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DHARMA WORLD

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Religion and Happiness

First World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan, 1970

Second World Assembly in Leuven, Belgium, 1974

Third World Assembly in Princeton, the United States, 1979

Fourth World Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, 1984

Fifth World Assembly in Melbourne, Australia, 1989

Religions for Peace Japan

Religions for Peace Japan

Religions for Peace was established in 1970 as an international nongovernmental organization. It obtained general consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1999. As an international network of religious communities encompassing over ninety countries, the Religions for Peace family engages in conflict resolution, humanitarian assistance, and other peace-building activities through dialogue and cooperation across religions.

Religions for Peace Japan was established in 1972 as a committee for the international issues supported by Japanese Association of Religious Organizations. Since then it has served as the national chapter of Religions for Peace.

Purpose

1. Calling on religious communities to deeply reflect on their practices, address any that are exclusionary in nature, and engage in dialogue with one another in the spirit of tolerance and understanding.
2. Facilitating multireligious collaboration in making peace initiatives.
3. Working with peace organizations in all sectors and countries to address global issues.
4. Implementing religiously based peace education and awareness-raising activities.

Activity

Religions for Peace Japan promotes activities under the slogan: "Caring for Our Common Future: Advancing Shared Well-Being," which include cooperating and collaborating with Religions for Peace and Religions for Peace Asia; participating in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference; cooperating and collaborating with both international and local faith-based organizations; and building networks with various sectors (politics, economics, academics, culture, media, and so forth). Religions for Peace Japan also promotes various programs related to peace education that include hosting peace research seminars and peace university symposiums.

Sixth World Assembly in Rome and Riva del Garda, Italy, 1994

Seventh World Assembly in Amman, Jordan, 1999

Eighth World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan, 2006

Ninth World Assembly in Vienna, Austria, 2013

Tenth World Assembly in Lindau, Germany, 2019

Religions for Peace Japan

Different Faith, Common Action

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FEATURES: Religion and Happiness

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

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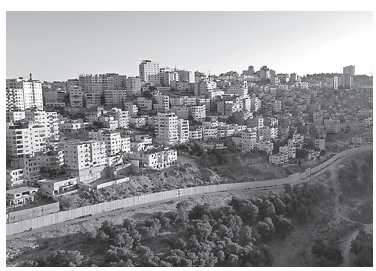

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Religion in Its True Sense

by Masashi Hashimoto

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

In his work *On the Improvement of the Understanding*, Baruch Spinoza argues that "All happiness or unhappiness is made wholly dependent on the quality of the object to which we are attached by love." Unhappiness arises "from the love of what is perishable," such as "riches, fame, and the pleasures of sense." "Love towards a thing eternal and infinite," on the other hand, "feeds the mind wholly with joy, and is itself unmingled with any sadness." Such happiness we can enjoy and share with others as the greatest good, "wherefore it is greatly to be desired and sought for with all our strength." Spinoza here is exploring a methodology motivated by the ethical question of what constitutes human happiness, rather than one driven by intellectual inquiry.

Interpreted in this manner, it becomes clear that in fact his methodology has much in common with the Four Noble Truths taught by Gautama Buddha in his first sermon at Deer Park in Sarnath, Varanasi, which set in motion the first turn of the wheel of the Dharma. The Four Noble Truths, referred to in Pali as the *cattāri ariyasaccāni*, are the truth of suffering (*dukkha*), the truth of the origin of suffering (*samudaya*), the truth of the cessation of suffering (*nirodha*), and the truth of the path to the cessation of suffering (*magga*).

Simply listed like this, the Four Noble Truths may seem quite opaque. However, they can be divided into two pairs: the first pair, the truth of suffering and the truth of the origin of suffering, concern the causes and effects of the world of *Sein* (being), and the second pair, the truth of the cessation of suffering and the truth of the path to the cessation of suffering, concern the causes and effects of the world of *Sollen* (oughtness).

The first pair of truths about suffering and the origin of suffering pertain to the world that results from following actions motivated by blind desire. They concern, in other words, the phenomenal world, in which "unhappiness" (suffering) unfolds, through the endless cycle of life, death, and rebirth in *saṃsāra*, as a result of our attachment to impermanent things—that is to say, our "love of what is perishable" (the origin of suffering).

By contrast, the second pair of truths, which concern the cessation of suffering and the path to the cessation of suffering, refer to the causal relationship that pertains to the ideal world. Here the spirit is nurtured with pure joy through the practice of right action directed toward the highest good (the path to the cessation of suffering) guided by right knowledge. This leads as a result to our release from all sufferings (the cessation of suffering).

D. T. Suzuki, who popularized Japanese Zen culture around the world, wrote in his book *Japanese Spirituality*: "If *seishin*, when it opposes substance and thereby becomes all the more enfettered, has an opportunity to come into contact with spirituality, the troubles of this antagonistic rivalry will fall away of themselves. This is religion in its true sense" (Norman Waddell, trans. [Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, 1972], 17). The process of observation that straddles this pair of spirituality (*Sollen*) and substance (*Sein*) is the Dharma gate of the Four Noble Truths, and it is from this Dharma gate that spirituality was cultivated as the Dharma eye in Buddhism.

The Andhaka school of early Buddhism offered a Mahayanistic view that sublated (Ger., *aufheben*) the division between both pairs of noble truths, declaring that bodhisattvas venture even into the hell of *vinipāta* through the exercise of free will (*issariya-kāma-kārikā*).

While in Buddhism the word *nirvāṇa* represents the highest ideal of happiness, in the Mahayana tradition it is transformed into the path of infinite improvement followed by bodhisattvas, who are driven by their vows to realize an ideal society through individual free will. Happiness in religion implies that one's way of life should be to improve the mind rather than follow one's innate desires, to thereby purify one's desires while cultivating one's spirituality across the twin poles of ideal and reality, and, ultimately, to awaken to one's free will to realize one's ideals in conformity with reality. ❑

The Quest for Happiness in Interreligious Perspective

by Leo D. Lefebure

While there are important differences between Buddhist and Christian worldviews, both traditions share a concern for seeking true wisdom as the only path to lasting happiness.

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Point of Convergence

Shakyamuni Buddha taught that all sentient beings seek happiness but that fundamental misunderstandings about our identity and our world perpetuate unnecessary suffering; he taught practices leading to the wisdom and compassion that can help to end suffering. Inspired by this tradition, His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama asserts that "the very purpose of our life is to seek happiness," and expresses the confident hope: "I believe that happiness can be achieved through training the mind."[1] The quest for happiness is one of the most important concerns for all humans, including practitioners of religious traditions holding contrasting worldviews. This essay will explore how, from different angles of vision, biblical authors and Christian spiritual guides offer points of contact and difference with the Buddha's teaching.

Biblical Perspectives on Wisdom and Happiness

The biblical book of Proverbs links happiness and wisdom: "Happy are those who find wisdom and those who get understanding, for her income is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her" (Prv 3:13–15).[2] The wisdom teachers of ancient Israel assured their hearers that virtuous living in harmony with the wisdom implanted by God in creation would lead in the long run to lasting happiness. They acknowledged that wrongdoing may bring a temporary advantage, but they warned that such gains would not last (Prv 10:2).

The Buddha taught that attitudes and actions inevitably have consequences (e.g., Dhammapada 1–2). Similarly, biblical sages believed that virtuous or vicious actions bring consequences for good or ill, but they also recognized that this connection may not always be evident or immediate. In the book of Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth, speaking in the persona of the wise King Solomon, warns, "All things are wearisome; more than one can express; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear filled with hearing. . . . I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind" (Eccl 1:8, 14). Qoheleth's teaching that all things are vain or insubstantial invites comparison to the insight of Shakyamuni Buddha that life is unsatisfactory because all things are impermanent, interdependent, and empty of own-being. The Hebrew phrase *hebel hebelim, qol hebel* has usually been translated as "vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (Eccl 1:2); but Masao Abe preferred to render it as "emptiness of emptiness, all is emptiness"; and there is some linguistic justification in Hebrew for this.[3] Acknowledging impermanence and insubstantiality, Qoheleth urges hearers to find happiness in the present moment: "[I]t is fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of the life God gives us; for this is our lot" (Eccl 5:18). Qoheleth presents joy as a divine imperative: "Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart. . . . Enjoy life" (Eccl 9:7, 9a).

In searching for happiness, the wisdom teachers of ancient Israel saw themselves as participants in an international, interreligious quest. They assumed that there were wise teachers in other religious paths, and they especially respected and learned from the discoveries and insights of their counterparts in Egypt and Mesopotamia. One section of the

book of Proverbs (22:17–24:34) is an adaptation of the Egyptian *Wisdom of Amenemope*, and the Mesopotamian *Book of Ahiqar* influenced some biblical proverbs. Job was not an Israelite, and the end of the book of Proverbs includes sayings that may come from Arabia. The book of Sirach offers what may be a self-portrait of the author as the explorer who "seeks out the wisdom of all the ancients . . . he travels in foreign lands and learns what is good and evil in the human lot" (Sir 39:1a, 4b). Jewish sages in the Hellenistic period continued the practice of learning from other traditions and incorporating these insights into their own teachings. The openness of the sages of ancient Israel to wisdom from other religious traditions offers an invitation and a precedent to Jews and Christians today to seek wisdom in interreligious conversations.

Jesus

The beatitudes of Jesus in the New Testament continue and develop the earlier Jewish wisdom tradition (Mt 5:1–11; Lk 6:17–38). The Sermon on the Mount in the gospel of Matthew, and its counterpart the Sermon on the Plain in the gospel of Luke, begin with beatitudes that point the way to happiness. The Greek word "*makarioi*," with which each beatitude begins, can be translated as either "blessed" or "happy." The teachings of Jesus are paradoxical in that they promise happiness to persons who are poor or mourning, or being persecuted for righteousness' sake. Matthew focuses more on attitudes to be cultivated, such as being poor in spirit, while Luke focuses more on conditions such as being poor. While Jesus's proclamation of the reign of God emerges from a very different worldview than that of the Buddha, the attitudes and practices that Jesus commends as leading to happiness resonate with the teachings of the Buddha in the Dhammapada (e.g., 3–7, 92–99, 133): according to Jesus, we find happiness by being meek, by making peace, by seeking justice even when we suffer for it, and by not judging others. Jesus promises happiness to those who practice non-discriminating lovingkindness by loving their enemies (Mt 5:44), and to those who renounce the desire for material possessions (Mt 6:19), and to those who live in the present (Mt 6:34). Like the Buddha, Jesus advises his followers to focus not on transient pleasures or possessions but on true, lasting treasure (Mt 6:19–21; Dhammapada 7–20). Jesus taught his followers to pray for the coming of God's rule or kingdom and to make this their central value and concern, promising that all good things will come to those who do so (Mt 6:9–34). In Jesus's teaching, the approach to happiness is oblique: if we seek happiness directly, we are likely to go astray through concerns with clothing or food or drink or status in society; but if we seek first God's kingdom or rule in our lives, all things will come to us and we will enjoy the promises of the beatitudes. The practice of Christian prayer, like Buddhist meditation, can cultivate a virtuous life, lead to increased focus and energy, a greater sense of the proper priorities in life, the letting go of unhealthy attachments, and lasting joy.

Early Christianity

In their quest to understand and practice the biblical wisdom teachings on happiness, some early Christians went into the deserts of Egypt and Palestine and developed intense forms of meditation and monastic life that invite comparison to Buddhist practices. Like the Buddhist monastics who seek happiness by living an ethical life and practicing meditation in accordance with the wisdom teachings of the Buddha, early Christian monastics sought happiness by living a virtuous life and meditating in accordance with biblical perspectives and values.

In the late fourth century, Evagrius Ponticus taught that spiritual practice begins in *ascesis*, the keeping of the ethical commandments in order to cleanse the affective part of the soul (not unlike the practice of the Buddhist precepts), develops through meditation that empties the mind of all thoughts and images (not unlike some forms of Buddhist meditation through mindfulness and concentration), perseveres through distractions, upheavals, and temptations (not unlike the Buddhist virtue of equanimity), and eventually yields the fruits of calmness, lovingkindness, and joy (not unlike the luminous mind, transformative wisdom, and compassion promised by Buddhist practice).

For the foundation of the practice, Evagrius advises, "The ascetic life is the spiritual method for cleansing the affective part of the soul."[4] Then Evagrius directs meditators to empty their minds of all thoughts and images in prayer: "Pay no heed to the concerns and thoughts that might arise the while. They do nothing better than disturb and upset you so as to dissolve the fixity of your purpose. . . . Strive to render your mind deaf and dumb at the time of prayer and then you will be able to pray."[5] Evagrius knows that many thoughts and emotions will arise, but he is confident that continued cultivation of the spiritual life will lead to a state of mind that "can be aptly described as a habitual state of imperturbable calm (*apatheia*)."[6] *Apatheia* is not to be confused with the English word apathy; it is the health of the soul and purity of the heart; it brings lasting peace and gives birth to love.[7] Evagrius trusts that faithful practice of meditation will lead through *apatheia* to happiness and joy: "The sheaves of grain are the fruit of seeds; the virtues have knowledge as their fruit. As surely as tears go with the labor of sowing, joy attends the reaping."[8] To encourage his readers, Evagrius Ponticus presents a series of beatitudes inspired by the biblical models:

"Happy is the spirit that attains to perfect formlessness at the time of prayer.

"Happy is the spirit which, praying without distraction, goes on increasing its desire for God.

"Happy is the spirit that becomes free of all matter and is stripped of all at the time of prayer.

"Happy is the spirit that attains to complete unconsciousness of all sensible experience at the time of prayer.

"Happy is the man who thinks himself no better than dirt.

"Happy is the monk who views the welfare and progress of all men with as much joy as if it were his own.

"Happy is the monk who considers all men as god—after God."[9]

The fruit of this practice is awareness of our radical interconnectedness: "A monk is a man who considers himself one with all men because he seems constantly to see himself in every man."[10] The tradition inspired by Evagrius had tremendous influence on later Eastern Christian spirituality, flowing into the later Greek Orthodox hesychast movement.

During the same time that Evagrius was meditating, in Italy and North Africa Augustine of Hippo engaged in a long-term search for happiness that transformed later Latin Christian perspectives. Etienne Gilson interprets the multifaceted philosophical journey of Augustine as a search for happiness because "in his doctrine wisdom, the object of philosophy, is always identified with happiness. He wants to find the kind of good whose possession will satisfy every desire and ensure peace. . . . For him, the important thing was to strive for self-knowledge and to learn what must be done in order to be better and, if possible, to be happy."[11] Similarly, Margaret Miles reads Augustine's *Confessions* as a text of pleasure that narrates a search for maximal pleasure.[12]

Photo: Alamy / PPS

Saint Augustine and His Mother, Saint Monica *by Ary Scheffer (1795–1858). 1846.*

Augustine believed that humans seek wisdom (including the formal study of philosophy) only in order to find happiness.[13] Shakyamuni Buddha taught that the path to happiness is a middle way between extremes; for Augustine, wisdom implies a mean: "by this mean, the spirit frees itself from all excess: it escapes the excess which leads to the superfluous as well as the restriction of its powers to limits beneath its full capacity."[14] Gilson explains that for Augustine, "The person who finds wisdom and holds it fast has no cause to fear any excess or defect: he never exceeds the mean; he never falls short in anything. Hence it is one and the same thing to possess the mean or wisdom, and to be happy."[15]

In contrast to the silence of the Buddha concerning God, Augustine identified beatifying joy with the truth of knowing God as the only lasting good, as Gilson explains: "but there is only one good whose possession no fear can disturb, viz. truth, and this is so precisely because anyone who wants it has only to know it in order to have it . . . to know truth (provided it is love as well) is by definition to possess it in some degree. This is why in Augustinism, where happiness is joy, happiness must be a joy born of truth."[16]

Because Augustine struggled with sinful patterns of behavior when he was young, he came to believe that humans can find lasting happiness only through the grace of God, which comes in unexpected ways to humans without them deserving it. Augustine's path to happiness can be compared to the path of Pure Land Buddhists, who trust in the gracious vow of Amida Buddha. In his *Confessions* Augustine describes a mystical experience that he and his mother Monica enjoyed in Ostia, the port city of Rome. After searching for the truth which is God, they experienced the presence of God in a new way: "Our minds were lifted up by an ardent affection towards eternal being itself."[17] Moving beyond the external created world and their own minds, they enter "the region of inexhaustible abundance where you feed Israel eternally with truth for food. There life is the wisdom by which all creatures come into being. . . . And while we talked and panted after it, we touched it in some small degree by a moment of total concentration of the heart."[18] Augustine and Monica imagine all creation becoming silent so that they can hear God speak without mediation: "at that moment we extended our reach and in a flash of mental energy attained the eternal wisdom which abides beyond all things. If only it could last, and other visions of a vastly inferior kind could be withdrawn!"[19] The inexpressible happiness of this mystical moment cannot last while they are still in this world, but it offers Augustine and Monica a foretaste of eternal happiness: "So too eternal life is of the quality of that moment of understanding after which we sighed."[20]

While there are important differences between Buddhist and Christian worldviews, both traditions share a concern for seeking true wisdom as the only path to lasting happiness. ❑

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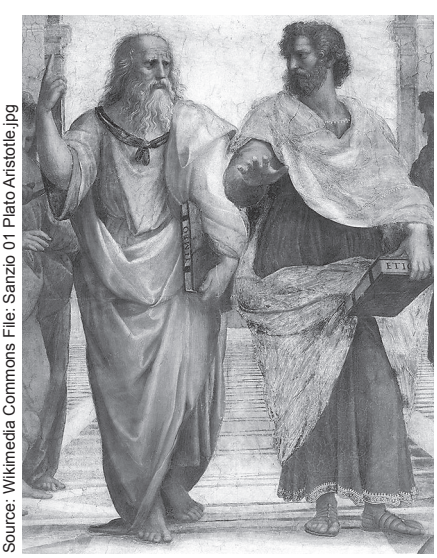
Buddhist Happiness Compared with Other Religious Views of Happiness

by Michael Givel

All major religious traditions are predicated on moral codes, which are the keys to living a happy life.

Commonalities in the promotion of altruistic happiness based in religious worldviews abound (Joshanloo 2014; Lobel 2017). This includes similarities in practices such as prayer, meditation, and yoga that lead to detached and non-judgmental mindful awareness in the present. Other similarities are the pursuit and acquisition of wisdom; compassionate treatment of others; positive and nurturing relationships and connections; authentic love and devotion; creative engagement through flow activities like religious painting or music that focus on beauty and the present; and the achievement of religious meaning, significance, and value in life activities (Lobel 2017).



Source: Wikimedia Commons File: Sanzio 01 Plato Aristotle.jpg

Detail from The School of Athens *by Raphael (1483–1520). Apostolic Palace, Vatican City. It is popularly thought that while Plato (left) argues a sense of timelessness, Aristotle looks into the physicality of life and the present realm.*

There are also distinct differences between major western Abrahamic faiths including Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, and major eastern faiths including Buddhism, Hinduism, Jain, Shinto, and Daoism (Joshanloo 2014). It should be noted that these differences are *tendencies* and cannot be generalized. In western religious traditions there is an emphasis on the Aristotelian notion of eudaimonia, or flourishing over time (Joshanloo 2014). Western religions also tend to focus on the deliberate achievement of the individualistic, self-interested pursuit of happiness through various religious practices and beliefs. This is meant to lead to a good life and happiness.

By contrast, eastern religions tend to focus on the individual as an interrelated part of the greater community and even the cosmos (Joshanloo 2014). Several eastern religions also consider reality to be non-dualistic, based in existence in one cosmos. From this perspective, ultimately there are no human-created dualities that are in contradiction with one another, because the greater universe is unified. This focus on the greater realities of the universe is not only due to self-interest but also engaging in compassion through altruistic activities greater than oneself. Another important tendency in various eastern religions, such as Buddhism, is the acceptance and overcoming of human suffering (Joshanloo 2014).

