CHAPTER III
CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF BODHISATTVA PHILOSOPHY

INTRODUCTION

Buddhism asserts that the path of the Bodhisattva is not an otherworldly undertaking for people with unique gifts of compassion or wisdom. Rather, the life-condition of Bodhisattva is inherent in the lives of ordinary men and women, and the purpose of Buddhist practice is to strengthen that state until compassion becomes the basis of all our actions.

A Bodhisattva is literally a living being (sattva) who aspires to Enlightenment. (Bodhi) and carries out altruistic practices. The Bodhisattva ideal is central to the Mahayana Buddhist tradition as the individual who seeks Enlightenment. both for him-or herself and for others. Compassion, an empathetic sharing of the sufferings of others, is the Bodhisattva's greatest characteristic. It is shown in the following incident from the Vimalakirti Sutra which concerns a prominent lay follower of the Buddha who had fallen ill. When questioned about his illness, Vimalakirti replied, "Because the beings are ill, the Bodhisattva is ill. The sickness of the Bodhisattva arises from his great compassion."

It is held that the Bodhisattva makes four vows expressing a determination to work for the happiness of others. "However innumerable sentient beings are, I vow to save them; however inexhaustible the passions are, I vow to master them; however limitless the teachings are, I vow to study them; however infinite the Buddha-truth is, I vow to attain it." 1
The vows, each of which commits the Bodhisattva to the open-ended pursuit of a continually receding goal, may seem daunting. Buddhism asserts, however, that the path of the Bodhisattva is not an otherworldly undertaking for people with unique gifts of compassion or wisdom. Rather, the life-condition of Bodhisattva is inherent in the lives of ordinary men and women, and the purpose of Buddhist practice is to strengthen that state until compassion becomes the basis of all our actions.

In addition to compassion, the vows reflect the Bodhisattva's commitment to self-mastery, to study and learning, to the attainment of wisdom. None of these, however, is pursued in a vacuum, merely to improve or adorn the self; at the base of all these efforts is always the determination to remove the sufferings of others, and to replace them with joy.

For the followers of Nichiren Buddhism, Bodhisattva practice is subsumed in the twin, mutually reinforcing aspects of "practice for oneself and others." The core of practicing for oneself is the recitation of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo (the "daimoku" of the Lotus Sutra) along with key passages from the sutra. The purpose of this practice is to revolutionize one's inner life, to develop the qualities of the Buddha: courage, wisdom, compassion and abundant vitality or life-force.

While many people may at first be inspired to practice Buddhism by the desire for personal happiness, to overcome illness or some other seemingly insurmountable challenge, as their life-state expands, they naturally develop a deeper concern for the happiness of others. Perceiving the interconnectedness of all beings, they take
compassionate action, including sharing with others the insights of Buddhism, so they may also tap into the same rich inner resources that lie within their lives.

Bodhisattvas are thus naturally engaged in society, actively struggling both to change themselves and make the world a better, more humane place for all people. This explains why members of the SGI strive to be valuable participants in society, and to contribute as much as possible to their family, work place and community.

MAHAYANA BUDDHISM

Mahayanists differentiate themselves from other Buddhist lineages in terms of two key ideas: the Bodhisattva ideal and the doctrine of emptiness. Many Mahayanists argue that the concept of the Bodhisattva ideal proves Mahayana Buddhism to be morally superior to earlier Theravadin lineages, which do not recognize the Bodhisattva ideal. A Bodhisattva is a being who has attained Enlightenment, but chooses to stay in the samsaric realm (rather than in Nirvana) to help other sentient beings also attain Enlightenment. Differently, the arhat is a being who has also attained Enlightenment, but who has sought it only for him/herself. Whereas the Bodhisattva practices the Buddhist path knowing he/she will remain in samsara after liberation to help all other sentient beings also liberate themselves, the arhat never makes this promise. Thus many Mahayanists claim that the Bodhisattva’s compassion reflects true selflessness, and superiority absent from the ‘selfish’ arhat path followed by early Buddhists (Hinayana).

The differences between these two types of enlightened beings are not as drastic as they may seem. Aspiring Bodhisattvas have to devote all of their energy to attaining their own Enlightenment. before they can help others. thus until liberation is attained, the
path of the Bodhisattva and that of the arhat are exactly the same. Both types of beings have to experientially discover the Buddha’s insights of non-self and impermanence for themselves through rigorous meditation and study. But once this is completed, Bodhisattvas undergo a series of preparatory compassion practices to be of service to other beings seeking Enlightenment. The Bodhisattva path is by no means limited to a single lifetime. By deciding to undertake this path, the Bodhisattva works to attain Enlightenment. (In however many lifetimes it takes) and then remains trapped in the cycle of rebirth indefinitely to help all beings attain Enlightenment.

As we can see, then, if one does not believe in karma and Rebirth, the Mahayana notion of the Bodhisattva path seems like nonsense, and the difference between the arhat and the Bodhisattva collapses. However, very few Buddhist Scholars propose understandings of Buddhist that reject karma and Rebirth, and the difference between the arhat and the Bodhisattva is still maintained in most every account of Buddhist philosophy.

Mahayana Buddhism’s other distinguishing claim is the idea of emptiness. It is a step beyond the non-self doctrine, arguing in favor of not only the emptiness of the self, but of all conditioned things. All Buddhist lineages support the non-self doctrine, but only Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhists support the concept of complete emptiness. All Buddhists take it to be true that there is no essential essence to a person, that there is no self. The Buddha argued that the entities we call ‘persons’ are just a bundle of five impermanent, constantly arising and passing aggregates (skandhas). There is no permanent ‘self’ within a person. Instead, there are only the five impermanent aggregates which, combined, make up the illusion of a permanent self. This depiction of the self
maps onto Sartre’s understanding of the ego fairly well. However, the Mahayana Buddhists not only accept the non-self doctrine, but they also claim that things besides persons lack essences. The Buddhist word for things is ‘dharmas’. Some Buddhist schools also refer to Dharmas as ‘conditioned moments’. Mahayanists argue that the bundle of aggregates (five skhandas) that make up the conceptual fiction of a ‘self’ are themselves full of impermanent Dharmas, the Karmically conditioned material that binds beings to samsara.

Therefore, Mahayanists claim that the earlier Buddhist lineages (those who adhere to Abhidharma interpretations of the Buddha’s teachings) do not understand the ultimate truth. They claim that such prior teachings are conventionally true, but not entirely true insofar as they do not recognize that all things (Dharmas) lack essences. This use of the term ‘conventional’ does not merely imply the kind of things that are made true by the fact that we have conventions about them. Rather, conventional truth is a Buddhist concept differentiated from ultimate truth in the Two Truths Doctrine. It states that conventional or relative common-sense truths describe our daily experiences in the concrete, material world, whereas ultimate truths describe the ultimate reality of emptiness, a world void of concrete or inherent characteristics. The ultimate reality is a realm only knowable by enlightened beings.

Therefore, the Mahayana Buddhists claim that earlier Hinayana teachings (the Lesser Vehicle) reveal only the conventional truth, which means they (the early teachings) have failed to get at the ultimate nature of reality. Mahayanists criticize earlier lineages for not realizing that the ‘self’ is not the only illusory, unreal substance. In fact, Mahayanists argue, the ultimate truth is that all things are empty.
Many scholars argue that the Mahayanist doctrine of emptiness leads directly to metaphysical nihilism. However, the particular Mahayana Buddhist school that my thesis is most interested in, Yogacara, refutes this critique and attempts to reinterpret the doctrine of emptiness in such a way that it does not lead to nihilism. The two major Buddhist schools within Mahayana Buddhism who offer complex philosophical arguments about emptiness are Yogacara and Madhyamaka. According to Siderits’ summary of the Yogacarin view here:

On the Yogacara reinterpretation, to say all things are empty is to say that all things lack the natures that are attributed to them through our use of concepts. They hold, that is, that whenever we cognize something by identifying it as falling under some concept, we are in some sense falsifying it. Yogacara identifies two reasons (and develops arguments for each) why all conceptualization should involve falsification of what is ultimately real. The first is that when we conceptualize, we impost a subject-object dichotomy on reality: we think in terms of an object ‘out there’ and a cognizing subject ‘in here’. This dichotomizing structure falsifies reality because there is no external world. The second reason is that, according to Yogacara, ultimately real things are by nature unique and so ineffable. To apply a concept to something is to say it belongs together with other things that also fall under that concept. To say something is red is to say it resembles certain other things in respect of its being red. But if everything is unique, this can never be true.²
Master Tai Hsu once said, "A truly cultivated person is, in fact, a Buddha". What this means is that, to reach the perfection of a Buddha, one must first start cultivation as a person. In fact, the Buddhist teachings of the human vehicle are as applicable to us as they are to Bodhisattvas. With determination, any one of us can become a Bodhisattva. Mencius once made a similar observation: "As Emperor Shwuen was, as Yu was, any determined person is, too." Of course, there are many stages of Bodhisattva development. There are the ten stages of faith, the ten stages of prajna and the ten lines of activities for the universal welfare of others, the ten transfers of merits, and the attainment of ten merits. These stages constitute the first fifty of the fifty-two stages of a Bodhisattva toward Buddhahood. Following these fifty stages is the attainment of Enlightenment. Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva and Manjusri Bodhisattva are examples of this stage. The development of a Bodhisattva is not unlike our educational system. Though students in elementary school, middle school, and college are all called students, they do differ in the level of knowledge acquired. Our goal is to make a certain amount of progress in our development as a Bodhisattva. But then, how do we move ourselves through the Bodhisattva stages.

The Bodhisattva Character: Selflessness and Compassion

In our previous lectures, we have mentioned that the development of religious faith calls for a religious disposition. By the same token, a key element of why the Buddha became a fully enlightened individual is because of his compassion, love, and kindness for all beings. Similarly, what makes an arhat an arhat is his inclination for the peace of nirvana as he shuns worldly existence. As we are all different in character and disposition some of us are friendly and generous, while others are distant and reclusive it
is good to know what kinds of persons are most inclined to becoming a Bodhisattva. To answer this, one should first understand the character of a Bodhisattva. Two words best describe the character of a Bodhisattva selflessness and compassion. Selflessness and compassion work hand in hand: with the sense of selflessness comes the sensibility of compassion, and out of the spirit of compassion arises the wisdom of selflessness.

