cultural (geographical and temporal) context. Adding to the cultural environs is what we may want to call the context of mode, motivation, or function. Meditative liberating modes of translation can differ from the social transformative modes. We need to acknowledge that scripture, reading, and reader form a dynamic triangle of understanding and that any translation is defined by the triangle's triple limit, or horizon, of experience, understanding, and interdependence. This means that any transferral is a limited (contingent) interpretation (exegesis). Making scripture fruitful for social advocacy,

*Professor Bee Scherer, PhD, is the director of the Intersectional Centre for Inclusion and Social Justice (INCISE, <http://incise.center>) at Canterbury Christ Church University, UK. A longtime practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism and a Full Professor of Religious Studies and Gender Studies, Bee has authored more than a dozen monographs and edited volumes on critical theory, mythology, and Buddhism. Bee's current research focuses on Buddhism, identity, and social justice (dis/ability, mental health, gender, and sexualities) in transnational Buddhist and Asian contexts. Bee's latest book, *Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy* (2018), is available as an audiobook download from Wise Studies (<http://wisestudies.com/product/essentials-of-buddhist-philosophy-with-bee-scherer/>).*

justice, and change, such interpretation can become explicative: social-action translation brings scripture into new and unusual contexts and applies scriptural wisdom according to contemporary evidence and understanding of the relevant social issues in today's world.

In the modern age, translating Buddhism into charitable work, advocacy, and social activism has been described with terms such as *socially engaged Buddhism* or *humanistic Buddhism* (人生佛教). Christian theologians call this mode of translation “practical” or “public” theology. Buddhist thinkers expound (解説) (Lotus Sutra, chap. 10, T. 262 30c18) scripture in the

same mode: they apply critical thinking and analysis to their own tradition; this mode of application can be appropriate means (Skt., *upāya-kausālya*; 方便) in itself for propagating Buddhism.

As one of the most influential Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures, it is reasonable to expect that the Lotus Sutra has spawned a wealth of applications to social action. However, any such application is far from straightforward. The Lotus Sutra appears to be primarily concerned with its own propagation; this is the scripture's primary impulse for action: promulgating the Lotus Sutra means to translate the text into action in the world of suffering, *samsara*; in the Lotus Sutra, ultimate altruism is to spread the ultimate truth.

Early on, the subsequent Mahāyāna traditions linked the social-action perspective on Buddhist practice to the Lotus Sutra. The eighth-century philosopher Śāntideva quotes pertinent verses of the Lotus Sutra in his compilation of Mahāyāna scriptures (*Śikṣāsamuccaya*, chap. 19). The quotation stems from the fourteenth chapter (the thirteenth in the Sanskrit transmission) of the Lotus Sutra, which deals with safe and easy Buddhist conduct. In this passage, the last Lotus Sutra verse quoted by Śāntideva reads:

In another manner the wise shall always think: "May I become a Buddha, and so may these beings. I will preach the very Dharma that is the foundation of my happiness for the benefit of the world." (Lotus Sutra, chap. 14 [chap. 13 in Sanskrit], v. 35; my translation from the Sanskrit)

Interestingly, the emphasis on benefiting the world (Skt., *hitāya loke*; Tib., *phan phyir 'jig rten*) cited by Śāntideva is not transmitted in all Lotus Sutra recensions. Central Asian Sanskrit manuscripts read simply "among sentient beings" instead of "for the benefit of the world." But the Lotus Sutra recensions

from Nepal and Gilgit and the Tibetan translations retain the explicit emphasis on altruism found in the quote, and so does Kumārajīva's Chinese version, in contrast to Dharmarakṣa's earlier translation. This understanding of "for the benefit of the world," or as Kumārajīva puts it, "for great benefit" (大利), sheds light on Nichiren's notion of *shakubuku* (折伏), the uncompromising propagation of the Lotus Sutra as an unsurpassable act of compassion.

A key element of the Lotus Sutra's teaching for the benefit of the world is that the bodhisattva's altruism and aspiration is connected to appropriate, or skillful, means; this combination of compassion and wisdom can be regarded as the basis for social action and social-justice advocacy. It is no coincidence that Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft's influential collection of Buddhist reflections on ecology, *Dharma Rain* (Shambhala, 2000), references the Lotus Sutra's fifth chapter and the famous simile of the herbs. In the Lotus Sutra the simile points to the Dharma as one vehicle, as the one rain that nourishes all the different plants. Kaza and Kraft transfer the simile into the new context of eco-Buddhism and make it productive for that field of contemporary engaged-Buddhist reflection which advocates ecological responsibility and the preservation of the earth's resources. Another form of action-Dharma translation of the Lotus Sutra occurs in contemporary feminist Buddhist thought, which advocates gender equality and challenges the structures of patriarchy that create oppression and suffering on a systemic scale. For example, critical Buddhist thinkers have transferred insights drawn from the narrative of the eight-year-old dragon (*nāga*) princess in chapter 12 and from the prediction narrative in chapter 13. It is, however, worth noting that the Lotus Sutra operates within a sexist patriarchal context and that the opportunities for Lotus Sutra-based Buddhist feminism are limited. The sutra's radical focus on ultimate truth exposes environs

of social injustice such as sexism and oppressive views on sexuality and gender that reduce humans to male and female stereotypes. It's worth citing one of the most prolific contemporary Lotus Sutra "theologians," Gene Reeves. He reminds us in *The Stories of the Lotus Sutra* that the scripture "arose in a particular historical context and was composed and translated within particular social settings," making it "not free from perspectives that we now regard as deficient or even morally wrong" (Wisdom, 2010, p. 308).

In public dharmology or liberation dharmology (in analogy to the Christian theology that focuses on eliminating the conditions for poverty and oppression), when translating the Lotus Sutra into social action, we need to start by acknowledging those cultural settings of time and place in which the scripture operates. We can recontextualize—translate into new contexts—the Lotus Sutra when we read carefully from the inside out, from closer to wider, and retranslate narrow and contingent elements within the wider frame of new social-action impulses.

Let us take the example of the scripture's treatment of dis/abilities. (I use "dis/ability," etc. in the tradition of critical disabilities studies; the slash indicates that individual impairments become disabilities by lack of social accommodation; the separation of "dis" and "abilities" further stresses the wealth of abilities all people embody—regardless of impairments). The Lotus Sutra contains content and language that is derogatory and oppressive to people with impairments—people living with disabilities. In that sense the scripture is enmeshed in "ableism": discriminatory discourse and practices around physical and mental impairments. If we get stuck on such elements and take them overly literally, we miss the wider picture and the opportunity to translate the scripture's core message of skillful compassion into the contemporary perspective of dis/ability suffering as a social-justice issue.

We might make the mistake of reading a certain scriptural element as philosophy when such an element is a narrative or literary device. When we scrutinize the different layers of text and context, we might detect that certain elements indicate specific literary or even poetic techniques, are expressing and creating specific modes and moods in the narrative, and have multiple functions and reference frames; therefore, we might ignore any potentially underlying philosophical reductionism and syllogism. The latter is particularly important when we are dealing with narrative and poetical references to karma (cause and effect): popular preaching and literary dynamics reduce the rather complex Buddhist theories of causality to simplistic one-to-ones of one specific action bringing one specific result (monocausality). For dramatic reasons or exaggeration, such passages might imply a simple moral determinism (a bad or good result *must* follow), ignoring the highly intricate, multilevel process of karmic ripening in Buddhist philosophy.

Let's take an example from chapter 3, the very chapter that contains the famous parable of the burning house. Here we find stark warnings against distrusting the sutra, among which are the following verses:

When born human again, those who do not have faith in this sutra will be idiots, lame, crooked, blind, and dull. . . . Foolish and deaf, the blasphemer does not hear the Dharma. . . . And when the blasphemer regains human birth, (she or) he becomes blind, deaf, and idiotic, becomes a slave, always remains poor. (Lotus Sutra, chap. 3, vv. 122, 129ab, 132a–c; my translation from the Sanskrit)

The extant Sanskrit versions from Gilgit do not include these verses; the Chinese versions of the text are rather loose in their renderings and omit considerable portions (however, Kumārajīva

reads closely at least for 132a–b: 聾盲瘖癡, 貧窮諸衰).