While there are overarching similarities and differences in themes of happiness across religions, each of the religious views of happiness is also grounded in differing traditions and practices that constitute the history of a particular culture and view of life. For instance, happiness in Buddhism is a function of the Four Noble Truths (Ismail and Haron 2014). The First Noble Truth is knowing that suffering exists. The Second Noble Truth is understanding the bases of suffering, including undue ego craving for material things, sensuality, and political power, as well as ignorance of being able to be enlightened. The Third Noble Truth is understanding that suffering can be countered and that a sentient being can become enlightened. And the Fourth Noble Truth is the Noble Eightfold Path to the cessation of suffering leading to enlightenment (Ismail and Haron 2014).

The requirements of the Noble Eightfold Path include right speech, or using language that is not harmful to others. Next, right action refers to deeds that do no harm to any sentient being and promote compassion for all. Right livelihood is an occupation that does no harm to others. Right effort includes meditation to overcome negative and unwholesome states of

Michael Givel obtained his PhD in political science, public policy, and international relations from the University of California, Riverside, in 1988. As a professor of political science at the University of Oklahoma, his areas of specialization include comparative politics, racial justice, and international studies. He is the author of scholarly publications illustrating the connection between Mahayana Buddhism and gross national happiness. In 2009 he became the first American Fulbright teaching and research scholar in Bhutan.

mind. Right mindfulness is focusing through meditation on what is happening in the present. Right concentration suggests a mind that is clear to reach a greater awareness of the reality of the cosmos. Right understanding is becoming more aware of the nature of the cosmos; countering undue ego craving for sensuality, material items, and political power; and comprehending the Dharma of the Buddha. Right thought focuses on having concern for the suffering of others and refraining from unwholesome thoughts. Taken together and over a long period of time, practicing all eight parts of the Noble Eightfold Path can yield enlightenment and happiness (Givel 2015).

Other core beliefs and practices of Buddhism that lead to happiness and enlightenment include realizing the vast universe is an endless movement and interface of energy and matter, no dualities exist in this unified universe, practicing good karma, and recognizing the phenomenon of transmigration, or rebirth. Impermanence indicates the ongoing changeability of all energy and matter. Non-duality is an understanding that there are no pairs of opposites in an interconnected universe. The elimination of duality in one's conception of reality must occur in order to obtain clear knowledge of the universe and become enlightened. Under transmigration or rebirth there is a link between the karmic law of cause-and-effect deeds in the present life and the quality of the next life. In other words, the accrual of good and bad actions, or karma, over a person's lifetime provides the basis for what happens in future lives. Bad actions may lead to a more hellish next life. Conversely, good acts may lead to a more Buddha-like existence (Givel 2015). Ultimately, when a sentient being becomes more aware and enlightened to the ultimate realities of the universe, they have freed themselves of all causes of suffering. When enlightenment occurs, this leads to a state of clarity, happiness, and peace (Givel 2015).

How do Buddhist practices to achieve happiness compare with those of the major western religions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, and the major eastern religions of Hinduism, Shinto, Sikhism, and Daoism?

Christianity

Christian belief includes experiencing an individualized, personal relationship with Jesus Christ as savior and Lord. Humans are either born into original sin or engage on their own in sinful acts, and require Jesus's love and help to be happy. This occurs by personally living a wholesome life free of sinful desires and actions. This can happen by praying and through practicing Christian religious moral tenets of right versus wrong. Ultimately, by accepting a personal God there will be happiness in the present life and in the afterlife (Lobel 2017). Additionally, while some Christians focus on a personal relationship with Jesus, others also emphasize doing good deeds to help others in this world as a basis of happiness (Schori 2014).

Islam

Islam focuses on the holy book of the Quran, which Muslims regard as the revelations of a monotheistic God (Esposito 2009). In Islam, Muhammad is regarded as the final prophet of God (Esposito 2009). Through the Quran, Muslims believe that God is merciful, all-powerful, and unique. Happiness in Islam is achieved through individual good deeds in this life, as well as achieving paradise in the afterlife (Ismail and Haron 2014). Islam also teaches that happiness is obtained not through undue carnal lust and desires, but by maintaining a natural belief in God, also called fitrah. While obtaining material items is important to meet basic human needs like housing and healthcare, ultimately happiness in

Source: Wikimedia Commons File: Bhavachakra.jpg

An image of the Wheel of Life. This is a symbolic representation of cyclic existence. This pictorial diagram presents basic Buddhist concepts such as karma and rebirth.

Photo: Shutterstock

Torii path in Fushimi Inari Taisha shrine located in Fushimi-ku, Kyoto. Inari is one of the principal kami of Shinto.

Islam is focused not on material things but on seeking and knowing the goodness and purity of God in the here and now (Ismail and Haron 2014; Joshanloo 2014). In essence, Muslims believe that God is the ultimate source of happiness in the world.

Judaism

Judaism is another major western monotheistic religion (Schiffman 2003). The Torah, or law provided by God, which is composed of the original five books of Moses, is central to the teachings of Judaism. The core values of Judaism include the following: God created the universe; God is invisible; God is an omnipresent and naturalistic presence throughout the universe; and Moses was the original and main prophet of God. Happiness and bliss are derived from accepting and practicing the laws and scriptures provided by God (Ismail and Haron 2014). Becoming closer to and more aware of God through prayer and religious studies leads to spiritual delight and happiness. Moses Maimonides (1138–1204 CE) was a key early scholar in developing the ongoing and modern Jewish worldview (Tirosh-Samuelson 2003). Maimonides, in a rationalistic manner, codified and organized the laws of God as reflected in the core values of the Torah. A key modern interpretation of Jewish happiness also holds that happiness occurs when a belief in Jewish scriptures related to God is combined with altruistic actions to better the human condition in the present (Gilman 2010).

Hinduism

The most prominent holy book related to Hindu beliefs is the Bhagavad Gita (Datta 2021), which provides a description of how to live a happy and meaningful life. In chapter 18, it describes how happiness and bliss can be achieved through a focus on Hindu spirituality. Yoga in particular is practiced as a form of meditation to center and calm the mind in a non-attached manner that is removed from worldly suffering. The Bhagavad Gita also counsels that free will allows a person to pursue an enlightened, happy, and blissful life or to follow a more unsavory path. This is based on how Hindus approach Artha, or not seeking undue wealth and property; Kama, or not seeking undue erotic love and pleasure; Moksha, or enlightenment; and Dharma, or the tenets of duty, virtue, and morality (Datta 2021). Enlightenment in Hinduism suggests a greater awareness of the nature of the cosmos, by which one overcomes suffering, and this brings joy, bliss, and happiness.

Shinto

Shinto, introduced in the sixth century CE, is a major Japanese indigenous religion in which adherents follow and worship invisible spiritual beings known as kami (BBC 2011; Hirai 2022). Kami are often found in nature, such as when they exist in rivers and mountains. Shinto involves rituals and ethical considerations that aid human beings to communicate with and experience the world with the kami. However, Shinto has no central religious texts and no ironclad religious creeds (Hirai 2022). The kami are not deities, but are interested in making humans happy due to the proper respect and treatment of kami. Shinto also considers human nature to be primarily good, with no concept of original sin. Kami were and are also seen as protectors of Buddhism, which was introduced in Japan in 552 CE (Hirai 2022). This has allowed for the merging of Buddhist and Shinto beliefs.

Sikhism

Sikhism is a monotheistic religion featuring an invisible God. Sikhs believe that if a person follows the Dharma, or law, based on good karma, or the law of cause and effect, he or she can be reborn in an enlightened state that is blissful and happy (BBC 2022). In order to engage in good karma, Sikhs believe humans must act with love and compassion toward others. Other requirements of Sikhs include the belief in and focus on God, giving charity to others, engaging in work that does not harm other sentient beings, and doing selfless service for others (BBC 2022). Embodied in this is living a life that is truthful and practical, and counters undue ego craving for material things, sensual pleasure, and political power (BBC 2022; Nayar and Singh 2012).

Daoism

The Dao is also known as the path or the way. Daoists believe that the world has an underlying mysteriousness (Lobel 2017). There is a known reality all around us and then there are elements of the vast cosmos and universe that are not known. The universe is considered to be in continual flux, with an endless flow and interaction of energy and matter. The universe existed before heaven and earth and has no purpose. It is what it is. There are no dualities in one unified universe. In order to become aware of this universe, Daoists believe in effortless actions that move beyond the normal human reality of our everyday senses. This provides insight and intuition into the ways of the universe. Effortless action occurs when a person practices meditation and being cognitively open to

the nature of reality. From this comes a centering in the ways of the universe that creates a calm related to life's ups and downs. This clarity of the way of reality also brings joy and happiness.

Conclusion

The Buddhist path to happiness occurs as sentient beings become enlightened, having freed themselves of all causes of suffering, and experienced the world with happiness and bliss (Givel 2015). When Buddhist happiness is compared with other particular paths to happiness practiced by other major religions, we find differences including varying forms of religious worship, differences around whether life on planet earth is dualistic or non-dualistic, and varying approaches to better the greater community. Some religious traditions, like Buddhism and Daoism, do not require a deity, while others such as Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity contain one or more deities. All major religious traditions are predicated on specific moral codes of right or wrong, which are the keys to living a happy life.

While there are significant differences in the traditions and cultural paths pursued to obtain happiness, all major eastern and western religious traditions also have common themes of happiness such as detached and non-judgmental mindful awareness in the present, seeking altruistic wisdom in human relations, and compassionate behavior (Lobel 2017). While there are commonalities, differences in the pursuit of happiness in world religions also mean that there is no universal definition of happiness in the major religions of the East and West. ❑

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Notes

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5. Evagrius, *Chapters on Prayer* #11; p. 57.

6. Evagrius, *Chapters on Prayer* #52; p. 63.

7. Evagrius, *Praktikos* #56; p. 31; see also #81; p. 36.

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20. Augustine, *Confessions*, IX.x.25; p. 172.

Does Religion Make Us Happier?

by Kayonda Hubert Ngamaba

A positive correlation between religion and subjective well-being has been reported in the empirical research.

Summary

This study looks at whether members of various religious groups experience differing levels of happiness and life satisfaction. The major world religions were investigated here, including Christianity (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant), Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism, as well as Other Religious Groups and the Nonreligious (Atheist, Agnostic, and people reporting "None").

Utilizing the World Values Survey from 1981 to 2014, this study found that individual religiosity and the level of country development play a significant role in shaping people's happiness. Buddhists, Protestants, and Roman Catholics reported a higher degree of happiness and life satisfaction than other groups, whereas Eastern Orthodox reported the lowest levels. One conclusion reached by the study is that religious groups and governments across the globe can increase happiness and life satisfaction by improving the health status, household financial condition, and freedom of choice among their citizens.

Happiness and Life Satisfaction: Not a New Concept

What makes people happy is a challenging question—one that has been debated throughout history. Philosophers such as Aristippus, Aristotle, Zhuangzi, Jesus Christ, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham, and Bertrand Russell have recognized happiness and life satisfaction as among the highest and most important attainments in life.

The terms "happiness" and "life satisfaction" have been used interchangeably to assess subjective well-being, but there is strong evidence to suggest that these terms are not precisely correlated. Happiness is more associated with emotions, feelings, or moods; life satisfaction is concerned with people's judgments about life as a whole, which might include more cognitive evaluations of their career or personal relationships (Howell and Howell 2008; Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith 1999). Beyond the affective component (which is to say, happiness), this study also investigates the cognitive component (that is, life satisfaction) to get a better picture of subjective well-being across religions (Boldt, 2006; Brockmann, Delhey, Welzel, and Yuan 2009).

Are Happy People Necessarily Religious?

Among the first methodologically sound studies of happiness is the work of Warner Wilson, which suggests that, yes, the "happy person" tends to be religious, but also to be young, healthy, well-educated, well-paid, optimistic, extroverted, married, of high self-esteem, worry free, of either gender, with high job morale and modest aspirations, and of wide-ranging intelligence (Wilson 1967, 294).

A positive correlation between religion (or spirituality) and people's subjective well-being has been reported in the empirical research. Most findings would suggest that religion is of some benefit in terms of people's sense of personal well-being, particularly in such areas as expressing emotions (Kim-Prieto and Diener 2009); encouraging virtues such as gratitude, caring, and charitable actions (McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang 2002); coping with adversity (Fischer, Ai, Aydin, Frey, and Haslam 2010); and having strong social connections (Jung 2014).

Nevertheless, most of these studies have limitations, and questions have been raised about the representativeness of these findings, because previous studies have been restricted to only a few religious groups and within-country analyses, disregarding other relevant contextual influences (Eichhorn 2013; Linley et al. 2009; Lobao and Hooks 2003; Lun and Bond 2013). Hence, several authors have called for a cross-national study of the link between religion and subjective well-being, as well as folding national and social contexts into the analyses (Lun and Bond 2013; Masud and Haron 2008).

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Aims

This study looks at whether members of various religious groups experience differing levels of happiness and life satisfaction. It looks at participants' happiness across a broad range of religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Other Religions, and Nonreligious groups. It also investigates the role of variation within some religious groups such as Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox, because these sub-groups have different traditions and may have different intensities of emotions (Kim-Prieto and Diener 2009; McCullough et al. 2002).

The list of major religions selected in this study was drawn from the Pew Forum on Religion and is comprised of the following: Christians (31.4% of the world population), Muslims (23.2%), Hindus (15.0%), Buddhists (7.1%), Jews (0.2%), Other Religious Groups (e.g., Ancestor Worship, 0.8%), and the Nonreligious (e.g., Atheist, Agnostic, people answering "None" or "Unaffiliated," 16.4%) (Pew Research Center 2015).

Definition of Each Religious Group

It would be beyond the scope of this study to define each religious affiliation group comprehensively, and this study does not endeavor to do so. Nonetheless, here are our operating assumptions, in brief:

Christians may be described as those who believe in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Within Christianity are various denominations such as Roman Catholics, who recognise the pope in the Vatican as the leader of the church; Eastern Orthodox, who identify their roots in the early Church of the Christian Era, with most adherents living in Russia, Eastern Europe, or the Middle East; and Protestants, who historically attempted to reform the Catholic Church—a category that includes Anglicans, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals.

Muslims are those who believe in the teachings of Mohammad as the messenger of Allah; this group includes the Shia and Sunni sects.

Buddhists subscribe to the Middle Way and follow the teachings outlined by the Buddha in order to eventually achieve enlightenment, or buddhahood, as the goal of life.

Hindus observe certain spiritual rituals and practices with the goal of achieving *moksha*, or liberation from the cycle of karma and samsara.

Jews trace their origins to the ancient Hebrew people of Israel. They believe in the Torah, which comprises the laws given to their people at Sinai.

While Hinduism recognizes multiple gods, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are considered monotheistic, Abrahamic religions (Pew Research Center 2015).

How Do We Measure Happiness and Life Satisfaction?

Happiness was assessed here using a self-report scale of 1–4 questions: "All things considered, how happy are you?" with 1 being not at all happy and 4 being very happy.

Life satisfaction was assessed using a self-report scale of 1–10 questions: "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?" where 1 stands for very dissatisfied and 10 stands for very satisfied. To closely model people's everyday experience and capture subjective well-being (SWB) better, we have used both happiness and life satisfaction as outcome variables.

Several factors were used to predict people's happiness and life satisfaction, such as religious affiliation, socio-demographic factors, household financial satisfaction, health status, income scale, trust levels, freedom of choice, control over life, attendance of religious services, friendships, level of country development, level of social hostilities, and geographical regions.

Religious Affiliation

Participants were asked to give the name of their religious denomination, and those who were not believers or affiliated to any religious group were able to select Nonreligious. A dummy variable for each religious group was created (e.g., 1 = Muslim and 0 = otherwise).

Analysis

Before running the multilevel mixed-effects regression analysis (Fig. 1), the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether there are any significant differences between the means of these religious groups.

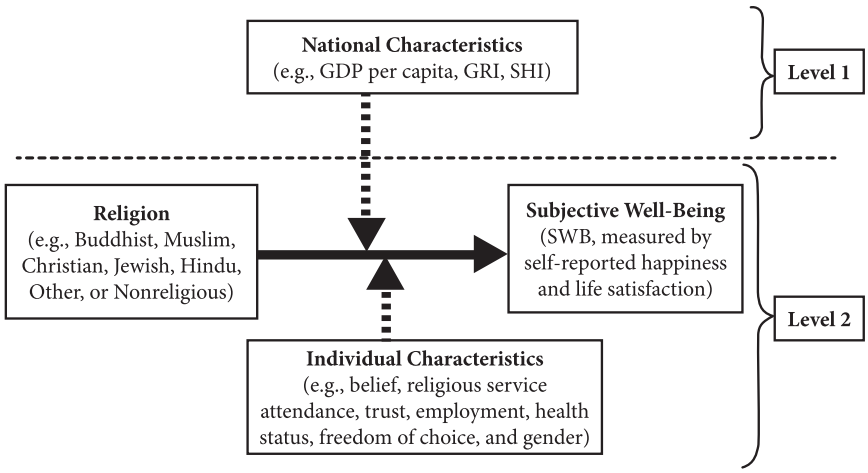

Fig. 1: Visual representation of theoretical multilevel structure investigating the variability in happiness and life satisfaction across religions.

Findings

The average happiness (on a scale of 1 to 4) was slightly higher amongst Protestants (M = 3.21, SD = 0.72), followed by Buddhists (M = 3.17, SD = 0.63), Other Religions (M = 3.17, SD = 0.72), Roman Catholics (M = 3.13, SD = 0.72), Jews (M = 3.06, SD = 0.73), Hindus (M = 3.05, SD = 0.78), Muslims (M = 3.03, SD = 0.76), the Nonreligious (M = 3.02, SD = 0.71) and finally, Eastern Orthodox (M = 2.72, SD = 0.76), who reported the lowest relative happiness. There was a significant effect of religion on happiness at the $p < .05$ level for the different groups [F (8, 316630) = 1299.72, $p = 0.001$].

A similar pattern was seen for life satisfaction. The average life satisfaction (on a scale of 1 to 10) was slightly higher amongst Roman Catholics (M = 7.12, SD = 2.31), followed by Protestants (M = 7.07, SD = 2.33), Other Religions (M = 6.97, SD = 2.26), Buddhists (M = 6.88, SD = 2.00), Jews (M = 6.85, SD = 2.23), the Nonreligious (M = 6.62, SD = 2.30), Hindus (M = 6.23, SD = 2.50), Muslims (M = 6.16, SD = 2.55), and, finally, Eastern Orthodox (M = 5.43, SD = 2.49), reporting the lowest relative life satisfaction. There was a significant inflection point of religion on life satisfaction at the $p < .05$ level for the various groups [F (8, 319261) = 2059.44, $p = 0.001$]. Amongst all religious groups, Eastern Orthodox had the lowest SWB. The correlations, tested prior to analysis, suggest a negative correlation between the Eastern Orthodox and both happiness and life satisfaction ($r = -0.144$, $r = -0.155$, $p < 0.01$, respectively).

In terms of happiness, the multilevel analysis showed the greatest positive associations with having a belief in God, being Protestant, female, married, younger (16 to 24 years old), with high financial satisfaction, positive health status, a high degree of freedom of choice, a sense of national pride, a high level of trust, quality friendships, time for family and leisure, and weekly religious service attendance. Being unemployed and in low-income-scale groups were negatively correlated with happiness.

Concerning life satisfaction, a similar trend was observed. The multilevel analysis showed a positive association between being female, household financial satisfaction, positive health status, freedom of choice, national pride, trust, weekly religious attendance, a belief in God, and positive associations with friends, family, and leisure. On the other hand, being unemployed or in low-income-scale groups were negatively correlated with life satisfaction.

