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*FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE*

# DHARMA WORLD

AUTUMN 2020 Vol. 47

Religion's Role  
in Building  
an **Inclusive**  
Society



## Through Religions for Peace Asia, Asian religious leaders have a visible manifestation of their own dialogue and fellowship

Religions for Peace Asia (also known as ACRP) is the world's largest regional body of religiously inspired people working for peace and inter-religious harmony. Based on the tenets of truth, justice, and human dignity, its members are active in their home countries, in the Asia-Pacific region, and across the world. Founded in 1976, it operates in tandem with the international body, Religions for Peace International.

Religions for Peace Asia advances common action among religious communities in Asia and the Pacific for peace. Multireligious cooperation for peace is the hallmark of Religions for Peace Asia. This cooperation includes but also goes beyond dialogue and bears fruit in common concrete action. Through Religions for Peace Asia, diverse religious communities discern "deeply held and widely shared" moral concerns, such as transforming violent conflict, bringing about just and harmonious societies, advancing sustainable development goals, caring for the earth, promoting nuclear and conventional disarmament, protecting human rights, and promoting the equal dignity of all forms of life. Religions for Peace Asia translates these shared moral concerns into concrete multireligious action.

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The Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP) regretfully announces that the ACRP's Ninth General Assembly in Tokyo, which was scheduled for October of this year, has been postponed due to the spread of COVID-19. The ACRP Executive Council also agreed that the rescheduled Tokyo Assembly be convened in October 2021 only if the COVID-19 pandemic is under control at that time.

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# DHARMA WORLD

FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

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## FEATURES: Religion's Role in Building an Inclusive Society

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

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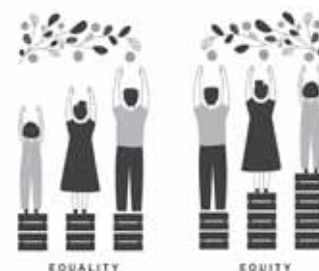


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# Religion's Role in Building an Inclusive Society

by Masashi Hashimoto



Masashi Hashimoto is the director of the Chuo Academic Research Institute of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo.

**Let us consider . . . the [Perfection of Wisdom Sutra], which says, “Eliminate differences of color among the people,” and whose twelfth and thirteenth vows declare that there should be “no distinctions of varna [skin color] nor distinctions between upper, middle, and lower sentient beings.”**

The word *kyōsei* (as in the Japanese for “inclusive society,” *kyōsei shakai*) is actually a modern coinage. It was created to translate the word symbiosis into Japanese by combining the characters for *together* (共, *kyō*) and *life* (生, *sei*). Organisms vie with each other while preserving their own particular niches, and the earth’s environment has been sustained to date because organisms have stayed in their niches to avoid as far as possible competing for food, living space, times of activity, and so on. However, humans have disrupted the equilibrium and pushed the earth’s environment into decline.

The progenitor of the concept of *kyōsei* in Japan was the Buddhist scholar and politician Benkyō Shiio (1876–1971). Shiio devised the term from the same two characters that appear in the line “to be born (生) in the Pure Land together (共)” in *Wang-sheng-li-zan* (Hymns in praise of birth) by Shandao (613–681), an influential Tang dynasty scholar of Pure Land Buddhism.

According to orthodox Pure Land thought, the absurdity of this world is a given and we aspire to be born into the perfectly harmonious world of the Pure Land after death. However, the character corresponding to *born* in *Wang-sheng-li-zan* can signify *life* and *living* as well

as *birth*. Shiio thus chose to interpret *kyōsei* to mean “to live together” rather than “to be born together.” The implication of this is that it is in this world and in this life that religion must be worked out, and in 1922 he launched the *kyōsei* movement to promote this concept of living together and inclusion.

In light of this, do we as Mahayana Buddhists need to revisit the true meaning of what is known as the original vow (*hongan*) made by buddhas and bodhisattvas?

The original vow is made when a Mahayana bodhisattva is practicing to attain buddhahood. There are also four universal vows (*sōgan*) taken by all bodhisattvas, and special vows (*betsugan*) taken by individual bodhisattvas. Special vows represent a vision of improvements and reforms for creating the ideal society, and they are formulated in the context of the cultural issues faced by the society of the time.

Let us consider, for example, the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (Perfection of wisdom in twenty-five thousand lines), which says, “Eliminate differences of color among the people” and whose twelfth and thirteenth vows declare that there should be “no distinctions of *varna* nor distinctions between upper, middle, and lower sentient beings.”

*Varna*, meaning skin color, refers to what are now known as “castes,” and this call to eliminate such distinctions indicates that there clearly existed in the beginning of the Common Era evil practices that hindered harmony between the classes of Indian society.

The special vows were thus depictions of the ideal, harmonious society that Mahayana bodhisattvas, who deplored the racial prejudice and class discrimination filling the real world, declared to build with a spirit of equality rooted in wisdom (*prajñā*) and compassion based on the buddha-mind.

The Pure Land is not something that only a select few ascetics and religious people can experience, whether through rebirth there after death or through contemplation of the Pure Land as practiced by Zen masters. As with the special vows taken by Mahayana bodhisattvas, the Lotus Sutra has already given us a blueprint for a peaceful world in which we can live in harmony and with gratitude for life. Based on this belief, we must each become aware of ourselves as bodhisattvas and vow to focus our karmic power on consistently building the ideal world here on Earth amid the endless cycle of death and rebirth that is *samsara*. It is precisely this that will create the “land of eternally tranquil light”—the inclusive society, the *kyōsei shakai*—here in the real world. □

# COVID-19 Challenges: Reaching Those Left Behind

by Katherine Marshall



***Inclusion as a foundation for social cohesion means acceptance of the idea that pluralism and diversity are fundamentally beneficial to the society; it also demands a robust acceptance of the idea that all human beings are equal in dignity and rights.***

The COVID-19 pandemic rages like a fierce storm with relentless winds and waves, unsettling people in all corners of the world. But while the storm affects everyone everywhere, its impact varies widely, and the boats that carry people have very different capacities to navigate and survive. Some are secure, even if their yachts are tossed about, but others, in flimsy craft, barely survive, and many drown.

The metaphor of the storm highlights urgent challenges of social inclusion because the COVID-19 crisis makes unmistakably clear both the

stark inequalities that separate human beings and the large and often tragic human impact of these inequalities. While the pandemic's universal reach underlines the common bonds that link humanity, inequalities that divide people are still more evident. Looking to the future with the hope of rebuilding the truly just and harmonious society that the Religions for Peace community promised in Lindau, Germany, in August 2019, addressing those inequalities is an imperative. That means concepts, convictions, and actions that translate the ideals of solidarity, equity, and inclusion into practical action. The world's religious communities have major roles to play in meeting this challenge.

Organizations that focus on global agendas such as those of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Religions for Peace Global Assembly in Lindau engage with lofty concepts and ideas; human dignity, human rights, sustainability, resilience, responsibilities, multiculturalism, freedom, diversity, social cohesion, and equity are among them. While these concepts are often affirmed, some aspects, it should be recognized, are easier spoken than realized, and other parts may be quite sharply contested.

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For example, the proper balance between pluralism, diversity, and cohesion, and between rights and responsibilities, are fiercely debated. The most demanding challenges, however, rest in translating ideals into practice. Inclusion is an ideal that few contest, but it demands clarity in defining the problems at hand and, in meaningful ways, moving from aspiration and promise to realization.

The COVID-19 crisis, in its effects on communities in many world regions and in the response of those communities, highlights the challenges involved for social cohesion. It also challenges religious communities to play proactive roles both in recognizing and addressing patterns of exclusion and in mobilizing the wisdom, example, and practice that can build more-inclusive societies.

## Patterns of Exclusion

With universal agreement that the "inherent dignity and . . . equal and



Photo: REUTERS / AFLO

*Migrants from Africa, Cuba, and Haiti, who are stranded in Honduras after borders were closed due to COVID-19 pandemic, shield from the rain during their trek northward in an attempt to reach the United States, in Tegucigalpa, Honduras on June 3, 2020.*



Photo: AP / AFLO

*An Israeli flag sticks out of the window of HaCarmel kosher restaurant in Amsterdam, Netherlands, on May 8, 2020, after a man smashed the window. The owner said his restaurant was vandalized for the sixth time in what appeared to be another antisemitic attack.*

inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,” as stated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where do the problems lie? Obviously, while many assert a belief in full equality, inequality has been the reality throughout human history; the long-standing practices of slavery and bondage, inequalities between women and men, and the large gaps that separate opportunities open to rich and poor are glaring examples. There are two important changes today, however, that give new zest to the ideal. First, with so many advances over the past century, technical (for example, in giving far more people access, instantly, to information about what is happening elsewhere) but also human (with the opening of educational opportunities), something far closer to equality and a fulfilling life for all is a far more real prospect than ever before. And second, inequalities among and within nations and among communities are both larger and more visible than they were in the past. The contrast between talk and ideals about equality and what people live on the ground is stark in a world with instantaneous and constant communications. Wide perceptions of unfairness translate into suffering but also into anger and at times political disruption and paralysis.

These broad patterns of inequality affect the challenges of achieving inclusion through different paths. First, inequality in control of resources

communities are widely excluded, while wealthy individuals, enterprises, sometimes families hold the reins of political power. Across many societies, two groups are often by culture and habit excluded: women and youth. Then, in many places and communities, legacies of ethnic, caste, and class exclusion are difficult to overcome. Certain groups that include people with disabilities or who work in certain professions may be ignored, pushed aside, or shunned. The ugly problem of racism may be overt and deliberate but more often is denied and even subconscious. Homophobia is another basis for exclusion.

Exclusion of certain communities because of their religious identity is a serious problem, and denial of the basic right to freedom of religion or belief affects people in many countries (Pew Research Center, 2019). Long, historic antisemitism is an example, with the appalling reality of the Nazi genocide. Islamophobia is rising in different societies, and in parts of the world Christians are targeted. Specific religious minorities are excluded in various ways in specific settings, and some religious minorities are among those most persecuted in today’s world.

Patterns of exclusion can begin within families (girls treated as lesser than boys, a disabled child disadvantaged), but exclusion has a particular impact in schools because, ideally, education is the great leveler in societies. It also affects employment, access to services, and many other areas. A major

(financial, land, human, access to communications) translates into very different access to what we call the tables of power, that is, places where many decisions are made. Poor

challenge today is the fate of those forced to move as refugees or internally displaced persons (an estimated eighty million people). Many lack citizenship rights as well as basic resources and freedoms.

In the COVID-19 emergency, patterns of inequality and exclusion have become more evident. Wide disparities in health care involve gaps in basic information about how people can protect themselves from infection from the virus and differential access to quality medical care. The digital divide has dramatic effects; at the peak as many as 1.5 billion children worldwide were out of school as a result of COVID-19 shutdowns and only about half of them have been able to benefit at all from online education. Families with savings and certain jobs can weather the storm and adapt, but those who live day to day must work and, if they cannot work, face hunger, eviction, and starvation.

In a crisis, and particularly in a case like the COVID-19 pandemic where so much is uncertain, it is a natural human instinct to cast about for explanations and for someone to blame. Many historic pandemics have exacerbated social divisions and upheavals, worsening intergroup tensions. The search for scapegoats is a common peril, and in many places religious communities are singled out as those to blame. The South Korean Christian community and the Muslim communities in South and Southeast Asia that were among early superspreaders of COVID-19 have faced significant prejudice and discrimination that extends well beyond those directly involved. Patterns of hate speech, already a grave problem before the pandemic, are accentuated by the stresses involved both in threatened disease and in economic hardship. It is important to acknowledge honestly that religious communities in some settings contribute to these patterns, but overall the outreach among different communities in responding to the crisis is positive,



and pastoral care and what some term accompaniment, akin to friendship and accompaniment within a caring community, allay fear, grief, and stress for many who look to religious communities for comfort and assurance.

## Obstacles

Religious teachings are fundamental to the principles and vision embedded in the ideal for an inclusive society that is linked tightly to the shared notion, in its different forms, that human beings are sacred and that lives have equal value. Interreligious movements, including Religions for Peace, strive to promote these ideals. But reservations and obstacles, acknowledged and tacit, also need to be recognized.

Perhaps foremost, there are hesitations and ambiguities regarding the significance of inclusion: what does it mean, and who is to be included, when, and for what purposes and activities? A society that includes one and all, embracing wide diversity, welcoming all strangers, is an ideal, albeit with limits. National borders and citizenship restrictions, the real constraints of language and different skills and gifts of citizens, and the real need to ration many scarce goods are obvious barriers. For religious communities, expectations of adherence to certain norms may conflict with desires of groups seeking inclusion. To take an example, a practice widely shared among communities is an expectation that the young will await their time and remain silent in the interim. And including women fully involves wide cultural shifts for many, including within religious communities. Specific practices, with the Muslim practice of the wearing the niqab (face veil) as an example, can represent barriers and feed anxieties about “the other.” With a strong dominant culture contributing in some instances to religious nationalism, accommodating different cultures and specific minorities can be difficult. These obstacles are often

present in educational systems and employment, but tendencies toward exclusion can also contribute to governmental restrictions applying to certain practices and groups.

The tensions and fears that arise also feed social hostilities that translate into discrimination in housing and access to services. In the most extreme cases, such as the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and the Uighur community in China, violence and even genocide can follow patterns of exclusion.

## Toward Inclusion

Many paths can lead to inclusion. First, at a community or national level, there can be a robust discussion about the full meaning of diversity and the benefits of a plural society. Analogies to the importance of biodiversity in nature and also the enrichment of societies and cultures that pluralism and diversity offer can be highlighted. Leadership and modeling of inclusive behavior by religious and national leaders is important. The challenge is one that involves many if not all segments of a society and nation. There, religious communities are important, with distinctive assets and characteristics, including their common focus on core values, that suggest a leading role in working toward the ideals that underlie an inclusive society.

Tensions can arise where understandings of social cohesion are inspired and driven by a majority culture or religion, as this can clash with a different view that holds the ideal of a diverse, plural society that includes fully distinctive subcommunities within the whole. There is an obvious continuum (few societies



Photo: AP / AFLO

*Muslim pilgrims wait in a bus that will take them to a quarantine facility, after a government raid discovered the largest viral cluster in India at the Nizamuddin area of New Delhi on March 31, 2020. Muslims in India are being stigmatized after the government blamed an Islamic missionary meeting for a surge in COVID-19 cases.*

fall fully at one end or the other), ranging from nations with a single language and few distinctive minorities to others whose ethos and history are built on understandings of diversity. The degree of integration that is expected by different communities can differ. However, even in societies where large majorities share a common understanding of national identity and the meaning of citizenship, forces of globalization today mean that minority communities are a common reality, with projections suggesting that this will increase. Even societies where large majorities share a common understanding of national identity are likely to see more diversity in the future. Further, expectations about freedom and lively communications channels mean that even within tightly knit societies long-accepted norms (for example, on youth behavior) are likely to meet challenges. These may include, for example, challenges to expected roles played in political leadership and other parts of society (including religious communities) by young and old, men and women, and sexual minorities.

In sum, inclusion as a foundation for social cohesion means acceptance of the idea that pluralism and diversity are fundamentally beneficial to the society, as is a robust acceptance of the idea that all human beings are equal in dignity and rights. This, in some societies, extends to a wider group of sentient beings and to the natural world overall. While perfect consensus and



A mask covers a security office check-in window opening at a homeless shelter inside the San Diego Convention Center on August 11, 2020, in San Diego. When COVID-19 emerged in the United States this year, public health officials and advocates for the homeless feared the virus would rip through shelters and tent encampments, ravaging vulnerable people who often have chronic health issues.

full harmony and acceptance by all is unlikely (and indeed inconsistent with diversity of ideas), a broad acceptance of a narrative of inclusion is an objective and ideal widely shared among many societies, even as it is adapted to the realities of each situation.

Societies and religious communities that are succeeding in setting clear ideals for inclusion need to identify, acknowledge, and address barriers that exclude. In the United States, the uncomfortable realities of racism, as translated into police behavior, and also of judicial, educational, and health systems, are forcing a new dialogue. The existence of vivid filmed evidence of brutality has opened many reluctant eyes. Where clear evidence, scientific data, and commissions of inquiry, for example, document how exclusion occurs and its impact, the process of dialogue may find solid support and aid the political decision-making process needed to change practice and behavior. However, the barriers are often unconscious and psychological. Artists and art forms such as film and music can play material roles in shifting attitudes.

In moving toward positive inclusion, leadership plays vital roles, setting the tone, modeling inclusive behavior, and hearing and responding both to the included and to those excluded. Political leadership is important, for example to move toward lifting restrictive barriers

in law and administration. Reforms in education systems have vital long-term effects, both in ensuring inclusive access and in curricula, textbooks, and teacher training that promote inclusive attitudes and recognize and address problems. Other prominent areas for action are judicial systems and social protection mechanisms that serve the most vulnerable within any society. These may be homeless people, those suffering from mental illness, the disabled, or specific minorities.

Religious roles in advancing inclusive societies are vital but also complex. Religious leadership, including formal clerics and less formally recognized community leaders, plays a vital role, as does the ethos and cohesion of the community. In societies where the religious landscape is complex, with relative autonomy of diverse communities, there may well be outliers with strongly held prejudices, including some that qualify as extremists. Some may resort to hate speech and deliberate misinformation directed toward specific groups. In contrast, some communities imbued with ideals of justice and inclusion show the way and inspire whole communities. Quakers who are devoted to peace and justice, Sikhs who run large efforts to combat hunger, and faith-inspired organizations whose members welcome refugees and risk their lives to save others are among many

examples of courageous religious communities who advocate and who serve.

Interreligious organizations, ranging from very local to global (such as Religions for Peace) have vital roles to play. They can bring shared ideals and theology to the not always easy task of recognizing barriers and breaking them down. Safe space for discussions and dialogue, educational efforts, and public witness all have a place. And through direct praxis—working with those who are excluded and showing what inclusion looks like—interreligious work can break down barriers and give real meaning to inclusive society. The shared objective is a bold one: to leave no one behind, to allow each person to develop their potential and to thrive, and to narrow sharply inequalities among nations, communities, and people.

The COVID-19 emergency is stripping masks from societies, revealing many entrenched patterns of exclusion and gaps between ideals for social cohesion and inclusion and the reality that many live day to day. In the face of sweeping challenges to normal life and to norms, change is both needed and possible. As vital stakeholders, religious and interreligious communities have an opportunity, in this special kairos moment, to boldly look to deep changes that will break barriers and open new vistas for the future. □

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# Social Inclusivism and Religious Altruism

by Keishin Inaba



**Religious altruism is a form of altruism that is rooted in religious ideas, and the burgeoning research on the relationship between religious altruism and volunteerism suggests that people who are more religious than others engage more in volunteer activities.**

The environment, conflicts, terrorism, the economy, education, health care, infectious diseases, disasters, and a range of other challenges pose hard questions for modern society. Expert systems have grown fragile as society has become more complex in the face of these challenges. It is now recognized that societies need spontaneously occurring forms of altruism that do not depend on conventional government-led systems, and citizens' networks have accordingly assumed greater importance. As research on volunteerism and altruism has flourished owing to criticism of excessive selfishness and a desire to build civic societies founded on mutual support, interest has turned also to religious altruism.

## Religious Altruism

The word *altruism* was coined by the nineteenth-century French sociologist Auguste Comte. It signifies concern for others rather than self-interest. Religious altruism is a form of altruism that is rooted in religious ideas, and the burgeoning research on the relationship between religious altruism and volunteerism suggests that people who are more religious than others engage more in volunteer activities.

There are four main theories of the motives for volunteerism: *resource theory*, which proposes that it is the result of rational choices based on the amount of resources that an individual has; *empathy theory*, which regards motivation as resulting from the empathic experiencing of others' suffering as though it were one's own; *religious theory*, which sees volunteerism as a part of the altruistic habits that arise from religious doctrines and culture; and *socialization theory*, according to which motivation is a product of socialization through the individual's social environment and the education provided by the people and institutions (the agents of socialization) around them.

