

FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

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Violence

in

Buddhism

Jodo Shu Buddhism

Japan's First Independent Pure Land Denomination



The Jodo Shu Research Institute was founded in 1989 in Minato Ward, Tokyo, by unifying the three research organizations of the Jodo Shu Buddhist denomination, which had been operating separately. They had been concentrating on religious doctrines, dissemination activities, and rituals and ceremonies. Japan was at that time becoming an information-driven society in the increasingly globalized world, and the aging of the country's population was advancing. Under those situations where things and events were changing in various ways, the Jodo Shu Buddhist denomination combined the three fields of research in order to propagate the teachings of Jodo Shu Buddhism while responding to those changes.

The changes in society will bring challenges that no one has ever experienced. The research activities of the Institute are not limited to simply promoting basic studies on the denomination's doctrine, dissemination, and rituals, but should also actively become involved in studying various issues arising from the present-day society as its research projects. For instance, at the beginning of its foundation, when the issue of transplanting organs from brain-dead individuals was being debated, the Institute began to tackle the issue from the perspective of how medical treatment should be related to religion.

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FEATURES: Violence in Buddhism

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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Photo: AFP/AFLC



Nonviolence and the Attainment of Peace in Buddhism

by Masashi Hashimoto



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Lay Mahayana Buddhists are not the same as the lay believers of early Buddhism. . . . Making our aspiration for enlightenment manifest, we must make every effort to bring about peace in the Saṃgha of the Four Directions (cātuddisa-saṃgha), that is, the world in which we live.

I have been asked by the editors of *Dharma World* to write the foreword to this issue, with its theme "Violence in Buddhism." However, Buddhist doctrine and "violence" (*hiṃsā*) are not concepts that can be discussed together. The decision of the editors to take up the theme of violence was probably related in part to their concern over the violent expulsion of the Rohingya people at the hands of the Myanmar military after 2016, fuelled by a Buddhist nationalism that has turned into a political ideology.

While there are texts demonstrating the universal truth of Buddhism, such as the *Dhammapada* (verse 130), that say we should not kill, simply enumerating such texts containing the Buddha's teachings over time and place will not suffice to demonstrate that Buddhism is a teaching of nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*).

I believe that the most urgent task for all Buddhists, including me, is to question again our own attitude toward the issue of violence and to sharpen our awareness of ourselves as Buddhists professing nonviolence.

Today when we talk about the Buddhist idea of peace, we often begin by using the Sanskrit word *sānti* (Pali, *santi*). When Buddhist texts were

translated into Chinese, this word was rendered into compounds such as *jimie* (Jpn., *jakumetsu*), literally "tranquil and extinguished," and *jijing* (Jpn., *jakujo*), "quiescence," both of which refer to the ideal inner realm that Buddhists aspire to. However, *sānti* was originally used in Buddhism to refer to the attainment of peace within the early Saṃgha, the community of those who had left secular life.

The purpose of the Saṃgha was to preserve an ideal environment where those who had attained spiritual liberation, as well as those who were yet to attain enlightenment and were still striving for liberation, could live together in accordance with the Buddha's teachings. Thus it was also known as *samagga-saṃgha* (harmonious Saṃgha). Should disputes arise in the Saṃgha, a kind of criminal procedure code called the Samathakkhandhaka was brought into play to resolve the conflict and return the Saṃgha to its ideal of peace.

Buddhist monks and nuns, who were forbidden to cook for themselves, depended on gaining the trust of lay believers in order to be able to continue their religious training, receiving offerings of leftovers by begging. This inevitably led to the development of a dual

structure between the ordained and the lay, and the Saṃgha laid emphasis on different ways of character building according to their differences.

While the Buddha taught the ethic of a general, common nonviolence, he also showed ordained Buddhists seeking liberation the way to not committing evil deeds. But as history demonstrates in respect to lay believers, there were limitations to the spiritual influence of even the Buddha, for he was unable to prevent the massacre of the Sākyaans by the advancing armies of King Viḍū-dabha.

We lay Mahayana Buddhists are not the same as the lay believers of early Buddhism. Unlike Sectarian Buddhism, which attributed enlightenment only to the Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism tells us that anyone at all can become a buddha. This means that not only the ordained but also we lay Buddhists must aspire to perfecting ourselves. Making our aspiration for enlightenment manifest, we must make every effort to bring about peace in the Saṃgha of the Four Directions (*cātuddisa-saṃgha*), that is, the world in which we live.

Herein lies the reason that it is the task of each and every Buddhist to think carefully about their attitude toward the issue of violence. □

Violence in Buddhism—with an Emphasis on Early Buddhism

by Elizabeth J. Harris



Buddhists appeal to two strands within Buddhist text and tradition to either oppose or justify the use of violence. The first strand is the moral injunction that violence should never be met by violence. The second is that defensive violence is necessary in exceptional circumstances, for example, if there is a threat to the nation or to Buddhism.

Introduction: An Illustration from Sri Lanka

In 1988 I attended a conference on peace at an influential Buddhist monastery in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Two wars were being fought in Sri Lanka at the time. In the north and east of the country, the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was fighting the Tamil militant group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who sought a separate state in the Tamil-majority areas of the country.

In the south, government forces were fighting the militant Sinhala youth group the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP—People's Liberation Front), who sought to overthrow the government and establish a far-left political system. The main speaker at the conference was a Buddhist monk from Thailand who argued that from a Buddhist perspective, violence should always be met with nonviolence. He argued that nonviolence was the middle way between passive indifference and violent aggression, and named three ways of promoting it: counter-

ing negative stereotypes of the “other,” holding nonviolent demonstrations, and challenging those who were attracted to military options. He spoke with enthusiasm about non-violent Buddhists during the Vietnam War and challenged those present not to hate the “enemy.” Some of the Sri Lankan

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Buddhist monks who were present disagreed with him. The chief monk of the monastery, for instance, stated forcefully that he had come to the conclusion that although nonviolence was desirable, it was not always possible. Another stated that Buddhism neither favored violence nor opposed violence. The conversation became quite heated. The chief monk's last word, however, was that he did not believe that the path of nonviolence would work in Sri Lanka. His implication was that the threats from the militancy of the LTTE and the JVP were too great.¹

Armed conflict in Sri Lanka ended in 2009 with the military defeat of the LTTE and the death of thousands of civilians. From 1988 to 2009, a large number of Buddhists supported the army, believing that nonviolence would not lead to the end of “terrorism.” Repeatedly, on my



A damaged building riddled with shot by machine-gun fire during the period of Sri Lankan civil war, in Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

Photo: Alamy / PPS

visits to Sri Lanka in that period, I heard people say, "We know that Buddhists should be nonviolent, but these are unusual times. The very existence of Buddhism in Sri Lanka is under threat from terrorists. So the state must use violence to defend us." Some used Pali texts to support their stance. For instance, a Sinhala Buddhist, Sarath Weerasekera, wrote an article for the national press in October 2000 in which he appealed to the strand in the Pali texts that records the Buddha's conversations with the rulers of the kingdoms of Kosala and Magadha. For instance, he wrote:

King Kosol once approached the Buddha and complained that his soldiers join the Order [the Buddha's monastic order], which had resulted in the depletion of the army. Buddha immediately incorporated the rule in the formula of ordination that the candidate must not be in the army and, if so, must get the consent of the King to enter the Order.²

Others who knew the Pali texts cited the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* in the *Dīgha Nikāya* of the *Sutta Piṭaka*, which recounts the narrative of a king who does not listen to the advice of his spiritual advisers, which includes giving protection according to the Dharma to the armed forces (*Dīgha Nikāya* iii 61).

Two Approaches to Buddhism and Violence

Buddhist support for state-sanctioned violence has not been limited to Sri Lanka. It is a global phenomenon. In the middle of the twentieth century, for instance, Japanese Zen Buddhists supported the expansionary policies of the Japanese state in the Asia-Pacific war. Brian Victoria has labeled this "soldier Zen" and has argued that this so "grievously violated Buddhism's fundamental tenets" that Rinzai and Sōtō Zen were

"no longer an authentic expression of the *Buddhadharma*."³ More recently, Myanmar has been in the international spotlight because of the violence used by the country's largely Buddhist military forces against the Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State, formerly Arakan. Internal criticism of this military action from Buddhists in the country has been low.

In contrast to these examples of Buddhist militancy, the Dalai Lama has gained much support in the West for his nonviolent stance toward China, even though China has systematically sought to undermine and eliminate Tibetan autonomy and identity. Among Tibetans themselves, however, he has received criticism from those who would like to have seen more vigorous, even violent, defense of Tibet's unique Buddhist identity.

These examples demonstrate that contemporary Buddhists appeal to two strands within Buddhist text and tradition to either oppose or justify the use of violence. The first strand is the moral injunction that violence should never be met by violence. The second is that defensive violence is necessary in exceptional circumstances, for example, if there is a threat to the nation or to Buddhism.

The first strand or approach is supported by numerous texts. The following verses from the Pali *Dhammapada* have almost become iconic in Buddhism:

For never here
Do hatreds cease by hatred.
By freedom from hatred they cease.
This is a perennial truth. (v. 5)

All beings tremble at the rod;
All are afraid of death.
Seeing their likeness to yourself,
You should neither kill nor cause to kill. (v. 129)⁴

The first of these verses appeals to the principle of karma. We should not commit violent acts driven by hatred, because

the karmic fruit of hatred can only be more violence, more hatred, and more suffering. The second verse embodies an ethic of empathy. We should not kill or engage in violent acts because we understand that all living beings are like us. They seek happiness and undergo immense pain when they are victims of violence. Buddhist ethics, in addition, never separates self and other. Action that benefits others is also good for us and leads us closer to liberation or the realization of our Buddha nature. Violent acts, on the other hand, will draw us further away from liberation.

The second strand or approach suggests that there is a pragmatic, context-dependent element of moral thinking in Buddhism that recognizes the need for armed forces and, by extension, the use of defensive violence in an imperfect world. When I first studied Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the 1980s, this intrigued me. I wanted to know for myself whether there was anything in the Pali texts that could justify the support for a military solution to the ethnic conflict that I saw around me. Consequently, my master's degree dissertation in Buddhist Studies in 1988 was *Violence and Disruption in Society: A Study of the Early Buddhist Texts*.⁵ What impressed me as I did my research was the wealth of violence-informed imagery in the Pali texts and the extent to which war and violence were mentioned, even while Buddhism promoted nonviolence. Here were texts, I concluded, that knew the political realities of statecraft. They were not purely philosophical or concerned solely with a transcendent realm but were utterly realistic about the human condition and the violence inherent within it.

At one level, warfare was present in metaphor and simile. For example, the Pali *Dhammapada* also contains verse:

By day, the sun shines;
By night, the moon gleams;
In his armour, the warrior shines;

Meditating, the Brahmin shines;
But ever, night and day,
The Buddha shines with radiance.
(v. 387)

Here the redactors of the text see no problem with the radiance of the Buddha being compared to the radiance of a warrior in armor. At another level, when the Buddha talked with kings, he is recorded as using illustrations from warfare, appealing to the experience of the ruler rather than condemning it. For instance, when King Pasenadi asked the Buddha about the fruits of giving gifts, the Buddha replied:

What is given to one who is virtuous, great king, is of great fruit, not so what is given to an immoral person. Now then, great king, I will question you about the same point. Answer as you see fit. . . . Suppose you are at war and a battle is about to take place. Then a khattiya [from the warrior caste] would arrive, one who is untrained, unskilful, unpractised, inexperienced, timid, petrified, frightened, quick to flee. Would you employ that man, would you have any use for that man?⁶

It is not surprising that some Buddhists have taken the use of illustrations such as these and texts such as the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* to argue that violence and war are sometimes necessary to defend the state or the nation from external threats. They were certainly used by Buddhists in Sri Lanka during the ethnic war to argue for their right to defend themselves against LTTE suicide bombs, even if this meant that innocent Tamils would be killed, tortured, or displaced from their homes.

A Personal Position

Can these two approaches be reconciled? In the last part of this article, I will attempt to summarize my own

personal position on this, drawing on several decades of reflection. I consider nonviolence to be a moral absolute in Buddhism. The damage that violence does to human communities and the environment, its self-perpetuating nature, and its karmic consequences means that there is no doctrinal justification for violence in the teachings of the Buddha. At the same time, however, the empirical realism within Buddhism means that violence and warfare inevitably appear in both Buddhist texts and tradition. They appear particularly in references to the pragmatic, conventional decisions that states are forced to make in a greed-filled world and in descriptions of the consequences of human greed. Buddhist texts and traditions, in fact, teach that violence is to be expected in our world simply because humans have not eradicated their greed, hatred, and delusion.

Let me illustrate this position with words that I wrote some years ago about the way in which Buddhism has helped me understand violence through what I have termed its empirical realism:

Buddhism says that our world is imperfect because it is permeated with greed and hatred, rooted in ignorance. The potential for violence is very much part of this. . . . If we accept this—I certainly do—then the arising of violence should not surprise us. Buddhism does not have the problem that some theistic traditions have: “Why does a God of love allow this violence to happen?” . . . I must hasten to say that I am not speaking of an acceptance of violence in the sense of becoming hardened to it or opting out of conflict transformation, but of an understanding that violence is to be expected in a world where only a few, relatively speaking, have ears to hear the radical message of the Buddha, or indeed the non-violent message of other religions.⁷



King Pasenadi of Kosala on a Royal Tour.
From Hutchinson's *Story of the Nations*.
Anonymous.

Most significantly, however, I see in the Buddhist texts a continual challenge to those who would justify violence by appealing to the greed-filled nature of the world. A higher and nobler way is always pointed toward. For instance, some of the most graphic descriptions of war in the Pali texts come in the *Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya* of the *Sutta Piṭaka*, but these are placed in the context of the dangers inherent in craving for sensual gratification, status, wealth, and power:

Again, with sensual pleasures as the cause . . . men take swords and shields and buckle on bows and quivers, and they charge into battle massed in double array with arrows and spears flying and swords flashing; and there they are wounded by arrows and spears, and their heads are cut off by swords, whereby they incur death and deadly suffering.⁸

In the same discourse, when love of the sensual results in theft and adultery, vivid pictures of the torture methods used to punish offenders are given. A king's right to punish those who commit crimes is not questioned. A nobler way is nevertheless present in this and other discourses: a society in which people do not need to steal or commit adultery because they are morally aware



Thousands of Tamil demonstrators gather at Queens Park in Toronto on May 13, 2009, to protest the conflicts between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

and are not forced to steal by poverty or oppression.

The same challenge is present in the following *Dhammapada* verse:

Though you might conquer in battle
A thousand times a thousand men,
You're the greatest battle-winner
If you conquer just one—yourself.
(v. 103)⁹

Working on the defilements in the mind is here praised above victory in war. One method of reducing violent tendencies according to the Buddha's teachings is mental culture, namely forms of meditation, chanting, and introspection that help pluck out defilements such as greed and conceit. There are many more.

In the mid-1990s, I interviewed some Buddhist monastics who were active in peace movements in Sri Lanka. I will always remember one particular monk who had lived in the north of the country among the Tamil community. He did not support an armed response to the militancy of the LTTE but appealed to something that lies at the heart of Buddhist doctrine: analysis of cause. He said this:

The solutions are crystal clear in Buddhism. The first step is to ask what caused the war in the north and east. Why did the young people take up arms? The same thing

happened in the south. The key to the solution is rooted in this basic question. We must tackle the causes.¹⁰

This monk did not see Sri Lanka's ethnic war as caused by "terrorism" but rather by the discrimination and injustices experienced by the Tamil people in the years leading up to the conflict, particularly by the young. So he pointed to the teaching on causality enshrined in the Four Noble Truths and asserted that if the causes of violence could be identified and tackled, then violence may cease or at least be lessened.

Concluding Thoughts

In this article I have argued that within Buddhist text and tradition there is evidence to support two positions: an ethic of absolute nonviolence, and the use of defensive violence by the state. Buddhists in the modern world are appealing to both positions, which means that Buddhists have been and continue to be implicated in violence. A closer examination of text and tradition, however, reveals that nonviolence is a moral absolute in Buddhism. The realism of the Buddhist worldview recognizes that violence is to be expected in a world that is shot through with greed, hatred, and delusion, and that rulers might opt for defensive armed

action. However, the nobler way that is held out involves addressing conflict and violence through alternative methods. One of these is to identify and address the root causes of violence—both the causes that lie in our minds and those that lie in unjust structures and practices in society. □

Notes

1. I also used this illustration in my book *Buddhism for a Violent World: A Christian Reflection* (Epworth, 2010), pp. 105–106.
2. Sarath Weerasekera, "Buddhist Stand on War and Its Relevance to the Present Conflict," *Island* 20 (October 2000). See also Elizabeth J. Harris, "Buddhism and the Justification of War: A Case Study from Sri Lanka," in *Just War in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Paul Robinson (Ashgate, 2003), pp. 93–108; here, p. 96. The version of the story that Weerasekera refers to appears in the *Mahavagga* I 40.
3. Brian Daizen Victoria, "A Buddhological Critique of 'Soldier Zen' in Wartime Japan," in *Buddhist Warfare*, ed. Michael K. Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 105–30.
4. Valerie J. Roebuck, trans., *The Dhammapada* (Penguin, 2010), pp. 3, 28.
5. Published in revised form as Elizabeth J. Harris, *Violence and Disruption in Society: A Study of the Early Buddhist Texts* (Buddhist Publication Society, 1994).
6. *Samyutta Nikāya* I 220, in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*, Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans. (Wisdom, 2000), p. 190.
7. Elizabeth J. Harris, "What Can Buddhism Offer a Violent World?," *Interreligious Insight* 4, no. 1 (January 2006), pp. 54–62; here, p. 55.
8. *Mahādūkkhakkhandha Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya* i 83–90, Bhikkhu Nānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Wisdom, 1995), p. 181.
9. Roebuck, *Dhammapada*, p. 22.
10. See Elizabeth J. Harris, *What Buddhists Believe* (Oneworld, 1998), p. 113.

Buddhism and Violence in Deep-South Thailand

by Pinit Ratanakul



The Buddha did not teach us to submit to evil force, but he discouraged the use of violent means to deal with this negative force, whether inside or outside ourselves.

Only love and nonviolence can end hatred and violence

The deep south of Thailand has been plagued by insurgent violence since 2004. According to government statistics from 2004 to 2019, the violence has already resulted in 7,139 dead and 13,776 injured, with a total of 20,711 violent incidents.

The Lotus and the Crescent in the Deep South

The “deep south” refers to the three southernmost provinces of Thailand: Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani. In these provinces, out of the total population of 1,424,700, 85 percent are Muslims and 14 percent are Buddhists. Historically the three border provinces were parts of the independent Malay Sultanate of Pattani, a former vassal of the Thai kingdom, which was annexed to the kingdom in 1909 by King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V). In these provinces Muslims are ethnic Malay with a strong sense of ethnic identity. They speak a Malay dialect and have customs and manners similar to those in the Malay culture. It is their cultural pride and lack of a sense of belonging to the Thai state that leads the deep-south Muslims to resist

the assimilation policy pursued by Thai governments to integrate them into Thai society, making them Thai. These historical and cultural roots have been used by separatist movements as grounds for their fights against the Thai government to reestablish the independent state of Pattani. To achieve this goal, violence has been used to challenge Thai authority and to scare the Muslims who do not want to join the movements nor be sympathizers.

Before the eruption of insurgent violence in 1990, the Buddhist minority and the Muslim majority coexisted considerably peacefully, with some conflicts and tensions arising from the lack of understanding between them. It was owing to the goodwill of religious leaders from both sides that the intercommunal misunderstanding was not escalated into violence.

Royal Benevolence

As a means of stopping insurgent violence, the late Buddhist king Bhumibol built his palace in Narathiwat and used it as the operating site for his social and economic development projects to raise the quality of life of the deep-south Muslims through education, vocational training, and environmental improvement, and to boost the economy of the region.

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As government officials—the civilian and the military—are mostly Buddhists from other provinces, to avoid blowing on the fire of violence, the king urged them to do their duties wholeheartedly and selflessly to bring peace and prosperity back to the south. To attain the goal, the king advised them to win the hearts of local people, first, by understanding Muslim culture, language, customs, and manners and acting accordingly and tolerantly; second, by reaching the people with goodwill and friendship, gaining their trust and friendship by humility, sincerity, and gentleness and treating them as equal human beings with rights and dignity; and third, by devising social and economic development projects boosting their economic condition and rendering justice to everyone. People’s loyalty, economy, and justice are the keys to stopping insurgency.

Compassion and Insurgency

It was the government of General Prem Tinsulanonda, the sixteenth prime minister, that adequately dealt with the secession conflicts. With more sensitivity to



The Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra prays during a Buddhist ceremony of presenting robes to monks at Khao Kong temple in Narathiwat Province, southern Thailand, on November 7, 2005. More than a thousand people have died in clashes and revenge killings since January 2004 in the country's Muslim majority provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala.

Muslim culture and with concentration on social and economic development in the deep south, the government made efforts to steer the deep south to economic progress.

The development policy was complemented by the leniency of the government toward the insurgents. The grant of amnesty enabled the rebels to participate in social and political reform through the democratic system. The violence was contained and stopped. However, the struggle for ethnic identity, autonomy, and secession remained like waves under calm water.