According to Cohen's rules of thumb (Cohen 1992) only three factors were above the "small" effect size (> 0.10). State of health, household financial satisfaction, and freedom of choice showed "medium" effect sizes and were positively associated with happiness and life satisfaction.

Discussion

In terms of happiness, individuals who described themselves as Protestants or Buddhists were characterized by high experiences of happiness compared to other groups. Concerning life satisfaction, Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Buddhists were more satisfied with their lives than any other group. On the other hand, those who described themselves as Eastern Orthodox were less happy and less satisfied with their lives compared to other groups. Variability in happiness and life satisfaction across religious groups has been supported empirically, although some religious groups have never been investigated across countries. For example, our results reported higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction amongst Protestants compared to other religious groups, as some cross-national studies have stated (Ferriss 2002; Rözer and Kraaykamp 2013).

An important question has been asked in the literature: does religiosity make people happier, or are they happier because they belong to a happy nation, for example (Eichhorn 2013; Linley et al. 2009; Lobao and Hooks 2003; Lun and Bond 2013)? Our results provide empirical support suggesting that religiosity and level of national development both play an important role in shaping people's happiness and life satisfaction. A comparison between people living in Latin America versus those living elsewhere may support our findings. With the same GDP per capita, living in Latin America—a region traditionally Roman Catholic and Protestant in orientation—might explain the high levels of happiness and life satisfaction compared to Eastern Europe where the collapse of communism has left something of a spiritual

vacuum (Inglehart et al. 2008). Also, our study found that Orthodox Christians living in Eastern Europe self-reported lower levels of happiness and life satisfaction compared to those living in Latin America.

The most significant factors driving happiness and life satisfaction include state of health, household financial satisfaction, income-ranking position, level of employment, freedom of choice, national pride, trust, the importance of friends, family, leisure, being a female, and weekly religious attendance. Nonetheless, when Cohen's rules of thumb (Cohen 1992; Wright 1992) were applied, most factors seem to have a "small" effect size ($r \leq 0.10$). Thus, the most significant factors driving happiness and life satisfaction were state of health, household financial satisfaction, and freedom of choice.

Conclusions

This study has provided empirical support suggesting that religiosity and the level of development within one's country both play a significant role in shaping the subjective well-being of people. Religious groups that promote good values such as freedom of choice, freedom of emotions, gratitude, and social connections may improve the subjective well-being of their members. It is suggested in the data that health status, household financial satisfaction, and freedom of choice are means by which governments and institutions can improve the subjective well-being of their citizens. ❑

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Making the Case for Religion as a Means to Happiness

by Yoshihide Sakurai

We must speak afresh about the relationship between religion and happiness, in a way that people of no particular religious faith can understand.

What Is Happiness?

Happiness is hard to define. The word commonly used to denote happiness in Japanese, *shiawase* (幸せ), does not have its own entry in *Kōjien*, Japan's most widely used dictionary. Instead, it appears as the third sub-entry under another word that, although pronounced the same, is written using different characters (仕合わせ). *Kōjien* defines this word as follows: "(1) fortune, fate; (2) course of events; (3) happiness, good fortune (also written 幸せ)." It was traditionally believed in the Sinosphere (or East Asian cultural sphere) that prayer and divination could bring good luck. It was believed that the so-called blessings that arise from religious belief are the source of happiness.

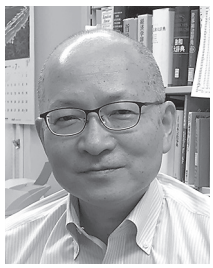
Buddhism, however—which has had a profound spiritual and cultural impact since its emergence in India sometime between the late sixth and early fourth centuries BCE, and its introduction to Japan via China in the sixth century CE—advocates a spiritual tranquility that is seemingly at odds with the idea that happiness stems from being blessed with honors and treasures. Eschewing terms corresponding to "happiness," the Infinite Life Sutra and the Amitabha Sutra use *anraku* to describe the peaceful state of mind achieved in the next life after rebirth in paradise. The Lotus Sutra uses *annon* to describe the peaceful state of mind attained in the Buddha land. Both terms mean something akin to "peace and comfort."

But what about in today's world? Psychologists in the main believe happiness to equate to an individual's mood or emotions, and measure it using questions designed to ascertain a person's mental state. Martin E. P. Seligman, the US-born founder of positive psychology, identified the following factors as sources of well-being in his PERMA Model: 1. Positive Emotion (P), 2. Engagement (E), 3. Positive Relationships (R), 4. Meaning (M), and 5. Accomplishment/Achievement (A). Seligman also drew attention to the relationship between virtuous living and well-being, and his research bears the fingerprints of the Christian churchgoing way of life that underpins many American communities. In fact, a number of social scientists have observed that it is not unusual for people to derive all five of the above factors from their involvement in church life.

Many economists, on the other hand, adopt the *homo economicus* view that humans seek utility, and that happiness is measurable by the degree to which that utility is satisfied. Because money is needed to obtain utility, runs the argument, people with higher incomes are generally happier. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, it began to appear that life satisfaction was failing to increase

Photo: Steve Vidler / PPS

A statue of Amida Buddha at Kōtoku-in, a Buddhist temple of the Jodo sect, in Kamakura. In the Infinite Life Sutra and the Amitabha Sutra, anraku, *or peace and comfort, is used to describe the peaceful state of mind achieved in the next life after rebirth in paradise.*



Yoshihide Sakurai serves as professor of sociology at Hokkaido University in Sapporo, Japan, having studied comparative religion in Thailand, South Korea, China, and Japan for over thirty years. His recent work focuses on the relationship between well-being and religious consciousness. He has written a number of books and articles on religious extremism and cults in Japan, which suggest that religion has a positive function but also a shadow side—one that should not be ignored.

in developed countries, despite economic growth making people richer. This phenomenon is known as the Easterlin Paradox, after the economist Richard Easterlin, who first observed it in 1974. Diminishing levels of life satisfaction and changes in the nature of satisfaction began to emerge in Japan, too, beginning in the late 1980s.

In developed countries, therefore, researchers have revisited the question of what exactly constitutes happiness and well-being. I have been researching the relationship between well-being and religion since 2010, and below I endeavor to explain why.

Does Religion Make People Happy?

The proposition that religion makes people happy has traditionally been accepted as self-evident all over the world, and it is still prevalent today. However, public opinion surveys and my own research show that while in Japan some believe in the importance of religious piety in the sense of worshipping a divine being or beings, less than 30 percent of the population actually have an affiliation with a religious establishment such as a temple, shrine, or church, and just a few percent report having any conscious religious belief. Although Japan is home to many religious leaders, researchers, and establishments, it is the most secularized country in the world. In a break from the state Shinto policy of the prewar years, church and state have been strictly separated in public spheres in Japan since World War II. Public schools, local governments, and the mass media are consequently reluctant to explore whether religion makes people happy, and very few social science researchers consider value systems and religious life in their research on well-being and health. It has to be admitted, however, that the situation in Japan is highly unusual, both socially and academically, in comparison to other countries (Sakurai 2019, 2020a).

Another factor that has contributed to this situation is the 1995 Tokyo subway attack, in which members of the religious doomsday organization Aum Shinrikyō released sarin gas on five subway lines, killing 13 people and seriously injuring more than 6,000 others. This incident made some Japanese people, especially those in the judiciary and police, question whether religion could be considered fundamentally good, which significantly diminished the overall credibility of religion in the eyes of ordinary citizens. The religious community tried to limit the impact by arguing that Aum Shinrikyō was a cult, not a religion. Following this incident, however, the number of people joining either traditional or new religions declined, and the population of existing believers shrank (and aged) noticeably. This was at a time in which Japan had recently become a super-aged society, with an elderly population accounting for over 20 percent of the total population.

Given this socio-religious environment, both religious leaders and researchers of religion appear to have abandoned any attempt to convince the public that religion makes people happy. All that religious groups are now capable of doing is telling believers that faith is "important" or "beneficial," and they have fallen into a growth cycle of ever-diminishing scale. Even many researchers seem only to address believers or those who are interested in religion.

Photo: Yomiuri Shimbun / AFLO

The highly toxic nerve gas sarin was released by several leading members of Aum Shinrikyō in the Tokyo city's subway system on March 20, 1995.

It is my belief that it is precisely in Japan, where religion is on the decline, that religious leaders and researchers of religion must speak afresh about the relationship between religion and happiness, in a way that people of no particular religious faith can understand. One effective way of doing so is not only by talking about religion in the language of religion, but also by drawing on the language of the social sciences.

Subjective vs. Objective Dimension of Well-Being

Has religion, by its nature, sought to increase human happiness? Comprehensive social surveys in Europe and the US have pointed to a link between religion and increased well-being. Traditional religions hold that renouncing the short-term sense gratification of hedonism allows one to attain permanent happiness, or eudemonia; liberation and eternal life are said to lie beyond worldly gratification. Let us now explore in greater depth the conceptual characteristics of religious well-being.

The German sociologist Wolfgang Zapf created a fourfold typology that combines subjective evaluations of well-being with objective indicators of good and bad living conditions (Zapf 1984: 25), which I paraphrase here.

		Subjective well-being	
		Good	Bad
Objective living conditions	Good	Type I Well-being	Type III Dissonance
	Bad	Type II Adaptation	Type IV Deprivation

Fig. 1: Typology of attitudes of life

Type I: Self-evident well-being (when subjective well-being and objective indicators are both high):
Members of the upper middle class in developed countries are likely to be satisfied with their lives and their livelihoods. However, as "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25; New International Version Bible), it is rare for people who are happy with their current situation to shake off the yoke of habit to become devout believers (apart from exceptional individuals such as ascetics and the founders of historical religions).

Type II: Happiness as adaptation (when subjective well-being is high, despite low objective indicators):
Members of the lower class in developed countries, as well as the lower middle class in developing countries, adapt to their circumstances and acquire a culture of abiding without complaint. Some believe that they should accept their lot in life, because everything happens by the will of God. Others believe that if the level of happiness enjoyed in this life depends on the amount of merit gained in previous lives, then merit should be accumulated uncomplainingly in this life in preparation for the next. The religious culture embedded in this manner of living (or "practice") is not learned as doctrine.

Type III: Nudged toward happiness in response to cognitive dissonance (when low subjective well-being is prevalent despite high objective indicators):
Members of the middle and upper middle classes in developed countries, especially young people, are often seen to be of this type. When life is ostensibly good but people feel dissatisfied, having a religious culture that encourages people to realize how fortunate they are is crucial. As Dōgen, founder of the Sōtō sect of Zen Buddhism, wrote in his essay on the eight truths of a great human being contained in *Shōbōgenzō* ("The True Dharma-Eye Treasury," https://www.bdk.or.jp/document/dgtl-dl/dBE_T2582_Shobogenzo4_2008.pdf), "Those who do not know satisfaction, even if rich, are poor. People who know satisfaction, even if poor, are rich." Resolving this dissonance so that people can experience happiness has traditionally been the role of religion.

Type IV: Well-being premised on rebellion against deprivation in pursuit of

Source: Wikimedia Commons File: Mengshan.jpg

The author writes, "When the common people had nothing to lose, they often joined millenarian movements that sought to change the world." This picture shows a historic monument to the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64) in Mengshan town in Wuzhou Prefecture, Guangxi, China, which caused the bloodiest civil war in world history.

utopia (when both subjective well-being and objective indicators are low): In the past, when people faced unstable circumstances, had no future prospects, and could not adapt through resignation as in Type II, they had no alternative but to rise up against the regime. When the common people had nothing to lose, they often joined millenarian movements that sought to change the world. Even today, deprived people account for half of the world's population, and the question for contemporary religions is how to teach young people to live a life that is not rooted in religious extremism.

Viewed this way, the dynamism of religion that produces happiness appears to proponents of scientistic social theory as a form of false consciousness or inverted value consciousness, and a threat to secularist power. That is why Marxism denounces religion as the opiate of the masses, for its role in legitimizing the social order and forcing the less fortunate to adapt, and why communist states have attempted to harshly suppress and control religion. However, religion did not die out in the former Communist bloc; rather, it has been reinvigorated there (Sakurai 2020b, 2022).

To understand religion's resilience, it is not enough to consider, like Zapf, only the cognitive aspects of religion. It is also necessary to consider the positive feelings and human relationships that religion and religious culture can help to cultivate.

Place, Role, and Affirmation

Due to space constraints, we refer the reader to the psychological and sociological literature for further information about how religion supports people's sense of happiness and sensory factors (Sakurai 2019), and hasten now to our conclusion.

The condition that most reduces happiness is isolation—a feeling of loneliness in which relationships with others are lost, along with a sense of alienation and feeling that one may as well not exist. As social animals, humans cannot find meaning in life on our own. Having one's own role to play in relationship with others, and being recognized for it, is what makes life worth living.

While it would be nice to enjoy the threefold satisfaction of having a place to belong, a role to play, and affirmation of one's being, such as in the family, local community, school, workplace, or gatherings with fellow hobbyists, this can be difficult to achieve nowadays due to the weakening of social ties and human relationships.

As such circumstances emerge during periods of social change, people seek new places, new roles, and new ways of being accepted. This was the case with the religious boom in postwar Japan, the rise of religion in China since it began reform and opening-up policy, and in Eastern Europe and Russia since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Many people are looking for somewhere they can live in peace and comfort, enjoy meaningful relationships, and be told that, whoever they are, there is a way for them to contribute and belong. Can we feel a sense of hope in today's world of unceasing war and climate change, or in the society of tomorrow in which artificial intelligence and robots take human jobs? What today's religions need to do is quite simple: they need to offer concrete proposals that pay serious attention to the question of human happiness. ❑

Source: Wikimedia Commons File: День Святой Троицы. Престольный праздник.jpg

Trinity Sunday in Russia. The Orthodox Church has experienced a great revival since the fall of communism.

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Be Who You Are

An Interview with Rev. Kodo Nishimura

Kodo Nishimura, born in Tokyo in 1989, is a person of many faces—Buddhist monk, makeup artist, LGBTQ+ activist, model. After graduating from the Parsons School of Design in New York City, Nishimura pursued a career as a makeup artist, working behind the scenes of the Miss Universe pageant and New York Fashion Week. In 2015, he began his training as a monk in Japan, and was certified by the Pure Land school. As an activist, he has spoken at the United Nations Population Fund and Zojoji temple in Tokyo, as well as at Yale and Stanford Universities. His story has attracted wide-ranging media attention, from magazines such as* Lion's Roar*,* Tricycle*, and* Vogue *to the* New York Times*, CNN and BBC News. In 2021 Nishimura was selected by* TIME *as a Next Generation Leader. His book* This Monk Wears Heels: Be Who You Are *has been published in seven languages, including Japanese and English.

Dharma World: How did you decide to pursue a career as a makeup artist?
Kodo Nishimura: When I was young, I really loved roleplaying as a Disney princess. I would wear my mother's skirts, along with *furoshiki*, which is the cloth used to wrap monks' robes, which I would put around my head, making it look like long hair, like Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*. I also loved teaching other girls in kindergarten how to be a princess. But because of societal expectations (boys were expected to behave like boys), I was taken away from my passion for beauty and fashion.

When I arrived in the United States, I was able to see many biological men wearing and selling makeup at the cosmetics counter, and I felt like maybe this was something I could do. At that time I was feeling self-conscious about my look as a Japanese person. Everybody around me was much taller than me, with blue eyes and blonde hair. I felt that, because I am Japanese, I couldn't feel beautiful. It's also because I was looking at Cinderella and Sailor Moon—they both have blonde hair and blue eyes.

But in 2007, the winner of Miss Universe Japan went to the international contest, and she won the crown as Miss Universe 2007. This made me realize I didn't have to feel inferior or self-conscious because of my ethnicity or nationality. That's when I started to love myself, be proud of myself, and express myself using my passion for makeup.

When I was in high school, I didn't have any friends because of my sexuality. I didn't want to expose my feelings to anybody. I was really quiet and always alone. But in the United States, I made a friend. She was another Japanese international student. She was struggling with

Rev. Nishimura responds cheerfully during the online interview with Dharma World *on June 17.*

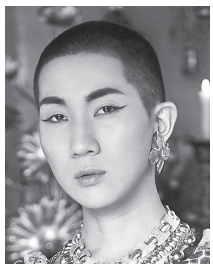

Photo: Masaki Sato

Kodo Nishimura rose to fame following his appearance on "Queer Eye: We're in Japan." His work as a Buddhist monk and makeup artist has received global media attention, leading to his selection as a TIME *Next Generation Leader. His book* This Monk Wears Heels: Be Who You Are *(Watkins / Penguin Random House) has been published in seven languages. His mission is to empower all people by sharing Buddhist wisdom (with a touch of makeup).*

some personal problems, and was even considering returning home. I wanted to help her and encourage her, like, "Please stay, you're my best friend. I want you to do well."

Then I decided to do her makeup one night, and she transformed so much. You know how some girls, they transform with just a little eyeliner? She was that kind of girl, and what was so interesting was that the confidence she gained did not wash away when the makeup did, it remained. This inspired me to study harder so I could encourage people like her even more.

So wearing makeup can be a tool to help boost people's confidence?

The reason why some people aren't confident about their bare face is, in part, because they're judging other people by their appearance. If you start to change how you value people, if you focus not just on how they look but how professional they are, how compassionate, how nice a person is—focusing on that inner beauty—then in turn you will not lack confidence in yourself.

It's something that I had to work through as well, as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Men with muscular bodies and fashionable styles, they are idealized, especially in advertisements and on social media. I was trying to be one of them—to go to the gym and wear nice clothes—but it's not very easy and it's not possible for everyone.

So instead of focusing only on physical beauty, I decided to change my mentality. Okay, I'm going to find a partner who will see my inner self, who is going to appreciate me for who I am, not just how I look. That's what I'm looking for in other people. I don't care if you look beautiful or put on nice makeup, it's all about who you are inside.

This is something I also learned from my Miss Universe experience. Even if somebody looks beautiful, if that person is not able to help other people feel good about themselves, then they lose some of that beauty, in my eyes. I learned that the most important thing is beauty of the heart. I mean of course it's nice to have a balance. It's nice to amplify ourselves and feel beautiful. But as long as our heart is the source of how we value ourselves and others, I think we are able to preserve that confidence.

In Japan today, many Buddhist monks, ministers, and priests, regardless of the school they belong to, are getting married and having families. Why did you decide to become a Buddhist monk?

I was born into temple life. People around me expected me to inherit the temple from the time I entered elementary school, so it was like, "Kodo, you must shave your head. You need to practice chanting. It is your duty to inherit the temple." This made me very angry because I felt that they were trying to dictate my future. As someone who loved roleplaying and loved fashion, I felt that Buddhism was somehow too minimalistic, too free of desire and kind of boring, so I was feeling rebellious.

When I arrived in New York and began my studies at art school, I saw that there were many students from all over the world—Bahrain, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, Myanmar. I wanted to know who I was and to show my uniqueness, so I was using *origami* and Japanese flower arrangement in my art projects, because it felt like something Japanese and something that only I could do. (Actually, anybody can do it with a little time and patience, but that wasn't what was on my mind at the time.)

For me to talk about my home, which is the temple, and my struggle with my sexuality, I realized these were things I needed to face. I thought, "What if I learn what it is to become a Buddhist monk? What if I go into training, what kind of person can I become?" I was very curious how I might be able to evolve and become a better artist. Also, my mother, who is a piano teacher, was saying, "Kodo, you say that you don't like Buddhism. But if you say you don't like music—for example, Mozart—first you have to study his music, you have to play it, you have to practice. Once you understand what it is, only then can you criticize or give a valid opinion about it. If you haven't studied Buddhism, how can you really say you don't like it?"

I realized that this was true, actually. I was making judgments based on the prejudice or partial knowledge that I had. I realized it would be more reasonable for me to go to the temple and see through my own experience what it had to offer. And I actually found out, to my surprise, that Buddhism is really encouraging and supportive of all people, regardless of sexuality, race, status,

Photo: Mikio Hasui

or other differences. In fact, I learned that Buddhism has been supporting equal rights for thousands of years. It has become my mission to spread this message of equality around the world.