The religious theory overlaps with both resource theory and empathy theory: both religious theory and resource theory recognize the role played by the organizational networks formed by religious organizations, while both religious theory and empathy theory recognize the interplay between faith and empathy. Socialization by socialization agents is also heavily influenced by empathy and religious sentiment. Religious influences can thus be seen to have a significant impact on motives for engaging in volunteer activity.

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Church participation plays a particularly important role in the relationship between religion and volunteerism in Western countries. Many studies have corroborated what is known as the network hypothesis. This posits that people obtain information on volunteer participation through church networks. They are invited to join in volunteer activities through these networks, and the normative expectations and social pressure exerted via these networks encourage volunteerism. However, normative expectations and social pressures run counter to the free will and freedom of choice that lie at the heart of volunteerism. Charity as a religious duty and religious altruism can likewise conflict with free will. Nevertheless, both research and public discourse tend to depoliticize these forms of volunteerism by emphasizing the virtues and empathy of volunteerism more than these normative expectations and social pressures.

Given that volunteer activities strengthen social solidarity and people

of faith tend to volunteer more, there are concerns that secularization may weaken social solidarity. However, the volunteer activities of people of faith have been observed to have a spillover effect on nonreligious people and the general public in various societies. The spillover effect is a concept originally used in public economics, but it is now also used to explain how the altruistic ethics of people of faith spread to affect society at large.

## Religion as Social Capital

Where the trust, norms, and reciprocity between people that are fundamental to various groups and organizations are strong, groups and organizations themselves will be strong. Mutual-support activities will be stimulated and the challenges faced by society will be ameliorated. Few would object to this logic. The trust, norms, and mutual reciprocity that exist in a group or organization are called social capital.

In the West there is strong interest in religion as a source of social capital. Religion can connect people and serve as the basis of communities, and it is suggested that therein may be found the connection with religious altruism.

Volunteerism and community service by religious groups and people of faith are gradually increasing. In these activities, the bedrock worldview and faith imparted by religion serve as a source of mental support for individual volunteers. The connections formed between volunteers who share the same worldview and faith similarly provide mental support. Activities involving members who share the same religious worldview may consequently feel closed to those who do not possess that religious worldview. This functions as what is known as *bonding* social capital. However, it cannot be denied that the community-service activities of religious groups and the volunteer activities of people



People perform Eid Al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice) prayer at Tokyo Mosque in Tokyo on September 12, 2016.

Photo: Abaca / AFLO

of faith may also have a spillover effect in that they encourage social empathy and convey altruistic values to society beyond those religions. This is known as *bridging* social capital.

Religiously motivated community service and volunteerism are expected to make important contributions now that the welfare state has run into financial difficulties. Such volunteerism and community service by people of faith is assisting the reintegration of religion into public spaces. In this respect, attention has been drawn to the importance of bridging social capital.

## Toward an Inclusive Society Founded on Mutual Support

Around the world, “my country firstism” is rampant, and respect for ethnic and racial diversity in the form of multiculturalism is in retreat. The start of the twenty-first century has been accompanied by a rise in racial discrimination based on cultural characteristics. While culture itself is viewed positively, differences between and detachment from other cultures divide humans.

Neither the United Kingdom nor the United States, both homes to people of many races, is a melting pot. Melting has not occurred; instead, their societies are like a mosaic or salad bowl of races,

and regions are split along ethnic and racial lines. We have entered an era in which it is becoming increasingly difficult for people of diverse ethnicities, races, and religions to coexist.

The problems of globalization and coexistence with heterogeneous others are not unique to the West. They are contemporary problems that have permeated Japan and other countries as well. Some foreign nationals living in Japan form groups with their own places of worship. There are about eighty mosques all over Japan, and a hundred thousand Muslims live in the country. They rushed to areas devastated by the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami to cook curry and rice for the victims. And religious groups such as Buddhist and Christian NGOs came from overseas to provide support in the devastated areas. In everyday life, however, lifestyles differ, and there can be clashes of values. How, then, can we learn to coexist with heterogeneous others? Coexistence is a worldwide challenge in a globalizing world where social frameworks are changing dramatically. There are people who find it difficult to cope in this age of weakened ties. Moves are afoot among citizens to build societies that are based on connections and mutual support rather than through the government-led projects, and people of faith have a role to play as a social force in this process.

## Social Recognition of the Activities of People of Faith

According to the third survey of religious groups' community-service activities conducted by the Niwano Peace Foundation in 2016, 42.5 percent of the respondents said they had heard about the community-service activities of religious groups. The most well-known form of community service, recognized by 36.1 percent of the respondents, was "management of educational institutions such as elementary schools, junior and senior high schools, universities, and vocational schools." This was followed by "services related to the promotion of child welfare (management of nursery schools, kindergartens, orphanages, and other child welfare facilities)" (31.6 percent). Other relatively well-known activities were found to be "management of medical institutions such as clinics and hospitals" (20.5 percent), "volunteer activities in the event of disasters" (19.4 percent), and "projects to assist the elderly (nursing homes, special nursing homes, and other elderly care facilities)" (18.1 percent).

Regarding public opinion of the social roles of religious groups, we turn to a series of surveys conducted by the Niwano Peace Foundation over the past twenty years concerning Japanese people's involvement in and awareness and opinion of religious groups ([https://www.npf.or.jp/pdf/2019\\_research.pdf](https://www.npf.or.jp/pdf/2019_research.pdf)). They show that the most commonly recognized role in 2019 (multiple answers were accepted) was "contribution to interaction and stability in local communities" (33.6 percent). A high proportion of the respondents also mentioned religious groups' "contribution to society through disaster relief and volunteer activities" (19.1 percent). Both figures are considerably higher than the corresponding figures for 1999 (21.5 percent and 10.7 percent).



Photo: REUTERS / AFLO

*Iranian refugees sew face masks for a retirement home in the evangelical community Saint Nikolai as the spread of COVID-19 disease continues, in Jüterbog, Germany, on April 7, 2020.*

People today need to be able to really sympathize with others, empathize with their hardships, and deal with a wide range of circumstances. Religions can help because they have teachings that promote the practice of altruism and compassion for others. Reverence for God and the Buddha, as well as gratitude for their lives being sustained by their protection, can make people humble and respect the lives of others as well as their own. People of faith can become a social force by transcending their denominations to work with various other actors in the public sector.

## Toward a New Era

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to rage, people are beginning to think about what a post-coronavirus world might look like. Some paint an extremely gloomy picture of a world in which the global order breaks down, globalization is reversed, "my country first-ism" spreads, and disparities widen further. Others, however, take the positive view that this experience will provide a model for solving global problems and encourage the global community to work together to tackle them.

World history is littered with threats to humankind, such as wars, natural disasters, and plagues. And in every case, life has gone on. Will life return

to what it was after several more waves of this pandemic? Probably not. The pandemic has had a major impact on many people's views of the world, people, and life and death. Lifestyles will be transformed by changes in consciousness, changes in behavior, and changes in responses to risk. We will enter a new era.

The fourteenth-century black death marked a turning point in medieval Europe that led to the Renaissance and the Reformation. The authority of the church waned, and some people lived hedonistically for the moment, as depicted in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. At the same time, though, some people acquired a deeper faith in God through a renewed recognition of the inevitability of death, encapsulated by the words *memento mori* (remember you must die).

Whether there is a second wave or a third wave, we will at some point have to learn to coexist with the coronavirus as with influenza. The society in which we live will change. Perhaps it will evolve into an inclusive society in which people work together to value and support life, rather than one in which profit and efficiency take priority. One cannot live alone, and this crisis has reminded us that we can't. Religion contains within itself the idea of social reform, and religious altruism will, I believe, help us to coexist with one another. □



# Inclusivity in a Post-COVID World

by Larry Yang

***When the defended heart is fearful, it is extremely difficult to manifest spiritual ideals of unconditional regard, kindness toward all beings, and the inclusion of all differences.***

The invitation to write this article acknowledged that *inclusivity* is a buzzword in many sectors of our world. The question posed was: “What exactly is an inclusive society?” To which, I append, “What exactly is an inclusive society in a post-COVID world that is clearly not inclusive?”

Whether on social or traditional media, I am feeling a contraction from the overwhelming barrage of intense, painful, even traumatic experiences in our world today—the atrocities of violence that lead to the murders and modern-day lynchings of black and brown people; the abuses of indifference and inaction from those with privilege and power, causing the health crisis to transform into unnecessarily disproportionate mortality rates for communities of color, the elderly, and the differently abled; the escalating brutality of political rhetoric, which is a precursor to tangible aggression and potential future violence; the increasingly autocratic fascist governance policies emerging around the globe that erode the democratic principles and decision making of the people, by the people, and for the people. While COVID-19 might create an economic recession in many world economies, societies (at least US society) are also going through a social and cultural recession that started before any current economic downturn.

Within any experience of extreme contraction, it is challenging to be open in the individual and collective heart to being genuinely inclusive. When the defended heart is fearful, it is extremely difficult to manifest spiritual ideals of unconditional regard, kindness toward all beings, and the inclusion of all differences. How do we live our lives so that we do not contribute further to the cultural recession of our civilization? If the human heart is inherently gentle, kind, and inclusive, how do we cope with a world that seems so harsh, cruel, and exclusionary? How do we individually and collectively refuse to participate in patterns of discrimination and fragmentation that are all around us? If we see the suffering, how do we not become the suffering as well? Unless we can refrain from falling into unconscious patterns of harming, instead of making the world and our lives a better place, we contribute to making it harder, more difficult, even traumatic. We cannot change that which we are not aware of—that is the Power of Mindfulness: once we are aware of something, we have the ability to transform it. Everything else remains unconscious.

I would like to emphasize four inter-related points and how they relate to the Dharma as follows:

1. True inclusivity is not just a personal or internal experience of awakening (upon which so much Western Buddhist practice focuses). True inclusivity is equally, if not more so, a collective and systemic process. Inclusion is a community practice and cannot be done solely in the isolation of the meditative retreat experience (which some traditions of Western Buddhism highly value). This is both the practice of internal and external satipatthana connected to the Teachings on the necessity of community and Sangha.

2. Because true inclusivity is about transforming historical patterns that span generations, a series of ongoing actions over a considerable time is needed, not merely a one-time intention or effort. One-time trainings, or a single BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/what-is-bipoc.html>) person in the practice space or circle of governance do not begin to address shifting the deep-seated cultural conditioning of racial exclusion. This is the use of wise effort and wise concentration over time.

3. In remedying the disparity of exclusion and the harm of not being inclusive in both Buddhist sanghas and the communities at large, what needs reform are the locations from which power emerges, the process of empowering leaders and decision makers, and how our Dharma communities hold authority. If the spiritual power and authority remain only in the control of the white mainstream, a truly inclusive spiritual community will never be



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able to emerge. A society's relationship to power is based upon the precepts of non-harming and the ethical integrity of wise actions.

4. True inclusivity is the spirituality of paying attention and affirms life. Exclusion is the practice of denial, neglect, and negation and rejects the inherent diversity of life. This is the expansion of the sometimes extremely narrow definition of wise mindfulness into its broadest application to the diversity of life.

For the past decade, social-change and organizational-development professions have used the acronym DEI, which represents "diversity, equity, and inclusion" (<https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/why-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-matter-nonprofits>). However, one large urban insight meditation center on the East Coast of the United States

is proposing to eliminate the "E" (or "equity") from the DEI acronym. The governing body of this mainstream Buddhist community found *equity* too triggering or problematic a term for their mostly white audiences. Doing DEI and antiracism work is the politically correct bandwagon to be seen riding upon; however, the deep work of DEI and inclusivity is more than a superficial image. This meditation center is substituting an "L" for "liberation" in the place of "equity" within the acronym to make it more palatable and less polarizing to their mainstream white audience. *Liberation* is felt to be a more appropriate term of speech within the Dharma. This changed wording not only represents a spiritual bypass using Dharma language but also dangerously conflates the Buddhist principal of wise speech with speech that is pleasant and devoid of tension. To whom is this speech appropriate and

acceptable? In this case, likely only to the privileged white culture. The choice is to create comfort for the mainstream culture at the cost of ignoring the realities of diverse communities. When does "appropriate" become "complicit" to the legacy of microaggressions that perpetuate patterns of white supremacy?

When we commit to changing the entrenched patterns of exclusion, how much leverage do we use when we see the psychic violence of white supremacy in our sacred communities? We can presume that we in Buddhist communities are more aware than the general populace, where physical murder and racialized violence occur daily. But the more subtle psychic violence of invisibility, dismissal, shunning, and willful repudiation of the experiences of diverse communities also occurs daily. We all have a responsibility to transform, whether it be in small or large ways, the seeds of racism and exclusion that are planted every day in innumerable ways in our society. It is these countless seeds and small gestures, not only words but also actions, that compound to eventually produce the reality of police officers performing racialized murder. The denial of diverse realities inherent in exclusion contributes to the path that leads to death.

As a nonblack person in the United States, I also feel the strengthening of white supremacy, which obviates inclusivity. Racism and white supremacy can get reframed and made further invisible by the dominant mainstream culture with attitudes like those below:

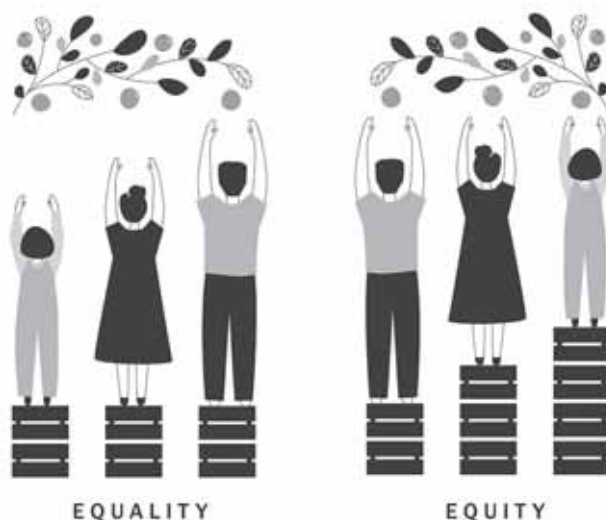


Photo: Shutterstock



Photo: AP / AFLO

*Rev. William Barber II, accompanied by Rev. Liz Theoharis and Rev. Jesse Jackson, speaks to the crowd outside of the United States Capitol on June 23, 2018, during a Poor People's Campaign rally at The National Mall in Washington, DC. The Poor People's Campaign is launching a national bus tour of poverty-stricken areas to bring attention to what they call the "real crises" or "interlocking injustices" afflicting the country including systematic racism, poverty, voter suppression, and ecological devastation.*

- "Racism is still here, but look at the progress we have made" or
- "It is the health crisis that is making racism and supremacy worse" or
- "We just have to get through COVID, and then we can address racism" or
- "I feel so bad about racism, I just don't know what to do" or
- "I can't believe that the police had absolutely no justification for what they did" or
- "I have tried to get minorities to come into our community, but they don't seem to want to."

Independent of the COVID crisis, I am feeling white supremacy intensify as part of a substantial cultural recession that we are experiencing (at least in the United States). While it might surprise those who identify with mainstream dominant cultural identities, I can feel the supremacist sentiments also

permeating our meditation communities. The unconscious policies that lead to a disavowal of diverse experiences are a metaphor for the repudiation of the reality of BIPOC lives—a spiritual equivalent to death. When COVID resulted in negative financial impacts on meditation retreat centers, many of them defaulted to fundraising tactics that were exclusionary and racialized. Their fundraising events often involved exclusively white leadership—creating the perception that it is only resources from the dominant culture that are abundant and worthy enough to support the centers. This is an exclusionary presumption that becomes an act of rejection that negates the existence of whole communities. These unconscious policies of denial are seeds that lead to the explicit life-denying policies of death described during the 2020 rally of the Poor People's Campaign by the Reverend Dr. William J. Barber II, pastor of the Greenleaf Christian Church in North Carolina (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2hOLO1kEBzA>).

When examples are made evident of racism in our sanghas, people can feel shamed, blamed, and attacked. The dominant culture can feel harmed. This feeling is the condition of white fragility (Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*). But the realignment of power and privilege, including within spiritual communities, is never a pleasant or comfortable circumstance, and thus feelings of fragility and defensiveness understandably arise. Redistribution of power feels uncomfortable because it is always experienced as a loss by those who traditionally have control. When diverse communities speak their truth, it can feel disrespectful to the people holding authority. Let me be clear: speaking truth to power is never disrespectful or harmful or a contradiction of the Dharma tenet of wise speech. It is an act of supremacy to claim that unpleasant sensations arising from the dominant culture's unease

are the equivalent of harm or lack of respect. The exclusion of multiple cultural life experiences from practice, from leadership, from decision making, is the harm that is currently pervasive in our Dharma world.

The ironic paradox is that fragility in the dominant white culture is extremely strong and intransigent. It is the strength of this deeply seeded pattern that protects white supremacy, just as supremacy protects the fragility. It is a vicious cycle that is sometimes extremely tough for kindness and compassion to break through. I remain unconvinced that we can do the effective work that is desperately needed in the larger world when the work is not being done internally within our Dharma communities. Unsettling, disturbing, and even disrupting the feelings behind dominant cultural fragility is a skillful means. These actions reduce the oppression of marginalized communities. Speaking truth to power is an act of kindness.

From the outset, East Bay Meditation Center (EBMC), in downtown Oakland, California, considered the practices of ongoing inclusion and awareness of diverse communities to be critical to the development, mission, and success in creating a place where multicultural communities could gather safely to practice. EBMC has been called the most diverse sangha on the planet.

For both introductory and advanced practitioners, the EBMC Agreements for Multicultural Interactions are important norms to be practiced. All of these agreements are implemented collectively and relationally, as well as on an individual, personal level. The specific agreement I wish to highlight in this discussion is Move Up / Move Back: "Encourage full participation by all present. Take note of who is speaking and who is not. If you tend to speak often, consider 'moving back' and vice versa" (<https://eastbaymeditation.org/2017/05/agreements-for-multicultural-interactions/>).



Applying this principle collectively, the broader mainstream community is invited to provide the same opportunities and to offer towards communities of color the invitation to *move up* into their own empowerment. This also means that those same mainstream communities *move back* to create space for the expression of multicultural leadership. In creating a greater sense of wholeness for all communities in the longitudinal course of the Dharma, there must be a conscious, intentional realignment of how communities relate to power. This is the equity piece of inclusion. Part of the responsibility of power is to hold it loosely so that it can be offered generously toward the empowerment of others, especially communities that have not historically had opportunities to hold power. Changing the narrative of exclusion can be done only by changing the narrators who have power over the story.

In creating the next generation of diverse Dharma teachers, we cannot rely on simply training Dharma teachers for a specific community (which is what dominant cultures have functionally done). Instead, we need to create the empowerment of spiritual leaders to hold and be of service to all our communities.

Leadership and the stewardship of spiritual authority are the responsibilities and obligations of us all—even those who never step into that specific role of leadership themselves. We all collaborate to manifest the leadership that our diverse lives require. If this were not so, leadership would fall only to those who have the resources, privilege, and power to obtain it—because the playing field continues not to be level.

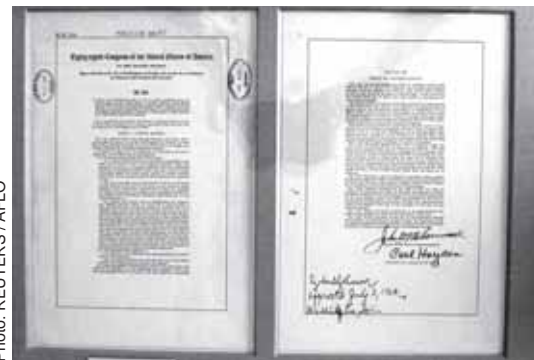
White leadership cannot be in charge of leading, teaching, or determining what leadership training programs would look like. The nature of white privilege and unconsciousness is that white people often do not know what they do not know; they do not realize the privilege

that surrounds them. White leaders are usually not aware of the power and privilege they have, nor do they understand their impact upon people who are not white, not privileged, or not part of the dominant culture. For this reason, inclusive diversity and antiracism practice on the part of white people demonstrates trust that communities of color know what they need in terms of leadership development. White dominant-culture leaders need to move back from leadership for diverse communities to move forward. Grace, in this transition and succession of spiritual authority, is more effortless when there are fewer attachments. Unconscious privilege often does not know what it is attached to. The conscious greed of white supremacy knows the attachments to power and remains attached despite that knowledge.

