

# Gleanings from Our Times

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## Preface

In the middle of a long night I sometimes suddenly awake from my deep slumber. At such a time I feel a strange sensation, knowing that just by the act of awakening I become a human being with the power of rational thinking. This, of course, is a sign of life. Then, I often ask myself: what is this thing called life, what does it mean to be alive?

Sakyamuni, Jesus, Socrates, Darwin, and others questioned life from their respective viewpoints. They reached an understanding after having struggled for many years with the dilemma of life, and they reached their insights through various paths and means. There are countless books which attempt to teach the meaning of life, but very few really satisfy our thirst for understanding.

The reason being that almost none of the books teaches the necessity of life itself, although there are many which describe the possibilities of life. In our scientific age, myths do not satisfy our curiosity any

symplicitic explanations do not suffice.

In recent years the discussions on the origin of man and the beginning of life have been clarified with advancements in biochemistry and biophysics. But this is still in the realm of theory, and it does not teach us what life itself is. Life is essentially a mystery to man.

Recent scholarship continues to explain phenomena by dividing material objects and life in the traditional dualistic manner. However, when man studies things objectively, he unknowingly, explains the inseparable relationship between material objects and life.

If such is the case, it would better to study things and life together in inseparable oneness from the very beginning. In this sense I feel strongly that the natural sciences and humanities must cooperate with each other more and more.

Once it was thought that God created life but such an explanation is no longer acceptable. Some scholars have said that life must have come from another planet, but in what matter was it brought to our earth? Even if it is possible to analyze and extract organic particles from meteors, it does not prove that life exists on other planets. Even if we grant that life exists on other celestial bodies, if their origin is not explicable, we would still remain in the dark concerning our own life.

Life on earth is assumed to have originated on earth. Since the appearance of Darwin's "Origin of Species," great advancements in scientific research have been made. A world-renowned Russian scientist states that just as the highly organized animal and vegetative life appeared as the cumulative result of evolution of lower forms of life, so the lower forms of life also have a lengthy history of development from the simplest organic life. He also explains how the organic matter necessary for life developed chemically from inorganic matter.

At any rate the more than 200 forms of life now existing on earth

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have a background history of five billion years which marks the beginning of our earth, and organic life itself appeared about 2.5 billion years ago. As long as the theory of evolution, including self-reproduction, climatic disruptions, and natural selection, is not denied, we can not but agree that all living things have a source.

Modern science explains that all life, from the lower form to human beings, is composed of cells, and thus there is a unitary dimension to all existence. Sakyamuni Buddha taught that all life, sentient and insentient, possesses Buddha-nature in the same degree. Although we can explain what life is about, we don not know the essence of life and the designer of life.

Buddhism is based on the dharma, the timeless truth of the universe, and it is this dharma that is the essence of life and designer of life. Dharma is not a supernatural, omnipotent godhead; it is the unseen norm of life itself.

Science is nothing more than the discovery of the branches of this great norm. Just as science explains the external universe, man must realize the great norm of his inner world. Buddhism is the teaching of the great norm, the essence of what man is.

We experience unexcelled joy in being able to awaken to the great norm of life and realize our fullest potential in the norms of human society.

This collection of articles, whose themes are based on incidents in our daily life, is dedicated to realizing the essence of what man is through the interpretation of Buddhism.

## Sacrifice

Since the horrible devastation of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, thirty years have elapsed. Fortunately for mankind the bomb has not been used since that time, but in recent years the number of countries possessing the nuclear bomb has increased and, more frightening, the destructive power of man's evil creation has increased a hundredfold. The countless thousands who were victims of the first atomic blasts and the many people who still suffer from the aftereffects of radiation were human sacrifices to man's ignorance and cruelty. We are reminded of this fact each year in August when we remember the terrible holocausts suffered by the innocent men, women and children of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And this is the paramount reason why the Japanese people shun wars and pray for peace on earth.

War is evil because so many sacrifices are made in order to kill—to kill a sacred unrepeatable life. Why must we sacrifice our intelligence, resources, and power to kill others? If we are going to make sacrifices, why cannot we sacrifice ourselves to bringing peace, making life meaningful, and creating a world of harmony? The essential spirit of sacrifice is the sacrifice of one's comfort and social position for the happiness and prosperity of all beings.