When you decided to train as a monk, did you have any hesitation or concerns?
Yes I did, partly because of the ceremonial choreography. The men step over with the left foot first, and the women lead with the right foot. But I didn't really know if I was a man or a woman—all I knew is that I felt like a princess. I knew my body was biologically male, but I didn't really identify that way. I am not a perfect man, nor am I a perfect woman. I am somewhere in between. I felt that maybe I was being overlooked, or maybe wasn't welcome at this school. Men and women are divided into groups to go to the shower, and women don't have to shave their heads, but I feel like a woman, too. I felt that maybe it wasn't really equal. That was my concern.

I am also a homosexual person who likes to wear makeup. Many of the teachings say "No makeup, no accessories." According to older or original teachings, you can only wear three robes—like two undergarments and the robe. I was really questioning: How can I be a competent monk, knowing that I'm not following the rules?

Toward the end of the training, I brought this to the attention of my master in Jodo Shu, Pure Land School. He said, "In Buddhism, everybody is equally celebrated, so your homosexuality is not an issue. The founder of our school, Honen, as well as the Buddha himself, will be proud to have you as a monk."

Your master's message is heartwarming. You must have been encouraged by his words.
There were so many monk teachers who told me, "You always have to wear monks' robes, so that whenever anybody sees you, it's clear that you are a monk." But for me, I feel like being a monk is not only about how you present yourself physically. The most important thing is why you wanted to become a monk in the first place—to help other people. My master, who helped me, was really logical, forward thinking, and yes, very, very understanding. I really am grateful that I met him.

Do you feel your two careers as makeup artist and Buddhist monk have something in common or conflict in any way?
According to the Flower Garland Sutra, sublime virtue requires a sublime appearance, which means that when you look beautiful you can inspire more people. If you present yourself as dirty and shabby, how can you expect other people to take you seriously?

I think that many people only focus on the minimalistic teachings because

it's easy to just simplify. But there are other teachings too that people don't focus on enough, in my opinion. There needs to be an understanding and deeper exploration in order to really learn what Buddhism is about. There is actually no conflict in that sense.

Do you think Buddhism will change along with the larger cultural shifts we see happening in the world?

I feel that Buddhism has already been changing. Well, in Thailand, monks still don't touch money or get married, but in Japan, Buddhism has needed to adapt to the society and our changing times. It has been evolving and will continue to do so. Yes, I would like to be a part of that change. It's not only about worshipping the ancestors, praying for salvation, or being guided to the Pure Land—it's also speaking out about equality and ensuring that everybody is able to claim their rights and have a voice. The lessons we learn from Buddhism can be really helpful in this.

How would you like to contribute to a society in which LGBTQ+ people can live in freedom and be themselves?

I would like to help achieve liberation for all people by using something fun and entertaining. For example, I like to write books and create graphic designs that are humorous and accessible. I actually made an anime character called Kodo el Liberador (Kodo the Liberator).

I think it's something fun and empowering. Instead of being angry and protesting, I would like to invite people to join the pride parade, with music or maybe a book, maybe with cute characters or something that makes it easier for people to learn. In this way, people can change their mentality. Hopefully, the law will change along with them.

Photo: Seth Miranda

There are many people in the world who still are not allowed to express themselves or be who they are. Do you have a message of encouragement for them?

I would say, find your tribe and that will make a way for you. In high school, I didn't have anybody I could talk to about my sexuality, but when I discovered the online world, I was able to connect with many people like me from around the world and share in my vulnerability and struggles, which really helped me to find my confidence.

I think that for various reasons, many people have not been fortunate enough to be educated about diversity, different ideas, different cultures. They've only been exposed to one universe that's limited, so they try to control others and oppress them. But when we're able to look beyond those social constraints—maybe with a different community, maybe online, and connect with like-minded people, life becomes much easier. ❑

ESSAY

The Contribution of Interreligious Dialogue to the Achievement of Peace

by Abraham Skorka

Religious leaders in our time must be models of the mutual respect that should characterize all human relationships.

Even after the terrible and abhorrent experience of the Second World War, wars have not ceased to erupt. The greater part of humanity often seems indifferent and apathetic to them, continuing with their daily routines and living mostly for pleasures and leisure. The common denominator lying beneath war and terrorism is a contempt and disregard for human life. Nation states not directly involved in the various conflicts look on as the carnage unfolds, weighing only their economic and political interests in the international arena. Petty interests far outweigh concern for the suffering and plight of victims. Organizations dedicated to peace often seem to bring more heat than light to the battle. Even religious leaders can become partisans in such clashes, invoking the sacred to justify what are really narrow self-interests.

Today Europe has awakened to yet another bloody conflict that shakes its foundations. Threats of nuclear attacks, speeches to foment tribal hatreds, and religious leaders who bless weapons and violence are outrages that affect not only that continent but the entire world. Kharkov, Kiev, Lvov—cities familiar from the great confrontations fought in them during World War II—now once again are sites of death and pain that cast terrifying shadows onto an unstable world.

Even countries not directly involved have been significantly impacted. The disruption of commerce in oil and gas from Russia and wheat from Ukraine generate widespread economic and supply crises, along with humanitarian ones. The world has seen the flight of millions of Ukrainian refugees, many of whom were received with care in neighboring countries—to those countries' great credit.

Unlike many local conflicts that do not profoundly alter the balance among great international powers, the Russian invasion of Ukraine raises the prospect of a direct confrontation between the East and the West, between Russia and NATO, accompanied by an implicit nuclear menace reminiscent of the Cold War era. The most dominant voices that we hear are those of politicians and state leaders. Voices of religious leaders seem like a whisper in the midst of a cacophony emitted by leaders who cause or take advantage of crises for their own gain. Meanwhile the human corpses continue to pile up.

Opposed to such devastation is a sense of the Transcendent that seems to have been part of the human experience since the dawn of humanity. It could be argued that all civilized societies are built upon an awareness of values and principles that inform their religious traditions and cultures. Most empowering, I believe, are interreligious dialogues, which until fairly recently mostly took place between individuals on an interpersonal level. There is, for instance, the famous relationship between the Jewish scholar Maimonides and the Islamic philosopher Averroes in Andalusia of the twelfth century, and the mutual influence they had on each other's thought. There were also fruitful interactions between medieval Jewish and Catholic mystics. These encounters had a great impact on the mutual spiritual enrichment of the participants, but did not lead to large-scale interreligious dialogue or the formation of global movements for peace until the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1893, the World's Columbian Exposition occurred in Chicago to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of the European discovery of the American continents. It attracted visitors from all over the world. At this auspicious time, Charles Carroll Bonney organized a "Parliament of the World's Religions." There were representatives from most of the major religious traditions, marking a milestone in the history of interreligious dialogue. This public gathering offered the unusual spectacle of numerous religious leaders interacting to jointly summon all peoples to come together in fraternity.

We should remember that although the twentieth century witnessed terrible destruction and death, there also arose great giants of the spirit who proclaimed the superiority of understanding, reconciliation, and dialogue over violence. Gandhi, Buber, Heschel, King, Küng, and Mandela are only a few names from a long list of people who dedicated their

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lives to infusing a common human ethic to serve as the basis for the construction of a different reality.

Another example of horror being answered by soul-searching and spiritual growth is the response of many Christian churches after the Second World War. Around fifty million people perished in that conflagration and countless atrocities were committed, including the *Shoah*—the industrialized, mechanical extermination of six million Jews merely for being Jews. Surely among the most horrendous crimes in history, this abomination demanded that Christians evaluate the role played by their hateful teachings and practices toward Jews over many earlier centuries. In 1965, the Catholic Church promulgated the declaration *Nostra Aetate* (from the Latin for "In our time") as a first step toward reconciliation and dialogue. From it has grown an unprecedented "journey of friendship," as Pope Francis has called it, that continues to grow and deepen. Nonetheless, many of the causes of the *Shoah* have not yet been fully confronted; neither have human beings yet succeeded in making the world morally healthier than it was in 1939.

There have been other great efforts since the end of the last world war to overcome the pervasiveness of violence. Thus, on February 4, 2019, Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb signed the Document on Human Fraternity and Common Coexistence as a response to the multiple forms of violence that plague different societies. Their statement was especially distressed by acts of violence committed in the name of God.

Photo: Alamy / PPS

Moses and Jethro *by James Tissot (1836–1902). The Jewish Museum, New York City.*

These are just two examples, among many that could be mentioned, of significant contributions toward the realization of a unifying spirituality that brings all humanity together in solidarity and mutual commitment. The present moment demands the combined efforts of all our religious traditions if this vision of love for and among all human beings is to be realized—one that sees aggression in any form as deeply inhuman.

I believe that religious leaders in our time must also be *inter*religious leaders. They must be models of the mutual respect and enablement that should characterize all human relationships. They must elevate the aspects of their traditions that promote human solidarity and peace, while relativizing self-serving ideas that in the past have led to conflict among religions and peoples. In this way their combined witness to the possibilities of unity amid difference will be credible, and their messages of peace will be more respected and impactful.

The current war raging in Europe, and other open or simmering battles elsewhere, show that it is not an easy task for religious leaders to see their responsibilities as embracing not only their co-religionists, but all humanity. However, it is essential that this happens. Political or national interests should not prevail over the commitment to dialogue and the deeds that dialogue inspires. This is the necessary interreligious character that our times require of religious leaders.

Exodus 18:21 tells how Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, advises him to appoint judges in order to lighten his work among the people. But he also advises him about the qualities that they should possess: those of courage, who fear God, who pursue the truth and spurn ill-gotten gains. It is only with such leaders, those who know how to cultivate justice and mercy, that the Godly society proposed by the Bible can develop—but today within a global vision and context. ❑

ESSAY

Buddhism's Role in Peacebuilding

by Somboon Chungprampree

Socially Engaged Buddhism is a wonderful way to cultivate peace by peaceful means.

Why We Need to Pursue Peace

Following World War II, countries around the world were understandably focused on stabilizing their economies as a tenuous peace emerged and a new era of development unfolded. Many international organizations were established at that time in order to meet the needs of an increasingly globalized community, including the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), among others. At the same time, the United States was continuing its ascendence as a superpower.

Then, at the end of the twentieth century, says Harsha Navaratne, Executive Committee Chair of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), Bangkok, a new liberalism began to emerge: "The story of democracy dominated by liberalism gave the world a new hope and future. The dream of liberalism was economic development, [which promised] opportunities for every individual, protection of human rights, maintenance of law and order, and most importantly [the granting of] political rights so that people [could now] select their own leaders to . . . take over governance" (*Enlightening Crisis: A Vision for a Post-COVID-19 World,* April 2020).

When communism crashed at the end of the twentieth century, Navaratne goes on to say, what remained was only a single- or multi-party political and governance system. "Today the story is different: dictatorship and one-party rule [have] emerged in many countries in the name of democracy. Most of these countries suffer from poverty, exploitation, structural violence, and internal conflict. Such phenomena have ruined people's day-to-day lives. Along with the message of democracy, concepts such as the free market, open boundaries, and globalizing economic systems came into existence. Local production was discouraged, while importing and producing for the export market became the mantra. Having embraced globalization and the global agenda, today the developing nations are in great chaos, caught in a huge debt trap that compromise[s] their own economic systems and . . . is disturbing countries' ecological systems," by stripping their natural resources and destroying biodiversity. People worship at the altar of consumerism and materialism, he says, and many have stopped believing in religion. As a result, people of South and Southeast Asia are losing their dream of liberalism and democracy.

Although the Cold War has ended, a new type of cold war has already begun between China and the United States, as Sino-American antagonism has increased in recent years. This is another manifestation of the struggle between so-called superpowers to dominate the world markets and feed consumer appetite.

Peace, from a Buddhist Perspective

Let's examine the Buddhist understanding of how to live in harmony with all beings through peaceful coexistence and respect for all of humanity. Buddhists believe that this is possible through nonviolent means—not force—based on *kalyanamitra*, or spiritual friendship.

In a number of his earliest recorded discourses, Shakyamuni Buddha preaches about not harming any living being, and practicing nonviolence to resolve potentially volatile conflicts. The Buddha did not teach violence as a means of solving problems. This makes it impossible for Buddhists to justify violence through scriptures and sacred texts—in fact, any act of violence, or the legitimization thereof, should be seen as violating Buddhist beliefs. Importantly, this perspective supports peacebuilding efforts in a profound way.

The Buddha's adherence to nonviolence rests on the basis of his teachings on overcoming suffering by following the Middle Way in cultivating ethics, wisdom, and compassion. The Middle Way eschews extremes of any kind, neither depriving nor indulging.

For Buddhist practitioners, the first of five ethical precepts is to abstain from harming or killing living beings (*ahimsa*). This and the other four precepts—to

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abstain from false speech, to abstain from taking what is not given, to abstain from sexual misconduct, and to abstain from intoxicants—are found throughout Buddhist traditions.

All five precepts are central to the Buddha's teachings on proper conduct and avoiding suffering, which is relevant for the sangha, the community of lay people and ordained or monastic Buddhists. These precepts are the religiously inspired ethical basis for peace-makers and peacebuilding initiatives within all societal levels, from the individual to the family, to the community and beyond.

Engaged Buddhism in Action

In modern times, the role of religion has been diminished by the growth of the nation state and the market-driven economy, where religion has in many ways been co-opted by consumerism. This condition brings about the ongoing challenges of:

- supporting marginalized groups that have traditionally been excluded from the mainstream economy,
- becoming a force for positive disruption in the modern economy, and
- offering alternative models of social enterprise that are congruent with right livelihood.

Individual and communal ethics alone cannot address the complexities of global politics in the wake of Ground Zero at Hiroshima, 9/11 in New York City, or the more recent Russia-Ukraine-NATO war. INEB's leading founder, Sulak Sivaraksa, has worked with Norwegian peace scholar Johan Galtung to better understand the root causes of violence, and to develop a deeper form of Buddhist practice called Socially Engaged Buddhism (SEB) to confront these complexities.

According Galtung, structural violence is summarized as the "systematic way a society's resources are distributed unequally and unfairly, preventing people from meeting their basic needs." This inequality and injustice is perpetuated by the three poisons of greed, anger, and delusion, which are the root of all forms of violence—personal, cultural, and structural. (Galttung's definition taken from Transcend, https://www.transcend.org/tms/2013/10/varieties-of-violence-structural-cultural-and-direct/)

Specifically, SEB can offer further support for developing the art of nonviolent diplomacy. The platform INEB uses for building relationships with interfaith organizations on shared issues of concern is *kalyanamitra*, which embraces diversity across cultures, religions, and countries. *Kalyanamitra* is the underlying premise for peaceful relations, through forming genuine relationships based on trust and the five forms of ethics mentioned above.

INEB, founded in 1989 in Siam (now known as Thailand), is a global network working to integrate the practice of Socially Engaged Buddhism with social action for a healthy, just, and peaceful world. As practitioners of buddhism with a small "b"— in the words of our founder Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa—we collaborate with social activists, spiritual leaders, academics, and young people from a wide variety of non-Buddhist backgrounds.

INEB focuses on building long-term relationships and being in right relationship, knowing that we can accomplish more when people work together. This model of friendship is not superficial, and reflects a deeper form of relating that connects INEB's members. *Kalyanamitra* is a key aspect of honoring the Buddhist precept to abstain from false speech and uphold right speech, and the first and most essential precept of *ahimsa*.

INEB's efforts, involving ordained monks and nuns as well as lay people, focus on building harmonious relations, alleviating suffering, attenuating consumerism, and contributing to sustainable development in many other ways. Widespread intensive education and training activities at the grassroots level support their activities. Currently, INEB is helping to develop a regional network of Buddhist peacebuilders that includes female, male, and non-binary people, both lay and ordained.

INEB's work embraces being in right relationship, through its initiatives in the South and Southeast Asia regions. Our network platform supports working closely with our partners around the world and has members in more than twenty-five countries. Our primary focus is to be continuously connected and kept current about network initiatives.

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ESSAY

Role of Religious Leaders in Enhancing Commitment to Respect Peace and Value People of Diverse Faiths

by Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan

God calls us to work together on shared challenges in eradicating the ills of our society.

The Danish Lutheran Theologian Lissi Rasmussen has called the union of interfaith dialogue and advocacy "diapraxis." Rasmussen writes: ". . . [B]y diapraxis I do not mean the actual application of dialogue, but rather dialogue as action. We need a more anthropological contextual approach to dialogue where we see diapraxis as a meeting between people who try to reveal and transform the reality they share." Similarly, I see dialogue as an active process—a way of living in co-existence and pro-existence.

By adopting this kind of prophetic approach—what I have called a "dialogue for life"—we can engage our faith in ways that address people's suffering, challenge structures of injustice, and cultivate civil society. In that spirit, allow me to share with you what I believe to be the role of religious leaders in enhancing our commitment to respect peace and value people of diverse faiths.

Religious Leaders Are to Be Prophetic

Throughout history, religion has often been used to legitimize the political power of the day. Too often, religious leaders have opted to remain quiet and complicit rather than confront injustice, for fear of losing their rights and status.

Contemporary religious leaders, conversely, must use the power of religion to speak truth to power and promote justice in their society and in the larger world. The prophetic leader does not seek to appease the powerful or maintain the status quo. Driven by a commitment to live out the command to love God and neighbor, prophetic leaders have often used their power to call for justice and secure human rights for all people—especially those dispossessed and marginalized by society. And the prophets have consistently opposed war, for it strips others of their human rights and dignity.

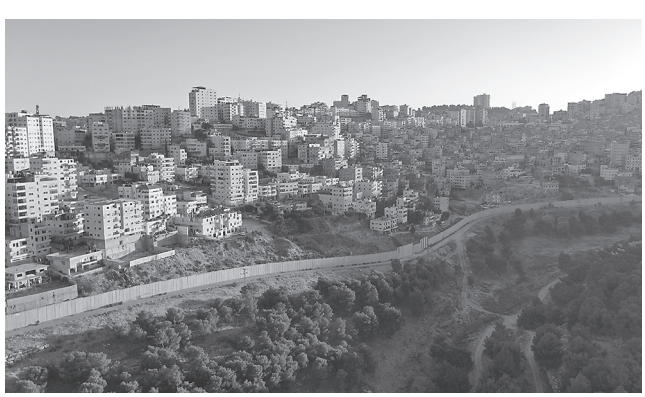

Photo: Shutterstock

The Israeli West Bank barrier is a separation barrier built by Israel inside parts of the West Bank.

In the Old Testament we find many examples of the prophets challenging injustice and abuses of power. Certainly Amos made no points with the ruling class when urged them to "[t]ake away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an overflowing stream" (Am 5:23–24). And the prophet Jeremiah suffered persecution for uttering powerful oracles that went against the prevailing wisdom of the time. Jesus Christ likewise suffered crucifixion for challenging the religious and political institutions of his day.

I believe that religious leaders have not always spoken out enough in service of justice. For example, how many countries suffer even today under oppression, human rights abuses, occupation, colonialism, and the like? Has the religious leadership spoken out enough about this? If faith leaders would only do so in a concerted way, there could emerge a beautiful symphony of voices to disrupt injustice and curtail human rights violations.

Some leaders today speak about freedom and democracy, but only from their own narrow national interests. In order that freedom and democracy may take root in developing countries around the world, it is our call as religious leaders to work for justice as a top priority—to clearly oppose war and the proliferation of weapons, be they conventional, nuclear, biological, or yet to be developed. Weapons are meant to destroy life. Peace and justice are meant to grow life abundantly.

Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan, Bishop Emeritus of the Evangelical Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, is a Palestinian refugee educated in Finland and the United States. He has been active in numerous faith organizations since his ordination in 1976, such as the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). He was the first to translate the Augsburg Confession, a key doctrinal document of the Lutheran Church, into Arabic.