Morally, amnesty represents compassion as forgiveness in political form. It provides the wrongdoers an opportunity to redeem themselves by doing good for others and society. Among insurgents were those who joined separatist movements because of economic hardship and the malfeasance of the authorities; they were under the delusion that violence could be justified morally and religiously. As they were not assailants by nature, with supporting factors they were able to make use of the best within themselves to do good for others and society.

Renewed Insurgent Violence

After four decades of peace, insurgent violence flared up again in 2004 when

Thaksin Shinawatra, the twenty-third prime minister, made war on drugs and used harsh measures and illegal means in suppressing drug traffic and insurgency regardless of Islamic culture and human rights. This led to questionable treatment of Muslim suspects, mostly youth, and in 2004 it resulted in 108 dead in Pattani, with 30 killed in the famous Krue Se Mosque, where they had taken refuge, and with 86 dead in Tak Bai, Narathiwat, with 7 dead on the site, 79 dead from suffocation in crowded and stuffy military lorries on the five-hour drive to a military camp.

Since that time the renewed insurgent violence has been aggravated by the increased killing of innocent people by brutal means such as shooting, decapitation, car bombs, and arson. From 2004 to 2019 the estimated number of people killed was 7,139, including government officials, civilian and military personnel, and innocent Buddhist and Muslim residents such as teachers and traders. These people died for nothing else than trying to go on with their lives and work. All live in fear and anxiety, as violence can erupt at any time.

Responses from the Buddhist Minority

The laity. The Buddhist minority in the deep south consists of government officials, civilian and military personnel,

traders, and monks and novices. All believe in the law of karma and the power of merit making. They fear the bad karmic effects of transgressing the first precept of the abstention from taking life, i.e., brevity of life (untimely death), ill health, misfortune, and rebirth in hell, and try to keep the precept according to life conditions and their abilities. In their understanding, killing animals for food, and killing humans for defending oneself, another person, the nation, and Buddhism, is morally justified and religiously acceptable. With such belief, soldiers are willing to do their duties of keeping law and order and protecting people's lives. When this involves killing an enemy, they do not feel guilty, which usually follows wrongdoing, for they regard themselves as defenders of people's lives and not as aggressors or assailants.

While soldiers are armed for self-protection, some civilian Buddhists have also undergone shooting practice. Some have resorted to the power of good karma and merit making. Some have turned to the magical power of Buddhist amulets, which they carry or wear around their necks to protect themselves against danger of all kinds. Some have tattooed their bodies with Buddhist sacred formulas to make them invulnerable, strong, and powerful in the midst of danger.

Regarding killing, in Buddhist morality, intention defines karma and determines the karmic effects on the perpetrator. Accordingly, if in a struggle against a hostile person one happens to kill that person unintentionally, the act of killing is accidental and thus yields no karmic consequences. All other kinds of killing are karmic deeds, including purposely killing for self-defense, "mercy killing," "painless killing," or "killing by necessity" when all alternatives are exhausted.

However, the karmic result of killing humans varies, depending on many factors, such as the nature and intensity of intention and the qualities of a

person killed. In this sense, the karmic effects of killing a holy person are more severe than killing an ordinary person. Similarly, killing a seriously defective infant has less karmic effects than killing a normal baby. Likewise, the gravity of killing for self-defense and killing in doing one's duty has less karmic effects on the perpetrator than killing with hatred and anger.

The Peace-Loving Monk. For Buddhist monks, observation of the precepts is central to the moral and spiritual development of the imperfect self to perfection. While believing in the importance and significance of the five precepts in the lives of lay Buddhists, the deep-south monks realize that life in the stricken provinces is most insecure and vulnerable, making it difficult for Buddhists to observe the first precept faithfully. The monks are sympathetic to the laypeople's use of Buddhist amulets for protection against danger but remind them of the great benefit they would get from taking refuge in the Buddha, his teaching, and his noble disciples. Living a life according to Buddhist teaching is a way of real self-protection against negative forces, within and without.

Following the Buddha's teaching that only love and nonviolence can end hatred and violence (*Dhammapada* 5), the monks advise the Buddhists, who have hostile feelings toward the insurgents, to restrain animosity and eradicate it by cultivating love and compassion in its place.

As it is normal for us to hold a grudge and to retaliate against our enemy, the Buddhist teaching against retaliation, revenge, and violence seems impractical in the real world with its "eye for an eye" ethos. But looking at it deeply, the teaching conforms to reality. It does not matter whether the enemy who inflicted suffering is punished or killed, because ultimately he is punished by the bad effects of his evil karma. Therefore, in dealing with violence and aggression,



Photo: AP / AFLU

Police inspect the scene of a shooting at a security checkpoint in Yala Province, Thailand, on November 6, 2019.

the best response is patience and self-restraint, avoiding involvement in the karmic action of killing, and letting the impersonal law of karma take its course.

The Militant Monk. In 2018 there was a militant monk among deep-south monks who reacted strongly to the increased senseless killing of the helpless Buddhist monks. Out of frustration and anger, in his posted hate speeches the monk called on Buddhists to unite against insurgent violence, while threatening harsh retaliation against the Muslim insurgents and sympathizers. This raised many questions among the Buddhists, such as, Does Buddhism encourage passivity and victimization? Did the Buddha teach self-surrender to the force of evil? Did the Buddha teach us to do nothing to protect ourselves, our families, our property, and the nation? Is threatening the would-be assailant with retaliation to prevent him from attacking us acceptable in Buddhism?

The militant monk's repeated hate speech worried the state and ecclesiastical authorities, who feared it would escalate the secession conflict into confrontation between the Muslim majority and the Buddhist minority in the deep south. Without support from the public and senior monks, he later moved to a temple in Bangkok and eventually stopped his militant activities.

Of course, the Buddha did not teach us to submit to evil force, but he discouraged the use of violent means to deal with this negative force, whether inside or outside ourselves. This is evident in the teaching against extreme asceticism in moral and spiritual development, and in the practice of loving-kindness meditation to cultivate love in the heart and radiate it outward from the self to others, including both friends and foes.

Impacts of Insurgent Violence. While the militant monk could not provoke the Buddhists into reacting violently to the killing of their fellows, the killing of innocent monks by the insurgents scared and forced some monks and laypeople into moving out of the unsafe areas. The majority of Buddhists go on living there and continue friendships with Muslim friends. In the light of warm relationships with these Muslims, the remaining Buddhists regard Islam as a religion of peace and love, like Buddhism, but it is unscrupulously used by the insurgents to legitimize their aggression and violence. Similarly, the average nonin doctrinated Muslims do not regard cultural and religious differences between them and Buddhists as the cause of hostility. They do not find it difficult to coexist with the Buddhists who are friendly and flexible.

The relationship between Buddhists and Muslims is either unconstructive



This picture taken on November 21, 2019, shows Muslim students of the Attarkia Islamiah Institute from Narathiwat Province, singing during a rehearsal in Bangkok, ahead of their performance for Pope Francis at Chulalongkorn University. Young Muslim singers from the country's conflict-plagued south gather for choir practice. Pope Francis himself was in Bangkok as part of his Asian tour.

or the opposite, depending on the attitudes of both sides toward each other. In some locations the relationship is characterized by mere coexistence, in which each side minds their own business and does not want to interfere with the another. In some few areas, the relationship is friendly and constructive. Buddhists and Muslims join hands to do social work such as healing the innocent victims of insurgent violence, mostly Muslim widows and orphans, helping them in the process of recovery from grief and disheartedness, and aiding them in finding peace within themselves. When brought together, Buddhist and Muslim victims, mostly women, develop emphatic understanding of the suffering of one another and foster fellow feeling by sharing their sorrows, suffering, and hostile feelings toward the perpetrator and perform common rituals of forgiveness. This small-scale cooperative work between Buddhists and Muslims is a silver lining in the dark cloud over the deep south.

Roles of Buddhist Monks. The relationship between Buddhist monks and laypeople is reciprocal. Laypeople provide the monks with food and material support. The monks reciprocate by serving as “fields of merit,” teaching the Dharma, assisting laypeople in accumulating merit, performing religious rituals, and counseling the laypeople on various issues of life’s problems.

In hard times when life is threatened by insurgent violence, the monks become a spiritual refuge for frightened and disheartened Buddhists. With knowledge of Buddhist teachings, the monks comfort them, strengthen their spirits, encourage them to live mindfully, help them to regain self-confidence, and enable them to deal with fear and anxiety, and strains and stresses.

In addition to these duties, some monks try to establish closer relationships with the Muslim communities near the temples. The monks’ efforts represent the goodwill of the Buddhist communities in reaching out to the Muslim communities to gain their friendship and to involve them in joining hands to kindle the light of peace in the violent deep south. This is not reaching for the stars, as there may be people of goodwill in one or more or all Muslim communities, and the Buddhists themselves are friendly, gentle, flexible, and tolerant.

Conclusion

The deep-south Buddhists have been searching for peace and struggling to cope with prevailing insurgent violence without breaking the first precept against killing. Increased violence has brought lay Buddhists closer to monks. In hard times, amid life’s turmoil, the monks apply their Dharma knowledge in helping laypeople on various matters, including

dealing with difficulties and dispelling fear and anxiety and other destructive emotions such as anger, frustration, disheartedness, and sadness. Lay Buddhists provide the monks with food and serve as temple security guards. With the monks as their spiritual refuge, lay Buddhists can live in hard times with courage and confidence.

We have to appreciate the courage and strong will of the Buddhist monks and laypeople who remain in the troubled deep south despite increased violence in order to keep the lotus in the land of the crescent. Symbolically, Buddhist presence in the Muslim-dominated southern provinces is a passive resistance to violence, like standing firmly in the river against a strong current.

The insurgents and their sympathizers are small in number and do not represent the Muslim majority in the deep south. The present government’s efforts to deal with social and economic factors that have fermented and sustained violence, the recent formation of peace groups by Buddhists and Muslims of goodwill to restore peace to the deep south, and the ongoing peace talks between state authorities and representatives of the insurgent groups encourage the deep-south residents to have hope beyond fear. The most challenging task of Buddhist and Muslim leaders in the deep south is to motivate their followers to faithfully practice the teaching of love and human brotherhood in their respective religions and to cultivate peace in their hearts. As the human heart is normally defiled by destructive emotions like greed, hatred, and ill will, motivating people to replace these negative emotions with empathetic love is the most difficult task. But it needs to be done to create genuine peace in the deep south and in the world. Without spiritual development, other kinds of development—social, economic, and political—become new grounds for further conflicts and violence. Only religion can change the heart. □

Can We Aim for the Future with Others? Toward Bodhisattva Ethics

by Fumihiko Sueki



Bodhisattva . . . practice is characterized not only by the pursuit of self-enlightenment (benefiting the self) but also by the furthering of others' interests and the attainment of enlightenment with others (benefiting others).

Is Abstaining from Harming Living Things Effective?

Confronted by the horrors of conflict in the wake of World War II, people all over the world pledged to forsake war and prayed for world peace. It was against this backdrop that the United Nations was formed and its members, including the emerging nations of Asia and Africa, engaged in serious discussions with the aim of achieving peace. The Constitution of UNESCO declares that "since wars began in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." The end of World War II was followed, however, by the commencement of the Cold War, and the world split into two camps. Nations such as Germany and Korea were divided and compatriots tragically took up arms against one another, as during the Korean War. The Cold War at last drew to a close near the end of the twentieth century. However, this did not usher in peace. Instead, the world became fragmented as individual countries vied with one another in pursuit of their own interests. All that remained was a state of chaos in which nations acted solely on their own immediate behalf, and ideals, thoughts, and hopes

for the future fell by the wayside. Is it then possible for us to regain some form of order founded on hope and ideals?

It was in this vacuum of hope and ideals that religion emerged as a serious problem. During the Cold War, the clash was simply between the economic systems of socialism and capitalism. After the Cold War ended, however, religion emerged as a major cause of conflict. Hardliners, extremists, and

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fundamentalists of religions including Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism fanned hatred and conflict. Even adherents of the seemingly tolerant religion of Buddhism have been guilty of persecuting the Rohingya people in Myanmar.

What then of Buddhism in Japan? Brian Victoria's *Zen at War* documented how the old Buddhist masters who advocated peace following World War II had been proponents of militarism during the war, sending shockwaves around the world. Zen was not alone in this. Practically all sects of Buddhism supported Japanese militarism and made major contributions to the war effort. In retrospect, it may be observed that Buddhist temples had fielded large combatants since the days of the soldier monks and the Ikkō-ikki uprising (the revolt against feudal lords by rebellious or autonomous groups of people, backed by the power of the Jōdo Shinshū sect of Buddhism, that were formed in several regions of Japan) in the Muromachi



Photo: Bridgeman Images / PPS

This painting depicts an image of soldier monks. From a manuscript telling the story of the soldier monk Musashibo Benkei (d. 1189), which was compiled in Benkei Monogatari (The tale of Benkei). Originally published in the early Edo period (c.1640–80).

and Warring States (Sengoku) periods in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The first precept of Buddhism, of course, calls for abstinence from the taking of life. This prohibits the killing of any living creature, not just humans. This precept is common to all the religions of India and is practiced most strictly in Jainism. Great importance is attached to this precept in Buddhism as well, and it has permeated Japanese society. Many tales tell of people who fall into evil ways after wantonly harming living creatures, and people have absorbed these tales. That is why the eating of meat was prohibited and people who hunted were often despised.

The precept to refrain from killing has thus had some effect. However, it has proven to be less effective as a principle for rejecting war and calling for peace. Today, with hatred and war on the rise, it can no longer simply be said that people all over the world seek peace and friendship. Why has such enmity arisen? And if peace and friendship are still to be sought, according to what principles should they be pursued? The first necessary step is to recognize that rather than being wholly good, people are spiritually complex beings who have both good and evil aspects.

The Mutual Inclusion of the Ten Realms: The Multilayeredness and Fluidity of the Mind

In conventional Western philosophical thought, the individual is autonomous and free from others' interference. Social-contract theory holds that modern society is formed on the basis of contracts entered into between autonomous individuals. When we look at how people actually behave in society, however, we find that they are not really completely autonomous. People do not necessarily engage in encounters and interactions rationally, and they do not always behave exactly in

accordance with the contracts entered. People act on their emotions, and they by turns assimilate and are repelled by others. For example, when baseball fans support their team as one, the individual "I" is easily subsumed into the "we." The individual self is not divided from others by a fixed boundary. Sometimes the boundary collapses and the self assimilates itself with others, while at other times the boundary grows more impenetrable and antagonistic toward others. Relations between the "I" and the "Other" are thus fluid. When assimilation and antagonism occur on the broader, political stage, they lead to conflict between nations and between faith groups.

Is it possible to theorize how the self both fluidly assimilates and becomes antagonistic toward others? Buddhism is essentially selfless in outlook and rejects the idea of the permanent and substantive self. In this it adopts a fundamentally different position from that of Western philosophical thought. This has led to the development of various theories concerning the nature of the self. I would therefore like to focus at this point on the Tiantai (Jpn., Tendai) theory of the mutual inclusion of the ten realms from the point of view of the multilayeredness of the mind and relations with others.

According to Tiantai Buddhism, all ten realms are contained in the momentary thought of living things. The ten realms consist of the six worldly realms of delusion and transmigration and the four sagely realms of enlightenment. The six worldly realms are hells, hungry spirits, beasts, *asuras*, human beings, and heavens, and the four sagely realms are *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, bodhisattvas, and buddhas. In other words, every realm from hells to buddhas is contained in the momentary thought of living things. Thus the mind of hells is inherent even in buddhas. As this means that evil is intrinsic to the nature of buddhas, this is known as the doctrine of

inherent evil. However, although evil is present in the nature of buddhas, buddhas do not actually commit evil acts. Because evil is inherent in buddhas, they can sympathize with and have a liberating effect on the beings in hells. On the other hand, as the nature of buddhas is also present in hells, the beings in hells also contain within themselves the potential for liberation. Naturally the ten realms are not hard and fast. What this means is that the human mind is not a single entity but, rather, something that contains diverse elements, both good and evil. The same person can thus become a good person or an evil person depending on which aspects come to the surface. Whether a person will be good or evil is therefore not cast in stone.

This doctrine of the mutual inclusion of the ten realms sheds light on the multilayeredness of the individual human mind and explains how people relate to others. I am completely different from other people, and I cannot know what they are thinking or how they will behave. I must live and interact with these incomprehensible others. However, despite being mutually incomprehensible, we both empathize with and are repulsed by one another. Why does this occur? It occurs because, as our minds contain the ten realms, the elements of these realms pull and repulse one another. When the elements of my hells and the elements of another's hells pull each other, this can give rise to a greater evil. Conversely, when the elements of my bodhisattva state and the elements of another person's bodhisattva state pull each other, the world of the bodhisattvas can become a reality. And when the elements of the *asura* realm meet, war may break out between the two.

The doctrine of the mutual inclusion of the ten realms thus explains the relationship between me and others from the point of view of the multilayeredness and fluidity of the mind. My

mind is multilayered and does not necessarily obey my will. It is impossible to say when evil elements may gush forth. For this very reason, I must look into my mind and proceed in a direction that takes me toward the good and prevents the evil elements from surfacing. That is where a Buddhist-based ethics has a necessary role to play.

Bodhisattva Ethics: Aiming for the Future with Others

The highest of the ten realms is the state of buddhas, and the elements of buddhas also reside within our minds. According to the doctrine of the attainment of the mental state of the Buddha while one is still alive (*sokushin jōbutsu*), it is also possible for us to attain buddhahood in this world. The Zen doctrine of sudden enlightenment posits the same. If we accept the position that “this very mind itself is buddha” (*sokushin zebutsu*), then we are in ourselves buddhas. Such an interpretation is possible. However, if it is supposed that I am in myself a buddha and my actions are all buddha actions, then there is no longer any potential for further practical development. Thus this position leads simply to an affirmation of the status quo.

What many Mahayana sutras propound is not such an affirmation but, rather, action as a bodhisattva, with the goal of attaining buddhahood in the future. A fundamental principle of early Mahayana scriptures such as the Lotus Sutra is that “all sentient beings are bodhisattvas” (Sueki, “All Sentient Beings Are Bodhisattvas,” *Dharma World* 43 [July–September, 2016]). Conversely, the implication of the doctrine of the mutual inclusion of the ten realms is that



Photo: HTP / JPRS

A Group of Monks and Bodhisattvas. Fragment of a mural painting that decorated the cloister of a Buddhist temple in Yanqi Hui Autonomous County, Xinjiang, China. Property of the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

it is also possible that “all living things are beings of the realm of hells.” This being the case, why is it that bodhisattvahood is made the fundamental principle?

The term “bodhisattva” was originally used to describe the former incarnation of the Buddha. Its practice is characterized not only by the pursuit of self-enlightenment (benefiting the self) but also by the furthering of others’ interests and the attainment of enlightenment with others (benefiting others). In Mahayana Buddhism, anyone who practices as a bodhisattva acquires the potential to attain buddhahood. Practice in this stream of Buddhism places particular emphasis on benefiting others. A key point to bear in mind here is that, unlike ordinary social ethics, the process is not completed solely in this life. The Lotus Sutra teaches that the disciples mentioned in the sutra who are satisfied with enlightenment as *śrāvakas* (direct

disciples of the Buddha) had actually practiced as bodhisattvas under the Buddha for many lives previously but had forgotten this. They are therefore urged to have an awareness of being bodhisattvas. The Buddha predicts that these *śrāvakas* will attain buddhahood in the distant future. This means that they will not achieve buddhahood in this life, but by going through the cycle of transmigration a number of times, their bodhisattva practice will continue into the distant future. Taking the *śrāvakas* as one example, the Lotus Sutra reveals that in fact all living things, and not just *śrāvakas*, are bodhisattvas who have similarly practiced under the Buddha in past lives long ago. The essence of Buddhist teaching encapsulated in the Lotus Sutra could thus be formulated as “all living things are bodhisattvas.” Engagement

with others can also take the form of engagement as beings of the *asura* realm and as beings of the realm of hells. However, Mahayana Buddhism’s basic orientation toward practice is evident in its adoption of bodhisattvas as its bedrock. The aim of bodhisattva practice is to draw out others’ buddha-nature so that such practice is further broadened as bodhisattvas reverberate with one another.

This is naturally not something that can be easily practiced, which is why it is a process that will continue throughout future lives as well as in this life. World peace will not be achieved right now. However, persevering practice will undoubtedly bear fruit at some point. If peace will not be achieved in this life, then such practice just needs to be continued in future lives. We must not give up pursuit of this ideal even if we are weak and can achieve very little now. □

Buddhists and Violence in Myanmar: A Conflicted Situation

by Leo D. Lefebure

While striving to live by the ideals of Shakyamuni, Buddhists in positions of governing authority have long justified the use of violence on the grounds of proper governance and self-defense. Buddhists . . . have developed principles to clarify in what circumstances violence, even though tragic, may be justified or necessary.