Let us first understand the embedded meaning of the word "Bodhisattva." This is a Sanskrit word made up of two parts. The first part "bodhi" means Enlightenment, while the second part "sattva" refers to any sentient being. Thus, if we analyze the term "Bodhisattva," it embodies Enlightenment. And sentience it means "a sentient being with the mind for the truth." There are two aspects to the term enlightenment and sentience. First, it speaks of the commitment and dedication to seek. Enlightenment, in other words, efforts for one's own use in the attainment of ultimate wisdom. Thus, we also describe a Bodhisattva as one who seeks the path. Second, the term enlightenment and sentience speaks of the devotion to bringing enlightenment to all sentient beings, in other words, efforts for the benefit of all. This is the manifestation of compassion, and it explains why we also describe a Bodhisattva as one who delivers sentient beings. Thus, we can see that a Bodhisattva embodies, on the one hand, the arhat-spirit of transcending the world and seeking the ultimate truth and, on the other hand, the Buddha-compassion and zeal of wanting to deliver all sentient beings. Indeed, a Bodhisattva is one who "seeks the Buddha Way and delivers all beings," an enlightening practitioner who finds fulfillment in the fulfillment of others.

When we think of Bodhisattvas, we inevitably think of their kindness and compassion. Like arhats, Bodhisattvas strive to practice liberation. Unlike arhats,
Bodhisattvas are rich in their great kindness and compassion. When Bodhisattvas witness our suffering, their flames of compassion are ignited, and they vow to help us free ourselves from suffering. This is in contrast with arhats, who develop a dislike for worldly existence when they see through the conflicts of the world and the suffering of rebirth. Arhats, hence, are keen on attaining salvation and entering nirvana. In Buddhist literature, we like Bodhisattvas to "great vehicles" that can ferry sentient beings across the sea of suffering, while arhats are often described as "small vehicles" that are available solely for their own personal use. While the goals of Bodhisattvas and arhats are similar, they differ in their approach. The difference lies in the compassion of Bodhisattvas, which gives Bodhisattvas their empathy toward others' pain. Compassion is, indeed, the source of energy that provides Bodhisattvas with the strength to practice the Mahayana spirit of attaining fulfillment for oneself through the fulfillment of others.

What, then, is compassion? The sutras describe compassion as the foundation of the Dharma. It is out of compassion that the Buddha preached the Dharma for more than forty years, gave more than forty thousand Dharma talks, and left us the numerous teachings of the Tripitaka. From this we can see the enormous significance of compassion! There are two aspects of compassion: loving tenderness and sympathy. Loving tenderness refers to the sharing of joy (heavenly joy, meditative joy, and the joy of nirvana) and sympathy refers to the removal of pain (the indescribable pain of being reborn in the three suffering realms of animals, hungry ghosts, and hell). With great loving tenderness, Bodhisattvas heal us of our sicknesses; with great sympathy, Bodhisattvas understand our pain. This form of great compassion is markedly different from and is a step beyond the loving and caring emotions with which we are familiar. The spirit of compassion is much deeper in meaning and much more embracing in capacity.
The compassion that Bodhisattvas have for us sentient beings can be described as a mix of the stern fatherly love and the tender motherly love that our parents have for us, always available and willing to sacrifice themselves for our welfare. The great kindness and compassion of Bodhisattvas can be compared to the warmth of the sun that is available to all without discrimination, their compassion is limitless, as they tend to all our pleas without reservation. With great wisdom and compassion, Bodhisattvas tailor their help to our varying situations as they guide us across the sea of suffering. The best example of a Bodhisattva is, of course, the great compassionate Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, whose compassion and kindness is universally known. With great compassion, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva made the twelve great vows of helping all sentient beings cross the sea of suffering. When we call to Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva for help and guidance, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva manifests in different forms to help us regardless of where we are. Based on the situation and need, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva has manifested as a celestial being, as a woman, and as a young boy. Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva has been seen carrying a fish basket, riding a dragon, living among bamboo groves, and holding a willow tree branch. In fact, we often use the term "the thirty-two manifestations of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva" to describe the many manifestations of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva coming to our aid during our times of crises. This very ability to manifest in differing forms depending on the situation is, in fact, a direct result of the Bodhisattva's great and selfless compassion.

Taking this a step further, the other side of compassion is selflessness. In the hearts and minds of Bodhisattvas, there is no self, just us sentient beings. Regardless of what we need be it money, property, or even his or her life, Bodhisattvas willingly give to us without reservation. In the Jataka Sutra, a sutra about the previous lives of the Buddha,
there is a story about a time when the Buddha was cultivating to be a Bodhisattva. In this particular life, the Buddha was also born as a prince. One day, when he was out traveling in the woods with two of his brothers, he saw below a cliff a mother tiger that had just given birth to seven baby cubs. Because of over-exertion, the mother tiger became so weak that her life was hanging in the balance. In the meantime, the baby cubs were all crying to be nursed. When the prince saw how pitiful the situation was, his compassion arose in him, and he decided to sacrifice his life to save the life of the mother tiger. He distracted his two brothers and jumped down to where the mother tiger was so that he might offer himself as a meal for the mother tiger. The mother tiger was, however, so weakened that she did not even have the strength to feed on him. Anxious to save the tigress, he used a sharp blade of bamboo bark to sever his own throat. With the blood gushing out, and disregarding his own pain, the prince slowly crawled to the side of the mother tiger so that she could drink his own blood. In giving up his own life, he was able to save the life of the mother tiger and her cubs. In the Jataka Sutra, there is another record about another lifetime of the Buddha when he was a king. The king loved his subjects and was very generous to his people. He established posts throughout his land to provide relief to whoever needed them. There was even an incident when trying to save the life of a pigeon he cut a piece of his flesh to feed a hawk.

Compassion allowed this prince to forget his own fears and give up his own life for the sake of others. With compassion, Bodhisattvas perform many selfless acts for us sentient beings. Because of the rich compassion that Bodhisattvas have for us sentient beings, Bodhisattvas are very forgiving of our folly and mistakes. They are so willing to make sacrifices without any regard for themselves that they reach the point of selflessness. Without regrets and fear, Bodhisattvas practice their great compassion, just like the
saying, "For the sake of sentient beings, I am willing to part with anything." The Lotus Sutra says, "With the strength of great compassion, [Bodhisattvas] deliver all suffering sentient beings." Bodhisattvas, who have gone through numerous kalpas of cultivation, have already severed all delusions and attained pure living. Accordingly, they could have entered the peaceful realm of nirvana, but out of compassion for sentient beings, they decide to stay within the wheel of rebirth to guide us through the sea of suffering. They show us Dharma methods, turn the Dharma wheel, and even pledge to be reborn in the three suffering realms to help the suffering beings of these realms. When Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva saw sentient beings suffering in the karmic flames of hell, he made the determination that, "If I do not enter the gate of hell, who will". So, he pledged, "I vow not to enter into Buddhahood until all hells are empty." What it means is that he, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, will defer his attainment of Buddhahood as long as there is one single being suffering in hell.

From the above, we can see that compassion is the underlying cause for one to become a Bodhisattva. Compassion gives Bodhisattvas strength to help us through the sea of suffering; it is the foundation of the Mahayana spirit. Compassion germinates from the wisdom of selflessness, and is incredibly powerful and strong. If we can all just have a little bit of the Bodhisattva character, our world will be a much better place; conflicts will diminish and harmony will flourish.

**The Bodhisattva Perspective: Prajna and Sunyata**

In the section above, we discussed that compassion is the distinguishing characteristic of Bodhisattvas. What I want to emphasize in this section is that in addition to compassion, Bodhisattvas are also very accomplished in the area of prajna (wisdom).
When compassion is integrated with prajna, it will not be applied blindly without distinguishing what is right from what is wrong. This is the compassion that Bodhisattvas have for us sentient beings. Take for instance; if we share our generosity with one who is a compulsive gambler, we are doing him more harm than good. Thus, only when compassion is mixed with prajna will it help others to do good. We should not confuse compassion with the blind parental love that can spoil a child, or with trifling acts of permissiveness that can encourage ill behavior. Compassion is like our two legs that make us mobile, and prajna is like our two eyes that help us tell the true from the false. Thus, for us to embark on the path of Bodhisattvas, compassion and prajna have to complement each other.

What, then, is prajna? Prajna is the wisdom that allows us to see through worldly differences, such as capable versus inept, physical versus mental, or self versus others. Prajna is the "non-discriminating mind," where the clinging to the discriminating notion of self and other objects is absent. In other words, prajna allows us to understand sunyata (emptiness) that self and the universe are mutually interdependent and all sentient beings and self are one. From a worldly viewpoint, our world is full of differences such as tallness and shortness, poverty and wealth, filth and purity, or ignorance and intelligence. From the viewpoint of prajna, however, all these differences in phenomena do not exist in an absolute sense; they are nothing but the result of varying causes and conditions. All phenomena of the universe be it physical or mental, be itself or others do not exist on their own, but as a result of a combination of many factors. This is the Dharma-realm of oneness. In this state of mind, all differences are equal, truth and phenomena are integrated.
Bodhisattvas live in this realm of prajna. Thus, Bodhisattvas do not look at sentient beings as apart from themselves. Sentient beings are their hearts and minds, and their hearts and minds are sentient beings. Our joys and sorrows are, in fact, their joys and sorrows. Our journeys in the wheel of rebirth are their journeys, too. When we get sick, Bodhisattvas also become sick. When we act in a deluded way, Bodhisattvas also feel our pain. Because of their "non-discriminating minds," Bodhisattvas see sentient beings as themselves. They continually and tirelessly manifest in our world to help us become clear of our own delusions and cleansed of our own karma. In so doing, they reach the state of mind of "purifying the world with great compassion," in which everything becomes possible. With the great wisdom of the non-discriminating mind, Bodhisattvas attain the ultimate bodhi (enlightenment) and masterfully lead sentient beings onto the path of enlightenment. With pure and great compassion, Bodhisattvas work diligently and effectively to free sentient beings from their ignorance. Great wisdom is self-benefiting as it enables Bodhisattvas to strive for the state of ultimate bodhi; great compassion benefits others as it motivates Bodhisattvas to stay within the wheel of rebirth to help others cross the sea of suffering. To benefit one is to benefit others, and vice versa, to benefit others is to benefit one. Striving for enlightenment is the same as being willing to stay within the wheel of rebirth to help others, and vice versa, to stay within the wheel of rebirth to help others is the same as to strive for Enlightenment. The eyes of prajna and the feet of compassion complement each other, and neither one can be lacking. Prajna and compassion are the two sides of a coin. There are two, yet there is one; there is one, yet there are two. Prajna and compassion, this is the core of the Bodhisattva principle.