Here we find a whole poetic list of karmic retributions—extended (v. 122) and condensed (v. 132). Similar lists are dotted throughout the extended corpus of Buddhist sutras. Looking at such lists from the angle of dis/ability and social justice, the first thing we need to recognize is the literary and poetic form and function of these enumerations as elements of stylistic polarization: the message is to warn the disbeliever and blasphemer, and the threat behind the warning is an unfavourable rebirth (*durgati*). The enumerated elements are illustrations of *durgati* that reflect the prejudice and social abjection of the specific time and place of the sutra. The scripture using such lists and literary devices does not project a sophisticated philosophy of dis/ability, nor does it focus on universal compassion within this specific context. The passage's direct audience is those who, because of their faith in the Lotus Sutra, experience rejection and abjection themselves from those who deny that the scripture contains the ultimate truth. By dint of such a stark warning, the faithful listener can feel consoled and reassured. The apologetic strategy of defending a newly emerged Mahāyāna scripture by means of stark warnings has become vitally productive in the history of reception of Mahāyāna sutras; in the case of the Lotus Sutra, we need only point to the example of Nichiren's "bodily reading" (色読; *shikidoku*) of the Lotus Sutra: the sincere embodiment and application through words and actions of the sutra in one's life in the here and now.

The list of both physical and social impairments and disadvantages fits into a wider framework of approaches to the body and suffering, where morality is inscribed in physical appearance and status. As such, embodiment in Buddhist poetry and narratives becomes a canvas for moral philosophy, in particular in popular, folk, and devotional literature:

a Buddhist body is depicted as a place of virtue or demerit. Nikkyō Niwano (庭野日敬) reminds us that the Buddha, "that which enlivens all beings at all times," is not a punishing or rewarding god:

[M]an brings it upon himself. His own illusion brings it upon him. Illusion is like a dark cloud that covers our intrinsic buddha-nature. When the light of our buddha-nature is covered with illusions, darkness arises in our minds and various unpleasant things happen to us. (*Buddhism for Today* [Weatherhill, 1976], p. 62)

If we take literary elements too literally (*nītārtha*), we are in danger of missing the most important or true level of meaning (*neyārtha*). For example, in our text passage from chapter 3 of the Lotus Sutra quoted earlier an impairment such as blindness (*andhatva*) points to something far more important than the physical inability to see. "Blindness" functions as a physical symbol for delusion and ignorance (*moha*, *ajñāna*). We realize this clearly when we look at the Lotus Sutra's twenty-eighth chapter ("Samantabhadra's Invigoration"), where we read the following:

Whoever leads into delusion [*moha*] any of those Dharma-preaching monks who are keeping the scripture will be born blind [*andha*]. (My translation from the Sanskrit)

This important point on the poetic/literary relationship between mental delusion and blindness can get lost in translation. The Tibetan version and Kumārajīva's Chinese translation of the passage read and/or interpret "slander," instead of "delusion," as the cause for blindness.

The Lotus Sutra offers us a key for unlocking the *neyārtha* meaning of blindness in the fifth chapter. By accident of textual transmission, this important

passage is missing in the Chinese translations: the parable of the healed blind person. The text clarifies that the physical is a metaphor for the spiritual:

In this way, all beings cycle around blind because of their great ignorance; because of their ignorance of the wheel of conditionality, they revolve in suffering. In this way, into the world dulled by ignorance, the all-knowing highest tathāgata has come, the great physician, who is compassionate to the core. (My translation from the Sanskrit)

This passage makes it very clear that “blindness” is not a bodily impairment but a metaphor for the experience of spiritual deficit: spiritual blindness is the focus, spiritual impairment becomes an extended metaphor. The passage stresses *ignorance* (Skt., *ajñāna*) thrice and uses the Sanskrit ablative case twice to indicate causality—or alternatively, as the Tibetan version reads, first to give a temporal sense (*mi shes tshe*): “while (they are) in (the state of) ignorance” or “since (the time they find themselves) in (the state of) ignorance,” and then a causal sense (*mi shes pas*). The emphasis on spiritual impairment (blindness) as human condition cautions against readings that would derive a moral judgment about an actual impaired person; in Buddhist philosophy the diverse sophisticated karma theories and the notion of no-self do not allow such reductionist judgment. The warnings found in scriptures such as the Lotus Sutra are poetic, contemplative, and/or literary in genre and mode, but for the most part, they do not belong to philosophical domains of writing. As such, the scriptures use popular exemplifications and, arguably, ableist language.

If we return to our passage in chapter 28 of the Lotus Sutra, we see that the literary-poetical function of bodily and social impairment in connection with spiritual deficit continues to become

clearer: defaming the scripture—which means making it ugly—engenders visible ugliness: the demeritorious action (Skt., *pāpakam karma*; Tib., *sdig pa'i las*) becomes poetically inscribed on the human body.

If we regard the wider framework of the Lotus Sutra, we clearly realize the scripture's propagation of unwavering altruism and care. We can point to the pivotal chapter 25, “Universal Gate of Avalokiteśvara,” where Avalokiteśvara (Guānyīn, 觀音) is the embodiment of enlightened compassion who “looks down” (from the Sanskrit root *ava-√lok*) with loving eyes upon the world of suffering and provides a model for unconditional, universal Buddhist love and compassion . . .

that will encourage us to be rooted in the suffering and misery of this world, shunning no one. . . . [T]his might mean, not only not avoiding those who are despised by the society in which we live . . . , but actively being with and supporting such people. (Reeves, *Stories*, p. 309)

In the Lotus Sutra, universal compassion and love characterize the Buddha himself: he is the skillful physician (Skt., *cikitsaka*; Tib., *gso byed*) in chapter 16, looking after the world as a father (chap. 3 and 4). The eternal Buddha proclaims:

Thus, I am the father of the world, the self-arisen physician, the protector of all beings. (Lotus Sutra, chap. 16 [chap. 15 in Sanskrit], v. 21a; my translation from the Sanskrit; Kumārajīva's Chinese version omits the reference to the physician in this verse)

In terms of poetic technique and genre, this passage is a revelation speech (“I am . . .”) and echoes the revelation in the earliest layer of the scripture, in chapter 3:

Thus, Śārisuta, I am the Great Sage, Salvation [*trāṇa*], and Father of [all] Beings. And all beings, fools who are bound by desires in the triple world, are my children. (Lotus Sutra, chap. 3, v. 85; my translation from the Sanskrit)

Of course, some modern interpreters, such as Alan Cole (*Text as Father* [University of California Press, 2005]) have been critical of the father imagery in Buddhist scriptures and problematize such literary “paternalism” and parental authority as “bad faith” functions of institutionalized control and power. These “suspicious” readings ignore that *father* is a core extended metaphor in the Lotus Sutra that can provide a powerful basis for a public dharmology of social justice. The core element of the metaphor is all-inclusive love; male parental authority is only the expression of this core within a contingent of social convention and script.

The system of literary symbols and signs (semiotics) in the Lotus Sutra is complex and open to both contemplative and activist modes of reading. The Lotus Sutra's lasting influence on contemporary Chinese and Japanese socially engaged and humanistic Buddhist traditions exemplifies how the scripture's core messages can be successfully applied to Buddhist welfare thought and practices. At the same time, the sutra is confined in its conditioned expressions, its time and place. Reading the Lotus Sutra into a specific time (and place) (*eisegesis*) features as one key element of Nichiren's thought. But such translating *into* must be accompanied by translating *out of* the scripture's specific context. Lotus Sutra public dharmology can acknowledge specific conditioned elements in need of critique, with full respect for and without changing what is, in its self-representation, the eternal Lotus Sutra: the ultimate Dharma, an appropriate-means revelation of transformative meaning beyond language. □

Buddha-Nature (2): We Are Children of the Buddha

by Dominick Scarangelo

Today some people may not be entirely comfortable with the gendered language of the Lotus Sutra's allegory, but a close reading of the text can open pathways to an understanding appropriate to contemporary society and twenty-first century social norms.

In the last installment of this column we explored the concept of buddha-nature—its meaning, the Lotus Sutra's teaching of revering buddha-nature, and how Buddhists can reveal the buddha-nature of themselves and others by demonstrating respect for people and discovering their goodness. This time we will consider another way of realizing buddha-nature that is inspired by the stories of the Lotus Sutra. Rissho Kosei-kai members speak of awakening to buddha-nature as attaining the conviction that both oneself and others are, in the allegorical language of the Lotus Sutra, “children of the Buddha.” Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, held that feelings of worthlessness thwarted people's ability to improve their own lives and brought them much suffering, and for this reason he employed the sutra's allegory of the parent-child relationship to help people see themselves as future buddhas and heirs to all the qualities that the Buddha Shakyamuni possessed. The belief that living beings are children of the Buddha also encourages the appreciation of all human life. As members of the human family, all people are our brothers and sisters, possessing the same inherent dignity and human potential

as the Buddha. Today some people may not be entirely comfortable with the gendered language of the Lotus Sutra's allegory, but a close reading of the text can open pathways to an understanding appropriate to contemporary society and twenty-first century social norms.