In the *Dhammapada*, Shakyamuni Buddha inspired his disciples as well as the followers of many other religious paths by teaching that “enmities are never appeased by enmity. They are appeased by peace. This is an eternal law” (verse 5). Maha Ghosananda, the revered Patriarch of Cambodian Buddhism, drew out the implications of Shakyamuni’s teaching: “When we are wronged, we must set aside all resentment and say, ‘My mind will not be disturbed. Not one angry word will escape from my lips: I will remain kind and

friendly, with loving thoughts and no secret malice.”

While striving to live by the ideals of Shakyamuni, Buddhists in positions of governing authority have long justified the use of violence on the grounds of proper governance and self-defense. Buddhists, like followers of most other religious traditions, have developed principles to clarify in what circumstances violence, even though tragic, may be justified or necessary to protect the innocent in a world troubled by aggression. However, applying the

principles of just-war theory is fraught with danger because in situations of tension, anxiety and fear can rapidly escalate violent actions in the name of protection. To make matters worse, perpetrators of violence often deny the full humanity of their adversaries in the conflict. Some of the most brutal forms of violence may not be physical; some ways of relating to others can be extremely cruel and damaging without being physically coercive. The historical record tells us that Buddhists, like followers of other religious paths, have in some situations violated their ideals and have used violent means in pursuit of aggressive goals.

The international community has recently expressed deep concern over atrocities committed by the military in Myanmar against ethnic and religious minorities, including the Muslims in Rakhine State commonly known as Rohingya. News reports charge that Buddhists in the military forces of Myanmar committed atrocities against the minority groups, burning homes, killing and raping civilians, and driving people out of their homes into exile. Approximately one million Rohingya fled into neighboring Bangladesh, which does not have adequate resources to care for them. This creates an ongoing humanitarian emergency situation that has no adequate resolution in the foreseeable future. For the most part the government of Myanmar does not recognize the Rohingya community as citizens, claiming that they are recent undocumented migrants from Bangladesh.



Photo: AFP / AEL0

A Bangladeshi man helps Rohingya Muslim refugees to disembark from a boat on the Bangladeshi shoreline of the Naf River on September 30, 2017. More than two thousand Rohingya have massed along Myanmar’s coast after trekking from inland villages in Rakhine State to join the refugee exodus to Bangladesh.



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Photo: Alamy / JPPS

Detail of the fresco painting on the wall of the interior passage of the Sulamani Temple in Pagan, Myanmar. The temple was built in 1183 by King Narapatisithu (1138–1211) of the Pagan Dynasty. The king encouraged further reforms of Burmese Buddhism. The majority of the Buddhist monks realigned themselves with the Mahavihara school of Ceylon, now Sri Lanka.

In March 2017 the United Nations Human Rights Council established the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission to investigate the accusations in the international news media. This mission issued a report in September 2018 alleging atrocities against the minority communities in the Rakhine, Kachin, and Shan states in Myanmar. When the mission issued its final report in September 2019, it charged Myanmar military personnel with having committed genocidal offenses that forced approximately 740,000 Rohingya Muslims to flee to Bangladesh in 2017. The mission presented evidence and proposed to the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar that the perpetrators be tried at the International Criminal Court for genocidal crimes against Rohingya and other ethnic minority communities in Myanmar.

On November 11, 2019, The Gambia filed an official lawsuit at the International Court of Justice in The Hague on behalf of the fifty-seven-nation Organisation of Islamic Cooperation against Myanmar, alleging genocide during the atrocities committed against the Rohingya in 2017. The lawsuit seeks trial and punishment for senior Myanmar government and military leaders, the cessation of all acts of genocide, and reparations for the victims. Most of the leaders in the government and military of Myanmar are Buddhist. In addition to the conflict involving the Rohingya Muslims, there have long been clashes between the armed forces of Myanmar and minority ethnic communities including Christians, such as the Karen, the Kachin, and the Shan. While the plight of the Rohingya has attracted the most international attention, the

other conflicts continue to cause great misery for certain populations.

Historical Background

Religious and ethnic identities intertwine in the history of Myanmar/Burma, and the current situation has emerged from an earlier long history of conflict. The dominant ethnic group in Myanmar is the majority Bamar (also known as Burman) community, most of whom are Buddhist. Most Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Baha'is in Myanmar come from ethnic groups other than the Bamars. Traditionally kings from the Bamar or Mon Buddhist communities ruled the valley of the Irrawaddy River, which forms the central area of present-day Myanmar. In the eleventh century, King Aniruddha established a Buddhist kingdom and is usually considered the first historical monarch of Burma, even though his father and grandfather had already begun the process and enjoyed a close relationship with the Buddhist community. The relationship between the Buddhist king and the sangha, or monastic community, was crucial to the traditional identity of Burma, and Buddhists viewed the magnificent capital city Pagan as the symbolic center of the universe. This heritage continues to influence Bamar Buddhists today. While the Bamar and the Mon communities were traditional rivals, there was no history of implacable animosity between them; a Mon military figure could serve a Bamar monarch and vice versa.



Portrait of young Burmese leaders for independence led by General Aung San. They constituted the embryo of the modern Burmese army called the Burmese Independent Army, which was formed to fight for independence from Britain. Photo taken in c. 1939.

The minority ethnic groups that inhabit the eastern, northern, and western border areas of present-day Myanmar were generally independent of Bamar or Mon rule; many of these communities were never ruled by the historic Bamar or Mon Buddhist monarchy. The state of Rakhine, in the western part of the country near Bangladesh, is separated from the Irrawaddy River Valley by hills and mountains and was traditionally independent of the Bamar or Mon Buddhist monarchs. The Bamar Buddhist king Bodawpaya conquered this area in 1784 and tried to subdue the people, accomplishing this only with difficulty.

During the course of the nineteenth century, the British gradually conquered not only the central area of Burma along the Irrawaddy River, the traditional homeland of the Bamar people, but also the areas along what are today the borders with Bangladesh, India, China, and Thailand. The British included Burma in colonial India until 1937, and they brought in Hindu and Muslim Indians whom they had already trained to be civil servants to administer the British Empire. The British ruled by dividing populations, and they were often perceived as allied with the ethnic minorities more than with the Bamar majority. Many people from the ethnic minorities became Christian and found favor with the British; this development

alienated the Burman Buddhists. They had earlier been the dominant power in the whole central part of Burma; now they were subordinate not only to the British, who were very few in number, but to Hindu and Muslim civil servants. Resentments built up among the Bamar Buddhists who had been displaced from leader-

ship in society. In the twentieth century, Bamar Buddhists became leaders in the independence movement and in the independent state of Burma.

Current Context

The government of Myanmar counts 135 different ethnic communities in the country. Dwelling in the hilly and mountainous areas near the borders with Bangladesh, India, China, and Thailand, the ethnic minority groups speak many different languages and often follow various religious traditions other than Buddhism. Almost all the Christians and Muslims in Myanmar today come from these ethnic groups. Many are Baptist, related to the American Baptist Church; some are Methodist; some are Roman Catholic.

In the postcolonial context, some Buddhists in Myanmar developed aggressive forms of religious nationalism hostile to Muslims and Christians in the country. Some Buddhists in Myanmar today view Muslims as an existential threat to the Buddhist Bamar identity of the nation, and some have performed and justified violent actions against ethnic minority groups in the name of protecting Buddhism. While the international community has paid the most attention to the conflict with the Rohingya Muslims, there are multiple conflicts underway, often with Christians from

other ethnic minorities, such as the Kachin Independence Army, who are largely Baptist Christians.

In 2012 some Myanmar Buddhists organized the nationalist 969 Movement, which seeks to protect Bamar Buddhists from Muslims who are accused of terrorism. In 2013 there were several violent riots of Buddhists in various places in Myanmar against Muslims who were accused of various forms of misconduct. In 2014 some Buddhists organized the Ma Ba Tha movement (Patriotic Association of Myanmar), the Committee for the Protection of Race and Religion, which also seeks to defend the Bamar Buddhist identity of Myanmar. This movement has been strongly anti-Muslim and can also be critical of all followers of religions other than Buddhism. Aggressive Buddhist nationalists in Myanmar protest vigorously against any non-Buddhists using traditional Buddhist terms. The situation is complex, as some other Buddhists have strongly criticized these movements, and some within the Ma Ba Tha movement have advocated for religious tolerance. Christians in Myanmar repeatedly accuse the government and military leaders of systematically favoring Buddhists over other religious communities.

Regarding the situation in Rakhine State, many Buddhists in Myanmar view Muslims as a military and demographic threat to the identity of the nation; even the use of the name Rohingya is extremely controversial, since many Buddhists accuse Muslims in Rakhine State of being recent undocumented migrants from Bangladesh. The government generally denies the citizenship of Muslims in Rakhine State. Many Buddhists in Myanmar also suspect international involvement by jihadist organizations in the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). Numerous Christians as well as Buddhists believe that Islamic militants are receiving international training in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan or elsewhere and are coming to fight in Myanmar.

Such beliefs tend to be used to justify the government troops' actions toward the Muslims in Rakhine State. After Muslims fled, government troops often burned their villages, and the government then paved over some of them and built new buildings. When BBC reporters have asked the people in the new installations about the earlier residences there, they have professed to be ignorant of any prior dwellings there.

Scholars have proposed various interpretations for the intertwining of religious and national political identities in Myanmar, including Buddhist nationalist movements. Some scholars argue that Buddhism is being instrumentalized for political purposes. Some claim that nationalism is the overriding issue of concern, with religion serving to sacralize the political realm. Meanwhile, other scholars maintain that Buddhist religion is an autonomous factor and politics is being religionized, so that the state becomes a means to realize sacred objectives.

Sitagu Sayadaw

In 2017 Sitagu Sayadaw, one of the most prominent Buddhist monastic leaders in Myanmar, delivered an address to the military leaders of Myanmar based on the traditional Sri Lankan chronicle the *Mahavamsa*, from the fifth century CE. The chronicle describes the aftermath of a great battle where the Buddhist king Dutthagamani defeats and slays huge numbers of opponents. The monarch intends to defend Buddhism and protect the Dharma, which he believes justifies the use of violence. Nonetheless, after the fighting has ended, he worries about the negative karma that he has acquired. Eight Arahants miraculously fly through the air to visit him and reassure him that he has not slain millions of human beings; he has slain only one and a half, as only one had taken the three refugees, and the other had taken on the five Buddhist precepts. According to the Arahants, only

those who have taken refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha are full human beings; thus they advise King Dutthagamani to cast away care from his heart.

Sitagu presented this account of the traditional chronicle to Myanmar's Buddhist military leaders, allowing them to draw the conclusion that their killing of Rohingya Muslims does not cause a great deal of negative karma because Muslims have not taken refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha and do not practice the five precepts; thus Muslims are not accounted to be full human beings. Since many Buddhists in Myanmar believe that Muslims threaten Buddhism, a number of them conclude that the duty to protect Buddhism authorizes the aggressive actions against the Muslims who were in Rakhine State. Other Buddhists have demurred.

Religions for Peace

Religions for Peace brings together Buddhists and followers of other religious paths to seek a constructive path forward after so much violence and suffering. In May 2018 Religions for Peace organized a visit by a multireligious delegation to Rakhine State. The delegation visited sites in the north of Rakhine State, where the atrocities occurred in August 2017. They saw the scenes of massacres and the destroyed Muslim villages, as well as refugee camps, and they met with some of the refugees from various groups. Members of the delegation emphasized the need to reject the climate of fear and suspicion and build trust and interreligious and intercommunal harmony. Participants in this delegation included Roman Catholic cardinal



Myanmar Buddhist devotees listen to a speech of Ashin Nyanissara, known as Sitagu Sayadaw, one of the most influential monks, during a ceremony of the legislative victory on "Race and Religious Protection Laws," organized by the Ma Ba Tha movement, the Committee for the Protection of Race and Religion, at Thuwunna indoor stadium on October 4, 2015, in Yangon, Myanmar.

Charles Bo, the Archbishop of Yangon; Al Haj U Aye Lwin, the chief convenor of the Islamic Centre of Myanmar; U Myint Swe, the president of Ratana Metta Organization and of Religions for Peace—Myanmar; Bishop Gunnar Stalset, bishop emeritus of Oslo, Norway; Rev. Joseph Maung Win, the head of the office of Yangon Archdiocesan Commission for Ecumenism and Interfaith and the secretary general of Religions for Peace—Myanmar; and Rev. Kyoichi Sugino of Rissho Kosei-kai and Religions for Peace.

In May 2018 Religions for Peace organized a letter from Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, and Hindu leaders, including members of the multireligious delegation, to the people of Myanmar in search of peace: "A Multi-religious Vision of Peace and Development in Myanmar: A Letter to the Peoples of Myanmar." The authors stress the need to reach across religious and communal boundaries to establish solidarity in overcoming conflict and building trust and harmony for the future. In November 2018 Religions for Peace convened the High-Level Multi-Religious Peace Delegation in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, to discuss a path toward national reconciliation. While the challenges of the situation remain extremely grave, the efforts of Religions for Peace and other interreligious partners continue. □

All Causes Are Good Causes: The Liberating Power of Holistic Causality in the Lotus Sutra

by Dominick Scarangelo

The Dharma of the Lotus Sutra is like a circle—no matter where you start, and whichever direction you take, you always end up at the same place: liberation. The teaching of the Lotus Sutra is the Perfect and All-Encompassing Dharma.

Introduction

Buddhism is a diverse religion that has taken many distinct forms as it has developed through time and space, adapting to various cultures in South, Southeast, and Northeast Asia, and over the last century, Europe and the Americas. Many people today have a hard time grasping the diversity of Buddhism, however. For example, I have talked to people who are under the impression that all Buddhists throughout the world belong to a single catholic religious organization, and I have even been asked on several occasions whether His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the Buddhist equivalent of the pope of the Roman Catholic Church. This may sound naive, but the diversity of Buddhism is even tricky for practicing Buddhists to navigate. Buddhists may take it for granted that other Buddhists cultivate the same practices or hold the same beliefs as they, and so it is not uncommon for Buddhists to find themselves perplexed by the practices or teachings of other Buddhist groups. They might also be surprised when they discover that what they think of as a typical Buddhist teaching or practice is unknown to a Buddhist from

another community or is understood in radically different ways.

In this piece I highlight an understanding based on the Lotus Sutra that is profoundly liberating but could confuse many because it sometimes strikes people as incompatible with basic Buddhist teachings on causation. This is the seemingly illogical assertion that all causes are good causes. On the face of it, this appears to run counter to a fundamental Buddhist understanding of causation that forms the basis of Buddhist ethics and practices: that bad causes lead to bad results and good causes lead to good results. In this issue's column I will look at how the "all causes are good causes" notion of causation based on the Lotus Sutra does not conflict with basic Buddhist teachings of causation, but instead includes them within a holistic view of causation in which nirvana and samsara and delusion and the mind of enlightenment are not unrelated dualistic entities but instead are inseparable from each other. The understanding that all causes are good causes opens a profoundly liberating perspective on the world in which all experiences are opportunities for enlightenment and nothing is in vain.

Causation: Good Causes Lead to Good Results, Bad Causes Lead to Bad Results

Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings about causality are indispensable to attaining liberation from the fundamental problem facing humankind: *duhkha*, which is commonly translated as "suffering" but is closer in meaning to "unsatisfactoriness" or "dis-ease." The path to liberating ourselves from this ever-present sense of dissatisfaction that leads us to constant discontentment is to eliminate its cause: unquenchable desire. This desire, in turn, is conditioned by our fundamental ignorance—the failure to see things the way they really are, the inclination to ignore the reality that all things are impermanent and nonself, the nonrecognition of the truth of interdependence: that nothing exists based entirely on its own power but comes into existence and is sustained in dependence upon other things. The Buddha's account of how to end the constant sense of dis-ease that haunts living beings is also based upon causation: if we remove the causes of *duhkha*, it will cease of its own accord. No matter which way we slice it, causation is central to Buddhism.

Shakyamuni Buddha's most basic explanation, repeated in many sutras, is as follows: "When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises; with the cessation of this, that ceases" (Bodhi 2000, 552). The objection may be raised that causation



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is a complex phenomenon, that in reality things come into existence based on multiple causes and conditions that can never all be known, which is to say that things are overdetermined. Buddhism does have numerous intricate analyses that take the complexities of causation into account, however, and a far more intricate description is found in the Buddha's enumeration of causation as a sequence of twelve steps, known as the twelve causes and conditions or twelve links of dependent origination. But despite its simplicity, the Buddha's explanation in the passage above is useful because it is easy to understand while at the same time capturing the essential principle of the teaching. The Buddha also maintains that causation is not something he created, nor is it a principle that he himself thought up. Causation is the way the cosmos works; as universal law, it is the same everywhere and at all times, whether a buddha is in the world or not. Buddhas like Shakyamuni merely rediscover this truth and once again proclaim it to living beings.

One of the fundamental aspects of the workings of causation is that good causes produce good results and bad causes produce bad results. This is the foundation of Buddhist ethics and all forms of spiritual discipline. "Bad" here, sometimes rendered "unwholesome" or literally translated from the Asian languages as "evil," signifies actions that invite the result of suffering because they go against the truth of the way things are. We can think of bad actions as akin to

stubbornly slamming our head against a brick wall: the wall will never fall, and we only end up hurting ourselves. Actions, including mental actions (thought), that contradict immovable universal truths such as impermanence, interdependence (nonself), and the principle of causation itself are as ineffective as banging one's head against a brick wall, and are sure to bring us the bad result of suffering. On the other hand, actions in accord with these immutable truths lead to the good result of lessening or removing suffering, and what's more, they develop our character and benefit those around us. The path of practice, most obviously the precepts—the Buddha's ethical guidelines for the Sangha—but also all the spiritual disciplines of Buddhist practice, all work according to these truths to bring about good results. This is Buddhism in a nutshell, stated succinctly in the well-known Precept of the Seven Buddhas:

To refrain from doing any manner of evil,

To respectfully perform all varieties of good,

To carry out the purification of one's mind—

It is this which constitutes the teaching of all Buddhas.

Dharmamitra 2009, 31

Buddhist practices, including ethics, are not upkept merely in obedience to the Buddha for obedience's sake, nor are they compulsory because the Buddha is some kind of judge of humankind, but in the promise that we ourselves can

lessen our suffering and the suffering of those around us through our own behavior by creating good causes and avoiding the formation of bad causes.

All Causes Are Good Causes?

In Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma centers one often hears that Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, taught that all one's experiences in life are for the purpose of liberation and lead one toward enlightenment. In her book *The Buddha in Everyone's Heart*, Rissho Kosei-kai's Rev. Kosho Niwano writes how the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai took a step beyond the basic Buddhist teaching of causation to understand all causes as good causes.

Having encountered the Lotus Sutra, he [the Founder] took an extra step, based on basic Buddhist teaching, and chose to see such good causes and good effects and to recognize the people one meets every day as good causes or good conditions. That is how the theory of causes leading to effects should be applied with the wisdom of the Lotus Sutra. This is the view of dependent origination taught in the Lotus Sutra capable of liberating everyone 100 percent. (Niwano 2013, 33–34)

When we first hear it, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano's counsel to see all causes as good causes may strike us as contradicting the principle at the very heart of the

law of causation upon which Buddhist morality and spiritual disciplines rest: good causes beckon good results, and bad causes call bad results. The taking of all causes as good causes might even seem a dangerous antinomian assertion. But in my view this Lotus Sutra notion of causality does not refute basic Buddhist teachings about causality but includes them while at the same time transcending them to achieve a powerfully liberating teaching.

In the Lotus Sutra the Buddha makes this paradox easily understandable by teaching it through stories. A good way to get a sense of how the Lotus Sutra's holistic Dharma of causation both includes and transcends basic Buddhist causation is to look at two closely related chapters of the Lotus Sutra that describe the activities of Dharma teachers of the sutra.

Lotus Sutra Chapter 10 Shows Bad Causes Invite Bad Results; Chapter 20 Reveals Bad Causes Lead to Good Results

The Lotus Sutra contains several chapters that provide depictions of Dharma teachers—bodhisattvas who uphold and disseminate the teachings of the sutra. The two I will discuss here are chapter 10, “Teachers of the Dharma,” and chapter 20, “The Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect.” Chapter 10 is based on the basic notion of causation: bad causes → bad results and good causes → good results. In chapter 10 the Buddha teaches the approach that Dharma teachers must take toward practice, describing both the great extent to which the Dharma teachers of the Lotus Sutra are worthy of the respect due a buddha and the negative karmic consequences of persecuting a teacher of the Dharma. Chapter 20 affirms the basic notion of causation but reveals it to be the initial workings of a holistic phenomenon of

causation in which even bad causes can lead to the ultimate good result: liberation. This chapter tells the story of a specific Dharma teacher, Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect, who is ridiculed and abused for bowing in obeisance to everyone he meets as people who are already buddhas in the future.