As an Arab Palestinian Christian Evangelical Lutheran, as well as a Palestinian refugee living in Jerusalem, I call on all religious leaders to raise their voices for justice and to work for a two-state solution, which would include two nations living side by side on 1967 borders, a shared Jerusalem, a halting of all settlement activity, a solution to the refugee crisis, and the sharing of common resources. Such a solution would certainly bring about further regional cooperation.

We believe in justice and security for both Palestinians and Israelis. The litmus test for the West—primarily, that is, the European Union and the United States—is whether they can help bring about peace based on justice with a single, uniform standard throughout the entire Holy Land.

Religious Leaders Are to Be Catalysts for Reconciliation

According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, nearly 85 percent of people throughout the world profess a belief in God. Together we can have a huge impact on fostering global reconciliation. A 2000 study by the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, called "Vulnerability and Security," states: "The great world religions have both similarities and fundamental differences. And one of the most important similarities is actually a conviction that it is part of the innermost essence of religion to be a source of peace and reconciliation."

God has entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to us religious leaders and believers. As Saint Paul has taught us, "God [is] reconciling the world to Himself . . . and entrusting the ministry of reconciliation to us" (2 Cor 5:18). Reconciliation, simply put, is the restoration of friendship and harmony. I believe that people of faith are reconciled when each is able to acknowledge God in the other. Our Hindu friends call this *namaste*, or, "the divine in me bows to the divine in you." This suggests that we all share a common humanity and are equally worthy of love and respect. By extension, it means that we should all be afforded dignity, religious freedom, human rights, and reconciliation.

Reconciliation is at the very heart of our faith tradition as Christians. It was the work of Jesus Christ during His public ministry in ancient Israel, and it is the mission He passed down to us. I believe that such reconciliation should be seen as a priority for all religious leaders. This is not simply the absence of hatred—it is the creation of a shared vision of common values and a hope for the future. Reconciliation also requires that we bring down the walls of hatred and prejudice that divide us—the xenophobia, Islamophobia, antisemitism, and Christianophobia that we see today more than in ages past.

Reconciliation asks each faith tradition to take responsibility for its own actions. In March of 2000, Pope John Paul II provided an example when he issued the most comprehensive papal apology ever, in part confessing the sins of some members of the church who had persecuted Jews throughout history. In doing so, he set an example for forgiving the past, healing the present, and providing a common vision for the future. This is reconciliation par excellence.

But the question remains: Will other religious leaders follow the late pope's example and confess their various sins that have led to such entrenched problems as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Dalit persecution, the violence against the Muslim Rohingya, and other such challenges around the world?

Dialogue as Intentional Engagement with the Other

In order to understand what dialogue is, it's important first to understand what it is not: Dialogue is not an occasion for converting other people to one's own religion, or for challenging their beliefs. It is not intended to be a course in comparative religion. Its aim is not to judge other religions from the standpoint of one's own doctrines.

Interfaith dialogue is meant to dispel our ignorance of one another. We dialogue in order to learn how the other seeks to be understood. For instance, I want members of other faiths to know that Christianity has many faces, and that Christians who call for antagonism or hatred toward other religions do not speak for me or for Christianity at large.

In dialogue, we are set free from a system of exclusive doctrinal claims in order to listen to one another, to seek

mutual understanding, and, on the basis of this foundation, to pursue our shared values. In this way, religion becomes a positive, constructive force in a troubled world, seeking peace, co-existence, and *diakonia* (from the Greek for ministry or service).

If we want our children to behave appropriately, we must do so ourselves. As faith leaders, we must publicly engage with one another in a healthy, respectful way so that those we lead will have the opportunity to see people of other faiths as neighbors and allies for life, not enemies.

Honest Representation of the Other

As religious leaders, we must also endeavor to understand the other as they want to be understood, and also to share this understanding with our grassroots community, ensuring that our people get a fair and accurate picture of the other—not just the prejudices they hear on the street or in the media. We must oppose those who perform selective readings of the sacred texts of other faith traditions in an effort to tarnish their reputations. We must not allow extremists to appropriate our holy writings for their own purposes. We must not tolerate the language of denunciation, dehumanization, and demonization. Ultimately, we must teach our people a new language—a language of love and respect.

This is among the main efforts of the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land (CRIHL)—the first Jewish, Muslim, and Christian council in the Middle East and an organization for which I continue to provide leadership. Because change must begin with faith leaders themselves, we have established a hotline for monitoring derogatory remarks by rabbis, imams, and clergy about other faiths. We jointly call on all religions to teach the right thing about the other, and to use conciliant language, whether at home or at work, in the synagogue, at the mosque, or in the church.

This applies to our schools as well. We must ask ourselves if our school curricula—particularly around history and religion—are teaching the right thing about the other. How can we expect future generations to engage in civil society with the other if they do not see them as equal citizens and partners? For this reason, CRIHL is working with both the Israeli and Palestinian Ministries of Education to develop a curriculum of tolerance for use in the classroom.

In November 2004, His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan issued the Amman Message—a statement calling for tolerance and unity in the Muslim world. The statement condemns extremism and emphasizes Islam's core values of compassion, mutual respect, and tolerance. The following is an excerpt:

"On religious grounds, on moral grounds, we denounce the contemporary concept of terrorism which is associated with wrongful practices wherever they come from—including assaults on peaceful civilians, killing prisoners and the wounded, unethical practices such as the destruction of buildings, and ransacking cities. These despotic attacks on human life transgress the law of God, and we denounce them.

"As the Qur'an says: 'Take not life which God hath made sacred, except by way of justice and law' (Surah Al-An'am 6:51). No human whose heart is filled with light could be an extremist. We decry the campaign that portrays Islam as a religion that encourages violence and institutionalizes terrorism."

Another example of interreligious outreach is "A Common Word Between Us and You," a 2007 open letter signed by 138 Muslim scholars from different branches of Islam all over the world, calling for peace between Muslims and Christians. The document urges people of differing faiths to work toward common ground and understanding,

Photo: Reuters / AFLO

Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al Azhar signed a common document that is called "Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together" in the United Arab Emirates' capital city of Abu Dhabi in February 2019.

based on the shared ideals of loving God and humanity.

I believe the approach taken in this document represents a healthy trend in interfaith dialogue and relations. Rather than focusing on differences in doctrine, it calls on leaders to uplift the common positive values of forgiveness, mutual understanding, and reconciliation. In the dialogue for life, we are focusing on such values that help us live together and strengthen our faith in the living God.

Dr. Miroslav Volf, a professor of theology at Yale Divinity School, addresses "A Common Word Between Us and You," in his paper "A Common Word":

"Lest someone think that this is a too-quick and somewhat cheap triumph of religion over conflict, let me make plain what I am not saying about the significance of finding commonality between Christianity and Islam in the dual command of love. First, to have the dual command of love in common does not mean to be amalgamated into the same religion. Even if there is significant agreement on the love of God and neighbor, many other differences remain—differences that are not accidental to each faith but which define them.

"For instance, Christians continue to believe that the One and Unique God who is utterly exalted above all created beings in the Holy Trinity and

that God has shown unconditional love for humanity in that Jesus Christ as God's Lamb bore the sins of the world; Muslims do not share these beliefs. Similarly, Muslims revere the Prophet Muhammad as the 'seal of the prophets' and the Holy Qur'an as Sacred Scripture, whereas Christians do not. An agreement on the love of God and neighbor does not erase differences. It enables people to accept others in their differences, leads them to get to know each other in their differences, and helps them live together harmoniously, notwithstanding their differences."

Ethical Conduct toward the Other

In September 2005, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published a dozen cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammed in what many considered an unfavorable light, spurring widespread demonstrations. As a religious leader, I felt an imperative to respond to these events by calling for a code of conduct to be signed by Arab Muslim and Christian leaders.

As a result, the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center, in Amman, Jordan, convened forty-eight Muslim and Christian leaders in January 2008 to develop and sign a shared code of conduct. The resulting Amman Declaration calls for mutual respect of all religions' holy places and symbols, and makes an appeal for worldwide religious tolerance (http//www.coexistencejordan.org).

It says, "We, as people who believe in the One God, and as people who own the legacy of coexistence in this region, Muslim and Christian, seek in this difficult era to build together our present and future society, in a spirit of mutual responsibility so that comprehensive peace and real justice prevail in our region and in the world as a whole. To achieve this, we undertake the commitment and pledge to call for the following to be implemented, not in our region only, but in the world as a whole:

- respect of religious freedom and belief
- respect of all messengers, prophets, holy books, and religious texts and prohibition of their desecration
- All holy places should be respected and made freely accessible to believers.
- All religious symbols must be respected and any desecration should be prohibited and prevented.
- respect for responsible freedom of expression which does not harm the beliefs and feelings of others
- to continue dialogue and human cooperation so that justice, peace, development, and decent living called for by the religious teachings of the heavenly religions, can be achieved."

Is this not the least we should expect for ourselves? I hope that a code of conduct like this will be observed not only by Muslims and Christians but by other religions as well.

In 2019, Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al Azhar signed "A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together," a significant effort in showing us how religions must work together on issues of common concern.

Religious Leaders Are to Oppose Extremism

Dr. Charles Kimball, a professor of comparative religion at Wake Forest University and a writer on Middle East religions and relations, says in his book *When Religion Becomes Evil (*Harper Collins, 2008*)* that the five markers of evil religions are:

1. absolute truth claims,
2. blind obedience,
3. establishing the "ideal" time,
4. the ends justifying the means, and
5. the declaration of holy war.

"Whatever religious people may say about their love of God or the mandates of their religion, when their behavior toward others is violent and destructive, when it causes suffering among their neighbors, you can be sure the religion has been corrupted and reform is desperately needed. When religion becomes evil, these five corruptions are always present. Conversely, when religion remains true to its authentic sources, it is actively dismantling these corruptions."

It is interesting to me that often the people who call themselves fundamentalists—in any religion—have often abandoned the most fundamental concept of all: Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Why is this? What can we do about it? The world is crying out for clearer vision and better leadership in today's increasingly violent, extremist, and militarized world. And, interestingly, no religion has a monopoly on extremism.

The Lutheran historian and professor Martin Marty says that extremism grows where injustice, oppression, and poverty flourish. I believe that this is especially true in the Middle East. The heart of the problem here is the unresolved and continuing oppression, injustice, and ongoing occupation of the Palestinian Territories. People here see the West as standing for justice and freedom for its friends while it is building walls, physically and symbolically, for others. Here, the test of the West is whether they can help bring a just end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Until there is some justice achieved here, rather than the acceleration toward greater discrimination, western claims of bringing democracy and freedom to the Middle East will seem like a cruel joke. Clever extremists will leverage democratic systems to seize power, and extremism will continue to grow and flourish.

It is high time that we moderate people of faith stand up and take back our religions. We who are grounded in the real fundamentals of love, compassion, and peace must affirm together that God has created every human life—indeed all

of creation—to be cherished, protected, and nurtured. We must stop demonizing one another in the name of God and instead try to see God in the other. Only in this way can we grow and learn from one another, bringing love and salaam/peace to this earth.

But lest it sound like I am focusing only on the extremism of the other, I remind myself and other Christians to clean our own houses before we criticize someone else's. We have our own extremists, such as Christian Zionists and others.

Religious leaders must create a united front to oppose extremism, for it tries to transform political injustice into religious war and conflict, in which the only winner is extremism itself. Extremism cannot be combated by shelling and bombardment, but by education and interfaith dialogue.

I believe the "neighbor" spoken about in the holy writings is every person, regardless of faith, doctrine, culture, ethnicity, or gender. It is the role of religious leaders to make every effort to educate our followers to apply this teaching universally.

Religious Leaders Are to Provide *Diakonia* and Confront Social Problems

Religious leaders in their dialogue need to move beyond intellectual dialogue to a dialogue for life. Religions must not see themselves as rivals, but rather as potential partners in the service of people of all faiths. Common service mandates that religions should not be in competition with each other but should instead complement one another's *diakonia* for the sake of humanity itself.

Religious leaders must tackle the social-ethical issues in our own societies before these issues become a further source of dissension. We need to discuss these social-ethical issues based on the theology of creation—that God created us equally in order that we may know each other and together address sensitive issues such as interfaith marriage, gender equality, state religion, social equity, and other topics that require frank and transparent deliberations and dialogue.

Religious leaders must also cooperate on global issues. God calls us to work together on shared challenges in eradicating the ills of our society, such as poverty, COVID-19, malaria, cancer, and other diseases. Can we also work together to stop the proliferation of both conventional and nuclear armaments? Can we convince our political leaders to sign an international agreement to fight the devastating effects of climate change? As religious leaders we have many challenges before us, but with God's help, we are called to serve the cause of peace in our time.

Conclusion

"No peace among nations without peace among religions," said the Catholic theologian Hans Küng. "And no peace among religions without dialogue."

To all the faith leaders reading this: I don't need to tell you about the enormity of the challenges we face. You know within the context of your own society that the stakes are high. I hope my words today encourage you to continue fostering respect and esteem for people of diverse beliefs, so that faith takes its rightful place as a force that unites us for the common good and works toward peace.

We are called to jointly serve the world for the sake of our Living God. Jesus said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Mt 9:37–38 and Lk 10:2). I would add, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out our faith leaders to make religion a driving force for peace, justice, tolerance, and reconciliation.

May God bless you all. ❑

Buddhism's Role in Peacebuilding

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One regional network has cultivated the practice of building eco-temples, which are holistic, sustainable environmental and ecological development models from which the entire community can benefit. Right livelihood projects and Buddhist psychotherapy and chaplaincy are other examples of helping society through initiatives that are consistent with Buddhist philosophy and teachings. Our ecological, climate-based focus is a common theme for interfaith and intrafaith dialogue in South Korea and throughout INEB's network. We also have a deep commitment and continuous involvement in developing vibrant civil society groups inside Myanmar.

Another example of forging right relationships is the International Forum on Buddhist-Muslim Relations, which was formed in 2013 with INEB's support, after several years of coordinating dialogue sessions between Buddhists and Muslims, and conducting situation analysis in South and Southeast Asia.

Networks like INEB are being tested even further—for example during the COVID-19 pandemic that has encircled the globe. We rely on our members to mobilize their human and financial resources to prevent hunger and death among some of the most marginalized and vulnerable populations. Another area of emphasis is reducing violence against children, and exploring opportunities for Buddhist communities to actively support protecting children from harm.

As demonstrated by leading Buddhist teachers such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the late Venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh, and the Venerable Maha Ghosananda, among many others, Socially Engaged Buddhism offers a wonderful means of cultivating peace by peaceful means. ❑

Living Our Daily Lives as Expected

by Nichiko Niwano

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

I often say, "Diligent, diligent, until I die, I must be diligent. And if I receive another lifetime, I must be diligent again." For a human being, there is no such thing as being perfect, so I admonish myself with these words, which remind me of my aspiration to make progress and improve myself.

However, if you simply hear this without understanding the meaning of diligence, you may feel that extraordinary resolution is required in order to practice diligence. Some people may suppose they are unable to practice diligence and shrink back from it.

Well, then, what exactly does diligence refer to?

In Buddhism, diligence is defined as "single-mindedly applying oneself to practicing and perfecting the Buddha Way." Zen master Dogen (1200–1253) said that diligence is "never ceasing in one's efforts to wholeheartedly perform various good deeds for the sake of other people" At the same time, "never ceasing" also sounds nearly impossible to do.

This reminds me of Founder Niwano's words: "I hope we are all people who can naturally do what is expected of us." For we lay Buddhists, that means never ceasing to live our daily lives with the attitude that at any time and in any place, "this is the place of the Way." And in that case, diligence is not so much a practice of relentlessly driving yourself onward but rather, of being considerate of others in the course of your daily life and being mindful of speaking and acting in ways that will give those around you peace of mind. In other words, it is nothing more than living an ordinary life and doing what is expected of you as a person of faith. Therefore, diligence is precisely what we are expected to do, naturally, as we live one day after another.

Awakening and Diligence Are One and the Same

To cite a well-known anecdote, when the visually impaired Aniruddha was patching his robe, he muttered, "Could someone thread the needle for me?" and Shakyamuni replied, "Yes, I will, as you will help me accumulate merits," and threaded the needle for him.

Seeing that his disciple was filled with surprise and awe by the words and actions of his teacher, who had already attained the highest level of awakening, Shakyamuni said, "Aniruddha, there is no limit to how much consideration we can show to other people and I, more than anyone, seek happiness." He gently explained to Aniruddha that regardless of one's standing or degree of learning, there is happiness in perfecting one's mind through the practice of benefitting others, and that continuing to do so is diligence.

This anecdote, like the aphorism "Practice and awakening are one," shows us that being able to perform faith-based practices is proof of awakening, and in awakening there is the joy of diligence. Rather than seeing diligence as the means of awakening, I feel the joy of the faith in interpreting diligence to mean that every time we practice benefitting others, we are shining forth our buddha nature and, at the same time, deepening our awareness of our own buddha nature.

However, even though we know the importance of practicing what is expected of us as people of faith, at times we are unable to do so, defeated by our self-centered desires or a lazy mind.

At such times, the thought "this won't do" crosses many people's minds, doesn't it? If you have this thought, even for a moment, that's fine. Your mind cannot reset what it does not have, but you can go back to what you do already possess as soon as the opportunity presents itself.

The switch that resets the lazy mind to the diligent mind is the self-reflection of saying "this won't do," and the moment that your mind reaches that thought, it should return to the true, original mind of self-improvement, just like when you first aspired to live your life according to the teachings of the Buddha. In that sense as well, the aspiration to vow to lead such a life is important. ❑

What Is God's Dream for All of Us?

Excerpts from the 39th Niwano Peace Prize acceptance address by Father Michael Lapsley, SSM

In an online presentation ceremony on June 14, 2022, the Niwano Peace Foundation awarded the 39th Niwano Peace Prize to Anglican Father Michael Lapsley, SSM, of South Africa, for his relentless struggle against apartheid, his continued support of the liberation movement in South Africa, and his global peacebuilding initiatives.

In 1990, three months after Nelson Mandela's release from prison, Fr. Lapsley received a package with two religious magazines inside, concealing a letter bomb that was attributed to the apartheid regime. Even after losing both his hands and his sight in one eye, Fr. Lapsley's good works have continued on undiminished. The following are excerpts from his acceptance address.

I am deeply humbled to be the recipient of the 39th Niwano Peace Prize today. This prize belongs equally to all those connected to the Institute for Healing of Memories (IHOM), its global network, and its many companions along the way.

IHOM focuses on addressing the wounds of history. How can we acknowledge the past and not be prisoner to it? How do we break the cycle that turns victims into victimizers? IHOM attempts to answer these pressing questions, through the process of detoxification from the poisons of hatred, revenge, and bitterness. I like to think of the facilitators of Healing of Memories as "midwives," supporting the storyteller and creating a safe space for peace to be born.

Trauma that is not transformed is transmitted—from one person to another, from one generation to the next. This holds true for individuals, communities, and nations. Even when political violence declines, domestic and sexual violence may escalate.

The announcement of this prize came the same week that Russia invaded Ukraine. Many millions of refugees have been forced to flee their homes, unleashing untold suffering and creating the largest refugee crisis since the Second World War.

The world is understandably focusing on Ukraine.

As South Africans, we recall that people from every corner of the globe supported us during the struggle against apartheid. We experienced international solidarity on a massive scale. We were very fortunate.

But there are many current, long-lasting conflicts and wars that do not receive the attention they should. I am thinking of Yemen, Tigray, and Myanmar, to name just a few. And there seems to be a sort of moral blindness when it comes to the struggle of the Palestinians against Israeli Apartheid.

In 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Seventy-four years on, it is apparent that the fundamental human rights of some people are respected, while less weight is still being given to those of others.

In the early days of the Ukraine-Russia war, as millions fled, many Africans experienced racism at the Ukrainian border. Black lives were not as valued as white lives.