Buddha-Nature in the Lotus Sutra: The Metaphor of the Parent-Child Relationship

Children of the Buddha

Last time we took a brief look at the history of the concept of buddha-nature and found that the tangible and highly positive depiction of living beings' potential for buddhahood initially posed some problems for Buddhist philosophy. The teaching of buddha-nature was probably not offered for exegetes, however, as Michael Zimmerman writes. Zimmerman concludes that the concretization of buddha-nature in the earliest buddha-nature text, the Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra, was a teaching aimed at nonspecialists. The purpose of the sutra's graphic depictions of buddha-nature, such as a

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

tiny buddha statue within people, was to “increase respect and appreciation towards others and towards oneself” (Zimmerman 2002, 52). The Lotus Sutra does something similar when it speaks of the Buddha as the father of all sentient beings, providing a way of envisioning the relationship between the Buddha and ordinary people that helps them realize the inherent dignity of themselves as well as others, and encourages them to have faith in their potential.

The appellation “child of the Buddha” is one of the Lotus Sutra's most prominent literary devices, appearing no less than thirty-four times in the text. The metaphor of the parent-child relationship is central to the narratives of the parable of the burning house and three carts (chap. 3), the parable of the rich man and poor son (chap. 4), and the parable of the good doctor (chap. 16). Narrowly speaking, “children of the Buddha” may refer to those who uphold the sutra and practice its teachings. In a wider sense, however, all living beings are the Buddha's children, as Shakyamuni Buddha says in chapter 3: “Now this threefold world [the

entire universe] / Is all my domain, / And the living beings in it / Are all my children” (Rissho Kosei-kai 2019, 120). The phrase “children of the Buddha” resonates with familial and kinship terminology associated with buddha-nature that we discussed last time, such as *gotra* and *kula*. The metaphor of parentage conveys an image of buddha-nature as a shared characteristic or pedigree that is an inherited birthright possessed by all members of the human family.

The Parable of the Rich Man and Poor Son

The fourth chapter of the Lotus Sutra opens with four of Shakyamuni Buddha’s disciples, Subhūti, Mahā-Kātyāyana, Mahā-Kāshyapa, and Mahā-Maudgalyāyana, awakening to their own ability to obtain Supreme Perfect Enlightenment and become buddhas. Having heard Shakyamuni’s initial exposition of the teaching of the One Vehicle; then listening to the parable of the burning house and the three carts; and next witnessing Shariputra, the wisest of all the disciples, obtain a prophecy of his own buddhahood from Shakyamuni, these four are struck with wonder and leap up from their seats with joy. Eager to show the Buddha they have grasped

the point of his sermon and awakened to a new understanding of themselves, the four tell the Lotus Sutra’s parable of the rich man and poor son. The parable goes something like this:

In a certain town lives a broken-hearted rich man who is coming to the end of his life. With death approaching, the man yearns desperately to find his long-lost runaway son and give him his rightful inheritance. Unbeknownst to the old man, in the years since running away, his son has fallen into poverty and homelessness and has passed his time wandering aimlessly day after day in pursuit of meager day-labor wages to feed himself. One day the son unknowingly walks up to the gate of his father’s grand estate, hoping to obtain some work so that he can buy something to eat. The son has been gone so long that when he sees the rich man, he fails to recognize him as his father. The rich man knows his son at first sight but soon surmises that the destitute man has completely forgotten the face of his father and therefore has no inkling of his own true identity.

Years of poverty and homelessness have left the son without any self-esteem or confidence, and he cannot even imagine that he could be the child of such a

prestigious man, that he is the scion of a noble lineage. In fact, the wealth and pomp of the old man actually intimidate him, and he begins to second-guess his decision to stop at that house in search of work. But the father, having recognized the man as his son, sends two of his workers to bring the young man back. However, when the workers catch up to him, it only increases his paranoia. He tries to escape, and when the two workers capture him, he passes out in sheer terror. The son assumes that such a magnificent and powerful person as the rich man could have no need for an undesirable lowlife such as himself, and he fears that the rich man only wants to punish or kill him.

The wise rich man sees that his son is completely down on himself, paralyzed by an inferiority complex. The son would not even be able to believe it if he were told of his identity and would surely shrink from the grandeur of his inheritance. The son’s feelings of worthlessness cause him to be satisfied with only a pittance, and selling himself short, meager wages are indeed all he seeks. The father decides to give the son what he is looking for—day labor—using it as a device to bring the son into his household and keep him close. But this is not all. The rich man plans to gradually raise the young man’s self-esteem by progressively expanding his duties, increasing his responsibilities and compensation to eventually bring the poor man to the point at which he can believe in himself enough to embrace his name and heritage.

So the rich man hires his son to shovel manure, keeping him employed on the estate as a means of ensuring he remains. The rich man even sheds his fine threads and changes into filthy workman’s clothes just so he can approach his son without alarming the young man. Over time the rich man slowly promotes his son in the household organization commensurate with his improving confidence and sharpening skills. After a

long time, when he sees that the son has attained enough confidence in himself to believe in his own identity and accept his inheritance, the elderly rich man, nearing death, calls together his extended family and members of local society to declare in front of everyone that he has found his son, and that he will now pass everything he owns onto this, his rightful heir. The grateful son responds: “Without any intention or effort on my part these treasures have now come to me by themselves” (Reeves 2008, 145).

Patriarchy and Gendered Language in the Parable

The parable of the rich man and poor son may feel surprisingly familiar to many readers, as it resembles the New Testament’s parable of the prodigal son. Both parables deal with the themes of parental love and a son’s journey of self-discovery, which leads to the transformation of his sense of identity. In the Lotus Sutra’s parable, the younger man awakens to what had actually been there all along but to which he had previously been blind. The rich man of the parable is the Buddha, and the poor son represents the Buddha’s four disciples who, at first satisfied with just attaining their own liberation from suffering—day wages—did not realize that they had the same capacity to become buddhas as Shakyamuni, nor could they believe themselves capable of it. The son also stands for living beings who have not yet awakened to their full potential. Nevertheless, as children of the Buddha, the disciples are heirs to his wealth, his enlightenment, and thus his name, just like the poor son of the parable. The rich man’s desire to elevate his son to the point where he can embrace his true identity is parental love, that is to say, the boundless compassion of a buddha, and provides the impetus for the pedagogy of skillful means that he

employs. The inheritance of the family name and the old man’s riches are the disciples’ realization that they, and by extension all other living beings, possess the very same capacity for buddhahood as Shakyamuni Buddha. Despite their having had this capacity all along, this was something that took years of practice in order to realize with conviction.

Today in the twenty-first century, some readers may see in the Lotus Sutra’s parable a paternalism that infantilizes religious believers. Moreover, in light of the sutra’s doctrine of skillful means, the Lotus Sutra may read as a Buddhist version of “father knows best,” as the Buddha acts for others on the paternalistic basis that he knows what is best for them (Keown 2002, 369). The gendered language of the parable, and its patriarchal trope, may also present a problem for some. In Judeo-Christian traditions, theologians have problematized gendered language in their sacred texts and liturgies, especially the notion of God as male epitomized by the epithet “God the father,” and it should come as no surprise that Buddhism has also failed to avoid androcentrism. Buddhism is widely viewed as an egalitarian teaching, and Buddhist concepts such as emptiness and buddha-nature would seem to undercut distinctions and discrimination. However, misogynist statements are found in Buddhist texts, and there was a belief that living beings could not directly attain buddhahood with a female body. Buddhism deserves no special pass with regard to issues of gender inequality. As Rita Gross’s work teaches us, it is important for Buddhism that Buddhists are honest about what is patriarchal when the label fits (Gross 1993, 21). At the same time, we need to distinguish religions’ “essential insights from non-essential cultural trappings,” or else we are forced to “completely discard the religions” (Gross 1993, 39). At this juncture, it behooves us to take a closer look at patriarchal language and metaphor in the Lotus Sutra.