When Bodhisattvas cultivate the prajna of emptiness, they give it their all, are deeply devoted, and will not hesitate to give up their lives as part of their cultivation. In
the Tripitaka of the Southern Tradition, there is a record about one of the previous lives of the Buddha. This was during the time when Dipankara Buddha was alive in the world.

Sakyamuni Buddha was then a Brahman by the name of Sumedha. He was very kind and eager to learn about the Dharma. He often paid his respects to the Triple Gem (i.e. the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha). One day, Sumedha learned that Dipankara Buddha was coming to preach in his village. He was delighted and was determined not to miss this opportunity of listening to the Dharma. He thought to himself: The road leading to this remote village is bumpy and treacherous. How can I let the feet of a holy person like Dipankara Buddha walk on such a filthy path? With this in mind, he took off his clothes and used them to cover the road that the Buddha had to use. He also prostrated on the ground and let his hair down for Dipankara Buddha and his many arhat disciples to walk upon. With indescribable joy, he welcomed Buddha Dipankara. When he lifted his head and saw the majestic and august look of Buddha Dipankara, his heart was full of admiration and he said, "In heaven above and on earth below, nothing can compare to the Buddha. Within the worlds of ten directions, there is also no comparison. I have seen all in this world, nothing is as great as the Buddha." At that moment, he vowed to help all sentient beings cross the sea of suffering, and that he may attain the same right effect (i.e. Enlightenment) as Dipankara Buddha. It is because of his diligence and effort in learning the Dharma that Sumedha attained Buddhahood nine kalpas before that of Maitreya Bodhisattva. The Astasahasrika-prajnaparamita Sutra (Sutra of Eight Thousand Verses of Prajna) recorded the touching story of Always-Weeping Bodhisattva. The gist of the story is that Always-Weeping Bodhisattva was often saddened by how difficult it was to meet a virtuous and knowledgeable teacher. He often worried about not being able to listen to the Dharma and thus not being able to grow in prajna. This distress often brought tears to his
eyes, which was why people referred to him as Always-Weeping Bodhisattva, or they called him Always-Mournful Bodhisattva. In earnest, he traveled far and wide to find the right teacher that could teach him what he did not know. Once, he learned that about five hundred yojanas to the east was a city called the City of Fragrance. There lived a cultivated and accomplished teacher, called Dharmauttara Bodhisattva. Delightfully, Always-Weeping Bodhisattva was determined to travel there to listen to the Dharma. He also decided to sell himself as a servant so that he could use the money to offer to Dharmauttara Bodhisattva. On the road, he kept asking passers-by if they were willing to pay for him as a servant. There were no takers, however, until a big burly man appeared. This burly man offered to buy one of his body parts or organs to be used as a sacrifice. Always-Weeping Bodhisattva, determined to seek the Dharma, did not hesitate to cut off one of his arms to sell to the burly man. This story soon reached the daughter of a rich local merchant, and she was touched. She then prepared five hundred carts of precious gems and followed Always-Weeping to the City of Fragrance. Afterwards, when Always-Weeping heard Dharmauttara Bodhisattva teaching "Suchness never goes and never comes; the nature of emptiness is, in fact, suchness," he instantly became enlightened. He entered into deep meditative concentration and traveled freely in the sea of prajna.  

From the earnestness shown by Sumedha and Always-Weeping Bodhisattva in their search of the Dharma, we can see how precious prajna and the understanding of sunyata is. The Mahaprajna-paramita Sutra says, "Prajna paramita is the mother of all Bodhisattvas and mahasattvas; it is the source of the Dharma." On the path to becoming a Bodhisattva, the cultivation of prajna is of utmost importance. It can be compared to the nourishment of a mother's milk helping an infant grow. Likewise, it is with the rich nutrients of the Dharma that Bodhisattvas gradually grow and mature in their spiritual
development. As they cultivate the prajna of sunyata, they began to lose the dullness of delusion until they finally reached the pure original state of the mind of emptiness. In this state, they can truly taste the meaning of emptiness without any notion of a self, any notion of others, any notion of living beings, and any notion of lifespan. Thus, when compassion is combined with prajna, our compassion will not cling to any notion of living beings or phenomena. This compassion, which is void of the notion of self and others, can be described as "Great compassion without any conditions, and great kindness as we all are one." This is why sutras often describe prajna paramita as the mother of the Buddhas of the past, present, and future.

In all Buddha lands, there live many Bodhisattvas helping Buddhas deliver sentient beings. Some are known for their compassion, while others are known for their prajna. Among the many Bodhisattvas, we are most familiar with those Bodhisattvas who are often portrayed flanking Buddhas. In the saha world, Manjusri Bodhisattva and Samantabhadra Bodhisattva are known to assist Sakyamuni Buddha. In the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva and Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva accompany Amitabha Buddha to welcome sentient beings into the Pure Land. The Pure Land of Azure Radiance has Sunlight Bodhisattva and Moonlight Bodhisattva. Of these Bodhisattvas, Manjusri, Mahasthamaprapta, and Sunlight are known for their prajna. They may be depicted as riding a fierce lion traveling and preaching the Dharma, or using the light of wisdom to pierce through the darkness of delusion, or holding the sun-wheel to shower us with light. Regardless of how they are portrayed, they all carry with them the sword of prajna, with which they sever all afflictions and delusions.
With great wisdom, Bodhisattvas see through the emptiness of the five aggregates and thoroughly understand all phenomena as empty. As they gain insight into the truth, they live according to the truth and do not harbor any clinging or attachment. Out of compassion for sentient beings, they cannot bear to forsake us, but vow to help us cross the sea of suffering. In order to live up to their vows, they often manifest themselves in our world and travel within the three realms to try to reach us. Even though they know that all phenomena are empty, there is no such thing as a self that can be delivered, and there are no living beings to be delivered, they still wholeheartedly go about delivering all sentient beings. There is a Chinese poem that aptly captures this spirit.

Establish places to teach the Dharma knowing they are only reflections of the moon on water. Hold Dharma activities knowing they are nothing more than flowers in the sky. Subdue the evil army knowing it exists only in the mirror. Seek Buddhahood knowing it is empty like a dream.

In summary, Bodhisattvas use their great wisdom to practice their great compassion, they use their great kindness to complete their great wisdom. When both prajna and compassion are fully integrated and can be employed at will, then we have attained the ultimate bodhi. With this bodhi, we can be worldly yet transcendental, transcendental yet worldly.

**The Bodhisattva Spirit: Perseverance and Diligence**

In our modern society, speed is everything. In trying to achieve ever-increasing speed, we have airplanes, space shuttles, telegrams, pressure cookers, and instant noodles. As we strive to have greater speed in everything, we still have to admit that there is no
short cut to building a person's character, and a tree cannot grow to its full height in one day. There is a saying which goes like this, "The nurturing of trees takes decades, the nurturing of humanity is measured in centuries." Certain things just cannot be hurried. If we want to be an expert in anything, we have to spend at least three to five years in that field. The path to being a Bodhisattva is just the same there is no short cut to it. It takes years, lives, and even kalpas of cultivation for one to become a Bodhisattva. In the Olympics, the marathon race is the event that can best bring out one's perseverance and stamina. To put it simply, the Bodhisattva path of delivering sentient beings and seeking Buddhahood is analogous to that of a marathon race. The sutras tell us that for Bodhisattvas to become Buddhas, they have to cultivate for three great asamkhya kalpas and practice all kinds of Dharma methods. After this, they still have to go through a hundred kalpas until they have accumulated all kinds of bodhi seeds and attained the majestic look of thirty-two marks of excellence and eighty notable physical characteristics. In other words, the journey through the path of truth must be taken a step at a time. Bodhisattvas must be steadfast in their patience and endurance, working on their progression without any lapse. Only with the test of time can Enlightenment be attained. Thus, the Bodhisattva spirit is characterized by perseverance, patience, endurance, and diligence.

How does the Bodhisattvas' spirit of perseverance and diligence come about? It comes from the development of their bodhicitta. The Bodhisattva-bhumi Sutra says, "When all those who belong to the family of Bodhisattvas pledge their bodhicitta and practice with right effort and diligence, they can promptly attain enlightenment." Bodhicitta is the seed of Buddhahood, it is the rich soil in which we can cultivate the pure Dharma. Bodhicitta can wash away all afflictions and can eradicate the
delusion of sentient beings. Bodhicitta is like a soft comfortable bed in which Bodhisattvas can cradle the weary bodies of sentient beings. With Bodhicitta, Bodhisattvas are not intimidated by the long and arduous journey of Buddhahood; they can distance themselves from the three realms and dwell in the Dharma-sea of Truth. Bodhicitta is the dedication of Bodhisattvas in not giving up on sentient beings as they frequent the sea of suffering to become willing vessels to ferry sentient beings across. This spirit of perseverance and diligence is the manifestation of Bodhicitta. All in all, the development of Bodhicitta also marks the beginning of all great vows. Bodhicitta is the foundation of all Bodhi paths and the guiding light of compassion. Without Bodhicitta, Bodhisattvas will not be able to look beyond our transgressions and work for our betterment. The Avatamsaka Sutra says, "The cultivation of Dharma without Bodhicitta is evil." Thus, if we want to cultivate the Mahayana Bodhi path, we must first pledge our Bodhicitta. The arhat Sudhana found this out in a roundabout way. After he traveled about learning from fifty-three virtuous teachers, he met Maitreya Bodhisattva who told him that he must first pledged his Bodhicitta. Maitreya Bodhisattva also told him that once he pledged his Bodhicitta, all Buddhas would guide him and show him the way of the Mahayana compassion, a path that even sravakas and pratyekabuddhas had yet to reach. From this advice that Maitreya Bodhisattva gave to Sudhana, we can see the significance of pledging our Bodhicitta.