In the contemporary world where human life tends to be regarded lowly, we oppose needless killing in any form, whether in wars, hunting,



fishing, etc. Only in reverence for all life, human life will be rightly valued and man will be willing to make sacrifices for peace and not for war.

### **Destruction of Nature**

Yasunari Kawabata, the Nobel Prize winning writer, was prompted to commit suicide, because he was deeply disappointed by the destruction of natural beauty in Japan. He went to Stockholm, Sweden, in December 1968, to receive the Nobel Prize for his story, "Snow Country." Kawabata gave a lecture entitled, "Japan, the Beautiful, and Myself," in which he cited the deathbed poem of the priest Ryokan, a Zen master, as the best artistic achievement embodying the essence of the Japanese spirit:

“Flower blossoms in spring  
The crying cuckoo in the mountain,  
And the autumn leaves in the ravine.  
How should I bequeath  
other than these wonderful treasures?”

He also said in the lecture that when one sees the beauty of snow, cherries in bloom, and the four seasons, one feels most of those close to him, and wants them to share his pleasure. And this comradeship is only born from the love of nature.

A glance at nature around us can endorse the cause of Kawabata's death. As Japan, during a quarter of a century since the end of World

War 11, has made the third largest economic power in the free world, she has also advanced to the world's forefront in pollution—destructive pollution—of her national life environment. Amid her brisk national land development and her rush at full speed to the apex of industrialization, Japan's traditional beauty of nature and wholesome *modus vivendi* are being destroyed on a nationwide scale.

The development of the petrochemical industry in the littoral industrial zones inevitably caused sea water pollution. The increase of organic matter in sea water has generated what is called the "red tide" which severely damages marine products. Typical examples were found in Tagonoura, Shizuoka Prefecture, where the port area bottom was filled with thick layers of smudge produced by pulp waste disposed of in paper manufacturing. Extremely serious was the destruction of life environment in Yokkaichi, an industrial city in central Japan. Since 1955, at the site of the former Navy Fuel Depot, many oil refineries have been established one after another and, beginning in 1958, both the sea water pollution and the atmospheric contamination by harmful exhausts have become conspicuous. In 1960, atmospheric pollution by sulfurous anhydride began to be found and the number of local residents suffering from respiratory disease has since been increasing.

The local people's movement against environmental pollution gathered momentum on a nation-wide scale. They undertook organized action in opposing new industrial plants and other factors leading to the destruction of their life environment.

The prime requisites for solution of environmental pollution difficulties lie in the establishment of individualism as the means of protecting the life of individuals. In Japan such individualism is not fully developed, and this fact, coupled with stubborn bureaucracy among responsible officials, makes the solution difficult.

## **A New Orientation**

At present we have a well-functioning economic system under which we produce goods which threaten us with physical destruction, which transform us, as individuals, into totally passive consumers and thus deaden us, and that creates a bureaucracy which makes the individual feel impotent.

We as human beings have no aim except producing and consuming more and more. We are threatened with inner deadness by the passiveness which our exclusion from responsible decision making engenders. In his search for scientific truth, man discovered such knowledge that he could use to dominate nature. He had tremendous success. But in his one-sided emphasis on technique and material consumption, man has lost touch with himself and life, by losing religious faith, humanistic values and the capacity for deep emotional experiences. The underlying cause of the increasing dissatisfaction with our present life, its passiveness and silent boredom, brought about by the devastation of human life, is the disregard of nature and the neglect of the value of human life, both of which are produced by undue faith in scientific progress. Science, as is well known, discovers and utilizes the hidden forces within nature. It can never be conceived by disregarding the laws of nature. And yet man is prone to think of himself as the conquerer and master of nature as soon as he discovers new uses of its powers. This arrogance can

invite only tragedy for man who has become a slave of his own invention.

Ideologies and concepts have lost much of their attraction; traditional clichés like “right” and “left” or “communism” and “capitalism” have lost their meaning. People seek a new orientation, a new philosophy, one which is centered on the priorities of life—physically and spiritually—and not on the priorities of death. This new orientation is possibly sought in a new vision that man can share his humanity with all his fellow men. Buddhism proclaims this new vision.