The father trope, which runs through the entire Lotus Sutra, stands in opposition to the hero archetype that the story of Shakyamuni’s birth, renunciation, ascetic practice, and enlightenment roughly follows. In the Lotus Sutra and several other early Mahāyāna texts, the portrayal of Shakyamuni takes a turn—he becomes a patriarchal father figure, and as Alan Cole has written, this works as a device to legitimize these texts (Cole 2005, 5). The father archetype is a conservative symbol, signifying the male collective and the established order. The mythical father hands down society’s values to the son, instilling them, and certifies his coming of age (Neuman 1993, 172–3). In a patriarchy this becomes the binding force of convention and tradition, and dependency on the father represents the dominance of collective norms (Neuman 1993, 187).

What is patriarchy? Theologian Adrian Thatcher defines patriarchy in easily understandable terms as “rule [Gr., *archê*] of the fathers [Gr., *pateres*],” a type of “power over” that refers to social structures, beliefs, and practices that ensure that men exercise power over women (Thatcher 2011, 26). In patriarchal social structures the female sex is disempowered to various degrees, and authority, symbolized by the power of bestowing one’s name, flows between males—from the male head of a household to his legitimate male heir. This power to grant one’s name to someone is a form of power over that person (Thatcher 2011, 24). In the beginning of the parable, the portrayal of the poor son evokes the archetype of the “eternal son,” who cannot inherit the kingdom because of his refusal to identify with the patriarchal father, but his return and reception of the name suggests an acceptance of conservative collective norms.

The analogy of the Buddha to a father is not a creation of the Mahāyāna, however; it appears in the earliest layers of the Buddhist textual tradition. Learning in ancient Indian culture was “learning

from the mouth,” by hearing the words of a teacher, repeating them, and consigning them to memory. Beginning in the oldest sutras, the Buddha is a father who gives birth “from his mouth,” bearing enlightened beings by transforming people through his words—the orally transmitted Dharma. We could read this metaphor in two ways: a patriarchal removal of the mother from lineage and a symbolic theft of her procreative powers or, alternatively, an androgenization of the father figure by assigning him female procreative power, in effect making the Buddha a “father-mother.”

Metaphorical birth from the mouth—assigning creative powers to the word—resonates with notions of the divine *logos*. In the ancient Western philosophical tradition, *logos* was sometimes treated as a higher male generative principle, associated with ideas and reason and, transcending the feminine material (*mater*), dispensed with the female (Soskice 2007, chap. 6). Giving birth from the mouth in Buddhism may have taken its cue from the legend that Brahmins, the priestly caste group, were born from the mouth of Brahma, a male creator deity. “Birth from the Buddha’s mouth” appears twice in the Lotus Sutra. The instance pertinent to our discussion comes at the beginning of chapter 3, in which the Buddha’s disciple Shariputra, having realized that he too has the ability to attain buddhahood and thus become equal to Shakyamuni, joyfully exclaims: “For today I know that I am truly a child of the Buddha, born from the words [literally, mouth] of the Buddha and come to life through his Dharma. Indeed, I have attained my share of the Buddha Dharma” (Risshō Kōsei-kai 2019, 93–94). Shariputra is a son of the Buddha, and just like the poor son in the parable of chapter 4, he is due his birthright.

However, this metaphor also assigns the Buddha female procreative power, in effect showing the Buddha as an androgynous “father-mother.” In Shariputra’s

statement above, he is born from the Buddha’s mouth but, through the Dharma, also “comes to life” (Skt., *nir-mita*), which can mean magical transformation but also the act of forming or fashioning. Additionally, Sanskrit recensions have a phrase that Kumārajīva, the translator of the most popular version of the text, chose not to render in Chinese: “brought to completion by the [Buddha’s] Dharma” (Skt., *dharmā-nirvṛttāh*). Metaphorically speaking, the Buddha gives birth to and fashions people, but also possesses an incubatory capacity to nurture living beings to spiritual perfection. Later in the Buddhist tradition, in texts such as the Mahāvairocana-sūtra, this is made explicit with the depiction of the Buddha’s compassionate skillful means as a womb. Many Buddhist texts also characterize the compassion of the Buddha for living beings and their yearning for the Buddha’s compassion as like the oneness of mother and child. When a mother embraces her child, they become as one body, with the subject-object distinction overcome by mutual love.

Some feminist Christian theologians have called for the replacement of androcentric language with abstract ungendered terms, gender-neutral symbols drawn from nature, or female characterizations of God, such as speaking of the Trinity as “Mother-Daughter-Spirit.” However, other theologians fear a loss of intimacy with the use of abstract terms, and others point out the absence of textual bases in scripture (Soskice 2007, chap. 4). In the case of Buddhism, there is a tradition that a buddha’s body has thirty-two distinctive features, one of which—a hidden male organ—undoubtedly marks him as biologically male. Yet Gross observes that what this depicts is actually his *asexuality* (Gross 1993, 62). And given that the Buddha’s spiritual nurturing of living beings is also likened to female procreative faculties, I think that Buddhists today can envision the Buddha as female if they so

desire, or use the more neutral term “parent” when describing the relationship between the Buddha and living beings. Ultimately, buddha is truth itself—the Buddha’s “truth body,” which, as a universal principle, is without fixed form and thus can be thought of as either male or female. As is widely known, the famous Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World (Chn., Guanyin; Jpn., Kannon; Skt., Avalokiteśvara), who appears in chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra, is widely depicted as female in East Asian Buddhism, and within the sutra itself the bodhisattva is said to manifest in whichever way people require in order to achieve liberation, including male and female forms.

With regard to those whom the Buddha nurtures, Chinese translations of *buddha-putra*, literally “son of the Buddha,” utilize the word *zi* (子), which can be read neutrally as “child,” particularly in Japanese Buddhism. Some may feel this is still an infantilization of the followers of the Buddha’s teachings, but all of us are offspring of someone, and as our parents are wont to remind us, we “remain their children” no matter how much we mature. *Child* in this case does not have to be understood as a state of development but, rather, a condition of relations between two people. In the case of Christian traditions, some theologians have concluded that God the Father is “father” because of the existence of the son, Jesus Christ. The appellation “father” emphasizes the parental relationship, in which both parties are interdependent, cocreating one another (Soskice 2007, chap. 4). In Buddhism as well, buddhas and bodhisattvas appear in the world precisely because there are living beings that have not been liberated from suffering. A buddha vows to help all living beings become buddhas, with no distinction. The existence of unenlightened beings gives birth to the buddhas, so from the perspective of dependent origination, both the buddhas and living beings are

simultaneously parents and children.

It is certainly true that the civilization from which the Lotus Sutra emerged had a radically different understanding of the individual as well as the family from many contemporary societies, and its parables reflect that. Since the end of the nineteenth century, industrialization has transformed the extended family in developed societies into nuclear families, and recent decades have also seen the social acceptance of heretofore alternative arrangements such as same-sex marriages. Economic disparities between men and women remain, but more and more women are attaining financial independence and also surpassing the education levels of men. Furthermore, what constitutes a family in developed societies today is increasingly a woman and her dependent children.

With regard to the overall narrative of the parable of the rich man and poor son, it is indeed a variation on patriarchal myth—the wayward, “eternal son” returns home, giving up his rebellious ways, is then socialized to the norms of the household, and accepts the rich man’s name, taking the older man’s place in society. But there are important differences that should not be overlooked. Instead of emphasizing the authority or power of the father, the parable’s central themes are parental love, identity, and potentiality. The rich man’s failure to forcibly bring his son home shows the impotence of raw power, and the necessity of shedding his fine clothing and donning the filthy attire of a hired hand in order to approach his son implies that symbolic expressions of authority cannot be relied upon to transform the human heart for the better.

Despite the differences between contemporary family structures and those assumed by the compilers of the sutra, the parable of the rich man and poor son speaks to the fundamental question “Who am I?,” which transcends time and applies to all partners in the relationship, because it is the relationship

itself that defines them. In an age of rapid transformation, the problem of identity takes on renewed importance. We answer the question “Who am I?” by weaving our own narratives of family history, as demonstrated by the popularity of ancestral research. In this era of the “absence of fathers,” the discovery of our fathers and its impact on the question of our identity remains for many people, and it may be even more pressing than ever before. The Lotus Sutra’s allegory communicates living beings’ capacity for buddhahood in a way that people can palpably feel, and thus believe, and this gives the Lotus Sutra’s literary devices soteriological power. For this reason, to those who find the language of the sutra too paternalistic, I would caution that we may not want to throw the baby out with the bathwater, and that by engaging in a close examination of these passages we can arrive at readings that are appropriate for the contemporary world.