This radical, inclusive transformation happens on both a personal and a social level. The intention changes our hearts and also the heart of our world. And intention cannot be an end goal in and of itself. We must follow our highest intentions of inclusion with our highest actions promoting equity. If we simply stopped at good intentions, without aligning our behavior, then the road to hell would truly be paved wide.

We will fail, and we do fail. And we return over and over again to the path leading to both justice and freedom—this is the work of social and collective awakening. The fact that the 1964 Civil Rights Act passed doesn't mean that racism is over or that legalized murders of black-bodied people by law enforcement are over. Just because same-sex marriage is now legal in the United States doesn't mean that homophobia is not thriving or that it will not be attacked as it was recently in the judicial courts. The lack of collective awakening in our society is very apparent after our electoral cycles have proven to us how fragile any gains toward justice are.

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has written, "We shall overcome because



The Civil Rights Act of 1964 document is on display in the East Room of the White House in Washington, DC.

the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." The profound subtext here is that justice, as worthy a task as it is in our lives, will take a longer time to be fulfilled than any of us would like, or even than we might have on this earth. Justice will require the efforts of the multitude and the many, rather than the individual and the few. Justice doesn't concern itself only with equity; it respects the sacredness of life within each community and each individual. This, by another name, is the experience of love.

Freedom is not the ability to do or say whatever we want whenever we want to whomever we wish—that is unbridled privilege and power. There is tremendous injustice and unfairness in our cultures, our societies, and our world—and there is freedom. True freedom does not require us to be in a place where there is no problem, struggle, or oppression. True freedom means being in the midst of any or all of those things and still having *clarity* in our minds, *tenderness* in our hearts, and *integrity* in our actions, even when we fail to live into our highest sense of who we can be. True freedom allows us to move through even our most difficult struggles for the benefit of all without recreating cycles of suffering or abuse of others. This is the kind of freedom that we seek together.

This is how we awaken in community and awaken together, inclusively. □

# Religion's Role in Building Inclusive, Peaceful Societies

by Sharon Rosen

***COVID-19's wake-up call is telling us not to return, when this is over, to the divisive and unjust ways of the past that hurt us and our environment but to take a different trajectory toward building a fairer and peaceful world.***

If we are going to succeed in transforming our world into a healthier, just, and more peaceful one, we must focus our main efforts on building inclusive societies. Globalization has demonstrated how interconnected we are, and hopefully we will learn one of the essential lessons from COVID-19—that we are also inextricably interdependent. Countries close borders in an attempt to protect their citizens' health. This may help in the short term, but it is only through international collaboration on fighting the pandemic that this distressing period of our lives will speedily pass. Sharing

information and resources, working together on speedily developing a vaccine with equal and inexpensive access for all, and supporting humanitarian and economic needs around the world are just some of the collaborative measures needed. COVID-19's wake-up call is telling us not to return, when this is over, to the divisive and unjust ways of the past that hurt us and our environment but to take a different trajectory toward building a fairer and peaceful world.

How does this relate to the role of religion today? Can it help develop a strategy that ensures the cultivation

and sustainment of inclusive, peaceful societies?

Perhaps the first thing to note is that religion per se cannot develop a strategy. We live in a magnificently diverse world of different religions, faiths, and beliefs, and each is believed, understood, and practiced within its own context, tradition, and culture. Religious beliefs can be perceived as (and sometimes are) exclusivist, even divisive when they promote one set of beliefs as superior to all others. Yet all religions and faiths aspire to universal peace and human dignity. More and more, the world of interfaith connection has opened up opportunities for religious believers to celebrate their special uniqueness while at the same time learn about and appreciate the commonalities that are to be found within religious diversity. These activities in themselves support the goal of building inclusive societies.

But if we cannot talk generally about the role of religion in developing a strategy of inclusion, there *are* religious actors playing this important role. I intentionally use the term *actors* in order to include people who may not have formal religious authority, titles, or qualifications. Religious actors include global, national, and community players—men, women, and youth—community lay leaders, educators, and activists whose faith infuses their actions. They are influential and trusted people within their communities, have many assets at their disposal, and are well positioned to promote peace. In addition, the thousands of faith-based organizations that



Photo: AFP / AFLO

*A volunteer of the nonprofit charity group Hunger Has No Religion blows under a pot to light a fire to cook porridge for breakfast for children at a nearby underprivileged area in Westbury suburb, Johannesburg, South Africa, on May 23, 2020, during a lockdown in the country to curb the spread of COVID-19. The charity group has been operating since the beginning of the lockdown in South Africa and provides an average of eight hundred meals twice a day, breakfast and lunch, to needy residents.*



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implement humanitarian, developmental, and other activities also play a crucial role in helping people to live in dignity while still practicing their own faith.

This has been especially evident during the pandemic, as religious actors and faith-based organizations have been some of the most trusted first responders, playing essential roles such as explaining safety regulations, adapting religious rituals, and providing food, education, and succor to communities. A senior advisor to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) told me that “the role played by faith actors in ensuring and supporting the resilience shown by so many and under such difficult circumstances needs to be more widely acknowledged by policy makers and factored into key policy decisions as we recover from the effects of the pandemic” (email correspondence with Dr. Kishan Manocha, senior advisor on Freedom of Religion and Belief at the OSCE, May 14, 2020). It is only recently that (mostly Western) countries that have consistently separated issues of religion and state have begun to recognize the importance of including religious actors in discussions for effective policymaking, particularly if the subject under review has a religious dimension.

For believers, religion provides a framework for understanding the material and spiritual world and how to live their lives accordingly. It is an inextricable aspect of their identity, of who they are and who they are not. Given that of the world's seven billion people today,

nearly six billion identify as members of religious communities (Pew Research Center, *The Global Religious Landscape*, December 2012), religious actors have a crucial role to play as integral members of society in ensuring that diversity does not lead to disharmony and violence but to a celebration of the richness within society. But sadly, deeply held religious identities can also be a lightning rod for conflict and a source for fractured societies. When fear, ignorance, and self-righteousness rear their ugly heads, people are stigmatized, scapegoated, and blamed because of their religious beliefs. Various religious minorities, for example, in different countries and across social media, have been blamed for our present pandemic, resulting in concomitant justifications for violence.

If “violence is the ultimate violation of human dignity” (Search for Common Ground, “Our Statement on the Tensions in the United States” [sparked by the killing of George Floyd], <https://www.sfcg.org/statement-on-tensions-united-states-george-floyd/>, accessed June 2020), then the role of religious actors becomes all the more relevant given their religious aspirations for universal peace and human dignity. To address these injustices, the human being's inalienable dignity must be the infrastructure on which to build our efforts. Once we get to know and appreciate one another, we can together build the inclusive societies needed for our well-being.

For the past fifteen years I have had the privilege of working at Search for Common Ground, the world's largest

international nongovernmental organization dedicated to peacebuilding. For nearly forty years the organization has been working to transform conflict into understanding and cooperation around our differences. One of our guiding principles is to include people from all sides of a conflict in order to build relationships of trust that lead to changed attitudes and behaviors. Although not a faith-based organization, Search for Common Ground has recognized the critical importance of engaging religious actors to build enduring peace.

Following are two initiatives where the engagement of religious actors has offered strategies for building peaceful societies. They focus on the root causes of conflict and emphasize inclusion as a guiding principle to reduce interreligious tensions.

## **1. Protecting Holy Sites by Promoting Mutual Respect and Collaboration**

For more than a decade I have represented Search for Common Ground in a dedicated partnership with the Religions for Peace network and two Norwegian organizations to protect and preserve holy sites. With assistance from senior religious leaders worldwide, we developed the Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites ([www.codeonholysites.org](http://www.codeonholysites.org)), whose purpose is to safeguard sacred spaces and promote interreligious reconciliation. The Universal Code offers





Photo: AFP / AFLO

*In Nigeria, holy sites have been in the crossfire of conflict. In the northern regions of the country, holy sites have suffered damages during clashes between Christian farmers and Muslim herders. A woman cries while trying to console a woman who lost her husband during the funeral service for people killed during clashes between cattle herders and farmers, on January 11, 2018, in the Benue state capital, Makurdi.*

practical guidelines for protecting places of worship and includes a bold call for cooperation among all relevant authorities, including religious actors, who are often in conflict. In cases where state authorities fail to effectively safeguard sacred spaces, the Universal Code enables bottom-up community-level activities by empowering religious actors—men, women, and youth—to play their part.

The Universal Code has been endorsed by interfaith networks, religious communities, and leaders worldwide (examples include the Religions for Peace World Council, The Nishkam Gurudwar [Sikh, UK], President of the All India Council of Imams and Mosques, the World Council of Churches, the Hindu Forum of Europe, the Muslim Council of Britain, and the Council of Religious Community Leaders in Israel).

Last year, in the wake of devastating attacks on holy sites as people prayed in their churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples in different parts of the world, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) was tasked by the UN Secretary-General with developing an urgent plan of action (<https://www.unaoc.org/2019/09/launch-of-plan-of-action-to-safeguard-religious-sites/>) for safeguarding holy sites. We partnered with UNAOC to adapt the wording of the Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites to align with the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard

Religious Sites. Over the years, as we've implemented this Universal Code, we have seen how mutual trust has flowed among people who mistrusted and feared one another, and faith leaders are collaborating with civil authorities in places as diverse as Nigeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sri Lanka, and the Holy Land.

## Nigeria

Search for Common Ground works in Nigeria to prevent ethnoreligious violence, transform violent extremism, implement early-warning response efforts, and promote accountability. Our efforts demonstrate that, by and large, despite the violence, conflicts are not inherently sectarian, although they often play out along religious lines. Nigeria, in fact, is marked by interreligious acceptance. A 2010 Pew study shows that 87 percent of Nigerian citizens believe religion plays an important role in their life, and 71 percent think that it is a good thing for people of other faiths to have freedom to practice their beliefs (<https://www.pewforum.org/2010/04/15/executive-summary-islam-and-christianity-in-sub-saharan-africa/>).

Against this backdrop, we engaged male and female Christian and Muslim community religious leaders in Northern Nigeria to build consensus within their communities around the principle that holy places are sites for peace and reconciliation rather than targets for attack. The ability of religious community leaders to come together across faith lines in a conflict zone was a significant step in itself toward facilitating collaboration and joint action. Local, regional, and national conferences were held across the three northern zones of Nigeria, ending in media conferences that highlighted the relationship between protecting holy sites and addressing hate speech, particularly by some religious leaders. There were also calls to

counter misinformation, abuse, and rumors that cause confusion and raise tension between religious communities that in extreme cases leads to recruitment by violent extremist organizations. Particular attention was paid to engaging youth through a photo and video competition calling for a demonstrated recognition of holy sites as places of worship, peace, and dialogue.

Sheikh Nurudeen Lemu, from the Da'wah Institute of Nigeria, noted that "once a place of worship has been demolished, the conflict changes its identity from its real cause to a religious one . . . [everybody] takes sides. If we can find a way of keeping religious sites, sacred places, out of the conflict and have an agreement about that, it becomes easier to diagnose the problems and to treat them." Pastor Margaret Inusa Meka of the Glorious Life International Church, Jos, added, "I think that if we can have that common ground, then we are taking a step towards peace in God's world" (<https://www.sfcg.org/holy-sites-nigeria/>).

## Mount Zion, Jerusalem, Holy Land

In the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict and frequent violence around holy sites, Search for Common Ground's Jerusalem program, together with the Jerusalem Intercultural Center based on Mount Zion, worked to reduce interreligious tensions, build cooperation, protect places of worship, and turn Mount Zion into a center that celebrates the heritages of all three religions attached to the location: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Just outside Jerusalem's Old City walls, Mount Zion is a highly sensitive location given its shared holy site. Centuries-long conflict over ownership and religious rights, fueled by rivalry and intolerance, had resulted in an atmosphere of suspicion and violence. This initiative, which began in 2015, aimed at changing this atmosphere by building



Photo: REUTERS / AFLO

*Israeli policemen walk near the Dormition Abbey on Mount Zion in Jerusalem's Old City, after graffiti was found on some of its exteriors in January 2016. Following the vandalism against the abbey, religious leaders joined to publicly denounce the attack.*

trust and cooperation on issues of common interest. Activities included engaging religious actors with representatives from government ministries, the municipality, and law enforcement agencies to identify shared concerns and find collaborative solutions; establishing a body of volunteers to help maintain a harmonious atmosphere and assist with religious services; and organizing workshops and site visits for Jerusalem Old City's law enforcement authorities and youth to increase interreligious sensitivity.

The results have been quite spectacular given the initial mistrust and intermittent violent behavior. For the first time ever, a 2016 desecration of the Dormition Abbey, located on Mount Zion, elicited a joint public condemnation by religious leaders living on the mount (the statement noted, "We, residents of Mount Zion, call on the public to preserve the security and mutual respect of the Holy Places to all religions on Mount Zion. When one of these places is desecrated, it affects not only the site itself, but also all other holy sites on Mount Zion"). Local authorities were enlisted to repair safety hazards; law enforcement improved; a Mount Zion website was developed celebrating the attachments of all the religions to the mount, all of which contributed to a reduction in violence. Over a thousand youth have toured the shared holy site and participated in workshops to expand understanding of the different religious attachments.

In one activity, an interfaith group of volunteers cleaned up years of garbage and restored tombstones in the famous Muslim Dajani Cemeteries while being supplied with refreshments from the local Ultra-Orthodox Jewish seminary. These may seem like small steps, but they build trust across hardened divides, foster critical discussions about protecting spaces for all faiths, and promote understanding that undermines acts of hate.

## 2. Kyrgyzstan: Promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief

As a post-Soviet country, Kyrgyzstan has a complex relationship with religion and state. Rooted in Soviet communist ideals, many in Kyrgyzstan maintain that religion must not influence state laws, and in turn it is the state's role to regulate and control religious groups. The resurgence of Islam in Kyrgyzstan after independence led to a profound level of mistrust between state authorities, who feared the rise of religious extremism, and some religious communities. Consequently, this has influenced how the police, judiciary, and other state instruments relate to Kyrgyzstan's religious communities.

Search for Common Ground works in Kyrgyzstan to promote a culture of mutual respect amid political, religious, and ethnic tensions. Promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief in Kyrgyzstan is an initiative that engages religious leaders, government authorities, and civil society organizations to jointly foster institutional legal reform and an environment of interreligious acceptance. Since June 2018, Search for Common Ground, in partnership with Kyrgyzstan's State Committee for Religious Affairs, has organized fourteen public sessions across the country to address amendments to Kyrgyzstan's draft law On Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Five hundred and ninety-one representatives from state and law enforcement bodies, religious organizations (including Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, and Baha'i senior religious leaders), academic and educational institutions, human rights organizations, and the media participated in these public hearings. The religious actors who participated in this project had a hand in formulating new government legislation that directly affects the religious rights of their communities (Gulnara Asilbekova and Kanekey Jailobaeva, "Final Evaluation: Promoting Religious Freedom through Government and Civil Society Collaboration in the Kyrgyz Republic," Search for Common Ground, July 2017).

We've learned three main lessons from these initiatives:

*Religious actors play a critical role in building inclusive societies.* Religious men, women, and youth, particularly those working at the community level, need to be encouraged to engage in building interreligious relationships, cooperating on issues of common concern, and using their influence to promote inclusion.

*Collaboration, not arms, builds peaceful societies.* Investments of time, effort, and resources are needed to engage and train religious actors in building mutual trust if we want to deal with root causes and sustain peaceful solutions. Continually pouring more and more resources into security has proven to be insufficient in protecting humanity.

*Multistakeholder approaches are essential.* Inclusion also means collaboration among local, national, and intergovernmental sectors; law enforcement authorities; the media; civil society organizations; and courts of justice, among others.

In this way, religious actors can live up to their highest aspirations, hold the dignity of each and every human being in their hearts, and cultivate inclusive societies that leave no one behind. □

# A Society Based on a Culture of Peace

by Kathy Ramos Matsui

***Collaborative efforts of religious leaders and peace educators are required to build an inclusive society, that is, to establish a culture of peace.***

Peace educators and people of various traditions and religions (religionists) envision an inclusive society where all living beings on this beautiful Earth can live in harmony by caring for each other and by sharing the same future and goal, secured with dignity, in happiness, and with all other benefits that they have the right to enjoy. Peace education methods of inquiry and of envisioning the future are important for establishing a society that respects cultural diversity. However, in reality there are many challenges in this present world that trigger exclusion rather than inclusion. There are many incidents of divided societies, violation against human dignity, and disrespect for nature. We should be able to read both the negative and the positive signs. If we read only the negative signs, we may feel overwhelmed and unable to cope, paralyzed into inaction. If we read only the positive signs, we may feel satisfied and think it is needless to change, which can also paralyze us into inaction. Hence we must read the signs correctly, recognizing the problems but at the same time seeing the signs of hope. The Chinese word for *crisis* (危機) is pronounced *kiki* in Japanese. The first *ki* means danger, breakdown; the second *ki* means opportunity, breakthrough. The task of religious leaders and peace educators is to cultivate awareness of

the problems and challenges but also to cultivate hope at and to serve as agents of the breakthrough (Castro and Galace 2010). This paper will discuss the significance of achieving an inclusive society, the definition of inclusion, and a plan of action to build an inclusive society.

To build an inclusive society, there is a need to actualize the declaration posted at the Tenth World Assembly of Religions for Peace, held in Lindau, Germany, in August 2019. The fifteen appeals contained in the declaration were compiled by the Japan Committee of Religions for Peace based on the assembly theme “Caring for Our Common Future: Advancing Shared Well-Being.” To achieve the goal of shared well-being, a paradigm shift is needed to create an atmosphere in which human security, not just national security, is guaranteed. Shared well-being connotes the importance of life and the dignity of all living beings on Earth. However, in the mindset of the political leaders of the world, peace can be maintained only by national security, and security means being equipped with military arms and strength, that violence can be prevented by violence, and that violence can be resolved by violence. War is devastating to human beings and to the environment, and yet nations have failed to find alternatives to war. But lo

and behold, religious people are standing up to transform our divided communities into an inclusive society.

The objective of the Tenth World Assembly is to seek and act upon alternatives to war and violence. Background papers under the following five themes were prepared to identify issues of common concern and suggestions for collaborative action on the local, national, regional, and global levels of the Religions for Peace network. Each of the following themes is based on the purpose of advancing shared well-being: (1) achieving a multireligious vision of positive peace, (2) preventing and transforming violent conflicts, (3) promoting just and harmonious societies, (4) promoting integral human development, (5) protecting the earth.

Although all of the fifteen appeals are important, this article will discuss three of them. The first appeal, “Our Common Future,” discusses the definition of *inclusion* through the words of wisdom of various religious leaders and peace educators to elucidate its meaning. The sixth and fifteenth appeals were chosen to elaborate on the plan of action proposed by the Japanese committee for realizing the suggestions for collaborative action mentioned in the background papers of the Lindau conference. The plan is an effort toward creating an inclusive society.

What is the definition of an inclusive society? S. Opatow, J. Gerson, and S. Woodside (2005, 303) define moral inclusion as “the emphasis on fairness, resource sharing, and concern for the





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well-being of all underlying peace building.” With this definition in mind, what can peace educators and people of various religious backgrounds do to build an inclusive society for the well-being of all people? The answer is in the first appeal, “Our Common Future,” based on the value “No individual can attain happiness without the happiness of the whole world.” Kenji Miyazawa’s book *Nomin geijutsu gairon koyo* (The summary for a general theory of farmers’ arts, 1926), depicts the goals we need to seek to achieve an inclusive society. He writes, “No individual can attain happiness without the happiness of the whole world.” Thus, an inclusive society is a kind of society where no individual happiness is possible unless everyone in the whole world should be happy, that no one gets left behind.