### **Interdependence: The Meaning of Life**

“If there is even one unhappy man in this world, then there can be no happiness for me,” thus wrote a modern Japanese poet, Kenji Miyazawa, who was a fervent believer in Hoke-Kyo (Lotus Sutra). We find in this simple passage of the essence of the Bosatsu (bodhisattva) spirit as expressed in the teachings of Daijo-Bukkyo (Mahayana Buddhism). The Buddhist world-view is that all beings, sentient and insentient, are inextricably involved in each other, like the mesh of a net. No mesh can exist by itself. In fact it is by virtue of the existence of all the other meshes that the single mesh is able to exist.

In this realization there is awakened in us a profound sense of gratitude to all of life that sustains us and provides us with the opportunities to experience the meaning of existence.

On the other hand, the single mesh is all important for the other

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meshes because the strength or weakness of this one mesh will affect the whole net. If a single mesh is cut or loosened, then the whole net fails to serve a useful function. When we understand this vast inter-relationship of beings in our universe, then we know that the aspirations and decisions of a single man affect the whole course of history.

### **Lockheed Scandal**

After taking office in 1972, the former Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka made continued efforts to put into effect his unique theories for "Remodeling the Japanese Archipelago." In March 1972, he submitted an integrated national land development bill to the Diet.

Due to concern about pollution hazards, however, public opinion arose against Tanaka's land development plans. Facing severe criticism by opposition parties, Tanaka finally withdrew the bill in early 1974. His autocratic policy, only aimed at winning the election, received severe criticism from the people. Finally the dark sides of his politics were disclosed in the election of the House of Councilors in the form of his "plutocracy" and was forced to resign the prime ministership. Moreover, suspicions about a connection between Tanaka and the Lockheed affair had been circulating since his resignation. He was convicted on the charge of having violated Japan's foreign exchange control laws in 1973 and 1974 by accepting 500 million yen—\$1.7 million—from Lockheed Aircraft Corp. Even while Prosecutor Reiji Takase was announcing

Tanaka's arrest to frantic newsmen, the grim-faced ex-Premier was being hustled off to the Kosuge House of Detention in northeastern Tokyo. It was the first time in nearly 30 years that a former head of government had been arrested.

The event stunned Japan. Newspaper raced extras onto the streets and thick crowds clustered around newspaper offices entrance to read headlines. Some newspapers and broadcasters considered Tanaka disgraced, even though he had not yet been indicted or tried: they immediately dropped from his name the courteous suffix San—honorable.

Tanaka persisted in confusing business with politics and ruined himself. What a shame to Japan! What a disgrace to Japanese people! We must take attitude toward self-incrimination.

### **Lack of Humanity**

Human relations in a society of unrest and irritation are a complicated affair. In such a society association and intercourse with neighbors do not go well and various troubles arise.

The shocking one of such troubles were the so-called "piano murder" case in August 1974 in the housing complex at Fujisawa City, Kanagawa Prefecture, and the "pet murder" case in November at the Kawara-machi housing complex in Kawasaki City, Kanagawa Prefecture. The piano murder was a case in which a 46-year-old man living in a fourth floor apartment stabbed a mother and her two children to death because the

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sound of the piano played by the children on the third floor got on his nerves.

The pet murder concerned a housewife who was irritated at the barking of a dog kept by a chauffeur across the way. She threw the dog from the veranda of the apartment and killed it. The dog owner in retaliation went over to the woman's place and killed her.

Those incidents show a lack of consideration for others in community living; self-centeredness had led to violence.

In the major countries of the world there is also an unsung war being carried out which has taken the lives of many people and injured countless others. This war comprises the traffic accidents occurring daily and called "traffic wars" in the Japanese press. The prediction is that fatalities will increase in the future. Although the causes are varied, such as traffic conditions, car maintenance, transportation laws, and so forth, the primary source of needless deaths and injuries is no other than man himself, whether driver or pedestrian. Thus, the causes of traffic accidents are mainly drunkenness, violations of traffic laws and signals, and plain carelessness. There occurred a horrible case in which Boso-zoku or a motor cycle gang invaded the main street of Kobe City and raised havoc in the Eve of Kobe Port Festival. These reckless hell's angels should be shut out from streets.