Seeing Buddha-Nature: Transformation of Values

Seeing buddha-nature is a critical juncture at which people catch a glimpse of the beauty of the world and the preciousness of both their own and others’ lives, and this propels them onto the bodhisattva path in earnest. In Risshō Kōseikai, becoming aware of buddha-nature is often framed as attaining the conviction that one is indeed a child of the Buddha. Rev. Niwano spoke of this as a life-transforming realization that is experienced as joy for having been given life, not just as an individual, but as a member of the human race. He describes this joy as so profound that we “cannot stop it from running through our entire bodies” (Niwano 1989, 14). For practitioners of Risshō Kōseikai Buddhism, this awakening provides a reserve of confidence and courage to draw upon in their daily lives and is the basis for seeing all

human beings as our brothers and sisters.

The Antidote for Feelings of Inferiority: Recognizing Yourself as a Child of the Buddha

In the parable of the rich man and poor son, it takes the son twenty years to attain ultimate liberation because he did not have the realization [of his connection with the Buddha] nor confidence in himself. The rich man, i.e., the Buddha, purposely took on a grungy appearance to get closer to his son, even telling the poor man, “From now on, we’ll be like father and son.” Despite this, as you know, the poor son had gotten the idea into his head that he himself was just an imbecile.

All of you may have also assumed yourselves to be “poor sons,” but because you have discovered the Lotus Sutra, you are not “poor sons” anymore. You are the true children of the Buddha, his heirs. I want you to go back and reflect on this truth again. Truly, there is no other knowledge that can benefit you above and beyond this realization. (Niwano 2018, 68)

Rev. Niwano believed that like the young man in the Lotus Sutra’s parable of the rich man and poor son, one of the biggest problems that people face in their lives is their inability to appreciate their own self-worth, a debilitating lack of self-confidence that prevents them from achieving their full potential. In this age of hyperindividualism, in which our personal lives, media, and politics seem overly populated with characters wholly in love with themselves, full of bluster and overconfidence, the idea that people today struggle with feelings of worthlessness might strike us as ludicrous. Yet many experts tell us there is a worldwide epidemic of depression today. According to the World Health

Organization, some three hundred million people worldwide suffer from depression, and close to eight hundred thousand people commit suicide each year. In the face of these sobering facts, a teaching that tells us we are children of the Buddha—an exemplar of human perfection and unlimited promise—is truly a gospel of “good news.” Rev. Niwano taught that when people are aware of their own buddha-nature, it naturally prevents them from degrading themselves, and even the impact of any delusions they may have will not manipulate them, cause them to fail, or aggrivate them, and they will instead become able to turn their human desires toward productive ends (Niwano 1991, 65).

Our inheritance is the capacity for buddhahood, which, like the poor son in the story, many of us today cannot even imagine because of our lack of self-worth. The son’s exclamation that he has received the inheritance “without any intention or effort on [his] part” indicates that the innate capacity for buddhahood is not something created through the individual’s effort but is woven into the fabric of life itself, and is in this way uncontrived and uncreated. Buddha-nature is at the same time our birthright as precious human beings and a gift, like the gift of life itself (Reeves 2010, 104).

This parable truly resonates with me. I can personally identify with the fraught relationship of the father and his son, and I strongly suspect that I share with many other people the experience of having distanced oneself from one or both parents in adolescence. For me, doing so was critical for establishing my own independent identity, but overcompensating left me in a state of poverty, a self-alienation caused by trying to run away from something that was part and parcel of me. This brings to mind what Rev. Niwano wrote about the Buddha: “The Buddha is inseparable from us, even if we try to distance ourselves from him” (Niwano 2012, 370). The Buddha, like

our parents, is part of us, and we cannot run away from ourselves. Just like the poor son in this parable, as many of us get older, we draw closer to our parents, deepening our knowledge of who we are, which includes our family’s heritage. It had really been there all along, but for some of us, it may take half a lifetime to rediscover. Growing closer to our parents can give us a sense of pride in where we come from, making us more secure and engendering self-confidence.

Self-discovery does not have to be restricted to the connection with only one parent. In recent years I learned that on my mother’s side there was a tradition of joining the Jesuit order going back hundreds of years, and many of those monks became theologians and teachers. This knowledge gives me a whole new perspective on the choices I have made in my own life and provides me with a sense of confidence that I am, in my own way, walking in my ancestors’ footsteps, developing my own natural capacity. By integrating this into my identity, I am “returning” to the house of my *mother’s ancestors*, in effect taking their names. Now, some might say that my conviction is ad hoc and the identity I create for myself randomly emphasizes some ancestors at the expense of others. I respond that while facts are facts, the stories we tell with them are our own, and there is no story without a particular perspective. When it comes to self-understanding, the nature of identity is that contingency becomes necessity. When we construct our own identity out of narratives in this fashion, we are empowered; we exercise our own agency.

What the sutra is telling us is that we need to believe in the capacity of our buddhahood in a similar fashion. Shakyamuni Buddha was a human being like us, not a god. He was no different from us. But by attaining enlightenment—becoming a buddha and sharing his teachings with the world—he cleared a path to human perfection for all of us. In these senses he is our parent. We can

consider him our father or mother, or even an ancestor. And the truths that he awakened constitute the very nature of reality and thus run through every fiber of our being. They are our DNA, our buddha-nature. Thus we can undertake the practice of Buddha mindfulness by envisioning him as our father or mother, we ourselves secure in the embrace of the Buddha’s arms of boundless compassion. The Buddha is part of us, and so what the Buddha accomplished, we can also accomplish. This is not a conviction that is easily attained, of course. But by always remaining mindful of the Buddha by envisioning Shakyamuni as our parent, be it mother or father, or even progenitor, we can develop faith in our own potential.

Buddha-Nature and Faith

Faith is indeed the key. Faith is the essential ingredient to unlock the transformational power of buddha-nature. The Buddha-Nature Treatise, one of the most important buddha-nature texts, teaches that faith is the conviction of the reality of one’s buddha-nature, the belief that it can be developed, and that developing it will lead to infinite benefits—the attainment of buddhahood (Takasaki 2010, 342). Inspired by the parable of the rich man and the poor son, in Risho Kosei-kai Buddhism this faith is “faith and understanding,” the knowledge that “oneself and others are all children of the Buddha.” Even the vaguest sense that there is some truth in this teaching, perhaps only for a moment, is said to result in innumerable merits. This is because without faith, one lacks the self-confidence to pursue one’s birthright. If buddha-nature is, as Sallie King explains, “a promise,” then it only becomes a reality when it is believed (King 1991, 150). One can be heir to the greatest inheritance in the world, but if one remains unaware of it, it is the same as if it had never existed at all.

Thus, from the subjective point of view of ordinary living beings, it is the very belief in buddha-nature that makes it a reality. The Lotus Sutra imparts this wisdom to us when it tells us that we can only obtain the truth of the sutra through faith. □

References

- Cole, Alan. 2005. *Text as Father: Paternal Seductions in Early Mahāyāna Buddhist Literature*. University of California Press.
- Gross, Rita. 1993. *Buddhism after Patriarchy*. Sri Satguru Publications.
- Keown, Damien. 2002. "Paternalism in the Lotus Sutra." In *A Buddhist Kaleidoscope: Essays on the Lotus Sutra*, 367–78. Kosei Publishing.
- King, Sallie B. 1991. *Buddha Nature*. State University of New York Press.
- Neuman, Erich. 1993. *The Origins and History of Consciousness*. Princeton University Press.
- Niwano, Nikkyō. 1989. *Shinshaku hokke sanbukyō*. Vol. 1. Kosei Publishing.
- . 1991. *Hokke sanbukyō: Kakuho no aramashi to yōten*. Kosei Publishing.
- . 2012. *Hokeyō no atarashii kishaku*. Vol. 1. Kosei Publishing.
- . 2018. *Bodai no me wo okosashimu*. Kosei Publishing.
- Reeves, Gene. 2008. *The Lotus Sutra: A Contemporary Translation of a Buddhist Classic*. Wisdom.
- . 2010. *Stories of the Lotus Sutra*. Wisdom.
- Rissho Kosei-kai, ed. In press, 2019. *The Threefold Lotus Sutra: A New English Translation for Today's Readers*. Rissho Kosei-kai International.
- Soskice, Janet Martin. 2007. *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language*. New York: Oxford University Press. Kindle edition.
- Takasaki, Jikidō. 2010. *Nyoraizō shisō/bushōron I*. Takasaki Jikidō chosakushū 6. Shunjūsha.
- Thatcher, Adrian. 2011. *God, Sex, and Gender: An Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Zimmerman, Michael. 2002. *A Buddha Within: The Tathāgatarbhasūtra; The Earliest Exposition of the Buddha-Nature Teaching in India*. International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University.