Betty Reardon (1994, 21), the former director of the Peace Education Center at Columbia University in New York and a world-renowned peace scholar, concluded that “we live on Earth not to control spaceship Earth but to be a part of a living organism with human society as a living subsystem within the whole, responsible but certainly not in control.” This suggests that the well-being of the whole world depends on a humble attitude on the part of human society toward this living organism, Earth, and a recognition of our role as its protector.

Nichiko Niwano (1990, 53), the current president of the lay Buddhist organization Risho Kosei-kai, adds to the concept of the inclusive whole: “If we all fully comprehend the Buddhist

teaching of universal causal interrelation and if we try to bear our interdependence with all other creatures in mind in everything we do, it will not be difficult to create a good world.” We can describe an inclusive society simply as a good society or a good world, as Reardon (1995, 7) states, “Defining positive peace, ‘the good society,’ as a set of social, political, and economic conditions dependent on the realization of rights and authentic democracy is to say that positive peace derives from social responsibility and active citizenship.”

Furthermore, UNESCO and the Centre UNESCO de Catalunya met in Barcelona from December 12 to 18, 1994, to prepare the “Declaration on the Role of Religion in the Promotion of a Culture of Peace,” which states that religions can contribute to the culture of peace. What is this culture of peace? According to the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace adopted by the UN General Assembly, “a culture of peace has a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life” that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups, and nations. Such an agreement is also identified as universal respect for human rights. We need to renounce the use of violence within the society. We must develop nonviolent processes for dispute settlement and decision making. Such processes heal divided societies and build an inclusive society. We need to believe that there is hope of strengthening human rights and

reducing violence in the global society. These are fundamental aspects of peace. The declaration says that UNESCO recognizes the importance of religion in human life, as the present situation of the world shows an increase in armed conflicts and violence, poverty, social injustice, and structures of oppression.

The second article of the declaration clearly states: “We face a crisis which could bring about the suicide of the human species or bring us a new awakening and a new hope. We believe that peace is possible. We know that religion is not the sole remedy for all the ills of humanity, but it has an indispensable role to play in this most critical time.” The declaration further mentions that “unless we recognize pluralism and respect diversity, no peace is possible. We strive for the harmony which is at the very core of peace” (UNESCO 1994). An inclusive society embraces diversity and pluralism. Building an inclusive society creates a culture of peace.

As a plan of action, we observe appeals six and fifteen. The sixth appeal suggests a “global application of methods of amicable settlement unique to individual regions.” As recommended in this appeal, peace educators and religious leaders can learn from various religious and traditional practices methods to achieve reconciliation and peace. One method mentioned is the Hawaiian practice of *hoʻoponopono*. *Hoʻoponopono* means to make right with the ancestors, or to make right with the people with whom you have relationships. Peace educators believe that the original purpose of *hoʻoponopono* was to correct



On the second day of the conference, some nine hundred delegates and guests of the Tenth World Assembly of Religions for Peace, entitled “Caring for Our Common Future,” which was held on August 20–23, 2019, in Lindau, Germany, took part in a multireligious procession and an interreligious and spiritual ceremony at the island town’s Luitpold Park, where the Ring for Peace, a 7.5-meter wooden sculpture in the form of a Möbius strip, was established. It is the symbol of the Tenth Assembly of Religions for Peace and will serve as a lasting symbol for peace between the religions.

the wrongs that had occurred in someone’s life (Burgess 2020). Thus *ho’oponopono* is a Hawaiian approach to conflict transformation and reconciliation.

The other method introduced is the *Moyainaoshi* movement in Minamata, Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan. As Y. Tsurumi (2020) indicates, “The original meaning of *moyai* is ‘tying boats together’ and ‘doing something cooperatively.’” *Moyainaoshi* means rebuilding the bonds between people that were lost as a result of the outbreak of Minamata disease—in other words, bonds between patients and government and patients and other citizens, and between patients and one another and citizens and one another.” The word was first introduced in 1994 by the then mayor of Minamata, Mr. Masazumi Yoshii, as “a solution for dialogue as Japanese people did in the old days to solve a problem at the community level” (personal interview).

There are other regional reconciliation methods, including the Islamic practice of *sulha* and the African concept of *ubuntu*, that can be studied and practiced to achieve amicable settlements. According to Dr. Mimasaka Higuchi, former president of the Japan Muslim Association, *sulha* is an Arabic word that means “conclusion of peace.” Generally it is used to mean reconciliation. Originally the word comes from the expression “to put the wrong back to a good situation” or “to bring back to the original form” (personal interview).

*Ubuntu* is an African philosophy that connotes humaneness, caring, and community. M. Gerzon (2003, 44–45) quotes the South African peace activist Susan Collin Marks’ definition of the centuries-old African practice of *ubuntu*: “[Ubuntu] speaks of community-building, a basic respect for human nature, sharing, empathy, tolerance, the common good and acts of kindness. In English there are many ‘C words’ that are akin to *ubuntu*: consultation, compromise, cooperation, conscience—but the biggest C of all is compassion.” The African practice of *ubuntu* has an important role in keeping the culture of peace in the community. *Ubuntu* emphasizes the priority of restorative as opposed to retributive justice. M. Ramsey (2003, 86) mentioned that “ubuntu speaks of communal peace and harmony.” *Ubuntu* compels us to understand what it means to be a human being.

Then there is *muhibah*, a word from the Malaysian tradition introduced by Dr. Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman (2010, 18) of International Islamic University Malaysia: “*Muhibah* is a unique word, self-contained and self-explanatory, a word with no direct or word for word translation in many other languages. *Muhibah* combines the meaning of kinship and togetherness, love and affection, sympathy and empathy, respect and decorum. . . . *Muhibah* is a spirit, a spirit of togetherness, a culture of sincere and appreciative co-existence with sensitivity towards fellow citizens and fellow beings, a kinship

and a fellowship among the people of this nation, Malaysia.”

However difficult healing may be, the religious and traditional practices are processes that may be crucial in assisting victims to overcome the past and achieve well-being. The processes focus on and include the victim, the wrongdoers, and other stakeholders that divide the community. These traditional processes of reconciliation play an important role in building an inclusive society.

The fifteenth appeal, “Development of Human Resources for Religion-Based Amicable Settlement and Peace Building,” depicts the importance of education and training. The goal for most peace educators is to develop the knowledge and skills to achieve a more humane society (on a community, national, or global basis), derived from positive, mutually beneficial relationships among the members of the society. Peace education also aims to preserve the earth and all living beings. It is a comprehensive and inclusive learning process that empowers children and adults to become active participants in the transformation of their societies (active citizenship) to a more livable, secure, diverse, accepting world. Peace education and religion can collaborate to cultivate the knowledge base, skills, attitudes, and values that seek to transform people’s mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors that have created or exacerbated violent conflicts. Transformation is sought by building awareness and

understanding, developing concern, and challenging personal and social action that will enable people to create conditions and systems that actualize nonviolence, justice, environmental care, and other peace values.

The campaign statement of the Global Campaign for Peace Education is “A culture of peace will be achieved when citizens of the world understand global problems; have the skills to resolve conflict constructively; know and live by international standards of human rights, gender, and racial equality; appreciate cultural diversity; and respect the integrity of the earth.” Religion can provide opportunities for citizens of the world to practice the points stated above and build the culture of an inclusive society. Such an accomplishment is identified as universal respect for human rights that promotes renouncing the use of violence within the society and developing non-violent processes for dispute settlement and decision making. The goal of peace education joins the goal of all religions.

Reardon (1994, 26) asserts, “As nations, we need to learn our responsibility to world society; as educators we need to prepare our students to carry social responsibility at all levels from local to global. Social responsibility requires that we recognize ourselves as members of a world community held together by concepts of common security, liberty, and humanity.” As religious people, we, too, need to recognize ourselves as members of a world community held together to “proactively engage in peace building, nuclear abolition, global environmental protection, eradication of poverty, and humanitarian assistance for peace” (quoting from the fifteenth appeal).

Reardon (2001, 49–50) concluded, “Building a culture of peace depends very much on education because education in our contemporary world is the main carrier of culture. Only education can enable societies to understand the culture of violence that has blighted our past, debases our present, and threatens

our future. It is through education that the peoples of the world will be able to derive and prepare to pursue the vision of a culture of peace.”

Collaborative efforts of religious leaders and peace educators is required to build an inclusive society, that is, to establish a culture of peace. As Kamaruzaman (2010, 10) has noted, “Religions are not only about faith, belief and spirituality, or only about relationship of the persons with God and the Divine. Religion is also about relationships with people, about how to respect and accommodate people, agreeable or disagreeable these people may be. This relationship is called ethic, and together with guidelines on proper conduct, namely the proprieties and etiquettes, they form the inter-personal dimension of the religion.” The role of religion is to take action to build a culture of peace, as proposed in this article, caring for our common future and advancing shared well-being. Thus, a culture of peace is the goal of an inclusive society. □

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# A Just Heart

by Susan Frederick-Gray

***We will never be profound, effective, or long-lasting leaders on the road of justice unless we also attend to the source of the fruitfulness of our work—and that means developing, maintaining, and nurturing a spiritual practice.***

When I was new to the ministry, a mentor shared with me the story of a minister who, nearing his retirement, was asked by his congregation to give a talk describing his entire theology—what he had learned throughout his long ministry about the nature of humanity, religion, God, meaning, and life itself. So on the Sunday he was to give this message, he stepped into the pulpit and said quietly, “love.” He said it again, this time with a sense of invitation and a broad smile, “Love.” Then he said it loudly, powerfully, “LOVE.” Then he said it

again, softly tenderly, “love.” And then one more time, with certainty, “Love.” Then he smiled at the people and stepped down from the pulpit.

Love is the foundational principle of my faith and practice as a Unitarian Universalist. Love is the motivation behind our religious commitment to work for justice. Love is a practice that leads one away from self-preoccupations to an experience and understanding of both compassion and the interconnectedness we share with all humanity and creation. Love binds us to others

and reminds us that we are connected and meant to be whole. It is love that leads us to hear the cries of injustice, to feel intimately the ways we ourselves experience separation and disconnection, and to feel the urgent call to confront systems that create and are built on separation, indignity, dehumanization. Love is the foundation of so many religious traditions, but it is not a love that is only tender, only gentle. The practice of love and compassion that is the foundation of religious commitment is one that is inseparable from the work of justice. It is a love that is powerful, that can be both fierce and tender, gentle and demanding, flexible and steadfast. It holds a both/and way of being that is absolutely necessary for these days we are living in.

A word on love. In English we use the word *love* to refer to the affection and commitment we feel for a lover or spouse. It is the same word one uses to describe one’s care for family and friends, as well as one’s devotion to community or country. Love is also the word that means compassion for those we know and those we don’t know. As Unitarian Universalists, when we speak of love from our religious perspective, we mean an overflowing and abundant sense of compassion for all beings and a commitment to the liberation and wholeness of all beings. It is a love that welcomes all, that abides always with us, that leaves no one out.

This is an incredibly difficult and dangerous time we are living in. The coronavirus pandemic is the most



Photo: REUTERS / AFLO

*At sunrise, a soldier keeps watch at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, after a night of protests over the death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, in the custody of Minneapolis police.*



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life-altering event in my lifetime. But it is not just the pandemic that is dangerous. Across the world, and in my own country of the United States, we are experiencing a weakening and corruption of democracy; a growth of authoritarianism and nationalism; growing militarism; and a rise in ethnic, religious, and racist bigotry, violence, and intentionally xenophobic, racist, homophobic, and transphobic policies, including practices of criminalization and detention that violate the fundamental human rights of entire groups of people. These are heartbreaking and volatile times. Specifically, I name my country, the United States' role in the last few years of leading and giving license to these dangerous trends.

What does a faith whose foundation is compassion, the call to love one another, offer us in these times? I believe it offers us a path forward, but it will not be a path without struggle, organizing, and the practice of the fierceness of love.

Within many religious movements, there is a tendency to separate spirituality from social justice. In this moment of particular volatility, there is a tension between those who call us to greater spiritual practice as a way to respond to the moment and those who call us to the streets, to protest and disrupt the mechanisms of suffering, exploitation, violence, and abuse. This tension arises within local congregations and also within individuals.

On the one hand, this separation can feel reasonable. After all, the work of

justice, of organizing people and campaigns, the times when we are called to be in solidarity and action: these can have a very different quality from the moments when we sit in the sacredness of worship, when we open our spirits in praise of life, when we sit in the still quiet of the morning in meditation, releasing our linguistic analysis and judgment of the world to rest in a moment of just being. These two aspects of religious life can and often do feel very different. They each offer their own moments of fear, courage, depth, and ecstasy.

Yet there is an innate risk in this separation. When we see the work of cultivating spiritual depth as separate from seeking wholeness and justice in the world, when we see these as two divergent paths, we miss the power and depth that is possible—that is necessary—when we hold them together, recognizing they are one.

A model of one who lived a faith that exemplified the integration of the work of the heart and the work of justice is the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

One cannot read Dr. King's writings without experiencing the undeniable presence of love. His powerful love for humanity and his belief in humanity's capacity for compassion and right action course through his words and his deeds. And right alongside that love, he spoke unapologetically about the systems of injustice, particularly racism, militarism, and poverty, that denied people their fundamental dignity. Beyond words, he organized for power, he confronted



*Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–68), American clergyman and civil rights leader.*

injustice, he helped dismantle laws of segregation and oppression, and he put his own life at risk to win the freedom of his people—the freedom of Black Americans—to fight for the poor and exploited, and to call out the injustice of U.S. militarism. As effectively as Dr. King understood power and organizing for power, he knew that power had to be joined with love. In 1967 he said, “Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love” (*A Testament of Hope*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1986, 247).

Dr. King's legacy and his effectiveness were grounded in his ability to be unwavering in naming the systemic forces that created suffering and to build power to change those systems without sacrificing love. Drawing on the Christian scriptures, he invoked the formula Jesus offered, to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves." He spoke of it as embodying a "tough mind and a tender heart." He understood the need for a both/and approach, that as religious people who believe in the liberation of all people, we need to be wise, sharp, and clear in our understanding, as well as compassionate and gentle. King understood that the greatest strength is not in choosing between two seeming opposites but in being able to embody both of these qualities. From his personal writings, we learn of how Dr. King continually returned to his prayer life, to which he brought his fears, his heartbreak, his doubts, and his faith. And through that practice, through tending to his spiritual life, he was again strengthened and called back to the work of justice.

One has to attend to both spiritual practice and acts of justice. We learn to embody this both/and way of being by nurturing both our spiritual life and our outward commitments. We build compassion and awareness by investing in our prayer life. And we build the courage and skills for making justice by getting involved in organizing, by supporting movements for justice, by building our own capacity for courage to name and resist injustice. Rather than choosing between these aspects of a religious life, when we cultivate them together, they strengthen each other.

The "just heart" is a metaphor for the union of cultivating compassion through spiritual practice and cultivating courage through the work of justice. I borrow the image of a just heart from a devotional practice, taught by the Unitarian Universalist ministers Reverend Laurel Hallman and Reverend



Photo: AFP / AFLO

*The White House as seen from Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington, DC, on July 27, 2020. Unitarian Universalists everywhere are joining the Black Lives Matter movement.*

Harry Scholefield, called "Living By Heart." In one chapter of the course, they speak of the Just Heart as a way of allowing our work for justice to emerge from a rootedness in our devotional life.

The most powerful acts for justice are rooted in our spiritual connection to life, creation, and humanity. For it is this relational spirit, otherwise known as love, that has the power to open hearts and minds and the resilience and strength to move mountains of injustice and make room for peace. Developing our capacity for compassion reminds us of the fundamental ways all are interconnected and of that sense of connection and dependence on one another which allows us to move in solidarity in ways that can make so many things possible.

Right now in nations across the globe, all of humanity has a difficult teacher. The science of the coronavirus pandemic reminds us in undeniable ways that we are all interconnected and that our actions and ways of being impact the health and well-being of others. This is even more apparent as the virus exposes the vulnerability resulting from inequity, poverty, and injustice. It thrives in places and within systems where people are treated as disposable. In the United States, long-standing systems of white supremacy have resulted in COVID-19's killing Black and brown people at exponentially higher rates, including within prisons and detention centers. And throughout our country, politicians reopened states and gave up on lockdown protocols knowing full well it could sicken and even kill our

own citizens. As religious people who believe in the value and dignity of all people and the radical interdependence that connects us all, we need to show up in new ways that embody these values of love and interconnectedness so we can better protect people in the present while organizing for a more just and equitable world in the future.

The just heart marries the ideals of our prophetic visions of justice with the relational and spiritual nourishment exemplified by the heart. Only together can they bring about real change, and only by joining them together can we carry out social justice ministries without withering on the vine. The choice is not between the activist and the mystic. Our strength as religious communities is to practice the middle way.

We will never be profound, effective, or long-lasting leaders on the road of justice unless we also attend to the source of the fruitfulness of our work—and that means developing, maintaining, and nurturing a spiritual practice. This means we attend diligently and intentionally to our spiritual lives because it is essential.

As the story of the wise pastor reminds us, the sum of all known theology, the first and the last, is love. May it be the first, the last, the sum, and the essence of how we live, how we act, how we organize, how we build, how we heal, how we tend, how we give, and how we pray. May our practice ensure that the fire in our souls burns as passionately for wisdom and love as it does for justice and action. □



# Social Inclusion for Muslims in the Arab World and Japan

by Makoto Mizutani



***One can well say that a call for more mercy and spiritual care, with a heightened role of religions, has become a part of a modus vivendi in this twenty-first century. Hence, it may be that Muslims in Japan hope for the inclusion of Japan in this new march in the international arena.***

## Arab Responses to the Issue of Social Inclusion

Although “social inclusion” is a rather broad term, Arab responses to this issue have been articulate. The United Nations World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 promoted the idea of inclusive society as “a society for all,” in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play. Such an inclusive society is equipped with mechanisms that accommodate diversity and enable people’s active participation in their political, economic, and social lives. As such, it overrides differences of race, gender, class, generation, and geography and ensures equal opportunities for all to achieve their full potential in life, regardless of origin.

Enshrined in the UN 2030 Agenda is the principle that every person should reap the benefits of prosperity and enjoy minimum standards of well-being. This is captured in the seventeen sustainable development goals that are aimed at freeing all nations and peoples and segments of society from poverty and hunger and also ensuring, among other things, healthy lives and access to

education, modern energy, and information. The agenda embraces broad targets aimed at promoting the rule of law, ensuring equal access to justice, and broadly fostering inclusive and participatory decision making.

Now let us turn to some of the main Arab Islamic responses to these issues.

### *Makkah Document of 2019*

The Muslim World League convened an international conference titled “The Values of the Middle Way and the Moderation” in May 2019, gathering approximately twelve hundred participants from 139 countries. It issued the Makkah Document (Wathiqa Makkah al-Mukarrama, [https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/Makkah\\_Declaration](https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/Makkah_Declaration) [in Arabic]), which contains the following points:

- Religious diversification is rooted in Islamic heritage from its beginning.
- Human beings are equal and share one origin.
- The fight against terrorism and coercion should be continued.
- Support of cultural and religious diversity.
- Call for a dialogue among civilizations.
- Call for female empowerment and social participation.

*Makoto Mizutani has a PhD in Islamic Thought and has taught for fifteen years at the Arabic Islamic Institute in Tokyo as academic adviser and has published the ten-volume Works on Islamic Belief (in Japanese) and, most recently, The Qur'an in Easy Japanese. He enjoys an intimate understanding of both Buddhism and Islam and serves as an active executive director at the Japan Muslim Association.*

- Call for a dialogue among youths, particularly young Muslims around the world.

The basic tenet for social inclusion, or in Arabic, *al-Ta'ayush*, is evident in the document, though the term itself does not appear.