Following the murder of George Floyd in the United States, after so many other deaths of mainly black men at the hands of the police, we saw the meteoric rise of Black Lives Matter. The movement found echoes across the world, not least in the Mother Continent, as it resonated with the lived experience of enduring racism, down through the ages and still today.

As demands for reparations for slavery and colonialism grow stronger and more insistent, there are important conversations being had about white privilege. When will the talk bring about transformative justice? As the saying goes, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

In the work of IHOM across the world over the last twenty years, there have been two common themes: gender-based violence and childhood trauma. Is not gender-based violence the oldest wound in human history? Many of our faith communities are more patriarchal than the mainstream of our societies. We often like to mystify how

we, as men, oppress women in the name of culture, tradition, and religion.

In our institute we launched a social media campaign called #thehandsofmen, which focuses on men's role as perpetrators and our power to stop the violence. Toxic masculinity prevents us from giving ourselves permission as men to be vulnerable and deal with our own woundedness.

Many of our faith communities have been the most oppressive when it comes to human sexuality. This has caused deep woundedness among sexual minorities. Science has taught us that the kaleidoscope of sexual orientation is a matter of genetics, not of choice. I have long harbored a dream that I would live long enough to see the leaders of all the great faith traditions making a public apology to the LGBTQIA+ community for our role in their oppression.

With the announcement of this award to me, specific mention was made of my role as a founder of the Friends of Cuba Society in South Africa. Whilst living under an illegal and immoral US blockade for more than sixty years, Cuba taught the world—especially the poorest countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa—the meaning of human solidarity. In Cuba, quality health care for all is not a slogan, it is a reality. When COVID-19 spread across the world, the weapons of mass destruction were of no use against it; doctors and nurses were called in as the heavy cavalry. Cuba's Henry Reeves Brigade saved countless lives, including those in South Africa and even in wealthier European countries.

During our relentless struggle against apartheid, one of the fronts was the campaign to end the death penalty. Every Thursday morning in Pretoria, there were executions, up to seven at a time, mostly of the black and poor. Today in South Africa we have abolished the death penalty. I am praying that I will live long enough to see all countries in the world following suit and choosing life. I hope the Niwano Peace Foundation will support this campaign.

Father Michael Lapsley, SSM, delivers his acceptance address during the online presentation ceremony on June 14, 2022. © 2022 Father Michael Lapsley, SSM

The Russian-Ukrainian war is a tragedy not just for the people of Ukraine, but for Russians, too. It has been encouraging to see people of faith in Russia, especially among the rank-and-file clergy, speaking out against the war. Russian citizens in cities across the country, despite the risk of long imprisonment, have been saying No to war and Yes to peace.

Psychologists speak of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a consequence of war and other traumas, but what about the moral and spiritual self-harm that results from people violating their own conscience? Many of our faith traditions assert that there is something of the divine in all of us, so when we attack another human being, we are also attacking the divine in ourselves.

The antidote to moral and spiritual injury can be found not in a medication, but rather in confession, remorse, and reparation. You can be sure that the Russian soldiers, and the Ukrainian soldiers as well, will be suffering from moral and spiritual injury for decades to come, and will haunt subsequent generations, too. Of course this is no less true for those in South Africa or Japan, or for the rest of humanity.

Once again we are facing the specter of nuclear war. The founder of the Niwano Peace Foundation spoke in favor of nuclear disarmament. As the only country in the world that carries in its soul the deep wounds of the atomic bomb, Japan is uniquely positioned to advocate for a new worldwide movement for nuclear disarmament. Perhaps this is something that could be championed by the Niwano Peace Foundation, together with the Japanese government.

The climate crisis is also telling us that we humans have declared war on Mother Earth and she is crying out in pain. Mother Earth would certainly survive without us, but we cannot survive without her. Perhaps we should follow the example of Bolivia.

"Mother Earth has the following rights: . . . to the diversity of life, to water, to clean air, to equilibrium, to restoration, and to pollution-free living." So states the Law of Mother Earth, passed in Bolivia in December 2010 as a binding societal duty.

An international gathering held by the Institute for Healing of Memories in 2019 at Cape Town, South Africa. © 2019 Father Michael Lapsley, SSM

As a person of faith, I often ask myself, "What is God's dream for all of us? What can I do to cooperate with God's dream?" With the eye of faith, I try to see the divine in everyone and to experience all of creation as part of the divine. I believe that we are called to be midwives in helping give birth to peace, through healing the wounds of history and working for transformative justice. Thank you. ❑

Engaging with the Religious Myth and Metaphor of the Lotus Sutra (II): The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World

by Dominick Scarangello

If we consider the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World as an archetype, she can inspire us and show us how a bodhisattva who has perfected their character does the work of the Buddha in the world.

Introduction: The Bodhisattvas of the Lotus Sutra

In my last essay we looked at how the Lotus Sutra uses myth and metaphor to help people realize spiritual truths that, when explored using analytical linear language and abstract concepts, are extremely difficult to grasp. After first considering how metaphors and myth work to cause shifts in cognitive frame and "carry over" (the literal meaning of the word "metaphor") people to understanding, I problematized the modern tendency to use dismissive interpretative strategies and translate myth and metaphor into concepts to dismiss or obscure this aspect of ancient sacred texts that modern people of post-mythical vision are uncomfortable with. Next, I explored how the Lotus Sutra expounds its main tenet, "the ultimate reality of all things," in both linear rational language and mytho-metaphor. I concluded by drawing on philosopher Bernardo Kastrup's proposal for how we can recover religious mytho-metaphor and pondered for myself the Lotus Sutra's symbolic expression of the ultimate reality of all things: the personification of omnipresent truth within the persona of the cosmic buddha known as the Eternal Original Buddha.

This time, we turn our attention to the last third of the Lotus Sutra, which comprises the stories of several bodhisattvas, and enumerates their powers and virtues. In East Asia, this was perhaps the most beloved part of the sutra for lay Buddhists, and one of its bodhisattvas, Regarder of the Sounds of the World, became the focus of popular practices for liberation from distress and all manner of dangers. Many who read the Lotus Sutra today may skim this section or skip it entirely, however, because they think it abounds in mythical stories that can hardly be taken literally, or find that it contains little in the way of philosophical content. Other people analyze its symbolism and use allegorical interpretation to recover meaning from this section of the sutra, but integrating its mythical bodhisattvas into spiritual practice is far less common among Buddhists outside traditional Buddhist communities in East Asia.

In this essay I will begin by introducing the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World. Next, we will consider how Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, interprets the bodhisattva's story analogically, while at the same time seemingly treating her as a "real" person—making her our exemplar and emulating her so that our mind resonates with hers. Rev. Niwano's divergent and seemingly contradictory approaches to the bodhisattva suggest some of the ways people do self-work by engaging the symbolic personas of psychological archetypes, and I will take this resonance with Jungian and archetypal psychologies, as well as with philosopher Henry Corbin's notion of the "imaginal," as a suggestion of how people who do not understand characters such as the Regarder of Sounds could become more comfortable thinking anthropomorphically and integrate a direct engagement of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World into their spiritual practice.

Chapter 25's Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World

The last third of the Lotus Sutra, especially from chapter 23 onward, tells the stories of several bodhisattvas who are described as having many fantastical powers. These include the Bodhisattva Medicine King, who sets himself ablaze as an offering to a buddha; the Bodhisattva Wondrous Sound, who gains many miraculous powers by revering a buddha with precious things including music; the Bodhisattva Universal Sage, who journeys across the universe to come and listen to Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching of the Lotus Sutra and protect its practitioners; and most importantly for the Lotus Sutra tradition, the

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Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World. In chapter 25 of the sutra Shakyamuni Buddha tells the assembly that by "calling to mind" the powers of the Regarder or invoking the bodhisattva's name, people can be saved from various perils, including harm by demons, bandits, falls, fire, drowning, executioners' swords, and even spiritual obstructions including the "three poisons" of desire, anger, and ignorance. The Buddha also enumerates the thirty-three forms the bodhisattva takes to liberate people in our world, including various types of gods, people, and enlightened beings such as arhats and buddhas. The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World received this name precisely because she hears and responds to people's cries of suffering and pleas for help.

Given the amazing powers of the Regarder of Sounds and her willingness to reach out to living beings in suffering, it is not surprising that she has garnered extraordinarily deep reverence from Buddhists, and became the focus of a popular cult of propitiatory practices throughout Asia. In popular religion this chapter of the Lotus Sutra began to overshadow the others, frequently circulating as an independent text. In China, the Sound Regarder came to be depicted as female, which eventually influenced the popular cult of this bodhisattva in other Asian countries including Japan. These gendered images of the Sound Regarder are so ubiquitous that people throughout the world today will recognize them as depictions of Guanyin, the "Buddhist goddess of compassion."

The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World in Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhism

The place of the Lotus Sutra's bodhisattvas in the faith and practice of Rissho Kosei-kai is somewhat different from that of much of East Asian Buddhism. First, rather than a source of direct liberation, Rissho Kosei-kai understands the various powers of the bodhisattvas that the Lotus Sutra introduces to be metaphors for the merits of practicing the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha, and specifically those of the Lotus Sutra. And furthermore, instead of an object of worship propitiated for protection and worldly benefits, Rissho Kosei-kai practitioners learn to take the Regarder of Sounds as an exemplar, whose bodhisattva virtues of discerning the sufferings of others and providing appropriate skillful means, they seek to develop themselves.

Rev. Niwano problematized literal readings of the stories of the sutra's bodhisattvas, taking chapter 25 as illustrative:

> For example, in chapter 25, "The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World as Universal Gateway," we read that if we focus our minds on the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World, we will be rescued from various difficulties. If we were to take these statements literally based on a superficial reading, it would imply that following the path of the Buddha's teachings requires no hard work at all. But this would nullify the Buddha's exposition of the Lotus Sutra thus far. It is unthinkable that at this point the Buddha would suddenly overturn all that he has taught. (Niwano 1989, 589)

Photo: Alamy / PPS

A statue of seated Guanyin in the Water-Moon form.

What would be the point of the Buddha's path of practice to remove our spiritual defilement and attain liberation from suffering if there is such a shortcut as merely invoking the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World? Niwano concludes that the bodhisattvas

who appear in the latter chapters of the sutra have to be understood from the perspective of the Buddha's teachings in the rest of the sutra, and when we take such a perspective,

> [W]e will discover that the transcendent powers ascribed to the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World are ultimately the workings of the Dharma that Shakyamuni Buddha has imparted to us. We also understand that we must depend on Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings. The sutra is really telling us that we should aim to emulate the model of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World when we cultivate the teachings by applying them practically in our lives. (Ibid.)

Rev. Niwano thus eschewed a literal appraisal of the bodhisattva's salvific actions and sees them as analogues for the life-transforming results of learning and practically applying the teachings of the Buddha.

Rev. Nichiko Niwano, son of Rev. Nikkyo Niwano and the current leader of Rissho Kosei-kai, also reads the story of the Bodhisattva Regarder of Sounds analogically, understanding the bodhisattva's wondrous powers that the Lotus Sutra describes to represent "our inherent power to rise from the depths of suffering and grow by turning suffering into nourishment" (Nichiko Niwano 2021, 2). As he explains, calling to mind the Regarder of Sounds is a way of becoming one with our "inner Regarder of Sounds," and when that helps us, it is "our inner power at work" (ibid., 3).

We might assume, then, that the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World is only a symbol of the Buddha's compassionate skillful means, rather than an actual person, and I have heard people describe the bodhisattva as such. But I think we would be wrong to assume that Rev. Niwano the elder engaged in the kind of dismissive interpretation I discussed last time that dispenses with sacred personas by replacing them entirely with abstract concepts. When he wrote about how to emulate the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World, Rev. Niwano seemed to treat the bodhisattva as a real person with whom we can attain heart-to-heart communication. The bodhisattva is "someone we should look up to and hold in high regard as a wonderful model of how to practice the Dharma" (Niwano 1989, 627), the reverend counsels, promising that:

> If we recall all of these [the bodhisattva's] qualities, our mind will resonate with the mind of the Regarder of the Sounds of the World by inviting a "sympathetic response" (Jpn., *kannō*; Chn., *ganying* 感応) between her mind and our own.
>
> To "resonate" in this case means to spontaneously attain the same state of mind as the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World. The phrase "sympathetic response" is often used to characterize this sort of phenomenon. If we call to mind the Regarder of the Sounds of the World, pondering all her qualities, we can make her mind our own. (Ibid., 638)

Here, when discussing the interaction that can occur between practitioners and the Regarder of Sounds, Rev. Niwano doesn't seem to be talking about a mere symbol or myth, but someone who is real. I think that for many of us today, imagination and reality are diametrically opposed, so the Regarder of Sounds is seen either as a symbolic myth or as an actual person out there somewhere in the world; it can't be both. I'm guessing that readers may be left wondering, "Is the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World 'real'?" Or is she just a symbol—simply a fictional character who represents the Buddha's universal compassion? Which is it?

Buddhism Problematizes Our Assumptions about What Is "Real"

Before we try to answer this question, we should first interrogate our notion of the "real." Mahayana Buddhism, including the Lotus Sutra, cautions us against absolutizing our assumptions about how things are. We see things as concrete, stable entities that exist on their own and possess an intrinsic nature. But Mahayana Buddhism tells us that this is not the way things are. It holds that phenomena are ephemeral—existing interdependently with other things, upon which they depend for their sustenance. Even the concepts we use to make sense of the world and make distinctions between things are only relative, deriving meaning only from their contrast with one another. We make absolute determinations because we read a permanence and stability into things that are not really there. This is why in the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings the Buddha explains:

> Living beings, however, make false and arbitrary assessments. They suppose that 'this is one thing' but 'that is another thing,' or 'this is a gain' but 'that is a loss.' (Rissho Kosei-kai 2019, 13)

Our absolute distinctions are arbitrary, often imposed upon the world by our own minds. This doesn't mean that we cannot make determinations about the world around us, but that the distinctions we make are necessarily relative, provisional, one-sided views that don't illuminate things in their entirety. In contrast to the absolute reality we perceive, things in their essence are so changeable, unstable, and fluid that the Buddha taught they are instead lacking existence—at least the kind of concrete existence that we read into the world. This is why in chapter 14 of the Lotus Sutra Shakyamuni Buddha declares:

Source: Wikimedia Commons File: Sramana Zhiyi.Jpg

A painting of Zhiyi (538–97), the founder of the Tiantai school of Chinese Buddhism. Author unknown.

> All things are emptiness,
> As they are without existence,
> Neither permanently abiding
> Nor arising and perishing. (Ibid.)

This is the teaching of "emptiness," which the Buddha used to get us to release our tight grip on the mistaken way we perceive the world, and it also challenges our smug self-assuredness about what is real. The Buddha is challenging us to let go of our perception of things as existing absolutely as ultimacies.

Buddhism also problematizes how we think about our minds, and specifically whether something is inside or outside of the mind. As we also saw last time, in the tradition of the Lotus Sutra there is a theory of extended mind based on the interconnectedness and interactivity of all existence, which holds that all phenomena in our world make up our experience of reality. This theory, taught by the Chinese Lotus Sutra expounder and meditation master Zhiyi (538–97) maintained that in addition to our own thoughts, feelings, and physical states, the bodies and minds of other people, the circumstances of society, and the natural environment are all interwoven, reciprocally influencing, and made up our moment-by-moment experience of reality. We will have to leave a detailed discussion of this theory for another time, but as Zhiyi explains it, this principle transcends the notion of things being inside or outside of one's mind: "It is simply that the mind is all phenomena, and all phenomena are the mind" (Lopez and Stone 2019, 69).

From the standpoint of this theory of extended mind, whether the Lotus Sutra's bodhisattvas are real or unreal, within the mind or without it, is not really an important question. The point is how the bodhisattvas of the Lotus Sutra and their stories can play a role in our liberation from suffering and attainment of awakening.

Archetypes and the Symbolic Personas of Sacred Texts

Even if we accept that a Buddhist perspective puts aside unskillful questions such as the reality or falseness of the bodhisattvas of Mahayana, I think we today need a modern way of making sense of the personas of Buddhist sutras like the Lotus Sutra that helps us enthusiastically interact with them by being mindful, emulating, and internalizing their qualities in ways that benefit ourselves and the people around us. I think the two ways in which Rev. Niwano makes sense of the Regarder of the Sounds of the World suggest interacting with symbolic sacred personas such as hers as archetypes.

When people today hear the word "archetype," it may bring to mind the notion of inborn mental images or ideas that are universal facets of a shared human "collective unconscious," and also inhabit our ancient stories that date back to a time when human beings did not, or could not, rigidly separate the outer material world and the inner world of the psyche. In the common understanding, archetypes are imaginal personifications of human ideals within our subconscious that can manifest themselves in our thinking and behavior, or can profoundly move us when we encounter them in literature or film because they strike a chord deep within us. If you search various New Age sites you will find a plethora of archetypical motifs such as mother, hero, king, magician, and so forth. While popular as a pop-psychology phenomenon, archetypes have also come under criticism for the notion that ideas can be physically inherited, for preserving outmoded notions around gender or patriarchy, and asserting universal ideas or motifs that fly in the face of cultural diversity.

Source: Wikimedia Commons File: ETH-BIB-Jung, Carl-Portrait-Portr 14163.tif

Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961).

Much of what is generally assumed about archetypes is a misunderstanding, however, and in the years since Carl Jung (1875–1961) popularized the term in the early twentieth century, psychologists have come to better understand Jung's ideas and refined their understanding of archetypes, responding to many criticisms of the theory. Archetypes have been called "evolved

psychological mechanisms," "prepared tendencies"—even "algorithms" (Stevens 2015, 15). They have also been likened to Noam Chomsky's "language acquisition device"—the inborn human capacity to learn language. Anthony Stevens has described them as "systems of readiness for action" (ibid., 21). Examples of the equivalents of archetypes in the animal kingdom include natural but unlearned behaviors such as fear responses toward predators, or the tendency for newborns to imprint on a caregiver.

Today, it is common to separate the archetype into two aspects. First, there are associated behaviors and attitudes, which Jung called the "archetype as such." Second, there is the "archetypal image"—the culturally sourced images or narratives that come to represent or symbolize attitudes and behaviors, and are capable of stimulating them. Thus, while the archetype may be widely represented and comparable across human populations, the archetypal image—the culturally derived images and stories that symbolize and evoke attitudes and behaviors—can be widely variable. Robert M. Ellis has coined the phrase "diachronic schematic function" to describe archetypes. "Function" means that an archetype (the archetype as such) is a spectrum of tendencies that are part of a system employed to achieve a goal. "Schematic" indicates that the archetype has a set of symbolic associations that make it meaningful to us. "Diachronic" is simply a way of saying that archetypes help us retain awareness of the goal and maintain functioning toward it over time (Ellis 2022, 3–4). But rather than getting stuck on what archetypes are, Ellis suggests we understand them by looking at what they do:

> Archetypes have the function of being *inspiring*, meaning that they provide us with ongoing motivation for developing beyond our limitations at any given point, but along with that function comes the profound experience of being awed and challenged. (Ibid., 4)

In a nutshell, archetypes are widely shared associated complexes of attitudes and behaviors (the archetype as such) that come to be associated with culturally determined symbols and motifs (archetypal images). The symbols and motifs, including narrative, represent attitudes and behaviors, and remind people of the importance of those attitudes and behaviors, but also appear to us as deeply profound or numinous.