Continued from page 16

Emptiness, Buddhist and Christian

Buddhist-Christian Encounters

The underlying assumptions of the understandings of emptiness in Buddhism and Christianity differ considerably. In Christian faith the kenosis of God involves the coming of the Creator of the universe to dwell in this world in the person of Jesus Christ. *Sunyata* in Buddhism is not the creator of the universe and does not become incarnate in one particular human life. Nonetheless, the transformations to which kenosis and *sunyata* call practitioners bear important similarities. In each tradition, teachings on emptiness call attention to the transitory nature of all experiences in this world and challenge grasping and greed as ultimately futile. Buddhist perspectives on emptiness invite practitioners to wisdom and compassion, while Christian viewpoints call practitioners to follow the path of Jesus Christ in lives of service to others. The outcome of Buddhist realization of emptiness is compassion; for Christians emptying leads to charity. It is not surprising that many have found points of contact between the two traditions.

Masao Abe offered a distinctively Mahayana Buddhist interpretation of kenosis in Paul's Letter to the Philippians, and he daringly proposed to see the God of Jesus Christ as emptiness or, better expressed, emptying. Abe repeatedly asked Christians if they could say that God is emptiness. After many frustrating encounters, Abe went to the Vatican in March 1993, where he met with Jacques Servais, SJ, and Piero Coda in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, then led by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. Donald Mitchell recounts that "both Servais and Coda affirmed Abe's view that because Christ is the self-utterance of God, his kenosis reveals a fundamental kenosis, an *ur-kenosis*, that is of the essence of Godself. For this and other reasons, Abe

told me that he found these Vatican theologians to be much more 'liberal' than most of the theologians he had encountered in the United States" ("Dialogue and Unity," in *Masao Abe: A Zen Life of Dialogue*, edited by Donald W. Mitchell [Charles E. Tuttle, 1998], 138–9).

William Johnston, SJ, was born in Belfast in Northern Ireland and grew up in an atmosphere of intense conflict between Protestants and Catholics. After moving to Japan in 1951, he studied Japanese Buddhism and practiced Zen meditation for a time. In his encounter with Buddhism in Japan, Johnston found that the differing perspectives on emptiness offered an opening to dialogue and to reconciliation: "To describe this night, St. John of the Cross speaks of 'nothing'—*nada, nada, nada*—and of emptiness. His *todo y nada* (all and nothing) is so similar to the *mu* (nothing) and *ku* (emptiness) of Asia that he has been called a Buddhist in Christian disguise. To this I would say, however, that the Buddhist *mu* and *ku* may well be an experience of the same unknowability of God. Perhaps mystics of all religions are called to unite in atoning for the ugliness of the world and facing the unknowable mystery that cannot be put into words" (*Mystical Journey: An Autobiography* [Orbis Books, 2006], 88).

Acknowledging the difference between Christian faith in a transcendent God and Buddhist nonduality, William Johnston reflected: "And in fact I now see that this problem can be solved only by the coincidence of opposites whereby we see that God and the universe are one and not one, just as man and woman are one and not one, life and death are one and not one, all religions are one and not one" (ibid., 219).

Thich Nhat Hanh's interpretation of emptiness as interconnected interbeing suggests a way to view the multiple Buddhist and Christian perspectives as continually intersecting, challenging each other but also enriching each other, inviting us toward a mutual respect and harmony beyond any present realization. □

The Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma

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.

Walking the Great Way Hand in Hand

I had my eighty-fifth birthday on November 15, 1991. The morning dawned quietly. As usual I rose at five o'clock. As I was drinking my tea, Nichiko came to greet me. "Today I'm a little more nervous than usual," he told me. It was today that Nichiko was to succeed me as the second president of Rissho Kosei-kai in a ceremony called the Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma. I led the daily home sutra recitation at six a.m. as usual, and Nichiko assisted me with the gong as the rest of the family recited the sutra together. On the altar were two new sashes. After the service, I handed one to Nichiko. In Rissho Kosei-kai, the white sash inscribed in black ink with the *o-daimoku* is equivalent to the robes worn by Buddhist priests. It is worn over the left shoulder during services to purify both mind and body. It also represents devotion to the Lotus Sutra and the pledge to follow its teachings. Thus it is a ritual item that is testimony to one's belief. I had myself inscribed the words "Namu Myoho Renge-kyo" (I take refuge in the Sutra of the Lotus

Flower of the Wonderful Dharma) on the sash I gave Nichiko that day. I had prepared the second new sash to go with it for that day's ceremony.

The Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma ceremony was held in the Great Sacred Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters complex. Some forty-eight thousand representatives from the Dharma centers all over Japan gathered in the Great Sacred Hall and other headquarters buildings in Tokyo. From the hall's platform, watched in hushed silence by the members, I read an invocation of divine protection for Rissho Kosei-kai under the leadership of the new president:

"Today, on this auspicious occasion, we perform the great ceremony of the Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma before the Eternal Original Buddha. Fifty years ago I, Nikkyo, was given the opportunity to come into contact with the wonderful scripture, the cherished Lotus Sutra. 'Because the buddhas, the world-honored ones, desire to cause all living beings to open their eyes to the Buddha's wisdom so that they may gain the pure mind, therefore they appear in the world; because they desire to show

all living beings the Buddha's wisdom, they appear in the world; because they desire to cause all living beings to apprehend the Buddha's wisdom, they appear in the world; because they desire to cause all living beings to enter the way of the Buddha's wisdom, they appear in the world.'

"I was awakened through 'opening, demonstrating, realizing, and entering' the Buddha's wisdom as taught in the Lotus Sutra. As I, Nikkyo, look back over the years, the great vow of the buddhas became my own aspiration as I followed

Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, was an honorary president of Religions for Peace and honorary chairman of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan) at the time of his death in October 1999. He was awarded the 1979 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.

the great Way that is beyond both joy and pain, and together with Cofounder Myoko, I laid the foundations of Rissho Kosei-kai, at the same time undertaking unremitting religious practice.

“Amid many hardships, I continued to believe that ‘of those who hear the Dharma, not one fails to become a buddha.’ Together with all the members, I weathered the storms, practiced single-mindedly to benefit others, and undertook the sacred task of building the Land of Eternal Tranquil Light in this world.

“How grateful I am that with the protection of the gods and the buddhas, Rissho Kosei-kai has now extended abroad, in testimony of the divine guidance that the spirit of the Lotus Sutra will spread far and wide through all the countries of the world.

“I, Nikkyo, after careful consideration, deem that now is the correct time to have my successor, Nichiko, take up his position as the second president of Rissho Kosei-kai. Thus today we hold the ceremony of the Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma.

“I ask all members to renew their great vow as lay Buddhists according to the true meaning of the Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma.

“With the second president, Nichiko, acting as leader, let us together confirm our profound mission as bodhisattvas who have sprung from the earth in this age of the final Dharma, mindful to continue our assiduous practice within an unbroken lineage. I make this announcement with deep emotion.

“We humbly pray that all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and good deities will watch over us and extend us their profound protection.

“Nikkyo Niwano, Founder, Rissho Kosei-kai.”

Nichiko read his formal reply. It might seem too easy just to copy it here, just as it is. However, these are the words written by Nichiko after deep thought and contemplation and so express his true mind. Thus I would like to quote the whole text without deleting anything. I think that it could prove very useful as a signpost to look back upon the way he has come, should in the future he find himself standing at the crossroads.

“My father and teacher, the Founder, Nikkyo Niwano, through weighty causes and conditions, practiced to benefit others as a lay Buddhist from an early age. He received birth in this age of the final Dharma and, awakening to the one great purpose, and being supported by a profound arrangement of the times, established Rissho Kosei-kai in 1938.