Given that bodhicitta is so important, what exactly is our bodhicitta? Simply put, our bodhicitta is our commitment to "seek the Buddha Way and deliver all beings." This is such an important subject that the Graduate School of Chinese Buddhism at Fo Guang Shan always includes the study of An Inspiration to Pledge Our Bodhicitta in its introductory session for new students. This piece was written by Master Shengan of the
Qing Dynasty, the Ninth Patriarch of the Lotus School of Buddhism. We can see that many people today shun work for comfort and moral values are on the wane. We hope this article and its theme of reminding us to be mindful of the ten causes and conditions can help us discover our bodhicitta. To be mindful of the ten causes and conditions is to be grateful to the Buddhas, grateful for our parents, grateful for our teachers and elders, grateful for our benefactors, grateful for all sentient beings, mindful of the suffering of life and death, respectful of our hearts and minds, remorseful of our transgressions, mindful to be reborn into the Pure Land, and hopeful that the Dharma will stay with us for a long time to come. In the sutras and sastras about Bodhicitta, we are told that for us to be Bodhisattvas, we have to discover our Bodhicitta by contemplating all Buddhas, observing the sufferings of the physical body, being compassionate toward all sentient beings, and seeking the holy fruit of Enlightenment. To contemplate all Buddhas is to emulate all Buddhas, to be a great person, to have great courage, to be willing to sacrifice our wealth and even our lives, and to seek Enlightenment. To observe the suffering of the physical body is to understand that the four great elements and the five aggregates are illusive like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows. To be compassionate toward sentient beings is to be compassionate toward the ignorance of sentient beings, who act in delusion without even realizing it, and thus to become determined to deliver all sentient beings. If we can do this, we have discovered our Bodhicitta.

The greatness of Bodhisattvas, their perseverance, and their diligence are not what most of us can live up to. Bodhisattvas, however, are not almighty and are not divine. Buddhas are not gods, and the same is true of Bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas are individual beings like you and me, the difference is that they have discovered their Bodhicitta and can persevere with diligence. The sutras speak of one incident when the Buddha was
preaching to a group of people. Most of the people listening accepted and received the Dharma with great joy. There was one individual who was most distracted and could not pay attention to the pure and wondrous Dharma. The Buddha used his supernatural power and spoke most eloquently, most patiently, and most compassionately. Even then, this person stubbornly refused to accept the Dharma. The sutras, therefore, tell us that there are three things that the Buddha finds himself helpless in doing: nullifying karmic forces, delivering those without affinity and necessary conditions and delivering all sentient beings without remainder. Although Buddhas and Bodhisattvas understand that they cannot deliver the countless number of sentient beings and cannot deliver those without affinity, [the enormity of their goal is matched by] their Bodhicitta which is just as immense and boundless. Thus, they still strive incessantly to achieve the impossible and continue to toil tirelessly to finish an endless task. Their Bodhicitta is like a running stream from the thawed snow pack of the Himalayas always flowing. When the conditions are ripe, they will melt away our long frozen spirit.

In the Lotus Sutra, there is a Bodhisattva called Never-Disparaging Bodhisattva who practiced patience and tolerance. With joined palms and utmost respect, he would greet everyone he met saying, "I dare not be disrespectful of you for you are a future Buddha." Now, some of these people practiced another religion and were not too happy to be so greeted. Not only did they not return the civility, they even cursed at him, threw stones at him, or waved a club at him. As Never-Disparaging Bodhisattva did not want to escalate the situation, he would back away respectfully while still muttering to himself, "I dare not be disrespectful of you for you are a future Buddha." From this, we can see that in the eyes of Bodhisattvas, we are all future Buddhas who are presently blinded by our delusion, like a precious gem which has temporarily lost its luster after falling into the
mud. Countless kalpas after countless kalpas, Bodhisattvas pledge their bodhicitta and practice their great compassion. With unparalleled patience and never-ceasing respect, they wake us up to help us discover our own pure nature. Amitabha Buddha is a perfect example of this kind of spirit. In one his previous lives, he was Dharmakara Bodhisattva cultivating to become a Buddha. It was during this lifetime that he vowed the forty-eight great vows, the strength of which manifests the majestic Pure Land. Dharmakara Bodhisattva vowed that if there is just one being within his Pure Land that has not discovered his or her Bodhicitta, he himself will not attain Buddhahood. Thus, the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss is [reserved] for Bodhisattvas who practice continuously without regress and aim to achieve Buddhahood in one lifetime.

In conclusion, there is no short cut to the Bodhisattva spirit. It starts with the initiation of one's Bodhicitta and manifests in continual perseverance and never-ceasing diligence. The initiation of the Bodhicitta marks one's transformation from the ordinary to the transcendental and is the first step on the path of Buddhahood.

The Bodhisattva Practice: Methodical and Eternal

Buddhism has been described as a philosophy and a religion. Why so? The Buddhist teachings are profound and have given us much insightful edification regarding various phenomena of life and the universe. It also differs from other religions in the sense that it allows room for one to have questions regarding the teachings. In these respects, Buddhism is very much like a philosophy. Although Buddhism is very logical, it does not stop with theoretical pursuits alone. It puts a heavy emphasis on practice; thus, it is also described as a religion. The Buddha himself is a perfect example of one who values the importance of practice. After he attained Enlightenment, he gave us this
important teaching: "Abstain from all evils and practice all goodness. The purification of the mind is what Buddhism is about." With this, he left explicit directions for us sentient beings to purify our minds through the practice of virtues and morals. When non-Buddhists posed him purely philosophical questions, the Buddha would remain silent and not answer them. The so-called "fourteen difficult questions" fit into this category. These purely philosophical questions are word games and do not pertain to the liberation from suffering or to our everyday lives. From these episodes, we can see that the Buddha places a lot of emphasis and significance on practice. Buddhism is a religion that highlights cultivation; it is also a philosophy that deals with life. Specifically, the Mahayana Bodhisattva path is founded on putting the fundamental spirit of the Buddha into practice.

How, then, do we practice the Mahayana Bodhisattva path? We should go about it methodically like a student going through the educational system. The "school of Bodhisattvas" is not unlike the educational system that starts from kindergarten, to elementary school, to high school, to college, and onto graduate school. The Mahayana Bodhisattva path can also be understood in terms of stages: the stage of sentient beings whose life is characterized by sufferings, the stage of arhats who are free from the wheel of rebirth, the stage of enlightened Bodhisattvas who have severed afflictions and ill habits; and the stage of Buddhahood or ultimate Enlightenment. Even the stage of Bodhisattvas can be further subdivided into very many stages depending on the level of practice.

The Mahayana Bodhisattva practice is characterized by the thirty-seven conditions (or practices) that guide us to Buddhahood. They are: the four subjects of contemplation,
the four proper lines of exertion, the four steps toward supernatural power; the five spiritual faculties, their five powers; the seven degrees of Enlightenment; and the Noble Eightfold Path. These conditions can cure all bad habits and strengthen our practice. They can severe delusions and help us live in accordance to the Dharma-body (the body of teachings). They are also nourishment for the journey on the Bodhisattva path. These thirty-seven conditions originated from the beginning of Buddhism, always serving as critical elements of one's practice. In fact, even those Bodhisattvas who have attained the ten merits continue to practice these conditions. In addition to these thirty-seven conditions, Bodhisattvas also practice the four great all-embracing virtues: giving alms, speaking with affection, conducting oneself for the benefit of others, and adapting oneself to others to lead them to the truth. The giving of alms can be further classified into the giving of money and material goods, the giving of the Dharma, and the giving of fearlessness. Giving should be practiced with the threefold emptiness of giving. It means that when giving one should not have any idea of an "I" as the giver, nor of an individual who receives the gift, nor of things being given. When we give without the notion of "I" as the giver, we are letting go of the notion of self. When we give without the notion of a receiver, we are letting go of the notion of dualities. When we give without the notion of how much we are giving or the thought of recompense, we are letting go of the notion of phenomena.

Speaking with affection is to speak with compassion and to let our warmth and concern for others come through. The Lotus Sutra praises Nagakanya, the daughter of the sea dragon king, with these words: "With compassion, she thinks of all sentient beings as her own children." Affectionate speech can be compared to the nice warm words of a loving mother. It can dissolve conflicts and turn tyranny into loving kindness. The
meaning of affectionate speech is captured with the saying, "Wondrous fragrance flows from the mouth of one who speaks without hatred." To conduct oneself for the benefit of others is a very important virtue and means that we engage in activities that benefit all sentient beings, that lead them to the truth. In fact, the earlier two virtues of giving and speaking with affection are supporting activities of this one virtue. As long as our activities benefit sentient beings, it does not matter how grand or how insignificant our activities are. During the Warring Period of China, there was a famous general by the name of Liu-Bei who gave us this very insightful advice on his deathbed. He said, "Do not commit a wrong doing, however minor; do not miss doing a good deed, however small." The Buddha once helped his blind disciple, Aniruddha, to mend his clothes. From this, we can see that if we do not start with small acts of virtue, there is no way for us to achieve greatness. Even the Buddha the fully enlightened one did not pass up this small act of kindness of mending clothes for his disciple! If we should not pass up the opportunity of doing the smallest of good deeds, we definitely should not miss the opportunity to engage in activities that can benefit all sentient beings. Last, the virtue of adapting oneself to others to lead them to the truth means that we should put ourselves in others' shoes so that we can teach according to their perspectives. The thirty-two manifestations of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva is a perfect example of how to adapt the teachings to the person and circumstance. For those who are greedy, we teach them to contemplate the unwholesome aspects of the human body. For those who are full of anger, we teach them to contemplate compassion. When we talk with farmers, we converse about farming; with housewives, we talk about housework. This is no different from the Confucian teaching method of directing your teaching to the audience. All in all, practicing these four great all-embracing virtues of leading sentient beings to the truth is a very important cultivation for Bodhisattvas.
In addition to what we discussed above, the Six paramitas and the ten paramitas are also key elements to becoming a Bodhisattva. The Six paramitas are the six ways of leading sentient beings to the shore of nirvana. Within these six paramitas, the three paramitas of giving, observing the precepts, and exercising patience benefit others and are tools for the accumulation of merits and blessings. The other three paramitas of diligence, meditative concentration, and prajna benefit oneself and are nourishment for wisdom. Thus, the practice of the six paramitas brings us both blessings and wisdom. It is also a wondrous way to understand and to be in touch with the Dharma.