Popular books and websites provide a bewildering plethora of archetypes, but in Ellis's view, most are aspects of four primary types of inspiration that we can think of as four basic archetypes. Ellis's formulation is useful because it is less culturally deterministic and gender specific than Jung's original formulations. First, there is what is commonly called the "hero archetype," which Ellis calls the "attractive self." The hero is associated with aspiration—the ability to set goals, follow plans, and see them through. The second is the "attractive other," what Jung calls "anima/animus." This is what is "other" or separate from ourselves, toward which we are attracted and wish to make part of ourselves. As Ellis explains, we all need to establish relationships with those who are different from us but have complimentary qualities. This archetype has often been construed in erotic terms as the enchanting person of the opposite sex, but while the archetype may indeed work this way for many people, at its core the attractive other archetype represents that which is radically different from us, but in complementary ways, and thus is fascinating and alluring, and therefore can take many symbolic forms. The third basic archetype is the "shadow" or "rejected other." This is what we regard as evil, repulsive or hateful, but I would add that the shadow can also consist of qualities that we may need but find difficult or feel uncomfortable with. Finally, there is what Ellis calls the "god archetype." This is the fully integrated person—the human ideal—often represented by images of gurus, wizards, prophets, philosophers, and buddhas (ibid., 14).

The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World from an Archetypical Perspective

If we consider the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World as an archetype, there doesn't have to be any contradiction between the symbolic interpretation of the bodhisattva and embracing the bodhisattva as something "real"—a person we can endeavor to emulate—because, as an archetype, the Regarder of Sounds is both symbol and person. She can inspire us and show us how a bodhisattva who has perfected their character does the work of the Buddha in the world. The Lotus Sutra describes how the Regarder of Sounds appears in any way that the liberation of people requires, and I suggest we can understand this as the bodhisattva taking various archetypal forms. And just as she responds with whatever form an individual may need, we can imagine the bodhisattva taking on any of Ellis's fundamental archetypes, depending on who we need her to be.

The Regarder of Sounds is a hero. As a bodhisattva who has practiced under innumerable buddhas, she has attained the samadhi of appearing in any physical form, and now has the ability to manifest anywhere she is needed in our world. She inspires us to set goals by making our own bodhisattva vows, and like her, persevering until they are fulfilled.

As a magnificent being who possesses qualities we fail to manifest ourselves, and someone whose compassionate mind we want to make our own, the Regarder of Sounds is the attractive other whom

we want to someday embody through our own bodhisattva practice.

The bodhisattva can even be our shadow. When we read the list of thirty-three manifestations of the bodhisattva, we see some beings who are ambivalent, difficult, or dangerous, such as dragons, demons, and warlike asuras. These are characters that most of us would probably not want to meet, but they are all within the repertoire of the bodhisattva's innumerable faces. While they may not be warm and cuddly, these characters have the strength, courage, fortitude, and combative qualities that we may not feel comfortable with, but are necessary at certain times in our lives. For example, we may find it hard to be contrarians when we need to speak truth to power. We might have difficulty creating and maintaining proper boundaries with others. Or, like a doting parent, we may struggle to use "tough love" and hold our children, or those for whom we are mentors, to the standards we expect them to uphold. The process of attaining liberation from suffering and reaching awakening is not always pleasant, and helping others sometimes requires us to be fierce in defending them or severe in our constructive criticism and stern in our discipline. But more importantly, we need to develop a strictness with ourselves, so that we don't allow ourselves to slack off in our practice. At times, we need to be a dragon toward ourselves. These characteristics that we need (but that can seem dangerous) are understood to comprise the shadow. To be a whole person we need to develop and properly integrate these aspects of ourselves that we are uncomfortable with and cannot control very well, and hence would rather shun.

For Buddhism, the god archetype—the motif of complete integration and actualization of the perfected self—is best manifested by Shakyamuni Buddha, who is the human ideal for Buddhists. But according to chapter 25, the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World can also manifest as a buddha, and from our standpoint her many qualities are, for all intents and purposes, "perfect." The bodhisattva practice that the Sound Regarder teaches us is comprehensive and all-embracing, and that is why it is called a "universal gate." Historically, Buddhists have debated the bodhisattva level of the Regarder of Sounds, but in the description of the path in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, the Regarder of Sounds is often said to be at the level of "equivalency to the Buddha in appearance" (Chn., *xiangsi ji;* Jpn., *sōji soku* 相似即), the fourth of six stages on the path at which, from the standpoint of ordinary living beings, bodhisattvas' refinement and capabilities make them appear as buddhas in the eyes of ordinary beings. The Regarder of Sounds is also perfectly integrated, in the sense that she embodies all of the other archetypes for us, and manifests them as needed. When we need a hero, she is the hero. When we need the attractive other, she manifests as our complement. And when we need to integrate our shadow, she teaches us how to manage those powers that must be used with great care. As our model, she is the epitome, the paragon of the bodhisattva—a true archetype.

Meeting the Bodhisattva in an Imaginal Place

I would like to touch on one more aspect of Rev. Nikkyo Niwano's discussion of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World—using imagination in religious practice. I wonder if some people overlook the degree to which imagination plays a role in Rev. Niwano's thought. I have previously discussed how he conceived of the awakening to universal suchness, or buddha nature, as the awareness of the Eternal Original Buddha—a personification of omnipresent truth, always together with us (Scarangello 2021; 2022). In his discussion of the Regarder of Sounds, Rev. Niwano again engages the use of the imagination:

> The practice of calling to mind the Regarder of Sounds that the Buddha encourages . . . means to form a mental image of the bodhisattva as an expression of our adoration for her as someone we want to emulate. If we focus our minds on such an exemplar with a deep sense of admiration, we will surely come to manifest their qualities in ourselves by making them a reality through our own conduct. (Niwano 1989, 627)

As Rev. Niwano explains it, the Lotus Sutra's direction to "call to mind" the bodhisattva entails creating and holding an image of the bodhisattva, and pondering her qualities:

> "Calling to mind" means to ponder something. We should remember that the Regarder of the Sounds of the World, our model, has taken a great vow to discern the inner voice within the hearts of all people and to help eliminate their sufferings. We must remind ourselves of the bodhisattva's gentleness, her spirit of self-sacrifice, and her compassionate countenance full of warmth. (Ibid., 638)

In Buddhism, "calling to mind" means recollecting something as well as holding something in the mind so that it is not forgotten. In the former sense, it is an act of imagination, forming an image of something in the mind, such as the practice of "calling to mind the Buddha" or *buddhā-nusmṛti*—creating an image of the Buddha's symbolic physical characteristics, and holding them in mind. We often conceive of imagination as something subjective that is a contrivance, a daydream or even an illusion, and counterpose "the imagined" to "the real." But the religious imagination of the kind that the reverend wrote about is better thought of as "intersubjective."

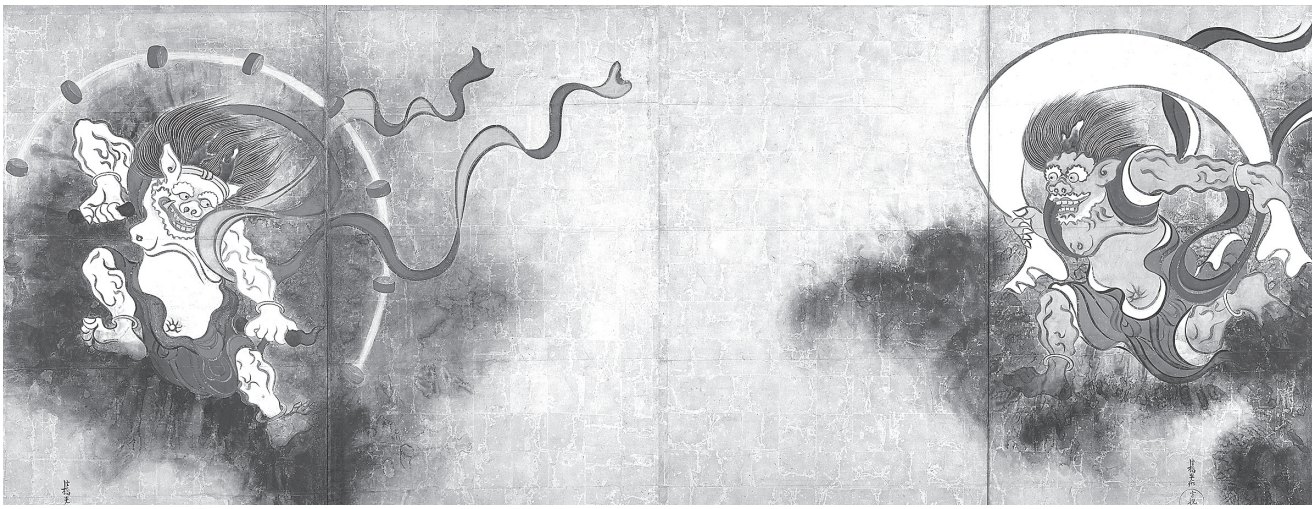

Photo: Bridgeman Image / PPS

Fujin raijin zu *(Wind God and Thunder God) painted by Tawaraya Sotatsu (c. 1570–c. 1640).*

Philosopher and religious studies scholar Henri Corbin (1903–78) called religious imagination "the imaginal" to distinguish it from flights of fancy, and described it as an intersubjective zone where personal transformation occurred. For Corbin, the imaginal was "neither passive reception, nor unconstrained fantasy," but a faculty that mediated "two realms of what would otherwise be the subjective and the objective" (Cheetham 2021, 44). We meet the world in the imaginal, we commune with it and model ourselves on it, and in the process we transform ourselves. Meeting the Regarder of Sounds in the imaginal realm is intersubjective because it is also not merely a private fantasy. Forming the image of the bodhisattva is guided by our reading of the Lotus Sutra, what we have learned in our study of the Dharma, the images and stories of the bodhisattva that we have encountered, and even the actions and qualities of other practitioners we look up to.

The fact that calling to mind the Regarder of Sounds is guided by the tradition and teachings is one way that it is similar to the phenomenon of "serious play"—an imaginal way of learning that children employ, trying on and experimenting with social roles that they will take on in the future. As psychologist Jordan Peterson describes it:

> Play allows for the permanent extension of competence and confidence through pretense. Play creates a world in "rule-governed" fantasy—in episodic or imagistic representation—in which behavior can be rehearsed and mastered, prior to its expression in the real world, with real-world consequences. Play is another form of "as-if" behavior, that allows for experimentation with fictional narrative—pretended descriptions of the current and desired future states of the world, with plans of action appended, designed to change the former into the latter. (Peterson 1999, 76)

The presence of governing rules that are derived from culturally defined behavior is precisely why serious play is intersubjective and not merely one-sided fantasy. Also notice that the long-term point of "as-if" modeling play is to transform the current state of things into what we want to exist in the future. Practitioners of Buddhism want to transform their current selves into their future selves—buddhas and bodhisattvas, including the Regarder of Sounds, provide the model. Anthropologist T. M. Luhrmann calls serious play in spiritual practice a "faith frame":

> To choose to think with the faith frame is a decision to enter into another mode of thinking about reality that calls on the resources of the imagination to reorganize what is fundamentally real. . . . This involves a shift in perspective similar to the shift in and out of imaginative play—except that the play claims are also serious claims about the world. (Luhrmann 2020, 23)

When children engage in serious play such as "playing house," they don't confuse the mud pies they make for hamburgers, or the tree branches they brandish for the real weapons of a soldier. They easily bracket out such questions of material realities and concentrate on the act of modeling, which is the point of play and its "reality." In the same way, the "faith frame" is a state of consciousness that is not delusion, but an "as-if" realm that coexists alongside the ordinary ways people make sense of the world" (ibid., xii), and it allows us to remake ourselves in relationship to an other that cannot be seen [with the waking eye] (ibid., xiv). This is precisely the state of mind we can enter when we call to mind the Regarder of Sounds.

Personifying and Thinking "Anthropomorphically"

Calling to mind the Regarder of Sounds is serious play that occurs in a "faith frame"—a spiritual imaginal space—where we construct and retain in mind a human image that embodies the qualities we wish to embody ourselves. It is

not concentration on an abstract concept, a mantra, or a single word, but instead is a way of personifying and thinking anthropomorphically. Having read and translated a great deal of Rev. Niwano's writings, I think it's safe to say that "thinking anthropomorphically" is a salient feature of his religious thought and practice (see Scarangello 2022, and Rissho Kosei-kai's Bodhi Day Lotus Sutra Lecture, December 2021, for explorations of this trend). This puts the reverend at odds with the bulk of modern philosophical and religious thought. But his tendency to think anthropomorphically and value religious imagination within a system of modern religious practice puts him in good company, such as that of Jung and Corbin, mentioned above, who were convinced that modernity's hostility to the image and its rejection of imagination as a path to truth were refutations of fundamentally central aspects of the human psyche.

A more recent prophet of thinking anthropomorphically is the psychologist James Hillman (1926–2011), the founder of the archetypal psychology school, which holds that psychic experience is composed of "fantasy-images," and that "Everything else—ideas of the mind, sensations of the body, perceptions of the world around us, beliefs, feelings, hungers—must present themselves as images in order to become experienced" (Hillman 1975, 24). He taught that rather than interpret the archetypal images of myths or the subconscious, we should interact with them as "utterly real" and possessing their own agency.

> To enter myth, we must personify; to personify carries us into myth. . . . To understand anything at all, we must envision it as having an independent subjective interior existence, capable of experience, obliged to a history, motivated by purposes and intentions. We must always think anthropomorphically, even personally. (Ibid., 21)

For Hillman, to "understand" does not mean being able to rationally explain something. Understanding is a kind of "participatory knowing." Participatory knowing is merging with something, incorporating it into yourself. Thus, for Hillman, "understanding" is a matter of incorporating something into ourselves, of "making something our own." The Greeks called this type of knowledge "gnosis." If we take Hillman's view, bringing to mind and interacting with symbolic images is a powerfully effective skillful means to transform ourselves, because symbolic images are the primary stuff of our deep minds. And while we learn by becoming able to explain things, to "understand" what we have learned, in order to unite it with us and incorporate it, we personify it.

Jung, Corbin, Kastrup, Ellis, and the other authors I've discussed in my last piece and in this one (especially Hillman) have all worked to convince modern people of the benefits, if not the need, to personify by thinking anthropomorphically, and to take archetypal images seriously by interacting with them as subjective personas rather than interpreting them in order to dismiss them. These thinkers also provide us with the tools we need in order to develop a contemporary appreciation of, and a new approach to, the mythological, symbolic personas of the Lotus Sutra—especially the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World—so that we can recover their therapeutic and transformative powers, rehabilitate personification in religious practice, and better appreciate "thinking anthropomorphically," in the coinage of Rev. Niwano.

I would like to close with a passage of verse from the Ten-Line Regarder of Sounds Sutra (Jpn., *Jikku kannon kyō* 十句観音経), a short but popular Buddhist sutra that I think encapsulates much of what has been discussed herein.

> Think of the Regarder of Sounds in the morning,
> And continue thinking of the Regarder of Sounds until evening.
> Thought after thought,
> The Regarder of Sounds arises from mind;
> Thought after thought,
> The Regarder of Sounds never separates from mind. ❑

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The Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue

(2)

This is the 138th installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.

TEXT Having spoken thus, the follower should again practice further repentance. When he has achieved the purity of his repentance, the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue will again appear before him and will not leave his side in his walking, standing, sitting, and lying, and even in his dreams will ceaselessly preach the Dharma to him. After awaking from his dreams, this person will take delight in the Dharma.

COMMENTARY At last the mind becomes purified to its very depths, and one reaches the stage of being able to live a life with religious exaltation at all times.

• *Walking, standing, sitting, and lying*. This means at any time, whether asleep or awake.

TEXT In this manner, after three times seven days and nights have passed, he will thereupon acquire the dharani of revolution. Through acquiring the dharani, he will keep in his memory without losing it the wonderful Dharma which the buddhas and bodhisattvas have taught.

COMMENTARY *The dharani of revolution*. (See the January-March 2011 issue of *Dharma World*). This dharani is the power to promote all good and to stop all evil.

After one has acquired this dharani for oneself, one will then extend it to others.

TEXT In his dreams, he will also see constantly the Seven Buddhas of the past, among whom only Sakyamuni Buddha will preach the Dharma to him. These world-honored ones will each praise the Great-vehicle sutras.

COMMENTARY *The Seven Buddhas of the past*. The six buddhas who appeared in the world before Shakyamuni (and about whom Shakyamuni preached) and who have left their influence markedly on the world, plus Shakyamuni himself. The six are Vipashyin, Shikhin, Vishvabhu, Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, and Kashyapa. Of course we cannot verify the existence of the former six buddhas historically; all we can say for sure is that Shakyamuni alone taught the Dharma for the sake of humankind. This is why in the dream the follower sees only Shakyamuni preaching the Dharma, while the other six praise the teachings. What is extremely important here is that while the Buddhas of the past are certainly to be revered, it was Shakyamuni alone who taught the Dharma in this actual world. The verse known as the commandment of the Seven Buddhas of the past, commonly taught by all of them, was transmitted to us in this world too by Shakyamuni.

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

Only through the teachings of Shakyamuni, we are able to know the Truth (the Wonderful Dharma) that has existed from the limitless past. So, it is good to devote ourselves entirely to those teachings, for by so doing we will also automatically take refuge in all the other buddhas (the various manifestations of the Truth). That is the meaning that lies deep within this passage.

TEXT At that time the follower will again further rejoice and universally salute the buddhas in all directions. After he salutes the buddhas in all directions, the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, abiding before him, will teach and explain to him all karmas and environments of his former lives, and will cause him to confess his black and evil sins. Turning to the world-honored ones, he should confess [his sins] with his own mouth.

COMMENTARY Through the power of the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, the follower comes to realize clearly his own sins. Having realized them, he must verbalize them and repent before the Buddha. Such repentance is of course done within the mind, but it should not be performed perfunctorily but with deep commitment and precision. By so doing the person will gain release from his or her evil karma.

Source: Wikimedia Commons File: AshukuNyorai.jpg

An image of Ashuku Nyorai *(The Buddha Akshobhya) from* Zuzosho*, a collection of Buddhist iconographic drawings. Twelfth century. It is considered to have been compiled by Yogon (1095–1151), a Buddhist monk of the Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism.*

TEXT After he finishes confessing [his sins], then he will attain the contemplation of the revelation of buddhas to men. Having attained this contemplation, he will plainly and clearly see the Buddha Akshobhya and the Kingdom of Wonderful Joy in the eastern quarter. In like manner he will plainly and clearly see the mystic lands of the buddhas in each of all directions.

COMMENTARY *The contemplation of the revelation of buddhas to men*. This is the state in which the realization that buddhas are always beside us has been firmly established and that realization remains constantly on the surface of the mind.

• *The Buddha Akshobhya*. He is the lord of the Kingdom of Wonderful Joy in the east. In esoteric Buddhism, he is considered to be the buddha who manifests the great and round mirror-wisdom (*adarsha-jnana* in Sanskrit), the perfect wisdom of a buddha that faithfully and perfectly reflects all phenomenal things as if in a large round mirror. This wonderful type of wisdom appears when through repentance the mind is purified and the buddha nature

burnished. If one comes to understand clearly the great and round mirror-wisdom of the Buddha Akshobhya, that person's comprehension itself will conform with the state of all the buddhas in the ten directions, for any buddha is fundamentally the Eternal Original Buddha (Thusness) and their enlightenment will conform to the only one Truth.

TEXT After he has seen the buddhas in all directions, he will have a dream: on the elephant's head is a diamond-man pointing his diamond-pounder at the six organs; after pointing it at the six organs, the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue will preach to the follower the law of repentance to obtain the purity of the six organs.

COMMENTARY We saw in an earlier section that the diamond-pounder crushes all mistaken ideas. Pointing it at the six organs is an indication of the power that can destroy the various defilements of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Having such a dream signifies that the repentant mind powerfully moves into motion.

TEXT In this way the follower will do repentance for a day or three times seven days. [Then] by the power of the contemplation of the revelation of buddhas to men and by the adornment of the preaching of the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, the follower's ears will gradually hear sounds without impediment, his eyes will gradually see things without impediment, and his nose will gradually smell odors without impediment. This is as preached extensively in the Wonderful Dharma Flower Sutra.