### *Doha Conference on Social Inclusion*

The Ibn Khaldun Center for Humanities and Social Studies at Qatar University has been organizing conferences on a more local level, the most recent of which was convened in Doha in March 2019 under the title “Civilizational Inclusion or Harmonious Living among the Peoples of the Middle East (Mu'tamar bi-al-Doha hawla al-Ta'ayush al-Hadari bayna Qawmiyat al-Sharq al-Awsat).” Here the term “inclusion” may be understood as “harmonious living,” as the Arabic term *al-Ta'ayush* can be construed in either way in this context.

### *Statement on Inclusion in Islam*

The International Islamic Fiqh [Law]

Academy (<http://www.iifa-aifi.org/5002.html> [in Arabic]), established by the World Islamic Summit held in June 2006, issued its “Statement on Inclusion in Islam” in November 2018. It presented twenty-six arguments claiming that Islam has been based on the concept and value of inclusion from its inception. Here the term *al-Ta’ayush* is squarely employed in the title of the statement, and it is firmly codified in the context of Islamic law, as in the well-quoted Qur’anic verses, “I do not worship what you worship. . . . You have your religion and I have mine” (109:2, 6).

## Piecemeal Responses to the Question by the Muslim Community in Japan

No major statement or declaration has been issued by native Japanese Muslims as of May 2020, as their number is only about twenty thousand, while the total number of all Muslims in Japan reaches around two hundred thousand, including non-Japanese residents. The primary objective in this section, then, is to review some of the main aspects of social inclusion among Muslims in Japan, both Japanese and non-Japanese.

1. International terrorism has worked to exclude the Muslim community in Japan, just as it has around the globe in some locations. Some have felt they need to defend themselves from any misunderstanding that Islam is the direct source of radicalism and direct action, which many terrorists themselves have claimed. Regarding this harassment among the Muslims in Japan, the Japan Muslim Association, for example, has issued a number of statements blaming the radicals and declaring that Islam as such has nothing to do with such actions or ideas. The reaction from the general public regarding terrorism has been rather modest toward the Muslims in Japan. The fact that the Muslim community

is an absolute minority in the society may contribute to this mitigated reaction, though it may also be because the Muslims are trying to behave themselves in social relations. I, for one, have kept saying that the best policy for the Muslims in Japan is to try their best to be good citizens in this society.

2. What struck the Muslim community in 2010 was the leakage of Muslim information gathered in the police offices and publicized on the Internet, which was then published in book form (*Ryūshutsu “Kōan Tero Jōhō” zen dēta* [Leaked police terrorism info: all data], Daisan-shokan, 2010 [in Japanese]). This collection showed clearly that the police had been targeting Muslims in their security operations. No further details have been disclosed that indicate who did what. But without doubt, it alerted the Muslim community to be wary in dealing with the authorities, which kept sending staff officers into Muslim prayer facilities—with the consent of the facility managers, who thought it best to cooperate with the authorities and prove that they had nothing to hide. This can be rather ominous when one remembers the 2012 arrest of a non-Japanese man praying at a Christian church in Kawasaki City, who was convicted of not carrying his passport as required by law.

3. Special attention should be drawn to issues relating to the living conditions of Muslims in Japan, such as halal foodstuffs, education in public schools, funerals and graveyards, and medical treatment, among others.

- We note that there has been a quick development of a halal food-supply system and a growing number of halal restaurants, which has eased the level of tension that once existed quite widely.

- Some distinguished efforts have been made to introduce school texts and materials that cover the questions of international cultural divergence, and we hear some cases of preparing a separate room for fasting Muslim children

during the month of Ramadan, while their classmates are taking lunch in an adjacent room.

- Islamic graveyards have been newly constructed here and there as land lots become available. This might happen, for example, when Buddhist temples that suffer from a lack of funds also choose to sell some of their land. Although it is not problem at present, should the Muslim community expand quickly with an increase of Muslim immigrants, it is possible that this could become a topic of increasing concern among the Japanese people.

- Medical treatment for female patients is a serious problem if one looks at it squarely. However, the dire need for medicine and the urgency of medical matters are usually what prevent them from becoming social problems on a large scale.

- LGBT is a complex case, as Islam essentially stands against it. The LGBT population in Japan is said to be approximately ten million, far more than the number of Muslims ([https://www.outjapan.co.jp/lgbtcolumn\\_news/news/2019/1/5.html](https://www.outjapan.co.jp/lgbtcolumn_news/news/2019/1/5.html) [in Japanese]). It would be a test case if the Muslims were to choose to side with the minorities while suspending the position based on their own creed. This is yet to be seen, but a choice is in their hands.

## Academic Research

It appears that academics are leading the discussion on social inclusion of Muslims in Japan. Although the Japanese term *kyōsei* refers to social inclusion, it is used primarily by researchers rather than activists on the ground.

The Japan Association for Middle East Studies was to have its annual general assembly on May 16, 2020, under the title “Human Inclusion and Religions,” but the project had to be canceled because of the untimely development of COVID-19. The meeting would have gathered both religious and



*Muhammad al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League, prays during a visit at the former Nazi German concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz II Birkenau in Brzezinka, near Oswiecim, Poland, on January 23, 2020.*

nonreligious academics and activists and was intended to be held in a university where religious studies are much stressed. It would have taken place on the same date as the UN Peace and Inclusion Day, as the UN convener in Tokyo called it.

Mention should also be made of an organized study on the gender issue in Islam (<https://kaken.nii.ac.jp/ja/grant/KAKENHI-PROJECT-16H01899/> [in Japanese]). The project—centering around nine designated areas: thoughts, laws, family systems, education, social development, politics, medical care, labor, and archives (recording of events)—was kicked off in 2016 with government subsidies. The intent of the research is to establish studies on gender questions as a vital aspect of justice in Islam, and it is administered mainly by the University of Tokyo and the Tokyo University for Foreign Studies.

The problem of social inclusion may increase among Muslims in Japan in the future; however, it is currently addressed primarily by individual Muslims, and even then it is rather uncommon, based on the spirit of hospitality among the Japanese public and because the Muslim community is yet too small to generate any major social voice. No hate speeches targeted against Muslims have been reported at this time, though quite a few publications by journalists and analysts blame Islam as a source of terrorism and claim that it may lead to a clash of civilizations.

## Hope for a Religious Revival in Japan

What is perceived as a serious obstruction for Muslims in Japan is the low level of religious awareness among the public at large. Muslims, devoid of any missionary institutions, all have a desire to propagate Islam in new lands. However, they must find Japan not to be very promising, where secularism has prevailed for more than seventy years, since the end of World War II. Now, since the nation has achieved economic recovery and after having suffered a loss of spiritual direction and a decay of morality, there is a genuine wish among many, Muslims and others, to see a religious revival in a new era. Some are even calling for an amendment to the constitution that would allow public schools to teach religion in the classroom. However, this goal is unlikely to be achieved at this time, given more eye-catching issues such as the defense policy.

Nonetheless, we may note a clear turn, around the whole world, toward more inclusion, conciliation, leniency, and mercy, and toward an increased spiritual approach to human life in general. As a clear sign of this, let us have a look at the two photos here. One is a scene of Muhammad al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, praying at one of the holocaust sites in Poland on January 23, 2020, when he visited there on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary

of the release of Jewish detainees in Nazi camps (<https://www.bbc.com/arabic/trending-51239625> [in Arabic]). And the other is Pope Francis giving an address at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park on November 24, 2019, when he visited Japan thirty-eight years after the last visit by a pope, the late Pope John Paul II in 1981.

Although these two occasions were not orchestrated to take place sequentially, they reflect very well a new phase of human community. This increased inclination toward a change in religious roles resulted from the collapse of Communism in 1990 and the 9/11 disaster in 2001. Both events unleashed various dynamics affecting the whole world; in particular, they brought religions and politics closer together. One can well say that a call for more mercy and spiritual care, with a heightened role of religions, has become a part of a *modus vivendi* in this twenty-first century. Hence, it may be that Muslims in Japan hope for the inclusion of Japan in this new march in the international arena. □

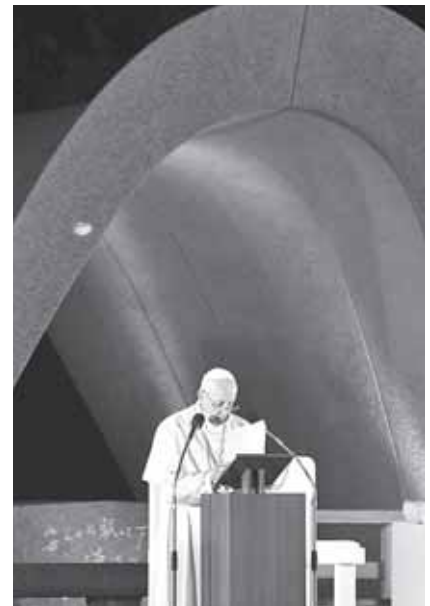


Photo: AFP / AFLO

*Pope Francis visits the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park on November 24, 2019. He said, "The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possession of atomic weapons is immoral."*



# Violence in Buddhism

by Michael Zimmermann

***The primary position of compassion trumps nonviolence. Nonviolent means is still something that is very much held in esteem, but as a moral guideline, compassion is the dominating factor. . . . Violence has been accepted as a necessity in light of a compassionate orientation toward the world.***

It happened many years ago. I was still a student of Buddhist studies at a German university. I had been invited to continue my studies in Japan, and considering myself to be a follower of Buddhism, I was excited to meet a well-known Japanese scholar and priest of Pure Land Buddhism on my arrival in Kyoto. Like most of my Buddhist friends in Germany, I had been on a vegetarian diet for years. I was proud to refrain from consuming meat and fish in the name of a religion that is often portrayed as one of tolerance, peace, and nonviolence: Buddhism. When, on my arrival in Japan, I mentioned my vegetarian diet to my Japanese host, I could see that he felt irritated with me taking for granted that Buddhism is a way of life refraining from eating meat and fish. I was struck by his unexpected reaction as he told me that he deems a vegetarian diet to be a useless form of asceticism. I had never thought of vegetarianism as a form of ascetic exercise. His explanation was simple: to strive for a spiritual advantage by way of following a particular religious practice is considered to be without a salvific result. It is, so he said, only through the grace of the mighty Buddha Amida that we

can achieve something wholesome on our spiritual path.

## Meat Eating as a Form of Violence

I take this as an example to illustrate how different the evaluation of “violence” in a religious context can be. Violence is not restricted to warfare and physical means; it can also comprise the daily patterns of our life: the slaughtering of animals for nutrition, structural manifestations such as hierarchical pressure and disadvantaging particular groups within society, and subtler forms of violence in terms of a coercive rhetoric or psychological pressure. There is no religion on earth that, in its conception, excludes such possible manifestations of violence in its entirety. The conviction of my Japanese host that Amida Buddha alone can grant us salvific benefits and his recommendation to eat meat and fish in order to avoid “useless asceticism” is a good example of that.

On the one hand, within the ethical universe of the Buddhism of the Great Vehicle (Mahayana) to which the Central and Eastern Asian forms of Buddhism belong, we find that compassion is

situated in a prominent overarching position, when seen from the doctrinal standpoint. On the other hand, all Buddhist traditions build on particular historical settings, and making changes would run the risk of being accused of deviating from the “authentic” teachings as they had once been laid out by the founders. If the founder of that religious tradition took the consumption of meat and fish as granted, this feature would become established for the following generations.

For someone who is looking at this from the outside, it may, however, be



Photo: Alamy / PPS

*One of the Pillars of Ashoka in Vaishali, a city in present-day Bihar, India. They symbolize Buddhism as a religion of tolerance, peace, and nonviolence. The Buddhist emperor Ashoka (304–232 BCE) was a determined promoter of nonviolence to animals.*



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obvious that if compassion is a ruling parameter, the consumption of meat and fish is a highly problematic issue. The standard argument used in the Buddhist traditions about why this would not be contrary to the compassionate spirit of Buddhism is that the person who eats the meat is not the one who kills the animal. Only the one who kills the animal is to accumulate unwanted negative karmic consequences, whereas the buyer, as long as they did not order the slaughtering directly and the animal was not killed particularly for them, remains free from any negative karmic retribution.

## Buddhism Challenged by Modernity

Buddhism in India, its country of origin, developed in small-scale agricultural societies with only modest tendencies toward the anonymous supply of meat products for the market, as we are used to it in our consumer-oriented societies of today. And this is one of the reasons the ethically negative evaluation of meat consumption in our times is in such stark contrast with how this was seen by Buddhists in the past. Today, nobody would deny that buying meat promotes the “production” of meat, which is inevitably based on slaughtering animals in order to keep up the supply chain. Even though there is no direct involvement of the consumer in the act of killing, it’s easy to identify a lack of compassion for the animals to be killed and, not to forget, for



Photo: Alamy / PPS

A bas-relief panel of the Borobudur temple depicting karmic retribution. On the right, it depicts the act of killing and cooking turtles and fishes. On the left, it shows those who make living by killing animals being tortured in hell by being cooked alive, being cut, or thrown into a burning house. Ninth century. Central Java, Indonesia.

the people who are entrusted with the act of killing.

Every religious tradition has its blind spots. In the example above, the historical outset of Buddhism as a religion of beggars who had to eat whatever was given to them led to a certain insensitivity—if not indifference—regarding the question of meat eating. This is reflected in many Buddhist traditions even today. Here we can clearly perceive how a religious tradition—seen with the eyes of an unbiased observer—contradicts itself and, based on historical circumstances, fails to live up to its own goals with reference to the noble Buddhist value of compassion. And not only that: religions can also proactively provide arguments against the application of modern ethical standards of nonviolence, such as the idea that vegetarianism would count as a breach against the Buddhist ethical code—this

time based on doctrinal considerations, that is, the conception of Amida Buddha as the only one savior, who grants liberation through his grace.

## Different Views on Religion and Violence

This example simply shows how careful we have to be when we look out for and define phenomena of violence in Buddhism. Recent years have seen a growing number of publications on the issue of Buddhism’s relation to violence, showing that violence has been a steady companion of Buddhism. There are different views of how religion and violence interrelate. The common view holds that religions aim at making people “good,” that they enhance the state of our world, and that they lead humans to attain some kind of great reward if they follow the rules. There is no space



*Tibetan Buddhist nuns pray as they listen to their spiritual leader the Dalai Lama at the Tsuglagkhang complex in McLeod Ganj, Dharamshala, India, on February 19, 2019.*

for religious violence in such a view. If, however, religions manifest violence and it is identified as such, the line of argument will be to say that these instances are just caused by human misconduct, for which the religion cannot be blamed. The idea behind such a view is that of a pure, peace-promoting, and nonviolent religion that is tainted by occasional human aberrances. Regrettable as these aberrances are, they are due to human beings who are never perfect, unable to fully follow the stipulated rules.

But there is another view on religion, a view that I think describes much better the actual nature of religious traditions. It starts from the observation that human communities have always been shaken by instances of violence, be it among individuals, between parts within a society, or between larger units such as ethnic groups or nations. If seen from that perspective, one function of religion is that of domesticating this ever-present violence and channeling it in such a way that the uncontrolled and potentially destructive impact of violence is minimized. It is easier to control violence in a restricted framework with defined rules to be followed in a quasi-ritualistic or truly ritualized way. Violence, if performed in this way,

becomes practicable and acceptable, given that a fitting religious narrative has been provided. A religious tradition can thus be described as an attempt to convert violence from being a wild and threatening phenomenon into something more “meaningful” that has its place in a clearly defined religious context.

## Violence as a Part of Religion

If we attribute such a constructive role to religion, it will not come as a surprise to encounter many instances of violence embedded in the religious realm, including Buddhism. Just think of the deliberate withholding of the right to full ordination for women in the countries of Southern Buddhism and in Tibet for centuries, even though the oldest source texts of Buddhism confirm that a nun order had been in place at the time of the historical Buddha. Pious Buddhist women have been fighting for this right for decades. The arguments mobilized by the opponents of such a right to full ordination as a Buddhist nun are, for the most part, based on issues of lineage and authenticity, reflecting a Buddhist universe constructed on an exclusionary patriarchal narrative. Similarly, there is

the Buddhist idea of karmic retribution that implies the notion that everybody receives what one deserves. This concept, in another step, can restrain one from engaging in the improvement of any such “well-deserved” situation. In Mahayana Buddhism this idea became enforced by even another concept that claims that all sentient beings have the same nature of a buddha and are thus already perfect. If that is so, then why would there be a need to change anything at all, especially in light of East Asian interpretations in terms of extending this idea of universal buddhahood to plants, stones, and the whole inanimate world as well? Everything could thus be seen as perfect, not only nature, but also the social stratification: the rich are perfect in their richness and the poor in their poverty. It is easy to understand how Buddhist concepts like these can lead to indifference toward any positive change in the world and cement worldly injustice by maintaining the status quo.

## Compassion as a Buddhist Core Value

But how about the ideals and normative codes promoted by Buddhist thinkers and practitioners over the centuries with relation to violence? There can be no doubt that a radically peaceful attitude and the practice of nonviolence hold a very central position in the ethical setup of all Buddhist schools. Having started as a movement of ascetic seekers, a way of life without resorting to violence against others, including animals, and a mindset free of anger, hatred, and aggression form the primary constituent for a life leading to salvation. This principle has a strong binding force and remained a focal point in the following centuries when the branches of Mahayana Buddhism came to develop their own characteristics. There is, however, another important ethical value that I already touched on at the beginning of



this essay, a value kept in highest esteem among the followers of the Mahayana: a compassionate mind. It is fair to say that compassion was also an important factor for pre-Mahayana Buddhists. However, compassion turned into the leading principle of the ethical code of conduct when the Mahayana ideal of being a bodhisattva, a person striving for awakening, evolved. Compassion is the overall guiding principle for such a being and, in terms of spiritual cultivation and moral behavior, relates to all aspects of life.

Compassion and nonviolence, at first glance, seem to go hand in hand. But there is more to say about it. How, for instance, should a caring father react to his child who is unwilling to engage with his study program, which would lead

to a better future: should he accept his child's disinterest or should he, driven by compassion for his child, turn to other means and pressure him? What are the obligations of a ruler to his subjects when his kingdom is attacked by an external enemy: should he remain nonviolent toward the enemy and surrender himself and his people to their fate, or should he resort to arms? And how about a bodhisattva who witnesses a mass murderer setting out for his killing: would he be morally obliged to intervene and, in the worst case, eliminate the murderer in order to prevent the bloodshed?

## Compassion versus Nonviolence

The examples above are representative dilemmas that Buddhist Mahayana thinkers in the first centuries of the Common Era tackled arriving at surprising insights. In all these cases clear answers were given: the primary position of compassion trumps nonviolence. Nonviolent means is still something that is very much held in esteem, but as a moral guideline, compassion is the dominating factor. The father should indeed apply violent measures such as beating so that his son, who is not yet able to see the situation and the consequences of his refusal to study, is driven to study. The father's compassionate motivation for the well-being and prosperity of his son outweighs the breach of the non-violence directive. Similarly, the ruler should not let the attacker invade and massacre his subjects but must act with a sense of duty and bravery and fight the attacker in a spirit of compassion. So also in the last of the three examples above: the bodhisattva should not let the murderer proceed. He is obliged to prevent the bloodshed and, if necessary, kill the attacker. Here the interesting point is that the bodhisattva is doing this out of compassion primarily for the perpetrator and not for the potential victims.

If the perpetrator were to perform this heinous deed, he would have to suffer for it for a long time by being reborn in bad existences. The bodhisattva, on the other hand, is aware of the negative karmic consequences of breaking the imperative of nonviolence and is prepared to accept its negative effect for his salvific future.