In order to avoid further unnecessary slaughter of human lives there are a number of points that we must reflect upon.

First is the great appreciation of life. If we understand it, we should take the utmost precaution to drive carefully and not speed recklessly or violate traffic regulations. A Buddhist saying reads, "The weight of the life of one man is greater than the whole weight of the earth."

The second point is the problem of self-centeredness. People create the conditions for their own destruction when they think only of their

selfish needs: jay walking, passing on curves, speeding through intersection, etc.

The third is the need for greater relaxation in the place of living.

In this age of speed when everyone is a slave of time, it is important that we do not become part of the mad rush and forget the center within ourselves.

Finally, the fourth is the respect for law. Laws are formulated not to be broken but to be upheld for the common good of society. We must obey traffic laws, because they are for our own good and to break them only invites injury to ourselves.

No one would deny that wars have brought great misery and unhappiness to the peoples of the world down through centuries, and this tragic fact will remain unchanged in the future. We also know that nuclear warfare which constantly threatens humanity will mean the destruction of the earth. More than in any other period of history, man today seeks harmony and peace for all beings. There are many factors essential to the practical realization of peace, but one of the most important is the mutual contact and understanding among different peoples of the world. Needless to say, political, economic, and cultural intercourse between nations is vital, but this alone is a weak link between the different countries which can be easily be broken for reasons of expedience.

International harmony must be ultimately based on the warm friendships arising from heart-to-heart meetings between individuals. The slogan for peace and the abstract plans for international cooperation are rarely realized, but we as individuals can act to cultivate friendship and understanding with the diverse peoples of the world. Naturally, such program must be based on humanity and workable within the framework of individual resources, but they need not be grand plans involving



many people and large funds.

### **Has Women's Power Become Stronger?**

Among the more commendable imports from the United States are the observance of Mother's Day in May and Father's Day in June. While both are practiced in Japan, Mother's Day is more popular than Father's Day. The reason perhaps lies in the fact that it is the mother, rather than the father, who is thought to symbolize love. The presentation of a carnation to mother is considered to be a symbol of the incarnation of appreciation for the love that a child has received from his mother.

It is frequently pointed out that what has gotten stronger since World War 11 is women and socks. Is it true? Movements defending the rights of women have become more and more conspicuous. They take the form of women storming business and industrial firms to protest the "dictatorial" attitudes of husbands.

The most effective of these movements was "Chupiren," a women's liberation organization protesting against the Abortion Prohibition Law and calling for lifting the ban on the use of birth control pills. These women formed what they called a "group to protect women from bearing silently." Whenever there was an appeal from a housewife, they would rush to the office of her husband, wearing pink helmets and carrying placards, denouncing the actions of the husband. It was a new

“strategy” of directly dealing a blow to the husband by resorting to group action.

## **The Unity of Mankind**

Our world is diminishing in size, but at the same time it is expanding as never before. These are two contradictory aspects of our world resulting from the brilliant scientific achievements of man.

Our world is shrinking in size because the unit of measuring distance is being increasingly shortened by the unit of speed. A news event occurring in one corner of the world is immediately transmitted to all parts of the world, and an object existing in one part of the world can be easily transported to another locality in the world. These actions are possible through the vast progress attained in the realm of communications and transportation which are basic factors contributing to the formation of a smaller world. One result of the diminishing size of the world is the universalization and equalization of the regional differences that exist between societies and cultures. Tokyo, London, and New York, for example, reveal a common feature as identical international cities.

In those days when mass communications were not so powerful, Roger Burlingame described how Einstein was treated in New York as follows: “Through an enormous applauding, cheering crowd, held back by police to make a pathway for him, there passed a man with a brier

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pipe in one hand and a violin case in other. To all appearances, he was a musician who had come to New York to give a concert. He looked like a musician with his abundance of hair, his absent-minded manner as though he were imagining a symphony. But if an unknowing bystander, whose curiosity had been attracted by the crowd, had asked someone, 'Who is that violinist they are cheering?' he would have been told 'He is not a violinist—or rather, not a professional musician. He is a scientist—a great scientist.' 'But what has he done to have so many admirers?' And the informant would have turned to someone else in the crowd to ask, 'Yes, just what has he done?' And the question might have gone on through the thousands who had come to see this great man, and not one of them could have answered. Yet in every civilized place all who read the newspapers or listened to their neighbors' talk knew that Einstein was a genius, that he had overthrown all the foundations on which physics and chemistry and astronomy had rested for hundred years and upset all previous human concepts of the universe. And later they learned that this revolution had made possible the development of television."