The text itself links these two chapters when in the beginning of chapter 20 Shakyamuni Buddha prompts the living beings in the assembly to remember what he had taught earlier in chapter 10 about the merits of revering the Dharma teacher and the sufferings that people would incur if they disrespected and abused the Dharma teacher:

At that time, the Buddha addressed the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva Great Power Attained, saying, “You should now know that speaking ill of, mocking, or slandering the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen keeping this Dharma Flower Sutra incurs heavy consequences, as earlier described, and that the merits it bestows are the cleansing and purification of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, as previously mentioned. (Rissho Kosei-kai 2019, 321)

“As earlier described” here refers to chapter 10, “Teachers of the Dharma.” In this chapter the Buddha explains that the Dharma teacher is always worthy of respect equal to a tathagata. About those who uphold the sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha says, “All the world will admire and revere them. They are worthy of offerings equal to those of the tathagatas” (ibid., 208). He also says of Dharma teachers that “everywhere they go, they are to be paid homage” (ibid., 209) and “You should revere with palms placed together / Those who are able to embrace this sutra, / Paying them the same homage as the World-Honored One” (ibid., 210). The Dharma teacher is to be “wholeheartedly revered with palms placed together, paid homage to,

honored, and extolled” (ibid., 209), and the Buddha instructs: “You should pay homage to the upholders of this sutra / With the most splendor of all things there are / To see, hear, smell, taste, and touch” (ibid., 211). Dharma teachers are worthy of such honors and deserving of protection because they are emissaries of the Buddha, carrying what is the ultimate teaching that fulfills the intention of the Buddha, the sutra that contains within itself the “entire body of the Tathagata” (ibid., 212).

Extolling Dharma teachers and revering them in these ways are good, wholesome actions that bring boundless merits for living beings.

People seeking the Buddha Way
Come before me with palms placed
together
And praise me with countless verses,
They will acquire infinite merits
Through such extolling of the
Buddha.
Yet those who praise the upholders
of this sutra
Will enjoy merits that are greater
by far. (Ibid., 211)

Conversely, the Buddha cautions that disrespecting and abusing the Dharma teacher is a bad cause that leads to the bad result of great suffering:

If, throughout the duration of a kalpa,
People constantly rail against the
Buddha
With angry looks and unwholesome
minds,
The consequences they incur will be
harsh beyond all measure.
Yet speaking ill, even momentarily,
Of those who read, recite, and
embrace
This Dharma Flower Sutra
Is a far more serious offense.
(Ibid., 210–11).

Living beings’ response to the Dharma and those who bring the

Dharma to them works along the lines of the notion of causation we saw above: good causes—that is, embracing and respecting the truth of the Buddha and those who transmit it—invite good results, and with time these bring liberation and, in the long run, the ultimate goal of buddhahood.

Revilng or harming the Dharma teacher is a bad action that beckons the bad results of extraordinarily heavy karmic retribution, not because the Buddha punishes these people, but because their actions arise from unwholesome minds. “Unwholesome minds” indicates ways of thinking and looking at the world that are not in accord with truth, which motivate actions that run counter to truth, thus inviting suffering. Suffering arises not only because harming another is a self-centered action that ignores the interdependence of self and other but also because people who obstruct those who work for peace and the betterment of our world ultimately lose the chance to improve their own lives and circumstances.

Now let us turn to chapter 20, “The Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect.” This chapter teaches the view of dependent origination taught in the Lotus Sutra: “capable of liberating everyone 100 percent.” Here, in contrast to the Buddha’s explanation in chapter 10, we are surprised to find that those who perform the bad action of reviling and abusing the Dharma teacher eventually attain the good result of liberation! As readers may know, this chapter tells the story of Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect, perhaps better known by the English translation “Never Disrespectful.” Never Unworthy of Respect “reads the sutra with his body,” conveying the central message of the sutra—reverence for the buddha-nature of all living beings, that is, paying homage to all as the buddhas they have already become in the future—by placing his hands together in reverence and paying homage to all people he meets. “I could never find

you unworthy of respect, / For you are practicing the Way / And will all become buddhas” (ibid., 326) he tells them all. But in this chapter, the Dharma teacher, the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect, is always disrespected, reviled, and abused. The people who receive his obeisances respond with ridicule and verbal abuse and even with projectiles and blows: “People struck him with staves and sticks or pelted him with shards and stones,” Shakyamuni Buddha recounts (ibid., 323). Thus, through much of the story the people treat Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect as being never worthy of respect, the exact opposite of the Buddha’s instructions in chapter 10.

This, of course, is the bad action of abusing the Dharma teacher, which, as Shakyamuni Buddha explains in chapter 10, will invite the bad result of extremely heavy consequences. This does indeed happen, in accord with the principle that bad actions invite bad results. As a result of their bad actions these people “could never encounter a buddha, never hear a teaching of the Dharma, and never see a sangha for two hundred million kalpas. They underwent great torment and anguish in Avici Hell for a thousand kalpas” (ibid., 324–25). Here, we should note that in Buddhism the hells can be understood both cosmologically and as states of ego-mind. We can think of this instance of Avici hell as a hate-filled heart that brings extreme emotional and spiritual suffering not just to the object of that hatred but to the haters themselves. Such feelings of extreme enmity make us incapable of opening our hearts to the wise and compassionate teachings of Buddhism, or any religious teaching for that matter, and we are instead drawn to violence and brutality. We shun nurturing communities like the Sangha, and in an effort to satisfy our feelings of aversion and our desire to punish or harm, we strike out at that or those we detest. We also tend to abuse those who try to

help us, represented here by the Dharma teacher of the Lotus Sutra, and this only increases and lengthens our isolation. This is why those in this chapter who abuse Never Unworthy “never encounter a buddha” or “hear the teaching.” This is indeed “bad causes → bad results.”

But here in chapter 20 this is not the end of the story. Their encounter with Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect, which initially causes great suffering (bad causes → bad results) ultimately leads to liberation for these people. As the Buddha explains, “The four groups of that era, / Who were attached to their own views of the teachings, / Heard Never Unworthy of Respect say, / ‘You will all become buddhas.’ / For this reason, / They encountered countless buddhas” (ibid., 326–27), and in time they are able to abide in the Buddha Way. After the suffering of their karmic retribution was complete, they again encountered Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect, who led them to enlightenment. Their encounter with the bodhisattva, the catalyst of immediate suffering for them, also cements the bond with him that leads to their next encounter, which facilitates their liberation.

We should also note that the same is true for the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect, as what we would normally take as a bad experience ends up becoming the cause of good results. The ridicule and abuse that Never Unworthy receives at the hands of these people becomes the cause for his physical and spiritual purification, allowing him to attain the Buddha Way:

The Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect
Could endure it gracefully.
Having cleared away all past offenses,
When he was able to hear this sutra
As his lifetime neared its end,
His six sense faculties were purified.
Through this transcendent power,
His lifetime was extended.
(Ibid., 326)

The Bodhisattva endured revulsion and abuse for the remainder of his life, but the ultimate result is positive: he achieves the relatively high stage of the bodhisattva path at which one's senses, including the mind, are purified, which is also a state associated with nonregression (Skt., *avaivartika*), meaning that one will no longer lose ground on the path and never again fall into unwholesome states of mind or existence, in essence an assurance of attaining buddhahood.

The Lotus Sutra's Dharma of Causation: Including and Transcending the Dharma of Causation in Basic Buddhism

The main point we should take away from this is that all of the characters in chapter 20 ultimately attain good results from bad causes or negative experiences that initially manifested as suffering. Thus, while it is true that just like the Buddha teaches in chapter 10—positive responses to the Dharma of the Lotus Sutra lead to positive results—we learn unexpectedly that the opposite is also true: negative responses to the Dharma of the Lotus Sutra can also produce positive results in the course of time. When it comes to the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, positive karmic affinity (Jpn., *shōen*, 正縁) with the teaching works to liberate, but negative karmic affinity (Jpn., *gyakuen*, 逆縁) can also produce positive results, and negative reactions to the teaching that initially manifest suffering produce positive results, with the liberation working in reverse order (Jpn., *gyakke* 逆化).

I would reiterate that liberation working in reverse order does not cancel out the law that bad causes produce bad results. As Rev. Kosho Niwano says, the Lotus Sutra Dharma of causation is based on the basic Buddhist notion of causation. It does not negate the basic

Buddhist notion of causation. The actions of the arrogant people who abuse Never Unworthy in this chapter lead to two results: an immediate provisional result and an ultimate long-term result. Indeed, as the Buddha taught in chapter 10, their actions initially produce suffering. This is an example of bad, or unwholesome, actions producing unwholesome results. But their unwholesome actions are also the first steps on their path to liberation. The negative karmic affinity of their unwholesome actions links to an additional, wholesome result over the long term. It connected them to the Bodhisattva, and the experience of suffering acted as a warning sign, the proverbial canary in the coal mine, telling them that something was wrong with their ways of thinking and acting that was hurting them, and this ensured that when they encountered the Never Unworthy again they listened to his words. Even our negative emotions and behaviors can be causes of the good result of liberation from suffering. As I will discuss below, by squarely facing and struggling to understand our bad actions and the mindsets behind them, we can find the keys to our liberation. This working of causality in the Lotus Sutra, "all causes are good causes," is a powerful liberating teaching for we flawed human beings struggling to make our way in an imperfect world.

But How Is This So?

I can predict that many readers remain unconvinced, as this notion of all causes as good causes is so counterintuitive and seemingly incompatible with the normative Buddhist teachings on causation with which we are most familiar. It may even strike some as a form of wishful or magical thinking. To explain the workings of "all causes are good causes," allow me to begin with the famous parable of the horse from the Chinese classic *Huainanzi*, which may be familiar to many of you.

At the near frontier, there was a [family of] skilled diviners whose horse suddenly became lost out among the Hu [people]. Everyone consoled them. The father said, "This will quickly turn to good fortune!" After several months, the horse returned with a fine Hu steed. Everyone congratulated them. The father said, "This will quickly turn to calamity!" The household was [now] replete with good horses; the son loved to ride, [but] he fell and broke his leg. Everyone consoled them. The father said, "This will quickly turn to good fortune!" After one year, the Hu people entered the frontier in force; the able and strong all stretched their bowstrings and fought. Among the people of the near frontier, nine out of ten died. It was only because of lameness that father and son protected each other. Thus,

good fortune becoming calamity, calamity becoming good fortune; their transformations are limitless, so profound they cannot be fathomed. (Major et al 2010, 729)

This parable is often read to mean that we should withhold our judgments about events in our lives because we can never know their long-term meaning or consequences. But for our purposes it is important to understand the reason this is so. Each event is a fact in the life of the frontier family, which may at the time it occurs engender suffering, but it's meaning and how it is taken is a function of its contextualization. The significance of each of the events is not determined on its own but vis-à-vis the other events. The meaning of each successive event changes when it is recontextualized by the event that follows. This is why good fortune becomes calamity and calamity becomes good fortune. Each event in the story can be either calamity or good fortune, each contains within it the potentiality to be both. It

is the contextualization that determines whether the various events take on the significance of calamity or good fortune. The father is indeed wise, but as time progresses forward, there would be no end to the recontextualizations of these events because time itself is unbound: "their transformations are limitless." As the arc of the story moves into the future, the meaning of prior events changes retroactively, over and over again, into infinity. Consequently, in the case of this story we can never determine a fixed, final meaning for any event.

I think we have the beginnings of an understanding of the Lotus Sutra's notion of causality, but we aren't quite there yet. The parable of the horse in *Huainanzi* is open-ended, as the story, like time, has no terminus. The earlier events are continually being recontextualized by succeeding events. But the Lotus Sutra's One Vehicle provides a teleology, that is to say, an end point or goal toward which things progress, which is the attainment of buddhahood by all living beings. According to the Lotus Sutra, becoming a buddha is the goal that contextualizes all that happens in our lives. Shakyamuni Buddha tells the assembly that his vow long ago was to make every person a buddha, equal to himself, and that this vow has been fulfilled because every person's attainment of buddhahood is certain. Universal buddhahood means that everything that happens in our lives, the experiences that bring us joy as well as those that bring us sorrow, are all points on our trajectory toward becoming buddhas, and as such, each is a step forward on the journey to buddhahood. As when people take a long trip to a far-off destination, each leg of the journey may be variously comfortable or uncomfortable, convenient or inconvenient, inspiring or boring, even depressing and painful, but each is one of the causes of their arrival at their destination. On a cross-country trip, most of us would rather fly direct, in business

or first class rather than coach, preferring an airplane to a train, and a train to a bus. But even the Greyhound gets us to where we want to go, and the tedious and protracted bus trip, with all of its transfers, detours, and frustrating traffic jams, is indispensable if the destination is worthy. Is there no destination worthier than buddhahood? When the destination is buddhahood, each and every step we take is a cause for buddhahood, and thus all "good causes."

This recontextualization applies not only to others' actions toward us but even to our own actions that cause us to suffer. Our bad conduct, if we acknowledge and analyze it, becomes the fuel for our enlightenment, providing opportunities for us to become wiser and more compassionate people. An example I often use is the parent who is emotionally or physically abusive to their child who is failing at school. The parent who curses or strikes his or her child is creating suffering for both of them, no doubt. In terms of basic causality, the parent might investigate the estranged relationship with the child and realize that it is the bad result of their own behavior toward the child. The suffering of being unable to be close to his or her child and have a loving relationship makes the parent aware of their actions, and the opportunity this provides is an example of how a bad situation can point the way toward liberation from suffering and bring one closer to the enlightenment of a buddha. From this perspective, a person's bad actions can become good causes.

But while this level of awareness may allow us to control our behavior and prevent or lessen the suffering we create for ourselves and others, to get at the root of the issue we need to turn our attention to the mind behind bad actions we perform. We must analyze the unwholesome mindsets out of which our actions stem on the faith that within these bad causes we can find the good. We may be surprised to discover

that the flip side of the negative emotions that motivated our destructive or hurtful behavior is an unfulfilled positive wish for ourselves and others. For example, behind the parent's frustration with the child may be the fear that the son or daughter will suffer because of the consequences of not getting a good education. The parent's anger is the deluded "heads" to the wholesome "tails" of compassionate love.

Many forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism teach that the three poisons of anger, greed, and ignorance are not separate from their wholesome opposites—loving compassion, generosity, and wisdom—but are more like two frequencies of the same electrical current or two states of the same substance, like water and ice. If this sounds absurd to you, take a moment to reflect on how easily spurned or unrequited love turns into hatred, or think of the times you have seen two good friends become embroiled in a dispute and end up archenemies. With the faith that we and others are future buddhas—the good result—we must find the seeds of our future selves (buddha-nature) within the unwholesome feelings and emotions that plague our minds. Zhiyi (538–97), the great Chinese Lotus Sutra exegete who was enormously influential on the reception and understanding of the Lotus Sutra in East Asia, likened the wholesomeness within the unwholesome to the fuel or potentiality for fire within something like a piece of bamboo (Ziporyn 2000, 242). That wholesomeness is not normally visible to us, but if we can find it and ignite it, activated wholesomeness can burn away the unwholesomeness. Practicing "all causes are good causes" entails taking our negative, bad behaviors, learning from them to change our behavior, and more profoundly, looking deeply within them to find the goodness that is concomitant with them, thereby affirming our own buddha-nature, coming to believe in it and uncovering and igniting it so that

these wholesome bodhisattva motivations outshine their deluded Siamese twins.*

Making the Choice to See All Causes as Good Causes

Obviously, recontextualizing all the experiences of our lives as good causes for our attainment of liberation from suffering, and ultimate buddhahood, requires that we take a leap of faith. In the Lotus Sutra the Buddha repeatedly tells his disciples of the difficulty of understanding the sutra's teaching. Among all the Buddha's sutras, "the most difficult to believe and hardest to understand is this Dharma Flower Sutra" (Rissho Kosei-kai, 211). "To hear this sutra is a rare thing, / And to believe and accept it is rarer still" (ibid, 214). Thus, even Shariputra, the Buddha's wisest disciple, is capable of "entering the sutra" only through faith. As Rev. Koshō Niwano writes of the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, "The Founder . . . chose to see such good causes and good effects and to recognize the people one meets every day as good cause or good conditions" (Niwano 2013, 33–34). This choice requires taking it on faith that liberation and buddhahood lie in our future.

What if I don't have that faith?, you may ask. If you wish you had that faith, however, you already have it, in embryonic form. In this case, taking all causes as good causes is like working on the paradoxical Zen koan. You don't see the solution at first, and you struggle with doubt in the hope that you will see it. This wish to solve the riddle is your faith. Then one day it is revealed to you. To see all causes as good causes is essentially to see buddha-nature in yourself and in others and that the events of daily life are the workings of the Buddha's liberation. But it takes work to open one's eyes. First, to attain a glimpse of buddha-nature requires emulating the Buddha, as a child learns by imitating adults or how apprentices

pattern themselves on a great master. This means practicing the actions that perfect the bodhisattva: being generous, following the Buddha's ethical guidelines, endeavoring to be patient, assiduously applying oneself, calming one's mind through meditation, and studying to enhance one's wisdom. And as Rissho Kosei-kai founder Nikkyo Niwano taught, "We have to tell ourselves 'I am a child of the Buddha' until we are wholeheartedly convinced of it" (Niwano 2020, 1). This is the same as repeatedly telling ourselves "all causes are good causes." The desire that motivates our perseverance in these practices is itself our faith, even though we may not realize it, and eventually something magical happens: our leap of faith is affirmed when we truly realize for the first time the precious lessons that an unpleasant experience taught us, or how we grew through our struggle to deal with a person whom we continually butted heads with, or when we discover within the negative emotions of our bad actions wholesome motivations that reveal our own buddha-nature.

A recurring question is how can horrible, senseless tragedies of the kind that we can't even wrap our minds around ever be good causes? This is admittedly a sensitive issue, as we should never pretend to fully grasp others' experiences of such suffering or arrogantly tell a victim of those kinds of suffering what they should feel. But modern psychology proposes that survival requires making meaning of such seemingly meaningless and malevolent suffering. According to psychologist and concentration camp survivor Victor Frankl, the primary motivational force for human beings is the will to meaning, including making meaning of suffering. "If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete" (Frankl 1992, 76). Frankl called finding meaning in suffering "tragic optimism":

How is it possible to say yes to life in spite of all that? How, to pose the question differently, can life retain its potential meaning in spite of its tragic aspects? After all, "saying yes to life in spite of everything," to use the phrase in which the title of a German book of mine is couched, presupposes that life is potentially meaningful under any conditions, even those which are most miserable. And this in turn presupposes the human capacity to creatively turn life's negative aspects into something positive or constructive. In other words, what matters is to make the best of any given situation. (Ibid., 139–40)

Frankl's appeal for us to use our suffering for creative purposes reminds me of how one Rissho Kosei-kai reverend I know speaks of the Fukushima nuclear power plant that tragically melted down, contaminating the surrounding areas and horribly impacting the residents' lives and health. A native of Fukushima prefecture, this reverend often refers to the power plant as the "great bodhisattva Fukushima." Some people are confused or flabbergasted when he says this, but for him, this way of talking about the site is part of his choice to take the disaster as a challenge, not only to minister to people's suffering, but as a teaching moment to sound the alarm about the dangers of nuclear power—even its so-called peaceful uses—to inspire people to save the future of humankind not only by eliminating nuclear weapons but also by safeguarding the environment by abolishing nuclear power altogether. For me, this is a powerful example of the faith that enables someone to take all causes as good causes, even the suffering of what people would normally see as a senseless tragedy. While always a source of great personal sadness, these tragedies cease to be only misfortunes and can take on additional significance by becoming the impetus for helping others and changing the world to make it a better place.

The Holistic All-Embracing Dharma

The Dharma of the Lotus Sutra is like a circle—no matter where you start, and whichever direction you take, you always end up at the same place: liberation. The teaching of the Lotus Sutra is the perfect and all-encompassing Dharma. When we practice according to the basic fundamental principles of causation, as Shakyamuni Buddha explains in chapter 10 of the Lotus Sutra, those good causes bring good results, and we can be liberated from suffering and attain many merits, build our good roots and move forward toward buddhahood. But as the ordinary people we are, we fail at this . . . we fail a lot. Even so, as Shakyamuni Buddha shows in chapter 20, our own unwholesome actions that make us suffer, as well as the unpleasant, negative things we encounter in life, and even our descent into the hells—the caustic mindsets of intense hatred—can be causes for our liberation and eventual buddhahood. We have only to accept this and practice accordingly. In this world, filled as it is with suffering that we cannot avoid, primary among them aging, sickness, and death, but also separation from what we love, the inability to flee what we dislike, and the disappointment of not attaining our goals, the principle that all causes are good causes is powerful liberating medicine.

But like Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, we have to take the extra step and choose to see all causes as good causes. This requires a leap of faith—to see the terminus of buddhahood at the end of our journey. But doing this does not make for an otherworldly religiosity. We don't have to wait until we cross over to attain liberation. Seeing the terminus is the same as having faith that all causes are good causes, and this is nothing other than perceiving the essence of ourselves, of those around us, and even of our environment as buddha-nature. Seeing

buddha-nature is seeing the Buddha in all things. When you think about it, this is seeing the terminus, our destination, in every step of the journey. As Zhiyi tells us, “One should know that which comes before and that which comes later are present within one another” (*Fahua xuanyi* [The profound meaning of the Lotus Sutra], in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* [The Buddhist canon, Taishō period new edition], vol. 33, 694b). Like the lotus flower, the cause (the flower) and the result (the fruit of the lotus cup and its seeds) are uniquely present at the very same time. Thus, we don't have to wait until the end of the journey to experience the world as the world of the Buddha. As Shakyamuni Buddha proclaims in chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra: “Of those who hear the Dharma, / None will fail to become a buddha” (Rissho Kosei-kai 2019, 77), when we have faith, we live in our world as the world of the Buddha, seeing the Buddha in others and the workings of liberation in the events of daily life. This is the conviction that the Buddha is always with us, and this is true liberation. □

* For an extended discussion of recontextualization in the Lotus Sutra, see Ziporyn 2019, xxv–liii; and Ziporyn 2000, especially 112–198.