## No Religion without Violence

These are just some examples taken from the scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism that indicate unambiguously that violence is not something that Buddhism rejects in every respect. There is no way to argue that these are exceptions from an otherwise nonviolent normative standard. Rather, violence has been accepted as a necessity in light of a compassionate orientation toward the world. It is easy to imagine that this kind of softening of the principle of nonviolence from "no go" to "under certain circumstances" made the use of violence acceptable outside the framework of compassion. The history of Buddhism shows many such violent instances. Publications like the one by Michael K. Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer (*Buddhist Warfare* [Oxford University Press, 2010]) or by Michael Zimmermann (*Buddhism and Violence* [Lumbini International Research Institute, 2006], <https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/4-publikationen/buddhism-and-violence.pdf>) document and discuss such occurrences. It seems obvious that in most of these cases, violence in Buddhism (as in any other religion) is not simply the aberration of a misled follower but grows organically out of some of the central concepts of the Buddhist teachings. I would further argue that violence in Buddhism should be seen exactly as what it is, namely, not an exception but another regular constituent aimed at directing human behavior, firmly engrained in this religion's setup. □



Photo: Alamy / PPS

*The left panel of the plinth of Tamamushi no zushi, a miniature shrine owned by the temple Horyu-ji in Nara, depicting an episode, from the Golden Light Sutra, of a bodhisattva removing his upper garments and hanging them on a tree before casting himself from a cliff in order to offer his life to feed a starving tigress and her cubs.*

# The Sixth World Assembly of Religions for Peace

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.*

In the early 1994, Religions for Peace officially announced that Pope John Paul II would attend the opening ceremony of its Sixth World Assembly, which was to be held in November 1994 in Vatican City and Italy.

Since its First World Assembly at Kyoto in 1970, Religions for Peace wished for the pope's participation in the conference and therefore continued to request his presence. Finally our long-held hope that a pope would be present at Religions for Peace was fulfilled.

This was the first time the pope himself was directly involved in the conference.

The Vatican had decided to send its first official envoy to Religions for Peace's Fourth World Assembly in Nairobi in 1984. It also sent the envoy to the Fifth World Assembly in Melbourne in 1989. Therefore, when Religions for Peace started to prepare the meeting of its Sixth World Assembly, it again requested the pope's presence. Just when people began to think, however, that it was useless to expect that the pope himself would attend the conference, we received notification that "if it is to be held in Italy, the pope's participation can be considered."

I heard later that such notification came originally from Don Silvio Franchi, deputy chair of the faith-based organization Fondazione Opera Campana dei Caduti (The Foundation of the Bell of Peace), based in Rovereto in northern Italy. When he met officers from Rissho Kosei-kai's Tokyo headquarters, he discussed it with them.

The site for the Sixth World Assembly had already been narrowed down, and some people thought it was too late to change our plans. However, unanimity was achieved, and we decided to do our best in the new circumstances. It was due to the great efforts of all concerned that it was decided that the Sixth World Assembly would be held in Italy from November 3 to 9, 1994. The opening ceremony would be held in Saint Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, and Pope John Paul II would give a special address.

Pope John Paul II had continued to show a deep interest in the work of Religions for Peace. He sent a message to the previous assembly in Melbourne in 1989 in which he said, "I join you in your conviction that it is religion that has to be the key to fostering and promoting a better atmosphere of trust

and mutual understanding." He clearly supported the contribution Religions for Peace was making toward establishing world peace through religious cooperation and dialogue. As was mentioned earlier, he sent his special envoy to former world assemblies, underlining Religions for Peace's position as the world's largest forum for religious dialogue. For this reason, in June 1983, when Nichiko [Niwano] officially visited the Vatican for the first time as the new president of Rissho Kosei-kai, following his Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma, I entrusted him with a letter to the pope asking for his further cooperation with Religions for Peace. Our efforts to continue doing our best to realize the pope's presence, no matter how brief it might be, eventually brought fruit.

Besides Pope John Paul II, participants in the Sixth World Assembly included Francis Cardinal Arinze, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue; Carlo Maria Cardinal Martini, an Italian Jesuit and Archbishop of Milan; Dr. Hans Küng, a Swiss theologian; Dr. M. Aram, founder and president of Shanti



*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.*

Ashram in India; and Mr. Yasushi Akashi, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to the former Yugoslavia.

## Filled with a Thousand Emotions

The Sixth World Assembly of Religions for Peace began with an opening ceremony in the Synod Hall in Vatican City on November 3, 1994. There were some 850 participants from sixty-three countries, who included, besides religious leaders, experts in various fields as well as political figures. From Japan some 290 official delegates attended, including representatives of twenty organizations of Buddhism, Christianity, and Shintoism, as well as experts and observers and so forth.

At 9:30 that morning, Pope John Paul II appeared to thunderous applause in the hall, crammed to capacity with delegates and members of the press. Greeting those to left and right with a “Good morning,” he sat down on the papal throne on the dais. A second chair had been placed to its right, and it was to this that I was conducted and seated. It was totally unexpected. Since the Vatican highly values diplomatic courtesy, this honor may have been an expression of the respect I was held in as an honorary president of the International Council of Religions for Peace. Seated to the left of the pope and a step down was Cardinal Arinze.

The theme of the assembly was “Healing the World: Religions for



*Pope John Paul II and Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, an honorary president of the International Council of Religions for Peace, take their seats side by side in the Vatican's Synod Hall during the opening session of the Sixth World Assembly of Religions for Peace, convened in Vatican City and Italy from November 3 through 9, 1994.*

Peace,” exploring measures for achieving peace in view of the approaching twenty-first century. After an introductory discussion of Religions for Peace's history, I greeted the gathering in my capacity as an honorary president of the International Council. I spoke of attending the opening ceremony of the fourth session of the Second Vatican Council twenty-nine years earlier (in September 1965) and how I had been filled with an unwavering belief that realization of world peace through religious cooperation should be a primary mission of people of religion. I was then further inspired by the words of Pope Paul VI, saying we must make contact with people of other religions in a spirit of respect, love, and hope.

Thoughts flashed through my mind: *I cannot be happier. After many long years, at last the day has come when Pope*

*John Paul II has accepted our invitation to take part in the assembly. I expressed all the emotions I was feeling before the representatives of the world's religions.*

The pope then stood up.

When I greeted the members of your International Council in July 1991, I spoke of the need for the religions of the world to engage in a dialogue of mutual understanding and peace on the basis of the values they share. These values are not just humanitarian or humanistic—they belong to the realm of the deeper truths affecting man's life in this world and his destiny. Today such a dialogue is more necessary than ever. Indeed, as old barriers fall, new ones arise whenever fundamental truths and values are forgotten or obscured, even among





*The Vatican Grottoes is the vast underground graveyard, located below this Saint Peter's Baldachin, a large Baroque sculpted bronze canopy, over the high altar of Saint Peter's Basilica.*

people who profess themselves to be religious. Through interreligious dialogue we are able to bear witness to those truths that are the necessary point of reference for the individual and for society: the dignity of each and every human being, whatever his or her ethnic origin, religious affiliation, or political commitment. We testify that we respect and love all men and women because they are creatures of God, and therefore are of immense value.

The theme of this Sixth World Assembly: "Healing the World, Religions for Peace," is itself a strong affirmation of a fundamental truth, namely, that religion is ordered toward that peace which reflects the divine harmony. As you reflect on the role of religion in healing the world, you will be examining some of the major manifestations of human suffering: the misuse of natural resources, violence and war, oppression and lack of justice, lack of respect for the human person. Violence in any form is opposed not only to the respect that we owe

to every fellow human being; it is also opposed to the true essence of religion. Whatever the conflicts of the past and even of the present, it is our common task and duty to make better known the relation between religion and peace. This commitment is inscribed in your own identity as an association.

Today, religious leaders must clearly show that they are pledged to the promotion of peace precisely because of their religious belief. Religion is not, and must not become, a pretext for conflict, particularly when religious, cultural, and ethnic identity coincide. . . . Religion and peace go together: to wage war in the name of religion is a blatant contradiction. I hope that you will be able, during your conference, to find ways to spread this profound conviction.

At the end of his speech, as the pope was about to leave the hall, I came up to him, intending to give him my thanks. The pope then clasped my hand, embracing me warmly, and said three times in Japanese *arigato* (thank you). I felt a surge of joy; a new page had been turned, both for Religions for Peace and for me.

The previous day I had visited Saint Peter's Basilica to pay my respects at the grave where Pope Paul VI rests in peace. Whenever I visited a country where an international conference was held, I made a practice of first visiting the graves of those who had worked to build peace in those places. Therefore I thanked the pope sincerely and prayed for the success of the assembly. This visit had a special meaning for me.

The papal tombs are located one floor below Saint Peter's Basilica. I knelt at the entrance and prayed. I had been received in private audience by Pope Paul VI when I attended the fourth session of the Second Vatican Council in 1965 as the first Buddhist to take part.

This meeting of twenty-nine years ago may well have determined the course of the latter part of my life. As I stood in Saint Peter's Basilica, I remembered the Vatican Council, and I felt as if I could hear the voice of Pope Paul VI. Sadness filled me.

The Sixth World Assembly in Italy was the first time Religions for Peace would organize its international meeting since the end of the Cold War. All the participants moved after the opening ceremony in Vatican City to the Congress Centre in Riva del Garda, near Trento in the north of Italy. There they listened to keynote addresses and took part in study groups. The question facing Religions for Peace was what role it should take regarding the new problems being experienced in the post-Cold War world, particularly the worsening of regional and ethnic conflicts. The importance of action was repeatedly emphasized, and a concrete plan of action in response to the problems was discussed. There was also serious deliberation about the relation between religion and politics and approaches to intolerant religions, given the existence of religion in the background of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia.

On the last day of the assembly the delegates unanimously issued the Riva del Garda Declaration.

Since, as Buddhism teaches, all things change and nothing remains the same, it is probably impossible for an unbreakable peace to exist. However, this means it is all the more important that we not neglect our efforts to achieve peace. If we forsake that, it is as clear as day that misery will prevail.

Even if a world eternally at peace is no more than an ideal, we must continue our efforts to raise that ideal high. I always keep in mind after international conferences that people of religion must not shirk their efforts to discover paradise in the despair of hells.

*To be continued*

# Affirming the Other: A Critical Issue for Today's Society

by Dominick Scarangelo



***We can realize our potential as unique individuals only because we are supported by and learn from others, and the perspectives and insights they provide are crucial to the discovery of what we ourselves believe and want for ourselves.***

*"Affirming the other" is a conscious form of practicing recognition of others as a Buddhist spiritual discipline applicable to the living of our daily lives, one that can help us and those we interact with to attain a sense of universal self-consciousness. It holds the promise of establishing peace and harmony between people, not by tolerating—putting up with—diversity, nor by annihilating difference, but by actively embracing the other as different yet equal members of the higher unity whose unique individuality is inseparable from the enjoyment of our own identities.*

## Introduction: "Affirming the Other" and Contemporary Society

Rissho Kosei-kai is a highly social form of Buddhism that places the utmost importance on applying Buddhist principles practically in daily life, and its practice of affirming the other can teach us much about embracing difference and establishing common ground with other people. In this essay I'd like to consider the practice of affirming the other because in these contentious times finding common ground with other people

and empathizing with those whose thinking differs radically from our own is a sorely lacking social skill that is needed more than ever. We cannot eliminate differences and disagreements in pluralistic societies, and nor should we want to if we indeed accept the proposition that we benefit from the diversity within our nations. Our development as unique individuals depends upon difference, because as philosopher Charles Taylor (2018, 33) tells us, human life is fundamentally dialogical in character—we define ourselves through dialogue with, and even in the struggle against, others from whom we desire recognition. Despite our need of one another, many times we dismiss the ideas of our ideological opponents as poisonous, categorically unreconcilable with our own; and worse yet, we often moralize our disputes by demonizing others as bad actors intent on causing harm. When we see each other in this way, our interaction can become a Manichean struggle not only to defeat each other's viewpoints but to silence each other's voices, and sometimes even to annihilate one another. This can lead only to permanent acrimony, or worse yet, a perpetual cold, if not hot, war. I believe that incorporating the practice of affirming

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the other into our lives can contribute to improving this state of affairs and can change our relationships with others for the better, making our lives richer and deepening our social bonds. The principles and practice of affirming the other are not something that is entirely foreign to us but resonates strongly with some Western philosophical notions of human intersubjectivity. In the pages below, I will look into the origins of affirming the other and how it is practically applied by Rissho Kosei-kai members, and also consider its affinity with intersubjectivity as mutual recognition.

## The Role of Affirming the Other: Inspirations from the Lotus Sutra

The models and language of affirming the other derive from several episodes in the Lotus Sutra, first and foremost the story of a buddha named Tathagata Abundant Treasures, whose



The Buddhas Abundant Treasures and Shakyamuni seated side by side in the jeweled stupa. Bronze and gold. Sixth century. Northern Wei Dynasty of China. Property of Guimet Museum, Paris.

Photo: TPG Images / PPS

bejeweled and exquisitely decorated pagoda appears at Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching assembly on Divine Eagle Peak. The pagoda suddenly bursts forth out of the ground in the beginning of chapter 11 of the text. After rising high up in the sky over the assembly, the pagoda stops, hovering in midair. And if this were not impressive enough, a voice suddenly resounds from inside the pagoda for all to hear:

Excellent, excellent, World-Honored Shakyamuni. For the sake of the great assembly, you are able to expound the Wondrous Dharma Flower Sutra of universal great wisdom, a teaching that instructs bodhisattvas and that buddhas protect and keep in mind. So it is, so it is, all that the World-Honored Shakyamuni expounds is the truth" (Rissho Kosei-kai 2019, 217–18).

Marveling at the beautiful grand pagoda and mystified by the mysterious voice that emanates from inside, a bodhisattva named Great Joy in Teaching, acting as the representative of all in the assembly, asks Shakyamuni Buddha why this pagoda has appeared. Shakyamuni answers by explaining that inside this pagoda is a buddha who lived long, long ago and who made a vow to appear anywhere the Lotus Sutra is being taught, so that he could "listen to that sutra, bear testimony to it, and extol it, saying, 'Excellent'" (Rissho Kosei-kai 2019, 218). This buddha from the ancient past appears to bear witness to the Lotus Sutra, that is to say, play the role of guarantor by affirming the truth of what that Dharma teacher is expounding.

The story of Abundant Treasures and the role he plays in the Lotus Sutra, affirming the teachings of Shakyamuni, is the locus classicus for the phrase "affirming the other." But there are other examples of affirmation, in particular a couple of passages where the value and contribution of what we might normally consider bad actors are recognized and affirmed. One is in chapter 12, where Shakyamuni Buddha affirms his arch nemesis, Devadatta—who tried to murder him on several occasions and take over his group of disciples—by explaining that Devadatta had actually contributed to his attainment of buddhahood precisely by being an obstacle and thus a facilitator of his practice. Another example comes in chapter 20, where the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect reveres all people he meets as future buddhas by pressing his palms together and bowing in reverence to them. Despite the severe abuse he receives from many of these people he encounters, Never Unworthy perseveres in revering their buddha-nature, the "buddha inside them," in other words, paying respect to the buddha they already are in their future.

## Affirming the Other in Rissho Kosei-kai

Affirmation is practiced two ways in Rissho Kosei-kai that are rooted in these examples from the Lotus Sutra. The first is in Dharma-circle discussion groups, or *hoza*. Dharma circles are group discussions in which practitioners share their experiences from daily life and, in discussion with the other participants, seek to gain new perspectives on their lives and ways of coping from the standpoint of the Buddha Dharma. The various participants in Dharma circles make contributions by elaborating on the suggestions and perspectives offered by the Dharma-circle facilitator. In this way, they bear witness to the teachings of the Buddha Dharma, sharing how they have applied them in their own lives, and to what results. Through this open and honest sharing, each participant in a Dharma circle plays the role of Abundant Treasures, testifying to the benefits of Buddhist practices and insights, and by doing so, the participants seek to help others.

A second form consists of affirming the people one encounters in one's daily life. This is a way of interacting with people by intently focusing on them, listening closely to their words, and endeavoring as much as possible to affirm what they feel and think, what they aspire to, and what they believe. In short, it is a way of embracing the whole individual. This is quite a different stance from what we often take toward others in today's society. Dominated by the notion of possessive individuality, we are increasingly atomized, and our interactions with one another are often in instrumental relationships in which we grasp each other as means to some end. To put it in the language of the great Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, we find ourselves in I–It relations that objectify other people as things rather than recognizing them as independent, subjective consciousnesses. Too often



we are motivated more by what the person can do for us, or how that person makes us feel, than by an interest in the other person as a unique and precious individual worthy of attention and recognition in their own right. My assessment may come across as quite dim, but don't mistake me for someone raging against individualism. Far from it. I see an individuality that is meaningful and fulfilling as existing against a horizon provided by others, as Taylor, whom I quoted above, holds. We can realize our potential as unique individuals only because we are supported by and learn from others, and the perspectives and insights they provide are crucial to the discovery of what we ourselves believe and want for ourselves.

Buddhism generally affirms a dialogical understanding of our existence because it holds that living beings are closely interconnected and mutually sustain one another. We live precisely because of our interconnectedness with others, and some varieties of Buddhism even go as far as to propose that our existences are all interfused. That is to say, I am in you and you are in me. I know that this may sound like some crazy metaphysics or the lyrics to a certain psychedelic song by the Beatles. But if we seriously consider the idea of the "extended mind," for example, we will realize that our environment and interactions with people change us both mentally and physically, even as we simultaneously exert the same influence on those around us, as well as the world at large. Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (2011, 78), the founder of Rissho Koseikai, describes all matter in the world and we individuals as being like the eyes of a giant net:

Imagine a net with a thousand openings, one of which is you. Are you worth only one-thousandth of the whole net? Far from it. All the other openings in the net support the one that is you, just as you

support the rest of the net. If the thread that creates the opening that is you breaks, the whole net will be affected. Acknowledge this interdependency and you can at last begin to think about what you should be doing for those around you.

Because we are all interfused and mutually influencing one another, all living things, and even all matter in our world, compose a single giant existence. Rev. Niwano again:

We speak often of the self, but Buddhism also teaches the concept of the other—the concept of all things other than the self; in other words, all phenomena. This seems an obvious idea, but consider it in terms of the openings in the net: if the opening that is me is twisted, the opening next to me will also twist. If the opening next to me is pulled, I too will be pulled. I belong not only to myself but also to the other. I and the other are actually a single existence.

My extended self includes the other, and vice versa. The other exists within myself and I exist within the other. (Ibid., 78–79)

Because our extended selves include one another, affirming the other is not the act of self-sacrifice or the diminution of oneself that it may seem to be. We establish ourselves in the very act of affirming the other.

## Affirming the Other and the Intersubjectivity of Recognition

If the practice of affirming the other comes across as somewhat alien to you more in tune with a strongly collectivist culture like Japan's, you might be surprised to learn that the notion of affirming the other has strong parallels with accounts of intersubjectivity in the

Western tradition. For venerable German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), the healthy development of the self-conscious subjective individual requires free and uncoerced relationships of mutual recognition with others. Like a mirror onto the self, only through its relationship with another consciousness can an individual's consciousness turn back and recognize itself, and to fully know its own perspective, a consciousness must exist in a world of multiple perspectives (Crossley 1996, 17). In a nutshell, we need the existence of others to be our own individual selves. But it is not sufficient that we are simply aware of others. For us to see ourselves reflected by the other, we require that the other recognize and affirm us as independent self-conscious subjects. When the other denies us this recognition, we feel objectified, dehumanized. Denied such recognition, we demand it from the other, and we may try to



Photo: Mary Evans / PPS

Hegel and Napoleon in Jena, *illustration from Harper's Magazine, 1895, depicting the encounter of Hegel with Napoleon in 1806, which became proverbial due to his notable words "world spirit on horseback" in reference to Napoleon.*

compel the other to recognize us. The other, similarly requiring recognition, resists our attempts to coerce recognition because such an attack is tantamount to negation of their own subjectivity. In this way two consciousnesses become embroiled in a battle for recognition.

There can be no successful conclusion to the battle for recognition, however. Destroying the other only eliminates the opportunity for recognition that self-consciousness requires. Defeating the other and compelling them to recognize us is also a false victory because true recognition that affirms our self-conscious subjectivity can really come only from another free and independent subjective self-consciousness. True recognition cannot be coerced, it can only be granted. As Crossley concludes: “Recognition is only satisfactory if one is recognized by those whom one recognizes as worthy of recognizing one” (ibid., 18). We can imagine the unsatisfactoriness of the recognition from a defeated other as akin to seeing ourselves by peering into a broken or warped mirror. The reflection that comes back can never be truly affirming.