The contrast of East and West is also gradually losing its sharp differences as Eastern culture is introduced into the West and Western civilization brings vast changes on Eastern societies. "The loss of distinctive national and cultural traits which were once the basis of nationalism are slowly losing their meaning and significance," according to Arnold Toynbee.

In short, the tide of history moves toward the unity of speed. The Moon, for example, is within man's reach. Seven years from the day when the first men walked on the Moon, the dream, that for centuries, in fiction as well as in fact, men have had about going to Mars and exploring the Red Planet, became a reality. And Venus has been touched

by the instrument of man's imagination which act as his hands and feet. The universe is no longer the airy space beyond man's reach, for scientific advances are constantly expanding his area of experience.

When viewed from spaceships flying through the stars, the earth is just another globe among countless similar floating bodies in the universe. When we consider our preconceived notions of nature, culture, society, etc., characterized by contrast and differences, from such a standpoint, all such ideas have become outmoded in the space age.

The movements of history will force all of us to think in more universal terms, so that we must abandon the conceptual diversities that separate man from man. In the past we saw history as the conflicting evolution of egocentric units, whether nation, state, religion, class, or tribe, but the dawning of the new age requires us to seek a new unifying ideal of harmony and brotherhood for all mankind.

But when we reflect on ourselves, we see how deep rooted egocentricity is, for all of us cling to self-centered ideas and customs on which we base the justification of warfare, whether in the name of personal justice or of national interest. The present world, therefore, carries within it a critical contradiction between the demand for a harmonious united world and the reality of egocentric interests. Unless we are able to solve this problem, mankind is headed for destruction.

## **Mankind Faces a New Problem**

Jackues Ellul in his "Technological Society" describes with great force the new society (Erich Fromm understands the new society is the one with dreadful lack of humanness) which we are approaching and its destructive influence on man.

We may simplify the contradiction as being between the progress in science which demands that all men live in harmony and the achievements of the humanities which attempt to enhance man's wisdom to be free of egocentricity. The crisis develops, because scientific progress is being utilized by man whose spiritual advancement has lagged behind.

In order to harmonize man's spirituality, including his capacity for art, music, literature, religion, etc., with the achievements of science, we must depend on wisdom. The energy behind man's quest for knowledge bursts outward, whereas his energy for spirituality turns inward. We must somehow maintain a proper balance between the two in order to tide over the crisis of mankind safely.

## **Man's Quest for Freedom**

One of the principal factors in the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, which attracted world-wide attention, is the problem of freedom. Freedom has also been the central issue of many wars and conflicts in world history. Life in society inevitably confronts the problem of freedom, because society is built on the sacrifice of each man's freedom. When this sacrifice becomes overly demanding, man necessarily rebels. Erich Fromm explains very clearly in his "Revolution of Hope" what he means by the over demanding of this sacrifice: "Man, if utterly deprived of all stimuli and pleasure, will be incapable of performing work, certainly any skilled work. If he is not utterly destitute, he will tend to be violent if life is too boring; he will tend to lose all creativity if you make him into a machine; Man in this respect is not different from animals or from inanimate matter."

This is because man is an existence in quest of freedom. Just as air, water and food are essential for man's well-being, so freedom is.

The demeanour of Prague citizens, standing bravely in front of the Russian tanks, is striking testimony of this fact. This is further illustrated in the words of Patrick Henry, "Give me liberty or give me death."