Regarding the paramita of giving, we have already discussed the subject in the above paragraph. What we want to emphasize here is that when we give, we should not be concerned about recognition. When we truly give in this spirit, we can experience what Lao Tze had said many years ago, "The more you give, the more you have. The more of yourself you give to others, the more of yourself there is." What this means is that the more we give, the more we have, and that we will not be short of anything. Regarding the observation of precepts, it can help us arrest our inclination to do wrong and mollify the karma of our past wrongdoings. Regardless of which precept we are observing, the importance lies in the intention. If our exterior behavior is only a facade and a cover-up of our ill intentions inside, then we are not living in accordance to the precepts. On the other hand, if our intentions are good, then we are observing the precepts even if we have to bend the rules a little to suit the situation. When the Sixth Patriarch of the Ch'an School of Buddhism was in hiding in the woods, he lived among hunters and ate with them. Under this situation, he could only eat vegetables that had already been cooked with meat, but he was no less cultivated.
Thus, when we observe the precepts, we have to observe them consistently in our minds and behaviors, continually at all times and persistently under all circumstances. In observing the precepts, one may initially feel restricted and practice with trepidation. With the passing of time, the practice becomes instinctive and one feels at ease with the practice; this is observing the precepts in the highest form. Next, the paramita of patience and tolerance is a cure for hatred and a tool for resting the body and mind. When we are patient and tolerant, we can dissolve away conflicts. Many such examples can be found in the Agama Sutra. There was a very famous general in Chinese history by the name of Han Sin. He was known to be able to endure insults. Before he became famous, he was humiliated by a bully who made fun of him by making him crawl between his legs. Han Sin swallowed his pride and did accordingly. His tolerance was [not a sign of weakness] but a key factor in his becoming a famous general later on. In fact, one cannot underscore enough the strength that one can derive from patience and endurance. In addition to the three paramitas of giving, observing the precepts, and being patient and tolerant, Bodhisattvas also work diligently. When they are steadfast in their practice and refuse to give up, they experience meditative concentration from which they will attain prajna. At this point, the reach of bodhi is within sight.

The ten paramitas is the six paramitas mentioned above together with adaptability, vows, force of purpose, and knowledge. Adaptability is a skill that Bodhisattvas employ to teach sentient beings so that the teaching is suited to the occasion and hearer. Vows refer to the vows that Bodhisattvas pledged when they first embarked on the path of Buddhahood. Examples include the ten great vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, the twelve great vows of Medicine Buddha, the twelve great vows of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, the eighteen great vows of Manjusri Bodhisattva, and the forty-eight great
vows of Dharmakara Bodhisattva. Another example is the four universal vows of a Buddha or Bodhisattva: "To save all living beings without limit; to put an end to all passions and delusions however numerous; to study and learn all methods and means without end; and to become perfect in the supreme Buddha-law." The pledging of vows is what gives Bodhisattvas the force of purpose and knowledge to fulfill the Mahayana Bodhisattva way.

Over the course of three great asamkhya kalpas, Bodhisattvas practice the thirty-seven conditions leading to Buddhahood, the four great all-embracing virtues, the Six paramitas, and the ten paramitas. With practice, Bodhisattvas gradually transcend the ordinary and join the ranks of the enlightened. The Bodhisattva path is a long road that cannot be finished instantaneously. To traverse this road, one must do it methodically, persistently, and consistently. Only then can one move from one stage to the next and experience the taste of eternal joy at each stage.

Today, we have covered a lot about what it means to be a Bodhisattva. We have used concrete examples as well as abstract logic. We hope that we have made the subject matter understandable so that everyone here can be motivated to put it into practice. From the discussion we have today, we can not see that to become a Bodhisattva is not exactly insurmountable nor is it exactly easy. One point about which we can be certain, though we all can become Bodhisattvas. If we nurture our compassion, initiate our bodhicitta, practice the spirit of perseverance and selflessness, then we are Bodhisattvas.
THE IDEAL OF BODHISATTVA AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

The Buddhist ideal of Bodhisattva (Sebastian C.D., 2008)\textsuperscript{15} which is the prime ideal in the Mahayana Buddhist preceptor tradition, if hermeneutically analysed, could be seen as a catalyst for social transformation. Individual transformation should lead to a social transformation, or in other words, individual transformation was a prerequisite for social transformation. If we search for the background as to why there was a need for the development of Bodhisattva Ideal, the answer becomes clear for the probing minds. Early Buddhism a (in Pāli: nibbāna) imparted the double ideal of Arhatva (in Pāli: arahatta) and Nirvāṇa Arhat was a liberated being, and he/she would not be re-born. He/She had accomplished what was to be done; he/she had lived the holy life; she attained final emancipation of mind and heart. He/She was alone, secluded, zealous, earnest and master of her himself. Such an Arhat went forth as a preacher and taught the doctrine of Buddha to the people. Buddha had exhorted his disciples to wander and preach the truth for the welfare and liberation of the people, as he loved his fellow creatures and had compassion for them. Such was the great ideal of the Arhat, as it was understood during the three centuries after the death of Gautama Buddha. But the Buddhist monks, it seems, began to neglect certain important aspects of it in due course, and they became too self-centered and contemplative. They confined themselves to the four walls of the monasteries and sought for their personal liberation. They began to overlook the zeal for selfless activity among the people. They seemed to have cared only for their own liberation from sin and sorrow. They became indifferent to the great command of Buddha in fulfilling the obligation of teaching and helping all human beings. In this context, may sometime around 2\textsuperscript{nd} Century B.C., the Bodhisattva doctrine was promulgated by some earnest and diligent Buddhist leaders as a protest against this lack of true fervour and altruism among the monks of that historical moment. “The coldness and aloofness of the arhats led to the
movement in favour of the old gospel of ‘saving all creatures’. The Bodhisattva ideal can be understood only against this background of a saintly and serene, but inactive and indolent monastic Order” (Har Dayal, 1978).\textsuperscript{16} In this sense, the social concern and transformation was the primary motif for the development of the Bodhisattva ideal.

There was a tendency towards spiritual selfishness among the monks. Besides the ideal of Arhat, the singular ideal of a pratyeka-buddha (In Pāli it is called Pacceka-buddha. Such a Buddha is “one enlightened by himself”. He is the one who has attained the supreme and perfect insight, but dies without proclaiming the truth to the world) also evolved during the early centuries. The Bodhisattva ideal was taught in order to counteract this tendency to a cloistered, quiet, inert and inactive monastic life (a similar strand of thought in Rabindranath Tagore, the mystic poet of modern India and Noble Laureate for Literature 1913, as it goes in the eleventh song of the celebrated Geetanjali). Bodhisattva is the one who condemns the spiritual egoism of Arhats and Pratyeka-buddhas and is always active and even gives his life for the wellbeing of all the sentient beings. The Bodhisattva doctrine was modified in its essential features in the course of several centuries. This course of time is from 2\textsuperscript{nd} Century B.C. to 7\textsuperscript{th} Century A.D. It should be noted that in the early Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Bodhisttvas are inferior and subordinate to the Buddhas; but they acquire greater importance in the course of time, and they are at last regarded as equal to the Buddhas in many respects. They are also worshipped like Buddhas.

Let us also analyze the altruism of the Bodhisattva: which could be taken as a philosophy of life. In contrast to the ideal of Arhat in Theravāda Buddhism who rests satisfied with achieving her his own personal liberation, and not necessarily and actively
interested in the welfare of others, the Bodhisattva is actuated by the motiveless a, but altruism. A Bodhisattva helps all beings not only to attain spiritual goal of Nirvāṇa also to obtain the more material advantages of happiness and welfare in the world (sukha). The austere and negative attitude to the world is abandoned in favour of a more humane aim. The most significant element in the altruistic character of a Bodhisattva is a himself, as she cannot apparently render any that she refuses to enter Nirvāṇa. She wishes to help service to the living beings of the world after her/his own Nirvāṇa. She thus finds herself/himself in the rather illogical all beings to attain Nirvana to other beings, position of pointing, revealing and elucidating the way to Nirvāṇa while she herself/himself stays in this world of suffering in order to do good to all creatures. This is her/his great sacrifice for others. She takes the great Vow: “I shall not enter into final Nirvāṇa before all beings have been liberated”.

Further, he/she says to herself/himself, “I must lead all beings to Liberation. I will stay here till the end, even for the sake of one living being”. The Bodhisattva aims at the highest good for herself/himself and also for others. Thus we find the ideal of Bodhisattva in Mahāyāna Buddhism as a very charitable being who gives his life for others. There is no trace of a, though fully selfishness in her/him. She shuns retiring into the final state of Nirvāṇa entitled to it, preferring by her/his own free choice, to toil for even the lowest of beings for ages.