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This is an image of Tamonten, who protects the northern quarter as a member of the Shitenno, four heavenly kings. The deity is called Bishamon in its own right. The image of this deity has a hōto, one-storied pagoda, in its hand. Thirteenth century.

Rissho Kosei-kai's Approach to the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons

by Kosho Niwano

The following article by Rissho Kosei-kai's president-designate Kosho Niwano is based on the speech the author made during the 2019 Sophia Symposium "Peace, Denuclearization, and the Future of Our Society: A Religious-Academic Dialogue," which was held on May 18, 2019, at Sophia University in Tokyo.

Dr. Susumu Shimazono, currently professor of the Graduate School of Applied Religious Studies at Sophia University, asked me to speak about Rissho Kosei-kai's approach to the abolition of nuclear weapons. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for being given this opportunity.

Rissho Kosei-kai first became involved in the nuclear disarmament movement in September 1963, when

the founder of our organization, Nikkyo Niwano, as a vice-chairman of the eighteen-member Peace Delegation of Religious Leaders for Banning Nuclear Weapons, visited France, West Germany, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, the Vatican, the United States, and other Western countries.

Following the conclusion of the 1951 Treaty of San Francisco between Japan and the Allied Powers led by the United

States, little by little the facts became clearer about nuclear destruction and the fate of the *hibakusha*—the atom bomb survivors. Then in March 1954 came the incident of the *Daigo Fukuryū Maru*, a Japanese fishing boat that got caught up in the US hydrogen bomb test at Bikini Atoll. This was the catalyst for the anti-nuclear movement that started with the women of Suginami Ward, Tokyo, and spread to the national level. In the world of Japanese religion, the Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan, known in Japan as *Shinshuren*, adopted a resolution against nuclear weapons and nuclear testing. The Association of Shinto Shrines, the Japan Buddhist Federation, the Japan Confederation of Christian Churches, the Sektarian Shinto Federation, and the Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan—the five member organizations forming the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations—issued a proclamation calling for the prohibition of atomic and hydrogen bomb tests. However, in the first half of the 1960s, nuclear arms testing continued at an accelerated pace. Because of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union reached a fever pitch, just one step away from nuclear war. With international criticism mounting against such a dangerous situation, in August 1963 the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union managed to sign the Partial Test Ban Treaty. This treaty, while conditional, was seen as a breakthrough in limiting nuclear development during the Cold



The Peace Delegation of Religious Leaders for Banning Nuclear Weapons before their departure from Haneda Airport, Tokyo, on September 14, 1963.



Koshi Niwano, president-designate of Rissho Kosei-kai, devotes herself to sharing the teachings of the Lotus Sutra with Rissho Kosei-kai members both in Japan and overseas. She actively engages in international interreligious dialogue and cooperation, serving as co-moderator of Religions for Peace International and as a member of the Board of Directors of the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue.



Photo: Science Source / PPS

Operation Castle was a United States series of high-yield nuclear tests at the Bikini Atoll, beginning in March 1954. The fallout affected nearby islands, including inhabitants and US soldiers stationed there, as well as a Japanese fishing boat, the Daigo Fukuryū Maru.

War. However, there were still many unresolved issues, since China, France, and other countries were not signatories to the treaty.

The Peace Delegation of Religious Leaders for Banning Nuclear Weapons conducted a tour of Europe and the United States the month following the signing of the Partial Test Ban Treaty. The delegation's Peace Proposal, calling for the complete abolition of the production, preservation, and use of nuclear weapons and an end to nuclear testing, was hand delivered to Pope Paul VI and UN secretary-general U Thant, as well as to religious leaders from many countries, at that time. More than five decades later, in 2017, the complete abolition of the production, stockpiling, and use of nuclear weapons and an end to nuclear testing was sought by members of the United Nations with the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons; at that point, Japanese religious leaders had already

been delivering the message of nuclear disarmament around the world since 1963. Unfortunately, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev and American president John F. Kennedy were not receptive to a delegation with the stated objective of abolishing nuclear weapons, and the delegation was unable to realize meetings with those two leaders.

The experience of taking action as a member of this delegation of religious leaders from Japan, a country that suffered atomic bombings, steered the determination of Founder Niwano to continue, thereafter, to "constantly make every effort to cooperate with other religions" for the sake of nuclear disarmament and peace activism. Since then, our approach at Rissho Kosei-kai to the abolition of nuclear weapons has been not to act alone but always on the firm foundation of interreligious cooperation. At Rissho Kosei-kai, this position has not changed; it is the same today.

Rissho Kosei-kai's relationship with the Society of Jesus—the parent organization of Sophia University—and the Vatican began when Founder Niwano was called as the only Buddhist observer to the Second Vatican Council in 1965. In a private audience, Pope Paul VI told Founder Niwano that for the sake of peace, "it is important for people of religion not to cling to factions or denominations but to recognize each other and pray for each other." These words fortified Founder Niwano's determination to promote interreligious cooperation, and thereafter he held repeated preparatory meetings with religious leaders

from countries around the world, including the United States and India, culminating in the First World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), which was convened in Kyoto in 1970 with the theme "Disarmament, Development, and Human Rights." (The World Conference on Religion and Peace is today known as Religions for Peace [RfP], but here I will call it by its original name, WCRP.) Regarding the theme, Founder Niwano said, "We cannot say that just because there is no war, we are in a state of peace. When the sufferings of poverty, famine, and the oppression of basic human freedoms have been eradicated from the earth, then for the first time peace will come to humanity—it is from this perspective that this World Conference decided upon its theme of Disarmament, Development, and Human Rights." So even at that time, disarmament was a central theme.

"Positive peace" was discussed in the Sophia Symposium, and I think that concept was already being explored at the time of the first WCRP. As indicated in the explanation of the concept for the symposium, religion itself is sometimes seen as an obstacle to peace. In the 1970 WCRP conference, religious leaders were focusing directly on the real problems to which their eyes had not turned before that time—the conflicts in different parts of the world, poverty, and discrimination—and were doing some soul searching regarding their own responsibility in realizing world peace. There is a passage in the Kyoto Declaration of the First World



On June 12, 1978, Founder Nikkyo Niwano addresses as an honorary chair of the WCRP the first UN Special Session on Disarmament held in New York, urging the world's leaders to work for general and complete disarmament.

Assembly that says as much: "As men and women of religion, we confess in humility and penitence that we have very often betrayed our religious ideals and our commitment to peace. It is not religion that has failed the cause of peace, but religious people. This betrayal of religion can and must be corrected."

This "humility and penitence" expressed by religious leaders regarding war was the dynamic force propelling the founders of WCRP and thereafter became the spirit supporting its programs. At the same time, the Kyoto Declaration stated that "because of these convictions that we hold in common, we believe that a special charge has been given to all men and women of religion to be concerned with all their hearts and minds

with peace and peacemaking, to be the servants of peace."

Three times during the Cold War—in 1978, 1982, and 1988—the United Nations General Assembly convened a Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD). Founder Niwano addressed all three of these special sessions. At the first of these UN assemblies on disarmament, he made his address as an honorary chair of the WCRP; at the second, as president of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF); and the third time, in recognition of our activities up to that time, as president of Rissho Kosei-kai. All three of Founder Niwano's addresses reflected the growing recognition of the value of international interreligious cooperative networks. These "interreligious

cooperative networks" are what we are striving to establish.

At the first SSOD, Founder Niwano appealed to political leaders, including Cold War-era US president Jimmy Carter and Soviet chairman Leonid Brezhnev, to change their minds regarding total disarmament, urging them: "Instead of taking risks with arms, please take major risks for peace and disarmament." At the second SSOD, Founder Niwano said, "In the face of the horrific death and destruction that nuclear war would bring, any notion of justice or injustice will be blown to pieces. There will be no winners or losers in a war in which no one is left alive, a war that will not even allow for innocent bystanders. Nuclear war would be a sacrilegious violation of the sanctity of life and nothing more." At the third SSOD, he stated: "Instead of world security being enforced by a balance of fear, it must be grounded in a new value system." In all three of these addresses, Founder Niwano stressed the importance of national security systems based on trust building, not military force and armaments, and therefore he rejected the theory of nuclear deterrence that was the major element supporting the continued existence of nuclear weapons.

Essentially, nuclear deterrence is a strategy of threat and intimidation that emerged from distrust and doubt about the Other. As we can see from the North Korean issue, nuclear deterrence fuels relationships that increase mutual distrust, and in fact, it is a policy of deterrence that heightens the risk that nuclear weapons will be used. The message "Instead of taking risks with arms, please take major risks for peace and disarmament" is a religious message appealing to people to change their way of thinking, and, at the same time, it becomes the starting point for a theory that, in reality, transcends nuclear deterrence. The religious leaders who are proposing this new starting point appeal to every country around the world, join



Members of the Peace Mission organized by Rissho Kosei-kai in June 1982 on the occasion of the SSOD-II appeal in New York for disarmament and the abolition of nuclear weapons.

hands with people in every field, and seek a reexamination of the theory of nuclear deterrence, the single largest obstacle to realizing denuclearization. I think it is important that this reexamination is grounded in atom bomb survivors' accounts of the effects of atomic exposure as well as in scientific projections. Despite the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2017, I think it is extremely important that we continue to pursue this reexamination, as at present there is an extremely high risk in every part of the world, including northeast Asia, of an unintentional or accidental use of nuclear weapons, nuclear accidents, the theft of nuclear weapons, or a terrorist attack using them.

At SSOD-II, Rissho Kosei-kai delivered to the UN General Assembly a petition appealing for the abolition of nuclear weapons, with thirty-seven million signatures that we had collected working in conjunction with the member organizations of the Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan, and we presented the UN Secretariat with donations totaling \$1 million collected for the Global Disarmament Campaign. The donated funds came from individual members of Rissho Kosei-kai who, with hearts full of empathy, prayer, and

donation, had gone without several meals every month and donated the money intended for those meals to the Donate-a-Meal Fund for Peace.

The Donate-a-Meal Movement is at present working with the UN's World Food Programme to implement the Myanmar school meals project. It is also undertaking a nurses' training project together with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), while also collaborating with UNICEF. Through these programs, the Donate-a-Meal Movement is contributing to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). All of the members of Rissho Kosei-kai took part in the petition drive and actually went without meals so that hunger could be experienced directly, and then the money was donated. We do so because we believe that the pain and suffering felt by someone here on planet Earth is not something experienced by some far-away Other. Accepting even a small part of that suffering as our own provides us with the opportunity to deepen our own faith, and at the same time—whether children and students or adults—we can fulfill our own duty toward peace education.

In Buddhism all things are interconnected, and therefore, Founder Niwano

never thought of denuclearization as an isolated problem. He said that we should think about it in terms of its relation to other issues, and at the UN he repeatedly proposed that “funds freed up by disarmament should be reallocated to providing assistance to developing nations.” The Vatican's International Symposium “Prospects for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and for Integral Disarmament” in November 2017 also stated: “All things are interrelated. All people are interrelated. Together we can abolish nuclear weapons, invest in the shared development of humanity, and build peace.” The UN's SDGs also note that “there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development,” so there is growing awareness that disarmament, peace, and development are interrelated.

Grounded in the interrelatedness of disarmament, peace, and development, in 2010 the Global Interfaith Youth Network of the WCRP launched its ARMS DOWN! Campaign for Shared Security. The goal of this campaign was to abolish nuclear weapons and reduce conventional arms in order to reduce global military spending by 10 percent, which would provide funds needed to reach the UN's Millennium Development Goals. The campaign collected twenty-one million signatures in 140 countries over the course of ten months. In Japan, the Youth Department of Rissho Kosei-kai worked together with young people of other faiths—including other Buddhist groups, Shinto, Christianity, and Islam—and collected more than ten million of those signatures.

In Japan, where many people feel very little concern for, or connection to, the Other and are disinterested in politics, it was no easy feat to collect ten million signatures on a petition calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons and disarmament. These young people stood on street corners on hot days and cold days, and on occasion endured the



A mushroom cloud over Hiroshima. The United States B-29 bomber Enola Gay dropped the atomic bomb on August 6, 1945. Photo taken by scientific observers aboard the B-29 bomber Great Artiste, which participated in both the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as an observation aircraft.

scorn of strangers. Elementary school students came home disappointed after their teachers informed them that they could not collect signatures for a petition at school. Shop owners turned them away, saying that such a petition would not help their business. However, there were also teachers who personally signed the petition and many others who gave them encouragement. One by one, these people's caring added up to ten million signatures.

The experiences of participating in the ARMS DOWN! petition drive and the Donate-a-Meal Movement deepened young people's awareness not as observers but as those feeling the effects of poverty and the nuclear threat.

In August 2019 WCRP convened its Tenth World Assembly in Germany, with the theme "Caring for Our Common Future." More than ninety member nations of the WCRP helped prepare for this assembly. In Japan we did our part by hosting a symposium at Osaka Cathedral in March. I had the honor of delivering the keynote address. After my

address, one elderly man approached me saying that he had been a junior high school student in the final years of World War II, when enemy bombers flew air raids over Japan's main islands. He himself had experienced fleeing through the flames of one such air raid. When he gazed across the burned-out landscape, he suddenly felt anger rising up within. It was not anger at the enemy nation or even at the warplanes. It was anger at adults—why do grown-ups do such things, why do grown-ups allow such things to happen?

Countries that depend on nuclear deterrence for their national security think that nuclear weapons are a necessary evil, but I think they are an absolute evil. When we hear the words "nuclear bomb," what comes to mind are the photos of the mushroom clouds over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, such as those taken minutes after the *Enola Gay* and *Bockscar*, B-29 bombers, dropped the bombs. However, what really ought to come to mind is the panorama of the lives of the hundreds of thousands of people who, under those two mushroom clouds, experienced a hell of suffering, misery, and despair. Although I know it is beyond what we can imagine, nevertheless we must try to envision what took place under the atomic mushroom clouds.

As Founder Niwano said, "Disarmament, no matter how complex and technological an issue, boils down to a matter of the human mind and a moral decision." The preamble of the UNESCO Constitution also contains the famous words, "That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed."

All conflict and violence begins in the human mind, and therefore it is the human mind that brought forth nuclear weapons. At present, the WCRP Japan as well as the World Council of the WCRP, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN),

and other groups are working together, promoting programs of denuclearization, and continuing to get nations to ratify treaties abolishing nuclear weapons. However, I hope that in the future, while we continue to make steadfast efforts to address these issues, we religious leaders will also face the problem of the human mind—that is, the seeds of violence and war in our own minds—and increase our efforts to foster inner peace.

The evidence that this matters so much is that since the 1980s, nuclear warheads have been reduced because two political leaders, Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union and Ronald Reagan of the United States, made up their minds to do so. In a similar way, the final decision to use nuclear weapons—to "push the button"—rests with a single human mind.

The progress of peace activities by religious leaders has been slow and might, at times, seem ineffectual. However, such problems that have no immediate solutions are, I believe, the ones that religious leaders should be taking on because we believe in shared values that transcend national and individual interests.

Finally, I would like to add something to a comment from Mr. Akira Kawasaki, a member of the International Steering Group of ICAN and an official representative of the NGO Peace Boat. After the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was adopted, WCRP secretary-general William Vendley and ICAN executive director Beatrice Fihn wrote a jointly signed letter addressed to the world's religious leaders. A copy of that letter was sent to religious leaders around the world, including organizations belonging to the WCRP.

It is crucial that every country ratify this resolution—the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Although our work may seem to go slowly, I truly believe that we will continue to make progress. □

No Regrets

by Nikkyo Niwano



In March 1999 an autobiography by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (1906–99), the founder of Rishso Kosei-kai, was published in Japanese under the title Kono michi: Ichibutsujo no sekai o mezashite (The path that we have walked: Aspiring to the world of the One Buddha Vehicle). The book is a lively account of the life of Founder Niwano as a leader of a global Buddhist movement and a pioneer of interreligious cooperation who dedicated himself to liberating all people from suffering with firm faith in the Lotus Sutra. Dharma World will continue to publish excerpts from the book in installments.

The most important practice for Rishso Kosei-kai members is to lead others to liberation through the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Through their practice, they make those teachings part of themselves, walking together along the Way to buddhahood. This practice involves connecting people with the Dharma or mentoring members or other kinds of voluntary activity.

The Lotus Sutra teaches us that it is in this world of the six realms of existence that we should practice the bodhisattva way. We must not attempt to escape from this world of the six realms because we hate it. We are able to undertake bodhisattva practice, which is practice to benefit others, because of the buddha-nature that lies deep within us, and we can burnish our buddha-nature through bodhisattva practice. Because we do this, we are all the more able to apply ourselves to our practice. Thus there is an inseparable relationship between buddha-nature and bodhisattva practice. It is not too much to say that this is the one point held in common by all

the large number of Mahayana sutras that have come down to us.

A world of wonder opens before us once we abandon the self and muster every bit of our strength for the sake of others. We will gain a new and joyful realm like nothing we have experienced before. It is by tasting this joy that we are able to take true refuge in Buddhism. Without being willing to take refuge, we can never achieve true happiness, even if we have a belief.

I have continued throughout my life to believe that as each one of us is thus changed, recognizing a true way of liberation, so our society, our country, and the whole world will be transformed.

All the same, even though we guide people to the Buddha Way by sharing with them the truth of the Lotus Sutra and the great law of the universe, that does not mean they will be able to understand it immediately. What people are interested in first and foremost is themselves, and so they ask how to resolve the problems that are perplexing them. By teaching them specifically how to do

Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rishso 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.

so, we enable them to discover what is the true teaching of the truth. This is the application of skillful means.

"Skillful means equals the truth," so we enable people to understand the truth through skillful means. When compassion arises in us and we ask ourselves how we can liberate a person, we must use all our strength to help that person overcome the suffering confronting him or her. It is here that the power of skillful means comes into play. There is no division between skillful means and the truth in practice.

The Mahavairocana Sutra says: "Make the aspiration for realizing enlightenment the cause; make great compassion your foundation; and make skillful means the ultimate end." In other words, everything is skillful means. Looking back over Rishso Kosei-kai's history, there was never a time when we said we no longer needed skillful means, even during the periods of the "Age of the Manifestation of the Truth (1958–77)" and the "Age of the Unlimited Manifestation of Compassion (1978–97)." We ourselves change as a result of our practice and thereby bring others to change, and by doing so we can change the whole of society. Rishso

Kosei-kai believes that we can bring true liberation to as many people as possible through our efforts.

I said to my son Nichiko at the time of his Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma, "To have a large membership or to take pride in imposing buildings does not mean an organization is flourishing. What is truly important is to plant faith in the heart of each and every member. What is most important is that you value the individual person in whatever kind of activity you promote and bring him or her true liberation. Whether or not you have many members, whether your various activities prosper or not, it comes down to this in the end. "To do our best in bringing one person to liberation" is Rissho Kosei-kai's founding spirit."

Someone, but I forget who, told me that Dr. Ichiro Kobayashi (1876–1944), a famous scholar of the Lotus Sutra, said that a religion will fall into ruin either through corruption or through aridity. Corruption is when a religious organization thinks only about its own prosperity, using the suffering and desires of its followers for its own ends. Aridity is when leaders make no attempt to understand the suffering and desires of society at large and fall into self-complacency. We should keep this in mind.

It was my intention that after passing over the presidency to Nichiko I would leave everything in his hands. This gave me no worry. I thought he understood that.

Just before going on his first tour to meet members as the second president, Nichiko declared: "Members are all like relatives and the same family. So I wish to devote myself with diligence, keeping in mind 'many in body but one in spirit.'" In February 1992 he began the tour, which he called *shinseki mawari* (visiting relatives), starting from the Great Sacred Hall at the organization's Tokyo headquarters complex. The tour covered 130 sites, including Dharma centers in Japan and overseas. He traveled



President Nichiko Niwano attended the gathering of members held on July 18, 1992, as part of the tour called *shinseki mawari* at the Tsuchiura Civic Hall, Tsuchiura City, Ibaraki Prefecture.

a total distance of sixty thousand kilometers over eighty days.

My Wife, Naoko

There was probably no one more joyful than my wife, Naoko, when Nichiko decided to inherit the Lamp of the Dharma of Rissho Kosei-kai and become the second president.

I cannot be said to have been a good father to my children. I was probably not a good husband to my wife, either. However, like me, other officials of Rissho Kosei-kai at the time of its foundation made a sacrifice of their families to a greater or lesser extent and closed their eyes to the family circle as they worked tirelessly for the organization.

I have referred to this a number of times already, but as far as my wife was concerned, I was the master of the household and her husband, and was responsible for the family's well-being. On the other hand, as president of Rissho Kosei-kai I had the mission of teaching the Lotus Sutra to all people everywhere. The Buddha abandoned his country and his wife and child to give his life to the Way. I cannot compare myself to the Buddha, but I could not have fulfilled even part of my mission if I had not abandoned my job, my home, and the affection of my family.