Although we frequently speak of freedom, its meaning remains unclear. By the very nature of existence, man's freedom is limited in both space and time. Human life, even if it should be guaranteed for 100 years, is but an insignificant fraction of time when seen in the light of

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billions and billions of years; and although our spaceships succeeded in reaching the Moon and Mars, we have conquered only an infinitesimal speck in the vastness of the universe. That is to say, the physical environment which conditions our existence limits and restricts our freedom, and if we possess freedom, it is only a relative freedom that we do. In spite of this limitation, however, men everywhere have sought freedom since prehistoric times, because freedom is essentially a matter of the spirit. Until very recently man could not fly and could not even conceive of going to the Moon, but he could live in heaven with the angels and play with rabbits in the Moon. Although we can not meet and talk to people in the past, we can converse with them through words they have left and works of art they have created.

In spite of time and space which restrict the activities of man, his spirit is free to roam the ends of the universe and inquire into the hidden recesses of the past and future. The spirit of man can enjoy infinite freedom. But the fact is that not every man is blessed with the freedom of the spirit. According to the Buddha, man is not free, because he binds and enslaves himself out of an utter ignorance. The Buddha called it *Bonno* (blind desire). Man's ignorance imprisons the freedom of his spirit, as if keeping precious jewels wrapped in old rags and not knowing the priceless contents. Man does not even know that his spirit can be infinitely free.

Tendai Daishi once said that "the man of wisdom transforms rocks into precious stones and transforms poison into medicine." But the majority of people today are changing precious stones into rocks and turning medicine into poison by not using the inherent freedom of his spirit to seek the riches of life and thereby to grow as a human being. Whereas, as human beings, we are free to rebel against the established order, but when our protest creates only disturbance and agitation of

our times, then we are transforming the precious stone of freedom into a mere rock and the medicine, which can nurture life, into a poison that can endanger the well-being of all men.

Big nations have the freedom to engage in trade everywhere in the world, but when that privilege is abused, they endanger their position in international affairs.

Again, the free spirit of man can be frozen into a deadening obstacle to understanding. Whether it be the individual man, society, or nation, we must not let the precious heritage of freedom turn into rocks and must not use the life-giving spirit of freedom to choke other forms of life.

What we must do is to open our eyes, seek the real meaning of freedom, destroy the obstacles to the open expression of freedom, and share the awareness of freedom with all people. Our ultimate goal should be freedom from the bond of selfishness and ignorance.

### **Cause and Effect**

G.N.M. Tyrell said, "Why does the idea of progress look so large in the modern world? Surely because progress of a particular kind is actually taking place around us and is becoming more and more manifest. Although mankind has undergone no general improvement in intelligence or morality, it has made extraordinary progress in the accumulation of knowledge."



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In this age of advanced science, the progress of technological industry has been accelerated to an unprecedented degree. And the concern of all has turned toward the future of mankind. We had great hopes for the future because of increasing production of material goods, amazing progress in communications media, better transportation systems, research in urban problems, programs for protecting nature, and so on.

The study of the future is essentially an attempt to derive greater and greater benefit from the world around us, so all men will live in comfort and happiness. The future has always been the province of youth, and the words of the famous Professor Clark at the Hokkaido Agriculture College many years ago, "Boys be ambitious," still stir the hearts of the young Japanese. The stress on the future, according to Mahayana Buddhism, is to be affirmed, but such an affirmation presents only one-sided picture of life, for it teaches that we are all products of an infinite past. My life in the present is the result of past karmic acts, and whatever my future may be, it would be the product of past and present acts. Thus Buddhism teaches man to contemplate on the past before he thinks about the future. When the past karmas of multitudinous people intermingle, we create a common karma which determines the kind of society we live in. Wars and rebellions, disasters and chaos, are all products of the common karma of mankind. Standing firmly on the present, we study the past in order to better understand the future which is yet to come. When we understand that the present is a product of the past, and that the future is the result of the present, we can avoid falling into the trap of nihilistic fatalism, for, regardless of past or present conditions, our future shall depend on what we think, and do in the present. This karmic law teaches man to accept the unalterable past and to strive for a promise to everyone, regardless of present circumstances.

The troubles that occur in our daily life are rooted in the mutual distrust of man, whether it be in campus disorders, labor-management disputes, or international conflicts. We constantly accuse the other side of error and bad faith, forgetting that everything that happens in life is the product of the common karma of mankind. The realization that the common karma has created our present society filled with antagonism will help us to see our problems objectively, and at the same time make each of us realize the limitations and ignorance of the self which prohibit the placing of all blame on others and open the avenue to a constructive and cooperative attempt to bring peace and harmony into our present world.