In order to better envision the battle of recognition, think about a partisan debate on a political talk show you may have seen on television. Both sides seek the recognition of their perspective from the other and attempt to compel the other through logical attacks or even plainly negate the other by shouting them down. In such debates neither side ever gives in; if it were not for time constraints, it seems that their battle for mutual recognition would continue for eternity.

Because we can be recognized just by another free and willing individual, there is only one way to end the battle of recognition: two consciousnesses must freely and mutually recognize each other. We must abandon the objectification of one another and renounce the desire to compel or defeat each other. This requires that we cease conceptualizing each other

as a diametrically opposed dyad, which is accomplished by reconceptualizing ourselves and others as part of a greater unity. In Hegel’s language, we must attain “universal self-consciousness,” as Terry Pinkard explains:

Hegel calls this “universal self-consciousness”: awareness of ourselves as sharing a world with others, of being an ingredient in a world of multiple perspectives, of not everything’s being good as a means to my own ends—that is, awareness of ourselves as being noninstrumental goods and of others as being likewise so. Self-respect, awareness of oneself as worthy of respect, is not enough. One must acknowledge the other as having an identical claim. (Pinkard 1998, 127)

This is a “unity of multiple people sharing a common world” (ibid., 128). You can see how this resonates with Rev. Niwano’s metaphor of the eyes of a net. The Buddha’s teaching that all beings are interconnected and interdependent (“nonself”; Skt., *anātman*; Jpn., *muga* 無我) emplaces all of us within a higher unity, a totality we can imagine as a single existence. Awareness of ourselves as part of this totality helps us transcend the view of the other as something unreconcilable, and this makes it possible for us to mutually recognize and affirm one another, to envision our selves as within one another. Recontextualizing ourselves within a higher unity does not negate us as individuals; on the contrary, it establishes us, because it allows us to freely and mutually recognize one another.

Affirming the other is a conscious form of practicing recognition as a Buddhist spiritual discipline applicable to the living of our daily lives, one that can help us and those we interact with to attain a sense of “universal self-consciousness.” It holds the promise of establishing peace and harmony

between people, not by tolerating—putting up with—diversity, nor by annihilating difference, but by actively embracing the other *as different* yet equal members of the higher unity whose unique individuality is inseparable from the enjoyment of our own identities.

## The Practical Application of Affirming the Other

How then, can we go about practicing affirming the other in our daily lives? Affirming the other can be, at its most basic level, entirely ordinary everyday actions such as greeting others or merely paying close attention to others when they speak. Being inattentive to someone who is speaking is negating a person seeking recognition by refusing to grant it. This leaves them feeling invisible and unworthy of attention, and this lack of recognition damages their ability to communicate, because their words, which are actualizations of themselves, seem to evaporate into thin air because they are not recognized by others. As Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (2020, 1) explained:

When people are speaking, they are expressing themselves through words. More than anything, speakers worry if listeners are really feeling and accepting what they are saying. If listeners are expressionless, looking away, or fidgeting, those talking feel like they are being ignored, and their words no longer have heart.

On the other hand, merely affirming someone by paying close attention to them and listening compassionately while they are sharing their suffering can provide them with a feeling of liberation. Rev. Niwano observed this in the context of Dharma circles:

If the facilitator’s attention is distracted by this or that and he or she is only listening with half an ear to

people's stories, the person speaking will feel ignored. But if the facilitator seriously listens and nods affirmatively to them, this will make the person feel that they have been liberated. (Ibid.)

Listening to another person by placing the focus upon them, leaning toward them with the body, and providing recognition through facial and verbal cues are simple ways of affirming them. We can ensure that we interact with a person in Dharma circles in this fashion by keeping the thought in our minds that we desire to assist that person in eliminating their suffering and helping them attain happiness. We can think of these attitudes as the first two of the four states of mental absorption called the Four Infinitely Virtuous Minds, also known as the four Brahmā abodes. If we remain focused on these aspirations, our actions tend to follow in kind.

Recognition is at the very heart of greetings. As Rev. Nichiko Niwano (1995, 104), the current leader of Rissho Koseikai explains,

As instances of right speech, polite greetings are especially significant in establishing harmonious social relations. Polite greetings on first meeting someone make a good impression and contribute to smooth relations. But such greetings must be sincere. If we regard them as mere form, we will greet people only when we feel like it.

Greetings are essentially expressions of trust and respect. In Buddhist terms, they amount to paying reverence to the buddha-nature, the potential for attaining buddhahood, that is inherent in all of us. Reciprocity is the true import of courtesy: I respect you, and you respect me.

When we refuse to acknowledge or communicate with a person in our

presence with a greeting, our gaze objectifies them, that is to say, it marks them as being a thing rather than an independent conscious being. The viewed person feels alienated or captured, because although refusal to communicate is indeed a form of communication, recognition is lacking (Crossley 1993, 415). This is why greetings are so important to the establishment and maintenance of good social relations.

Affirming the other can be quite difficult when engaged in dialogue with others, especially those with whom we disagree. Rev. Nikkyo Niwano championed the principle of charity in discussions with others. *Charity* means that we are open to the truth claim of another, seek to understand it, and give them the benefit of the doubt, as we assume that they have some valid reasons for their opinions. Rev. Niwano taught that no matter how hard we try to force our opinions on another, they will never really accept them. You may be able to force someone to outwardly agree with or follow you, but you'll never win over their heart. "This is why," Rev. Niwano (2018, 1) explained, "I always accept the other person's opinion up front. Then I consider how I can align or harmonize my thinking with theirs." When in dialogue with another, beginning by rejecting what they say out of hand is ultimately self-defeating. When we reject their perspectives from the get-go, we are negating them and the validity of their experience. Instead, we can establish the grounds for successful dialogue by taking the position that there is some validity to their opinions and then actively seeking out that validity by asking questions, rather than making performative statements, and closely listening to and truly considering our opposite's responses. Perhaps in the end we cannot adopt their opinion, but at the very least we can recognize that people have understandable reasons or motivations for those opinions, based in their lived experience.

Rev. Niwano also stood firm in the belief that when we affirm others, they will respond in kind.

When you adopt the reverential attitude that everyone is undertaking bodhisattva practice through their work, the need for you to assert yourself completely ceases. If you accommodate yourself to others, they will definitely meet you halfway, and you will absolutely understand one another. (Ibid.)

Why do most people respond positively when you affirm them? As Rev. Nichiko Niwano (1995, 103), explains:

We all have unique traits and strengths and weaknesses, and all of us—even if only subconsciously—want our talents recognized. . . . When well bestowed, recognition is welcomed and can be both a stimulus for improvement and a reason for living.

We all need recognition, and are, even if not openly or even consciously, grateful for it. In their hearts, most people want to do the right thing, so your affirmation of the other up front will usually bear fruit.

This is what's important. When you adopt the reverential attitude that everyone is undertaking bodhisattva practice through their work, the need for you to assert yourself completely ceases. (Ibid.)

This faith in others is rooted in the belief that all others are future buddhas, people who will blossom to the fullest extent of their gifts and talents and realize their human potential. The seed of that future fully realized self—buddha-nature—is present in all of us today. Faith in the other person also comes from the belief that all people are playing their part in the movements



of the higher unity, even if today we do not know what their significance will be. In this sense, we can consider their deeds the work of bodhisattvas, which is to say, someone who is contributing to the greater good.

And what if they do not respond or they react negatively to us? As the Buddha teaches in the Lotus Sutra when he praises his nemesis Devadatta, it is our competitors and those who are difficult for us to get along with that can teach us the most and provide us opportunities for honing bodhisattva qualities such as patience and perseverance. Persisting in valuing such a person as a human being deserving of dignity also allows us to develop our compassion. Their reactions to us provide the counterpoint to our practice, like the resistance of weight applied to our muscles when we lift barbells or the immovability of the floor when we do push-ups. Without opposition and resistance, we can hardly even move. If you've ever slept in a waterbed, think back to how difficult it was to move around or get out of bed because the water in the mattress always moved in the same direction as you instead of remaining immovable or pushing back against you. If we think of people who oppose us as providing the resistance we actually require, we see that their actions complete us.

Perhaps the reader will conclude that Buddhism wants to “have its cake and eat it too” by positing an intersubjectivity of recognition while also teaching people to accept negation and opposition as a kind of recognition. I can also imagine that this way of seeing things could invite the criticism that it amounts to a kind of stoicism, a turning away from the sense world to seek an inner freedom not by grasping the world as it is but by structuring it through one's own thoughts and concepts (Houlgate 2013, 104). Such an appraisal is along the lines of Slavoj Žižek's infamous critique of Western Buddhism (see Žižek 2001, 2009) as an ideologically deceptive

palliative. I do acknowledge that religion can indeed be a way of running away from the world and shutting one's eyes to the world, and when it does, faith becomes opposed to action. But when the Buddhist message of interdependence and the interfusion of self and other is grasped as a call to action that demands a positive relationship with the world, it instead evokes some aspects of Hegel's description of reason. Instead of simply negating things, self-consciousness sees itself in the world and seeks to go beyond the properties of things to discover universality. When fully developed, this self-consciousness finds no contradiction between the universal and the individual but instead embraces the individual as the manifestation—the only possible manifestation—of the universal (Houlgate 2013, 124).

I should also add that the requisite of continuing to affirm the other who refuses to return recognition does not require that one tolerate violence, either physical or emotional, nor any form of oppression. While affirmation of the other requires patience and

perseverance, it should never negate one's own existence. It has long been noted that the Lotus Sutra's Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect safeguards his own life by fleeing when people throw stones at him or attempt to strike him with their staffs. Mahayana Buddhism teaches the benefit of self and other precisely because its principle of nonduality requires that we avoid the false one-sidedness of extremes. Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect removes himself from danger but continues his reverence of those malicious people from afar. He does not dehumanize those people or himself by negating the other, returning evil for evil, slight for slight. Our recognition of the other is also never pointless, because of inverse karmic affinity and the reverse workings of liberation—difficult relationships and suffering can point us in the direction of liberation—that I discussed in my previous piece (Scarangelo 2020). Our continued recognition of even the recalcitrant other can call forth that goodness within them, as we have seen in movements of peaceful nonviolent opposition to oppression



Photo: Courtesy of Daikyōji

*A wooden relief at the temple Daikyōji in Tokyo, depicting the story of Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect in chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra, “The Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect.”*

that have wakened oppressors to the fact that their actions were destroying their own humanity. Ultimately, returning evil for evil has no power to turn people toward the good. Our only realistic choice is to continue to affirm them while also guaranteeing our physical and emotional safety.

## Affirming the Other in Disagreement

Affirming the other does not mean that we abandon our convictions or retreat in the face of the slightest opposition. It does not ask us to agree to the unacceptable. In these cases, affirming the other becomes a way of disagreeing, of disagreeing with respect. In her reminiscences of a contentious interfaith cooperation meeting, Rev. Kosho Niwano, the president-designate of Rissho Kosei-kai, remembers how the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, practiced affirming others even in disagreement.

Once, at a meeting dedicated to interreligious cooperation, despite sincere and heated discussions, opinions remained divided and the participants failed to reach agreement. The founder [Rev. Nikkyo Niwano] stood up to deliver the concluding remarks and said, “Today, thanks to all participants, we had a wonderful meeting. Everyone participated wholeheartedly, and that wholehearted zeal was what gave rise to clashes of opinion. I thank you all for your energetic debates and your cooperation.” (K. Niwano 2013, 165).

Although the meeting had ended in disagreement, Rev. Niwano affirmed everyone at the meeting by recognizing their honest aspirations to attain a certain goal and their efforts in pursuit of it. Rev. Niwano’s affirmation of zealous disagreement and contentious debate also stems from his idea that liberation can be achieved not only through

agreement but also through disagreement (ibid.). How could this be?

Rev. Kosho Niwano elaborates on the founder’s thinking as follows:

Even when people are working together toward a common goal, they will not necessarily adopt the same opinions. However, I think that when there is an awareness that the goal can be the same even though opinions may differ, as the number of people with this awareness increases, the right path toward that goal will inevitably open up. (Ibid., 165–66)

Here, too, we see the recontextualization of conflict from the standpoint of a higher unity in which each of these contradictory opinions is one component of a more universal view. Rev. Kosho Niwano sees this as a function of all living things’ originally being a manifestation of the one great life, the totality of existence that is the ultimate reality. I think it is also important to take note of the mechanism of reaching a goal that the founder shows us here. The number of differing opinions grows until a point at which a critical mass is reached, producing a new synthesis. At a certain point increasing quantity tips into a change in quality—disagreement transforms into agreement.

An increase in quantity does not always lead to a change in quality or the essence of something. If you add more water to a bucket of water, you still have water, and this could go on for eternity. But certain types of quantitative increases are transformative. If you take that same bucket of water and increase its temperature, eventually it reaches the boiling point, and water becomes steam (Hibben 2000, 92). It is hard to see how simply increasing the number of people with differing opinions could lead to agreement, but I think the key here is that the participants, while recognizing each other’s different perspectives, agree on the goal of their dialogue.

When there is agreement on the goal, widening the dialogue and increasing the number of perspectives focused on that goal is akin to increasing temperature, and the boiling point—agreement—will be reached sooner or later. Recognizing an increasing number of perspectives on a single issue dialogically transforms our own perspectives, and when enough people undergo this shift, a new consensus is reached.

Practically speaking, how can we grant recognition in disagreement? Peter Boghossian and James Lindsay, authors of *How to Have Impossible Conversations: A Very Practical Guide*, suggest that “The way to change minds, influence people, build relationships, and maintain friendships is through kindness, compassion, empathy, treating individuals with dignity and respect, and exercising these considerations in psychologically safe environments” (Boghossian and Lindsay 2019, 12). They urge us to abandon adversarial attitudes and approaches to our opposites, to stop focusing on winning and instead see them as our partners (ibid., 12–13).

Affirming the other teaches us an important lesson about disagreement. We can recognize opposing viewpoints and affirm those who hold them even though their ideas seem to stand in opposition to our own. Shutting people down gets us nowhere. Widening dialogue and the exchange of opinion in open debate in which the participants affirm one another in disagreement is a path to achieving breakthroughs and arriving at new solutions.

## Conclusion: Affirming the Other Is Now More Important Than Ever

In our societies today, the stakes of recognition are higher than ever. With the eclipse of fixed social hierarchies and other relatively stable status categories along with the rise of egalitarianism in modern society, the need for recognition

has been modified and even intensified (Taylor 2018, 47). This intensification of our mutual need for recognition seems to be an unavoidable counterpart of the increasing freedom we enjoy. However, the battle for recognition in the political and ideological spheres is becoming a conflict that, if the participants do not grant each other free and uncoerced recognition, could continue indefinitely and cause us to lose much of our freedom. This is not a satisfactory outcome, even if many of us foolishly think otherwise. Any winner in this conflict is dehumanized in victory, and the defeated eventually come back to fight another day. Our differing opinions and beliefs are not diametrically opposed; they appear so only from our limited perspectives. We can instead understand them like the eyes in a grand net, mutually influencing and interdependent nodes that compose a larger unity. In the end, we share the same towns, states, countries, and we must coexist within the closed ecosystem of our shiny blue planet. There is nowhere to escape. This world is all we have. And because we are pushing up against the ecological limits of our world and have the capacity to destroy not only ourselves but all life on the planet with weapons of war, we cannot remain locked in the battle for recognition. The absence of shared fundamental beliefs, faiths, or ideologies makes it feel as if there were no longer any reliable reference points, codes of interaction, or grounds for mutual understanding. The solution to this predicament is not to try to return to a mythical state of cultural and ideological unity, because in our globalized world and diverse societies there is simply no going back. As odd as it seems, we have to move in the other direction, widening the debate to a greater multiplicity of voices narrating the good life until we achieve the critical mass for new consensuses.

The only way we can do this is to grant our recognition to our opponents and those who have radically different

viewpoints and beliefs. We may be convinced that our opposite's beliefs and ideas are harmful, and they may indeed be so. But we shut down any peaceful resolution when we negate and dehumanize them through demonization, and depriving them of their voice will only ever be a temporary victory, because it will only reinforce their belief system, and instead of moving toward us they will simply dig in their heels and plot their revenge. We may even be able to force their compliance for a time, but we will never win their hearts, and we dehumanize ourselves by treating another in this way. This is how we become trapped in a never-ending and continually escalating battle for recognition and create nothing but misery for ourselves and others.

In short, we need to practice affirming the other. In the view of Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (2011, 79), recognizing the existence of ourselves within one another is "the foundation for any kind of democracy." This is desperately needed wisdom for us today. I'll conclude with a pertinent comment by Rev. Niwano that was recorded at a Dharma talk at Rissho Kosei-kai's head temple, the Great Sacred Hall, in the 1960s. These words compose a definitive statement of his notion of the fundamental Buddhist practice of affirming the other.

The Lotus Sutra gives particular emphasis to the chapter called "The Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect," which describes that bodhisattva [a former life of Shakyamuni Buddha] paying homage to and revering, with palms pressed together, every person he meets because he sees everyone as a buddha. He had true faith that everyone, no matter who they are, will become a buddha, while respecting the individual personality of others and recognizing the position of others to the highest degree. And that is why, at the time that Shakyamuni was born in India,

he was born a great person. I think this is the most elementary principle of Buddhism. (Rissho Kosei-kai 2020) □

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# Do Not Be Defeated by a Lazy Mind

by Nichiko Niwano



There is a funny verse in a Japanese song from the 1960s (“Sudara Bushi,” by the Crazy Cats) that perfectly expresses the workings of our minds. It goes, “I know, but I just can’t help it.”

We are apt to either not do what we should, or do what we decided not to. We often reflect on our behavior and say to ourselves, “I know, but I just can’t help it,” just as the song says, don’t we?

Buddhism teaches us that it is important to “always be diligent.” The teachings of Confucianism and other ancient philosophies explain the importance of always learning and making the effort to lead a virtuous life. The reason for this is that the cultivation of the human mind has no ending point where we can say, “This is good enough.”

Generally speaking, the Buddha Way is called “the unsurpassable Way,” which means “the very best Way that no other exceeds.” However, I think it is better to interpret this as meaning, “Even if you think you’ve awakened to it, that is not the final goal. There is no end to the number of opportunities for you to open your eyes to wisdom.” This stimulates us to aim for further progress.

It is important to always be diligent, but we are liable to be defeated by thoughts such as, “It can’t hurt to let things slide, just a little bit.”

Chapter 14 of the Lotus Sutra, “Peaceful and Agreeable Practices,” gives us these lines of scripture: “They will rid themselves of laziness / And all thoughts of indolence. / They will free themselves from worries / And teach the Dharma compassionately.” The Buddha must have

understood that we sometimes feel like letting our practice slide, and therefore he expounded this chapter, which allows us to clear away the various worries and delusions that spring forth and, with a peaceful mind of our own accord, agreeably and joyfully be diligent in the practice.

## Someone Is Waiting for You

“Always studying and mastering something. What could be happier than that?” These are Confucius’s words. The meaning is that, just like children who repeatedly imitate the actions of the adults they admire, when we have objectives and continue our studies in order to achieve them, there is no way that the experience would not be enjoyable.

This also applies to the world of faith. “Try to keep a smile in mind,” “Don’t forget to be grateful,” and so on—if we can realize our daily goals and the purpose of our faith, no matter what these may be, then all we have to do is be diligent so we live up to our ideals. When this becomes habit, our joy is further increased.

With this in mind, understanding the goals and purpose behind why you have faith and the reason you’re being diligent every day becomes the foundation of joyfully being diligent.

However, even though we know this, it is only human to be defeated by the temptations of our innermost hearts. Frankly, I think it is natural to get distracted or want to take it easy, and occasionally it’s necessary to have a place for

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our minds to escape to. At such times, it’s fine to do so, as long as we don’t forget our goals and purpose.