It seemed that in my children's minds the thought that they were made to live apart from their father for thirteen years

was deeply rooted. When my second son, Kinjiro, was in high school, he had a fight with Nichiko. When I reprimanded him, he suddenly grappled with me. I have a vague memory of that. According to Kinjiro, he sprang at me with all his strength but was thrown and held down. He still remembered what I said to him afterward.

"I don't want you to be a special person, or ask you to do any special religious training. It's enough if you lead your life as an ordinary person. However, since we all make a living doing the Buddha's work, you must realize what this means. You must be careful about your behavior. You should properly make offering at the morning and evening services at least. If you don't know how to do it, copy me. If you are not able to understand and accept what I'm saying to you and you can't do as I ask, I will cut my ties with you."

At that time Kinjiro cried from vexation, but later he told me that he was happy to feel his father's body warmth when he tackled me.

At some point my wife told the children, "What your father told me has all happened as he said. You must listen carefully to what he tells you." Kinjiro, too, came to work at the Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters. He was trained by senior members and took on a variety of tasks.

My third son, Hiroshi, was only a baby when I sent the family to the

country, and so the thirteen years' separation probably didn't make much impression on him. After he left university, he spent several years training at a Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma center in Fukushima Prefecture. Since he did not want any special treatment from members because he was the founder's son, he took the name Nakajima from the head of the Dharma center. Every morning he began his training by chopping wood and cleaning the toilets. Hiroshi, too, later came to work at the headquarters as head of the Youth Division, among other roles.

Recently the children spoke these words: "Talking of Father, what he says and what he acts are the same thing, so we cannot find any weakness." "If he decides to have one cup of sake before going to bed, he will have only one cup." "Even if he drinks, in the morning he gets up even more punctually than the clock." "It doesn't matter if it's hot or cold." "He may have got back from abroad late last night, yet even if you think he'll sleep a little later than usual in the morning, he gets up as usual and recites the sutra." "It's impossible to emulate him."

My wife used to get out of bed every morning at 4:00 a.m. and, before anyone else got up, offer water at the family altar and recite the sutra alone. At the time everyone recited it before the family altar in the morning service, she joined again.

She came to speak to me such words as: "Should I just keep thinking only of other persons?" She would also say, "It's easy to become a devil but not at all easy to become a buddha." I wondered if she may have had an experience of coming close to the mind of a buddha.

She left this world on April 13, 1994. She had been receiving treatment in a hospital since early February for complications from a cold. Her condition worsened suddenly on April 12. Miraculously, she regained consciousness, and she thanked me and

Founder Niwano leads the evening chanting of the sutra together with his wife, Naoko, and their family members.

the other family members who had hastened to her side. She nodded, a smile on her face, and took my hand. The following day she drew her last breath in her sleep, without suffering any pain, while being watched by family members around her. She was eighty-five. We had been together as a married couple for sixty-four years.

The funeral was held with the second president as the chief mourner. It was attended by forty-eight thousand people from many different areas of life—religion, government, and business, among others—who had come to mourn her passing.

Nichiko spoke with deep feeling. "My mother had the habit of saying, 'The Threefold Lotus Sutra is my treasure. I am so grateful to that.' However difficult things were, she was never apart from the Threefold Lotus Sutra, and adverse circumstances acted as a spring to deepen her faith. She worked faithfully and taught us about the splendor of living according to the Dharma by making herself an example. 'Being meek and honest is the best way for a person to live,' she would always say. I think my mother was a person who lived according to those words." Nichiko went on to say:

She was lively by nature and didn't like mawkishness. She was always a warm and bright presence in our family. She preferred a simple lifestyle,

but whenever the opportunity arose she invited guests, and greatly enjoyed making them welcome.

She was the Founder's wife for sixty-four years. She continued to support him constantly from behind the scenes and worked hard to raise us children. She was a mother who taught us from her own example the nobility of living the teachings with all our might. We her children will continue as one to value what she has left behind.

Shortly before her death, my wife spent her days, from morning till night, repeatedly speaking words of thanks. She carried out admirably the unavoidable responsibilities of accepting birth, aging, illness, and death and departed this world for another, farewelled by many people at the funeral.

I have heard that in death the face of a mother who has raised good children is truly peaceful. It was so with my wife. I think Cofounder Myoko Sensei and a whole host of people came out to meet her when she entered the other world. She must have been indeed satisfied to see her children follow the path of their father. I would like to take the opportunity here to thank people on behalf of my wife for their kindness, both public and private, to her during her life.

To be continued

illuminating One Another in Dialogue: Interreligious Perspectives through the Prism of the Lotus Sutra

by Paride Stortini

This is a report on the International Lotus Sutra Seminar held June 13–16, 2019, at the headquarters of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo.

Introduction

Every year the International Lotus Sutra Seminar provides a unique venue for an international cohort of scholars in different disciplines and areas to share their current research on the Lotus Sutra and to promote the spread of knowledge about it. The format of the seminar, with each participant also commenting on one of the other presentations and with plenty of time for questions and discussion, allows for a lively and reciprocally enriching conversation, which adds a genuinely human encounter to the academic experience. In previous seminars, the fact that the presenters come from a multiplicity of backgrounds generated rich discussion on the place of the Lotus Sutra in intercultural and interfaith dialogue. But this year, this was the primary focal point, as the presentations centered on “illuminating one another in dialogue: interreligious perspectives through the prism of the Lotus Sutra.” The presenters proposed a variety of ways in which the Lotus Sutra can inform interreligious dialogue, ranging from theological and philosophical arguments to literary analysis, historical reception, and contemporary practice. The limits and problems of these approaches were discussed in the question-and-answer time. While the study

of Buddhism from an interfaith perspective has historically been dominated by Buddhist-Christian dialogue, this seminar provided rich diversity, giving significant space to presentations on the Lotus Sutra and Islam, the Lotus and Judaism, and the sutra’s reception in modern European culture. These papers enriched the conversation, opening up new venues for research in this field. For example, the presentations on Islam suggested how the presence of a Muslim minority in Japan or of Buddhism in Muslim-majority countries can provide new insights for the intercultural reflection on the Lotus Sutra, especially by rethinking ideas of community and family. The reading of the Lotus Sutra in a Jewish context instead opened a discussion on the emotional response to images contained in the text and on the kind of audiences, universal or exclusive, the sutra and Jewish scriptures conceive for themselves. In addition to the presentations, the seminar included visits to two temples and to Rissho Kosei-kai’s Sugunami Dharma Center. At the Tendai temple Fudōson in Meguro, and at the nearby Gohyaku Rakanji, seminar participants experienced the variety of contemporary Buddhist practices in Japan and were particularly fascinated by the role

that images and statues play in them. At the Sugunami Dharma Center they took part in a Rissho Kosei-kai gathering and were actively involved in the Dharma circles, where they could learn firsthand how members of Rissho Kosei-kai live social and everyday aspects of Lotus Sutra practice.

The seminar opened with a moment of silence and remembrance dedicated to Gene Reeves, the Buddhist scholar who was coordinator of the seminar for many years and who passed away a few weeks before this year’s meeting. What follows is a summary of the presentations and of the discussions afterward.

“Ways of Being Religious in the Lotus Sutra: Themes for Interreligious Reflection and Dialogue”

Ruben Habito, Southern Methodist University, University Park, Texas

Dr. Habito’s presentation analyzed the Lotus Sutra, its doctrines, and its practices through the fourfold framework elaborated by the scholar of comparative religion Frederick Streng and built on this analysis to suggest how each of the four points can be fruitfully used for a comparison with Christianity and for a constructive project of interfaith dialogue. The view of the human condition that emerges from the stories contained in the sutra, characterized by suffering but also by the idea of salvation through being children of the Buddha, echoes, for Dr. Habito, existentialist conceptions of Genesis and



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The participants examine the theme, "Illuminating One Another in Dialogue: Interreligious Perspectives through the Prism of the Lotus Sutra," during the four-day seminar in a facility of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo.

more broadly of Christianity. The non-duality of ultimate reality expressed by the idea of the immeasurable life span of the Buddha, further elaborated by Tiantai master Zhiyi, can be compared to the way Christian mystical traditions talk about coincidence of opposites. Devotional practices centered on the Lotus Sutra, such as Nichiren's chanting of its title, which help in translating the complex doctrines and cosmologies of the sutra into everyday practices of salvation, were likewise compared with devotional aspects of Christian traditions, such as devotion to the Virgin Mary and the contemplative tradition of Hesychasm, whose recitative meditation recalls for Dr. Habito the *namu myōhō rengo kyō*. Finally, Dr. Habito analyzed the way in which these ideas and practices based on the Lotus Sutra have historically been translated into action in this world, quoting as examples the way devotion to the sutra influenced thinkers as different as Chigaku

Tanaka and Kenji Miyazawa. Dr. Habito stressed that the religious view contained in the Lotus Sutra has a deep transformative impact at both the individual and social levels, as the devotee is encouraged to turn this world into the Dharma world. This specific fourth element of the Streng-based analysis of the Lotus Sutra becomes in Dr. Habito's presentation a key for interfaith dialogue, as members of other religions can be inspired by the social engagement of Lotus Sutra devotees and reflect on how they translated their own religious views into everyday practice and commitment to transform the world. Dr. Habito's presentation spurred a lively debate, which centered especially on the existential suffering generated by the three poisons, on the limits of personal agency, and on the active salvific role of the Lotus Sutra. The other participants discussed these ideas in comparison with Augustine's concept of sin, with the idea of *akunin*—evil

person—in Jōdo Shinshū Buddhism, and with notions of good or bad inclinations in Judaism. Dr. Habito's closing remarks pointed out how the differences that emerged from the discussion can be suggestive of further constructive reflection.

"A Muslim's Reflections on the Saddharma Puṅḍarīka Sūtra, the Lotus Sutra"

Imtiyaz Yusuf, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC-IIUM), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Dr. Imtiyaz Yusuf's paper expanded the discussion on Buddhist-Muslim dialogue, which all participants recognized as of primary importance not only because of widespread Islamophobic prejudice but also because of the cohabitation of large Buddhist and Muslim populations in Southeast Asia, where Dr. Yusuf is based. In his presentation, Dr. Yusuf placed his own comparative reading of the Lotus Sutra and the Qur'an against the background of the intellectual encounter between Islam and Buddhism. After introducing his experience with and interest in Buddhism, Dr. Yusuf traced the history of Buddhist-Muslim encounter, focusing particularly on a number of Muslim intellectuals and poets who studied and appreciated Buddhism. This survey also problematized the more limited scope of knowledge of Buddhism present today among Muslim scholars, which is based on the legacy of colonial-period orientalist perspectives and does not facilitate

a constructive engagement. Moving then toward the comparative part of his presentation, Dr. Yusuf recognized how the encounter between Islam and Buddhism is made difficult on the conceptual level by the nontheistic nature of Buddhism. However, he proposed an analogical and parallel approach to resolve this issue, aiming not for a hybrid of the two religions but for a hermeneutical expansion of horizons. Dr. Yusuf offered a practical example of this approach in his comparison of passages and concepts in the Lotus Sutra and the Qur'an. The centrality of these two texts themselves, and of the figures of the Buddha and Muhammad in the life of their devotees, suggests a potential point of encounter. Further elements discussed were an analogy between the concept of *upāya* in the sutra and the concept of *sunnah* (the model of the Prophet for the Muslim), as well as a parallel between the concept of prophecy in Islam and the role of the Buddha as carrier of a message of salvation. Dr. Yusuf's conclusion stressed again the pressing need for Buddhist-Muslim interfaith dialogue in the context of Southeast Asia, for example, where such a relation has recently been at the center of violence and persecution. The analogical method proposed by Dr. Yusuf was at the center of the participants' subsequent discussion. While the risk of undervaluing important differences was pointed out, some other presenters proposed a conception of analogy as including differences rather than erasing them, while others saw in analogy just a point of departure to develop further discussion, as Dr. Yusuf's presentation itself has shown. In addition to offering a non-Christian point of reference for the dialogue with Buddhism, Dr. Yusuf's presentation started an essential debate on methodological problems in approaching interfaith dialogue. For example, the issue of the value and use of analogy resurfaced multiple times in the seminar.

"The Lotus Sutra and the Qur'an: Similarities and Differences"

Makoto Mizutani, Arabic Islamic Institute, Tokyo

The discussion on the Buddhist-Muslim encounter was expanded, after Dr. Yusuf's presentation, by Dr. Makoto Mizutani, who enriched the discussion with both methodological reflections on and concrete application of the comparative method with respect to the Qur'an and the Lotus Sutra. In introducing his contribution, Dr. Mizutani built on the previous debate concerning analogy and its problems in comparing religious ideas. He associated this problem with the question of semantics and differences in meaning when we use terms from different cultural and religious backgrounds, a problem that is heightened in the Buddhist-Muslim dialogue, as it often uses a vocabulary built on Christian terms. Translation itself becomes a vehicle of reflection and of religious comparison. Dr. Mizutani's paper started with a comparison of the inductive and deductive ways of reaching the absolute in the Qur'an and the Lotus Sutra, pointing out, among other things, the centrality of reciting Allah's names in Islam and the practice of chanting the title of the Lotus Sutra in Buddhism. Dr. Mizutani also expanded the discussion on Buddhism from the context of the Lotus tradition, including references to Jōdo Shinshū and Zen Buddhism that also present parallels with concepts in the Qur'an, such as the stages of intuition leading to the absolute. After surveying a number of comparable ideas in the two sacred texts, such as the oneness of truth, human natural dispositions, and justice, Dr. Mizutani also pointed out a series of important differences, centering on the impossibility for a Muslim to conceive merging with the absolute; the omnipresence of legal terms in the Qur'an, which reflects the lack of separation between sacred and

secular in the Muslim context; and the lack of suicide in Muslim societies that Dr. Mizutani connects with the social impact of Qur'anic ideas. It is particularly this last topic, the impact of religious views on suicide in the Japanese and other societies, that dominated the discussion after Dr. Mizutani's presentation. On the one hand, the presenters provided more cultural and social background to explain the high rate of suicides in Japan, and on the other they compared this issue with religious ideas from other contexts, such as the Christian condemnation of suicide. The discussion turned the presence of a Muslim minority in Japan—despite being limited in quantitative terms—into a resource for the Japanese to reflect on the strong sense of community and cohesion that a religion like Islam can provide, giving tools to respond to the problem of social disintegration and high suicide rates. This religious and cultural contact was interpreted as a further constructive way to avoid the "Galapagos effect" of isolation by exposing Japanese society to new ideas.

"Transformation or Rediscovery? Soteriological and Cosmological Themes in the Lotus Sutra and the Philokalic Tradition"

Thomas Cattoi, Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University, California

Dr. Thomas Cattoi's presentation offered an example of comparison between Buddhist and Christian ideas that built on similarities but kept the differences visible. The paper also pointed out the importance of expanding the comparison of doctrinal concepts to see how they affect the spiritual life of the devotee. Its main purpose was to show how forms of spirituality based on ontological and anthropological views in the Lotus Sutra find closer echoes in the early Christian Evagrius tradition, and



International Lotus Sutra Seminar participants pose at the main entrance of the Nikkyō Niwano Memorial Museum at Rissho Kosei-kai Tokyo headquarters' complex.

before that in the Hellenistic thinker Origen, rather than in what became the orthodox tradition, established in the fifth century by the Council of Chalcedon. More specifically, the Christ of the Evagrian tradition becomes a mirror for the devotee to return to the original communion of intellects with God in a way that, according to Dr. Cattoi, resonates with the conception of the Buddha contained in the Lotus Sutra as the ultimate reality to which all beings are invited to recognize themselves as identical. By contrast, Dr. Cattoi noted, Chalcedonian doctrine retained the distinction between the human and the divine in the final achievement of salvation. While pointing to potential parallels, the presentation also recognized differences, such as between Origen's view of time and the one contained in the Lotus Sutra. Dr. Cattoi also offered a historical reflection on how the presence of a central authority to establish orthodoxy in early Christianity has not allowed for the same degree of inclusivity as is found in Mahāyāna Buddhism, ultimately explaining the accusations of heresy against the Evagrian tradition. This observation sparked a lively discussion among the presenters, who discussed approaches to normativity and orthodoxy in Buddhism and Christianity. While pointing out how the lack of a strong central institution in Buddhism

has led to more flexibility toward and inclusion of heterodox positions, the history of internal schisms and controversies on heresy within Buddhist traditions, including the Lotus Sutra–based Tendai and Nichiren sects, was also recognized. On this point, Dr. Munehiro Niwano interpreted Nikkyō Niwano's view of the One Vehicle in the Lotus Sutra as turning Nichiren's exclusivism into a more inclusive approach toward different traditions. As a concluding remark regarding a potential constructive use of Evagrian spirituality for interfaith dialogue, Dr. Cattoi mentioned the rising interest in it in scholarship but also noted how this interest has not necessarily informed a positive engagement with it in the Orthodox Church, or its application in interreligious dialogue.

“The Representative Truth and the Decisive Validity of the Lotus Sutra in an Interreligious Perspective”

Kristin Johnston Largen, United Lutheran Seminary, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

Shall we include at the table of interfaith dialogue those who exclude the validity of other religions? Are the religious people involved in dialogue secretly just trying to include the diversity of the other into their own tradition? These are some of the questions—essential

to any effort to arrive at interreligious understanding—that Dr. Kristin Largen's presentation raised for the seminar. In her presentation, Dr. Largen built on an analysis of the Lotus Sutra and interfaith dialogue by theologian Schubert Ogden in order to propose that a representative interpretation of the claims of validity in each religious tradition can allow for a space of dialogue that avoids exclusivism, inclusivism, and indifferent pluralism. Rather than looking at the Lotus Sutra's attitude toward different paths to truth as an example of inclusivism, in which different views are subsumed within an ultimate and superior truth, Dr. Largen built on Ogden's reading of the Lotus Sutra's message as representative of truth in order to inform a constructive dialogue among religions, avoiding both relativism and the denial of the other. According to this interpretation, the Lotus Sutra points to an ultimate truth that it only represents and does not define once and for all, allowing other religious traditions to conceive themselves in the same way as formally valid but not encompassing the ultimate truth. Dr. Largen then provided a close reading of the text to identify elements in support of her interpretation. She finds them in the expansive setting of the first chapter, where the teaching is defined as without time and space. The concept of *upaya* also allows for a representative interpretation of the message of the Lotus, which becomes itself a form of skillful means pointing to the ultimate truth without exhausting it in itself. Finally, stories such as the three carts and the burning house, the father and his estranged son, the Buddha as rainfall for everyone, and the multiplicity of the characters themselves lent support to her interpretation. After suggesting how the Gospel of John can provide a venue to reinterpret Christ's message as representative of truth in a similar way as the Lotus Sutra's, Dr. Largen closed with a question concerning how best to reinterpret

Nichiren's ostensibly exclusivist reading of the Lotus to foster interfaith dialogue. While the questions raised by this paper did not find a simple solution in the following discussion, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was proposed as a model for recognizing one's own faults as well as facing the inevitable difficulties implied in encountering the other.

"Ways to Interreligious Dialogue: The Teaching of the Lotus Sutra and the Spirituality of the Focolare Movement"

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

Dr. Munehiro Niwano's presentation provided the seminar with a practical example of interfaith dialogue between the Catholic Focolare movement and Rissho Kosei-kai based on parallel spiritualities of love and joy. Dr. Niwano also offered his own experience as a student of theology at Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and at the training facilities of the Focolare movement as moments of inspirational and challenging religious encounter. In his article, Dr. Niwano started with an analysis of the paternal figure of the Buddha in the Lotus Sutra, where the Buddha's love for all human beings and their longing for his presence become essential conditions for enlightenment. This concept finds translation in the spiritual practice of Rissho Kosei-kai members, who are invited to emulate Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's attitude of deep respect toward all other beings. The presentation then built on Nikkyō and Nichikō Niwano's views of joy arising from faith in the Buddha and of the reverential nature of all human beings signified by Never Disparaging as the basis for the practice of interreligious dialogue in Rissho Kosei-kai. This has been particularly developed together with the Catholic Focolare movement, founded by Chiara Lubich during World War

II. Dr. Niwano introduced the spirituality of this movement, showing the parallels with Rissho Kosei-kai. The Focolare conception of faith in God as love that can be found in all beings supports a spirituality of joy and unity, which then gets put into practice by, for example, sharing with and helping the disadvantaged. Following the impact of the Second Vatican Council's call for dialogue, the Focolare movement has increasingly seen interreligious encounters as essential to the search for spiritual unity. And this is the basis for the encounter with Rissho Kosei-kai, which has been fostered primarily through youth exchanges. Dr. Niwano also suggested a parallel between the centrality of the model of Jesus Forsaken in Focolare spirituality and Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. Contributing to this observation with a translation in practice, Dr. Scarangelo pointed out how the dialogue with the Focolare movement might have helped Rissho Kosei-kai to define in more practical terms

embracing it. However, this reflection on the message of the Lotus Sutra as one of embracing suffering stirred a debate among the participants on the limits that such an accepting attitude can have, for example in how it could make sense of extreme historical cases of imposed suffering such as the genocide of the Jewish people under the Nazi regime.