### **A Thought on New Social Trends**

In the constantly changing universe, the solar and planetary systems move in a set pattern and on earth the passing of seasons occur in orderly sequence. All living things, including man, undergo the transformation from birth, growth and development to old age, death, and disappearance. Within this universe of flux there is an unchanging, timeless principle which people have called by various names.

With the oil crisis as the turning point, Japan tumbled from its position as an affluent nation; the consequences of being a resource-poor country were keenly felt. For the Japanese, 1974 was a turbulent year; it was also a year in which they were compelled to change their sense

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of values. The precept that "consumption is a virtue," the standing order in the past fervent drive toward economic growth, has no longer held true.

Reflecting the darker side of this economic world, the social interest and curiosity toward something mysterious, something which could not be explained or proven by contemporary science gave rise to the occult boom. The direct cause for this fad was a broadcast over a commercial television station by Israel-born Uri Geller in Canada saying he would display his supernatural power on a certain date. He boasted that he would make a broken watch move again and that he would bend a metal spoon just by will power.

Hypnotism also became popular and there were cases in which hypnotized children were rushed to hospitals because they could not be returned to their normal self. In a closed and depressed society, it seemed that the children were attracted by something which could not be explained by logic or reason.

The "Era of Unrest" was seen in the adult world. The novel "Jonathan Livingston Seagull" by Richard Bach was immediately sold out after its Japanese translation by novelist Hiroyuki Itsuki was published. It ranked first on the best-seller list through the year. This trend showed that people wanted to escape from their dark society and fly to a more promising place like a seagull. At any rate, the best-selling novels like "The Submersion of Japan" in 1973 and "Jonathan Livingston Seagull" in 1974 seemed symbolic of the Japanese people searching for something to serve as a guideline in the "Era of Unrest" as described by the Government White Paper on Livelihood.

The world is constantly changing according to the laws of the universe. The buds of Sakura, or cherry blossoms, seem to be aware of the advent of spring more precisely than the weather bureau. In 1976,

the cherry blossoms bloomed approximately two or three days earlier than usual, due to high temperatures in late March.

All plants are sensitive to the changes of temperature, but the short-lived cherry blossoms which bloom instantaneously in all their colorful glory and disappear just as quickly especially impresses us with their inter-action.

Ki-no Tsurayuki, a prominent Waka poet of the Heian Period, so vividly described in his poem the ephemeral life of Sakura:

“In the shiny and balmy spring day,  
Cherry blossoms are falling restlessly.”

Another Haiku poem, by Issa, a famous poet of the Edo Period, who mourned the death of his baby daughter—his own “dewdrop,”—reads:

“A dewdrop fades away,  
It’s dirty, this world,  
And in it  
there is no place for me.”

Plants are affected not only by the weather but also by the condition of the soil, water, atmosphere, etc., and their growth is inconceivable apart from these forces of nature.

Not only the plants, but any other things in our universe are mutually interrelated in their evolution.

In Buddhism this fact of interrelation and interpenetration among all things, both animate and inanimate, is preordained by the term “dependent origination” or simply “conditions” (*pratyaaya*). The dynamic manifestation of conditions interrelating and interpenetrating is expressed in the teachings that “All created things are impermanent” and “All dharmas are non-self or non-substantial.”

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The Buddha attained enlightenment when he awakened to the truth of conditional origination, for this is the basic law of the universe. The wisdom and compassion of the Buddha operates through conditions, and the whole world is nothing but the aggregate of conditions. Man experiences pain and suffering in life, when he fails to see the truth of conditional originations.

Birth and death are products of various conditions, and even the objects of our desires are results of conditions. When we see this truth, our attachment to things and people disappears like the morning dew before the rising sun. As we view our life with the truth of conditional origination in mind, we gain a new insight into reality. Our minds, for example, are sensitive to changes and are constantly being affected by external conditions. This is the reason why education becomes supremely important in developing human potential.