The Bodhisattva is unwilling to be satisfied by securing her/his own liberation, as he/she is deeply moved by the sight of the sufferings of other sentient beings. She feels compassion for the living beings, and determines to remain in the world so as to be able to provide the maximum benefit to others. She makes the great Vow to be in the world in order to free all beings in the universe from suffering regardless of how many beings there are, or how many a eons this might require. Her/his goal is the welfare of all
sentient beings, their liberation from suffering. She wishes and strives for the attainment of Buddha-hood together with all sentient beings. She does not look for her/his personal liberation alone, but she strives to make everyone attain the final release of Nirvāṇa. Thus there is the communitarian or universal outlook in all what she does. The altruism of the Bodhisattva is so sublime and noble that she even forgets about her/himself. This is a great ideal for the world order. The following passage from the Bodhi-caryāvatāra highlights the altruistic attitude of the Bodhisattva: May I be the protector of the helpless! May I be the guide of wayfarers! May I be like a boat, a bridge, a causeway for all who wish to cross a stream! May I be a lamp for all who need I (wish a lamp, may I be a slave for all who want a slave! May I be a cintā-ma (pot of fortune) and a potent medicinal (fulfilling gem) for all creatures, a bhadra (wish fulfilling tree) and a kāma-dhenu (May I be for them a kalpa that yields all that one desires).20

There are three important metaphors popularly illustrated in Buddhist literature about the Bodhisattva’s altruistic activity. It is said that some Bodhisattvas become Buddhas in manner of a king, who first ascends to the throne and then provides for the welfare of his subjects. In the same way, the Bodhisattvas first become Buddhas and then lead all beings to samyak sam-bodhi or perfect enlightenment. Other Bodhisattvas are like a boatman, who arrives at the far shore at the same time as his passengers. These Bodhisattvas are said to achieve samyak sam-bodhi along with all other beings. Thirdly, the Bodhisattvas are said to be like a shepherd, who makes the sheep enter the sheep-shed safely at night and then enters himself. Such Bodhisattvas become Buddhas after all other sentient beings attain samyak sam-bodhi.
The philosophical bedrock of the Bodhisattva ideal is the theory of Tathāgata that means all beings possess the essence of Buddhahood, in other words, all are potential Buddhas. Logically speaking if all the sentient beings do not possess the gata-garbha, then the path of the Bodhisattva who tries to help all beings reach Tathāgata Bodhi would be useless and her/his work would be a futile attempt. It is owing to the gata-garbha that She perceives the unity of all beings. Her/his presence of Tathāgata-garbha. He/She is due to her/his realisation of Tathākara expression of mahā (non-duality) between her/him and other living beings. The realises the advaya (essence of this consists in the inner realisation of unity of all beings and the utter gata-garbha in every sentient being will negation of egoism. The realizations of Tathā enable us to think in terms of equality, fraternity and unity. Only this realization can bring forth a fundamental unity of existence and at the same time make room for differences. This realization will enable us to have the genuine feeling for our fellow humans, and genuinely aspire for universal brotherhood. Furthermore, it will lead us to live and work for the happiness of others. All beings are part of us, for we all share in the common heritage of living beings.

BUDDHISM AS A HUMAN-CENTERED RELIGION

The path to human-centered social reform

Shakyamuni left home to set out on a journey to solve the questions of human existence. First he studied under Brahman teachers who had achieved a high level of awareness, and then he underwent a long period of austere practices, before abandoning that course as well. Finally, through intense meditation, he was able to grasp the ultimate truth and attain enlightenment. The truth that he discovered could be defined as the Law of non-self and dependent origination. He traveled throughout India preaching the Law, telling people that by becoming aware of this Law within their own lives, they could free
themselves from the shackles of suffering. In other words, he taught that the fundamental cause of suffering in the world must not be sought in the external environment, but within the human heart. Opposite of being escapist, this approach naturally leads to tangible social reform. In such early Buddhist texts as the Sutta-nipata (The Group of Discourses), the Buddha repeatedly instructs both monks and laity to take rational, self-restrained, yet compassionate action. Based on such teaching, he endorses a moderate amount of economic gain for members of society, and recommends that rulers govern with compassion based on the Law. He also endeavors to organize his disciples in a way that promotes equality and eliminates discrimination among practitioners, exerting a positive influence on Indian society, which was strictly bound by the caste system.

The above is an explanation of how Shakyamuni Buddha's religious movement attempted to realize a moralistic revolution of society by reforming the hearts and minds of the individuals in that society. After Shakyamuni's passing, however, trends toward doctrinal scholarship and deification of the Buddha in Nikaya and Mahayana Buddhism served to minimize the role of the Buddha as a moral leader. In contrast, Nichiren, the thirteenth-century Japanese Buddhist priest, viewed Shakyamuni in one respect as a moral teacher based on the teachings the Lotus Sutra, saying: "The heart of the Buddha's lifetime of teachings is the Lotus Sutra, and the heart of the practice of the Lotus Sutra is found in the 'Never Disparaging' chapter. What does Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's profound respect for people signify? The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being." 22

Today, members of the Soka Gakkai International, embracing the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism, believe that human revolution—a profound inner transformation in the life of each individual—will lead to world peace, echoing the Buddha's original teachings and his desire to change society spiritually through reforming the individuals that comprise it.
If we look at the approach of modern Western social thinkers, we see that they have continued to make efforts to realize human happiness and fulfillment through establishing ideal social systems. As a result, social systems that guarantee much greater freedom and equality compared to feudal times have been achieved. However, although this pursuit of ideal social systems does place importance on human subjectivity, it does not transcend environmental determinism, owing to the belief that human happiness is dependent on environmental factors, namely the social system itself. Therefore, if we seek to realize social reform that is initiated by human beings, who possess true subjectivity, it must be reform in which human beings are not controlled by environmental factors. In this respect, Shakyamuni placed highest priority on people's inner transformation and sought to change the social environment through moral reform, aspiring to achieve an ideal human-centered society. Shakyamuni's social reform only extended to the realm of morality, and did not result in actual reform in the social system. Moral reform, however, may in time lead to reform in the social system as well. Indeed, this can be seen in King Ashoka's rule in accord with the Law and in Nagarjuna's treatise concerning social policy, Ratnavali. From spiritual transformation to reconstructing human morality, and then from moral reconstruction to social system reform--this gradual path of progressive change, I submit, is the only way to bring about genuine, lasting human-centered social reform.

The Law and compassion

So the next question is then, what is the relationship between human subjectivity and the Law expounded in Buddhism? First of all, the Law can be interpreted in many different ways, but generally it is explained in terms of three basic concepts: non-self, dependent origination, and non-substantiality. These concepts deny the existence of the
individual, and view the phenomenal world in terms of relationships and relativity. Therefore, the truth of existence lies in a realm of negation, and the true nature of all things is grounded in nothingness. Accordingly, if attainment of a higher state of life that is not governed or influenced by ceaselessly changing phenomena is desired, then there is no choice but for human beings to rid themselves of all substantiality attachments. This is the reasoning that lays at the heart of early Buddhism, which concerns itself mostly with emancipation from the various sources of desire that give rise to illusion. Furthermore, in early Buddhism the Buddha taught the rejection of a life of illusion, but at the same time he also taught compassion for all living things protecting and helping them grow and regarded respect for life a fundamental rule of behavior. Consequently, the Law, while a principle of negation, also possesses a life-affirming aspect.

The Soka Gakkai's second president, Josei Toda, was persecuted by the military government of Japan during World War II and imprisoned. During his time in confinement, he read the "Virtuous Practices" chapter of the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, which is considered a prelude to the Lotus Sutra. In the course of his study, he came upon the section that is sometimes called "the thirty-four negations," which describes what the life of the Buddha is by listing what it is not. For days, Toda pondered the meaning of this section in prayer and intellectual contemplation, until he suddenly came to the realization that the one thing that can remain in a world of absolute non-existence is nothing other than life itself and that this is the reality of the Buddha. He concluded that life is a reality of negation itself. Toda takes a huge leap in logic reaching this conclusion, but it is not illogical; it is merely intuitive logic. In early Buddhism, the Law expounded by Shakyamuni for human salvation is both a principle of negation and a law of respect for life. Toda expressed the Buddha (who is one with the Law in Soka
philosophy) as "life." This view does not contradict early Buddhist thinking regarding the Law. This is because, though life is substantively negated, its existence is an undeniable reality, which in itself is an affirmation of life.

Thus, the Soka Gakkai also refers to the Law as the life of the universe, or cosmic life. It has been promoting a new Buddhist movement based on humanism and the dignity of life. The belief that the Law instinctively works to nurture life is its underlying religious tenet, which Ikeda expresses in a dialogue with historian Arnold Toynbee as:

"This Law [that is inherent in the universe] is the cause of all phenomena and is the reality that becomes the basic principle maintaining strict harmony among all phenomena. I believe that the movement of the universe, which is based on the Law, is compassion (jihi in Japanese Buddhist terminology) or to use your word, love which strives to build and preserve harmony among all things."

According to this, the universal Law has two aspects: one of cold, mechanical precision as the law that governs the workings of the cosmos, and the other of compassion as it strives to maintain a balance and harmony between all living and nonliving things in the cosmos. This compassion originates not from the will of the Absolute, but is a function of the Law, which is an impersonal reality. This being so, from the viewpoint of Soka philosophy, the human being as an individual in Buddhism is not negated by the Absolute, but instead is connected with the Law that governs the cosmos. Through this connection, the individual can attain fundamental subjectivity. In addition, since one aspect of the Law is compassion, Buddhist practitioners are led to take compassionate action on their own initiative. Although the Soka Gakkai’s view of the Law does not lend itself to proof by logical reasoning, it can no doubt be regarded as a valid modern interpretation of early Buddhist thinking.
The individual's own power (jiriki) and external power (tariki)

Here, Mikio Matsuoka (2005) explored the Buddhist approach to salvation in order to clarify some of the characteristics of Buddhism as a human-centered religion. Whereas Christianity and Islam preach salvation through the grace of an absolute deity, in Buddhism we find two approaches to salvation. One is salvation through emancipation from worldly desires by means of the individual's own power (jiriki), and the other is salvation by means of the external power of a transcendent Buddha (tariki). If we consider Buddhism a human-centered religion, the basic component of the religion should include aiming for emancipation exclusively through the individual's own power, but as the Law itself is compassionate, it becomes necessary to bring in a component of external power. In other words, as a human-centered religion, Buddhism teaches practitioners to save themselves, but as they progress in their practice, their own individual power and external power fuse.