"Contexts of Reception: The Lotus Sutra in Nineteenth-Century Europe, and What They Overlooked"

J. Jeffrey Franklin, the University of Colorado Denver

Dr. Jeffrey Franklin enriched the conversation of the seminar with questions suggested by a historical analysis of the reception of the Lotus Sutra in the West. By shedding light on how nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars projected ideas and expectations on their conception of



Each scholar summarizes his or her presentation before the others discuss it.

the spirituality of suffering. The subsequent discussion saw the participants expanding the reflection on inclusion and engaging particularly the experiential and emotional aspects of religious encounter. They suggested how the Lotus Sutra has turned the conception of suffering in Buddhism from one based on its solution through nirvana to one of

Buddhism, this paper showed that some of those biases are still present among scholars and, further, that these biases raise essential questions regarding religious encounter, since they affect whether we consider a text or a tradition to be authentic or somehow less than authentic as a result of cross-cultural transmission and translation.

His presentation divided the history of the reception of the Lotus Sutra in Western scholarship into two phases. The first was dominated by the search for the historical Buddha and was aimed at reconstructing the moral and philosophical content of the earliest texts, disregarding the later traditions. The second phase saw an increasing appreciation of Mahāyāna when Western scholars realized that it offered a fertile context for comparison and dialogue with Christianity; some scholars went so far as to advance hypotheses of mutual derivation between the two religions. Dr. Franklin suggested that this turn might actually have been encouraged by a closer engagement with the Lotus Sutra. After the historical analysis, Dr. Franklin first pointed out a number of instances of misunderstanding in the early reception of the Lotus Sutra in the West; then he outlined his constructive proposal for interfaith encounter. He suggested that the Lotus Sutra contains a view of eternity that need not be considered contradictory to the historical record of the life of the Buddha. In Dr. Franklin's reading, the narratives of the Lotus Sutra can be seen as collapsing historicity such that moments of crisis in the history of Buddhism—for example, the death of the historical Buddha, internal schisms in the sangha, and the threat of persecution from outside—are figuratively healed within the text. In addition, Dr. Franklin argued that the Lotus Sutra be seen as authentic by showing how the text's long history, from its earliest moments to its global spread, can be considered an application of the concept of skillful means, therefore demonstrating the coherence and consistency of the text. In the following discussion, the problem of authenticity of a text in the light of historical-critical analysis, and of a religious tradition in the encounter with different religions and cultures, encouraged a lively debate among the participants.

“Clouds Speaking and Words Chanting: Comparing Patterns of Vision and Piety in the Lotus Sutra and in the Hebrew Bible”

Mira Niculescu, École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris

Dr. Mira Niculescu's presentation expanded the conversation on interfaith dialogue and the Lotus Sutra, leading it to a venue that is recently gaining more scholarly attention: Jewish-Buddhist relations. She proposed a comparative reading of the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible) and the Lotus Sutra based on dialogical hermeneutics as developed by Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas—that is, by attending to the encounter between the reader and the sacred text rather than focusing on doctrinal concepts. Dr. Niculescu centered her analysis of this encounter on revelation and piety: the first, as in Mircea Eliade's comparative scholarship, was intended as a manifestation of the sacred described through stories and imagery in the scriptures; the second was the normative attitude of the worshipper toward the text, such as its recitation and transmission. Concerning the manifestations of the ultimate reality in these texts, Dr. Niculescu pointed to parallel images, such as the use of the colors blue and gold when the Buddha and God appear, which also find expression in ritual garments. Anticipating the metaphor of illumination in the following presentation by Dr. Lefebure, she also connected the rays of light emanating from the Buddha and from Moses at the moment in which they are delivering messages. The comparative reading also included a functional analysis of the earthquakes and other natural phenomena associated with revelation, which Dr. Niculescu interpreted as a call for the reader to wake up. The pedagogical use of metaphors and images in the text also provided a bridge in the presentation to

talking about how the devotees use the text in their daily lives and transmit its message. This is explained using temporal and spatial metaphors: the vertical transmission of revelation and its horizontal spread. In the vertical dimension, Dr. Niculescu includes both the reception of revelation from above and the normative aspect that compels the devotee to transmit the legacy of the message to the following generations. The horizontal dimension, by contrast, includes patterns of approaching the text in everyday life, such as repetition of the name and prayers. Despite proposing a parallel reading, Dr. Niculescu concluded by drawing attention to the contrast between the exclusive, community-focused concept of audience in the Hebrew Bible and the universalist and open reception implied in the Lotus Sutra. This final point spurred discussion among the presenters on the problem of inclusive and exclusive attitudes implicit in sacred texts and how interfaith dialogue can engage with them. In addition, Dr. Niculescu's attentive and insightful reading of the affective elements of the texts prompted discussion of the emotional aspect of longing in the devotee's encounter with a sacred text.

“The Lotus Sutra and Christian Wisdom: Mutual Illumination in Interreligious Dialogue”

Leo D. Lefebure, Georgetown University, Washington D.C.

Dr. Leo Lefebure's use of an interreligious hermeneutic to show the similarities between the Lotus Sutra and the biblical wisdom tradition provided the presenters with a potential methodological map for interfaith dialogue, which represented an ideal introduction to the concluding reflections of the seminar. In his paper, Dr. Lefebure emphasized that the centrality of a search for wisdom, rather than specific doctrinal points that inevitably reveal deep differences, can



On June 14, after the day's session, the participants and staff members of Rissho Kosei-kai visit Ten'on-zan Gohyaku Rakanji in Meguro Ward, Tokyo. They pose for a commemorative photo together with the head priest Rev. Takuro Sayama. The temple, whose name means "five hundred arhats," was originally founded in 1695 as one of the Obaku Shū temples in Japan, a Zen school of Japanese Buddhism.

help build a bridge between Buddhism and Christianity. While moving between references to the biblical wisdom tradition and to stories contained in the Lotus Sutra, Dr. Lefebure did not ignore the long history of exclusivist hermeneutics these traditions have had. In light of this, he argued, the first of the three steps in the path to wisdom acquires a particular preparatory function toward the actual encounter: the recognition of one's own ignorance. In addition to finding this step in the Christian tradition, which includes the Socratic admission of ignorance, as well as in the many warnings against arrogance contained in the Lotus Sutra, Dr. Lefebure built on the Jesuit theologian Bernard Lonergan's concept of "systemic blindness," showing how an unconscious refusal of insights can block the process of intellectual and spiritual development. Accepting with honesty these fallacies opens the way to the second moment in the path to wisdom: the illumination. This is described by Dr. Lefebure as an unexpected and sudden gift that deeply transforms the person who receives it. Such a transformative gift is expressed with metaphors of light in both traditions of wisdom, hence the name of this step. Once the insight of illumination is accepted, the third step leads toward union, which is the final moment for interfaith dialogue.

However, Dr. Lefebure warned against the history of ambiguous interpretations that the concept of union in wisdom can imply. He particularly referred to how such a view was co-opted by the Christian emperors of late antiquity for their imperialist projects and also by the twentieth-century Japanese thinker Chigaku Tanaka for "Lotus nationalism." Nikkyō Niwano's rejection of this view of the Lotus Sutra in favor of one of dialogue further testifies to the importance of hermeneutics of the text. In concluding his presentation, Dr. Lefebure offered a concrete example of how the wisdom tradition might be applied in today's world: if we awaken to our folly by acknowledging the worsening environmental crisis, then we might come to union by caring for our planet together. During the following discussion, all the presenters envisioned ways to apply Dr. Lefebure's model to the practice of interfaith dialogue and suggested further examples of the wisdom model, specifically Bodhisattva Never Disparaging and the teacher of wisdom met by Moses in the Qur'an.

Concluding Remarks

In the final discussion session of the seminar, moderated by the coordinator, Dr. Dominick Scarangelo, the participants

shared their thoughts and suggestions about future topics. The ideas expressed echoed some of the points around which there had been previous debate. For example, reading the Lotus Sutra in a comparative frame with other religious texts encouraged people involved in the forefront of interfaith dialogue to reflect on the central issues of inclusion and exclusion that a sacred text or its historical interpretations generate. Two key terms that have inspired many of the participants to greater investigation for their application in interreligious encounter were "revelation" and "wisdom": the first seemed appropriate in the hermeneutics of the messages of texts such as the Lotus Sutra, the Qur'an, or the Bible, while the second offered a paradigm for spiritual encounter without denying important differences. All participants were pleased with the active participation of scholars of Islam and Judaism, and it was suggested that Buddhism, as it emerged in the seminar, could effectively become a point of reference in the dialogue between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Finally, the practical dimension of interpersonal contact, as exemplified particularly by Dr. Munehiro Niwano's presentation of the youth exchange between Rissho Kosei-kai and the Focolare movement, was highlighted as vital to interreligious encounter. In light of this, the coming together at the seminar was interpreted as an embodiment of dialogue, which encouraged the participants to decenter themselves in order to meet the other, which itself is a basis for a reciprocally enriching encounter. This interpretation also took the Rissho Kosei-kai staff who worked for the seminar as an example of decentring through service and active participation in the dialogic encounter.

The presentations at this seminar will appear soon as articles in the *Buddhist-Christian Studies* journal, published by the University of Hawai'i Press. □

Making Offerings to “Buddhas”

by Nichiko Niwano



In chapter 6 of the Lotus Sutra, “Giving Assurance of Buddhahood,” Shakyamuni tells his disciples that they will also become buddhas, and he repeatedly gives them each the assurance of buddhahood. For each of his disciples, he explains in particular detail the importance of making offerings to and revering buddhas.

For us, hearing that these disciples will make offerings to three hundred thousand million or eight thousand million buddhas—numbers so large we can hardly calculate them—may make us think this is a tale from another world. The text says this will happen “in future lifetimes,” which must mean after one lives and dies repeatedly, and although we can understand this to be a magnificent figurative expression particular to India, it is impossible to think that we ourselves could do such a thing.

We often call people who have attained buddhahood, like Shakyamuni did, “buddha” or “honorable buddha” (and in Japan, people who are deceased are called *hotoke*, meaning “buddha”). This means that our model of “buddha” is Shakyamuni, which is one reason why we have difficulty understanding such an expression as “eight thousand million buddhas,” which indicates the existence of an enormous number of buddhas.

However, we can see this scripture in a completely different light when we read it from the viewpoint that, as a human being, the historical Shakyamuni accepted as “buddhas” all of the people he encountered prior to his awakening, the people from whom he received the teaching, and the people he came

in contact with on his travels to share the Truth.

Therefore, when we emulate Shakyamuni and accept that each and every person we encounter in our daily lives is a “buddha,” then these lines of scripture almost become a task for our daily practice, don’t they?

The Basis of Making Offerings Is Consideration for Others

Speaking of seeing the people before our eyes as “buddhas,” Linji Yixuan (d. 867), founder of the Linji school of Chan Buddhism (known as the Rinza school of Zen Buddhism in Japan), said the following to his fellow practitioners: “If you let go of the mind that seeks the Buddha outwardly, you are already a buddha. Therefore, all of you now before my very eyes who are hearing me expound the Dharma are none other than buddhas.”

If you realize that you yourself are intrinsically a buddha with a pure heart, then you are a buddha and so is the person before your very eyes. This is no different than believing and accepting that “everyone you encounter, without exception, is a buddha.”

I often hear that although people can readily put their hands together reverently before the dead, they can hardly do so before the living. But because people who have died and people who are living are all “buddhas,” the practice of making offerings to people before our eyes with the feeling of “revering,

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honoring, and extolling” them is hardly something strange, but rather something quite ordinary.

What then, in concrete terms, should we do? The most important thing in making offerings that express our sincere gratitude to the Buddha is putting the teachings into practice. Through practice, we fully realize that the teaching is the Truth. We go through each day with a mind of compassion like Shakyamuni’s. In simple words, we hope that people’s sufferings and concerns will decrease and their joys will increase, and we show our consideration for them.

Doing so is an offering to the “buddhas” before our very eyes and, by extension, an offering full of reverence and gratitude toward Shakyamuni, the Buddha, who—through his accumulation of practice and diligence—revealed the Truth to us. In this way, we become human beings overflowing with consideration for others, which in turn leads to our coming closer to buddhahood.

Each and every one of us is like a piece of fabric—a wonderful piece of fabric that has the qualities of becoming a buddha. When this fabric is backed with the lining that is our practice of compassion—our consideration for others—it forms the most splendid robe: that of a “buddha.” □

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 27

The Story of King Resplendent (2)

*This is the 133rd installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra
by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.*

TEXT “Then the two sons, desiring again to announce their wish, said to their mother in verse:

‘Be pleased, mother, to release us / To leave home and become shramanas. / Very hard it is to meet the buddhas, / And we would be followers of a buddha. / As the blossom of the udumbara, / Even harder is it to meet a buddha, / And hard it is to escape from hardships. / Be pleased to permit us to leave home.’

COMMENTARY This is a truly aspirational request, and one whose words are certainly logical and persuasive. The entreaty is youth-like and brimming with youthful passion.

• *Shramanas*. This Sanskrit word is a general term for those who renounce the world, shave their head, put on shabby clothing, commit no evil, prepare themselves in mind and body to strive for goodness, and practice to earnestly seek enlightenment.

• *Very hard it is to meet the buddhas*. The Eternal Original Buddha is always omnipresent, but it is not easy to meet the Buddha who has appeared as a human being in this *saha*-world.

Since the beginning of history, the Tathagata Shakyamuni is the only one to have appeared in this world. It is said that following his entering extinction it will be 5,670,000,000 years before the Bodhisattva Maitreya finally becomes the next buddha and appears in this world, so this period is one in which no buddha lives in this world. That is why it is so difficult to meet a buddha.

Of course, the Buddha Thunder Voice Constellation King of Wisdom is the buddha in this story. It is important that the reader does not confuse the four types of buddhas: the Buddhas of the Past, like this buddha of the past world about whom Shakyamuni preaches that they were in past worlds; the Buddha who actually appeared in this *saha*-world; buddhas such as the Tathagata Abundant Treasures and the Tathagata Amitabha who symbolize universal Truth and the power of salvation; and the Eternal Original Buddha who is neither arising nor perishing.

• *Udumbara*. This Sanskrit word stands for a kind of fig-bearing tree. Because the blossom blooms inside a pouch, it cannot be seen from the outside. Therefore it has been employed here as symbolizing something which is rarely seen.

TEXT “Then the mother spoke, saying: ‘I grant you permission to leave home; and why? Because a buddha is hard to meet.’

COMMENTARY It seems as if the permission is being granted uncompromisingly, but with the addition of the reason, “Because a buddha is hard to meet,” one can detect the mother’s reluctance to part from her dear sons.

TEXT “On this the two sons said to their parents: ‘Good, father and mother! We beg that you will now go to the Buddha Thunder Voice Constellation King of Wisdom, approach [him], and pay him homage. Wherefore? Because a buddha is as hard to meet as an udumbara flower, or as the one-eyed tortoise meeting the hole in the floating log. But we, richly blessed through a former lot, have met the Buddha Dharma in this life. Therefore, father and mother, listen to us and let us go forth from home. Wherefore? [Because] buddhas are hard to meet and the occasion is also hard to encounter.’

COMMENTARY As the one-eyed tortoise meeting the hole in the floating log. Although it is hard enough for a one-eyed tortoise to even find a log floating on the great ocean, it would be even harder for the tortoise to find the small hole in the log, stick its neck inside, and take a rest.

In Japanese plays and narrative storytelling, we find a samurai who has travelled throughout the land in search of an enemy upon whom he seeks revenge. When he finally finds his enemy, the lines he speaks often mention how he has searched “like a blind tortoise for a floating log, or like someone trying to find the udumbara flower in bloom.” Such lines come from this particular passage of the Lotus Sutra. This is just one example of how deeply the Lotus Sutra has penetrated to the heart of Japanese culture and the daily life of the Japanese people.

However, this is merely limited to the surface of the culture, and there is cause for concern that the spirit of the Lotus Sutra is continually being lost. It is to be hoped that the spirit of the Lotus Sutra, which has been transmitted continuously since Prince Shotoku (574–622), can be revived within the mind of every Japanese.

I do not believe that doing this is very difficult. For a thousand and several hundred years, the spirit of the Lotus Sutra has been the flesh and blood of the Japanese people. Therefore, if given the opportunity, it is certain to be restored and begin to function again full of life.

TEXT “At that juncture all the eighty-four thousand court ladies of King Resplendent became capable of receiving and keeping this Dharma Flower Sutra.

COMMENTARY The two royal sons were earnest about guiding their father and mother to the Buddha Dharma. Their wholehearted aspiration had not only a great impact on their parents, but also on the people surrounding them.

TEXT The Bodhisattva Pure-Eyed had for a long time been thorough in Dharma Flower contemplation. The Bodhisattva Pure Treasury had for infinite hundreds of thousands of myriads of *kotis* of kalpas been thorough in the contemplation of freedom from evil paths, [which] sought to lead all the living away from all evil states of existence. The queen of that king had attained the contemplation of assemblage of buddhas and was able to know the secret resources of buddhas.

COMMENTARY *The Dharma Flower contemplation.* This is the condition where one deeply believes the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, practices them with the physical body, and has mastered them so completely that the mind is not distracted.

- *The contemplation of freedom from evil paths.* The evil paths, or evil realms of existence, are the worlds of mean-spirit-edness such as hells, *asuras* (demons), hungry spirits, and animals. Accordingly, this is the condition in which one’s spirit is settled in a stable and clean state of mind, “away from all evil states of existence.”
- *The contemplation of assemblage of buddhas.* This is the state of contemplation in which one can entirely comprehend the gathering of the buddhas, that is, the entirety of the teachings.
- *The secret resources of buddhas.* This means the teachings in the minds of the buddhas which are difficult to express. The “secret resources” are not something that the buddhas are concealing, but the Truth (the Wonderful Dharma) which is so profound and subtle that it is utterly impossible to express in spoken words or writings. “Secret,” in this sense, is a synonym for “esoteric” as in esoteric Buddhism (Ch., Mijiao).

Accordingly, the queen attained the spiritual state, or capacity, of being able to understand everything, both the teachings as manifested in the sutra and the teachings in the minds of the buddhas.

TEXT Thus did the two sons with tact wisely convert their father, bringing his mind to believe, discern, and delight in the Buddha Dharma.

“Thereupon King Resplendent accompanied by his ministers and retinue, Queen Pure Virtue accompanied by her fine court ladies and retinue, and the two sons of that king, accompanied by forty-two thousand people, at once set out together to visit the buddha. Arriving and prostrating

themselves at his feet, they made procession around the buddha three times and then withdrew to one side.

COMMENTARY *They made procession around the buddha three times.* This refers to an act showing admiration for the meritorious virtue of the buddha; this involves going clockwise around either a buddha or a stupa three times, stopping each time one passes the front and worshipping. For this reason, in India at the stupas that still remain today, it is always possible to go around them on the outside.

TEXT “Then that buddha preached to the king, showing, teaching, profiting, and rejoicing, so that the king was greatly delighted.

COMMENTARY *Showing, teaching, profiting, and rejoicing.* “Showing” means to give an outline of the teaching. On the basis of this preparation for understanding, the preacher then proceeds to “teaching” in order to expound more deeply the meaning of the teaching. When perceiving that the listener has almost understood the content of the teaching, the preacher next proceeds to either preaching the benefits that can be obtained from actual practice or letting the listener actually practice the teaching and experience those benefits. This is “profiting.” When the listener has done this, that person will have felt the joy that comes from maintaining the teaching and will have discovered a purpose in life. This is called “rejoicing.”

This “showing, teaching, profiting, and rejoicing” can, in other words, be taken as the basic and logical order for leading a person to the teachings of the Buddha.

TEXT “Then King Resplendent and his queen unloosed from their necks the necklaces of pearls worth hundreds and thousands, and threw them upon the buddha, and in the sky were transformed into a four-columned jeweled tower; on the tower was a large jeweled couch spread with hundreds of thousands of myriads of celestial coverings, on which was the buddha sitting cross-legged, emitting a great [ray of] light.

COMMENTARY *Sitting cross-legged.* This is the posture of seated meditation in which the left foot is placed on the right thigh and the right foot is placed on the left thigh.

TEXT Whereupon King Resplendent reflected thus: ‘Rare, dignified, extraordinary is the buddha’s body, perfect in its supreme, refined coloring!’

COMMENTARY *Rare.* This means to be “uncommon, seldom seen, and therefore to be much appreciated.”

- *Dignified.* This refers to “good, correct order and majestically beautiful.”

- *Extraordinary.* This means “not merely unusual or without parallel, but precious beyond expression.”

- *Coloring.* This refers to the substance, physical body, and form that appear as phenomena.

TEXT “Then the Buddha Thunder Voice Constellation King of Wisdom addressed the four groups, saying: ‘You see this King Resplendent standing before me with folded hands? This king, having become a bhikshu within my rule, and being zealous in observing the laws which aid the Buddha Way, shall become a buddha entitled Shalendra Tree King, whose domain will be named Great Luster, and his kalpa named Great High King. This Buddha Shalendra Tree King will have countless bodhisattvas and countless shravakas, and his domain will be level and straight. Such will be his merits.’