Just as our minds are influenced by various conditions, so also our thoughts, actions, and speech affect the world around us as different forms of conditions for other peoples. The impact of our conditions is extremely important in this age of mass communication, for a single event in a corner of the world is immediately reported to the rest of the world. Today in Japan the cry for improving the ethical and moral quality of the people is being constantly heard.

But no matter how the new morality is formulated, unless it is based on the understanding of conditional origination, it will be repetition of old ways which have failed. In order to fully appreciate the various conditions that create our life, we must first gain insight into the nature of conditions. This insight constitutes wisdom, and the action based on this insight is compassion. The obstruction to gaining insight is blind passion (klesa), and the purpose of Buddhist teaching and practice is to eliminate the obstruction so that insight can be gained. Even a single

petal of the falling cherry blossoms teaches us the impermanence of life. We must humbly accept the truth of life that the various conditions which surround us teach and reveal to us in the "Era of Unrest."

### **Is Asia One ?**

The number of Japanese traveling abroad is increasing year by year, and Southeast Asia seems to be especially popular for reasons of closeness and expense. The travel bureau announces frequent tours to Southeast Asian countries, and their counters display many brochures on the charm and beauty of these countries.

While Japanese visitors to various Asian countries acquire knowledge and understanding of this important area of the world, the crucial factor in the advancement of Asia in international affairs is mutual respect and communications on the personal, human level.

The problematic question, however, is the extent of our knowledge of our fellow Asian countries gained through travel tours, international expositions and the exchange of trade. However, in some parts of the Asian countries Japanese are severely criticized due to Japan's economic advance into these countries, particularly in Thailand, which resulted in campaigns against Japanese goods in the first part of 1973. The criticism against Japan as an "economic animal" still remains unabated in some parts of the world market.

The biased philosophy supporting the growth of the economy at the

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expense of our fellow Asian peoples should be immediately abandoned.

It is, however, good that we expand our awareness of the world and experience the unique cultural traditions of other countries, but it is also imperative that we should see Southeast Asia in the proper historical perspective. Perhaps due to the myth that "Asia is one," many Japanese fail to see the distinctive differences that characterize the diverse Asian countries. Neither historically nor culturally is Asia a single, monolithic entity.

Many of Southeast Asian countries, especially, have unique histories and traditions, woven from a plurality of racial and ethnic groups and consequently precluding the modern concept of nationhood in the Western sense. Compounding the differences was the colonization of Southeast Asia by different European powers which pursued diverse colonial policies.

Here is an interesting episode related by an NHK correspondent who visited Sri Lanka:

Ninety-nine per cent of the farmers and more than half of the inhabitants of Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, do not wear shoes. At first I hastened to conclude that this reflected their poverty. But this judgment was not necessarily true. To make it clear, I'll describe one incident at the Japanese Embassy in Colombo. One day, a Ceylonese driver was temporarily employed by the Embassy. He turned out to be such a hard-working and skillful driver that the Japanese officials invited him to become a full-time employee in charge of driving the Ambassador's car. However, he declined the offer though he must have realized well enough that as a permanent employee he would be better paid and that his future would be guaranteed. As you can easily imagine, the officials had not expected his reply at all. "Suppose I drive the Ambassador's car," the man said, "I'll have to wear shoes. That's the last

thing I want to do. I can't bear them." Because of their long-standing habit of walking barefoot, the Ceylonese almost always have thicker and larger soles than we Japanese. They are, therefore, capable of calmly trotting barefoot on an asphalt street in the scorching sun and any pebbles or pieces of broken glass that might be scattered about the street are of no concern to them. Some of the natives are "civilized" and put on shoes outdoors, thus giving up the habit of walking about barefoot. However, the instant they step inside their house, they slip off their symbols of civilization. Now, I feel like cursing the Europeans who took the trouble to introduce the habit of shoe-wearing into Southeast Asian countries. Such a habit, I believe, ignores both Providence and the Laws of Nature.

As seen in the above episode, we must see the Asian countries, their background and their aspirations realistically if we are to cooperate with them in creating a peaceful and prosperous Asian community.

The unity of Asia, based on generalization and abstraction, must be abandoned before mutual respect and concern for mutual welfare can become a reality.

For successful relationships the most important thing is the willingness to respect differences and to understand the other's standpoint. The same holds true for relationships between nations and races.



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