I do not think, for example, that just because a sutra recitation or a gathering of the sangha has been decided upon, you should force yourself to do it if you aren’t feeling well or if you’re tired because you’ve been very busy. In other words, in order to continue being diligent, you should avoid forcing yourself, and rest when you need to.

“Peaceful and Agreeable Practices” also says, “Show compassion for all, / And never have a thought of laziness.” These verses mean that when you are actively thinking of other people, your mind will not get tired or lazy. You might call to mind the image of a mother willing to take on any hardship for the sake of her child, no matter how tired she feels. Put differently, this is like when you realize that someone is waiting for your help, and you become far removed from the self-centered mind as your desire to help that person comes springing forth and every action of your diligence is turned into happiness and joy.

The world, not only Japan, is suffering from various difficulties. The scripture tells us to “teach the Dharma compassionately.” Don’t you have someone nearby who is waiting for you to do so? □

# The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

## Chapter 28

### Encouragement of the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue (1)

*This is the 134th installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra  
by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.*

**INTRODUCTION** The word “encouragement” in the title of this chapter means to strengthen and inspire. This chapter is filled with the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue’s encouraging and uplifting words for the multitude which has listened to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra for the previous twenty-seven chapters and strengthened its determination to receive and keep and actually practice those teachings. This chapter is certainly a fitting conclusion to the Lotus Sutra.

The Bodhisattva Manjushri represents the Buddha’s wisdom, while the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue typifies the Buddha’s practice. These two bodhisattvas are regarded as a pair, wisdom being the awakening of the Truth and practice being the practice of the Truth.

We have already studied the Truth (principle) in the realm of trace, which refers to fourteen chapters, 1 through 14, of the Lotus Sutra. In the assembly of the Buddha’s preaching there, the Bodhisattva Manjushri was the representative of the Buddha’s disciples. Next, in the second half of chapter 15, all of chapter 16, and the first half of chapter

17, called “one chapter and two halves,” we learned that the Buddha had attained buddhahood in the infinite past. In this assembly, the Bodhisattva Maitreya, who typifies compassion, was the representative of the Buddha’s disciples. Furthermore, we learned about the practice of the Truth through the examples of the practices of the various bodhisattvas in the second half of chapter 17 and the remaining eleven chapters of the sutra, which is the “concluding part of the Teaching of the Original Buddha (realm of origin).”

Finally, the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue appears in this last chapter of the Lotus Sutra. There is deep significance to his appearance at this particular point.

**Four workings of the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue.** As is clear after reading carefully this chapter and also the Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, the closing to the Lotus Sutra, the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue has all of the following four workings:

1. He himself practices the teachings of the Lotus Sutra.
2. He protects the teachings from all persecutions.

3. He bears witness to the merits obtained by one who practices the teachings and to the punishments suffered by one who obstructs the teachings.
4. He proves that even those who act against the teachings can be delivered from their sins if they sincerely repent.

In other words, the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, who has all of those four workings, calls out as a general finish to the concluding part of the Lotus Sutra, the section dealing with actual practice, saying, “I vow to perform these four workings, so be assiduous in your practices and have no anxieties.” He is offering parting words to sincerely encourage those who have finished learning the Lotus Sutra during the extended assemblage and are at long last ready to start forth on a new life.

His encouragement may be likened to the commencement address that the principal of a school delivers to graduating students. They are now leaving school, keeping in their minds the teachings that they have studied there. When they go out into the world, they are often puzzled as to how best to use what they have learned in school. Or sometimes the teachings they have studied may be denied by others, or they may be persecuted.

Foreseeing such a possible situation, he says, “Whenever you face hardships, you can always visit your old school. We will prove to you that the teachings are not wrong. Moreover, we will teach you how to apply the teachings to each practical situation. If you fail in anything, we will show you how to overcome your failure.” In this way, the principal guarantees to protect their activities even after leaving school. No farewell speech could be more encouraging than this.

There is very deep significance in the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue’s appearance in the last chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

The Bodhisattva Universal Virtue is called Samantabhadra in Sanskrit, *samanta* meaning “universal” and *bhadra* meaning “auspicious.” In Chinese this name is translated as *pien-chi* (“universally bestowing fortune”). He is an active bodhisattva who gives us strength and encourages us, and who leads us to obtain happiness.

Let us now proceed to the content of chapter 28.

**TEXT** At that time the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, with sovereign supernatural power, majesty, and fame, accompanied by great bodhisattvas, unlimited, infinite, incalculable, came from the eastern quarter; the countries through which he passed were shaken, jeweled lotus flowers rained down, and countless hundred thousand myriad kotis of kinds of music were performed.

**COMMENTARY** *Sovereign supernatural power.* There are various types of supernatural powers, known as the six



Photo: HIP / PPS

*Image of the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue (Jpn., Fugen Bosatsu). Twelfth century. Property of the Tokyo National Museum. National treasure.*

divine faculties (See the July–Aug. 1992 issue of *Dharma World*). The Bodhisattva Universal Virtue has of course attained these six divine faculties, and we in this modern age may take this phrase as meaning that he possesses the power of the Dharma to liberate others freely and unrestrictedly.

• *Majesty, and fame.* “Majesty” means the power of virtue that causes others to spontaneously have esteem for him and that powerfully influences them. “Fame” means that his name has been spread far and wide.

This great Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, accompanied by a group of great bodhisattvas, has flown from the faraway eastern quarter, displaying majestic supernatural powers to move anywhere with great speed, to Mount Gridhrakuta (Divine Vulture Peak). By merely seeing his abundant love for humankind and his majestic appearance filled with resolute strength for actual practice, the people of the countries through which he passed were so moved that they were shaken, flowers rained down from the heavens, music was performed, and all were filled with admiration.

**TEXT** Encompassed also by a great host of countless gods, dragons, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas, men, nonhuman beings, and others, all displaying majestic supernatural powers, he arrived at Mount



Gridhrakuta in the saha-world. Having prostrated himself before Shakyamuni Buddha, he made a procession around him to the right seven times and addressed the Buddha, saying: "World-honored One! I, in the domain of the Buddha Jeweled Majestic Superior King, hearing afar that the Dharma Flower Sutra was being preached in this saha-world, have come with this host of countless, infinite hundred thousand myriad kotis of bodhisattvas to hear and receive it. Be pleased, World-honored One, to preach it to us, [and tell] how good sons and good daughters will be able to obtain this Dharma Flower Sutra after the extinction of the Tathagata."

**COMMENTARY** The great bodhisattva, unsurpassed in majestic supernatural powers, comes before Shakyamuni Buddha, prostrates himself before the Buddha, makes a procession around him seven times (this being more reverential than a procession of three times), and praises the virtues of the Buddha. This may seem to be a matter of course, but it is a spirit and conduct that we in the modern world should properly reconsider.

That is to say, as long as we believe the teachings of the Buddha, we must never forget that Shakyamuni Buddha is the founder, the center, the nucleus of our faith. For various reasons, there are Buddhist sects that take as their central objects of worship other abstract buddhas preached by Shakyamuni Buddha and there are sects that venerate as founders disciples of the Buddha who appeared after his extinction. That may be well and good, but one must not forget or ignore Shakyamuni Buddha, who is the founder of Buddhism. If we were to forget our great obligation to Shakyamuni Buddha or to slight his teachings, it would be exactly the same as being grateful for tea, coffee, or sake but forgetting to be grateful for the water from which they are all formed. In that case we would certainly be called ungrateful ones or followers with shallow views.

Even the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, a great bodhisattva who has come from the domain of the Buddha Jeweled Majestic Superior King, pays this degree of reverence to Shakyamuni Buddha, who was the first to preach the Truth (the Wonderful Dharma) in this saha-world. This scene where he requests Shakyamuni Buddha to preach is one to be savored deeply.

**TEXT** The Buddha replied to the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue: "If any good son or good daughter acquires the four requisites, such a one will obtain this Dharma Flower Sutra after the extinction of the Tathagata: first, to be under the guardianship of the buddhas; second, to plant the roots of virtue; third, to enter the assembly of [people of] correct resolution; fourth, to aspire after the liberation of all the living. Any good son or good daughter who acquires

such four requisites will certainly obtain this sutra after the extinction of the Tathagata."

#### COMMENTARY

**The four requisites for achieving the Lotus Sutra.** This is very important, because the phrase "such a one will obtain this Dharma Flower Sutra" means not only that people encounter the sutra, but that they understand it sufficiently to apply it. By doing so, they can obtain its true merits.

The Buddha teaches here the four requisites necessary in order to obtain the Lotus Sutra after his extinction. Because they are the essentials of religious faith and very important matters that the World-honored One showed as the conclusion to the Lotus Sutra, we must understand them well.

**The establishment of religious faith.** The first requisite is "to be under the guardianship of the buddhas," which means having an absolutely unshakable faith in being under the protection of the buddhas and being kept in mind by them.

In short, it means one's establishment of religious faith. Without this establishment, no matter how thoroughly people may understand the Lotus Sutra from a doctrinal point of view, the degree to which the teaching can be made use of in the reality of their daily lives is extremely low.

**Accumulating good deeds.** The second requisite is "to plant the roots of virtue," which means to naturally keep on doing good deeds in one's daily life. The phrase "roots of virtue" indicates a good mind, which is the foundation of one's attaining enlightenment. To "plant" such a good mind means not only to sow seeds of virtue (called a good mind) or plant seedlings of virtue, but also to nurture them by watering and fertilizing them.

What do the water and fertilizer that nurture a good mind refer to? There are many things, but doing good deeds is the first consideration.

Ordinarily we think that the practice of good deeds is caused by a good mind, but that is not always the case. There are many instances where people simply imitate others or, feeling pressure, do good deeds grudgingly. Yet if they continually do some good deed, they will often have an experience of inexpressibly feeling good after doing these good deeds and thereafter gradually begin doing good deeds on their own. In other words, the practice of good deeds fosters a good mind.

When we look back on our lives, we cannot help recognizing that these two, the practice of good deeds caused by a good mind and the practice of good deeds fostering a good mind, form a cyclical relationship. Like the chicken and the egg, we cannot say which comes first or which causes the other. There are many examples, such as the following.

Parents and teachers always tell children that when they are on public transportation they should offer their seats to senior citizens. But when they are on the bus or train and have somehow managed to get a seat, they do not want to take the trouble to stand again, so when they see an elderly person they just pretend not to notice him or her. This is the state where the good mind is not yet developed.

Then there comes a day when the child decides to offer his or her seat to let someone sit down. In other words, the seed of the good mind that the parents and teachers had planted has sprouted.

The child is somewhat embarrassed, but makes a decision, stands up, and says, "Please take this seat." The elderly person says, "Why, that's very kind of you. Thank you," and gratefully sits down. The child stands, holding on to a strap and swaying back and forth, but feels no regret. That child feels rather pleasant and thinks, "Yes, I guess it is pleasant to be kind to others." In other words, this is the stage where the good mind has sprouted, and being watered and fertilized by the good acts, it is finally ready to grow.

Before long, being kind to others ceases to be the least bit troublesome and in whatever situation the child will be able to naturally and serenely carry out good deeds. It is at this stage that the good mind has become genuine, that the mind itself has become good.

In this way, to practice good deeds daily is to foster the roots of virtue in the mind, and consequently to begin really to embody the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. This is what is taught by the second requisite.

**Joining a group with a correct purpose.** The third requisite is "to enter the assembly of [people of] correct resolution," meaning to become a member of a group that is resolute to do good.

In Buddhism, groups of people are divided into three types: those having correct, incorrect, and unsettled resolution.

The first group, with correct resolution, is that of those who are resolved to do good, and it includes groups of people who believe in a correct religion, movements promoting kindness, and various organizations that work on behalf of society.

The second group, with incorrect resolution, is that of those who have decided to do evil, for example, gangster organizations, groups of criminals, and groups with extremist ideologies that seek to disrupt the order of society.

The third group, with unsettled resolution, is that of those who vacillate between good and evil. Most assemblies of ordinary people belong to this third type, in which they are inclined toward good but waver so much that they may tilt toward evil at any moment.

We believers in religious teachings must join the group having correct resolution. Needless to say, it is easier and better for us to belong to a group of people who believe in the same faith than to seek the Dharma by ourselves, being in isolation. When we are in a group with correct resolution, we can teach one another, encourage each other, and prevent each other from retrogressing.

Even if we do not speak of encouragement or non-retrogression, we are linked mentally in a close relationship just by discussing and listening to the Dharma together, and we can display the power of faith two or three times more strongly than if we were alone. The third requisite, to enter the assembly of correct resolution, teaches this to us.

**The spirit of being liberated together with others.** The fourth requisite, "to aspire after the liberation of all the living," hardly needs explanation at this point. The true attainment of buddhahood does not mean awakening alone or being liberated only from one's own suffering. The fundamental spirit of Mahayana Buddhism lies in the establishment of an ideal realm in this world through the liberation of others as well as oneself. If we deviate from this fundamental thought, however assiduously we seek the Dharma and practice religious disciplines, in the final analysis it will be a self-centered faith, and seeing it from a broader perspective, we will not be able to attain true merits.

One may hold that if each person individually attains liberation, then in the end everyone will attain it anyhow, and society will be purified. This may seem realizable in theory, but practically it is virtually impossible. Therefore, Mahayana Buddhism, in particular the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, emphasizes actively aiming for the liberation of the whole of society.

**Acquiring the four requisites.** The four requisites can be paraphrased as follows:

1. Always to be convinced that we are caused to live and are protected by the Buddha.
2. Always to endeavor to practice good deeds.
3. Always to be part of a group of people with correct faith.
4. Always to aim to make society as a whole better.

These are really precious teachings. If we try to fathom the mind of the Buddha, it seems that the Buddha conveyed the essence in a simple manner for us. Although he has taught difficult teachings so far, it would be enough to keep in mind these four requisites in order to practice the teachings. Those who might have been slightly overwhelmed by the profundity of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra would have felt encouraged anew to hear them.

When the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, who is the leader of the practice of the Lotus Sutra, was anxious as to how he

should guide living beings in the period of the Latter Days of the Dharma, he must have been deeply moved by the Buddha's explicit guidance. His eyes sparkling, Universal Virtue turns toward the World-honored One and says the following:

**TEXT** Then the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue said to the Buddha: "World-honored One! In the latter five hundred years of the corrupt and evil age, whoever receives and keeps this sutra I will guard and protect, eliminate the anxiety of falling away, and give ease of mind, so that no spy shall find occasion—neither Mara, nor Mara-sons, nor Mara-daughters, nor Mara-people, nor Mara-satellites, nor yakshas, nor rakshasas, nor kumbhandas, nor pishacakas, nor kritiyas, nor putanas, nor vetadas, nor other afflictors of men—that none may find occasion.

**COMMENTARY** *The latter five hundred years.* We explained earlier about the five five-hundred-year periods (see the Jan.–Mar. 2015 issue of *Dharma World*), and this phrase refers to the last of those periods. In other words, this is the period of continual doctrinal disputes. Even though the teachings of the Buddha remain, people lose sight of them, and lose themselves in false views. Everyone is self-centered, and greedily pursues his or her own interests at the expense of others. People are always irritable and uneasy, and there are endless conflicts, great and small. This is the period of the Decay of the Dharma.

- *The corrupt and evil age.* The world is filled with defilements. The Buddha Dharma divides the decay into five categories, according to their causes and conditions. These are known as "the five decays."

First, "decay of the kalpa" is one in which the same sort of age has continued for so long that decay arises naturally and evil symptoms occur. It is the same kind of worsening of condition as that of human beings who as they grow older suffer from hardening of the arteries and the rising of blood pressure.

The second is "decay through tribulations." This is the decay that arises from the increasing power of people's defilements. In earlier times life and the social structure were simpler, the variety of defilement was small and weak. Now, as the world grows increasingly complex, human defilements increase in number and become more serious. This is because cultural defilements have been added to the instinctive human defilements.

The third is "decay of living beings." This decay springs from the fact that each living being's standpoint and disposition are different from others'. This also occurs as the structure of human society grows more complicated. Because individuals come to consider things from their own standpoint

alone, they often perform what is corrupt from the viewpoint of society as a whole, but they are not aware of it. Even if they do notice it, they are liable to pretend not to know, out of a base spiritual outlook that there is no problem as long as it is not against the law. When such a base spiritual outlook and base acts gather and accumulate, it creates decay within society. This is "decay of living beings."

The fourth is "decay of views." This is the decay within the world that results from the fact that people's views become immoral. When human society was still young, human beings were generally simple and pure of heart. The distinction between right and wrong was clear. Gradually as time has passed, great progress has been made in terms of technology for living, but in terms of how people think of things, the distinction between right and wrong has grown less clear. A veritable pandemonium of false views go unchallenged, for example, the view that the truly human way to live is by instinct alone, the idea that moral education is quite unnecessary, and ideas that are tied up in extremities. The world has been greatly corrupted by such false views. This is "decay of views."

The fifth is known as "decay of lifetime." This is the decay of the world that arises because of the shortening of life spans. "Lifetime" in this case somehow or other refers to spiritual life. People's thoughts and actions become focused on things that show immediate benefit or instant effect. Their thoughts become petty, the longer view of humankind that gazes at eternal life begins to disappear, and all kinds of ugly problems always arise.

When we think about these things, we feel keenly that our own is truly the evil age of the five decays, the period of the Decay of the Dharma, or the period of continual doctrinal disputes (the latter five hundred years).

Shakyamuni Buddha has preached repeatedly that the period of the Decay of the Dharma is precisely the age in which the teachings of the Lotus Sutra are necessary. It is in this same sense that the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue inquires how in the period of the Decay of the Dharma one is able to obtain the Lotus Sutra and vows that "In the latter five hundred years of the corrupt and evil age, whoever receives and keeps this sutra I will guard and protect."

This is a passage we ought to appreciate deeply.

- *Pishacakas.* These are the demons said to feed on human vitality.

- *Vetadas.* Translated as "red demons," these are a variety of evil demon.

The other varieties of demons were explained earlier in chapter 26, "Dharanis," so we will omit further explanation here.

*To be continued*

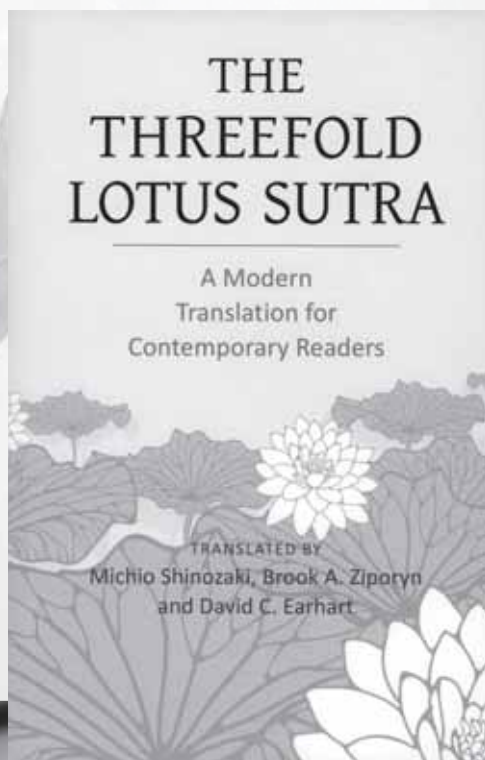


# A Sublime Buddhist Classic Newly Translated for Today's World

The Lotus Sutra has been one of the foremost scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism since the appearance of its superb translation into Chinese by Kumarajiva in 406 CE. Over the ensuing centuries, this centerpiece of the three sutras composing the Threefold Lotus Sutra has thoroughly spread throughout East Asian civilization.

*The Threefold Lotus Sutra: A Modern Translation for Contemporary Readers* is the first English version of this religious classic tailored to the essential Buddhist practice of daily sutra recitation. In addition to providing an accurate translation faithful to the original text and following the standard definitions of key Buddhist terminology, this innovative *Threefold Lotus Sutra* breaks new ground by employing more inclusive language to reflect present-day concepts of equality and human dignity in an increasingly diversified world.

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