In his book, The Living Buddha, Ikeda narrates the Buddha's moment of enlightenment under the bodhi tree in the following way: "In Shakyamuni's case, as the darkness of night began to give way to the first light of dawn, the state of Buddhahood existing in the universe and the state of Buddhahood inherent in Shakyamuni's own life merged in harmonious communion and blossomed forth." 25

The term "communion" used in the above quote refers to the relationship between people's capacity to comprehend the teachings and the function of the Buddha to lead people to understand the teaching. It is explained as the "mystic principle of responsive communion" in Tient'ai's Hokke gengi (Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra). Therefore, Ikeda's narrative of Shakyamuni's enlightenment can also be understood in
terms of a fusion between the human being, representing the individual's own power, and the cosmic life, representing external power. This concept of a fusing of inner and external power originates from Nichiren's writings concerning his views of Buddhist practice. He writes, "One's own power is actually not one's own power. External power is actually not external power," indicating that the individual's own power and external power are essentially one. Nichiren views external power as a function that aids the individual's own power. Also, Nichiren was extremely committed to the heart of both the Lotus Sutra and its teacher Shakyamuni, often making statements such as: "I am certain that this is all because the [written] characters of the Lotus Sutra have entered into your bodies in order to give us aid," and "I wonder if Shakyamuni Buddha has entered your body to help me." In all cases, he regards the power of the Lotus Sutra and Shakyamuni Buddha as support for the individual's efforts for self-salvation. So external power functions to bring out the individual's own power to the fullest. This view of practice is characteristic of a human-centered religion. In a Harvard speech on Mahayana Buddhism, Ikeda refers to this fusion of internal and external powers as the ideal needed for "the restoration and rejuvenation of humanity."

Mentor and disciple

Buddhist practice is usually carried out based on a relationship of mentor and disciple. Is it possible for this hierarchical relationship to interfere with the goal of realizing a humanistic approach to religion? In order to answer this question, it is essential to investigate why a mentor is needed and whether there is any disparity in religious dignity between mentor and disciple. These two points are of vital importance.
I would like to focus on the fact that Shakyamuni instructed his disciples just before his demise to make the Law their teacher. Generally, faith in an impersonal Law, due to its very impersonality, makes it difficult for people feel a sense of reverence toward the Law and often results in diminished religious zeal. To overcome this difficulty to revere the Law as the teacher, the need arises for a human teacher who can show people the Law through their teaching and behavior. This allows individuals to sense the compassionate workings of the Law as an indivisible part of the teacher's life. In this way, respect for the Law as the fundamental teacher begins to blossom in people's hearts. Bergson asserted that Buddhism lacks zeal, but I believe that Buddhists who persevere on the path of mentor and disciple, living a life of compassion based on the Law, can also obtain a level of apostolic passion evidenced by believers of monotheistic religions. In addition, because their lives are actively engaged with the ultimate Law of the cosmos, they do not lose sight of their fundamental subjectivity. By maintaining steadfast faith in the Law, Buddhist mentors and disciples keep their passion as practitioners fresh and strive to pursue a human-centered practice.

Unlike Christian love, which derives from an external higher power, Buddhist compassion is equally endowed in the lives of all human beings. Therefore, mentors and disciples who base themselves on the Law share the same fundamental capacity for compassion and live their lives based on a shared vow for the salvation of all humankind. There is total equality in terms of religious dignity between mentor and disciple in Buddhism.

Christianity has fostered individual independence of a kind that transcends secular authority through devotion to God, forming the philosophical basis for the modern ideal
of individualism espoused in the West. In this model, however, human subjectivity and dignity are not necessarily guaranteed because of the limiting factor of God's rule. On the other hand, it is said that pantheistic teachings such as Mahayana Buddhism recognize the inherent subjectivity of the human being, but as the ethics of this type of thinking are difficult to put into active practice, believers tend to passively follow along with prevailing secular values. Pantheistic teachings try to find the transcendental within, but to do so without knowing the transcendental without is ultimately a futile endeavor. What is needed is a humanistic religion that expounds transcendence that returns toward immanence. The Soka Gakkai espouses a faith in the Law based on a mentor-disciple relationship. This faith reveres the Law that is the cosmic source of human life—namely, the life of the universe. From this approach of religious philosophy, the absolute dignity of the human being can be attained, thereby providing modern civilization with a possible model for the solution of ethical issues.

A Buddhist view of humanity

Cosmic subjectivity—the rationale for human dignity

Now that some basis for understanding has been established, I would like to begin discussion on the main topic of this paper, which is the Buddhist view of humanity. First, I will explore the rationale for human dignity.

When discussing the Buddhist view of human dignity, the Mahayana Buddhist concept that all living beings alike possess the Buddha nature is often cited. However, when Buddha nature is viewed as something substantive, all phenomena are absolutely affirmed as positive and the significance of the Law as a principle of negation is diminished. Therefore, some regard the concept of Buddha nature as a non-Buddhist teaching. However, if we go beyond the Law as a principle of negation and recognize its
life-affirming aspect, we can see this positive aspect itself as the source that gives rise to all life. Carrying the logic one step further, the altruistic behavior of human beings as well as symbiosis in nature? For example, the relationship between the nourishing earth and a plant? Are an expression of the life-affirming Law, resulting in an implication that all life possesses supreme dignity.

With that established, the next question to pose would be whether or not human beings possess a kind of dignity that sets them apart from other living things. Although a question of degrees remains, both humans and other living beings express the life-affirming Law; consequently, there is no essential difference in their dignity. However, unlike other living things, which only manifest the Law instinctively in nature, human beings are endowed with the unique ability to manifest the Law actively through their own subjectivity. It is this unique ability that serves as a basis for establishing the dignity of human beings. Buddhism defines the human body as a "vessel of the Law," an insight that no doubt recognizes the unique dignity of human beings based on their potential to give active expression to the Law.

Also, if, as in Soka philosophy, the life-affirming Law is regarded as the life of the cosmos itself, then by definition the Law also possesses subjectivity. Using this principle, the subjectivity of human beings, who give expression to the Law, may be defined as a manifestation of the more fundamental subjectivity of the life of the cosmos. All life is an expression of the cosmic life, but only human beings have the potential to become its subjective agents. Ikeda proposes an ideal for the human being, in which each individual manifests the subjectivity of the life of the cosmos in their own life and cares for and protects all other life, thereby establishing the subjectivity of the cosmic life. He calls this the "cosmic human being" and the "greater self." The true dignity of human beings
derives not from the fact that each individual's life is a natural expression of the cosmic life, but from the fact that human life can possess cosmic subjectivity. Ikeda states: "Compassionate action nurturing and leading all forms of life toward happiness and creative evolution is the mission with which we have been entrusted by the cosmos. It is by becoming aware of and working to fulfill this mission that we can enjoy the experience of genuine meaning." In this way, Ikeda explains Soka philosophy in simple terms, stating that the rationale for the dignity of human beings lies in their practice of compassion as an expression of cosmic subjectivity. Based on this view of human dignity, he posits the concept of "cosmic humanism," the philosophical foundation of which is the Buddhist doctrine of ichinen sanzen (three thousand realms in a single moment of life) set forth by T'ien-t'ai.

As is generally known, modern Western humanism views reason as the basis for human dignity. For example, Kant distinguishes between persons and things, the latter including plants and animals. In Kantian thought, a person is a rational being and has absolute value as an end in itself. A thing, on the other hand, is a non-rational being, so it only has relative value as a means to an end. Kantian humanism does not recognize the rights and intrinsic value of plants and animals, which are today central issues in the field of environmental ethics. In contrast, Mahayana Buddhism, which teaches that even plants and animals possess the Buddha nature, regards both human beings and non-human beings as having equal religious dignity. However, recognizing the absolute equality of the dignity of all life based on the concept of the equality of Buddha nature could possibly lead to a rejection of anthropocentric ethics and an undermining of human dignity. The biocentrism found in such modern environmental thought as deep ecology faces the same problem; it treats as an exception the social reality that human beings take
precedence over other living beings in terms of the right to survive. This position seems to contain an unresolvable antinomy. Another stream of environmental thought known as process theology, meanwhile, espouses a hierarchy of intrinsic value with human beings at the top, and attempts to develop a theory of anthropocentrism that respects nature. However, process theology is also problematic, because it justifies things of low intrinsic value being sacrificed for the survival of those higher on the intrinsic value scale. This cold, pragmatic approach threatens to undermine the spirit to protect nature.

The concept of the equality of Buddha nature and the realm of modern environmental ethics and thought are riddled with ethical contradictions, but the cosmic humanism of Soka philosophy may offer a solution. According to this concept, all life shares a basic equality in terms of dignity, but in light of humanity's unique capacity to manifest cosmic subjectivity their right to exist should be given priority. In return, human beings have an obligation to demonstrate cosmic subjectivity, have compassion for all living things, and act as creative managers of the ecosystem and builders of symbiosis. That is to say, humans should base themselves on a spirit of respect for all life deriving from active compassion. For example, one expression of this way of thinking may be that, as Ikeda notes with regard to the slaughter of animals for food to sustain our lives: "We human beings must always be aware of the dignity and value of life and be deeply grateful for the lives we take for the sake of our own sustenance." He also adds that since our lives are sustained by such sacrifice, we should endeavor to lead them in the most valuable way. Cosmic humanism does not blindly discredit theories of modern civilization such as the anthropocentric approach; it attempts to infuse those theories with a characteristic of benevolence and with a respect for all things on this planet.
In this connection, the original Buddhist approach of seeking the Law has much in common with the modern way of rational thinking. The teachings expounded in early Buddhism contain truths that are key to human salvation. Attempts like those of Ikeda to actively incorporate modern rationalism into a spiritual framework of human salvation do so in the best spirit of Buddhism. In The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra, Ikeda comments on the convergence of Mahayana Buddhist insights and the worldview of modern physics painted by the interrelationship between different kinds of matter, and stresses the need to "direct this tendency toward recognition of the infinite worth and nobility of the individual."^33

It can be summarized that Buddhism of the kind that posits cosmic subjectivity as the rationale for human dignity is seeking to build on from modern Western humanism with a Buddhist perspective by combining modern reason with Buddhist compassion.