COMMENTARY *You see this King Resplendent standing before me with folded hands?* The question is not whether the disciples can see him, but how they should look upon him. Implied of course is that they can surely see the invaluable figure of this king who has devoted himself to the teaching of the buddha.

TEXT “The king at once turned over his domain to his younger brother; the king together with his queen, two sons, and retinue forsook his home and followed the Way under the rule of [that] buddha.

COMMENTARY Immersed in the bliss that comes from living in accordance with the teachings, the king lost all desire to return to his palace.

TEXT Having forsaken his home, for eighty-four thousand years the king was ever diligent and zealous in observing the Wonderful Dharma Flower Sutra, and after these [years] passed, attained the contemplation of adorned-with-all-pure-merits.

COMMENTARY *The contemplation of adorned-with-all-pure-merits.* “Pure merits” means that the merit of saving others is pure. Therefore, this is the mental state of acting to lead, guide, and save others without seeking reward but merely for the joy of doing it. When this happens, the person achieves a state of exultation in the Buddha Dharma, being exquisitely adorned with the joy of pure merit, called “the contemplation of adorned-with-all-pure-merits.”

TEXT “Whereupon he arose in the sky to a height of seven tala trees and said to that buddha: ‘World-honored

One! My two sons have already done a buddha deed by their supernatural transformations, changing my heretical mind, establishing me in the Buddha Dharma, and causing me to see the World-honored One. These two sons are my good friends, for out of a desire to develop the roots of goodness [planted] in my former lives and to benefit me, they came and were born in my home.'

COMMENTARY *He arose in the sky to a height of seven tala trees.* The tala, as mentioned earlier, is a kind of palm tree. That achieving the contemplation of adorned-with-all-pure-merits is an extremely elevated state is shown here in the image of rising in the sky.

This king's extremely elevated state is that of having achieved putting all of his heart and mind into the condition of "emptiness." In other words, it is the state in which he has truly taken as his own the worldview that all things are equal. It is out of this state of mind that there comes the open-minded way of seeing his children as good friends and good guides.

This important section is one of the most central of this chapter. Some very important teachings are contained in this short passage, so please read it with deep appreciation.

TEXT "Thereupon the Buddha Thunder Voice Constellation King of Wisdom addressed King Resplendent, saying: 'So it is, so it is, it is as you say. Any good son or good daughter, by planting roots of goodness, will in every generation obtain good friends, who will be able to do buddha deeds, showing, teaching, profiting, and rejoicing in him, and causing him to enter into Perfect Enlightenment. Know, great king! A good friend is the great cause and condition whereby [men] are converted and led to see the buddha and aroused to Perfect Enlightenment.'

COMMENTARY

All is due to cause and condition. We really must think carefully about cause and condition. There is a proverb that says that even the touching of the sleeves of two passersby through a chance meeting is due to the karma of a previous life. We pass by one another with no intention whatsoever, and on this earth there are almost five billion people; the planet is so huge that we are unable to walk the whole of it in an entire lifetime, even if we wanted to. We cannot positively say that it is just a chance occurrence that only two human beings among those five billion come across each other at a point on this vast planet.

One person, as the result of the accumulation of innumerable acts committed to date, has as a matter of course come to that particular spot. The other person passes that point as a consequence of having to be there, too. To explain their inevitable meeting as a mere accidental concurrence is

a rather shallow, pat logic that relies only on the phenomenal aspects of matters. There is without doubt some invisible thread of cause and condition that connects these two.

It is even more true that extraordinary cause and condition brings us together as parent and child, brother and sister, as close friends, and as colleagues at work, and above all, as good friends, who lead us in spiritual ways and guide us toward the perfection of our character. This is what is called great cause and condition.

When we think of this, we can deeply understand the Buddha's teaching that we should never neglect our parents, siblings, relatives, friends, masters, pupils, and colleagues, that is, people we are in close contact with, and moreover, those of the same faith.

TEXT Great king! Do you see these two sons? These two sons have already paid homage to buddha sixty-five [times] the hundreds of thousands of myriads of *kotis* of *nayutas* of the sands of the Ganges, waiting upon and revering them; and among those buddhas received and kept the Dharma Flower Sutra, having compassion for the living with their false views, and establishing them in right views.'

"King Resplendent thereupon descended from the sky and said to the buddha: 'World-honored One! Rare indeed is [the sight of] the Tathagata; by his merits and wisdom the protuberance on his head shines brilliantly; his eyes are wide [open] and deep blue; the tuft between his eyebrows is white as the pearly moon; his teeth are white, even, close, and ever shining; his lips are red and beautiful as *bimba* fruit.'

COMMENTARY King Resplendent descends from the sky and stands upon the earth. This motion signifies a complete change from ideals back to reality. It is important to see the aspect of equality of the true nature of all things in this world, but one cannot discern the true aspect of things unless one is also quite conscious of the aspect of distinction that appears in phenomena.

King Resplendent has until this point looked upon his own sons as "good friends" and "good guides" from his standpoint of the view of equality. Now he returns to the aspect of distinction, praising the rarity and sublimity of the buddha.

The buddha said that by virtue of the king's two sons' accumulation of practices in their former lives, the king aspired for enlightenment. Then the king replies that although that may be true, the ultimate cause of their accumulation of good karma was the power of the buddha. We must notice that such a spirit fills these words of praise.

- *The tuft between his eyebrows.* It was also mentioned in chapter 1, "Introductory," that the Buddha has a circle of white hair between his eyebrows from which he sends

forth a ray of light. This is one of the distinguishing physical features, well known as the thirty-two primary marks of the Buddha.

[For further reference, see the September/October 1992 issue, the May/June 1996 issue, and the July/August 1996 issue of *Dharma World*.]

- *Bimba fruit*. The fruit of the *bimba* tree has such a beautiful red color that it is likened to the color of ideal lips.

TEXT Then, when King Resplendent had extolled that buddha's so many merits, countless hundreds of thousands of myriads of *kotis* of them, with all his mind, he folded his hands before the Tathagata and again addressed that buddha, saying: 'Unprecedented is the World-honored One. The Tathagata's teaching is perfect in its inconceivable and wonderful merits. The moral precepts that he promulgates are comforting and quickening. From this day onward I will not again follow my own mind, nor beget false views, nor a haughty, angry, or any other sinful mind.' Having uttered these words, he did reverence to the buddha and went forth."

COMMENTARY Next he praises and expresses his heartfelt gratitude for the excellence of the buddha's teachings.

- *The moral precepts which he promulgates are comforting and quickening*. These words are very important. The teachings of the Buddha are in no way rigid or formal. Nor in practicing them does one experience any mental anguish. This is because the teachings conform to the essential nature of human beings.

The reason one may feel them punctilious or feel pain because of them is due to illusion. It is because of the conflict that occurs between our mind of illusion and the correct teachings. Therefore, if one experiences constraint and anguish, this is proof that illusions still exist, and one has to defeat those constraints and pangs through practice. The real significance of religious practice is therein.

As one does this, one will gradually awaken to enlightenment and come to feel no resistance at all toward observing and practicing the teachings of the Buddha. Not only that, but one will inevitably come to feel grateful. This is the meaning of "The moral precepts which he promulgates are comforting and quickening." It is a state that is truly to be welcomed.

- *From this day onward I will not again follow my own mind*. Following one's own mind here means following the mind of illusion. It is the mind, or mental function, of ordinary people. It goes without saying that one must obediently follow the correct activity of the mind that springs forth from the depths of religious faith.

At the conclusion of a past-lifetime story about King Resplendent's family, the Tathagata Shakyamuni says the following.

TEXT [Shakyamuni] Buddha [then] said to the great assembly: "What is your opinion? This King Resplendent—could he be any other person? He is indeed the present Bodhisattva Flower Virtue. That Queen Pure Virtue is the Bodhisattva Shining Splendor now in the presence of the Buddha, who out of compassion for King Resplendent and his people was born amongst them. These two sons are the present Medicine King Bodhisattva and Medicine Lord Bodhisattva.

COMMENTARY *The Bodhisattva Shining Splendor now in the presence of the Buddha*. In Sanskrit this bodhisattva's name is Vairocana-rashmi-pratimandita-dhvaja-raja.

TEXT Those Bodhisattvas Medicine King and Medicine Lord, having perfected such great merits, under countless hundred thousand myriad *kotis* of buddhas, planted virtuous roots and perfectly attained qualities of goodness beyond conception. If there be anyone who is acquainted with the names of these two bodhisattvas, gods and men in all the world will pay him homage."

While the Buddha preached this chapter, "The Story of King Resplendent," the eighty-four thousand people departed from impurity and separated themselves from uncleanness, and acquired pure Dharma-eye in regard to all things.

COMMENTARY *Departed from impurity and separated themselves from uncleanness*. Remaining aloof from impurity and withdrawing from uncleanness mean the state of mind that is entirely without the impurities of defilement and the uncleanness of sin and evil.

- *Acquired pure Dharma-eye in regard to all things*. All things referred to here indicate everything that exists in the universe. "Dharma-eye" is one of the so-called five types of vision (see the May/June 2002 issue of *Dharma World*), meaning the ability to intuitively penetrate and touch the depths of all existences with all one's physical and mental forces.

When defilements are completely removed and the mind has become perfectly clear, it can take in vividly the life that is in everything, whether a plant or a tree, a stone, or some earth. Great poets and painters are in one sense rich in such receptivity, so their works touch the human heart.

In one sense artistic and in another sense religious, the pinnacle of this way of seeing things is having what is called "Dharma-eye." Thus the pure, perfectly clear condition of that way of seeing is called "pure Dharma-eye."

With this the chapter comes to a close, so let us consider the important messages of this story.

The meaning of miracles. First, we must ponder the true meaning of the two sons' showing their father many kinds of miracles (supernatural deeds). This does not mean that they were enabled by means of the Buddha's teachings to display supernatural deeds, nor that they stimulated their father's curiosity by showing him such deeds. Their performing various supernatural deeds means that they completely changed both their character and their actions in daily life by studying and believing the Buddha Dharma.

Their showing such deeds to their father means that by their deeds they proved to him the true value of the Buddha Dharma and led him to be inspired to the aspiration for Perfect Enlightenment.

Living by the example is the best way to lead others. When we attempt to lead others to the teachings of the Buddha, none will follow us only through hearing us praise the teachings. We must graphically present to them the reason that the Buddha's teachings are worshipful. Therefore, it is important for us to explain the content of the teachings. Further, to others' satisfaction we must elucidate the teachings according to their level of understanding—sometimes simply, sometimes theoretically, sometimes by using popular parables, and sometimes in light of modern science.

But the quickest and simplest way to lead others to the Buddha Dharma is to justify the teachings by our own demonstration of them. Our first consideration is to show others living evidence that we have changed in this way since believing in the Buddha Dharma and practicing it. There is no more powerful or direct way of leading others.

To those whom we seldom see or with whom we have a limited time together, however, we cannot show such living evidence unless we have decisive evidence, such as recovery from a disease, a favorable change in our circumstances, a brightening in our expression, or how we have become so kind to others that they hardly recognize us. It is this kind of instantly recognizable change that inspires the admiration of others.

On the other hand, members of our families living together can sense clearly even little changes in our everyday actions and attitudes—our speech and attitude toward our parents, brothers, sisters, and those outside our families. If we change through believing in the Buddha's teachings, they will notice a great change in us. Such evidence will certainly influence each member of the family.

Leading members of the family. To put it the other way around, in leading and guiding members of our family to

the teachings, however repeatedly we explain to them their content and however much our explanations may satisfy them intellectually, it will not lead to any practical result unless we change our attitudes in our daily life.

We can spout fine words to outsiders, but within our families we reveal our true selves. The true importance of the family is that it is a place where one can relax unencumbered by pretentiousness and where one can refresh spiritually, so it is difficult to maintain pretensions and affectations. When our family members see us acting contrary to what we say, they will say, "The teaching may be good, but it couldn't be that good if you believe it and still act like that."

It would seem to be easy for us to lead the members of our family to the Buddha's teachings, but in reality it is most difficult. We find it especially difficult in cases where a son leads his father to the teachings or a wife leads her husband.

A father or a husband holds authority of a kind in the family. Unlike a young and naive son, who has little experience in worldly affairs or life's hardships, older men have gained experience in the ways of the world, have a strong sense of self, and stubbornly hold to their own view of life depending on their experience. Because of their sense of authority and their fixed ideas, even if they feel the teachings to be basically good, they cannot bring themselves to believe in them, much less act upon them.

Although nothing of King Resplendent's character was presented in the story, he may be considered a model of the typical father.

Passionately idealistic youths and the wisdom of their mother. The two royal sons filled with idealism merely regretted that their father had different ideas and embraced a different faith, but then their wise mother entered the situation.

Their mother never told her sons to reason with their father directly, because she foresaw that such attempts would produce the opposite of the desired result. Nor did she attempt to intercede between her husband and sons. This is because she did not think it permissible, with her moderate attitude, to act as an intermediary in the serious, spiritual matter of faith.

Instead the wise mother suggested that her sons show their father concrete evidence of the results of their practice of their faith. Actually, they revealed to their father the wonderfulness of the teachings in all aspects of life.

Father with a flexible mind. King Resplendent was a good father. Although on the surface he appeared to have firmly established notions, underneath he had a mind that was

receptive and flexible. As a consequence, when he saw the evidence shown by his sons, he recognized it with good grace.

What it means to be surprised. Surprise is evidence of flexibility of mind. It was the Japanese novelist and poet Doppo Kunikida (1871–1908) who expressed this when he wrote that he always wanted to be surprised by nature. Such flexibility is characteristic of a mind that is growing. It is greatly significant and noble that King Resplendent was frankly surprised on seeing the miraculous acts of his sons.

Most fathers, shown such impressive evidence, would criticize it on one pretext or another and try to trip up the son over some trivial point, dependent on their established notions. Moreover, they would certainly not abandon ideas and beliefs that they had embraced so firmly in the past. Although they might actually be inwardly impressed by what they have been shown, they would hesitate to admit it, feeling that to do so would diminish their prestige.

The attitude of King Resplendent is admirable indeed. He did not cling to his authority and was not concerned about his position, but more than anything else revered the truth and revered those who transmitted the truth. That is why he called his two sons his good friends. King Resplendent, who as king had no equal in power and as a father had absolute authority in the family, had such a frank and open mind that he was able to call his sons good friends. We cannot help admiring his attitude of venerating only the truth.

Renouncing the world in the aspect of mind. Thus the problem of faith within the family of the king was resolved in a satisfactory way. All the members of the king's family joined the correct faith of Buddhism and entered into religious lives with joy and religious exaltation. His was an ideal family.

Still, doubts are bound to arise as to whether a family will collapse if its members renounce the world. The act of King Resplendent, his wife, his two sons, and the others renouncing the world symbolizes that they were emancipated from defilements by the Buddha Dharma. In other words, "renouncing the world" was a matter of mind rather than the actual entering of the priesthood. This chapter is a valuable teaching for lay believers, so if this is misunderstood, the entire chapter will be misconstrued.

The faith of leaders. Another important point of this chapter is that the faith of King Resplendent influenced his ministers, retinue, and the people of his country. We must seriously

consider, as a matter of reality, the great extent to which the right faith of a leader affects the people serving under him.

Faith is basically an individual matter and is apt to become impure when it interferes with authority and, conversely, when political affairs interfere with it. Faith ought to be something that arises from one's inmost thoughts, and any kind of power or influence on it should not be imposed externally.

However, we cannot conclude that the great influence that the faith of a leader has on people is necessarily the result of some kind of authority or power. Some may think that people in subordinate positions would follow the faith of their leader in order to flatter their superior, or from obsequiousness. But this is a disingenuous way of thinking. It is quite natural that if a man is a leader who is really respected and trusted by others, his actions will naturally exert great influence upon many people.

All people are equal before the Buddha Way. As disciples of the Buddha, a commoner is equal to a great king. In terms of potential influence, however, a commoner's aspiration for enlightenment cannot be compared to that of a great king. Therefore the Buddha Thunder Voice Constellation King of Wisdom was absolutely delighted with King Resplendent's aspiration for enlightenment and immediately gave a prediction to him about his future attainment of Perfect Enlightenment.

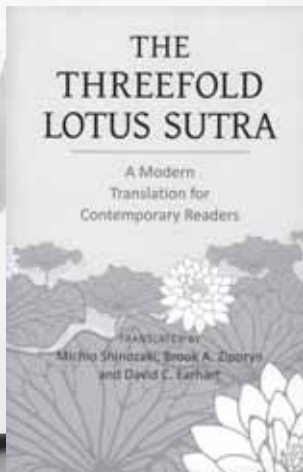
Whether male or female, an exceptional leader who has a large following should embrace the correct faith. But it should not be forced upon subordinates. If the leader can deal fairly with them in the workplace, with the virtue and dignity and vigor of correct faith, his fine personality will surely have a positive influence, just as the scent of perfume smells good to everyone, and naturally penetrates into everything in the vicinity.

This chapter thus touches upon many important matters (or challenges) that we must consider seriously in actual life. We should take the various characters as models, appreciating the attitudes of the king's family members in accordance with their positions. The attitude of King Resplendent is an example of that which a person engaged in politics or national leadership should take toward the Truth (the Wonderful Dharma); the deeds of the two royal sons, Pure Treasury and Pure-Eyed, show how children may open their parent's eyes to faith (this also applies to a wife's opening her husband's eyes to faith); and Queen Pure Virtue is a model of the attitude a mother ought to take in mediating between progressive sons and a conservative father in regard to the Truth.

To be continued

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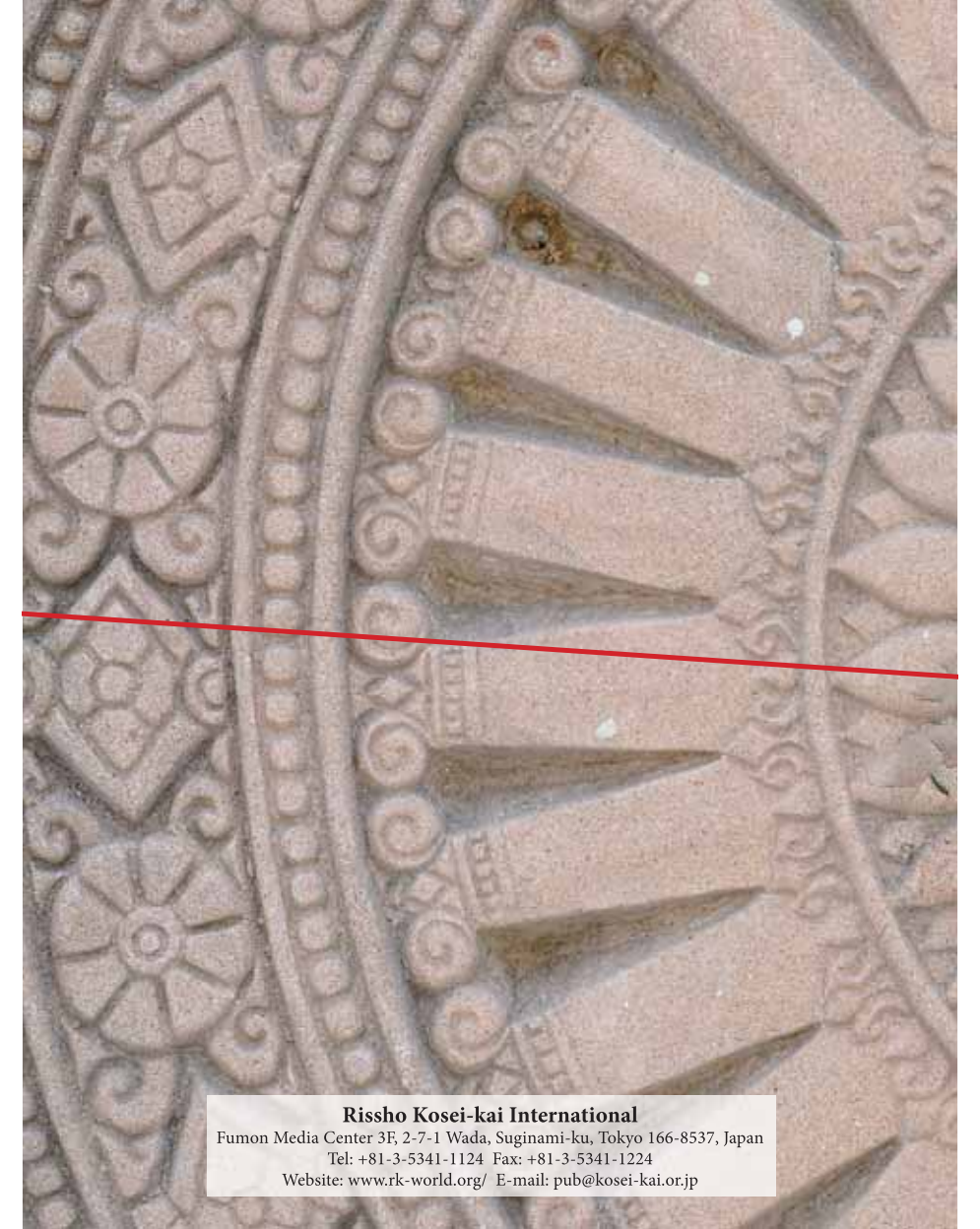
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