COMMENTARY In usual conditions, our feelings and perceptions cannot know accurately the actual nature of things because they are clouded by the delusions. When, however, the mind is purified to its depths through faith, those delusions are removed and we can clearly perceive things as they truly are. What we teach others will then spontaneously conform to the the pure and supreme Dharma (the Wonderful Dharma) of the Lotus Sutra.

TEXT Having obtained the purity of the six organs, he will have joy of body and mind and freedom from evil ideas, and will devote himself to this Dharma so that he can conform to it.

COMMENTARY *So that he can conform to it [the Dharma].* This is an extremely important phrase. It refers to the state where the mind is constantly in conformity with the Dharma no matter where it moves. It means that one can do so naturally without consciously thinking of having a good mind or doing good. It is the splendid stage of acting spontaneously in accordance with the natural working of the universal Dharma.

TEXT He will again further acquire a hundred thousand myriad kotis of the dharani of revolution and will again see extensively a hundred thousand myriad kotis of innumerable buddhas. These world-honored ones will all stretch out their right hands, laying them on the head of the follower, and will speak thus: 'Good! Good! You are a follower of the Great-vehicle, an aspirant to the spirit of great adornment, and one who keeps the Great-vehicle in his mind. When of old we aspired to buddhahood, we were also like you. Do you be zealous and do not lose the Great-vehicle!'

COMMENTARY We can take "keeps the Great-vehicle in his mind" as meaning resolutely meditating upon the Mahayana teachings, but here it would be more appropriate to interpret it as "keeping in mind the liberation of all living beings" when we consider the essential meaning of the words "the Great-vehicle" (Mahayana).

The buddhas continue:

TEXT Because we practiced it in our former lives, we have now become the pure body of the All Wise. Do you now be diligent and not lazy! These Great-vehicle sutras are the Dharma-treasury of the buddhas; the eyes of the buddhas from all directions in the past, present, and future; and also the seed that produces the tathagatas in the past, present, and future.

COMMENTARY The three phrases "the Dharma-treasury of the buddhas," "the eyes of the buddhas," and "the seed that produces the tathagatas" are well-chosen metaphors concisely expressing the nobility of the Mahayana sutras. A careless reading might suggest that the Mahayana teachings were for the sake of the buddhas alone, but this would represent a serious misunderstanding. Since the purpose of the buddhas, the tathagatas, both in their enlightenment and in their workings, is the liberation of all living beings, the Mahayana sutras, which are the Dharma-treasury of the buddhas, the eyes of the buddhas, and the seed that produces the tathagatas, are in the final analysis none other than the teachings for the sake of all living beings and also for those leading them to the stage of the buddhas.

The buddhas still continue:

TEXT He who keeps these sutras has the body of a buddha and does the work of a buddha; know that such is the apostle sent by the buddhas; such is covered by the robes of the buddhas, the world-honored ones; such is a

true Dharma-heir of the buddhas, the tathagatas. Do you practice the Great-vehicle and do not cut off the Dharma-seeds! Do you now attentively behold the buddhas in the eastern quarter!'

COMMENTARY Do not cut off the Dharma-seeds! The seeds of the Dharma must from this time on be planted so that they can sprout, grow into saplings, put forth flowers and fruit, and in turn scatter seeds in all directions, thus propagating themselves widely. Interrupting this endless expansion in midflow is called "cutting off the Dharma-seeds" and is the worst of all sins. Slandering the teachings, persecuting those who follow and practice them, and acting in ways that quench faith are the worst examples of cutting off the Dharma-seeds. Indolence on the part of the follower himself or herself is also a passive form of cutting off the Dharma-seeds. We must therefore always reflect upon our actions and never neglect our study and practice of the Mahayana teachings.

TEXT When these words are spoken, the follower sees all the innumerable worlds in the eastern quarter, whose lands are as even as one's palm, with no mounds or hills or thorns, but with ground of lapis lazuli and with gold to bound the ways. So, too, is it in the worlds of all directions. Having finished beholding this matter, the follower will see a jewel tree that is lofty, wonderful, and five thousand yojanas high. This tree will always produce deep gold and white silver and will be adorned with the precious seven. Under this tree there will be a jeweled lion throne of itself; the lion throne will be two thousand yojanas high, and from the throne will radiate the light of a hundred jewels. In like manner, from all the trees, the other jewel thrones, and each jewel throne will radiate the light of a hundred jewels.

COMMENTARY *Jewel tree*. This is a symbol of the Mahayana teachings. The blessed teachings of "deep gold and white silver" flow continually from it, while under it is the lion throne where the Dharma is taught.

TEXT In like manner, from all the trees, the other jewel thrones, and each jewel throne will emerge of themselves five hundred white elephants on which all the Bodhisattva Universal Virtues mount. Thereupon the follower, making obeisance to all Universal Virtues, should speak thus: 'By what sin have I only seen jewel grounds, jewel thrones, and jewel trees, but have been unable to see the buddhas?'

COMMENTARY The follower was able to see before his very eyes the beauty of all buddha worlds. This means that when people feel gratitude for the Buddha's teachings, and deeply understand how splendid it is to expound them, and also when the teachings spread widely, living beings, society, and the whole world will be sure to take on a new beauty. All the same, the follower remains unsatisfied in the depths of his heart, for he has seen the jeweled grounds, the jeweled thrones, and the jeweled trees, but he has not been able to see the buddhas. You may detect some inconsistency here, for a previous passage clearly mentioned that he did see the buddhas, but there is actually no contradiction. Though one may be very sure that he is in the presence of the buddhas at one point, as long as he has not attained the bodhisattva stage, his awareness may wane if his mind becomes engrossed in other things. What is to be done in such a state of affairs? Repentance, I probably need hardly say, is what is necessary. We must reflect deeply on our behavior and attitude to wash away the stains that have overtaken our thoughts.

TEXT When the follower finishes speaking thus, [he will see that] on each of the jewel thrones there is a world-honored one sitting on a jewel throne and very wonderful in his majesty. Having seen the buddhas, the follower will be greatly pleased and will again further recite and study the Great-vehicle sutras. By the power of the Great-vehicle, from the sky there will come a voice, praising and saying: 'Good! Good! Good son! By the cause of the merit you have [acquired] practicing the Great-vehicle, you have seen the buddhas. Though you have now been able to see the buddhas, the world-honored ones, you cannot yet see Shakyamuni Buddha, the buddhas who emanated from him, or the stupa of the Buddha Abundant Treasures.'

COMMENTARY Having again become able to see the buddhas, the follower rejoices, but he must not fail to continue to recite, and practice the Mahayana teachings. This point is very important, for there is a strong possibility that a person, having gained awareness that he is in the presence of the buddhas, may fall into indolence and arrogance. In the course of everyday life, we are beset one after another by the bank of clouds of the five desires and the earthly cares (defilements), and if we relax our guard, these clouds will soon cover our minds, causing us to lose our consciousness of the presence of the buddhas. As we continue to recite and study the Mahayana teachings, we will at some point hear a voice echoing in our hearts, saying, "Ah, that is very good! It is through the Mahayana teachings that I have come into contact with the minds of the buddhas." We will be able to have such self-awareness. Nevertheless, we again come to feel a lack of satisfaction, for although we are able to have awareness of coming into contact with the mind of the buddhas, we

are yet unable to understand the depth of Shakyamuni Buddha's mind concerning why he came into this world to teach the Dharma for the sake of living beings, to comprehend the nature of the buddhas who emanated from him, or to realize buddha nature itself (the Buddha Abundant Treasures). Unable to comprehend these things fully, we are assailed by a feeling of incompleteness. The true followers of the Buddha must be very strict toward themselves about their religious faith. Such strictness is nothing other than repentance itself.

TEXT After hearing the voice in the sky, the follower will again zealously recite and study the Great-vehicle sutras. Because he recites and studies the sutras of Great Extent, the Great-vehicle, even in his dreams he will see Shakyamuni Buddha staying on Divine Eagle Peak with the great assembly, preaching the Dharma Flower Sutra and expounding the meaning of one reality.

COMMENTARY *The sutras of Great Extent*. The original two Chinese words for "Great Extent" mean "correct" and "equal," so "Great Extent" is an epithet for the Mahayana sutras, because Mahayana teaches that the truth of the Middle Way is correct and that the Buddha and all living beings are equal in their essence.

• *The meaning of one reality*. As I explained in the commentary on the "world of one reality" (see the 2022 Spring issue of *Dharma World*) and the "way of one reality" (see the same issue), "one reality" refers to the real aspect of all things. "The meaning of one reality" is the teaching that illuminates the true essence of all things. It also teaches us that since too the true human essence is buddha nature, all human beings will be able to attain the stage of a buddha like that of Shakyamuni Buddha if they attain enlightenment. The Mahayana teachings ultimately all teach this truth.

TEXT After the teaching is preached, with repentance and a thirsting heart of hope, he will wish to see the Buddha. Then he must fold his hands, and kneeling in the direction of Divine Eagle Peak, he must speak thus: 'Tathagata, the world's hero forever remains in this world. Out of compassion for me, please reveal yourself to me.'

COMMENTARY The follower has the sense of having a greater understanding of Shakyamuni's sole purpose in appearing in the world and of the essence of his teachings. He feels he is approaching true enlightenment and that only a little more effort is needed. At that point he again practices further repentance. Furthermore, he deepens his longing and thirst for the Buddha more and more; visualizing Shakyamuni on Divine Eagle Peak, he folds his hands and prays to him to reveal himself clearly. You may think it strange that he should again be praying to the Buddha to show himself, considering the text said previously that he had done so already. The passage above expresses his wish to come into closer contact with the mind of the Buddha and to deepen even more his feeling of oneness with the Buddha.

TEXT After he has spoken thus, he will see Divine Eagle Peak adorned with the precious seven and filled with countless bhikshus, shravakas, and a great assembly; this place is lined with jewel trees, and its jewel ground is even and smooth; there stands a wonderfully jeweled lion throne. [On it sits] Shakyamuni Buddha, who sends forth from between his eyebrows a ray of light, which shines everywhere throughout all directions of the universe and passes through the innumerable worlds in all directions. The buddhas emanated from Shakyamuni Buddha in all directions where this ray reaches assemble like a cloud at one time, and preach extensively the Wonderful Dharma—as [it is said] in the Wonderful Dharma Flower Sutra.

COMMENTARY The follower now sees the emanated buddhas illuminated by the ray of light from between the Buddha's eyebrows. This means that if we take refuge in the teachings of Shakyamuni, we will come into contact with the minds of all buddhas. In other words, by awakening to the Truth (the Wonderful Dharma) taught by Shakyamuni, we will be able to comprehend the true meaning of all teachings. That the emanated buddhas all expound the same teachings as the Lotus Sutra (the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma) signifies that the Wonderful Dharma (the ultimate Truth) is one, and that the Lotus Sutra teaches that ultimate Truth. Therefore, it is only natural that the profound truth of all teachings is one with the Lotus Sutra.

TEXT Each of these emanated buddhas, having a body of deep gold, is boundless in the size of his body and sits on his lion throne, accompanied by countless hundreds of kotis of great bodhisattvas as his retinue. The practice of each bodhisattva is equal to that of Universal Virtue.

COMMENTARY The color of deep gold symbolizes the consummate splendor and beauty of each buddha's virtue, and because the Dharma they teach penetrates the entire universe, it is expressed as "boundless." The text says that the practice of each of the "countless hundreds of kotis of great bodhisattvas" is identical with that of the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, but as mentioned earlier, each bodhisattva is endowed with

a special virtue and is a symbolic existence that enables us ordinary people to make that virtue our exemplar, which we feel close to. Though each bodhisattva appears to have his or her own special virtue, in essence all virtues are one in that they bring living beings to deliverance through the Buddha Way. The bodhisattva practice of striving to bring all living beings to liberation is what defines a bodhisattva and is thus one with the practice of Universal Virtue.

TEXT So, too, is it in the retinue of the countless buddhas and bodhisattvas in all directions. When the great assembly has gathered together like a cloud, they will see Shakyamuni Buddha, who from the pores of his whole body emits rays of light in each of which a hundred kotis of transformed buddhas dwell. The emanated buddhas will emit from the white hair circle between their eyebrows—the sign of a great man—rays of light that stream into the top of Shakyamuni Buddha's head. When the follower beholds this aspect, the emanated buddhas will also emit, from all the pores of their bodies, rays of light in which abide transformed buddhas numerous as the atoms of the sands of the Ganges.

COMMENTARY The rays coming from between the eyebrows of all the emanated buddhas flow into the top of Shakyamuni's head, and myriads of transformed buddhas can be seen within those golden rays streaming from the buddhas' bodies. This signifies that the Buddha's teachings expand one after another without end. Wherever the light of the Wonderful Dharma reaches, all things that accord with it become reflected in its light and instantly emit the same light themselves. Those whose buddha nature is obscured by delusion and sin, however, will not emit the light, however much they absorb it. Those who do not dispel that veil by repentance will always remain in a state of delusion.

TEXT Thereupon the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue will again emit the ray of light, the sign of a great man, from between his eyebrows, and put it into the heart of the follower. After this ray has entered into his heart, the follower himself will remember that under the countless hundreds and thousands of buddhas in the past, he received and kept, read and recited the Great-vehicle sutras, and he will himself plainly and clearly see his former lives. He will possess the very faculty of transcendent remembrance of former states of existence.

COMMENTARY "The Bodhisattva Universal Virtue will again emit the ray of light . . . and put it into the heart of the follower" symbolizes the complete purification of the original buddha nature through repentance. This enables

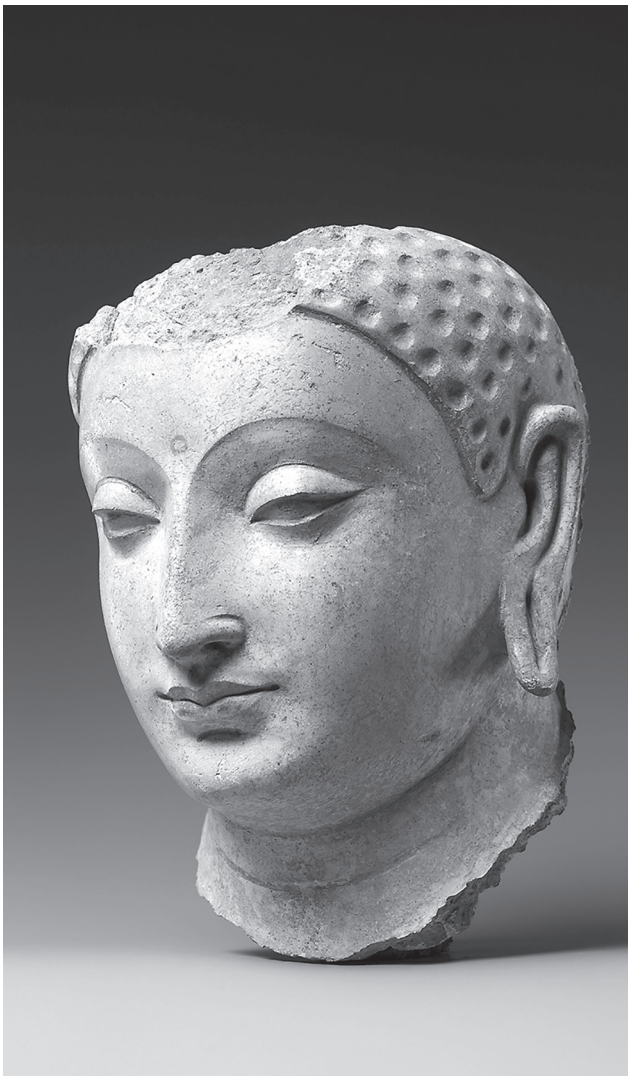

Photo: Alamy / PPS

Stucco head of the Buddha from Hadda, Afghanistan (c. fifth century CE). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

the follower to comprehend distinctly his former states of existence, recalling: "Though I have served innumerable buddhas in the past and received the Mahayana teachings, in the course of rebirths delusion has again arisen and clouded my buddha nature. Yet my practice in the past is not for nothing, for it is the cause of such former practice that enables me now to see the buddhas." This state of being able to recall former lives is equal in worth to the ability to perceive all previous lives of oneself and of others, the fourth of the six divine faculties (see the July / August 1992 issue). Human beings do not need to strive to attain such powers; they are a natural result of bringing forth buddha nature through repentance and gaining wisdom in the true sense of the word from Mahayana teachings.

TEXT Immediately attaining a great enlightenment, he will acquire the dharani of revolution and a hundred

thousand myriad kotis of dharanis. Rising from his contemplation, he will see before him all the emanated buddhas sitting on lion thrones under all the jewel trees. He will also see the ground of lapis lazuli springing up from the lower sky like heaps of lotus flowers; between each flower there will be bodhisattvas numerous as the atoms [of the sands of the Ganges] and sitting cross-legged. He will also see the bodhisattvas who emanated from Universal Virtue extolling and expounding the Great-vehicle among their assembly. Then the bodhisattvas with one voice will cause the follower to purify his six organs.

COMMENTARY Even at ordinary times the follower is able to perceive the emanated buddhas preaching the Dharma. This implies that in the course of everyday life the follower can perceive and grasp the true teachings in even any word and deed of any person. He comes to possess such splendid wisdom-power. The realm of innumerable lotus flowers blooming in the ground of lapis lazuli signifies the certainty that it is possible for those who receive and keep the Mahayana teachings to increase limitlessly. One without firm faith may be often and utterly disappointed with the ugliness of the world and the stupidity of its people, but the person who has been devoted to the Mahayana teachings and is able to perceive the buddha nature that all share receives the confirmation that the Truth (the Wonderful Dharma) will eventually tug at the heartstrings of all and make them aspire to buddhahood. Visualizing in the mind this saha world turning into the picturesque Land of Tranquil Light, where lotus flowers are at their best in the ground of lapis lazuli, the follower will be even more diligent in practice toward the ideal. When you consider in this way, you will understand the meaning of the passage "He will also see the bodhisattvas who emanated from Universal Virtue extolling and expounding the Great-vehicle."

We must not think, just because we have reached such a stage, that repentance and religious training are no longer necessary. This is certainly not so. So great is the distance between our enlightenment and that of the buddhas that any carelessness could lead to retrogression. Thus training through which we purify the mind and cultivate buddha nature must never be neglected. This is why the bodhisattvas command the follower to do a variety of things in order to purify the six organs.

To be continued

In this series, passages in the **TEXT** sections are quoted from *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Company, 1975, with slight revisions. The diacritical marks originally used for several Sanskrit terms in the **TEXT** sections are omitted here for easier reading.

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Paintings of lotus flowers drawn on the sliding screens of the Kacho-den (drawing room), Shoren-in, a Buddhist temple of the Tendai denomination of Japanese Buddhism, in Kyoto.

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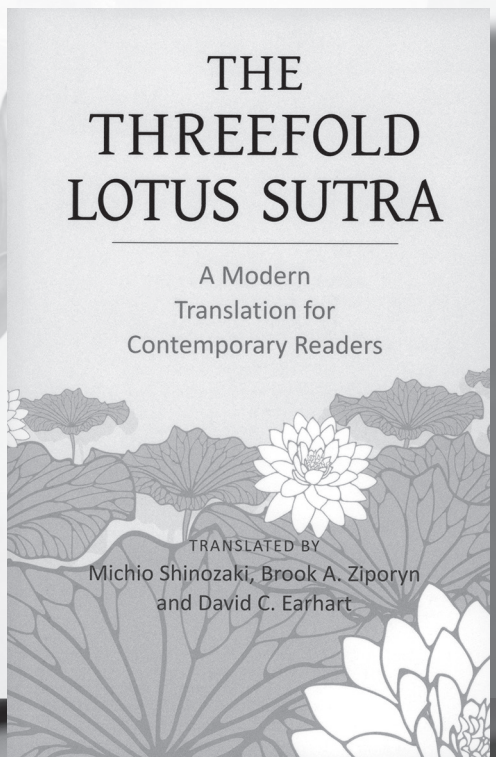

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