**The self-discipline of compassion and active morality the ethics of the subjective human being**

From the position of a belief in the life-affirming Law, compassionate action that nurtures or fosters life is naturally deemed as good, and the opposite as evil. Also, since all phenomena are an expression of this compassionate Law, human beings are regarded as being fundamentally good. However, when surveying human dignity from the perspective of cosmic subjectivity, it becomes apparent that a sphere in which good and evil struggle for dominance is a necessary backdrop for human beings to take subjective action to put into practice the benevolent Law of compassion.
The Buddhist principle of dependent origination is a concept of interconnectivity that negates all dichotomies. Therefore, the Law's definition as good indicates absolute good, not good as opposed to evil. But if the Law of absolute good only passively enveloped all life, human existence would be enfolded in absolute good, and there would consequently be no need for human beings to actively manifest the Law. The fact that human beings have the potential to actively manifest this Law, therefore, means that human existence is a realm where good and evil do battle, and it is only through taking on this struggle that they can give active expression to the Law.

In addition, Soka philosophy, based on its concept of the identity of the Law and the life of the cosmos, holds that the Law itself possesses an active dynamism functioning continuously to destroy evil and manifest good. Ikeda describes the Mahayana idea of non-substantiality as a ceaselessly pulsating dynamism, which he terms "creative life." By viewing the Law as the dynamic rhythm of the subjectivity of cosmic life, the directly affirmative view that all phenomena are agents of the Law is negated. This is because the Law as "creative life" represents dynamic not static absolute good that functions ceaselessly to destroy evil and manifest good. All phenomena that act as the agents of this Law must accordingly be the battleground for good and evil. One of the reasons that the Tendai concept of original Enlightenment (hongaku) has come to directly affirm actual evil may be its tendency to view the Law contemplatively as a static absolute good, ignoring the active dynamism that the Law possesses.

In any case, it is because human beings have both the capacity for good and evil that we are able to become active agents of the Law, and if asked whether our nature is basically good or basically evil, Buddhism, which places importance on subjectivity,
would no doubt reply that we are indeed both. Here, the ethics of subjective human beings neither employs strict external rules as would be deemed necessary in the theory of inherent human evil, nor does it succumb to a permissive optimism that would tend to arise in the theory of inherent good. It features a self-disciplined approach of suppressing evil and realizing good within our own lives. Impressing upon his followers the importance of self-restraint, Shakyamuni stated, "Only within himself would he be at peace. A bhikkhu would not seek peace from another," and "Dispel greed for sensual pleasures." He suggests that the master of the self should be the self, and that the entity which restricts one's desires should be none other than one's self. The self mentioned here transcends the enlightenment ideal of rational self to comprise a self that has realized cosmic subjectivity within itself and is filled with benevolence. Ikeda calls this the "greater self." The concept of rational self-discipline dating back to Plato may be said to include a component of humanity's ability to connect with the cosmic subjectivity, but history has shown us that an over-reliance on reason leads to such phenomena as elitism, Eurocentrism, and environmentally destructive anthropocentrism. To cure the ills caused by the rational self, we need a concept of the self that is not restricted by distinctions between self and other and that takes a more holistic approach. Here, the benevolent self-discipline of Buddhism comes into play. This form of self-discipline will not be disengaged from ordinary people, and will be accessible at the most grassroots level, unlike rational self-discipline. Chinese scholar Cai Delin concludes that Ikeda's Buddhist humanism "makes humankind the protagonist."

In this way, self-discipline is one cornerstone of the ethics of subjective human beings in Buddhism, but another ethical cornerstone from the perspective of human beings establishing cosmic subjectivity is the concept of "active morality." Human beings,
embodying the subjectivity of the living Law that combats evil and manifests good, must cease to be passive spectators of evil and become active practitioners of good. Both Soka Gakkai founding president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi’s statement, "To not do good is the same as doing evil," and the teaching of the Bodhisattva spirit in Mahayana Buddhism offer a model of an active morality that human beings rooted in cosmic subjectivity ought to strive for. In The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra, Ikeda defines a good person as "someone who struggles against evil."37 A thoroughgoing ethics of subjective human beings does not objectify good but views the dynamic process of fighting evil itself as good.

Interdependence and the oneness of good and evil--the formation of human beings who live in symbiosis

In this final section, the researcher would like to discuss the Buddhist view of the human being as it relates to dependent origination. At present, there are two opposing camps with regard to the assessment of this concept. One is a positive evaluation recognizing that dependent origination, a teaching of the interdependence of all phenomena, provides a basis for symbiotic relationships between human beings and with nature, which is not found in modern Western individualism. The other is a negative evaluation pointing out specifically that in modern Japanese history this concept has been employed as a theoretical underpinning for totalitarianism and to suppress the rights of the individual. This divergence of opinion makes us question whether or not Buddhism in fact places importance on human subjectivity. That is, the view that subjective individuals come into existence through interdependent relationships gives rise to the idea of symbiosis between disparate beings and things. In contrast, if dependent origination is viewed as a relationship of interdependence that negates individual subjectivity, it becomes a concept that gives rise to totalitarianism.
From the perspective that subjective compassionate action is the goal of a Buddhist, the concept of dependent origination could offer a philosophical foundation for the creation of a truly symbiotic society in which the respective subjectivity of individuals inter-permeates. Generally speaking, Christian love, which originates from God, is first received by the individual believer, and then directed vertically toward others in a top-down fashion. In this framework, the individual receives part of God's subjectivity, but those who are the object of the individual's salvation efforts tend to be extremely passive and may even feel resentful of the charity being directed toward them. In contrast, in Buddhism, which is based on an impersonal Law, the individual's own subjective compassion is conveyed to others horizontally in a spirit of equality. In the Sutta-nipata, Shakyamuni says, "As I (am), so (are) these; as (are) these, so (am) I.' Comparing himself (with others), he should not kill or cause to kill."\(^{38}\) This can be interpreted to mean that the concept of dependent origination, stressing the empathy arising from compassion that is horizontal and subjective, fosters symbiotic individuals who respect one another's subjectivity.

Again, from the perspective of forming symbiotic human beings, I would like to touch on how Buddhism that emphasizes human subjectivity both actively opposes those who commit evil, while at the same time striving for their ultimate salvation. As discussed earlier, the Law of compassion constitutes dynamic absolute good that continually functions to destroy evil and realize good. The good that appears after defeating evil is an absolute good engendered in a realm of relativity. The triumph of good in Buddhism is the emergence of absolute good, which is the oneness of good and evil. Thus, when those who commit evil are defeated, they can be enveloped by the realm of absolute good and led to salvation. In The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra, Ikeda explains,
Only when evil is thoroughly challenged and conquered does it become an entity of the oneness of good and evil."\(^{39}\)

Monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam sharply divide good and evil into two distinct entities. While these religions are uncompromising in their ideals, they cling to a dualistic view of good and evil, which can encourage attitudes of violence and intolerance toward those they regard as enemies. Christian and Islamic fundamentalisms are cases in point. Dualistic concepts of good and evil in monotheistic religions have been known to be obstacles to the peaceful coexistence of communities whose inhabitants hold a variety of religious beliefs. Does this mean that pantheistic religions such as Buddhism, Shinto, and Hinduism fare better in fostering symbiosis between people of differing religions? Unfortunately, history tell us the answer is no. The armed priests of feudal Japan or, more recently, the Sinhala Urumaya of Sri Lanka are but two examples of numerous militaristic and extremist Buddhist movements in history. Also in the modern era, Shinto, through its practice of ancestor worship, helped strengthen the cause of imperial nationalism in Japan. In addition, Hindu nationalism, which has steadily gained in momentum in India from the 1980s, seeks to oust Christianity and Islam from Indian society. While pantheistic religions are essentially incompatible with a dualistic view of good and evil, they are easily influenced by the values of secular society. Pantheistic religions sometimes copy the tenets of monotheistic religions and create their own intolerant dogma. In the end, both the intolerance of monotheism and the compromising tolerance of pantheism prevent the creation of a society for peaceful coexistence, pointing to the need for a new religious framework that overcomes these limitations. Soka philosophy seeks to realize a philosophical principle of absolute tolerance based on the view of oneness of good and evil, and further seeks to do
so with a non-compromising spirit like that of the dualistic view of good and evil. As exemplified by Bodhisattva Never Disparaging in the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren in Japan, Buddhism, which places importance on human subjectivity, can foster symbiotic human beings of unwavering commitment to their beliefs, and the Soka Gakkai is in the process of proving the great potential that human-centered Buddhism has to contribute to humankind.
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In "Letter to the Brothers," Nichiren states, "The Lotus Sutra is the eye of all the Buddhas. It is the original teacher of Shakyamuni Buddha himself, the lord of teachings"(The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 494), indicating that although it was Shakyamuni who preached the Lotus Sutra, the sutra was also the source of
enlightenment from the distant past, even before the appearance of Shakyamuni. This view was not held solely by Nichiren, as evidenced in the "Introduction" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, where it states: "At this time the Buddha Sun Moon Bright arose from his samadhi and, because of the bodhisattva Wonderfully Bright, preached the Great Vehicle sutra called the Lotus of the Wonderful Law [the Lotus Sutra], a Law to instruct the bodhisattvas, one that is guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas" (The Lotus Sutra, trans. Burton Watson, p. 16). This implies that the Lotus Sutra is timeless and transcendent, propagated throughout the universe across past, present, and future.

28 Nichiren, "On Rebuking the Slander of the Law and Eradicating Sin," The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 444.

29 Nichiren, "The Two Kinds of Illness," The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 920.