“With Cofounder Myoko as his companion, he practiced the Lotus Sutra, sparing himself nothing. He and Myoko Sensei together gave all their efforts to bring members the benefits of Lotus Sutra practice. They strove to purify local society, first through individuals undertaking this practice, and then extending it to rectify their own families.

“After long years of study and religious training, in 1958 he affirmed the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni as the focus of devotion. This was accomplished according to his great purpose as founder of Rissho Kosei-kai.

“This was a time when religious cooperation and dialogue were gaining momentum among religious people around the world, based on the idea that all religions were at root one. The great Way was gradually opening to bring liberation and peace to all parts of the world. Truly it was a matter of ‘One Heaven and the Four Seas, all things in the universe originate in and return to the Wonderful Dharma.’

“Today I, Nichiko, unworthy as I am, accept the role of second president of Rissho Kosei-kai according to the great purpose of my father and teacher, the Founder, Nikkyo Niwano, the envoy of the Buddha. I take on the great task of the Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma by reason of lineage succession.

“The sutra says: ‘Wholeheartedly wishing to see the Buddha / Not caring for their own lives.’ Believing this with all my heart, I vow to follow the single path to the ultimate realm. May I with all members of the Sangha be aware of our mission in this world, and may we walk the great Way hand in hand.

“The sutra says: ‘[They] are as untainted with worldly things / As the lotus flower in the water.’ May we live our lives, as Buddhist practitioners, always reflecting upon our actions to correct our inner feelings so we can live our days without shame.

“May we all experience the spirit of the Lotus Sutra and act upon it, offering ourselves to purify society at large and the hearts of all people. May we practice diligently to improve ourselves for the benefit of others and together accomplish the Buddha Way.

“I express my gratitude before the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Great Benevolent Teacher, World-honored One. I ask the protection of all the

buddhas and bodhisattvas that I do not fall into even the smallest error.

“Nichiko Niwano, Second President, Rissho Kosei-kai”

When I handed Nichiko the certificate of the Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma, warm clapping broke out from among the members, enveloping us both. I was grateful and also very happy.

Archbishop William Aquin Carew, papal nuncio to Japan, read a message from Francis Cardinal Arinze, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, on behalf of Pope John Paul II; and Mr. Yasushi Akashi, the UN under-secretary-general for Disarmament Affairs, read a message from Mr. Javier Perez de Cuellar, the UN secretary-general.

The ceremony was broadcast by satellite transmission to the organization’s Dharma centers around the country and was seen by around seven hundred thousand members.

Nichiko then gave his first sermon to members as president.

“In March 1938, the Founder established Rissho Kosei-kai. It seems almost impossible to express in words the hardships he experienced over the next fifty-three years in guiding us along the Way of the true Dharma.

“People cannot choose their parents. This fact troubled me at one time, but I have come to be truly grateful for

the life they gave me and for my inheritance of their bloodline. Further, it was through my father and teacher that I received ‘the unsurpassed, profound, wonderful Dharma that is rarely met in myriads of *kalpas*.’ I give great thanks for both these things.

“The Founder’s teachings have awakened us to the fact that we are all related, you and I.

“Accepting the great mission of the second president of Rissho Kosei-kai and your guidance, though I am imperfect, I am resolved to devote myself, with you all, to the pursuit of the Way. The chapter in the Lotus Sutra called ‘Springing Up out of the Earth’ relates how the Buddha entrusted the bodhisattvas who sprang up from beneath the earth to teach and transform the human world. The appearance of these bodhisattvas, guided by the Original Buddha of the eternal past, tells us that the teachings of Shakyamuni are not to be taken theoretically but are to be put into practice.

“The bodhisattvas who sprang out of the earth are the nameless people who walk the world with sentient beings, sharing their sufferings. I vow that from today I will devote myself to the Way as such a bodhisattva. I pledge, on this occasion of the Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma, that I will do so, with you all, in the light of the *o-daimoku*—‘I take refuge in the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma.’”

To be continued

People Who Are Like a Fragrant Breeze

by Nichiko Niwano

“Hana,” by the composer Rentaro Taki (1879–1903), is a song describing the beautiful spring scenery in Japan. The song begins with the words “a beautiful day in spring,” a lyric that many of you know very well. The cherry blossoms featured in the song are a flower representative of spring, but before the cherry blossoms appear, the sweet scents of plum flowers, daphne bushes, and magnolias fill the air and many people feel the joy of spring’s arrival.

Words expressing such joy are also found in the introductory chapter of the Lotus Sutra: “the fragrant breezes of sandalwood delight the minds of the assembled.” Founder Niwano explained this in simple language as meaning “when the fragrant breeze of the Buddha enters the minds of living beings, it produces great rejoicing.”

As we who have encountered the Buddha’s teaching continue to hear, study, and practice it, we gain many realizations. We become able to feel gratitude for people and things we disliked, and we become aware that the things that had made us feel happy up to that time were really nothing more than selfish thinking. At this point, our way of life undergoes a change.

Once we come to realize what is truly important, we spontaneously give voice to the joy of being emancipated from worrying and suffering—we have been liberated through the teaching. This is what Founder Niwano calls “producing great rejoicing,” and at this time the person “brings joy to the minds of others.” Incidentally, the Chinese character for

joy (*etsu*) means removing ill feelings from the mind.

We cannot see the Buddha with our eyes. But, in the Great Sacred Hall, for instance, when we hear the Dharma Journey talk of someone who felt the Buddha’s compassion and became aware of the joy of living through the practice of the teaching, we too experience the joy of encountering the Buddha Dharma. The grandeur of the teaching blows through our minds like “the fragrant breezes of sandalwood.” From the time of Shakyamuni to the present, this has not changed.

We Are All Virtuous People

The Zen monk Ryokan (1758–1831) of Echigo (present-day Niigata Prefecture) must have known this verse about the breezes, since he made the phrase “all my life, be fragrant” his personal motto. He was determined to—and, indeed, he did—live his life as a person who could be like a fragrant breeze that surrounds people’s hearts with warmth, makes them peaceful, and brings them joy.

However, the Dhammapada tells us that “the fragrance of virtuous people advances, even against the wind” and “virtuous people fill every quarter with fragrance.” Therefore, we could take the position that bringing joy to people’s hearts requires being virtuous.

It might seem as though a well-cultivated mind or the accumulation of good deeds is the determining factor of being virtuous. However, I do not think this

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

is necessarily so. Right now, we are living the one life we have in this world, which we receive through the blessings of nature and the virtues of our parents and ancestors. Every one of us already possesses abundant virtues. Therefore, we only need to realize our own virtuousness. Anyone who realizes his or her own virtues and cultivates them can give off a fragrant breeze and be a virtuous person.

In order to do so, it is important to feel gratitude. People are naturally drawn to those who are humble and sincere in remembering to be grateful for whatever happens. Using cheerful, kind, and warmhearted actions and words makes one’s virtuousness all the more fragrant. Interacting with consideration and in harmony with others releases the fragrant breeze of the teaching that lets people breathe easy.

This year, April marks both the anniversary of Shakyamuni’s birth and the end of the Heisei era in Japan. The new era will begin on May 1. I take this to be an opportunity to refresh our minds and prevent our bodhisattva practice—the practice of promoting peace among all people—from falling into a routine, a force of habit. To make this happen, living in a way that sends forth the fragrant breeze of the Buddha’s teaching will be all the more important. □

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 26

Dharanis (3)

This is the 131st installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.

TEXT These ten female rakshasas, together with the Mother of Demon Sons and her children and followers, all went to the Buddha and with one voice said to the Buddha: “World-honored One! We, too, would protect those who read and recite, receive and keep the Dharma Flower Sutra, and rid them of corroding care. If any spy for the shortcomings of these teachers of the Dharma, we will prevent their obtaining any chance.”

COMMENTARY The Mother of Demon Sons is a demoness called Hariti, a daughter of a yaksha. There is a tradition that she possessed and doted on five hundred of her own children, but she was extremely cruel and malicious, and whenever she came to the City of Royal Palaces, she would abduct some children and devour them.

As an appropriate means of enlightening her, Shakyamuni hid the youngest of her offspring. Out of anguish over the child’s disappearance, she searched around frantically. Then Shakyamuni remonstrated against her, saying, “You have

five hundred children, yet you are very sad. Try to imagine what it is like for the parents of the children whom you have abducted and devoured.” She for the first time realized the wickedness of her acts, submitted herself completely to the teachings of the Buddha, and took an oath to be forever the guardian deity of safe childbirth and babies. The Mother of Demon Sons remains today in folk beliefs.

That is why the Mother of Demon Sons and the other female rakshasas were at the assembly to hear Shakyamuni’s discourse, since they had already taken refuge in the Buddha.

TEXT Whereupon in the presence of the Buddha they delivered the following spell*:

“[1] *Idebi* [2] *idebin* [3] *idebi* [4] *adebi* [5] *idebi*
[6] *debi* [7] *debi* [8] *debi* [9] *debi* [10] *debi*
[11] *roke* [12] *roke* [13] *roke* [14] *roke*
[15] *take* [16] *take* [17] *take* [18] *toke* [19] *toke*.”

COMMENTARY [1] *Idebi*. “In this” is meant by this term. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies it as “Oh, what misfortune! Oh, what pestilence!” [*itime*]

- [2] *Idebin*. In this place; here. [*itime*]
- [3] *Idebi*. (Repeat of no. 1.) [*itime*]
- [4] *Adebi*. Among the people. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies it as “Oh, she who is great!” [*itime*]
- [5] *Idebi*. (Repeat of no. 1.) [*itime*]
- [6] *Debi*. Selflessness; nonself. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies it as “Oh, she who is beyond the ego-mind! Oh, she who has transcended worldly matters!” (*nime*)
- [7] *Debi* [8] *Debi* [9] *Debi* [10] *Debi*. (Repeat of no. 6 for emphasis.) (*nime, nime, nime, nime*)
- [11] *Roke*. Having already occurred. Dr. Tsukamoto identifies this with “Oh, she who grows!” (*ruhe*)
- [12] *Roke* [13] *Roke* [14] *Roke*. (Repeat of no. 11.) (*ruhe, ruhe, ruhe*)
- [15] *Take*. Moreover standing. [*stahe*]
- [16] *Take* [17] *Take*. (Repeat of no. 15.) [*stahe, stahe*]
- [18] *Take*. Nothing can bring harm; the teaching is well protected. [*stahe*]
- [19] *Take*. The different Chinese word for *to* is employed here, but it has approximately the same meaning as no. 18. According to Dr. Tsukamoto, the phrases 15 through 19 have the same meaning: “Oh, she who offers eulogies! Oh, she who praises!” [*stahe*]

TEXT “Let troubles come on our heads, rather than on the teachers of the Dharma; neither yakshas, nor rakshasas, nor hungry ghosts, nor putanas, nor krityas, nor vetadas, nor kashayas, nor umarakas, nor apasmarakas, nor yaksha-krityas, nor man-krityas; nor fevers, whether for a single day, or quotidian, or tertian, or quartan, or weekly, or unremitting fevers; whether in male form, or female form, or form of a youth, or form of a maiden, even in dreams shall ever cause distress.”

COMMENTARY *Vetada*. A red demon.

- *Kashaya*. A yellow demon.
- *Umaraka*. A black demon.
- *Apasmaraka*. A blue demon.
- *Yaksha-kritya*. A demon in the form of a yaksha that devours cadavers.
- *Man-kritya*. (Skt., *manushya-kritya*). A demon in the form of a human being that devours cadavers.

TEXT Whereupon before the Buddha they spoke thus in verse: “Whoever resists our spell / And troubles a preacher, / May his head be split in seven / Like an arjaka sprout; / May his doom be that of a parricide, / His retribution that of an oil-expresser / Or a deceiver with [false] measures

and weights, / Or of Devadatta who brought schism into the Sangha; / He who offends these teachers of the Dharma, / Such shall be his retribution.”

COMMENTARY *Arjaka*. It is said that when a branch of this tree breaks off in the wind and falls to the ground, it scatters into seven pieces.

• *Oil-expresser*. This is rather difficult for people of today to comprehend. When one presses out oil, if the nuts or seeds that are the raw materials decompose, the worms and insects inside will come out. If one presses the materials just as they are, the fluid of the worms will increase the volume that is pressed out, yielding a greater amount. At the same time, if all of the insects and worms are killed in the process, the taste and flavor of the oil will degenerate. In ancient India this was apparently considered a very bad thing to do. In other words, not respecting the life of another and selling something impure—the acts of taking life and greed—were thought to be greatly despised.

• *A deceiver with [false] measures and weights*. The same can be said of the crime of one who deceives with false

measures and weights. Although such a crime cannot be compared with that of killing one's parent in today's legal system, it is a heinous criminal act from a spiritual point of view. Therefore, one can see how such an act was considered a great crime in ancient India.

- *Devadatta who brought schism into the Sangha.* Devadatta, a cousin of the Buddha, attempted to break the close and loyal concord in Shakyamuni's community of believers (the Sangha). The sin of thwarting the teachers of the Dharma and bringing schism into the Sangha is remonstrated against as being the worst of all the other sins, because it affects all living beings.

Now, a person who disturbs the preachers of the Lotus Sutra is no better than a criminal who commits a serious crime, and his retribution will be such that his head will be split in seven parts like an arjaka sprout.

Reading this passage superficially, the female rakshasas appear to be vowing vengeance on the enemies of the Lotus Sutra. This is a mistaken interpretation, however. We might be able to consider that their vigor and zeal caused them to utter passionate words because they had not accumulated such great virtues as the disciples of the Buddha and because of their demonic nature. But if that is so, Shakyamuni Buddha, who preached thorough tolerance for all living beings, could not have unconditionally extolled the female rakshasas, saying, "Good, good!"

The fundamental principles of punishment are as we have discussed earlier, in chapter 3 (see the July/Aug. 2001 issue of *Dharma World*) and in chapter 10 (see the July/Aug. 2005 issue of *Dharma World*), and those principles definitely do not waver. When we carefully consider the verse, we notice that it reads "May his head be split in seven," not "The rakshasa women will split his head in seven." Similarly, as to the punishment for the parricidal crime, these rakshasas do not say that they "will punish him," but rather "he shall be punished."

Such expressions accord with the karmic principle of the Buddhist concept of punishment, which teaches that everyone will be punished by one's own crimes. It is important to take heed of this principle, because if one does not understand it thoroughly, one may easily fall into a vulgar view of punishment.

TEXT After these female rakshasas had uttered this stanza, they addressed the Buddha, saying: "World-honored One! We ourselves will also protect those who receive and keep, read and recite, and practice this sutra, and give them ease of mind, freedom from corroding care and from all poisons."

COMMENTARY *Poisons.* This, of course, should be interpreted as various spiritual poisons.

TEXT The Buddha addressed the rakshasa women: "Good, good! Even if you are only able to protect those who receive and keep the name of the Dharma Flower, your happiness will be beyond calculation; how much more if you protect those who perfectly receive, keep, and pay homage to the sutra with flowers, necklaces, sandalwood powder, perfumes, incense, flags, canopies, and music, burning various kinds of lamps—ghee lamps, oil lamps, oil lamps of scented oil, lamps of oil of sumana flowers, lamps of oil of campaka flowers, lamps of oil of varshika flowers, and lamps of oil of utpala flowers, such hundreds of thousands of kinds of offerings as these. Kunti! You and your followers should protect such teachers of the Dharma as these."

While this chapter on the dharanis was preached, sixty-eight thousand people attained the assurance of no [re] birth.

COMMENTARY *Those who receive and keep the name of the Dharma Flower.* As noted before, names manifest the entity itself, so receiving and keeping the name is receiving and keeping what it refers to.

- *Ghee lamps.* In India, a butter called ghee, which is made from the milk of sheep and goats, is put into dishes and used for votive lights of this type.

- *Lamps of oil of sumana flowers . . . oil of utpala flowers.* These are votive lights, which burn the scented oil of all the pleasantly fragrant flowers.

- *The assurance of no [re]birth.* "No [re]birth" means the realization that all things in this world are of emptiness (*shunyata*), neither arising nor perishing. The state of "assurance of no [re]birth" (*anutpattika-dharma-kshanti*) means experiencing that awareness and not being swayed by the changes of phenomena. "Assurance" means having fully acquired that state, so that one does not regress any more from that state.

* 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.

Rissho Kosei-kai

2-11-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo 166-8537, Japan

Tel: +81-3-5341-1124 Fax: +81-3-5341-1224

Website: www.rk-world.org/ E-mail: pub@kosei-kai.or.jp